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# Rachael Frydman interview for the Emmanuel Ringelblum Collection

Rachel Frydman

Willis Stoesz

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Interviewer: Dr. Willis Stoesz (WS)

Interviewee: Mrs. Rachel Frydman (RF)

This interview is in connection with the Wright State University Oral History Project.

WS This is Oct 5, 1978. Now, Mrs. Frydman can you tell me where you were born?

RF Yes, I was born in Kurzeniez, Poland.

WS Can you spell that for me?

RF Yes, KURZENIEZ. It is a small town.

WS It is not the name that it has anymore, is it?

RF No, it is the same name, even now.

WS Did it always have that name?

RF Yes, it always has had and always will have, I guess.

WS Ok, and when were you born?

RF In 1927.

WS It must be in a district or region.

RF Yes, it is near Wilaika, which is a bigger town.

WS All right because there might be a number of places with that name. It was a small town then?

RF Yes, a small town.

WS Do you have a very clear memory of it?

RF Yes, I remember this small town! I don't know how many people lived in it but there were about 100 Jewish families.

WS About 100 Jewish families and how many others?

RF Probably the same. About half and half.

WS You lived there until 1939 or 1940?

RF We lived there really until 1942. In 1939, the war started in Poland. Half of Poland was taken over by the Germans and the Russians took

over the other half of the country. So we had Communists for almost 2 years.

WS So this is east of Warsaw, some distance?

RF Oh, it is far to the east. It is really White Russia. Close to our neighborhood, it is already Lithuania but we were White Russians.

WS So the other people living in that town were Russians not Poles?

RF Yes, they were White Russians. That is, the Gentiles were White Russians. There were Protestants, as they are here, and then there were Catholics and then the Jews. They all lived in the same place, in the same area, in the same neighborhood.

WS Did you travel much? Did you and your family travel to other places very much?

RF No. When I was a child I don't remember any travelling at all.

WS So you mostly stayed just there?

RF Yes, we stayed in the same place. Well, when my father was younger, he travelled. He travelled a lot to Poland and to the border with Germany because he dealt with them. He dealt with cattle at that time. He supplied cattle for the German army because he spoke German. He dealt with that. He was in a partnership.

WS Was that a business which he had?

RF It was a business which he started when he got married. He started it after WWI in 1918. However, from what I remember from when I was a child, my father had a butchershop in our own hometown. For example, we lived in part of the same house to the rear and to the front of the house there was a butchershop. This was my father's business.

WS Did you have any brothers and sisters?

RF I have one brother and one sister who are alive, Thank "G-d. It is my only brother who came to visit me now from Israel and my sister lives in Israel. We all went through the war in different places.

WS Did you know about each other at the time?

RF No! No, we did not. We found each other after the war. My sister ran away from the front in 1941. The Russians went and she went with them just to get away from the Germans. We knew in 1941 that the Germans were coming, so she went with the Russian people. The Russian people went. The real Russians who came over from Russia and stayed,

they were working there. The Russian government had sent them to all the parts of the country from 1939 to 1941. At that time she went with the Russians she went with some friends of ours. A lot of people from our hometown went. We couldn't go. We started out and we heard that the German army was already ahead of us.

WS      So you just went back home?

RF      We went back home and we settled and waited for what ever would happen to happen; I, my mother, and my brother. My father died just exactly the day the war started on Sep 01, 1939 and he knew that Hitler was already on his way to part of the country of Poland.

WS      So he died and was buried.

RF      He was buried the right way. Everything might be considered normal with the funeral, so to say. Then we were in Sept. 1941, no Oct. the Russians had taken over until June 22, 1941. That is when the war started, when the Germans started the war with Russia. It took maybe 10 days until the Germans were there. When we saw the first German military units, that is when the army units and the officers came into our small town. It was all mixed up. People didn't know where to go, what it was all about. We knew that Hitler was bad for us, especially for the Jews, but we waited until time gave us some indications. The local people, really they started to loot like during all the wars, but especially our houses. They got whatever they could.

WS      Even while you were there?

RF      Yes. We were there, we had a family coming from another small town, visiting. They were not just friends, they were relatives really. When they came, they had a lot of luggage. They brought luggage with them. They came by horse and buggy. So we had the whole house full with packages and the people started to loot. People came into the house from all around the little small towns, even smaller villages (then the one we lived in) farmers even some who didn't live in villages, they came to the small towns to loot. My mother recognized one person whom she had known and she talked to him by his name. She said: 'why, this is mine, take mine but don't take from these people, they just left home. They tried to run, they didn't know where to go.' People just ran; they didn't know where to go. He got so mad that he broke my mother's arm. It was already hard to get a doctor. On the second day my mother thought that it was broken and she felt that she couldn't move it. It was also swollen. So she went to a doctor and the doctor put her in a cast. She had that cast for 6 weeks. When the German army came, they made up the "Kommandatur" (military command place). They organized the local police that means local people to maintain order. At that time, they didn't tell them what to do with the Jews. Everybody continued to live in their own

room and house. What they asked from this local police committee was all the best of all the belongings such as gold or diamonds or pearls. You know, we had skins to make furs, like skins from sheep, we had to give it up. So much money had to be collected. Especially from the Jews, not from the Gentile people, just from the Jews, as a contribution for the German army. It had to be paid otherwise they would take a few Jews and they would kill them. What could we do? We gave. We brought it to one point which they had designated as the place where we had to bring it. We brought it and it was collected. Then the real problems started. They put out a call. All of the Jewish men and boys had to assemble at one certain place, it was in the market place of the small town. The market place was the center of the town. There were stores and places where most Jews lived all around this market place. That was so, because the Jews had the stores and the businesses. In that center of the small town, they gathered them all together for a whole day. They told them what they had to do in a day and they had to work and if they didn't obey, they were going to be killed. If someone turned their head, there was a soldier right there and he just shot him. So they had to obey (the Germans). Then they left it all up to the local police. The local police did whatever they wanted to do, even if it was wrong and they really did a lot. They made a lot of problems.

WS        When was that?

RF        In 1941, 2 or 3 weeks (after the Germans invaded) that is all the time it took. Then they had the local police giving orders.

WS        The men were made to work.

RF        Yes! Especially the men and all the boys, not the children. They sent them to work.

WS        Nearby?

RF        Yes, nearby. They sent them whenever there was something to do.

WS        Did they come home at night?

RF        Yes, they did. They came home at night and they had to go to work from the very beginning on.

WS        Were they payed at all?

RF        No!

WS        Were any promises made?

RF No the only thing we got was like ration coupons to buy certain foods. Not a lot of food because they didn't give a lot to the whole community not just to us Jews. We got less, of course.

WS But the coupons were good?

RF Yes, we could use them for some foods. However, at that time food was not the problem. First of all, we had food which we had stored from before which they didn't take away from us. We had wood for the first winter. We had a supply. Everybody had a little supply of food. Then the local people, the Gentile people not from our hometown, the farmers, we went there and they helped us. We sold something and always gave them something in exchange. They didn't take money because they didn't know what the German money was all about. So during the war, we gave them clothes or whatever somebody had as bargaining for food. They brought us potatoes, flour, but they didn't have sugar themselves because sugar was out. First of all, when the war started it was that whoever had a supply of sugar had sugar otherwise, they didn't have it. It was the same thing with salt or with kerosene because we had lamps we didn't have electricity yet. And then it was exactly at this time of the year, in October of 1941, it was the job of the local police really they seized some Jews whom they thought or they had in their mind were Communists. So they gathered them at night and they locked them up. They brought them to one place the next morning. They kept them the whole morning until afternoon. I myself was sent to work. I was only 14 years old. I was sent to work about 7 or 8 km away from our town to the next bigger town. They sent us to work there. What we did there was really work. My job was to clean up a basement with a lot of books in Russian. All kinds of books and papers, something like archives. We had to pick it up from the basement and load it up on trucks and they took it someplace. We did the same thing the entire day. When we got home, it was our (Jewish) holiday which is coming in 2 weeks, Simchas Torah, we heard that all 53 people had been slaughtered.

WS The 53 people who had been arrested the previous night?

RF Yes, these people and amongst them were 2 cousins of mine. Two first cousins, some very handsome boys. One was maybe 22 and the other probably 19. Out of all of them, one person was left. He was a gentle man who had been put in that group. He was working for the Soviets but he was not a Communist. They probably needed him because he was now working for the Germans. This family, it was a special family. It was a mother and 2 sons, they were also to be slaughtered like cattle. So he stood up and he said, "hold it!" to the German officers. This family cannot be killed because of Communism. If you look at them as Jews, they are Jews, but they are not Communists because their father, her husband, is in the equivalent of a concentration camp in Russia. He was sent to Russia because he made a

deal for grain and the Russians did not allow things like this. So they sent him to Siberia for 5 or 10 years. The Germans heard that so they knew that she could not be a Communist because he was in jail there, so they let her go with her young son. But the other son, the older boy, he was given an assignment like that when (the others) were slaughtered, none of them were really dead. You know, when they shot them they did not verify whether the victim was already dead, or not dead. They dropped them into a hole which they had to dig prior to their death. See, that is why it took them all morning to kill them until afternoon.

WS So they were made to dig their own graves?

RF They dug the deep hole and they threw them into the hole. That boy, that young man, he was 5 or 6 years older than I was, that means that he was then probably 21 or 22, he had to cover the hole (probably it was a trench) together with a few Gentiles, who worked for the Germans. He was the first one to cover the dead. He was so mixed up later, that he went crazy. He couldn't sleep. It had been like a shock. The first time in his life -- the first time in all of our lives that we saw something like this. Prior to the killing, we saw that the Germans caught two people, not Jews, I myself saw it, two people, some farmers from a village, I don't know why and no one else knew either. They caught them. They couldn't speak to them because they didn't speak any German. The Germans were looking for somebody and maybe these people weren't the ones they were looking for but they seized them. I went by there myself and I saw them, they hung them. It was shocking what people could do. We found it just shocking that people did things like this. But the other was the first real slaughter in our hometown. It was a few weeks after the Germans were really settled. These were the first 53 people who died, the first Jews.

WS They were picked up by the local police?

RF Yes, they were locals because the Germans didn't know who was who. You see the German people from the German Kommandatur - you remember that that was really a military government. They didn't know who was a Jew and who was not a Jew. They could care less! Later on, when the Gestapo (this stands for "Geheime Staat's Panzer translated into Secret State Police) arrived when the German soldiers went to the front, deeper in Russia, they set up a government type of administration. They were there for 3 years, after all! Then it was different. However in the beginning, the Germans, especially the military, they didn't care.

WS That lasted for a period of maybe 6 months?

RF Yes. So the local police was the government made up of our local people. The local people, from our hometown, they knew who is a Jew and who is not. Maybe someone was mixed up with the Russians, when they were there.

WS Were any of the local police Jews?

RF No! No! They made a Jewish committee, something like our JCC (Jewish Community Committee) here in Dayton which takes care of the Jewish people around here. They called it a "Judenrat" in every small and big town, no matter where. There had to be somebody in charge. For us, it was our teacher who had taught us sports. Here it would be a coach. He had been coaching the girls and boys in all kinds of sports. He had been a German Jew, a Jew from Vienna. Really from Austria. He spoke the best German. He was put in charge of the Jewish Committee. Now, a few more people had to be in charge. Someone had to be in charge or else they would kill all of us.

WS Was the Judenrat ever asked, as for example, when these 53 people were arrested? Was it involved in that?

RF We had no Judenrat yet. We were free so that everyone could lead his own life. The Judenrat came later after things settled it was just made up of local people, like our neighbors. We knew each other as neighbors. Like neighbors knew my cousins. If they were mad at them or something like that or if you had something to say to someone or you didn't like somebody. That was a time when you could do anything to them.

WS There were about 800 people involved, did they all know each other?

RF Yes, we had more than 800. We had 400 Jewish families and 400 Gentiles (in our small town). It was half and half, but the people knew each other. It was just a small place.

WS Maybe 2000 people?

RF Yes, we lived together for so many years. We knew each other. We had a nextdoor neighbor like we have here. At that time, we had small homes in a small town. Next door to us we had a neighbor, a Gentile neighbor, it was one family which spoke Hebrew and Yiddish as we did, because we played together. They had only one son who joined the Germans, that means the local police. He is the one, only he himself with his own hands caught my cousin who was driven to that slaughter but ran away from there. He had hidden in a place at the Polish teacher's - the one who used to teach us Polish in the school - he knew the way to his place and he went to hide in his place. My neighbor found him there. That was my neighbor who knew him.



WS Your neighbor?

RF Yes, my neighbor who knew him. He knew that he was not there and that he had not been slaughtered. The neighbor went with a few more police. They found him. First of all they dragged him all the way back, that was a long way back. They dragged him back behind the town and they shot him only once and the neighbor boy finished him off. I wasn't there myself. It was the story which was told me. This guy who was left alive just to cover up the hole, he was there. These were local people. As a matter of fact, after the war in 1945, no, in 1947, because we left Russia in 1946, my brother was there from the army. The Russian people dug them out (of the hole) and brought them to a cemetery and put them into one grave.

WS Were there other times when people were rounded up like that?

RF Yes, a lot of times. Especially in my hometown because we never had a ghetto. They left us where we were. We stayed there until they liquidated the whole place. They liquidated it 2 weeks before the High Holy days in 1942. The Germans knew when our holidays are. Always when it was a holiday they did especially nasty things: like ten Jews to be gathered for slaughter; 22 Jews there - a few Jews here and a few Jews there; they came in the middle of the night. They took them out of their beds and just slaughtered them right there at these places. Just like a cat and mouse game. We were not in a ghetto environment, that was different. Later on, they started to send Jews from our hometown to another city which was a bigger city and had a bigger Kommandatur. There were more Germans there. So they sent us to work and they made like a little concentration camp, a really little camp. As a matter of fact my brother was sent there and we had to bail him out through a Polish fellow whom we knew. I was working for a Polish family. I was young then but I knew that this particular Pole was a big shot. He worked with the Germans and he liked me. I did clean his house nicely and he liked how I did my job so he told the Judenrat not to send me anywhere else. He said that if they touched me, if they sent me anywhere else to work he would make a mess for them. He just liked me and he wanted me for himself and his family. He had a wife and 2 children and I took good care of them.

WS How long did you work there?

RF Until the end of the day, until the day that they slaughtered the whole town. Until they slaughtered everybody. Until they liquidated (all of the Jews). It was in 1942 in Sept on a Sunday. I don't remember the date. Three days before our New Year's. Three days!! So, I had worked there for over one year.

WS When you couldn't work there anymore, where did you have to go? With the others?

RF I had to! There was much more to the story.

WS We need to go back and get some more of the background.

RF That's right!

WS Your father had been a cattle trader?

RF Yes. At the beginning after he got married. Then he didn't do it **anymore**. He settled in the same little town but he had a butcher shop. My mother helped him in it. That was until 1939.

WS Was it kosher?

RF Yes.

WS Did he have the equivalent of a high school education? How much education did he have?

RF I don't know. You see I don't think that when he was going to school they even had a high school. They had the local (primary grade) education then they went to Hebrew school. They learned in the Jewish prayer book. In the old times, the Jews were on their own to learn. But my father he was abroad before he got married. He was here in the United States. Then he came home (to Poland) after 3 or 4 years. He worked already in 1914. he was taken into the army. It was the Russian army at that time (prior to WWI there was no Poland since Poland had been divided in the 1871 war between Russia, Prussia and the Austrian empire)truly the Russian army, in 1914.

WS So, he served for a few years?

RF And he went to war against Germany. The Russians sent him to the front. He was taken prisoner and he was in Germany for a few years. Before that, he had already met my mother and they had become engaged.

WS Before WWI?

RF Yes, before the war. After he came back from America to his father's **house**. My father spoke German. My father also spoke English because he had lived in America. So he was already more knowledgeable, more educated because of the traveling. Being in Germany for a few years, he spoke German, that is how he could deal with the German people. He also spoke Polish of course and Russian and Yiddish and Hebrew; he could manage with the papers. So he was not such an uneducated person. I don't know what the equivalent would be but he didn't go to high school. He didn't have a diploma. I don't think that they had a high school at that time in our little town.

WS But he was a very knowledgeable and capable man with 6 languages?

RF That's right!

WS And your mother also?

RF My mother was different. In those days, the women did not have much education. She went to a school like a Hebrew school probably. She finished the Cheder and probably at that time they spoke Yiddish and Polish, also Russian. Then she knew how to bake and how to cook. At that time, that was it. She also had to know how to be a housewife, how to raise children and how to manage.

WS And she taught you that also?

RF That is right! Then, also, life wasn't easy. People worked very hard in those days in Poland. They worked very hard to make it.

WS Did you keep kosher?

RF Yes, oh, yes!

WS Did everybody?

RF Most everybody. Maybe a few didn't but I don't think so. At that time everybody kept kosher, not like here now.

WS And celebrated the Sabbath?

RF Yes, and how!

WS And all the holidays?

RF Strictly kosher. We celebrated all the holidays, like we say in Yiddish, "Fromm". It was not like we say here a Conservative Synagogue and a "Fromm" (Orthodox) Synagogue. We never knew about Reform at all. There were Very Very Very Orthodox and then there were Orthodox. A Jew had to be a Jew" They didn't know any other way. We were taught like this, they were all taught like from generation to generation.

WS Were all the boys Bar Mitzvahed?

RF Oh yes! We didn't have parties like here. This is just the opposite. Here they have the parties. The Bar Mitzvah is not so important here. For us it was the Bar Mitzvah which was very important. And a wedding was a real wedding!!.

WS For 7 days?

RF They celebrated everyday. It was a real wedding the night of the wedding, the celebration of the wedding and the 7 days were the 7 blessings. They celebrated the entire week.

WS People still do that?

RF Yes, but here it is just a bigger place, bigger city. It is more difficult to do that then in a little town.

WS So you children also spoke all the languages, also English?

RF No, we did not. We spoke Polish. We went to school for it. I went to a Hebrew school and I spoke Hebrew and Yiddish.

WS You spoke mainly Yiddish in the home?

RF At home it was always Yiddish. Then in 1939, the Russians came. They stopped all the languages and we went to Russian schools and we learned Russian.

WS Russian besides everything else?

RF We started with Russian and then we learned Russian very well.

WS Your father had a butcher shop. Would you think of him as being of average income in the community?

RF At that time it was average. There were a lot of poor Jews.

WS How did you know about that?

RF As I said it was a small town and we knew about each other. A shoemaker was poor and a tailor was poor. So was a dressmaker lady who mended dresses. She didn't make a lot of money. So we were above average, a little higher than average but not rich.

WS But there were some richer people?

RF Yes, richer people. There were people who had stores. People who had bigger businesses such as sending out the material and buying. It was more. Maybe they had inherited more than my father did. My father did not inherit anything from his father because it went to the other children.

WS There was just one synagogue in the town? Did everyone go to it?

RF No, we had 3.

WS Three! I see.

RF There were 400 families, it was a big community. Three beautiful Synagogues, all three in one place.

WS Right near each other?

RF Yes, in one place.

WS Were they different from each other in anyway?

RF Notmuch. All about the same.

WS Did they each have a Rabbi?

RF Yes, yes. We had like three Rabbis. no two Rabbis in our town.

WS Two?

RF I believe that there were two. Two Reverends like.

WS But three Synagogues.

RF Yes, three Synagogues, one next to the other.

WS The one Synagogue didn't have a Rabbi, then?

RF I really just don't remember. (here follows a consultation in Yiddish with someone else in the room). We had one Rabbi for the first Synagogue and one for the third one. There were three Synagogues built together, the front Shule, the middle Shule and the left Shule. The front Shule and the last Shule had one Rabbi, our Rabbi. This was the bigger Shule, more congregants. So that is how they divided it up. And then we had a little place, just like we have here. Shomrai Enumah. Have you heard about them? We had a little Shule, just a little place like a private home, and they prayed there. They were ultra orthodox. They were Hassidim.

WS Were there many Hassids?

RF No, not many. But a few of them made their own congregation. They made their own congregation. So this was a small place, but the main Synagogues were three Synagogues. They were really beautiful Synagogues.

WS Were the Hassidim very different than the rest of the people?

RF           The way of their prayers are different.

WS           They kept to themselves?

RF           They kept to themselves just as they do here. The Hassidim are different. They pray differently. So they could not go together with us. It wouldn't have worked. It wouldn't have meant anything for them. It has a different meaning, like old Jewish traditions. But otherwise, the three Shules were not different one from the other. They were just almost the same.

WS           Was the Synagogue very much the place where people would do things? The center of life?

RF           Yes. The Center of life. The Schul was the center of life.

WS           People met each other there?

RF           Yes. The weddings were in the Schul and in the place around the Shul. Or a speaker came and he spoke in the Shul. If a Cantor came to sing, it was in the Shul and we had the Hebrew schools there. Most of our Jewish kids went to Hebrew schools

WS           That was the main meeting place?

RF           Yes. It was a nice Jewish life. I believe that it was even more than here, as a place for Jews. It was a real Jewish Staettele. Whenever you went that is where you went. Even the Gentile people spoke Yiddish, mixed up. It was one family! And that is why we were shocked when the Germans came in 1941 and they really broke it up. It hurt us (mentally) because we didn't believe it. How could they do it to us? Here we lived with our neighbors. We had the first potatoes from the ground in the Spring. They brought them to us so that we could eat them because we didn't have a garden. Here it is impossible to comprehend that they would get together with the Germans and that they would help the Germans to destroy us, to kill us, to slaughter us.

WS           Did the other members of his family criticize him, do you imagine?

RF           They did not criticize him. They couldn't do it. No father or mother could criticize their children. No father or mother could do anything to their child. Maybe they were afraid of him. The father or mother really didn't do any harm to us. They couldn't help us. This guy was totally uneducated, maybe he went to school for 1 year, so he had a good opportunity there (with the local police). But his father, for example, and his mother could not help us either. They were afraid.

WS      Were there other people, Gentiles in the community who would have helped you if they could have?

RF      Yes! Oh, yes! First of all, we had not far from us in a small, small town, maybe a few blocks away where people lived by themselves, farming. You could call it a little village. The lady had worked for my mother and she had helped raise us. She used to come to my mother and cry: "would like to save your children". She had raised us when we were little and she used to take me in her arms and say: "I wish, I wish that I could save you. I wish, I wish that I could keep you! I wish that I could do something that you could stay alive." But she couldn't! It was too close to our town and one would have told another. This is what the problem was. They were afraid. The good people couldn't do anything. What they did for us was to help us with food. They gave us always, no matter if we didn't have something in exchange. They would give us food.

WS      Was there anybody who was hidden during the war?

RF      We couldn't in our small town. They couldn't hide us. As a matter of fact, it was in the second year at the beginning of 1942 that two young men, in my brother's age, they went out of the town and they went into the woods to hide. Then they sent messages that we could go out and that we could survive there. Somebody, locally, found out where they were hiding and the police got them and they shot them.

WS      Right out there in the woods?

RF      Oh yes and one family they went out there to hide. They were wealthy people. And the local people around the wood knew it. In White Russia, if you start talking about woods, it is not lie here, just a little bit, it is kilometers (km) and km and km of just woods, big old trees; and you could hide there forever. But people were first of all afraid of each other. After the slaughter in our hometown, three days before Rosh Hashona, we went out into hiding for two days. Later we went out and we were there for two years. I and my mother. My brother was separated from us. This is a story to tell. This is something you can tell about for years.

WS      Were there any of the young men who got away during the that time?

RF      A few of them got away and then they were found.

WS      But they were all caught?

RF      Eventually they were all caught. later on, when the Russian army already fought back against the Germans, when the Russian people gave themselves up to the Germans they were slaughtered in the prisons like the Jews. So they had a war there in Russia because the Germans

killed the Russian people and the Russian soldiers - they did not save them to, later on, get them out of the prisons - but they killed them. So they didn't surrender but fought back, they had no choice. So they sent people into the woods and that started out the Partisan war, and then we could hide and then we could be saved. Anyone who was there (in the woods) could be saved. My mother was then slaughtered there. She was caught by the Germans, by the German army.

WS      When exactly was that?

RF      It was in 1943 already. It was a long way off from what we had been talking about. Much happened before then.

WS      Tell me a little more about your town? The Shul was the main place in which Jews got together. Was there any place in the community where Jews and Gentiles would get together? A theatre, maybe.

RF      Yes. It was a Polish place. We were under Polish rule yet. It was a club like where I went. I used to play in every play, every year we presented a play. We raised funds for our school that way. We sold tickets anywhere. We performed a play, maybe with music and it was in the Polish place. It was not performed in the Shul. We needed a larger place. It was for everybody. Sure the Jews came to a Jewish play in Hebrew but it was in a local Polish club. It was a very big place and it was rented out. Across the street from this club was the Polish school. A lot of Jews went to Polish wochnachna (school) as they called it. A lot of Jewish kids went there. There, you didn't have to pay. Yes, they went to school there and finished there their first 7 grades. I went to Hebrew school because my father wanted me to have a Jewish education, since we did learn Polish in our school as a language. And we learned the Hebrew, we really got the Bible and the reading, the Hebrew and the history, everything. We also learned Polish, we learned Polish geography and history. All the rest was in Hebrew.

WS      Did most of the children do that?

RF      Yes.

WS      Almost everybody?

RF      No, a few of them went to wochnachna. A lot of people couldn't afford it since it was a private school. We had to pay tuition and the tuition was high. If you had a few children there, particularly so. It was hard.

WS      Were there ever any Jews who got elected to public office?

RF      There were a few, but not in our hometown.



WS It never happened?

RF It happened in the big cities but not in the small towns. We had a good relationship with the Polish local government. They didn't bother us until 1938 because the Germans were already sending a lot of their own people like spies to Poland and it was like a cancer spreading around all over Poland. We felt the antisemitism already. But before that we didn't know any of it in Poland. We just lived with the Gentile people together in peace and we dealt with them and they dealt with us. They bought from us and we bought from them and it was that we couldn't succeed without them and they couldn't succeed without us. It was just as it is here in Dayton. It doesn't matter who my neighbor is we say "hello" and he says "hello, we are fine". This is why in 1941 it was a shock to us, a real shock, we couldn't believe it, what they did to us. First of all, this you have to know, when the Germans came for few weeks only, we were free. We could walk any place. But there came an order that Jews were not supposed to walk on the sidewalks. Just in the middle of the streets and we had to put on the yellow star in the front and in the back.

WS Did houses have to be marked?

RF No. Usually in every small town and big town and city there was a ghetto. However, in our particular place there was no ghetto.

WS But they didn't make any exceptions and mark the houses also?

RF No, no. We just had to wear the stars. They knew that even if the Germans would not recognize us, our neighbors would recognize us.

WS Was it like on the upper arm?

RF No, it was on our breasts. The same thing on the back and in front. You got clobbered if you didn't have it on. If you went into the street without it, then you got clobbered from them.

WS By the police? How about the local people?

RF The local people didn't care one way or another.

WS Just the police?

RF Yes, the police, the local police. The people didn't care. They didn't bother. They didn't bother to talk. They knew that eventually they would have everything of ours, everything which belonged to us. It would go to them anyhow. They knew, even the local people. They weren't dumb. They knew that they would slaughter us. One day, another week, another one. Eventually we all would be killed because

it went from one place to another place. One place was 'Judenrein' (clean of Jews) and then the next place would be. Soon it would happen to us too but we couldn't help it. There was no place to go to. I know that if I got to another place, another small town, it would be the same thing. Should I die in a strange place when I can die in my place? We knew that eventually we would be dead. But this is already the nature of human beings. If you are alive, you hope until the last minute you hope that you will be saved. That some miracle would happen. We all prayed that maybe something would happen at the front in the war. Maybe something would happen to Hitler. You have to live by this otherwise you are dead. You have hope. This is all we lived by.

WS We are getting close to the end of this tape for this hour but we got a lot of information. Everything we wanted to know. First of all some of it even though I haven't asked the questions, this has been very fruitful. I am, however, still puzzled. It is so strange that this one fellow, the neighbor, would do such a terrible thing as that, even though his own family would probably have liked him not to. They couldn't do anything about it.

RF They didn't do anything about it.

WS Did he think that the Germans would take care of him, whatever happened? That he would be all right. He just went over to the Germans then?

RF Yes, he worked with the Germans. He was one of the local police. He was so mad. As if something had turned over in him. He was divorced in our hometown. He was not alone. There were a lot of them!

WS A lot of them did similar things?

RF Oh yes, but most people, most of them were more educated.

WS How about the people who had been on the police (before the Germans came)? There must have been a police department. Did they all stay on the police?

RF It was like a transformation you see.

WS All different people?

RF You see it was Poland until 1939. Until 1939 the Polish police kept order, everything was normal. Then when the war started Poland was

divided. We were taken over by the Russians. The Russian army came into our town. Up to Vilna, the Russian army took over. All White Russia was taken over by the Russians. So then, (after Sept. 1939), it was the Russian police. The Russians constituted the local government for almost 2 years. In 1941, the Germans took over. The Russians went with the Russian army. They went back to Russia, as well as whoever wanted to. A lot of people ran away. It was lucky for them they ran away to Russia and they stayed alive. Families ran away.

WS        So the police was a Russian police for a while!

RF        The Russian police stayed as long as the Russian government was in charge.

WS        Was that the local police?

RF        Yes, local also! Yes, the Russians managed the local police, which worked with the Russians, and left with them. So, when the Germans came there was no police at all

WS        Just the Germans, as in German army?

RF        The army came in and they recruited local people for the local police station. They took whoever joined them. They didn't choose. It was just the beginning, they just got in and it was wartime, it was not a government yet. So the local police governed. These young men, they were the police.

WS        Just anybody?

RF        Yes, they put an armband on with a swastika and that was the police. They took care of us (for law and order).

WS        Were they paid very well?

RF        I don't know.

WS        Why did they do it?

RF        They wanted to. They knew that they would be able to do something against the Jews. They could do anything they wanted.

WS        So they agreed to become policemen for the Germans because they could do something to the Jews.

RF        That they could do something to the Jews and they liked the Germans and they didn't like the Russians. They didn't like the Russians and the Russian people.

WS            You mentioned that the Germans already sent out people in 1938 as spies in Poland. Would some of the people who came to work for the police have been contacted?

RF            Maybe yes. We didn't know.

WS            You didn't know?

RF            Nobody knew but we knew that we felt it. As Jews we felt it, the antisemitism. They felt sure of themselves. They knew that Germany was strong, and that sooner or later the German army would start out. They started by invading Czechoslovakia in 1938 already. They took a lot of territory. When they started on Poland. It took them two weeks and they got Poland. They didn't have a long fight. Poland didn't have a strong army because the spies had already done so much. They sold out, the entire Polish army disintegrated.

WS            I see. So the spies were already at work?

RF            The spies were there in 1938. Already there were a lot of spies.

WS            They weakened the army?

RF            That is right! They weakened the whole Polish government.

WS            How could they do that, bribe people?

RF            Anyway they could. Anytime they could get hold of anyone who worked or wanted to work for the government. If they were part of the fascist party or anybody else. Let's face it they got help. They had their own people who worked for them there in every local government and everywhere. We knew it, we felt it, but there was no choice. You couldn't go to the other part of Poland which is even closer to Germany.

WS            Did your father ever think of going back to America?

RF            It never came to his mind.

WS            He didn't talk about that?

RF            We didn't have anybody in the U.S. The last year he was so sick. You see he knew, he read the German papers and the local papers, so he knew. When Hitler came to the government (in Germany) he knew that Hitler was not a joke. Before he died, he died of cancer, but he fought to the last minute. He already said, "poor Jews, Hitler will get here and it will just happen. Just what happened in Germany." Because he knew what was going on in Germany. The Germans already had concentration camps. Luckily a lot of the German (Jewish) people were

able to leave. They told a lot of them to go out of the country. Whoever went out, went out. The rest suffered the holocaust. Something like what we lived through in our part of Poland. These German people lived in their part of Germany. That included the beating up of the Jews in the streets, exactly as happened in our place. They just beat up whoever they could.

WS           When Kristalnacht happened, did anything like that happen in Poland?

RF           That was not one night only, it was many nights.

WS           Were you there also?

RF           Yes, you could not show a lot of nights on television! It was similar, it was just similar. Like they beat us up. They took some of the Jews in the marketplace and just beat them. Just beating. Like they took my cousin the same night, a very handsome young man, they took him to the police station and they held him the entire night and they beat him. They beat him so badly that he couldn't walk. Then they released him to go home. When we went in to see him, since it was such a small town, it was my cousin, we went to see him. I remember that you sometimes seen television, like the shows when they beat the people, they hang them up by the wrists (and then whip them), that is how his back was. When you see it with your own eyes you can never forget it. Even though it has been 36 or 37 years ago, but seeing it before your eyes, it is like seeing it again and again and again on a TV show. You forget many things but you cannot forget this - during the nights, the nightmares don't let us forget!! Sometimes, even I dream that I am running and that the Germans are running after me. They almost catch me. Here they catch me. Here I am running again. It is the same story. We ran so many times, so many times. It is not just one time. Here is, for example, one episode, which involves a rabbi, another first cousin of mine, they gathered ten people in a roundup. It was Friday. You see, they always do something on a holiday or on a Friday or on a Shabbos. So they took the people from the roundup to the market place, into the middle of the market place, across from his house. Since he lived at the market place where there are nice homes, they shot them in the middle of the market place. Before they shot him they beat the rabbi so much. He was a nicely built, tall guy and he didn't cry, he just praised "G-d" that the ending was there. You know the prayer we always say for our dead, you know, the "Shama". So the Gestapo let us, the local people, bury him in the cemetery. Only the ten Jews in this roundup were buried in the cemetery, not just put in a pit. That is the case until now because when I brought back my mother from the woods, after she had been buried for three years there, I buried her in my hometown. I buried her in the Jewish cemetery.

WS           It was in 1947?

RF No. It was in 1946 when I brought her back with my own hands. It was a long way to carry her home from the woods. It is a long story. This is interesting, but she is buried not far from the roundup with the rabbi with the ten people.

WS That must be at least some satisfaction.

RF Yes, So I said: I am leaving Russia for good (note that the Eastern portions of pre-WWII Poland was attached to Russia and Poland was given some territories of eastern Germany including East Prussia in exchange at the 1948 Treaty) I don't know if I will ever come back. But I had to do it, I could not leave my mother buried in the woods, thrown in a pit. So I brought her back and I made a funeral as it is supposed to be done, according to Jewish law. The day before sundown before the Shabbos. It was the end of March. It was cold but I made it. So that is what I did for my own satisfaction. This is, after all, the only thing you could do, what else, nothing was left after that.

WS That was something you could do.

RF I was able to do it. Luckily, I was saved. My brother was saved in a different way and my sister was saved in a different way. It was all different. We got together after the war and found each other.

WS The tape is almost over and I don't want to have it run out in the middle of a sentence so I will stop it and start again maybe one week from today. Next week, Thursday?

RF I don't think that we can do it next Thursday because my brother is leaving. Next week my son will be here, maybe yes.

WS Since we talked last, I listened to the tape and there are a couple of things that I need to clarify and it may be helpful to do that now. I did not ask about your grandparents. Do you know the occupation about your father's father? He also lived in Kürzeniez, am I saying it correctly?

RF Yes, the accent is on the second syllable in Polish and it is slightly different in Russian. We used the Polish name because we were living in Poland. Both my grandparents on my father's side were from that place. Their parents, my great grandparents lived also in the same place. They had lived there for generations. I just remember them from when I was little.

WS I have forgotten whether I asked whether your father had brothers and sisters?

RF Oh yes. Six brothers but only one brother and one sister lived in the same town. The rest were scattered all over.

WS Along distance away?

RF Oh yes. Far far away. One was in Moscow. One was in Minsk and another Bolushnik, another place in White Russia.

WS Doing the same kind of things your father did, running a shop?

RF Yes, most of them. No, in Russia they worked. One brother was also a butcher. One made hats for the police and such. You know, the police wore different hats as they do today. He was the only one in that place to make them.

WS You had to get a special shape didn't you?

RF Oh yes. He had a specialized shop. He was a specialist.

WS And your mother's parents?

RF They came from a different place. My mother came from a different place. She married my father and moved to Kurzeniez.

WS Was it far away?

RF It was kind of far but also in Poland. From the same area but pretty far away.

WS You said that it was near the Russian border. How far away was it from Russia? How far was it from Latvia? It was in northeastern Poland?

RF Latvia was to the north. It was one of the Baltic states and we were in White Russia to the east, rather southeast. To the south of us it was already not White Russia. It was Prussia. It was a different area all together.

WS OK, now I can see it on the map.

RF So, we were kind of in the middle, closer to Russia.

WS Then I was wondering about the different schools, not to spend too much time on it. But there was the Hebrew school and then there was the town school where Polish was spoken. It cost tuition to go to the Hebrew school. Did all the girls go to Hebrew school?

RF Yes. The tuition is right and the schooling was the same for girls and boys. But only those who could afford it went to Hebrew school.

They sent their children to have a religious education and those who couldn't afford it went to public school. In public school the first seven grades were free. Like here, exactly. Instruction was only in one language, Polish.

WS Did as many girls as boys go to the Hebrew school?

RF Yes. Maybe there were more boys because their fathers wanted their sons to know Hebrew. To know the prayers, but then all the Jewish kids, or most of them at least, who did not go to Hebrew school, they had a Chader. It was taught by a rebbe, not a rabbi like in a synagogue, but a rebbe who taught only the bible and to become Bar Mitzvah.

WS Did he teach the Torah?

RF Yes. Torah and prior to the time we started on the Torah, we have to go to the beginning of the Bible and the Hebrew. Like writing and reading because they did not go to Hebrew school, as well as later to become Bar Mitzvah.

WS Did the girls get to be Bat Mitzvah?

RF Very seldom. We knew that there is such a thing as a Bat Mitzvah at thirteen, but we did not have this famous things like the girls have here of becoming Bat Mitzvah. It was not the custom.

WS Were you aware, obviously you were a child then, of the kind of education which your brother had? You were not Hassidic?

RF No. We were just Orthodox. You see we didn't have Conservative or Reform. Except for the Hassidim, there was one Jewish faith. There were different groups, but otherwise everybody was just the same. The basic Jewish education was the same. But a rabbi had more, he had a license. You also had to know more to be a rabbi, like the teachers were. You had to finish school for it.

WS They all had that, however, there was something like a "moussar" movement. It was kind of like a reform movement in education. Did you know anything about that?

RF Not in our small town! Maybe in a big city but not in small towns.

WS You never heard about it? You didn't have it?

RF No. We didn't have it. No, we just had the Hebrew school and the Chader. The "Misnadim" like. Just two parts. In our own synagogue for example, it was divided. We had the Misnadim, the word "Misrarhet" means something like against. It is "their way". That is



what it says. Well, traditionally the Jewish rituals are the same.

WS I wondered whether that movement was present? Whether it had made any impact in your town? Okay. Do you remember anything else about the religious education or what went on in the Chader or in the Hebrew school or in the Synagogue that you would like to mention now? Something especially important or unusual?

RF Hebrew school was the same as other schools. We had Hebrew, most of the teaching was in Hebrew and then we had the bible and the Torah, of course, and we had Polish as a language and Polish history. However, otherwise than that it was just a regular school. One just finished just basic schooling there until the war. That is what I had time to finish.

WS Yes, until you were fourteen years old. Well, I just wondered about that. I also wondered about the town. You mentioned that amongst the Christians there were both Catholics and Protestants. Do you have a clear memory about how many of the Christians were Protestants, half and half?

RF Really, in the town where we lived we had more Protestants than Catholics. I do remember that on Sunday when the churches had services we noticed where more people went since they were in different places.

WS You mentioned that people pretty much got along one with the other, like half and half, Jewish and Christian. It appears unusual to me that there were a lot of Protestants.

RF That was because we were in the White Russian area. We were not in Poland proper. Poland had more Catholics.

WS So the fact that there was not so much antisemitism in your area had to do with the fact that it was White Russia rather than with the fact that there was a large number of Protestants.

RF You see, before the war, until 1938 we didn't know or feel any antisemitism because we lived in harmony. It was a small place, everybody knew everybody so we didn't feel anything.

WS Were the Protestants more open, more willing to be free and easy with Jews than the Catholics or don't you know? Maybe that is too difficult a question?

RF No, no, not different at all. We didn't feel it. At least we didn't know. We didn't notice anything from the other side. No, we especially led our lives. You know every Jew had his own home. Not many were mixed up with the government and things like politics.

WS Let's see now about the sequence of dates. The Russians moved in Oct 1939. Then in Sept of '41 about two years later, the Germans came in, the Nazis.

RF No, that was earlier. The war started in June, so they came in July.

WS All right, in the beginning of July.

RF Yes, 8 days after the war started on June 22. Then the Germans were already to be seen. In the middle of July the Germans were already well established in our town.

WS So that would be June 30 and when the 53 people were taken that was about the time of the holidays.

RF In October.

WS In October. So, there was a period of a couple of months or 3 months. Now, I just want to establish the dates. How long did it take for the Judenrat to be set up? Was that during the same fall, after the 53 were killed?

RF Yes. That's right! I will tell you why I can place it. The Germans not the Germans but the local police ordered the Jews to clean out the house at the market place. They moved the lady out of there. Prior to that, the same house had been occupied by the Russian police. The young men, whoever were there, all the men who worked there had to move out the furniture from the police station, the Russian police station. It had been all locked up. They moved it out and they claimed that they found papers from people who had filed some kind of petitions. Anyhow, they got names. According to those papers, anybody who had their name there for any reason, they figured that they were mixed up with the communists. After that, they had a list and they went according to the list and then they picked the people up at night.

WS And those were the 53 victims?

RF Those were the 53. After these 53 died, they set up the Judenrat at the very same place. In the same house, after it had been cleaned out.

WS So the Germans took the initiative to clean the house?

RF It was not the Germans yet really, it was just the local government. The local police. In our hometown, we did not have many Germans staying there, but 5 miles further in Vilejka(54.30N,26.53E) they had a komandatur, A German komandatur. The local komandatur was made up of 1 or 2 Germans. Most of the Gestapo and the S.S. (The black

\*note: "Kommandatur" should have two m's.

Shirted Nazis of the Schutz Staffel or Security Guards) stayed in the bigger city, 5 miles from us. Whenever they needed something to do they had their men available ~~anyhow~~ anyway.

WS        So the Judenrat was set up a little after the holidays?

RF        Yes. Just after the holidays. The Judenrat was set up to tell us whatever we had to do. For example, they had to bring so much for the German government to collect that sum from the Jews, or they had to send so many people to work in one place and so many people to send to another place. So the Judenrat had to do their bidding. They had to take care of it. They took care of everything except, of course, harming and killing. The Gestapo came in for that.

WS        So the Judenrat existed there and in Sept of '42 about one year later, when the Germans evacuated the Jews.

RF        Oh, just 3 days before Rosh Hashona. Whenever it comes out, three days before but the Judenrat was there as long as the Jews were there. In Sept in '42, just three days before Rosh Hashona, it took them but a few days to liquidate the Jews.

WS        To liquidate the ghetto?

RF        Oh no! We didn't have a ghetto. We each lived in our own places. What they did was that they surrounded the town in the morning fog. Nobody knew about it. It was just all of a sudden and whoever went to work in the morning was caught and that is how they went from house to house. Whoever was caught on the 1st day, they brought him to the end of the town, in just a field and they made a fire and they burned them. We were in a hiding place for two days that time.

WS        They must have had several hundred people.

RF        More than that. At least 1500. It took them 2 to 3 days to kill them because for two days we were hiding and seeing everything which was going on. When we went out, the 2nd night, we smelled it and we saw just a little flame. We could just see it as we went by it.

WS        All in one open field then?

RF        All in one open field. They just scattered the ashes and at the end they couldn't do it any longer. So the third day, whoever was caught on that third day, they just shot them and put them in holes in ditches and they covered it. When we came back we found the one mass grave.

WS        How many people were in hiding?

RF        Quite a few people, thank goodness, because my brother, you met him here before he left. He went to work early in the morning. You see, in our town was a distribution station for power and light and together with the distribution station they had a sawmill. We called it the Tartack at home and a lot of people worked there. They had Germans watching that day and night because it was the main switching station and they were afraid that someone may sabotage it. So my brother went early in the morning to work with another fellow. When they were already half way, another fellow, who was a very good friend, he was a Gentile Ran, he was a Catholic. He went out of his house and he met them both. The fellow who was with my brother was a friend from school of this Catholic man. The Catholic man told them, "turn back because today is the end! Today is the day!" He didn't have to say any more. He was afraid to talk to them. My brother came home. While he was walking home, whomever he met in the street outside he said, "if you have a hiding place- it is "srony" in White Russian - go ahead and hide because there is nowhere to go. The town is surrounded by the Germans and this is the day". So from our street that I know, people had hiding places and they hid and they scattered into the woods and we met later on. Whoever didn't know and went to work as usual to their own jobs like I had to go to work at that Polish family, they got caught and killed. I worked for that Polish family, the fellow I worked for was there. A big shot at the power and light station. My mother had to go to work in the woods, whatever odd jobs they got. My brother woke me up and he said, "you are not going to work" I said, "How come? I have to go!", because I had to buy some food for the Polish family. I would stop by at the store on my way to work to buy the food for her and take it to her home. My brother said, "no, you can't go! Dress and let's go out and we will go to our hiding place." My brother had built this hiding place. We took another mother and daughter, neighbors and a little orphan boy with us. The boy had been orphaned in another place from where he ran away and came to our hometown. We hid there for two days and we saw what was happening. Just 15 or 20 minutes after we were there in the attic. It was in the attic he had made a double wall.

WS        Yes, so the hiding place was right in town?

RF        Yes, right next to our home. Our house was facing the street and it was to the back of us, a small house. My brother built another wall in the attic there with a little door behind the chimney. We all went in there. We couldn't lay down in that small room, we could only sit down, since it was such a small area. We remained there for 2 days. Through the wooden frames, all the houses had wooden frames, we could peek, actually through the roof. We could see how the Germans went around with the local police. They went from house to house just looking for the Jews. Wherever they could find them. They went around the houses, inside the houses, behind the houses, inside every room and they turned everything upside down. At our neighbors, they

caught them right away. We listened to the neighbors as she was begging them, "Why? Just leave me, let me live!" They took him out from the basement. That was just next door to us. Then one of the neighbors, a young man, he started to run so they shot him right there. We understood because we could understand German, we could also understand the local people, the White Russians. We understood when they said, "You can't run! There is no place to run. The town is surrounded. Wherever you go, you can't escape! This is the end for you". As I said, we stayed up there 2 days and the second day in the morning, we heard our next door neighbor, they packed everything in their wagon and they said that there was a fire, that someone had made a fire. The way they were talking we knew the couple, they were a childless couple. They were a Jewish couple. They were rich people. They decided not to give in to the Germans. They took their own lives and they made a fire. Obviously it started to burn. Of course, in a small town if one house goes the rest of town catches fire. However, here they didn't want that to happen. The local people, the people who had a lot at stake because they had all the goods in their houses, they didn't want that. They didn't want everything to go up in flames. So they fought the fire. We heard the racket when they put the fire out and they found the couple dead in their house. We still sat there for an entire night. As a matter of fact, that neighbor of ours, who was so good to us, when the Germans went to look (for us) - she couldn't speak with the Germans - so she said that the Jews were in the attic. The Germans didn't know what attic and in what house. But the Germans didn't want to go because when we had our ladder we had dropped it. You see the ladder had been dropped on the ground. So they didn't know which attic and what she was talking to them. They didn't want to waste time and they didn't want to go up so they sent him. He put the ladder back up and we were sitting there and we were just sitting like mice not moving hardly breathing. He went up, he took something down. Something in a copper container and he said "I could see nobody". During all that time we were so quiet. If he had seen somebody or he would even hear something that would have been it. However, fortunately he didn't see anything and he didn't pay attention. He didn't go behind the chimney. He just went up and since he didn't see anything there, so he went back down. He couldn't see anything because my brother had made the wall of old wood. The same wood matching the original wall. So he went down and luckily for us, he left the ladder up. That was good for us since we waited through the night. At night my brother went down first on the ladder then we followed him. That is how we went out.

WS        So you didn't see the Germans? They had gone from around the town by that time.

RF        Yes, it was at night. The 2nd day already. But we heard everything and we heard everybody talking. We knew everything because we heard

it all. At night they had the watch. We called it "die patrol". They went all around the town and all the places. So we had heard everything and we knew what was going on. We knew who even died, because as a matter of fact this same neighbor of ours, who had talked to the Germans, the husband and wife said to their own friends. She said that she didn't see my mother. They even called her by my father's name. My mother and the children did not see them. So she said that they must be hiding someplace. You see, they knew who was there and who was not. You see it was as I told you - we all knew each other.

WS But they didn't tell the Germans though?

RF She just couldn't say. She just mumbled that she saw all of the people. She didn't see my mother there dying - so she didn't know where we are. She thought maybe we ran out and maybe we didn't. She might have said it (to the Germans) but she didn't know! That is how we waited up through the night.

WS That was just about New Year's day (the Jewish New Year's, I meant).

RF Yes, it was the day before New Year's.

WS Was your mother with you then?

RF Yes! My mother was with me until 1943, February 1943.

WS Oh, for another 5 or 6 months then?

RF Yes. We were in the woods already hiding.

WS Many people were in hiding that way after that round-up?

RF From our town maybe, thanks to my brother, quite a few. He had warned a lot of people from our street. They went to their hiding places and then escaped because we had no choice. Most people had hiding places. We had no other choice because there was no other way, either you die in the hiding place or you die by the Germans unless you go into the woods. By that time, we already knew that we could survive in the woods. We had at least a chance to survive there. As a matter of fact, we did. A lot of them were killed. Just as my mother was killed there by the Germans and by the Ukrainians.

WS So maybe 50 or 100 people got away that way?

RF Oh more! We had around 300 people from our hometown who got out but they got killed later on.

WS But maybe 1000 did not get away?

RF Oh no! More than 1500. They were slaughtered like sheep.

WS Well, then the Judenrat also went out of existence at the same times maybe before going on we should talk about that. It is important to know about the Judenrat. What was the name of the man who was the head of the Judenrat?

RF Schatz. He was a teacher of sports. He had run away from Austria. He was an Austrian Jew.

WS He left from there after the Anschluss in 1938? (That is when Germany occupied Austria).

RF I guess because he was there already in 1939, when the Russians took over. He was our teacher. His name was spelled S-C-H-A-T-Z. I forgot his first name. I believe that he was Viennese. He had been educated there. He couldn't speak any Russian or any Polish. He just spoke German.

WS How many people were in the Judenrat? It must have had at least 5 or 6 members.

RF Oh, they had more than that. They had representatives from every little group. They had like a 12 member committee. They were not at all like police but they had like their own militia. You know, like a few men in charge.

WS Do you know how these 12 members were chosen? Did Schatz choose them?

RF No, the Germans asked who was well educated in German so that they could speak to him. So just when the Germans came to our town we asked Schultz to talk to them because he talked perfect German. So that is how he started out, and he was in charge of everybody else.

WS So he did not volunteer for that job? He was asked.

RF No, no He was asked by his neighbors and by the people who knew him.

WS He was just the logical person for the job.

RF Yes, that's it. He was in charge of all the Judenrat. So, if something came up he spoke to them. As a matter of fact, it happened before the liquidation of our town. We had several things like terrible nights. We had one policeman, he was from a small village, a local man not a German at all. We use to call him the cat. He was like a hitman for the Germans. He was wild. For him to kill was just like a play. Every few months or weeks, he went out with a few other policemen on his own, without even being told by the Germans, he went

out just gathered some Jews from their homes during the night and slaughtered them in the yards. Then, it was already around springtime in '42, around April that some guy went out of his way and he went to a small village, not far from the same village he came from. Somebody told him that a few people there from the village had something to do with the underground, with the partisans. We already had heard that some people, partisans were in the woods. So, he went and he made a mess. First of all, he killed 2 people there. And these were not Jews. And he messed up a few families. These people couldn't stand it any longer so they went and drew up a petition to the Germans that it was too much! He was punished. I saw it myself because I was in a place where I could see it because of my job. He used to come in where I worked. No Jew could walk on the sidewalk but I could because my employer said to me, "you should not be afraid" because I was so devoted to the couple I worked for. I was still a child myself but I was so devoted and I really worked hard for them. So, he really did not care whether I walked on the street or on the sidewalk. But on that day the Germans from Wilaika, the Gestapo came and I saw that they took him and took his gun away and put on handcuffs. That was the most pleasing thing I could see. To see it, gave me a lot of pleasure. Then they took him to a cellar, like a basement in their police headquarters he was in handcuffs and they took him in a car and they drove him back to their headquarters in Wilaika and there he was shot by the Germans. So in a way, we were pleased because there was nobody worse than him. He was truly the only one.

WS He was from a small village?

RF Yes. From a small village not far from our hometown.

WS Was he a farmer?

RF Like a small farming village as they have here. A small place. He was uneducated but he was just good for this. But until he did what he did, several times the same thing. He had stopped whomever he wanted. He went to the house and he killed the whole family. So when he was shot we had kind of peace for a few months. It got quiet because then the local police were afraid. They were not afraid to kill Jews, but they were afraid that since something happened to him, it might happen to them. So, it was kind of quiet for almost the whole summer. We had no killings. Just go to work. A lot of young people went to Wilaika. it was really not a concentration camp like the really well known ones. But it was a camp. They stayed there, they lived there.

End of Side 2 of Tape 1.

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WS This is an interview with Mrs. Rachel Frydman, 200 Folsom Dr. Looking back over the last hour we had, there were a couple of other questions



which occurred to me such as: when you were in the hiding place, there was a lady who said in Polish so that the Gestapo people did not understand it, that "they are in the attic."

RF She was a neighbor of ours.

WS But a Christian?

RF Yes. That was the mother of the boy whom I spoke about earlier. Whom we grew up with and who went to work for the police.

WS So that was the mother of that fellow?

RF Yes, that was the family which lived next door to us. She knew my mother and she knew that my mother wasn't there. She came back from out of town when they slaughtered and burned the Jews and she noticed that my mother and brother were not amongst them. She came back and she talked to her family and to people, whoever came to take the goods from the houses; she mentioned my mother's name that she didn't see her and her kids (being burned or otherwise slaughtered) so that she must be some place. That is really all she said. That was the second day in the hiding place when the Gestapo came around to look for Jews to see wherever they would be hiding. She told them in Polish, "the Jews are in the attic".

WS So she did know that?

RF No! She just said it. No, if she really had known and they would have known they really would have come after us, but they really didn't know. They didn't want to go up there, the Germans so they sent him, her husband. He came up there, he looked around but he didn't notice anything because the door through which we went in was made so specially, skillfully, that was a little tiny entrance door, as I told you behind the chimney, that he didn't find it. You know in Europe every house has a chimney which goes through the attic. He didn't really look for us but he, this neighbor, just took something made of copper. You know just about every house had some old things made of copper which was kept over the generations. So, he just took something and he went back down and said something in White Russian language which meant that no one is there and that I couldn't see anybody there. During that time we were just sitting there, quietly. He didn't look long. It was good too because this one lady who was the owner of the house was sick. As a matter of fact she died later in the woods. This lady could hardly breath. We kept her under the clothes which we had up there so that she wouldn't give us away by coughing or even breathing loudly. She had been a sick lady most of her life. So he went down rapidly and we waited until night came, the second night.

WS So it was important to be very very quiet?

RF Right! That is so because below us, there was another family residence where they gathered all the things which had been looted from the Jewish homes. You see, this was a good place to load it up. We even noticed some of our own things.

WS Your own things had been looted and were being carted away, right like you were there?

RF Yes, they were stored right underneath us and we could see them because they were very old things made out of metal. We could see them through the outside walls.

WS Ok! Then another questions is, you were talking about the Judenrat. Then a question about the Judenrat which was working during that year. I was wondering how the people were chosen and you said that they were not chosen by the Germans at all but by members of the community.

RF That is right, they were appointed to be in charge.

WS You said that there was one from every little group. I didn't understand what these groups were. Were they neighbor groups or groups from the different schools or family groups?

RF Yes, family groups and neighborhood groups. So that they would know people. They appointed somebody so that they would have to give their orders to ten or twelve people altogether. The people of the Judenrat were in charge about what went on during the fifteen months when we were at home. They were not special people but they were people whom we had chosen because they were more knowledgeable and who could talk better. They could take care of us, the rest of the people. For example, I mentioned that Mr. Schatz, who was in charge because he spoke fluently German. Somebody had to take care of us.

WS All right! So you had a good feeling toward the members of the Judenrat, they were not against you?

RF That's right! They just did the job someone had to do.

WS Could you remember a little more exactly about what I had asked you about before. About this man Schatz. He came in 1938 as a Jewish refugee from Austria about one year before the Russians came in.

RF He came in 1939 and by 1940, he was a teacher in our school.

WS So he really arrived just before the Russians?

RF Yes, he obviously had been somewhere in Poland earlier.

WS           How did he happen to come to your town, Kurzeniez?

RF           I really don't know exactly. During that time he was our next door neighbor from the otherside. He was in charge and the Germans always came to his house, to his small apartment. As a matter of fact, I worked for him for a while. I did clean everything in his house. The German people smoked a lot. You know, they had meetings during which they talked about the future. About what to do next and I was always there, listening. When they left, I had to clean up. He asked me. I cleaned up the house and he used to give me an extra something such as a copper piece to buy something. Really, I did not go for his sake but I went for another neighbor. You see, they smoked a lot and they used to leave a lot of ends of cigarettes. I used to pick them up before they were thrown out. I got a handful of tobacco and I gave it to the other guy. It was like giving him bread and butter. I remember this. You know, I was still a child. He got married. He found a girl in another town. Apparently he had been somewhere else before but this girl had blood relative in my home town. He was probably looking for a job when the Soviets came and this (being a school coach) is the only job he could do.

WS           We were thinking, when we were talking about him the last time that maybe he left Austria. Perhaps Vienna because of the Anschluss (the German sponsored unification between German and Austria which Hitler engineered in 1936). However, if he was a Jew running away from the Germans, from the Nazis', wouldn't Poland be a rather poor place to run to?

RF           They all left! There were a lot of (Jewish) people who came to Poland and who were caught again. Yes! Yes! As a matter of fact, in 1939 when the war started in Poland, the whole war with Poland took only a few weeks. A lot of people ran just to our side of the border, agreed to by Russia and Germany. The Russians gathered them in one place. We had one couple housed with us for a few weeks until the Russian government took care of them. So they asked them that whoever wanted to go back, they could go back but those who said they wanted to go back were not sent back but were sent to Siberia. As a matter of fact, these Jews generally survived. They were sent to Siberia because they didn't like it where they went first. Of course, they didn't have homes there. They were even called the homeless ones. Staying in our part of Poland was safe until 1941.

WS           I guess people never thought that the Russian army would have to retreat .

RF           That is right. As a matter of fact, in 1941 a lot of our people, whoever could, ran away together with the Russian army. My sister went with them. She left home before the Germans came. She left and

went to Russia with a group of people. A lot of these people have since resettled here in Milwaukee. They took her with a horse and wagon on which they had loaded everything. You see, I could not go with my mother because my brother was in a school in a different town and we waited for him to come back from school. When he came back it was already too late for us to go anywhere. We tried to set out but the farmers along the road told us that there was no use. That the Germans were already in Minsk, which is the main city in White Russia.

WS        So, you actually got ready to go?

RF        Yes. We would have liked to, why not! We already knew what was going to happen, but it was too late. The German army was already ahead of us. So we returned home the same day. A lot of other people did also.

WS        What I was really getting at was that there was no reason, that it was just a crazy idea that Mr. Schatz had come there as an error. He was Jewish, wasn't he disguised?

RF        Oh yes, he was Jewish. Oh no, no, he was just used by the Germans in case there was something they wanted they would ask it from him. He was in charge just because he could speak to them. He befriended individuals and he has friends but when it came to the burning and slaughter, the Judenrat was not notified. They didn't know that it would happen, or when, because most of them were killed. Schatz lived through it. He ran out. His wife was killed. Only one person that I know survived those days...me! I don't know if Schatz is alive right now but he ran out from a hiding place to the woods.

WS        So Schatz survived?

RF        Yes, he survived. I met him. The Russians came back by the end of '44, then I met him in my hometown. He came back alone. So, he survived, just like anybody else.

WS        Do you know Where he is now?

RF        I never encountered him again. The only thing which he told me was that I should go back to school. He said, "for the years you lost, go back and learn something. Become something!" He cried when he saw me because I had been a child when he last saw me and in those 3 years I had grown up. That is all I know from him. I never saw him or heard from him anymore. Somebody told me, we were talking about him while we were in Germany, in '46 already, when I was already married, that Schatz was in Germany on his way to Israel. I never met him in Israel While I was living there. But he could be there or maybe, he is back in Austria someplace.

WS Now, on a different subject. There was a small camp in Wilaika. Incidentally, where in Wilaika was it, nearby? (This question was answered earlier).

RF It is 5 miles, 7 km from Kurzeniez. Wilaika is a bigger city.

WS And Wilaika is how far from Bialystock?

RF Oh, it is a little further, maybe 10 miles.

WS OK! So, which is the bigger city. I was looking at a map and trying to find it (actually Bialystock is located 53.09°N, 23.09°E at the Eastern border of postwar Poland).

RF Bialystock is also in our neighborhood. I believe that Bialystock is more to the north and Grodno is a little to the south (actually that is inverted since Grodno is located 53.42°N and 23.50°E at the western border of postwar Russia, but well within 1938 Poland). I really don't remember the map anymore. They are both in our area in White Russia. White Russia is actually a big area from Vilna to Minsk and even further but it is all Russia (actually Minsk is the capital of the Byelorussian S.S.R-). Minsk was always Russian.

WS. How far were you away from Minsk?

RF Oh, pretty far!

WS Would Minsk be a couple of hundred km (kilometers)?

RF Oh no, it was not that far. (Minsk is located 53.54°N, 27.34°E). Maybe my husband knows better but I don't. I went to Minsk twice but I really don't know the distance. I don't remember it now if I ever knew it.

WS I was looking at a map and I was trying to see where it was.

RF You should be able to find Wilaika on a map but I doubt that you would find Kurzeniez because it is so small.

WS Wilaika (here WS spells the town and RF agrees to the spelling. Note that the transcriber also could not find it on a map)!

RF I believe that you will be able to find it on a larger scale map because it was at that time in Poland, it was a much more important town. Marked with a star on the map (probably a district capital city). The relationship between Kurzeniez and Wilaika was like the relationship of Troy to Dayton. Of course, not as big but comparing the importance.

WS Now, during the time that the Germans were in control there and you were in Kurzeniez, you said that there was a workcamp. That some of the younger people were taken off to the workcamp in Wilaika. It was not a concentration camp but more like a boarding camp. How were they chosen for that? Was it just people who didn't have anything to do?

RF Yes, they stayed there. They lived there. No, no, no. The Judenrat sent them. The Gestapo or whoever was in the Komandatur in Wilaika asked for 40 or 50 people. As a matter of fact, the Judenrat came to my mother and said that you have to send your son, but my mother said that it was her only son, that she was a widow and that she would do anything she could so as not to send him there. There would only have been the two of us left. My mother begged that guy, that Polish gentleman whom I worked for to intervene not to take my brother. At least not until later, and that is what the guy did. Of course, we gave them a lot of presents for it. Actually we gave them to his wife and he intervened and he told them that he needs my brother in the electric station and the sawmill for himself. So my brother worked there until they had the roundup.

WS So, that your boss, the man you worked for, did help you?

RF Yes, he did help. He really liked me. I was really lucky to work for him. When I came the first time, it was because my mother couldn't come. My mother had worked for them. They always sent him all the help he needed because they considered him an important man for the Germans. You see, the sawmill operated for the Germans. He asked the Judenrat that someone be sent. The Judenrat sent my mother. So one day my mother couldn't come, so I came. I was young. Only fourteen years old at that time, and I cleaned his library. I managed to put his books in such a good order that he liked the job I did. So, he asked, "what are you doing?" So I told him that I do a different job every day; that I work wherever they send me. He told me: "ok, I want you to come back here tomorrow". I said: "Well, I don't know, you have to ask the Judenrat". he said: "I will take care of it." He really did. he went there and he said: "I want Rachel to work for me as a steady job, coming to me everyday". They had two children. The baby was 9 months old when I started. He was one and a half years old on my last day of work. I did work there. I did everything. I cooked and I cleaned. He like everything I did.

WS So, if you had not been working there, either you or your brother might have been sent off to that camp?

RF Yes. Because he was very pleased with my work and I did a good job for him, including cooking even though there was one German SS man there in charge of the whole thing. This SS man was unusually nice except that he talked a little too much. I used to work twice a week for him in that house. I brought the food over there myself. I used

to walk over there. He asked me, usually, why couldn't I eat over there. Yes, he used to ask me to sit down and eat with him. I did not eat there because it was not kosher. I had been brought up to eat strictly kosher only.

WS But he understood that?

RF He understood that. He used to say, "you better eat everything you can in that house. You will need your strength because you have to suffer a lot longer and a lot more". That is what he used to tell me in German. He spoke German to me. He found a nice young man who also worked there. This young man, a Jewish man, was in charge of the whole group in that place. That was a nice big place which was important for the Germans. They worked there day and night. So he told him that while they had the night people watching, they were watching day and night, that the day would come, but he didn't say exactly when or how, when it wouldn't remain like this. "In another few months and you will be gone". (He was warning that Jewish young man. He told him and me what to do and how to do it incase it came about and where to hide and how to hide. He told us that. Somehow, it happened that he drank too much at a party with my boss and he talked a little too much and they took him away. They took him away and they sent him to the front. Then we had a bad German and then I didn't cook any more for the new guy. I never really met this other SS German, except that I saw him in the house, at my boss's house. He was there for Christmas. My boss had a party for Christmas.

WS But your boss might still be there at the sawmill?

RF He was from Vilna himself. He was sent to the sawmill when there was still a Polish government. He had been working for a company, actually, I believe for the government, in an office.

WS You think that he might be back in Vilna now? (Actually, now Vilna is called by its Russian name of Vilnius. It is the capital of the Lithuanian SSR).

RF Nobody ever saw him in Vilna, but he might be in Vilna. He never really was a good man for the Jews. The only thing he really cared about, because he said it was for my mother, my brother and myself. He liked us. He liked me because I was so clean and I saw to it that the house was kept in order.

WS What happened to the people who were sent off to the camp in Wilaika?

RF They survived longer than we did. They were still there after our place was gone. Then a few months later, I believe that it was in the middle of winter, they kept them. They had kept us until Sept. After that, middle of winter, they sent them someplace. Maybe to a

concentration camp, one by one. A few of them got back to the woods where we met them, a few of them are still alive now.

WS Was it more like a ghetto?

RF It was not like a ghetto. It was one place. Like a block or half block with wire around it.

WS Were all the Jews of Wilaika in that same area?

RF They were already gone. The Jews of Wilaika were gone before they got after us. Well, Wenetchka is next to Wilaika. It is a rather big place. It was the first city without Jews. A big, big "Judenrein" sign was visible for any one who drove by. That was the first such place in all of White Russia from where they took out the Jews. They took out the Jews from Wilaika in the first few weeks. They sent all the men off someplace and they told the women not to cry, to be calm, that they would come back, but they never did. They slaughtered them somewhere near Wilaika. They slaughtered all the men.

WS They slaughtered them in the forest?

RF Yes, they did. Later on we found the bodies. On yes, Wilaika no longer had their own Jews. That is why they sent them over from Kurzeniez.

WS Now, when that incident happened about the burglar, the one who broke into houses, then the Gestapo came and everyone was worried what this meant; but your boss said, "no, don't worry". How did he know that? Was that knowledge just for him not for everybody?

RF He came out of the place where he worked, from where he was in charge, he came home for lunch as he usually did. I was there and I saw all the Jews running. I saw my mother running there also. They ran to the end of town. It was just stupid because the people got so excited and so worried. They didn't know what to do for themselves. They ran from the center of town to the outskirts of town, but that was all. Then he came into the house and he said it is nothing. Then I called my mother in and he told her that there was nothing to worry about. That there were no killings. They didn't come for killings. That they didn't come for anything. He told us not to be afraid.

WS How did he know that?

RF He probably had been informed that there was nothing going on. He had connections with them. As a matter of fact, he used to go to Wilaika for parties. He used to stay overnight there once in a while and I used to stay in his house once in a while to watch the children overnight. He knew that it was nothing except that they came to get



that guy. Actually, it was an accident with that guy and they made him pay for it so that the rest of the people would control themselves. It was already the second year. It was in April of the second year that was in 1942. At that time, they should already have enforced the law.

WS But later on, when the town really was surrounded, he must have known that that was happening, but he didn't say anything?

RF Yes, he didn't say anything, but then we did not see him anymore. You see, it happened in the morning, as I told you during the last session that my brother went to work as usual. Remember that he met a guy, a Gentile person who knew the guy who was with my brother who told him.

WS But you didn't see your boss for quite a while, at that time?

RF That was the last day that I was going to go there.

WS But your boss's wife had given you a ration card?

RF Yes, I was supposed to buy things for her and bring them with me. I had the card to buy them with.

WS But he was not at home on that day? He wasn't there at the time, you hadn't seen him?

RF I saw him everyday but I had nothing to do with him. You see, I worked for her and I worked in the house.

WS If he did know that the first time, there was nothing to worry about, he must have known that this time it was something.

RF This time was early in the morning, nobody knew. I don't think that he knew. Nobody knew. It was a surprise to everybody.

WS As far as you know, he didn't know?

RF No! He didn't know. We knew that someday the day would come. We all knew that the day would come because [the slaughter] was going from one little city or town to another city or town. They really took care of one town at a time. I don't know if you believe it or not but it was expected sooner or later. However, we did not know it would be this soon. We thought "us, they will keep". We thought that we were better Jews, that we always were orderly. We worked wherever they sent us. We thought that we did that much better than Wilaika. You know Wilaika was such a big city. The Gestapo headquarters were there and they needed somebody to work. They needed somebody so they kept us.

WS So you were thinking that maybe you would get by?

RF We were all hoping that maybe maybe we wouldn't get slaughtered. You know as long as there is life there is hope! Maybe we would survive.

WS Had you heard? Did you have any contact that would let you know what was happening in Russia or on the Western front, or elsewhere in Europe?

RF No, No nothing! We knew absolutely nothing.

WS You didn't have a radio or something like that?

RF Maybe some people had but we didn't know. Those who had them listened to them in secret since we were all afraid. First of all, we had been told to give everything like that away. Whoever had a radio had to give it away.

WS I see. No one got broadcasts from the BBC or something like that?

RF Not at that time.

WS Did people know about the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation). [The BBC undertook as early as 1939 to broadcast from England to the European continent in the various languages. They used refugees from various countries so as to talk in "perfect" idiomatic languages to broadcast news and other programs. It was a way of obtaining news and keeping up with the war to listen to "Big Ben" which started the BBC news at 9 PM in France. Listening was done clandestinely by people gathering in people's backrooms from where sounds could not penetrate to the streets. The news about the Germans lack of success and then reversals in Eastern Libya as well as the naval victory against the battleship, The German Pocket-Graf Spee were great moral boosters. They prevented complete mental cave-ins to the German overlordship. These BBC news programs were utilized later to pass coded messages to the underground. Listening was, of course, illegal and was punished by deportation or execution without trial or appeal. Attempts were made regularly to jam the programs but usually, especially in the evenings, it was possible to listen and understand most of it. The Voice of America programs were patterned on the BBC prototypes). The BBC was frank enough about reversals of the allies to be completely believable.]

RF Not at that time in Poland. We were not that advanced in technology and we had very few radios.

WS On quite a different subject, during that year, when the Germans were there, were there any marriages or funerals? There were funerals, of

course, but were there marriages though? Did people get married during that time?

RF No, not that I remember, no marriages.

WS People who wanted to get married, have family gatherings?

RF There were no marriages or no births that I know of. Except the birth of that little baby which survived with me. She was born after the Germans came. That lady was pregnant before. As a matter of fact, I was in the woods with her. With that little baby, there were three children.

WS This was your boss's baby?

RF No, no, no.

WS Oh, another lady?

RF This has nothing to do with my work!

WS We will get back to the woods a little later, but I just wanted to clear that up. Nobody was Bar Mitzvahed or anything like that?

RF Oh no, oh no! The entire religion was put away from sight. We just made it privately at home when a holiday came. Like first we had Rosh Hashona in 1941. We gathered in our homes. Then came Yom Kippur, the day of the fast. We gathered as much as we could. We were afraid even to be all together. May be only ten men (certain prayers according to Jewish tradition required ten men per the orthodox tradition, expanded to accept ten people as sufficient in the postwar days) to make services. Then, there was the following spring, the Passover festival when I helped them make the matzoh.

WS Oh, you made matzoh? That was very good!

RF Yes, we made matzohs. We had flour so we could make it. We made it in a place where she used to bake bread. To go to the main market place from my home we only needed to go through a little garden which she had and the bakery was there. It was there that I helped them bake the matzoh.

WS On Purim did you make hamentashen also (those are the special three cornered pastries which are prepared to celebrate the victory of the Jews under Esther and Mordecai against the bloodthirsty Haman who wanted to kill all the Jews in Persia but was hanged on the very gallows he had had prepared as his own "final solution" for the Jews in his own time)?

RF Yes, we certainly did.

WS Did you give them names?

RF No.

WS Gestapo would have been a good name for them.

RF That is right. The Hamentashen are named after Haman whose name we don't even want to remember.

WS I see, but everybody was thinking that way?

RF That is right. There was a lot in common.

WS It was hard for people to keep their hopes up.

RF Well, a human being, no matter how bad he is off, still has hope. As long as your eyes are open you hope that maybe some miracle will happen. We used to hear a plane coming, then we thought that maybe, maybe the Russians are coming. Maybe something will help us. We didn't know about the Americans on the Western front, you know. We never heard anything from that side. However, we thought maybe the Soviets will wake up. Maybe they will see what the Germans are doing to their people. After all, the Soviet army had given up. They surrendered to the Germans like flies. They ran to them after the German attack in 1941 and later on the Germans kept them in the camps. In the prison camps and they were mistreated. They were treated worse than the Jews. We had homes, we had ghettos, we had something. They had nothing. They were without shoes when they were working together with the Jews on the railroads and other projects for the Germans. I was one time in Wilaika to work and I worked with these Russian prisoners. They went to prison camps, that is the Russian soldiers. They were without shoes, their clothes were torn.

WS That was in the winter time already?

RF It was already very late fall. The German army gathered a lot of potatoes. What we did was that the soldiers dug like a big pit and we used to put the potatoes in there and cover them with straw and then with the ground. It could lay in there for the entire winter, and the potatoes were available when needed. Then they started killing them, just like they did to the Jews. They killed them and that was the end of it. The word of that treatment got back to the Russian army. That is what caused the partisans to get started. They saw that there was no reason to surrender to the Germans. They then fought better, first of all.

WS These were the Russians?

RF Yes, the Russians. Then a lot of them ran away from the camps and they found hiding places with the people of the forest area. So the Germans realized what they had done (they also began to have many of their own people as prisoners of the Russians, who, of course, returned the treatment of their own prisoners) and they fed them better and they gave them clothes to put on. Then the Jews came out from all over, whoever could go.

WS And joined the partisans?

RF Then the Russian army already sent supplies by parachutes and also they parachuted special groups in to organize the partisans. That is how it started that we could survive because of this. However, later on, when we were in the woods, the Germans came and blockaded off one section of the woods. They were really looking for the partisans not for the Jews. They did not know that there were Jews in hiding. Actually, they found out because some people told.

WS I would have to ask you this eventually. Did the groups which were dropped by parachute know that they would join up with the Russian prisoners?

RF Yes.

WS And that there were Jews with them.

RF Yes. I worked for a group like this. My brother worked for another groups like this. These were special groups, especially trained people.

WS Were they glad to have the help of the Jews, the partisans?

RF Yes, yes.

WS That was a good thing. Even although they were communists, they were okay?

RF Oh yes. They helped us a lot. But what happened when an area was blockaded off, the partisans went. They had guns, they had everything. So they ran out. They didn't wait to fight the Germans. They went from one forest to another forest. However, the Jews with small children, the families, who were hiding could not go. Where could we go? That is why we were left behind there and a lot of children were killed. Three times they killed three or four children. The fourth time they did not come to us. That fourth time was when the Germans were already in retreat. There were three blockades in almost two years time. From September to August of 1944.

WS The first time was in February of 1943?

RF           When my mother was killed. She was caught in a small village. I am telling the story from way back then and there really was a lot to tell before that. We were living in a bunker underground and she went out. We had food.

WS           There were eighteen of you in that bunker?

RF           Yes, we had saved food for the winter because winter was hard. In winter we could not go out and beg because first of all, on the fresh snow you could see the tracks. So we tried not to make tracks, therefore, we saved up some food. That is, potatoes, peas, whatever the people from the surrounding areas would give us. We could even have survived for a few months with the little we had. Then my mother saw that there was snow, a lot of snow on the ground and it was really cold. She said, I am going to go to that place, Margi, (spelled by RF at the request of WS) that little village. She went there since we knew all the people there already. We had gone there so often. We knew all of the people. She said, I am going to bring some peelings, you know when we cleaned the potatoes, the potato peelings which we saved for them as fodder for their cows. So my mother had saved a whole bag and she said I am going to bring it to them and will drink a little milk and I will bring back some straw for a new mattress. She said I will ask a lady there whom she know who was a dressmaker for some scissors, because when we came out of our hiding place my mother ran into our house and tore one drape and she rolled up with pair of shoes in it and she ran back out. Then at night we ran out of the attic. So she had a piece of material and she said, "I am going to make a dress for you". That is why she left me in the cellar. She went together with another lady. This other lady had a husband and four children. The two ladies went and she even put what she wanted us to eat to boil and said, "you eat, don't wait. I will eat later. The food will be ready. Just take it off the stove". That was the stove which we had made. I was already nervous because it got pretty late in the morning and my mother was not there. She should have been back. I ventured out of the cellar and I heard a few shots. I went back down and I said you know what, I heard shots, something is wrong here. So the man said, oh nothing is wrong. Don't be afraid. Don't panic. My heart wasn't in it and I said something is wrong! I tell you! I should go out and investigate. So they said, okay, go. I went. There was snow on the ground. There were a lot of tracks and no one could see which way they were and where they led to. Before I left, I stopped in another underground shelter where another few Jews lived altogether. There were always three or four Jews living together in one area. We were all taking care of ourselves (there were no chiefs or other people who organized us). I talked to them and I told them that I was worried because my mother had been gone for a long time. I asked them whether they heard about anything going on. Anything strange going on in the woods. They said that they did not,

that they had not heard anything. However, later, while I was talking to them, one came running. He came from the other side of the same forest. He said that on the other side of the forest (the terms of woods and forest are used interchangeable) not of the village but of the woods, that the Germans had surrounded the whole forest. He told us that one guy had been killed and that a lady who I knew had been killed. He did not know yet about my mother. Then I said, oh, something happened to mother!!!! Then I told them, I am going. In case I am caught I am not going to tell anything. I don't care. If my mother is gone I want to go to find out. I don't care to stay by myself. I came just to the end of the forest and from afar I saw the village. You know, you could see a lot of tracks from houses and buggys. Actually, in the winter time you don't have the buggys but you have the sleighs. I saw that there was something wrong. There was something more than a few Germans, as that fellow had been saying, were on the other side. That place, Margi, was on our side and they had another few villages on that side in which other Jews lived. As a matter of fact, my future husband's mother lived in one. His sister, who came to visit, stayed there also. I went into the first house. I didn't care at that time. I didn't see anybody in the street, that was the first house from the corner facing the forest. There was a guy who was always in contact with the partisans. He always gave warnings to the partisans and as "the Germans are coming" or "the Germans are here", he always knew what was going on. He worked for the partisans and he supplied them with information. I came into that house, and he said, "Jew, what are you doing here, right now?" I said "why?" I knew already that something was dreadfully wrong because he was shaking. He said "you better go out from here this minute. Go out! Your mother was caught just one hour ago with that other lady. I don't know what they did to her and what they did to the other lady. There was one German and ten Ukrainians. The Ukrainians worked for the Germans then. I don't know if they are alive or not". Of course, I was very upset and I cried and he said "there is no use to cry, you just go out because in case they come back. In case they are still around. They might be at the other end of the village". His house was at the end closest to the forest. He then added, "you better go back and tell your people who can hide, to hide because they are going to surround the entire forest. They asked, because they knew that there are a lot of Jews hiding around this place, for directions". The Germans went to the place where we were and to other places also. I got back to our cellar and I told the people, the few Jews who lived underground together, what had happened. Then I cried and I told these friends of mine what had happened. Their mother was there also. "I am not certain that they have been killed already but I believe that the shots I heard were the shots which killed my mother". I have a feeling that the guys, we had then three or four men in our group, the rest were children and women were shocked. They said "let's go out of there! If they have not been shot, in case they are alive and they force them to show the

place where they had lived, we won't have a chance. They might all come here, so let's go out!" I said "where will we go, where is there to go to? What reason do I have to go on living?" They said that I just couldn't stay there. I felt so bad also for the children, and of course, I also felt bad for myself. So we went out. I was so upset! We went away, just to hide in the woods. Really in the same area where we had lived. Really, just not to be caught in our cellar. By that time, I was so upset that I got separated from the entire group. I had just lost track of them. I did not know where they were. I was all by myself. When I woke up in the evening, I was laying on the snow, I was freezing. I wondered, "my goodness what happened to me". It was already dark. I did not know how to go and where to go. I didn't know anything then. It was just too much!! So I went back. I didn't know how to go or where to go. I didn't know then, nothing just nothing made sense to me. All the trees looked alike. All the bushes looked alike. I didn't know what to do, so I just went. I went and I walked and I walked until I found their tracks to our cellar. When I got there they had already returned. They were already in the bunker. When I came back I knew that my mother would not be home, that she would not be back, that it was no use talking about it. That night, I could not sleep, of course, I was too upset. I, at least, wanted to find her body. I said, "I give anything, just go please, don't ask anybody." I had a few rings from my mother, just go back and find her body. I said that because the Germans were already gone. It didn't take the Germans longer than one day. They wouldn't stay in the woods overnight. Next day somebody came to the place, to Margi, and asked a few people, "so what happened?" One fellow was also caught with the two women. However, they let the guy go. I met him later on. He told us that they shot them right in the forest while they were looking for the rest of the Jews. They just shot whomever they caught. My mother was in the process of running away when they shot her. She fell a little bit further than the other lady. It was snowing very hard. Then the people from Margi were so nice. They knew me. They knew that I was now alone. So they said, "tell her we will try to find the body for her". People from another village went to look for wood and found the bodies. The bodies were partially covered with snow. The fellow who found the bodies told the people in his village that he had found two bodies. So the people knew already that it was my mother and the other lady. They got word to us that bodies had been found and that we could have them if we wanted. I got hold of the fellow and gave him one of the rings from my mother, so that he would show our people where it is. Our people then went and brought her back. Then we held a Jewish funeral.

WS            In Margi or in the forest?

RF            In the forest. Really not far from Margi. As a matter of fact, later on, I went back to recover her body and bury it in Kurzeniez.



WS Yes, you mentioned that.

RF We buried the others wherever we could, by the people who found them. They were also buried in the villages, wherever they had been caught because this raid was a surprise. If my mother had known, she would not have gone. But of course, she didn't even go out begging. She just went for a little bit of milk and a little straw. Until then, we had lived pretty peacefully.

WS That was in February?

RF Yes, February 2nd or 3rd. Because in December, which was the time for Chanukah and Christmas, we didn't really know which it was. The men had prepared the place to make it possible for us to move in the bunkers. When we went into the bunkers there was already snow on the ground. We had not had much snow until then and we had slept in the open under the sky. It was cold. I always had slept close to my mother. She still had a fur coat from former times. We covered each other with that coat and we held on to each other. She used to say, "who knows how long we will have to live like this! Who knows?" You see, we made a fire always but it still was cold. We were sitting around the fire but still it was cold. Finally the end of December, we could move into the bunkers. She only lived there for five weeks or at the most six weeks, that is all.

WS Did you, the rest of you, stay in the bunker?

RF Yes, we stayed there until the second blockade, that was on April 29, 1943. Three months later after the first blockade there was a blockade again and this time, they destroyed our bunkers. They then killed some people who had been staying close to us. They killed some men who were living next to us.

WS You got away?

RF Yes, we got away. I saw the Germans stand in front of me! I saw him but he didn't see me. I was just a short distance away. I was, at that time, with a Gentile boy from the same village, Margi. As a matter of fact, I was there. They didn't have anybody else, so I used to come to help them by peeling their potatoes and prepare supper. Just so that I had something to do. I met him there and he said, "I want to go with you". So I said, "All right, let's go home! It was night and I was afraid to walk all by myself. So, he went with me and he came and stayed overnight in our bunker. Actually, he was not a partisan, but it was about the same thing since he worked for the partisans. So, he was there and he had to find out what was going on with the Germans. Then, he was bringing the latest news to the partisans. So, I brought him to the bunker and we were seated together. He stayed overnight and the next morning, the Germans came

with the new blockade. All of a sudden, we ran out without any other consideration. We just ran out! Fortunately, that it was in April when it no longer was so cold or else, we would have frozen to death. We hid away for a whole day. A little baby who by that time was already one and half years old, she started to talk at two years of age, was hiding with us. By March, the baby would not say anything. The mother covered the baby's mouth because if she said one thing the Germans would have heard her. You see, we were just next to the Germans, just as close as that TV set is from us now, We were hiding under a fallen tree. We were under that tree and the German was over there. They went to the very place where our people were hiding. However, they did not make a chain. They kept each other in sight, but they did not touch. So, they went through and that was all for them. They really didn't care!!

WS            Did they pass on either side of where you were about ten or twelve feet?

RF            Just so close to us that we could hear them talking. We were hiding under a fallen oak tree with a big bush near us. That place was so bushy that they would not bother to go there. They went where there were no trees. It was a little like a march. We were under that tree, under the bushes laying there quietly and they went through and we heard the grenade go off in the bunker. When we got back there, later on, there was nothing left. We could even hear that they took a lot of cows and a lot of pigs from the villages. We could hear all that. We could hear them loading the trucks with all of it. They certainly did not leave empty handed. Whoever was caught was caught.

WS            You were that close that you could observe it all?

RF            Oh yes. It was close. We could hear it all. Especially, you could hear the pigs. You know how pigs yell. We remained holed up until late. Late at night, in hiding. Then we went out to see. Truly, one of us went to see while the others stayed under cover what had gone on. Then we noticed that everything was quiet. We had been able to hear it all because we were so close by. Wherever we would have gone to we would run into the Germans. They were all around us. Around our little area. More than around any other area. You see, the first time they were in another area of the forest. This time, they were more concentrated in our area. A forest is a big place. There km, km and km of forest.

WS            You would say that it was a miracle that you escaped then?

RF            Oh yes. Just a miracle!! It was just meant to be! I don't know who brought us back, but it just happened! It was just meant to be. Now, if someone would tell me that something like this would happen I would not believe it. How could we have seen it all but the Germans did not

see us. We were looking for places to hide and they caught whoever they saw. They shot whoever they caught.

WS            Did they get any from your group of eighteen?

RF            No, not from my immediate group. Another time three of us girls went together begging on one evening when I saw somebody with a collar around his neck. We used to say that it was like a court from another nationality which decided all our fates. They were two Jews, two men, they had run away from a concentration camp and they begged us to take them somewhere. One of the girls did not want to take them and I said, "why not, they are alone". They were actually four of them. Two came out and two stayed in hiding. I said let's take them with us. After all they are young men and who knows maybe they are hungry. They told us that they were not hungry because they went begging at night and they had gotten some food but they just wanted a place where they could stay. Where other Jews are because they had not met any Jews in a long time. So, we brought them with us.

WS            The four people whom you had met in the forest?

RF            Four men and then four more came. They all had escaped from a concentration camp. There were eight people all together. As a matter of fact, they were so religious that in the morning there were eight men and they called our two men and they used to daven (that means pray) every morning. So now there were ten men and they used to make a minyon (that is the number, ten men is what is required as per the orthodox Jewish ritual to say certain prayers) and daven. These men were so religious. One of them was very young and he used to sing like a cantor (cantorial schools educate people to sing and chant the prayers etc.). He was young, intelligent boy. He was killed in that blockade. Actually, four of them were killed in that blockade. The four others were alive until we were all rescued. I don't know where they went later. However, I met a few of them later in a different area of the woods. Because after the blockade everyone went to different places.

WS            You don't know what concentration camp they got away from do you?

RF            I don't know. But my sister-in-law, she would know this because one of them was good friends with my sister-in-law. It was a camp from White Russia. I will get that information for you. I will find it out. I can't remember now.

WS            We can get that later on. Right now, we are getting pretty close to the end of the tape and we need to stop before too long. But it was about the hardest part of the story to tell about your mother's death.

RF                That was very close to my heart. There were many problems there and before and after. But that was TRULY THE HARDEST PART!! It was hard because I lost my brother during the time when we went out to the woods. That is when we lost contact with each other. My brother went to a different part of the forest than we went to.

WS                Oh, your brother wasn't with you at that time? Oh, I see.

RF                My brother went through hell after this entire episode. He went to the woods in a different way because instead of going to the right like we went, he went first (probably right from the attic) then we went, the little boy with my mother and the lady with her daughter who was six. You see, we lost him because the old lady I told you about, we went through something like a gate in a village. The lady caught her coat and could not go through. So, I went back and unhooked her. In the meantime, I lost my brother. It was dark. We could not see anything. Then my brother heard shots. We heard shots also because in that place, close to the electrical station, sawmill, they heard us going by; so whoever was there, in charge, started shooting. So we ran and my brother thought that they shot us and that we had been shot. So, he went into the woods and he did not look for us anymore. He told me, when I next met him, that he thought that the shots killed us.

WS                He thought that for a long time, for a couple of years didn't he?

RF                He knew later, when I sent a message to him after I had received a message from him that he is alive. From the woods, I even sent a message to Vilna to the Vilna ghetto. They remained in the ghetto in Vilna for a long long time after us. Then he got the message that I am alive. However, my mother was already dead. That, however, is a different episode.

WS                The place where you were hiding near this village, Margi, was Abe (RF's husband) said like 50 or 60 km from Kurzeniez, a long distance anyway.

RF                You mean in the woods?

WS                Yes.

RF                It was not far. Margi, the little village near where my mother was killed was not far. These little villages were all around the forest. Farmers lived all around there. Just plain farmers with a little bit of cattle and pigs and gardens. The main industry they had was wood to sell. Wood from this forest. That was really their main business. That is what they lived from. They were not really rich people. These people were really the ones who saved us. They helped us.

END OF SIDE 1 TAPE 2

WS This is the fourth session.

RF Now, before we start let us say that this is November 9th.

WS Yes, November 9th.

RF Yes, today is the day of the 40th Anniversary of the Kristal Nacht in Germany (night of broken glass when the synagogues throughout Germany were burned down, where businesses owned by Jews were looted. Jewish homes broken into and Jewish males arrested whenever the local dictator wanted to do it. The date was November 9/10 1938).

WS Oh yes, I had forgotten.

RF At that time, (Rachel was 11 years old), these were not exactly our troubles but we heard the radio and the people who came from Germany. We heard this news in Poland. My father was still alive and he spoke and read German. So, we knew more than the average person in our little town. He used to talk about it with neighbors. They really never thought that it would ever involve anybody outside of Germany.

WS You felt safe?

RF Well, we didn't know. Something happened there. Some people didn't even believe that it did happen. They thought, it cannot be! The Jews in Germany had felt very good about being Germans and Jews until then. They lived a quiet life. As a matter of fact, they lead such a life that they went away a little bit from the Judaism. Conservative Judaism started prior to that time. Reform also started in Germany. Well, this is the night and I don't know if you watched the news, they mentioned it, Kristalnacht.

WS I didn't know.

RF Oh yes. On both channels. Yes, we watched both channels at 6:30.

WS Yes, people are beginning to realize what went on.

RF Germans not Jewish Germans but Christian Germans came to the old synagogues and they had speeches and lectures there. People from the clergy. came and they demonstrated that no matter what we do we should do it that freedom prevails. No matter who tries to curtail it. Whether from the left or from the right, we have to make sure that freedom is here to stay. Then he again, I believe that it was the German Chancellor talking, apologized to the Jewry from all over the world for the wrong doings which the Germans had done to the Jewish people.

WS I guess that it was Helmut Schmidt.

RF I guess that it was he, since he is the chancellor. They showed him on the news and I saw him today.

WS They did not use to acknowledge that. Adenauer and Schliesser and these chancellors did not acknowledge that in those days.

RF Now they are starting to acknowledge it. They don't want the young people to forget. They want to do better, to make good.

WS Well, I hope that they succeed.

RF On the other hand, they had here the pro-Nazi demonstrations. He mentioned the name of a place where such demonstrations took place and it was here in the U. S. (probably Skokie, IL) but I don't remember the name.

WS We have to make these tapes so that people can listen to know how it was.

RF I hope so! However, people don't always learn from their mistakes. A lot, an awful lot of blood was shed and not only by Jews, not just Jewish blood, an awful lot of blood was shed. Of course, we, as Jews, know that we were the main victims. We were the main target.

WS You mentioned that Mr. Schatz, the schoolmaster, I keep going back to Mr. Schatz because he interests me.

RF He was interesting. He was a very interesting man.

WS You mentioned that he had some Germans coming to his house. They must have been German Jews to talk to him?

RF No, no. Those were the German officials when they wanted to talk to him privately. Different Germans. Of course, not the SS men and not the Gestapo!. They were Germans who worked for the Germans. Some of these Germans were very friendly with him. They were not civilians. In Kurzeniez, where we lived, there were no German civilians at all. They had a few wives with them but most of it was the army. All of them wore uniforms. All of them. We didn't see any German civilians. Maybe, there were some, but we did not see them. Without uniforms we really did not know who was a German and who was not.

WS There weren't any German Jews living in Kurzeniez before Mr. Schatz?

RF No, no. We did not have any. No, he truly was the only one. They could speak to since they spoke in his language. We were friends and he was friendly towards us. You see, we were next door neighbors.

One Sunday morning they came out. There was a nice breeze. It was cold because it was winter. They started shooting the birds. I never knew why or what kind. They just started shooting. We heard a shot, so I came out of the house into the backyard and Schatz's backyard opened into ours. It was one backyard for both houses and I used to play there. I saw Mrs. Schatz. I liked her. She was a very nice person but then she was not feeling well. I used to help her to clean up the house. There was really nothing to cleaning the house but they smoked a lot. That is the most what I did, clean her living room.

WS I was wondering again what kind of Germans they were.

RF No, I guess just regular normal Germans. The gestapo used to come to the office not to his house.

WS He was not specially friendly with the Gestapo was he?

RF Oh no. He was doing his job as head of the Judenrat. He did whatever he was told to do. Whatever they asked from him. The Germans who came to his house had nothing to do with the rest of the Germans. They were just Germans who worked some place else and on other things.

WS Maybe from Winaika?

RF I just know that nobody stayed there. They used to come and visit with him.

WS I wanted to get the timing down again. You mentioned the three blockades in the woods. Three times when the Germans came or one German with four Ukrainians. When they would come into the forest and try to find whomever they could, Jews or partisans. The first one was in February 1943. The second one was just a short time later.

RF On April 29th.

WS When was the third time?

RF The third time was around the holidays, in September.

WS Oh, the following September of 1943, after the summer?

RF The fourth time was in 1944, in July but by that time they didn't get to us. The Russians got us out of that one. However, more to the east, there were a lot of forests in the east. Other people were killed there.

WS In September?





WS                    They must have been able to escape just a short time before that. They got out of the camp in March of 1943!

RF                    Yes, in March of 1943. At that time, we brought them into our camp.

WS                    You said that you found some of them and talked to your friends in letting you take them in? Had you remembered the name of the camp they came from?

RF                    It was a small camp. One I had never heard about (RF consults with someone else, probably her husband). It was Baranovizi. Yes, that is it. It was a labor camp. These people were from Baranovizi. Actually, someplace near Maranovitch there was a camp just for men.

WS                    Oh, they were from the town of Baranovizi?

RF                    Yes, all from Baranovizi. It is a town. They escaped from that camp near there. More Jews escaped but we only established contact with these. First, we found two, then two more were hiding and they found four more. There were eight. Until we got them together, we first had to contact our people to find out if they wanted them. You know, if all the Jews would congregate together, it would be dangerous. It would then be hard to escape into a different place. So, in case somebody gets hold of them or someone knows that Jews are sitting there and hiding and tells the Germans, it could be very bad. Like we were separate, only eight people in our bunker. We were all alone. All alone. A long way from any others, maybe one mile from us was another small camp similar to ours.

WS                    You did not want them tonlose together?

RF                    No, No!! You see, at one place in the forest, in Russian it is called the "Pasha", that is their name for forest. In that one place, like a block, a whole lot of Jews were sitting there. They didn't even have any underground bunker like we did. Just on top, they set up tents and they lived there for three winters. Abe's mother lived there with three sisters. All three of them were there. There were also some of Abe's uncles and cousins.

WS                    Ok. Some of the people were gathered in another part of the forest. They were gathered under tents and stayed through the whole winter that way. Quite a few people together, evidently.

RF                    Yes.

WS                    Nobody found them? The Germans did not find them?

RF           The Germans knew because somebody had told them that there were a number in this specific block. All the blocks had been designated by numbers, since the entire forest was divided into blocks. The neighboring villages, they knew which block had which number because somehow, if the farmers went for wood, which they later sold, they had to know the numbers. If you did not have such numbers as guidelines, you could get lost. For example, the 66th block or the 42nd block of that forest was between four villages. There was a village on each side so in the block there was something like a little road and that road took you right to one of the villages. So, all the villagers around one block knew where the Jews were. As a matter of fact, and I am certain of this, when the first blockade happened in February 1943, during which they caught and killed my mother and another lady, they also captured and took hostage one man. He had gotten up in the morning to feed the cattle. They caught him and they took him with them. They asked him to show them where this and this block was. There could have been Russians hiding there. So they knew that they were going to that place. They did not go where we were hiding. They did not appear to care because they never asked my mother from where she came. They didn't even bother to ask the ladies. Mother just begged them to let her live because they let him live. They had been sitting together when they were asking for the address where that big camp of Jews was. That is where most of the Jews were. After they shot the ladies they let him go because they were on their way to that camp.

WS           Did the Germans go to that address?

RF           Yes. They went there and I believe, they killed thirty-two people that day. A few of the villagers, two young men, were killed in the villages as my mother was in the woods. They were caught there by surprise. A few of them were killed just because they didn't hide or run away. You see that day, when I heard the shots, remember that I told you that I heard shots in the morning, they were probably the shots which killed my mother and this lady. These people probably heard them also because the shots were closer to them than to us.

WS           They were on the other side of the shots?

RF           That is right! So they knew that it was the signal that something was wrong. People came back from the other side of the villages and they also told them that there is something wrong. That something was going on. After all, we were surprised by the first blockade. You know, the first time it is always harder to know what to do. We did not really know what to do. Altogether, they estimated that thirty-two people were killed on that day. Mostly people from Kurzeniez. As I said, the Germans didn't do anything after dark. Somehow they were frightened of the dark. They were afraid because most of what the partisans did what they did at night. The partisans

did not bother to go out during the day. So, the Germans made sure that they were back out of the forest at night and that they did not catch any partisans. The partisans always watched so that they would know what was going on. They had connections all over. Every village had someone working for the partisans. They knew what was happening. They packed up and they went someplace else.

WS            How far would it be from one village to another, 5 km or 6 km?

RF            That is right, about 5 km or sometimes 6. It was not far. Some villages were side by side next to each other. Then there were other people living by themselves. Farmers, just like you see it here. One farm with a lot of ground around it. Sometimes these farmers were living very far from each other, not together as on one street. That is how the richer people lived. They had bigger farms. Other than that all the villages were alike.

WS            Ok, I am beginning to get a general picture of life in your area. How did you manage to survive? Of course, there were people who ran around on an area of three to five miles. There would be somebody but how did you live in the bunker? I was wondering, did you have a little store?

RF            Yes, you see, we were in the open under a tree without anything else from September to Christmas time. We made a fire. After all, we had a lot of wood.

WS            Then you began to dig a hole? Did you have shovels?

RF            Yes we did. You see I was with my mother at that time, my mother could not do any physical work then, and these two men they had their two families, they got up and they found the place. We were actually three families and the others were singles. I guess there were actually three men with one younger man who did the digging. They got up in the mornings and they got shovels and they worked because they knew that sooner or later we would get a heavy frost and that it is harder to dig in the winter in frozen ground. So they built something like a bunker.

WS            How deep was it, like six feet?

RF            It was deep enough for us to stand up and walk around in it. You see, it was lined with wood inside and the roof was flat.

WS            What, a clump of trees cut up?

RF            That is right. They covered it and later on, the snow covered it so that no one could even see it. Then, inside, we had left an opening which we could, of course, close since otherwise it would have been

cold. Then we went into it kind of on a downhill, kind of a slide not slick slide, however, because we had to come up also. If it was slick, we could not have come up. We could not have gotten out of there. They built a stove of clay. We used it to cook. After all, we ate. We could cook potatoes and whatever we had and it was warm.

WS           An open fire then?

RF           No. It was closed. An inside fireplace. The top was straight and it was shaped. We burned the wood inside day and night. It kept us warm.

WS           It was clay? Even the top was clay?

RF           Yes, it was all made up of clay. The top was made of bricks which at that time we got from the villages. We also had gotten the shovels from the villages. The only thing which we had to be careful about was who we talked to in the villages. We could not trust all the individuals. Of course, we had to make sure that those we couldn't trust didn't know where we were. As I told you, we used to go begging in order to eat.

WS           Did you go everyday?

RF           No! No! If we went everyday and everybody would give us something we would have too much food. We couldn't eat so much. So we went about twice a week and we got food. Everybody gave something. One lady may give us a potatoe, another lady may give us a few carrots, another gave us cabbage, another gave us a little bit of salt. Salt was like gold. Another would give us a piece of bread. So you see, that we got food. We got food like real beggars. They helped us. They just couldn't say no to us. These people were really good people. What could they do! They said there are children, there are people whose lives depend upon us giving them something to eat.

WS           Was it a big enough village to have a church of its own?

RF           No. They did not have churches. They had like a church on the road serving several villages. There was one village which had a church of its own. This was a bigger village. It was like a small town. It was further away.

WS           Were these people very religious?

RF           I didn't see them as being religious. In some places I used to stay for a few days with some people. Some people kept me because when I lost my mother I had nobody to care for me and to come back to. So whenever it was quiet and they were not afraid of Germans. You see the problem was that the people themselves were afraid. They were

afraid of one another. That someone would tell that they kept a Jewish girl in their house. They would ask me to stay over for a day or two. They would keep me gladly. Why not! I was young, I was fifteen, I was healthy. I could help them gladly. You know I didn't eat their food for nothing. I did help them a lot! When I came to one of these houses I really worked hard. After all, I always liked to help them anyways. As long as I can remember even when I was very little, I used to help my mother. Just to have something to do.

WS                    It seems like you always were that way!

RF                    Yes, that is what I did most of my life. As a matter of fact, it was a bad winter, a very stormy winter, a very cold one. I was in one place, both the man and the wife were old. Their sons had gone over to the partisans. One daughter was a very very sick woman. I believe that she passed away later on, at the end of the war when we moved to a different place, so I am not certain since I had no more contact with them. They kept me there for an entire week. I really had not come to them for that. I had not asked them for it. I just came to that house and asked them if I could come in to bake bread. Just to make a loaf of bread. You want to know how I got up the nerve to ask for that? Well, that was nothing that extraordinary. It was the harvest time but they only had the grain. I said, "what a lot of grain! What do you do with the grain?" I went to that fellow, he was a very good really religious man. As if he was actually speaking to "G-d", he spoke wholeheartedly because that is a good thing to do. So he said to me, "ok, child, come in" So, I came in with the grain and I said "I will first grind it on the stone". That is what we did and we had the flour. So I started to work. To make the dough you have to wait at least twelve hours until it is ready and then you knead it in order to make the bread next. So I stayed overnight. So naturally while I stayed overnight I helped the old lady. He liked that because he thought that I would not do anything and she could not do much since she was very weak. He liked my work so much. You know I knew how to do the work since I had done it for the Polish lady. As a matter of fact, I knew how to do everything in the kitchen particularly. He said, "it is a blessing to have you in the house". I cleaned everything, every room in the house. I served them at the table. He was very pleased! He said, "of course, the Germans! If there could only be peace in the world and we could have the help of someone like you!". It was night when somebody knocked at the door and there was a terrible storm. The snow was drifting over the windows so that you couldn't see through them. The knock on the door was loud, so he was afraid, he really was afraid! He was scared but he told me right away, "you don't move. Don't make any move". If there were Germans he would let them in but they were even afraid of their own people. Keeping a Jewish girl there was a crime, however, luckily they were partisans. Even the partisans were hunting for people, for strangers. So, they came and they asked them to explain

if they had strangers in the house. He said no, nobody! It is all my family. Later, the same night, one of his sons came. The old man told him that he was keeping a Jewish girl from the forest in his house. He added, "I cannot send her on; it is so bitterly cold. By that time, it was already early morning, actually daybreak. So the son said, "ok dad, but be careful". He ate some breakfast and he left. This was not the married son who had come, there were two sons. Anyways, I was there for an entire week. During that time I baked my bread. I really didn't need bread since I was alone and I would eat it alone. So I left it there anyways. However, he wanted to know how a fifteen year old girl can bake bread like this. I was afraid to go out to the cattle which he had. In our White Russian neighborhood the farmers have a kind of forehouse which is kept empty where they keep a lot of grain for the cattle. Since it is so cold in the wintertime, people used to go there to clean up and to put everything in order. That was really a very good week for me. First of all, I was fed well then I was warm. That was lucky for me since that was the worst week of that entire winter. During that week the storm quieted down a little. However, at the end of that week I said that I had to go. That I couldn't stay there. I had several other people who offered to keep me in that village.

WS            Was that in Ardina?

RF            No, it was in a different village called Norun. We had to go through a little stream of water to go from our place to this village by a little boat or by a little bridge which they had built at one place. This was a nice size village and there a lot of people knew me. They knew that I did not come only to beg. There was also a family with small children who would have liked to keep me. However, they were not actually part of the village. If something had happened such as if the Germans would come, they would have been there first, so they were really afraid. They were living in a little tiny home between villages. Actually, the Germans were afraid that some of these homes were communist strongholds, so they didn't dare to go there. Even the blockade in February was not all that easy for them.

WS            Now that was then in late February or just a few weeks after your mother had been shot?

RF            Yes. That was the same month. That was also the month when a big storm came. We did have a lot of snow then. This blizzard kept blowing for an entire week. Even worse than what we had in Dayton last year.

WS            Did this farmer know that your mother had been shot?

RF            Yes, he knew. As a matter of fact, he had known my father. You see, a lot of people knew my father. You see my father traveled in the

summertime. He was traveling a lot when he bought and sold cattle. He knew a lot of people and a lot of people knew him. He was also known for his ability to tell a joke. He was well liked. I came to some places about which I had never heard before and when people used to ask me, as they often did, who I was, where I came from and I told them that my father was Avram the butcher from Kureniez. They used to tell me how much they liked my father. I had never known how many people liked him. This old man had known my father. I don't know how, but he kept me, out of respect for my father. You see, when my father was dead and the Russians came and closed all the business' because they wanted Communism, farmers from all around came and brought my mother cattle for no money. She was to be able to use the cattle as she wished, butchering them or trading them and was able to pay them later. No one knew what money had any value left due to the war and the Russians and Germans splitting Poland up. That is how my mother was able to get her life back on an open keel for all four of us. She even made money from this until the Germans came. Then, of course, it stopped. That is how nice the people were. They were shocked that my father had died. That, of course, lasted only until the Germans came, in September 1941. Of course, in 1939 and 1940 no one could do any business, only work for the government because of Communism.

WS                    I never had gotten your father's name?

RF                    It was Avram. That means Avarpwocz, AVARPWOCZ(spelled by WS rather rapidly). However, while we were in the woods that is what we used to do twice a week (go to the village). Once in a while, we used to go out not just begging but otherwise also. There was even a time when my mother was still alive in Margi that a young man from that other village came to our bunker and asked us to go to a Saturday night dance. Of course, we didn't go there. We were afraid but they trusted us. We were five young girls in one place. He was a spokesman for his village and he said, "you are part of us now". But we didn't go, we just couldn't. However, once we went there, my mother and I and two other girls and their mother, that lady who was killed with my mother, on a Saturday night. They used to have a little sauna outside. The regular way to make steam by pouring water over hot bricks. You know actually a sauna without electricity. The sauna was just outside in a little building, the inside of which was mainly made of stone. That sauna was really hot but it was a good place to bathe. After all, we had to bathe also, we were people. It was cold and such a sauna, all the steam, really cleansed you. It used to be a custom for people to use such a sauna on Saturday nights or Sundays to bathe. So they let us in after they were finished. Obviously, that was good for us because in our bunker where we lived there was one man, we had two single men, who had a coat made of sheepskin. And that coat was full with lice. The lice just traveled inside the coat so you could not see them. We used to take this coat to the sauna and expose it to the steam so as

to kill the lice. Especially, we young girls were very sensitive to lice. That is why my mother tried to make a new mattress for us. We certainly wanted to keep clean. I had long hair and I wanted such hair since my mother had long hair. So cleanliness was most important! So we wanted to go to such a sauna to clean-up particularly in the winter. During the summer we could clean ourselves outside. Then we made a fire and we heated water and with hot stones, we had the equivalent of our own sauna. Of course, we could not change clothes much since we didn't have many spare clothes. As a matter of fact, we didn't have any extra clothing. We had the same dress. We washed it and in this way we cleaned ourselves and our clothes. This was also healthy for the body. So that evening, after the sauna in Margi, they bathed and then they gave us the room and then we bathed. After we were done and we were already ready to leave. It was the house of the mayor of Margi, one of his two sons came. By that time they already had active partisans. So, the son came and said, "the partisans want you to come in. We are having a party". And you know that we had to run away from there! First of all, they told my mother that she cannot come to the party because she is old. She was only 47 years old at that time. However, 47 appeared old to all of us. Especially in wartime. They said, "no, you go back to where you live and we will bring your daughters back to you". They thought that all three of us were her daughters. The others were actually two sisters who now live here in the United States. We had to leave because we were also afraid of the partisans especially on Saturday nights when they got wild. We went to the party sometimes but later on we noticed it. You know we had heads so that we could observe things. We noticed that they were drinking too much on Saturday nights and the parties were getting wild. They had a few girls there from the village, their own girls. The mayor's daughter, she was a beautiful girl but she had a bad ending. However, that is a story by itself. They had a party which lasted very late. I was really young at the time and inexperienced and I wouldn't let anybody touch me. I was very much afraid of everything. You know, here you get sex education in school, from the television and from books but we didn't have any of it, so I was just terrified. I know that nothing good would come of it not only because of the boys from the village but also the partisans. They were rough, even rougher than the villagers so, we somehow made our escape. One girl stayed to entertain them, she was a little older. She danced with them and then when we left we told the guys who had asked us that we had to go. They said, "if you have to go, you have to go by yourselves! You have to go outside". There was no way that anybody would bother us so we went. My mother was waiting across the street so we went with my mother. Then when she was by herself, and we knew that we could talk, we decided to try to get that other girl out. We knocked 3 knocks so she would know and she would come out. Also she told them something and slipped out and we ran away. They ran after us but we ran so fast that we hardly could breath. We got back home. You know I mean the



bunker-quite breathless. We were just afraid to get involved with them. That was already during the winter. It was very cold! Naturally, when we ran we didn't feel the cold. Even then, it was so hard to stay away from these fellows. Maybe they didn't mean any harm, but they maybe wanted us just to be like the other girls, like the girls from the village.

WS                    However, you couldn't trust that, you couldn't take chances?

RF                    Of course, we were young girls. They wouldn't kill us but they would do us other harm maybe. You could never be sure especially at that time. In the beginning, in the forest it was tough. Later on, there was already a full fledged partisan group. Then the Germans made the rule that any man who did anything with the partisans, who carried any weapons or even just sold them anything would be punished. Later on, they just shot anybody who was involved with the partisans in the slightest way. A guy who was caught was brought to a simulated trial and then disciplined similarly. At first, you could get by if you just watched yourself very carefully. A few months later, while my mother was still alive, we didn't have as many partisans then as yet. Still, she did always keep me beside her and she watched over me. It wasn't easy. The food wasn't so bad since we could easily beg. It was easy to go begging at night but of course, it isn't pleasant. People gave us whatever they could. So we always had food. We were not hungry then. Sure, we were hungry at the beginning of the time we were in the woods since we didn't know where we were and whom we could trust. Once we found the place where we settled we no longer suffered from hunger.

WS                    Where did you get your water from, did you dig a well?

RF                    We begged. Everyplace we begged!!! You see, before we go to the bunker we lived in maybe twenty different places. We were just in the open and we moved from one place to another. Whenever somebody came into the woods, maybe just a villager drove by and knew that we were there. We were afraid that they would tell. After all, these were the first few months.

WS                    So you just kept moving?

RF                    Yes, then we just kept moving to another place. At first, we got somewhere and we thought oh, this is a good place. So we dug a hole for the water right away. If we couldn't find good water we didn't stay. Fresh water was needed for us.

WS                    So water was not very hard to come by?

RF                    No, so once we had clean water we always boiled water, we washed our hands.

WS                    So you had a few kettles to boil water in?

RF                    Oh yes, we had some kettles. We even had something to boil potatoes in. We had obtained something like this . We found these in the villages. Later on, that was no problem because later on the groups of partisans lived there, all over the forest. Oh, there were a lot of partisans. They had everything. They had set up bunkers for twenty people. Some of them were even large enough to accomodate maybe sixty people with twenty people in one corner. When they got set up, it was unbelievable what all was set up underground in the woods. That, of course, was one year later. The Russians sent material and equipment by parachutes. So then, we had everything and they could get anything they wanted dropped to them. We even got doctors. I was even treated when I had trouble with my throat by a doctor from the partisans. They made me go because they were afraid that I had more than a sore throat. A lot of people also had young children with them in the woods. So they made go and the doctor treated me. That was a regular doctor during the second winter in the woods.' Yes, the first winter was tough!!

WS                    Let's see, how big was your bunker? About the size of this room, maybe?

RF                    No, not as large as this livingroom. Maybe from the window to the couch.

WS                    About twelve feet?

RF                    Yes, about that. It was narrow. The entire length was maybe like a table but it was made out of wood as a frame and we made mattresses out of straw on which we slept on both sides of the separation. Here, at the end, there was a family which had four children whose mother was killed with my mother and her husband. Then, there were two more ladies, two single ladies, they were sisters and then my mother and me. Then, on the other side, there was one family with one child. We were ninteen, all together. However, one of the group wasn't always with us. He was a loner. He came and he went.

WS                    You had a door at one end?

RF                    We had one door and there was cement just across the door. Yes, just across. We had build a little chimney through the ceiling. We also had a little window at the end opposite to the door, for ventilation and so that we could see the light. You see, we couldn't see through

the wooden door. It was just to allow us in and out but they built it well. The door was damaged during the second blockade when they threw the grenade.

WS           The door stood upright?

RF           Oh yes! We stayed there only until April 29, 1943. Then it was damaged so that we could no longer use it.

WS           Who were you with after that blockade? Just with the people from the Kurzeniez?

RF           Yes.

WS           Then, when that bunker was broken up on the 29th of April?

RF           Then we moved to a different place.

WS           You dug another hole?

RF           Another place with another hole in the ground. That was a different kind of hole. It was only half way below ground. It was built up. It was nice.

WS           It was like a log house?

RF           Yes, we still had to go down but only half way. But when we slept then the beds we had made were right between the windows. I call them beds. So it was a lot more airy because we were half way up. That second bunker was also made better. It was nicer. We got bigger logs to build with. It really looked like a little home. However, then we were not as many people. We were people from a different group. It was a different place. You see, after April 29th we all separated. The villager who came to invite me that night, he showed us where we could dig. He really gave us the place. It was also next to the village of Margi. We are talking about the same village but in a different place. Actually on the other side of Margi. The villager showed us where we actually passed by, during the day of the blockade when we saw the Germans.

WS           Do you remember the man's name?

RF           Nickolai but I don't know the rest of the name. I never did. We called him Cholai. You see in Russian we always shortened the names. He was truly nice. He was a nice young guy. He worked with the partisans. He was our contact with the partisans. He went to the smaller cities to the farms as a kind of messenger. He found out whatever he could, that was his job for the partisans.

WS            You see, the more names like that which we can put on the tape the more credible the entire story is. The more people will feel that you are not making it up.

RF            How can you make up stories like that? What do you mean?? It is not a story! It is something which happened! You can't even tell so many things!! It is impossible!!

WS            The only thing is that when someone sits down to write a history about it, to just tell the whole story in a book, then they can refer to the stories and they know what story goes with what story and they can put it all into the proper sequence.

RF            Yes, because I will tell you exactly how it happened day after day. For example, I tied the first blockade to the second blockade and I tell you what happened before the first blockade. Before we went to the bunker we had so much trouble finding a place. One fellow, the one who I told you was the only survivor when they killed fifty-three out of fifty-four men who were accused of being communists in the very beginning and who had to bury all the others. He survived in our corner of the woods and he was with the partisans. He was a very courageous young man. All the eagerness to kill and take his revenge was already in his blood. So, he was the first one to join the partisans. He rode on a horse. He had learned to handle horses from his father. He grew up with horses. He rode a horse and he came to all the Jews who were gathered in one place without even knowing if we had to winter there or not. He talked to the partisans and he told them that they had to bring all these Jews who survived from Kurzeniez and a few other towns around. That they should be taken through the fighting line and taken to Russia. He organized it and we all went like cattle. A few partisans went in front of us. We came to Janzun, it was a big station (the spelling is approximate since it has not been located on the map) and the Germans started to shoot. There was too much commotion going on. Many had children on their shoulders.

WS            That turned out not to have been such a good idea.

RF            No, it wasn't. There were too many all at once. It should have been done by groups. A group could probably have gotten through. That was the first time and they had made a mistake. The Germans started shooting and when they started shooting, we started to run back. What else could we have done since we were helpless people. We had to cross the lines somewhere. Everyone ran in a different direction. A young lady, she was the daughter of a fellow who did the ritual killing, who had lived in the woods, they were actually three sisters. One of whom had a child, she left her little boy and she ran away. That gives you an idea of the panic that existed. You see, the Germans then came and ran after us. They shot but they could not find us because everybody ran in another direction. My mother said we are

not going to drop the piece of bread which we had with us. We had just a little something with us. But in case, she said, it gets to be so bad, we will drop it. But don't leave me, just hold on to my hand. We held hands then because otherwise people just couldn't find one another. There was such a panic. All of a sudden we ran away. It was already dawn when we got to a village. Then all of us gathered together with the two partisans who had escorted us. They came back and they grouped us again. They said, "we will wait here one hour more and whoever comes it is ok. Those who don't make it, that is too bad. We will go back into the forest". A few didn't come and we never knew what had happened to them. However, we learned one thing from a villager the next day . That little baby boy which his mother had dropped, the villager had found that the Germans had shot him. That young lady could never forgive herself for dropping the baby. She has been a sick person since then. She got through the whole mess like I have but she is alive, all three sister are alive.

WS            This must have been September or October 1942?

RF            It was October 1942.

WS            What was the man's name who had the idea of going through the German lines? The one who was riding the horse.

RF            As a matter of fact, his last name was the same as mine, Avarowicz. His first name was Joshua. Yes, Joshua Avarowicz. He still lives in Russia. I heard from him three years ago. He did not want to leave because he married a Russian girl. Later on, he was a boyfriend of my sister -in-law. That's my husband's sister. He was a handsome, nice looking man. He was also a really nice guy.

WS            Do you know where, in what city he is living now?

RF            I think in Moldavskoja (there is such a town in the USSR AT 47.0N and 29.0E). He went back to Kurzeniez where there is nothing. It was all burned down. Then, he went to a place where I was in school (sounds like Posna). Then he was sent for a job to Moldavskoja. The Russians sent him. I don't believe that he ever was a communist but he still lives in Russia because he married a Russian girl. She is a doctor. They have had one child. I heard that he is sick now, from my cousin.

WS            What sort of work does he do?

RF            He was a manager of a distillery. They make vodka and other spirits. He still works with something like this. He is in a different place than Moldavskoja. He doe not stay in one place. The latest I had heard is that he was in Moldavskoja and then he was transferred to Minsk. It is all in the same general area. This guy came back and he found all of us and we came back to the forest the next morning. At

that time, we had to go through the railroad right of way, so the partisans told us how to go through. He told us you all go through the railroad right of way and after you cross the railroad there is a small forest. It is not really the woods you are after but it is a small forest and there we will meet. Then we will rest a while before going on. You know that he was in charge with a few members of the partisans. When we got through the railroad right of way and it had an alarm system that, if you touch it, it rings. So one was holding it up, probably with a stick, and we all went through. He had told us not to touch it so that the Germans would not hear us. Later on, then we were resting, so this young girl who was from our hiding place in Kurzeniez came over to me and said, "did you see my mother?" So, my mother said, "no, we were sitting here but we never saw her". That mother had left her there and had died. The girls never knew if, where, and how she died. She went back but she never found her. You see, everyplace is another place to us, where someone we knew died. That was a heartache even though she had been a sick woman. At the end, she was very sick. That is how it went, but this is only the beginning. That was only the beginning. Before we settled anywhere by group of 18 or 20 people, there were also some smaller groups of 8 or 10 people. Each group then settled in for the winter. We knew winter was coming.

WS            How did you break up into groups?

RF            For example, these two families were neighbors from Kurzeniez. They knew each other. They both had children. One family had two grown up and two smaller children and the other family had a baby. I believe that I told you that she nursed the baby. She still nursed the baby in the forest. She had the baby in 1941 just before the Germans came. When we started in the forest, the baby was just a little over one year old and when we got out of the forest she was three years old. These families lived together. They knew each other. They knew the woods. These people lived from those villages. They had been there all their lives. They knew the places. They took us in because they felt sorry for my mother. They really didn't want us. Nobody really wanted a lady alone. People tried to run away, you know one from another. They felt that it was a bother. Why should they take us in. If something were to be wrong, they know the forest better than we do. They didn't really want us but this lady who got killed with my mother, she told my mother, "don't move! Just follow us. If we got to a different place pack up whatever you have and come with us. They will try to run and hide in order to lose you. They want to leave you". They really didn't want us. She told us that because she felt sorry for my mother, what could we , two helpless women, do?

WS            Was this more or less how each of the small groups was formed?

RF Yes, neighbors or people who knew each other well. Here my mother-in-law to be, Abe's mother was by herself, with nobody just her three daughters. She didn't even have anything like a bunker. Like we, she lived in a tent but what made it easier for her is that they were helped by the partisans who brought them food. We had nobody, nobody brought us anything. We had to do it ourselves.

WS Well, the eighteen of you, first there were eighteen and then there were sixteen, you had to work out ways to get along with each other. You just had to.

RF Oh yes!

WS There were ten days since we talked last and I have to remember what we were talking about. But I have gotten some of the timing down last time of the period in the forest between February of 1943. That must have been early in February?

RF Yes on the 2nd or 3rd.

WS And April 29th was the second blockade. The one where your mother got killed. The 3rd blockade was in September of 1943. The last one was in July or August of 1944.

RF That was just before the Germans retreated. That never came to our area. It was well to the east of our forest.

WS Now, during this time, you told me on a previous tape how your brother went one way and you went another and how you got separated.

RF Yes, during the second night of the slaughter, we got separated.

WS He went on to Vilna right away?

RF He was really in some area of the woods. You couldn't find anybody in the woods. We met up with a lot of people who got out of the ghetto. A few days later, we got together with them in the forest. He didn't meet anybody, so he went on and then we went all the way to another small town. These people were still in the ghetto. Somehow, they did not keep him there long. The Judenrat told him he was a newcomer to their ghetto and that he has to go to work, that they would send him someplace. He didn't want to go there, so they told him, the Jewish police did, if you don't want to go there, you have to clear out.

WS Do you know the name of that town?

RF Swia. That was approximately the same size of town as Kurzeniez. From there, he went to Smogorn where we had a relative. He thought that maybe he'd find the relative so that he will have someone to stay

with. He went to Smogorn. I believe that I told you during our first session, that we had a little boy without parents from a small village in Kurzeniez. We kept this boy and he was one of the six people in our hiding place. He left with my brother. He was truly a little boy. Much younger than my brother or me. He went to the Postov ghetto. (That was spelled by WS but there is no assurance that RF was listening) while my brother went to Smogorn. He managed to get around with the help from farmers so they were able to get around. From Smogorn, they took all the young boys, I don't know up to what age, but when I met my brother later on he told me that they took them with a transport to a type of military barracks in Lithuania. It was Rzanr Camp. From there, they selected some young boys to the Vilna ghetto. The Judenrat that selecting. You see, the Judenrat did it all. They asked for so many to be transferred everytime and the Judenrat had to supply the numbers. So they had to transfer the required No. Then from Rzanr Camp, they transferred them to Vilna. Rzanr Camp was a small place. It was not far from Kolna (here the name of that camp is spelled by Abe Frydman and concurred in by RF). Then he was in Vilna for the rest of the time until he came out from the underground. He was working in Vilna. In a separate place, there were 70 boys and young men. They lived together. They went out to work in the morning then they came back. It was in Vilna ghetto but not really a part of Vilna ghetto. When I was in the forest and I had already lost my mother, as a matter of fact, after the second blockade, something like the second or third of May 1943. I had lost all of the belongings I had since they threw a grenade into our bunker. So I went to look for the rest of the people who survived hoping that they may have had something of mine. When I went back to the bunker to look for my jewelry, I saw the complete destruction and that everything was gone with the rafters and all the supports. I noticed that someone had been there already. Obviously looking for something. We understood that the people who had lived in the bunker were now separated. Everybody had run into a different direction. As a matter of fact, I wondered whether the fellow who hid my jewelry for me, whatever small things I had left from my mother, maybe he had been there because the jewelry had been removed from the hiding place. So I tried to look for him. On the way to go to the place where he and his family were, their new camp, I had figured out approximately where it should be. I met four young men laying on the side of Margi. There was a call "Amho", which is the Hebrew for New Nation since "Am" means nation, so "Amho" meaning I am from the the same nation". This was a call which we used to tell one another that we were Jews. You can realize that I was scared since here were four men laying in hiding there. So they said, "Amho" and they knew that I would understand. I asked them who they were and from where they came. They told me that they came from Vilna ghetto. That they had just come from the ghetto and that they were looking for a man whose name is Makasky and that they wanted to talk to him. This was one fellow who had connections with the partisans. He was a messenger.



WS            Was he from Margi?

RF            Yes, however, he spent most of his time in the woods near us. I had just met him because I had not known about him earlier. He lived in the area where we had set up our new camp. The one we set up after the second blockade. I told "okay, guys, I can take you to him. I don't know whether he is there right now but I will show you the place where he comes to. You should then stay there and he will find you". Then I asked them from where they come? I knew that they were not natives from Vilna. They told me that they truly are from a different place. Not far away. I knew the place which they mentioned. It was also a small town. Three of the boys were from Kadinik and one was from Swia. That was the place that my brother went to first. Then they asked me who I was. Naturally, I told them that I came from Kurzeniez. Then one of the guys said, "just a minute! I had someone whom I met in Vilna ghetto from Kurzeniez. A young man." I said, "who could it be?" From our little hometown to Vilna ghetto was quite a way and I would know any young man from my hometown. Somebody about my age and Jewish. He couldn't remember the fellow's name since he had just met him briefly. So I asked them about the various names of young men I could think of who it could have been but who were not it. Then all of a sudden, while we were going back toward my camp in preparation for bringing them to Makuskys, he said, "you know what. There was something about that young man. He told me that he escaped with his mother and his sister from the hiding place which he had constructed. He thinks that they were killed because he heard the shots". So I was stunned!! I couldn't believe it!! I was shaking!! I still believed that maybe my brother was alive someplace. So I asked, is his name Maja? So he said yes and he told me right away the family name. Yes, that is the nickname for Michael or Moses. As a matter of fact, he told me that he got sick in that camp. He got typhus. Usually, if somebody has something like this which is highly contagious, they take him out of the camp and the people get destroyed. That means they kill them or they send them to a death camp. Him, they sent to the hospital. When, maybe a year later, I met my brother he told me the same thing. My brother told me about him being in the hospital at the time when my mother was killed. That he was so sick and that he felt lonely there and that he cried so much, he had thought, if I could only see my mother or someone of my family due to the loneliness. That was the same time when my mother was killed. That fellow told me about my brother's hospitalization, so I had some hope again that my brother was alive and in Vilna. Now, I wondered how I could get word to him that I am alive. There just was no way! Nobody goes back to the ghetto. Anyways, it was like a miracle. Maybe just something which was supposed to happen. One of those guys, after a long time before the third blockade, before September had a sister left in Vilna. So he went back. He was already with the partisans. He was given a mission as he told them

that he wanted to bring out more young men from Vilna. He went on his own, by himself after he received permission. He went to Vilna to bring his sister out. He knew that we can survive in the woods. That there is more hope to survive there than in the ghetto. So, he went back. While he was in the ghetto he just happened to meet my brother at a time when my brother came back from work. He told him, "oh, wait a minute! I have regards for you from someone but hold on and listen." My brother asked: "Where were you? How come you are here to give me these regards?" He said, "I am back from the woods and I came to pick up my sister, to take her with me. Many people live in the woods. We set up camps. I have an announcement from your sister". So, my brother was astonished. My brother had, of course, asked where his mother was? So the fellow told him, "Your mother was caught while she went begging and she is dead. But, listen to the advice from your sister, she is a young girl and came out. He told him approximately how I looked. My brother was, of course, overwhelmed, and of course, he was very happy. Then he told himself that he had to get out. They had set up a committee in Vilna that all the young people who were willing and able to buy weapons, you had to give money to the committee, then the committee bought weapons and each time they sent men out. That means small groups. So my brother went after he found out where it was. Then he gave them whatever he had saved up from the proceeds of whatever he brought in, potatoes, or whatever. He had accumulated a little money. He gave them all he had so that he was in line to be sent out of the woods. Of course, since he had somebody to go to and he wanted to go out, he was in consideration. Still he was told we will let you know. He used to come back and as when and where? But he got no answer. Once he came there and there was nobody in the offices. They were all gone, as if the committee had disbanded. However, by then he so much wanted to get out of Vilna ghetto, so he met a guy who also for money took people out from the underground in a different way. He met Halevy Aneton (the spelling here is questionable), a childless family, just a husband and wife from our hometown. My brother told them what he had in mind, so they decided to go out together, all of them. That they would not remain in the ghetto. The woman took my brother. she took a niece and another girl who was homeless and not of her family. I believe that there were six of them. Yes, she also took a brother-in-law, that made it a group of six. First, there were supposed to be eight but then two decided not to go. They felt that they couldn't make it. So there were six besides the guide. They paid the guide the money. So he took them out underground through the sewer. Their routing was from the sewer to a cinema. That night, when the people left the movie, they went out with the people. My brother told me later, when he came to visit me here, that a lady saw people coming out of the sewer. She got so scared that she crossed herself and said, "oh Jesus Christ, oh Lord!! What is going on here?" She got so scared that she ran away. She had never seen anything like this. People coming out of the sewer! That is how they went out of the ghetto and then into

the woods. When they came out, as a matter of fact, the guy who brought my brother my regards, he brought his sister out just in time to have her be killed in the third blockade. So they just came out in time for the third blockade. These newcomers hadn't yet learned where to go to escape. Meanwhile, while my brother was attempting to go out, I was already in a different place. In a different camp with different circumstances. I went to visit a friend of mine who was working for a special group of partisans. When I was at my friends, they asked me to work for them also, to help them in the kitchen. They set up a beautiful camp in a village. A partisan camp. I really didn't want to do it because I wanted to get back to my place. I really had only come to see my friend. To visit her. Anyways, I promised them that I would stay a day or two, however they noticed that I was a pretty good cook. And they asked me to stay another day and I couldn't say no. So I worked another day and then we transferred this partisan camp from the village of Misuni to the village of Niver. Over in Niver, we set up camp. So I told them that I would just stay a few days with them and that then I would go back. That I was not about to go with them wherever they go. Unfortunately, the blockade happened then, the September blockade. At the time of the blockade one guy, he was an older man told me, "you better stay with us because there is no other way in which you can be saved. You know the rest of the people in their camps were surprised. We had to leave that place and the Germans pursued us. We traveled only by night. During the days, we stayed in the woods. Every night for one week or ten days we moved. We stayed in one place during one day and that night we went to a different place. Possibly in a completely different area. The Germans went to every village. Wherever we had stopped the Germans came. We could only see the fires from the villages at night. That is how far away we stayed. At that time, things were really bad. I happened to be at a different place altogether with the partisans, working still in the kitchen for them. That happened to be already the Katania forest. It was an entirely different forest than the one where we had started out. This was more in the area of White Russia. More to the north. That was a huge forest. A lot of Jewish people from different places lived there.

WS                So, it was still in White Russia?

RF                Yes. In the same White Russia. There we set up camp and I met a lot of young men from the Vilna ghetto. You could notice them because, first of all, they were dressed different from the way we were. They were dressed nicely. They were all young. All had weapons, beautiful weapons. A whole group of them. One guy, who was with them was from Kurzeniez. He was my age otherwise said, a very young man. So I was with the partisans with my girlfriend from Kurzeniez, that was the one because of whom I had stayed with the partisans. I told her that we should talk to the medical men. We called them our "Komandier" from the "Special Group". This special group was sent to us from Russia.

It was not the kind of self help group from the partisans who had gathered all their people from the White Russians or was from the escaped prisoners; these were people sent from the Russian army who made up the "special group". They had been sent to take care of something special. So we went to talk to them. We told them that here is a group of approximately thirty-five young men with weapons just fresh from Vilna ghetto. They have no idea about the partisans, They have no where to turn and no where to go. We would like for you to take care of them. You could maybe take them to our group in one group. They are willing to learn whatever has to be done later on. Our men told us, "take me to their men in command of that group so that I can tell them that they should give all their weapons to our group so that we together can proceed. Then, later on, they will learn all the ways to go about fighting the Germans and all the other ways of the partisans". However, their men in command did not like that set up. They did not want to give their weapons away. The weapons were to dear to them. They had personally paid too high a price for them. They had exchanged a lot of money and a lot of lives for it. They were afraid of being cheated. So they said no and so they left. We couldn't stay long wherever we set up camp because the Germans were after us anyhow. No matter where we went they came. They just executed sweeps. A day or two later we heard that this group from Vilna ghetto were all massacred. They just plainly had gone in a wrong direction. You see, in our group, we had men who went ahead of us. No matter where we were going to see where the Germans are. They called them "trasvekfa", they were horses. They just scouted around. If the Germans were to the west, we went to the east. They also checked all the villages. These Jewish boys didn't have anybody. They didn't know where to turn to. Then after that slaughter, we went to a different place altogether. A lot of people were killed during that period.

WS                    Your brother was still in Vilna at that time?

RF                    No. My brother was out of Vilna by then but he was in a different place altogether. He was not yet in the forest. He was on his way from Vilna to the forest. This traveling took them quite a few days. It wasn't so easy to travel. They had to walk at night when the coast was clear.

WS                    That was in September '43?

RF                    Yes, middle of September '43. When I met another group, a smaller group also out of Vilna they were already in a different village. I used to ask each group whether maybe they knew about a Maja Avarowicz? I mean these groups who came from Vilna. But nobody knew anything about him, so once, one young man told me, "don't wait for him". He told me the group of the seventy young men was sent to Rega. To be sent to Rega meant to be sent to the death camp, that is the end.

Rega was the end, so I lost hope. This meant that my brother would never come. We already knew all about Rega. That was from the Vilna boys, the young men who came they told us about Rega. That camp was the final trip. All the authorities in Vilna sent people to Panar to Rega for extermination. (The camp at Panar is a new one to the transcriber.) From Vilna my uncle and his sons went to Rega. My aunt went to Panar. All those who they could not get rid of in Panar they sent to Rega. Sometimes later, when I met my brother and when I told him that I heard that he was sent to Rega he said, "yes, the whole group went to Rega. Only I survived by hiding under straw bags." They had straw bags instead of mattresses and he hid under them. He came out and all of a sudden he was on the trucks to be loaded. They didn't know where they were going. It was as if they were going to work but he heard somebody saying, "this time they are not going to work, they are going to Rega". All the Vilna people knew what Rega meant. That it was the end! So somehow he noticed that no one paid attention to him so he went back into the place where they slept. He went under the bags and stayed there hiding the entire day until night. They locked the doors because all seventy people from this barracks went. So actually, they did not ship seventy but sixty-nine because he was the seventieth. He stayed until night and then at night he went out through a back door. As things were from this place, their barracks, the back door went out of the ghetto. He went out the other side, climbed up the roof and out of the ghetto to a doctor's house. You see, the Vilna ghetto was arranged by yards. In one yard there were three or four buildings (probably meaning barracks). One building may be into the ghetto, the other building may lead out of the ghetto. That doctor kept my brother until the next day and then he brought him back to the ghetto. My brother asked for that since there was nothing he could do outside the ghetto. So, he went back to the ghetto and that was how he survived. He went back to the Jewish people in the ghetto where he had an uncle. So that young man who had told me about the entire group going to Rega, told me the truth but by a miracle, because that was what was meant to happen, he escaped. So he got saved in this way.

WS                    Was that your father's brother who was in Vilna?

RF                    No, that was my mother's uncle. That was my grandfather's brother.

My grand uncle with his three sons. I had by then already lost hope. Since they told me that they all went to Rega, that was it! I never heard anymore. By that time, my group for whom I worked had moved around so much that we really did not know where we were. The partisan group received orders from way deep in Russia to return. When they received that order the one in charge told me and another Jewish fellow with his wife and son that they are not supposed to take us or the few White Russian men whom they had recruited back to Russia. That they are supposed to leave us. So I started to cry and I begged them 'take me wherever you go,' but now I don't even know

where I am and how will I ever get back to my people, to my camp, to my friends. I begged him to take me along. One young man was really very nice to me. But he said that he just couldn't. That this was an order and that they could do nothing but obey. He said, "this is a military order we can't take you. We now have to get back to Russia. He told me that although he was not supposed to say it. We can't. We have received the order not to take you. No foreigners at all". So he said, "do you want to stay with this couple and their son?" The son was much younger than I was, I was then 15. He added, "I can't take you, the only thing you can do is to follow him and to stay with them." Well, we had no choice there. My friend, the girl who I came to visit, and because of whom I stayed there, she went with them because she had worked for them earlier than I had. She had nobody of her family. I told them that I had nobody either and that I had no place to go to. They still didn't take me.

WS            Was she Jewish?

RF            She was Jewish and from my same hometown. It was true that she had worked for them for a very long time. She worked with them ever since they came to our woods to set up camp. In the beginning I was just visiting and I told them that I don't want to join the partisan group. I just wanted to stay there and help them out until I could get back to my people. Unfortunately then the blockade incident happened. When I went back with that fellow, with his wife and his young son, we went through hell. He didn't know the way. He didn't know where we were. Afterall, we were all together in a different place. Far away from our home forest.

WS            Almost as far as to Poland?

RF            No, not to Poland.

WS            Well, how far to the north, east from Vilna?

RF            Right! When we went back we had to go through all the forests and all kinds of places not suitable for human beings to go through. We were halfway immersed in water. I had been in the woods for a year by then and I had never one through such hardship. It was so hard to walk. The fellow with his wife, son and I, probably had a good idea but he didn't know exactly where we were. He didn't know everything about the forest and the swamps. We went one day, it was actually already evening, out looking -I myself was the first one-where we are. There was one house surrounded by a courtyard, no vegetation close by. I crawled to that house because obviously we couldn't walk. I crawled there and I heard them speaking German. So it was kind of a garrison of Germans. I then went back and I told the other three that we are at the wrong place. Because of that garrison we went deeper into the forest and on the opposite side when we came out there was a village.

When we got out to the village, it was already pitch black. It was the night. We couldn't find anybody to talk to. So we stayed another night in that forest. It was already chilly. He said, "whatever will happen will happen. We just have to get out of this place!" We had no food since we were afraid to go to the village since on the other side was the house where I had heard the German speaking people. We were so afraid that after we slept that night, we went the whole day in that forest and when we came out we had to go to the other side by the railroad. We went over the railroad right of way. When we went through that right of way, we came to a place which that fellow recognized. Then he said, "now, I know where we are! Now I am not lost". Then we went a whole day, we just walked around villages. We were afraid to go into them because the Germans were all around. When he said that he knew where we were we followed him. I didn't know where we were so I just followed him. He brought us, it was the holy day of Yom Kippur. He didn't ask any questions. We went to a place and stayed there all day in the barn. The fellow who owned the barn came out and the father told him, "we are here, we are four people. We don't eat for a whole day and after that day we will be hungry." We knew that this was a day of fast. So the owner came back at night and he brought us bread and sour milk and a cheese. So we ate and the moon was shining like in the middle of the lunar month. It was already October, of course. At that place he gave me a list of villages. I will never forget that list as long as I live and he told me that he would not take me any further. He told me that I would have to go back to my old place all by myself because he is going to the next village from there to his friend, a Gentile friend. This friend will keep him, his wife and his son until everything quiets down. However, he is not going to ask the friend to put me up also. After saying that, he left me, after he lead me out of the village where we had slept and eaten. He had made up this long list of the villages through which I would have to go to, to get back to the woods near Margi. One of these places, it was not really a village, it was a small town, there I would have to meet somebody. This somebody would give me the rest of the directions. Maybe this fellow will keep me for a few days while he gives me the directions about where I am to walk. This fellow is a friend. It was Saturday night and I came away from that place and I stood at a four way street sign. The moon was shining very brightly. So I started walking all by myself in the night. I had two cords with me, a longer one and a shorter one. I did not want to throw them away since I felt that I might need them. I was hot. I walked and walked. When I came to a house, I heard some noise. I didn't knock but I went to the place where the noise came from. I couldn't figure what was making the noise. To myself, as young as I was, I was going to be sixteen the following year, I thought that maybe they are doing something like playing cards. I heard a lot of noise and I got so scared that I started running. I ran back to the major road. Then I went maybe half mile and I thought where am I going? How do I know that I am going in the right

direction? I don't know this area. The place where the noise came from was not a village, it was a house. So I went back and I knocked at that door. After he opened, he went backwards and said, "who the hell are you, knocking at my door at this time of night?" I again was scared. Nobody let me in. Then I thought to myself and I really cried, it was already late in the night, probably 9 PM on a winter night. It was very cold but I had been walking for a long time, so I said to myself the hell with all of that. What am I waiting for? For whom? For what? I don't care any more! The only thing was that I didn't want to be caught by the Germans. Whatever will happen, will happen!. I had previously told you that the people had baths outside the villages where they went to bathe once a week. Usually on Saturday night. I noticed that it was something like this, a little building in the middle of the field. What can happen. I will go there, I will see. If it was that and was in use, it would be warm inside and I could sleep there. I had slept in such sauna's many times before. That's a Saturday night special as we called it because we knew already. So I went close to it and I heard people talking. I said there are people in here. By that time I no longer cared. I decided whatever will happen will happen. What can it be? They will sell me some soap. Okay, let them sell me! Then I came into that place. There were a few women there since in the saunas, first the men take their baths then it is the turn of the women who take care of the rest. I came into the courtyard of that place and one lady, a very old lady came out. She said to me, "daughter of mine", that is a common expression, "who are you, where are you going, what are you doing out so late at night?" I told her quite frankly I am a Jewish girl. I didn't tell her until later how that man had kicked me out. By the way, that man is living in Israel with his wife and his son.

(END SIDE 6 - BEGIN SIDE 7)

I didn't tell her how they left me and everything. I just told her that I got lost from the partisans and that I didn't know where I should go or where I am. If you would please let me stay here overnight. So she said to me, "listen, child, take off your clothes and take a bath. Make yourself comfortable. Make yourself clean. It is nice here and later on we will see. I have to talk about this with my daughter and daughter-in-law." A child was also in the sauna at that time. She did that and then she came out back to me. Of course, I don't know what they talked about. I was sitting in that sauna. It was so warm and comfortable. I had a very good feeling inside, to the point where I really didn't care. She told me, "listen, I can't take you to my daughter and daughter-in-law since I never know what my son will say. You have to understand us also. However, you come with me". Then she took me around after she had helped me to bathe and helped me to dress. She never even asked me whether I was hungry or not? She took me to her home. Then she asked me whether I wanted to



eat and I told her that I would like to eat something. Just a little bit because it is late at night. However, I told her that I want to sleep because I am very very tired. She put me on the couch to sleep. I told her that I couldn't sleep the whole night, even though I was so tired. I thought what will she do tomorrow? Will she really sell me? That is how much my mind was wandering. I was worried that she would sell me for a little bit of salt. That is how the Germans bought Jews. They gave the people who turned Jews in some salt. Salt was scarce. That was a precious item. In the morning she saw that I was not asleep. She was probably up early because I guess that she was Catholic because she had Mary and Christ in her house whereas the Protestants just had Jesus. These home shrines were beautifully decorated. It was embroidered in green and amber. Most of the Gentile peoples had homes shrines, at least in our area. She stood by that home shrine and she prayed. I already heard the bells from the church, then I got so scared. I was more scared than, than at any other time in my life with the Germans and with anything else. I don't really know why I was so scared but it was as if I had a feeling or something. I saw her praying then she looked at me and said, "daughter of mine. Oh you are not asleep? Do you want to come down?" I said I sure will. She said here is breakfast. It is ready. She had a breakfast such as I hadn't seen in a long time. She had everything on the table. I ate. I was still waiting as to what she would say and what she would do with me. Then she said, "listen, I can't keep you. There just is no way! I am afraid of the neighbors and I am afraid of the people here." She did not truly live in a village. That village was just one street and she lived to the side of that street. She gave me some food to take along and she told me, "today is Sunday, you will see people in the street through which you will have to walk. These people will look at you and the way you are dressed and they will look again at you and they might even ask questions. Don't answer anybody. Don't talk to anybody but especially don't walk at night, because if you do, our people will kill you. People in our days don't know who is walking and who is who. So just walk in the daytime". So I knew which village I had to go by. I showed her the list which I had in my pocket. I went through four villages that day. By evening, I got to the small town of Balkolat (no spelling was supplied here). In Balkolat I found the fellow who was supposed to show me again how to go further and tell me what to do next. I found the house and I went in. He wasn't there then but he came later. He told me that I had made a big mistake by walking so early in the evening. It was not dark yet. That was the case because Bokolat was a small town which had police agents and even a few Germans. It was very dangerous for me to do that. I told him that I had not known that and that the lady had told me to walk during the day and not at night. I truly didn't know whom to listen to. Anyways, he kept me overnight. The next day I went out. He told me that I was lucky because the Germans took all the young men to camp to Germany. That was not talking about Jews now. The Germans went with

them so the two policemen were in the police station since that was probably all they had in that small town. So no one looked at anybody and no one cared who was walking and who was not.

WS           The Gentile young men had been taken to a camp in Germany? To factories?

RF           Yes, to the German camps. To work! Yes, an entire transport (during WWII the Germans transported to Germany train loads of citizens from various countries which they had overrun to work as slave laborers in factories, etc. IG Farben, Krupp and the other industrial plants have been forced, by international courts to reimburse these slave workers or after their death, the countries. They went by entire transports of cattle cars.)

WS           They did that in 1943? (That was actually done from 1941 through 1944 and the allies did liberate dozens of DP (Displaced Person) camps all over Germany and Austria).

RF           Yes, in October at the time of the blockade. The next day I walked a lot. It was already Monday morning when I left this fellow's house. I walked through a lot of other villages. There I met already a few partisans. They were also looking what was going on and where the Germans were, what area is clear of Germans and in what forests it was safe to return. Anyhow, I walked for five days until I got back to the place from where I had started. I went especially to that place to see where my girlfriends were. When I went back to that place, I found that the blockade went by and that just a few of our people were missing. I found that my clothes had been sold. They sold whatever I had had for a few potatoes or whatever.

WS           They didn't think that you were coming back?

RF           That is right! They no longer knew anything about me. I went back to my old place but I didn't stay there long. Then I went back to my old friends from Kurzeniez. Back to that very place not far from Margi. However, from Margi we had gone to Nergia (the transcriber does not recall reference to this village). They were sleeping in bales of hay. Nobody was there. No people, just bales of hay. It was like a little barn just filled with bales of hay. Nothing else, no people. We stayed in those barns on top of the hay. We slept there. When I arrived there a young man came and told me that he saw my brother during the blockade. My brother came into the woods while I was out with the partisans and he was looking for me all over. They told him that I was somewhere in a different place with the partisans. I said how can that be? I was told him that my brother went to Riga. How could that be my brother? I didn't believe it. So I asked a girlfriend of mine, that was this young man's girlfriend, to ask this man if he is just joking or did he really mean it. The man said,

"well, I myself met him and I told him that you went away with the partisans. That you were no longer with these people." It took me probably five or six weeks because by then it was probably already November to look for my brother by myself. I got to so many places and I went through so much. I looked everywhere and at everybody. That everybody looked at me. They said, "how could you go by yourself into so many woods and so many forests to look for a brother when you don't know where he is? I was supposed to look for the people he went out with. These people now live in Ohio and they are truly close friends now. I found them. I stayed with them for a whole week in the camp where they stayed. They told me that my brother was looking for me. That he couldn't find me. Then he joined up with a group of partisans. So my brother went with the partisans. They added someday he will come back into this neighborhood. Then you will meet him. Stay here. However, I chose not to stay with them because I wanted to go to some other people and to look somemore. I thought that maybe he was already there. I again went through so much hardship. I had to sleep nights in different places. As a matter of fact, I met Abe's mother at that time with his sisters in a village. I was waiting for someone to take me to the place where my brother was supposed to come back to, to which his group of partisans was supposed to come back to. When I came there a friend of my family from Kurzeniez, the girl was a friend of mine from school, was there. I stayed with her. A few days later my brother came. Then we finally met again. I took him with me to where my other people were, not far away from Naorun. (This place was mentioned earlier. It is spelled as phonetically as possible). It was a different place. We remained together until we went back during the spring of 1944. During that spring we went to a different place and a different group took my brother in with them. So he was with the partisans and I was in camp with the Jewish people.

WS            At least you each knew where the other was?

RF            Yes! I went always to see him and he supplied me with food. I didn't have to go to beg.

WS            What sort of partisans were those he was with?

RF            He was with a special group. Under a Soviet officer who was also sent from Moscow. They had orders from Moscow. They had nothing to do with the partisans who were already established. They had a lot of partisans there by then.

WS            The group cooperated with the partisans?

RF            Yes, but they each had different missions. You see, the partisans had groups which had names. The entire group got a name. Each group had several commanders. Then there were main officers who transmitted to

them a mission for the day. Then the groups were sent out to different areas and were given specific jobs. Each group was assigned a different area where to fight. Mainly what they did was to cut off the railroads to keep the trains from traveling. Or else they would go into a small town and place some dynamite or bombs under something specific in order to do harm (and force German troops to guard the area behind the lines). They were given specific jobs to do to sabotage. We were there until we already heard about the German reversals to the east of us. We were there until July or August 1944 when the Russians liberated us. We went out of the woods in August 1944 and my brother went with his partisan group. That group went back to Russia. My brother first went to Kurzeniez and they they took him in the army.

WS           The Russian army?

RF           Yes. I stayed in Kurzeniez and I went to school after I came back. That entire period after the September blockade until July we were already prepared. As a matter of fact, we built an underground shelter near a small river in the woods as a hiding place so that we would have some place to go in case something happened. We saved bread. We dried some food including vegetables. We put all that into the shelter so that we could use it if we had to run and we would not have time to take provisions with us. However, the fighting didn't get to us and we didn't need it.

WS           Did he then stay in the Russian army?

RF           Yes. He stayed with the Russian army. He served on the front. He went into Berlin and deep into Germany.

WS           Did he get to Austria?

RF           My sister got to Austria. My brother was in different places in Germany. He was in the army until he got released at the end of 1946. We got married in 1946 and went to Poland. We tried to find him in Poland. As a matter of fact, I sent a letter. You see, when we came to Poland there was a Jewish organization which wanted to save Jewish boys from wherever they could possibly find them. I told them that I had a brother in the army and that I would like for him to be saved from having to go back to Russia. I also told them that I am in Poland and that he was supposed to meet me and my sister in Poland. I said all of that in that letter but he never got this letter. He himself didn't get it but the authorities did and they knew all about it. But they sent him back to Russia. You know he had finished his duty in the army after which he went back home. There was no one in Kurzeniez so he went to Pskov (this city is located 57.50 N and 28.20 E). Yes, he knew Abe's mother and he knew that I had gotten married to Abe. So he went to Abe's mother. You see Abe's mother and sisters

were in Pskov. So he stayed with Abe's mother until he got married and returned to Wilaika.

WS           When did he go to Israel?

RF           In 1956. Then he left Russia t<sup>7</sup>Poland. In December of 1958 he went to Israel. When I left Israel he came to Israel.

WS           So, he had no difficulty in leaving Russia for Poland in 1956?

RF           No, that was a time they let all the "Western" people go. People who used to have Polish citizenship. Those who used to inhabit lands which used to be Polish. When we went to Israel all the Polish citizens, the Jews, could go. Not those who used to be Russian citizens. Not the Russian Jews.

WS           Kurzeniez was Polish?

RF           Yes, that is right. It was Polish. It was Poland until 1939, so they let him go. You just applied for a visa and you got a visa. It was no problem. It was the same with Abe's mother and sisters.

WS           Did he have papers to prove that he was born in Kurzeniez?

RF           Yes. We were registered there. All of us.

WS           Did you always have papers with you the entire time?

RF           No. We had no papers. Everything was done (from the original register) the whole thing. First of all, when we were living in Kurzeniez we were registered there in the city hall. You cannot live in Russia for three days without being registered. They came, even in the middle of the night and the check you. You never knew when they came in and check. You couldn't hide anybody without registration. You also had to have a passport and you can't travel without a passport.

WS           I hope that we never are forced into that here.

RF           The way we are now, we are used to it. When we came out of Russia and Poland, everything appeared different to us. We always expected to identify ourselves. It is different in a free world.

WS           We need to go back and I need to know the rest of it. What happened after November 1943, when your brother was with the partisans and you were in another part. Actually, the tape is almost over so it would be best if we did not get into that now. However, your brother also went into many experiences.

RF                    Yes. He went through it his way and I went through it my own way. It all was tough but in different ways. My brother has had plenty to tell. It was just by a miracle that we survived. At least to us. It was just a miracle. The way we both escaped from death. In truth, it is impossible to comprehend how I am still alive. I guess it was just meant to be that I would live and be happy. It is impossible to believe. Actually, it was not just death. It was not the way we were hungry. We were cold, We were scared. You never knew where you were. Whom you would meet. After all, anybody could have killed you. Nobody cared for anything. It was like Margi. For example, at the place where we went to bathe and they wanted us to come to the party, the same man who was mayor of the little village he was killed by the partisans, since he had some connections to the Germans. Somebody told the partisans about this connection. They made it sound like a double cross. So a special group came out. I met that special group and I also had to run away from them for my own safety. That was a different story all together. But what they did to the mayor was unbelievable!

WS                    Which partisans were those now?

RF                    You see, there were a lot of partisans of all different groups and names. Tough guys. That was a special group. For example, if someone denounced someone else and said that this somebody was to be put to death and if they said that they have to get rid of the family, then the partisans would wipe the family out. I was there and I had to run from this guy myself. Because of me, our entire group, several families together, we all had to run. We got away from him but that is an entirely different story. A whole unbelievable story!!

WS                    This was a period when you were in your middle teens? A period of unsettledness for two years? When life could have ended anyday?

RF                    For two years, yes.

WS                    Now, it has been ten days since we talked last. Longer than that. Almost two weeks. Last time you told about your brother a lot and gave us the main outlines of what he was doing. To end up when he was with that partisan group. Then you told about being left all by yourself in the northern part of White Russia. Quite some distance north of Kurzeniez in the forest, the name of which I wrote down (it sounded something like Katania). Then you worked your way back down again and finally got back together with your own original group again. Then you met your brother and found him in Norun. Then you were together from November until the spring of 1944. (Actually, the brother did not leave until liberation which occurred in August 1944). One question which I had as I went over this. I know that there are many kinds of partisans and you mentioned that some had Soviet officers who were under orders back from the Russian army. Did all

the partisan groups that you know about or were in contact with have Soviet officers?

RF                   A lot of them did. You see, the partisans were groups. A lot of groups belonged to one main group. They called it a brigade. Most of the officers in that brigade were Russians. They were sent from Russia (in opposition to the Russians who escaped from the prisoner camps) to organize it. These officers were under the rule of the Soviets. The Soviets sent these officers by planes and helicopters. They dropped them off in certain areas and in the area where we were. There was the Adrat brigade. One brigade had a few adrats since Adrat means a big group. Each Adrat had a name. They all were supposed to do almost the same thing but of course, in different areas. Some groups were stationed in areas not far from us. We were just private citizens in the underground. That group was mainly to stop the railroad but also to do other damage.

WS                   There were some partisan groups who were Jewish and some were not?

RF                   Oh no! Most of them were not Jewish. The only Jews who were there were those who had managed to escape from the camps (and towns where they were annihilated) as it happened in Vilna ghetto. In Vilna ghetto, the Jews knew about the partisans. You knew that it is very hard to survive just by escaping to the woods. With the help of the partisans it was a lot easier to survive. So, naturally the men and the young women went to the partisans. The escapees from Vilna had what they brought with them or from other ghettos or towns. They brought guns or a pistol or whatever else they had or had bought. Also, by the time of late 1943, the Russian army also dropped weapons by parachute.

WS                   Did they also drop food?

RF                   No. They did not drop food. We had actually relatively more food than the Russian army. We all got food from the farmers. They went in and they told the head of the village we need so much of that and so much of that. The villager brought it. Each group had a kitchen and the cook cooked meals like in a regular army kitchen.

WS                   It was still a dangerous time there but it was much more pleasant than the winter before.

RF                   Oh yes. You see, the first winter we didn't have such well organized Adrats. We had partisans drifting by. In the place where we were for the most part of the two years, they never had actual groups staying there. There also were not as many partisans. Remember that I told you that once the Germans mistreated the prisoners of war so badly a lot of prisoners ran away and joined the partisans. Of course, the Germans sent a lot of prisoners to forced labor camps but those who

were strong enough, and could, escaped. These prisoners were raw materials for the partisans.

WS            Now the Jews who were in the forest some of them were civilians with women and children. Probably most of the men were with partisan groups?

RF            The young men not the older men. The older men would not have been much use.

WS            Were there some groups which were almost completely Jewish?

RF            There was one group. It was called "mistite" which translates into "revenge". Most of the people in this group were Jewish. Not all but most of them were Jewish. However, this was the first group which started out for the partisans.

WS            Is that a Yiddish or a Hebrew word?

RF            No, it is a Russian word. It actually means "will fight back". Then they started another group of Jews. Somehow nothing happened with it. So they became a group of "Bryvotsla". This is also a Russian word and it means something which they make. The entire group was Jewish. It even contained men and women. All the people had a trade. Something which they could make and that is what "Bryvotsla" means. They made leather goods. They baked for the entire surrounding area. This group was a supply group. They had shoemakers, tailors, dressmakers. Anything and everything which was needed. Everything was done in the forest. It was far away from where I stayed but we knew where they were. They had buildings which were half underground. They had a sauna bath, a bakery and anything you needed for a normal life.

WS            Would they be paid or would they be supplied?

RF            Oh no! Nobody got paid. They were just given supplies. Every group got what was needed. Some people who were in charge of the groups came to the support group. Some people traveled when it was needed. Everybody would. A lot of people who didn't have a trade used to go out at night and obtain the supplies. They also repaired things for the other groups. People got around just about all the time by walking. Some of them had horse buggies.

WS            The Germans never found them?

RF            No. They did their traveling at night. Even the group where I worked the entire summer for the partisans there was a special group. Those groups were small they did belong to some brigades, but they came from far away. They weren't stationed any place. They just came to do as



much work as needed. Mainly like the railroad destruction. There were only 12 men or so. They came over to our place in 1943 to meet us in the summer. We were several young girls. They asked what they could do. I said, "whatever you want we might try to help you out." They said that they would like to come to set up the camp for a few weeks and that they would like me and this other girl, and they pointed at a friend of mine from Kurzeniez to help out just by preparing the food for—us. That is what we did. We got up in the mornings and met a special man from their group. This man escorted us from the bunkers where we slept to their place since in the woods you might get lost and he took us to his camp. They brought us all the supplies, including the wood. We made a quick breakfast for whoever was in the camp. There were always some who were on the job. However, for supper, most of them came back together. Really, they used to do most of their work at night. At supper time they ate and then they had their assignments. After supper we were taken back. Most of them were sleeping or resting during the daytime or get ready for their work. You see, they had the main line railroad which went through. The main railroad to Minsk. There was a switchyard not too far at a junction at a place called Usla. That junction at Usla is the main place which they damaged. Every night they went back and what the Germans fixed, they destroyed. Fixing and destroying was regular happening. These special groups belonged to a brigade, we never knew which they just came. No questions asked. And we, my friend and I just cooked for them fresh and hot food everyday. Usla is both the name of the switchyard and of the small village. That was the main place where the partisans could do damage to the railroad.

WS            When did you first become involved with the partisans?

RF            During the summer of 1943. At the same time that I was on my own after my mother had been killed. Of course, we just worked with them. We didn't really join the partisans. Particularly this special group was stationed far to the east. They were sent from far away and at other times they were sent in different directions. We would not know where. That special work was good for me since during that time we got a lot of good food. They were in our forest for a few weeks and when they left, they left a lot of food. They left us a lot of things. We kept what we could, however, we could not keep such things as eggs and meat since it was summer. So we gave that surplus to other people who knew where we were working. People used to come to us since they knew that they might be able to get such things as meat. As I told you before I lived with the partisans I lived with a family with 3 children, really small children. So I gave them all I could. You know I was alone and a single person does not need so much. So we all had food for the summer. We didn't have to go begging. Of course, that also went for another family which used to live with me. That lasted the entire summer. That summer also I had the use of a cart. One time we were just sitting around. That special group, the

Bryvotsla, went to a little town not far from Kurzeniez, Lubania, it is a farming place. During the time we had been in Kurzeniez, under the Germans, we had been sent to work on the farm at Lubania. The partisans went back to that farm in order to destroy the farm. They took out all the livestock. They let them loose and they brought as much as possible into the woods. One cow was left over in the woods. The one fellow who did scouting for the partisans and whom I mentioned before, he knew everything which went on. That was his job. And he chose me from all the Jewish people who lived in the camp. And I was the youngest. He told me that he wanted me to care for that cow for him. I asked him what I should do with the cow. He told me to just feed her and milk her.

Part 2 Interview by Dr. Willis Stoesz (WS) of Mrs. Rachel Frydman (RF)

"So later on somebody will come back for the cow to get it. And we will give it to them but in the meantime you will have milk." The lady who had the 3 children in my camp, she was truly happy. She personally couldn't milk a cow. I didn't know how, so she said, "Rachel, you do it, keep the cow, just feed her and I will milk her". Feeding a cow in the summertime, in the woods is not all that difficult since the cow herself eats. The lady was going to milk it, she needed the milk. That summer we had a really good summer. I cooked for the partisans. She had the milk. The kids had all the milk they wanted. From nearby camps other Jews came to ask for a little milk. So since she couldn't keep all of the milk for herself, she gladly distributed it. At the same time, that summer so many things happened. The Germans knew about the partisans but they couldn't do anything about it. So they went to the villagers and they tried to get rough with them by harming a lot of villagers. Therefore, a lot of people who had gotten involved with the partisans got all afraid and they ran off to the woods. We got a whole family with children. A Gentile family, Christians. They came to the woods and set up camp close to us. The fellow who gave the cow, Cholai Avarovicz, had a partner whom he worked with for the partisans. This partner was staying next to that Gentile family in the woods. So, I told him, "why don't you take the cow because it is a bother for me to feed it and give the cow to this family". You know it was quite a task to stand in the pasture by myself and see that the cow wouldn't go away. The family did not want to take on another cow because they had brought their own cows. So he said to me, "If you go over to that family to stay there, you can bring your cow with you". I had to go with the cow. So I said, "I don't want to go there. They will stay in the woods for a few weeks and then they will go back home because they no longer will be afraid of the Germans." That won't last. The German's can't kill all of them (the Germans have done just that for one village or the other which worked with the partisans) since the Germans needed them and a lot of people still work with the Germans. At that time, also in Margi, another group of partisans altogether

just a group of men, we didn't know what had happened, we only knew that here came a group of four or five men and they came and they camped right next to us. We never saw them by the fire and I already had brought the cow back from the pasture. It was evening and the lady milked the cow. She boiled the milk. She asked me if I wanted a glass of warm milk. I said, "thank you. Right now, I don't want anything". Then someone called me. They had another fire, here is our fire and next to it they made a fire and a strange men whom I had never met or seen in my life was sitting beside the fire and he looked fierce. But he called me so I had to go. So, I went over and asked, "May I Help you?" He asked me who I was. I told him, "Well, here I am. You see the whole group with the children, I am a part of this group". Then he said "What at are you doing here?" I said, "I am here now. You can see that I just came back from the pasture and I brought the cow back". Then he questioned, how old is the cow? Then I asked him, "Why are you asking me all that"? Then he said, "A girl like you who is healthy and young shouldn't be with these kids. You know, with these people. You should go and work for the partisans." So I told him that I do work for a group, "They are not here now but they should come back any day. I don't know when but I expect them. They don't usually tell me. They just come to get us and then we work for them." He asked me what I do for them. I told him that I just do some cooking. That I didn't know what was going on. At that time since I had brought back the cow and she had milked the cow, a friend of mine who was older than me, as a matter of fact, she was quite a few years older, she was the sister of the woman who had the children. She went to give the cow another feeding before evening. So she went to look after the cow. Meanwhile, we heard a shot. In the woods there was a rule, if there is one shot it means nothing but if there are three shots, then it is trouble. Then someone knows about something bad going on. We heard another shot so we got scared. And then it was just out of the woods, that means the shot was in the empty place where the cow went to pasture. Then all of a sudden, the other girl, my friend, ran over. She was pretty much out of breath. She was so scared because one partisan had tried to do something. He actually didn't do anything to her but he had tried. She got so scared that she ran back and left the cow in the pasture. She said, "that guy called me". You see that had been something I had always been worrying about but something which is not truly my business is something which I try not to get involved in. That is one thing I have believed in all my life. However, the guy had asked me to come. There were four girls but he just asked me and he had never asked anybody else. So he asked me again. Not the man who was in charge but one of his men came over and said, "He wants you". So I went back to that group of partisans and the fellow in charge asked me, "What is going on there?" So I told him. I couldn't say any thing else, I had to tell him, "She ran away from one of your partisans or another man, we are not certain of who it is tried to get a hold of her." For the idea of a rape happening, it was death. Even as early as 1943.

Any

man who is in charge of a group and one of his men is raping someone, that man is to die without any trial. That man has to be shot! The fellow in charge called his men and it was truly one of his men who had gone to the pasture. It really was all in our same area. It was not far from where we stayed. That man was really scared. The man tried to talk up and to say the he didn't do anything. That she had just gotten scared. That he only wanted to talk to her. The chief said, "To kill a person is nothing to me. It is as simple as it is for her to make a cookie". We really didn't know what to do next. If we let him do what he wanted to do, that would be bad for us. Somebody could take revenge under the pretext "Why he didn't do anything to the girl!" So, I myself went to the chief and I asked him, "please, don't do any harm to the guy since nothing happened. She has forgiven him." Then he told the guy in front of me, "Whatever Rya is saying now (there he used my Russian name) your life is in her hands and if Rya will tell me that you are guilty of an attempted rape, you know what will happen". He had a gun with a silencer and the chief was ready to do it. I told him, "no! We all forgive him if he promises that it will never happen again". He let it go at that. After that, I prepared supper. I always liked to do things like this. I prepared supper for the entire group. We had cheese which we had made from the milk. White cheese of course. We had had potatoes on the fire all day even though it was summer. I called these partisans and I told them that I had enough food for all and that they should come to eat together. The guy who was in charge said, "no! We have an assignment to carry out for the war." So they didn't eat and they left. We didn't know where they went or why. They came back the next morning. I noticed right away that something had happened. Something bad!! One of the partisans came over to talk to us at the fire. The whole group of us was so scared of those five men. We had not been able to sleep during the night, although we knew that they had not been there during the night. At our fire, this partisan told us that the mayor of Margi was shot. That his wife was shot. They had had a very beautiful daughter and two sons. However, the sons had been taken away before then for forced labor in Germany. I had talked earlier about the party which took place when my mother and us ran away from the mayor's house and that the daughter was there. That daughter was older than I was. That girl begged the partisans, she said she would do anything for them. That she would accept any assignment, after they shot her mother and father in front of her eyes. The fellow who talked to our group said that they went right on, nevertheless, and raped her and then shot her. Then they went to sleep after they had done the job. The fellow who talked to us came over briefly. When they woke up it was already afternoon then the leader again called me. Before that they brought everybody in our group clothes to wear. At that time we had not known what kind of a mission they were on. I didn't get anything but the other four girls, one got a jumper, one got a skirt, something but nothing for me. I really didn't know why and I didn't care! I didn't have anything and

I didn't need anything. Later on he called me over again. Actually, that was another one who called me. So again, I went over. That leader was the worst man I ever met in my life except for the Germans, I am not talking about them. That leader came over. He took out a package and opened it up and he handed it to me. I recognized right away the skirt because I knew when she was making it. She worked on that skirt the whole weekend. You see, we used to be over there in Margi at all occasions after my mother got killed because she went for a little bit of milk. After all, Margi was the closest village to us. When we used to go there for a weekend, we used to stay in their house. We used to sit there and the mayor's wife used to ask us to eat with them sometimes. So, I noticed that she was knitting. After all we had become friends. It was some off white wool which she had. When he handed me the skirt I was shaking! I couldn't refuse it! I couldn't say no! I knew that he meant trouble for us! I decided that if I took it he would have his hands on me and I figured that it would be something which I would have to pay back. I was shocked! I spoke Russian fluently and I asked him, "What would I have to pay for it?" It truly was the best because it was handmade. Made out of pure wool. It was really a warm long skirt. I used it. I had it. I came all the way to Pskov with it. Anyways, I had to take it. I couldn't refuse it. I couldn't afford to make him angry. However, I was still afraid that I would have to pay something for it. Even though I was so young and he was so much older than I. He had his eye on me anyway . I felt it. Then they went away and two days later they came back. In the meantime, my partisan group came back. You see what was happening, I had told that leader when he asked me to join the partisans to join his group and to work with them, to go on assignments and to do everything with them. He also had told me that there was no use to stay with these people in the forest. That I was not helping the cause of fighting the Germans from the woods. I had told him that I don't want to join up with the partisans or any group because I don't want to be a wife yet. That I was not ready to live with somebody. I also told him that I am all alone in the world. I have no idea what would happen to me later on. I told him, "I can help you in away in which it is not going to hurt me, then it is all right" I had also told him that I was working for a group which should come anyday. He got very angry. He got so angry that he got terrible because he had been refused. When this partisan group of people came back, the original partisan special mission group, an all Gentile group, a whole family was back. One of the sons of that group came to the woods where we stayed and he told me right away, "do you know that Kawania", (that was the name of the partisan leader who had killed the family of the mayor of Margi), is back". You see, they knew him also and knew that he meant trouble. They didn't belong in that area to begin with.

WS

They were both Gentiles.

RF                    Yes, both groups. I was scared but what could I do? I am not going to run now. Wherever I run to, he will find me. Anyways, I was awakened in the morning when the group I used to work for woke me up, as well as my friend. We get them breakfast very early in the morning because they had to go somewhere. We never know where. They never told us about their missions. This was not our business. That day, I was so tired! They had a tent. I went in the tent and laid down with my friend. One soldier was staying there watching the area. So we two girls went inside and we fell asleep. We told the guy outside, he was not really a soldier but one of the partisans, to wake us up because we had to prepare dinner for the group of partisans when they returned. While we were sleeping, the same Kawania with another man came by. Somebody must have told him where we were or maybe he was just looking for me or something else, we never knew. He went by and he started not yelling but using obscene words. "What are you doing there and why are you sleeping there?" The guy who was on guard duty, first of all, was not supposed to let him through, since there was a code. If he is a partisan he should know the code, so maybe he knew the code. We all knew that everyday they had a new code. However, he called us out of that tent. Both of us and he started on us. He said that he does not want to see us anymore there or any place because I, he especially talked to me, had told him a lie. Such as, "to me she told that she doesn't want to go with partisans and here she is with partisans." I tried to explain to him what it was all about. "I am here because this is my group. I told you that this is my group! The group for which I am working whenever they come. They come and they go back. I don't know where they go. I just know when they come to get us. Here is the food and here is the wood so that we can prepare dinner." So we prepared dinner. When my group came, I told them all about this encounter. I actually told the whole problem to the man in charge. The one guy whose name was Sacha and whose name I never forgot. He told me, "Raja, if Kuwania does something to you, we will do it to him. Don't worry!!" Another day went by. Then the same guy from the partisan Gentile family came back to me again and said: "Raja, just go away from here! Wherever you can. But go far. He is so mad, but especially he is mad at you that he will kill you as easily as nothing. He is too mad. He is not going to take "no" for an answer!" We took off that same night. We left everything although we had had a good time there. What does a good time mean then? We certainly were in danger. We had to beg for food. We helped a lot of people. So, we had to leave everything and go away. That means the whole group not just I including the children, had to go. Because of me they also had to move. We moved then to the Naoran Jari. (That was mentioned earlier). It was a long distance. We traveled through the entire night. We took whatever we could take with us. We met different people when we settled in the new place. By then, it was already late in the summer. It was already coming toward the time of the third blockade. It probably was late August and the blockade happened in September. I had not been there long. We had just

settled there and we just had gotten to meet people in Naoran when the blockade happened. You see, I was alone and I had no one to care for and no one cared for me. So I didn't care to stay long in one place. I could collect my things from the family I stayed with and I could go away. I went away during the day. Not just at night. In Naoran, we had to cross the river. I went off in the morning. We crossed the river by boat. The river wasn't very high. As a matter of fact, at one time, it was so low that I could just walk across. I stayed with many families there. They all wanted me to stay because I helped them. I didn't only want to stay with them, I wanted to help them. I didn't stay there just to talk to them. These people were very busy. Everything had to be done by hand including boiling clothes to wash them. They were also busy working in the fields. It was already harvest time. I always helped them. No matter what they were doing.

WS            Were they Jews or Gentiles?

RF            They were farmers. The small farmers from around there. They were Gentiles from the small villages. They all wanted me because the minute I went, I had to do something. I peeled potatoes or I cut something. Help them cook something different. Prepare the evening meal for the people coming in from the fields. They used to come back good and hungry and they liked to have something ready and waiting. They really liked me wherever I went. They would have kept me there if they had not been afraid but you just can't stay too long anywhere at a farm. I sometimes stayed one day and a couple of nights. Then I went somewhere else or I went back to my own quarters. Once, I went to a little island where a few families lived. I went to see a friend of mine, Nidia. Then it started! When I went to see this friend, I stayed there. Then I went to Mizoli to see another friend and then the blockade started. I knew about my brother at that time, but I could not do anything. (She had heard that he had been deported to Rega). After the blockade and after all my troubles, after all my traveling I came back to Midiar (the transcriber is not at all certain about the spelling of these places except that Midiar must have been close to Naaran) and I found that all my possessions had been sold. I had nothing left. So nothing tied me to Midiar anymore and I went back to my original group. Back to the place in Navania. There, we stayed in a barn. As I said before, you see when they get the hay for winter they put it in little barns. That barn where we stayed, was on a very small island. You could not go around it because it was a very swampy place. On the island there was a small dry place and they had the barn there. At that time, usually several farmers had a barn together. Except for the richer farmers who owned their own barns. We then stayed a few weeks in this barn when I came back and then I got busy looking for my brother. I came back late in October and it was already November when I met up with my brother. It was already very cold. When I was with my brother, so many things happened to me. I had never given up on my brother & I fought to see

him back alive!! All my dreams came really true then. I brought him back and it was a little place near Naoran and Midair. It was Nivarishi - Nometa (or something which phnetically sound like that). That was a small place. When we went out to this place, there was a big farm. This farm was more than the usual farm. It belonged to a rich man with a lot of workers to help him. It was not in a village. Just a beautiful big home! There were a lot of smaller farmers who worked for this rich farmer. We used to come and meet at this place. We used to meet with the partisans who came through the area. They had a very big kitchen in which I used to help. In the summertime I came there to help in the harvest. This is where I cut this finger. I didn't know to do many things for the farm. I had not been used to living on a farm.

WS            You were a city girl?

RF            Kurzeniez was not a big town but this was really the farm. We had not been farmers. I had to help them in the fields and I learned. We cut flax. You know, the plant you make linen out of. We bundled it up to dry it then we worked it. When I brought my brother back we stayed in that place all through the winter. That was a really bad winter for us (but worse one for the German army) since I did not want my brother to go begging. If he were to meet partisans, that would not be good for him. They would take him with them. I didn't want that. I wanted him to stay with me until we could find out really where he could belong since he was already with the partisans but not with any special group. When he met me he had left his group. We thought that we would go someplace together. He didn't want to leave me alone now. I went begging for 20 km during the night. That was really bold! There were no villages and those villages that were there we didn't want to beg so much. The people who had families with smaller children, they begged in villages close to them. We went where the partisans used to go or where the Germans used to come for food. But the Germans never came at night. There, where the Germans came, we got a lot of food because the people were really scared. You see, the people who lived close to the main railroad, they were truly afraid! They were scared from both the partisans and the Germans. They were really in a bad spot. So that is where we used to go begging the whole winter. Actually, we were still together with the people. At least many of them who we started with in 1942. Naturally several of them had gotten killed but the rest were still in the same place.

WS            How many were there still left from Kurzeniez? Still a couple of hundred?

RF            Yes, still a few hundred. We were together then for the entire winter. The men came out to Noaran and they took out a cow from a widow. They knew that they should not have done it! They took out the cow and they slaughtered it. Then we had meat for the whole



winter. You see, in the winter, it is cold. Everything is frozen and you can't stay outside in the snow. Somehow, word got out to the partisans and the partisans came out to tell the men that they were not allowed to do anything like this. First of all, in general, but particular to those villagers who are very helpful. So it was hard to make our peace with them. They were told how much they had to pay for that. I don't know how much that was. They paid it off to that poor widow for her cow. If they hadn't paid they would have been shot. There were three men who were involved with that. One was a father with three children. Another had two children. The third man was not from our hometown. Somehow, they were able to work out a deal. That was around February 1944. So I told my brother, "let's try next month when the snow will be down a little to get away from here. This is not the place for us anymore. We are both too young for this and I have had enough of it. When I go begging for whom do I have to do it? We are two adults. Let us join a group someplace". It just happened around the beginning of spring, in April, because in March we couldn't go. The roads were impassable. There had been so much snow and the snow had melted in places to make a swamp. In the woods the snow melts slowly. In April, we went to a different place all together. Abe's mother was there. Actually, they had just gotten there. We all traveled around. None of us stayed in the same place for long. If we got wind of a blockade, for example, we had to travel. We went to that place and there we met a group, the supply group I told you about. One man came to us and he said to my brother, "I have a place where a special group is looking for a young man who could speak some languages. They need somebody like you." He went there of course. It is not easy to say that. It took a day to go there and that was by horse and buggy. He went there and he told the fellow in charge, the man in charge had been specially sent from Russia. He came special to that place and he took my brother with him. He didn't take me but he took my brother. I had gone with my brother but he did take me. Then I traveled and I stayed in a different place and left my friends. I then met new people. Most of them were from Vilna, the big city. We then stayed not very far from where my brother was stationed. I didn't want to lose my brother again. He had told them, "if you take me, I have my little sister and you have to help me take care of her. You have to supply her with food". He would never go without me. As a matter of fact, they supplied me with food until the end when we came out of the woods. Still, when I was with the mainly young people who were there and he brought the food for me, they usually brought me more than I needed so our whole group of young people ate. At that time a piece of salt was very valuable. Nobody had salt but the partisans had salt. So they used to give their clothes to wash to farmers and give them soap to wash it with. So I told one of the partisans, "bring me your things and I will wash for you. I clean and I wash for you but I will need soap." Once I started washing word got around to that special group of partisans that I had washed the clothes. The man in command knew about it. He says, "No more!" I

was not supposed to wash. He even sent me a piece of soap not to have me wash for anybody. They truly treated me like one of them. They could really have used me in the kitchen or they could have taught me how to use their radio transmitter. Instead of letters, they used dots on their transmitters. However, if I would go there I was still only sixteen years old. I was just afraid to get involved. You see, they had plenty of young men. This kept me back from whatever happened or could have happened. It probably would even have been safer for me but I was just afraid. I was at that age and I was afraid of falling in love. You fall in love anyways! I fell in love with a fellow whom I never ever saw. Well, I saw him a few times and I fell in love and then I didn't want to get involved with anyone. I just didn't want to be involved with anybody. You see, when people are young, they don't think about anything and we were young. I don't have to tell you. You are still young. Nature takes over! There were so many young men and nice looking men. However, somehow that was not for me. You get together with friends. You see them. You enjoy them. In the evening at times, you are so relaxed. We formed a group. One use to come and play the guitar and I used to sing a lot. Everybody knew that I sang well. They brought me a song written on a piece of paper and told me how to sing it with a tune. That is how we entertained ourselves. The only thing was that I was afraid. Since I was alone, I was afraid to get involved. I thought that if anything happens, what would I do alone? That is what kept me away from being actually with the partisans.

WS Do you still remember your mother at that time? Was that it?

RF You see, my mother had already been gone for a long time.

WS You remembered your mother, did that make you hesitate?

RF I certainly remembered my mother but I was afraid. I just was afraid because I felt that I was too young to get seriously involved, possibly heartbroken. You know people can get pregnant! You see, here the young kids are more knowledgeable. They know more about sex. Maybe they don't know all that much about love. It is hard to take care of them even now. But we were afraid because we didn't know anything. We didn't know how to take care of ourselves. So we thought best not to go near men. No to know them. There were different times and we were afraid! We act differently even. We are brought up different. When my brother said, "you know what" he came over every so often to visit me "the man in command" he was a big shot a colonel here or something like that. He wanted me to join them. You know to be with them to stay with them to sleep with them. To eat there and do whatever I could. That he would find something for me. I told my brother plainly that there was a young man upon whom I had my eyes. He was really handsome! I just was afraid! I was afraid that I would fall in love with him and he is not even a Jew. I had in

my thoughts that if I ever get married it would be to a Jew and he is not a Jew. That was the problem. You know now in college the kids are falling in love. Jewish and Non-Jewish and the whole world is mixed up. After all these days they go out together. They never talk about religion. Love is supposed to be the answer. As a matter of fact, when we came out of the woods, much much later, that guy went back to Moscow to the regular army. Most of them went to the regular army. Then he talked to me and he said that if I would like to go to Moscow he would arrange for me to be sent to Moscow to school.

Because he knew that my brother also would go to the army, so I would be again by myself, all alone. But I didn't want to accept his offer. I didn't want to go to Moscow. I didn't even want to go deep into Russia. I just went back to Kurzeniez. I didn't find anybody there so I went back to school. I didn't want to go to Russia for them to take care of me. That guy went back. He had a temporary wife in the woods. As a matter of fact, he really fell in love with a Jewish girl from Vilna. A friend of mine and my brother came to the place where the girl lived. My brother moved in there. She told him right away, "no!" Even though he was very good looking. Oh what a good looking guy! However, she said no! no!. She probably had the feeling that it was a temporary thing. However, he found a beautiful girl in the place next to my brother's partisan was a group of partisans "Gepaias" and she moved in with him. Her mother also moved in. They lived in a truly beautiful place. Everything including vodka was sent from Russia. She lived with him until August of 1944 when we came out of the woods. Then he sent her home with her mother. His wife was the ballet dancer, Alova. He was too good looking not to have a wife. A lot of people connected to the dancing field have heard of Alova. Alova was his real wife. We said goodbye to him in a little town and at that time he said, "Raja, this here is my wife Alora". She was truly a beautiful lady. It was late in 1944 when we said good bye to him. This was when the farmers again had their barns filled. He tore off the whole canopy of his parachute the material and gave it to me. He also gave me a few other things. We did not have anything at all. From the canopy of the parachute I made bed sheets, pillow cases and a gown. You see, that it came in handy. He was a very nice fellow, but you see what happened with the partisans. They didn't take my brother with them when they left. They only took their own original group, the way they arrived and went back to Moscow. But the people whom they used in the woods, the White Russians and the Jews, they told them just "go home!" And that was the end of it. That was 1944 at that time the army came through and they fought. This was in Poland in Eastern Poland. We had already been liberated from the woods.

WS

You have mentioned about fighting. Were there battles with the Germans where you were? As the Germans were retreating to the west were they fighting?

RF

That is right. They were not fighting so much just in certain places.

The Germans were scattered. They traveled by small groups and they caught and made prisoners. The partisans took a very big group of German soldiers prisoners. As a matter of fact, a dear friend of mine, who was taken into the same group with my brother, he was sent to a different area to do something special. But he never came back. When the Germans ran back toward the west from the frontlines, they had all kinds of ammunition with them. He was killed by them. Another friend of mine, this one was from Kurzeniez and we had been brought up together, and another friend from a different small town, they were both killed just a few days before we got clear of the Germans. The Germans even while running away still shot people. They actually tried to shoot their way back into Germany. However, all of them were caught and a lot of them were killed. And the others were sent to prison that was most of them. They gathered them as prisoners where we stayed and then sent them to Witnica (the transcriber located such a town at 52.40N and 14.55E, which is much further west than had been anticipated. Therefore, it is possible that the name was misunderstood). Witnica was always the center of all that surrounding area. An odd thing, is that my brother went into the Russian army wearing German boots. They took the boots from the German soldiers. The Germans had their watches which the Russian people never had had. The partisans didn't have anything so they took the clothes from the Germans including their watches. We all took some things like that. They called it "Gonif" and it was gathered. They even offered me some of it but I didn't take it. I didn't want it. The only thing my brother took were the boots. He didn't have anything on his feet. I have a picture of him being a soldier. A Russian soldier wearing German boots. By that time, the Germans no longer fought back.

WS

After 6 hours of talking we have recorded a lot of experiences for people to know about eventually. We got pretty much to the end of the Germans being in that part of Poland which was in August of 1944. The end was coming fast. The Germans had disintegrated into small groups. A lot were taken prisoners and a few were shot. One of the Germans contributed his boots to your brother so that he could fight for the Russians in the winter which was coming.

RF

Yes, he had these boots in the Russian army. These were the only shoes which he had to wear. I didn't have anything. When we came out of the woods I didn't have anything. I had no shoes on my feet.

WS

What was the name of the town? I am looking for it here in my notes.  
The town where Abe's mother was from?

RF

Pskov (that is located 57.50N, 28.20E) it was Pskawy in Polish. In Polish it has a y at the end.

WS

Is that near Kurzeniez?

RF                   It is almost the same area. It is to the east closer to Vilna. When I went there I went to the railroad center of Kuryecheniez. From there, you could go to Vilna and to Milovetchna and to Miladera, to Kurzeniez and to Pskov and Vestadi (no attempts to locate these cities were made with all the post war changes of names from Polish to Russian and the relative casual importance this did not appear required or even possible. Some errors in the phonetic transcriptions may be present.)

WS                   Was it still in Poland and not in Lithuania?

RF                   It was still Poland. Vilna is Lithanian.

WS                   So, that is where you went eventually, after you came out of the forest? You didn't go to Pskor for a while, you said.

RF                   You see, when we came out of the forest in August 1944, we first stayed in the villages. When we learned that the German army was retreating and the Russians were advancing, we had really been prepared for another blockade. Remember that I told you that the fourth blockade did not get to us. It remained far to the east, in Russia. They did kill a lot of people in that fourth blockade, also in the wooded areas.

WS                   In the area of Minsk?

RF                   It was further away than Minsk. Much closer to Smolensk. Yes, in that area. So we had prepared ourselves since we knew that the blockade was coming. Fortunately they did not get to us. The fourth blockade was not a one day thing like the three we had had. The first three were that they came and stayed for one day and then they went. They went from one part of the forest to another part. That is how the Germans went. During the third blockade I went wherever the group went until they sent me home. It was fortunate for me that they sent me home. The entire group got killed later on long after I had left them. The friend whom I had gone to see when I got involved with the group never came back. Later I heard that the whole group which by then was deep in Russia when they tried to cross through the German lines got involved in a fight and were slaughtered.

WS                   So, it was good luck for you that they didn't allow you to stay.

RF                   Yes it was but at that time I suffered a lot. It took me a long time until I did rejoin my original group with my friends. I truly had to go through hell. I guess it was meant for me to survive this. I suffered but I came out of it. She never came back! She never did. I never found out where she died. We got ready for that blockade! That summer we built hiding places. It was built on the edge of the wooded area where we were staying. It was built by big groups of

young and old people, most of them from Vilna. It was not far from the area where my brother was with the partisans. All the men of that big group started in July to dig the hiding place. I remember that it was July because it was very hot. All the men went to dig for half a day every morning. They dug so much that they established a very big underground bunker. We even stored dry bread. Since it was summer it was easy to dry whatever bread was left over. Whenever we could get bread. We dried some fruit. Whatever fruit we could find in the woods such as blueberries. We dried it out and put it in bags. We said that in case something happened and we hear that the blockade comes closer to us, we would first transfer all the bread there, since we wouldn't know how long it would last. They took me there for one day to help, only. You see, they didn't often take the women. They didn't even want word to get out that they were making such a major effort. One day I went down there to work. The entrance was at a very big rock just near a very small lake. That lake was flowing into a big lake at Narod (located 54.57 N and 26.49 E). Narod used to be a resort place in the area. There was a small town of Kapmuni then it went to Narod. The big lake was far away but it has a very long shoreline. To show the kind of resort area it was, you have to look at the richest people of the area. The ones from Vilna used to come there for the summer. Most people who came there went fishing. A cousin of mine, after the war, her husband was in charge of the fishing, they also had experiences similar to mine. Under that rock was the entrance and they had put a little door behind the rock. Of course when I went there to work it was just a hole, the door had not yet been installed. That hole was the entrance. It remained as it was and we never had to use it. But nobody could ever, unless someone talked or pointed it out, have known that it was there. We knew the tactics of the Germans. How they travel. How they go about a blockade. They would just move at arms length to each other. They would not go into the water. Since this was on the edge of the water they would never think of that. So from our previous experiences we already knew how to hide. Even the partisans and the group which my brother had joined weren't far away. It really was only walking distance from our place. Didn't know where it was. That partisan group belonged to a bigger group which was called the Chipai. It was not the supply group and it was mixed Jewish and non-Jewish group. It was a real fighting group. They had the same idea. They also built a shelter & places to hide. They would use these hiding places in case they were not ready and the Germans would come sooner than expected and sooner than they got the order to move. The partisans received orders from someone deep in Russia and the orders were that the partisans should not fight the Germans when the Germans came out to look for them but that they should leave everything they couldn't carry with them and move. Of course, they would know where the Germans are so that they would move away from them There were orders not to make a stand of it since it would be useless to fight the Germans. The partisans existed only for one purpose. Not to fight

the Germans for a piece of land. It would just be suicidal. They were to do harm to the German communications. Whatever they could do in that line would help a lot. They built shelters. Not so much to hide people but to store all their valuable supplies such as food and grain. I knew that since it was not a secret. Partisans wouldn't tell you their secrets anymore than any other military unit.

WS                    They would have been ready to move out and hide everything there?

RF                    Yes, hide it and when they would come back it would be there.

WS                    They had supplies for many weeks?

RF                    Yes, they had a lot of things. Of course, they could not keep things which would spoil. But they kept things like grain which they could save and which would last for at least a month since there was not refrigeration. If the blockade lasted longer, they would at least have food. However, that was not all that important for the partisans since the Russians always supplied food first. In any village which the Germans suspected of helping the partisans, such as Margi in the third blockade, they burned it completely. They did that to all the villages. When we traveled in the third blockade with the partisans, when I was with the group, we could only travel at night. You could always tell the villages. Village by village. Wherever they set foot they burned, they took most of the men especially the young men with them. That is the same thing which they did in Varska (this is located 57.98N and 27.38E not far from Pskov) which is to the east. We, really the Jews, were sitting there just hoping to survive but the partisans knew every move the Germans made. Wherever they went or where they were supposed to go the next day, the partisans usually knew everything. They also had their own people to find out. So nothing stayed a secret from the partisans. So, we were prepared, even we. This is one thing you have to hand to them, they told us everybody had connections, just as I had my brother there. He would warn me. However, fortunately, they didn't get to us and we survived.

WS                    So further east the Germans had time to destroy everything but by the time they came to you they were in disarray and in retreat?

RF                    They were in complete retreat. They were retreating so fast that they no longer thought about catching partisans or anybody. They were just glad to be alive and to survive themselves. They ran away in very small groups. Everything came too fast for the Germans. All of a sudden, after nearly two years in the woods where just about everyday was like every other day, at the end of which we thought, "Oh, a day

went by! Maybe tomorrow something will happen at the front and maybe something else will happen". Things did happen. Our hope, we had lived by hope so long that we didn't even hope anymore. Everyday was the same as every other day. Maybe somebody got killed or somebody came back from the frontline and we would not hear anything special. Then all of a sudden even for us, it was really too fast. Since they got hit deep in Russian (she is groping for the name of Stalingrad) in 1943 they had bad luck. After that there was a time when there was something like a standstill and we didn't know about anything and how things were going. We didn't know what is what. The only thing we knew was that there were always more partisans around. Their numbers was ever increasing. By the end of that same summer the Ukrainians came back. The very same ones who had worked with the Germans. They came over to the partisans.

WS Even the Ukrainians came to join the partisans?

RF Yes, but they had worked with the Germans all the time.

WS Were people warned about the Ukrainians?

RF Yes we were. We were worried about them. During all the three blockades, the Germans really didn't go there not so many Germans. The Ukrainians came. There were two Germans to ten Ukrainians. The Ukrainians fought against their own people. After all, the Ukraine was one of the Soviet Socialist Republics. However, then something happened in the German army. Maybe they didn't treat them well, The Ukrainians really were not prisoners of the Germans, those who were prisoners were really treated badly and not many of them survived unless they just ran over to the partisans or just decide to change sides. You see, the partisans were a refugee for all of them whoever could joint up. The Ukrainians came back and they begged to join up. Of course, they did but they were not just accepted like that to come back because the partisans, whoever was in charge did not accept them easily. They had to prove that they were trustworthy and to do something. For example, they had to bring a live German with them or something like that in order to atone for having run over to the Germans and worked for the Germans. That the first thing they had to do. Of course, they knew how and where to get their Germans. After all they worked with them. That summer it was just full of partisans. Wherever we went, whenever we turned around there were partisans.

WS When did the Ukrainians first start to be friendly with the partisans?

RF In the summer of 1944. Not yet in the spring. They started to come over in May. As a matter of fact, one told me that he was there when my mother got killed. He showed me where her body was near Margi. Of course, he didn't know that it was my Mother. Another one who wanted to make himself look nice he said that they shot those few Jews who



were going out. You remember, that my mother went to the village but it was a different village, he knew that when they shot at them, one fell to the ground but these Ukrainians said to me, "I knew that he was not dead, that he couldn't be dead because we were firing from too far". So I said it was a couple of children: "the other four were dead". He said, "but this one, he couldn't be dead! I knew he is not dead. He made himself lay down and lay still! But I didn't want to bother, I thought let him go. Let him live". As a matter of fact, the Ukrainian was right, that fellow was not even wounded. Just when they started shooting he fell from fright and he is still alive someplace. So then the Ukrainians joined and they did whatever they were told to do. They didn't know what we had gone through. There were so many that summer. There were so many of them. They knew that the Germans could not last long. So they had no choice if they wanted to wind up on the right side.

WS                                So, all during August then the Germans were coming by in small groups. It must have taken quite a while until they got passed of where you were.

RF                                We were afraid only if somebody would try to interfere with the groups of Germans. The partisans told all the Jewish groups, the Jewish families there, "the war is over! Be careful try to get together into a group and go home. Wherever home is. Whenever you can". So, I, for example, tried to gather a few things. After all being with so many people and everyone gave you something. I had a blanket and I got another blanket. I got a little cart and I got a washbowl. You know I had to have something to carry it in. I could not just leave the woods with that stuff in my hands. I didn't know how far it was. I knew that it was far from Kurzeniez anyhow. So we got to a little village. Katowitz, next to the lake. Truly it was beautiful there. I went there and I talked to a villager. "Listen, I have some things. Take me from the forest to your village and I will give these things to you and I have some food which all the people from Vilna had abandoned." The people from Vilna went in another direction from mine in order to get back to Vilna. They went off in a group and left everything they had behind. I told that fellow, "come and I will show you where it all is." Oh, we were still all in the woods and we knew that things were still going on. We knew that the Russians were coming but we had not seen them. They took me to their place. I stayed there for three days. It was beautiful. Every morning I went to the lake. It was like a beach. That place was just beautiful!. However, I wanted to get to my own people and particularly to see where my brother is. He had left. They left before us anyway. They had to go someplace and I didn't know where to. I had asked them too. They then asked me if I wanted to go back to Kurzeniez? I told them, "no, that is too far!" So I mentioned another small town and he took me half way and then told me that I would walk the rest of the way. He knew that it was dangerous to go. At that time, it was more

dangerous to go in the forest than during the previous two years. I went to one place to see one friend and some people I knew were at the other end of the forest. I almost knew every corner of the forest. I wasn't afraid! I thought, "what can happen?" The Germans certainly would not go there in the middle of the day unless they had a blockade and there were the partisans. I was concerned of the partisans too, after all, I was a young girl. By that time I got a little more afraid. After all, I could meet Germans too. They were cutting through at times. However, most of the Germans were afraid of the partisans. The Germans really by then gave up the fight. They really had. Maybe a few stronger groups still tried but not many. And usually they traveled by groups of three or four. They didn't know where there were roads in the forest. By that time, I had arrived at that small town, Yadlig. It was closer to the forest than Kurzeniez. But anyway, I was already not far away from Kurzeniez. There, in a village not even in Yadlig, somebody told me that there is a group of partisans who had been there already for a few days. That there were two Jewish boys with them. So, I went to the other end of the village and there was my brother with his group. A few of the Chipai group had joined them. I knew a few of them from the Chipai group. I stayed with a villager for a few days then I went to the little town of Yadlig. There, I already met a lot of Jews. They came out of the woods earlier than I. They came directly there while I was staying at the two villages. So they were ahead of me. I met a lot of people there from the forest where we had seen each other. I stayed there for several weeks. Some of the partisans somehow went back to Russia and my brother was sent home. He joined me in Yadlig where we stayed together. Then word reached us that my sister is alive. She wrote a letter to one Christian family which lived in Kurzeniez next door to us. She sent a letter to them. They, however, were not there because they ran away with the Germans. The letter, however, was kept in the postoffice and somebody brought the letter to us in Yadlig. She wrote in her letter to the neighbor, that she had - she was in the Russian army- hoped that she could answer some questions for her mainly: is someone of all, she asked, could you please right away let me know if someone of my family is still alive. Of course, no one received that letter, it was at the postoffice until we got it. So my brother said, "let's go home". He went first, since he was a young man. He wanted to see how we could settle in. Whether he could look for a job or whether they would take him into the army. Later on, they took him anyhow. They didn't tell him earlier but that was that. I stayed for a few days with a friend of mine, Andreovitz, later on we even went to school together. Her father/since we had gone home barefoot, he made us each a pair of boots. He was a shoemaker. Naturally, I had to wait for that because it took a few days. After I had gotten these boots I went home. By that time I had a few things, not much with me. A family from that area, as a matter of fact, there in that little town of Yadlig I met again a young man from Krymsk, in Russia. In Krymsk they are dark haired people who look like Jews. As a matter of

fact, when I met him in the woods I thought that he was a Jewish boy. We now got acquainted and he really was paying court to me. Maybe it wasn't love, but then we were both young. When we were in the woods he used to come often. He was in that partisan group, Chapaii. When I used to go to see my brother I went near there to see him. Whenever he used to see me while I was with the group from Vilna, he used to bring me flowers that entire summer. Then when I was in Yadlig, that little town which was near the lake, the whole area is such a beautiful place. When I met him in Yadlig I asked him, "what are you doing here?" He answered me, "Well, I am waiting since our group will be going into the army." As a matter of fact, some of the partisans did not go home. Most of the people from that area they went home. They could go home if they had a home to go home to. However, people from deep in Russia, and he was from way deep in Russia (Krymsk is located in the Crimea at 45.00N, 34.00E) couldn't go. He told me, "I am going to go into the army and we are waiting for someone to come and get us" I guess that is what he had been told. They had assigned a place where they should wait until the unit was assembled for those who were going into the army. They supported them by giving them food while they were waiting. They really already were part of the army. Then he told me when we said good-by: "maybe someday we will meet again!" I told him, "there is noway now. That's it! It is over!" Things like these, you know. Then I said to my friend, "I will go home!" After her father had made me the boots. So I took the little bundle which I had accumulated, it wasn't much. I heard of a man who went to Wilaika, I guess that is where he was going to and I asked him to let me go with him. He told me that his horse was not strong enough to pull him, his wife and me but that he would take my baggage. I would have to walk in my new boots. So I walked all the way by road. It is far from Yadlig to Kurzeniez. It took us a long time and I walked all the way. I followed the wagon. When we came to Kurzeniez it was already late afternoon after a whole day of traveling. I thanked him and he went on. So then I was back home. That was my first time home after these three years. There was nothing left.

WS                      Your brother was there then?

RF                      My brother was staying with a family for a while. I asked him, "did you go to see the house?" He said, "there is nothing to see". Everything had been burned because when the Germans retreated they didn't leave anything. So they just burned it. There really was one street at the edge of town which had escaped the burning. It had not been a big town to begin with, but the edge of town was saved. So we had no home to go to. I stayed with a family. They took me in. That was the same family with which I had started out in the woods with. The one with the three small children. She took me in back after I had separated myself from them in the woods when I went different places with my brother. I stayed with them for the summer. Not

longer because I became sick. Most of the people who had been in the woods became sick with the typhus. A man who had been very strong and a young man died. A lot of people died from it. I never got sick while we were in the woods. I had been strong as a horse. I developed and I grew. When I went into the forest I had been thin. However, then I got sick. First, I had a very bad case of diarrhea and then I caught the typhus. It was very hard. We had no medicine. I was afraid to tell anybody. When you tell somebody they take you to a hospital where you were isolated. In the house where I stayed with the family, the Russian army set up their headquarters in the rest of the house. So if word got out that I am sick with the diarrhea they would want to know and they would send me away since it is so contagious. I didn't tell anybody. However, one of them found out. He noticed that I was sick. He brought me rice. I hadn't had anything to eat. We had three eggs at that time. We went into the fields. We dug the potatoes out. They were ready by then, that late in the season. It was already September. We also ate whatever the people could beg again. As a matter of fact, I got so homesick for the life back in the woods that I said that I would be better off there than in my hometown since I had no work. I had no money. Truly had nothing. From the woods I used to go out to the villages and they gave me food. They supplied me with everything I needed. I had enough food so that I was not hungry. Here I was at home and I had nothing. When the Russian army came back there was still a war going on and they didn't have time to look who is and who is not hungry. The army itself didn't have much food. Then I got sick. I thought that I had a cold. I went to see my brother in Wilaika. He was already there. He worked there. While I was in Wilaika, I had troubles. I don't think that that had anything to do with the Germans because the German era was over.

WS                    About two hundred Jews from Kurzeniez were left. How many came back, would you say?

RF                    Not many. At the beginning most of them came back but they didn't stay long. Everybody had worked for a different group and there was no reason to stay in that small town. As a matter of fact, when I applied for a job I had already filled out the application and even been accepted, I got sick. Then when they saw that I was sick this time they took me to a hospital.

WS                    In Winaika?

RF                    In Kurzeniez. They cut off part of my hair which it had taken me so many years to grow during the German times. I was sick. I was really sick!! After I got through the typhus and all the other sickness in the isolation unit in the hospital I went back to the same family to live. Of course, by that time I was again without a job since my job had been taken by someone else. Therefore, I did not know what to do.

Of course, all the other people who lived in Kuzeniez knew me and they tried to help me. Then I was again thinking what shall I do? I had recuperated. I felt well but I just didn't know what to do. Then I met the same Schatz about whom I told you. He first had been my teacher and then he was my neighbor. He saw that I survived and he was so happy to see me. I told him that now I am even worse off than I had been before. Now I had nobody!! By that time my brother was already in the army. It was already September or October. Anyway, it was fall. It was around the high holidays. He told me, "listen. You are a child anyhow. In spite of all, you are still a child. Forget these three years which you lost and go back to school." I really wanted to do that since another friend of mine, she had had her father and mother in the woods, they all survived, was going to school in Wilaika. I was so envious! She goes to school and I can't go to school I thought. How can I go to school? Who will give me the proper food? I didn't have anything. So he said, "You know in Pskov, there is a school for teachers. They are just now accepting students. The head of the school is a fellow by the name of Ischkin". I answered; "the same Ischkin who was the principal of our high school?" He said; "yes, the same Ischkin." He came back from Russia. When the way started he was from 1939 to 1941 the principal of our high school. in Kurzeniez. Then in 1941, when the Germans invaded, he took his wife and children into Russia. They were Jewish. He had come from Russia and then they went back to Russia. Schatz told me, "Ischkin came back. His wife didn't. He is alone with the two children. He is now the head of that school for teachers. It is a three years teacher seminary. That seminary prepared you only to teach the first four grades. That is how I got involved with Pskov. So it came to my mind that what do you have nothing to lose. If you go to work as a secretary someplace. You earn 200 rubles. If you go to school you make 100 rubles. You see, they actually pay you while you go to school. Schatz added, "as Ischkin is the head of the school he will do something for you which no one else could do". So I packed my things and I told my friends I am going to Pskov and I am going to apply for the school. I wrote a letter to Ischkin right away. I told him that I was from Kurzeniez and this and this, of course, he would not remember me of course. After all he couldn't possibly know all the children in his high school. I told him that I survived and that my ambition is to further my education and to become something. I received a letter back before I had even had time to think about it. The letter told me that it was still time to apply for enrollment even though the school was already open because it was already October, (and cool really cool. I again took the couple of things which I had and I went to Pskov. I went by train but then I found out that the trains didn't run. Finally, I caught a train and I had to sit on top of the caboose and got very dirty. I first came to Kralerseina (this is a town located 55.03N and 27.52E). From there I took a real train,( probably meaning passenger train) and from there on to Pskov. It was not easy to travel in Russia at the time. It was still during the war. People

were traveling all over. The trains were full with people from Russia who came to look to buy grain, or to buy anything else (the German army had lived off the land in Russia for two years or more and then practiced a "scorched earth policy" before finally collapsing into a rout). All of the Russian people came. You see, these Russian people were very poor. A lot of the army people traveled. So the trains were overcrowded. You had to run to see if you could get on the train. Whoever came first got in. The other didn't! I got to Pskov. In Pskov, I came to Abe's aunt who was living in the same place with his mother in the same house.

WS Did you know Abe's family from before?

RF I knew them from the woods. As a matter of fact, I had stayed with them. As a matter of fact, I had stayed with his aunt for a few weeks. She took me into her bunker. So, when I got to Pskov, I went to see her and I remained with her for a few weeks and I went to school. By the way, I got accepted in the school right away. Ischkin told me then that there is a place in the dorm. First, I had a friend from Kurzeniez who had not been in the woods. She had been somewhere else from where she came back. She had married a fellow from Pskov. She asked me to stay with her. I told her we will see. Then in Pskov I had a boy friend from the forest. I had met the boy. We kind of fell in love. We didn't see each other often. However, we dreamed! It was our wish that we would get to meet someday. As a matter of fact, when I got to school he came to see me. Once he found out that I was alive, he came to visit me. He was stationed in Pskov. So he tried to find an apartment for me. Instead of the dorm. However, I was the kind of girl who also got concerned what someone else would think. (During the above telling, Abe intervened with some gentle teasing of Rachel which she completely ignored). He would have to pay my rent since I had no money to pay rent. So, he would pay the rent for my apartment and he would come to see me. I felt that I was getting involved too much. So I said no!! Of course, I went to see the apartment. It was a nice apartment not far from the school. Anyhow, I decided to continue living in the dorm. As long as Ischkin was director of that school he made sure in the school restaurant that I would not have to pay for my food. That was for three meals a day, including breakfast if I got up in time. If not, then starting with lunch. I was a very good student. For straight A students, you were given an added stipend of twenty rubles. So I got 120 rubles and I had no way to spend it. Just about all the food was free and I didn't have to pay for the dormitory. It was very very cold in the dormitory. All we could do on Sunday was to go into the forest to cut wood. That is what all the students did. We brought the wood back to the school. That is how we kept warm in the dorm. It was a bad winter that winter of 1944 - 1945. So in school I did normal studying and led a normal life. However, it was still lonely. It was even lonelier because it was a strange town. I had nobody. A short time later, my supposed

boyfriend, he was transferred back to Wilaika. Now, he was closer to Kurzeniez but that didn't matter. At least he had supported me morally and now he was gone. I really wanted to study. It was the thing I really wanted to do so that I could see what might become of me. In 1945, Ischkin days ended. They didn't send him away but someone else who had been an army man got out of the army. So they officially made this new guy the principal of that school He was really a nobody. A nothing! He wasn't even a good teacher. He taught us geography. Once, he called on me to give a report on geography. I started with Suez. I talked for one hour and I could tell that he himself didn't know what I was talking about. He got the job because he had been in the army and that gave him something to do. Ischkin had been a good principal truly. He was an historian, so he taught history. At that time, we had no books. We had to make notes on whatever the teachers told us. Then I got very sick. They didn't think that I could make it because I was so weak. You see, after I got typhus, I needed food, nourishment and I did not get it. I just got plain bread and potatoes. So, I got weaker and I got a virus. It affected my eyes. I went to a doctor. She gave me some ointment but it didn't help. The infection went into my ears and my face broke out. My Russian teacher's daughter was a doctor. She was in charge of the hospital. This teacher talked to her daughter, "there is this student of mine, this poor Jewish girl, she is very sick". Then she told her about the symptoms. So the daughter said, "she needs nourishment. She needs good food. Something including fat such as milk, cheese, eggs, poultry". So Ischkin offered me, because it was so cold in the dorm, his home. So that I could stay with them. With the entire family. That meant his mother and his brother and two sisters. So, I stayed with them in their house and they gave me some food. However, they were poor themselves. Whenever they had food I went out since I didn't want to take some of the meager resources for me. Anyway, when I didn't eat, the daughter of my teacher told her mother. Send the child to me and to the hospital. I couldn't see so I covered my eyes and learned what was being taught just by listening. But then the friend whose father had made my shoes, she also came there to go to school. She took me to the hospital. On the way to the hospital, it was a very cold winter, I fainted. I felt so very bad!! I told my friend I don't want to die in the house of these people. Whatever you do take me back. A friend of ours, she stayed with a Jewish family, she told them about me. That family had no children so they took me in and I stayed with them. His mother came and put on "banchas" (hot cups) on my back (W.S. assisted Abe and RF in identifying this fairly ancient way of treating inflammations) I was very sick and they fed me well including honey. I had truly felt that I was going to die. That this would be the end of me. So, I said that I wanted to die in a Jewish family. I didn't want to die in a non-Jewish home. So I stayed there for a long time. I missed school for several weeks. My friend went to school regularly and brought all her notes home and I could study at the home of these people. By

then, it was already March. I received a package. At that time the war was already being fought in Germany. It was a beautiful package which my sister sent to me. She was with the army. I went to the marketplace and I sold everything and I bought cheese and eggs and sour cream, etc. That was truly like medicine and I returned to normal. My face cleared. My eyes got clear. I was just like brand new, like with a new skin.

WS                    Was that March of 1945?

RF                    Yes, March of 1945. I went to school during that winter except for the few weeks when I had to stay home. They were afraid that I would catch pneumonia. So they made me stay home. My whole system weakened because I had typhus and I didn't get enough good food. Of course, I had gotten sick with typhus in October. So you see it took me a very long time to get strength back and to recuperate. It was not a pleasant time. However, I still was free. My sister had been with the army in Czechoslovakia and Vienna, Austria. She was in that direction. Every army unit followed a different route. My brother was in the middle of Germany. She got into southern Germany. After the war, she asked the army to release her. She said that she wanted to go back home. So she got discharged and came home. She got home to Kurzeniez and I went there also during the summer of 1945, vacation time. I went there and we met.

WS                    You hadn't seen her for four years?

RF                    Yes, four years. That is right. In 1941, she went with the Russians.

WS                    How much older is she then you are?

RF                    Five years. So we decided that there was nothing for us to stay for in Kurzeniez. Possibly, there was something in Pskov. That was a much bigger town. She went there with me. She had brought something with her. Not much! She brought some beautiful things with her but they stole it from her in Minsk on the train. She gave her luggage to another girl from the army. The other girl picked it up. The other girl was on the train whereas my sister was on the lower step. My sister lifted the big heavy suitcase up to the platform but instead of her friend picking it up, somebody else did. It was dark. A lot of army people were traveling. So they stole the best things which she had been able to pick up to bring home. The girls felt very bad about losing all of that. So I said we have gotten rid of a lot of things over the time so this is nothing. If we will live, we will have things later on. I will finish school and we will both work so that we will make it. That is how we two started out in Pskov. She got a job although it was not all that easy to get a job.

WS                    How long did you stay in Pskov then?



RF                    Until May 2nd of 1946. Then we left. We took a train to go to Poland.

WS                    Were you working the whole time then or were you going to school?

RF                    Yes, I went to school. That second year I worked part time and went to school at nights. By then I had decided not to become a teacher since as a teacher I would be sent to a village because I was just learning to teach the first four grades. So I decided to get out of that and I saw an announcement about an application for a dental school in Minsk. When I got to Minsk, remember it wasn't easy to travel, it still was during the war, it was too late so my applications was not accepted. They promised me that if I continue school they will give me credits and next year I will be accepted. That next year mine would be amongst the first of the applications. I said, "next year? To hell with them and to hell with the school. I better go out to the free world: After all we were free!! It was not as good in Poland as it had been but Poland was still a democratic country. So, we went back to Poland (Pskov and Minsk are located in USSR) but that wasn't free either since the government was communistic. However, we had agreed to go to Palestine by then. It had gotten to be our dream. I had already met Abe and we had decided to get married.

WS                    When did you meet Abe?

RF                    I met him in Pskov in 1945. I went home for Christmas vacations. You see, the Christmas vacations were two weeks. Actually, in Russia, there is no Christmas. It is the New Year's vacation. So I went back to Kurzeniez to be with my friends. I stayed with them. At that time Abe came back. He came home to his mother. In 1945, when I came back from my vacation, we met. In May 1946, when we left Russia, we got married in that same month. We left Russia together and got married in Poland. We had the ceremony in Poland although we knew that we would not stay in Poland. I got the things which I had and I sold what I could and made a small wedding. We got married there and we got on our way to Berlin.

WS                    You didn't get married in Pskov?

RF                    No. You see, that that was at the time of the festival of Passover.

Between Passover and the holiday of Shavu'ot (consecration of the Torah) for six weeks. we are not allowed to have any weddings except for one day and that is a holiday also, although a minor holiday. On that minor holiday we got married. On that day there is a specific time to get married that is prior to sundown. After sundown the interval is over. So, two of us couples got married on that day. A second cousin of Abe's and Kurzeniez girl friend of mine. We got

*Szczecin (located 53.24N, 14.32E)*

married in Szczecin- (former German city of Stettin which is now a Polish city). A week later we went to Berlin. We paid for a taxi to take us to Berlin (later on she refers to a truck in which they hid).

WS To Berlin from Stettin?

RF Yes! The taxi took us to Berlin. We stayed in West Berlin for a few months. In Berlin we registered to go as German Jews to a different camp. It was not a camp like the concentration camps were but it was a DP (displaced person) camp in Eschweiler (or something like that). It was in the English zone. They transported us to the English zone by going through the Russian zone. We were told not to speak Russian. Not to speak any of it. As a matter of fact, I was so afraid that I took all the pictures which my sister had brought back including some of her in the army. They had told us to throw everything connected to Russia away especially things connected to the Russian army. I kept only one picture of my brother as a soldier. I folded it and I put it in my shoe. I had never told him about that so when he came and asked me how do you have this picture, why is it cut. I told him that it just got worn through and broken. I had it restored. This is how we got to Eschweiler. That is actually a big town. We stayed there through the summer. In the fall, we got a telegram that Abe's sister was already in Germany. My sister was also in Germany. You see, when my sister came back she got married and they also left for Poland. They were in a different place in Poland and from there they went to a different place in Germany. They were in Ulm (located 48.25N, 10.00E) in a beautiful place in a farm. The farm was like a kibbutz (communal village of the type used for Jewish settlements in Israel). In 1946 we stayed in Hanover. That is right! Then we stayed in Eschweiler a while and then we got to Bad Rausingen , close to Ulm. Actually between Stuttgart and Ulm. From there we went to the big city where they had the Denazification trials, that was Nuremberg. There Abe went to see his cousin and I went to Nuremberg. I wanted to see where the trials took place and also where the infamous anti-Jewish laws were proclaimed. I also went to the Nuremberg Opera House. It was a very beautiful and very historic. We stayed in Germany for almost two years.

**(Note from transcriber: Later on added references are made to a DP camp of something like Eschwe, Such a city is located at 51.11N, 10.04E and could truly be in the US zone. I opt for this as the answer.**

**There is a city of Eschweiler located in the British occupation zone of West Germany at 50.49N and 6.17E. That may possibly be the city in question although it is not at Hanover. But that does not appear to be the camp which supposedly was in the US zone. )**

RF                                Those two years lasted until late 1948. I had my first child in May 1948. I was teaching school in Germany. That was Hebrew school. In Nov 1948, my baby was then six months old. Of course, the war in Israel was still going on, of course. Israel had been established in May 1948 when I had my baby. When we arrived in Israel life was hard. Upon arrival they assigned us to a camp after landing in Haifa from our boat. Right after arrival they assigned people to different places. Where to settle in Ramla (that is a city immediately south, about three miles from Ben Gurion Airport and the city of Lod). When we got there the Arabs had just been driven out. You could even still find some bodies which were still warm. (Ramla is also about ten miles south southeast of Tel Aviv). We were afraid to go in or out. Many people were wounded. Everything was scattered all over. It was just terrible to stay there. We stayed there however, and decided to work in Tel Aviv. We really didn't want to stay there, We couldn't sleep. It was difficult to adjust.

WS                                Were some of the Arabs still around at that time?

RF                                Not where we were. They were in Yafo (the older and Arab portion of Tel Aviv. Both cities are incorporated as one). We went to Tel Aviv but Tel Aviv and Yaffa are one and the same. They raised the Moslem flag in Yaffa, but most of the Arabs had fled before we got there. Whoever had not fled before we got there stayed in their homes and they stayed quietly and lived there.

WS                                How long did you live in the state of Israel?

RF                                Oh we lived there for ten years from 1948 to 1958.

WS                                Did you come directly to Dayton at the time?

RF                                Yes! Actually we came by boat to NY.

WS                                Did you know somebody in Dayton to make the connections to this city?

RF                                Abe's sister. That is why we came.

WS                                Listening to the tape of two weeks ago, a short question occurred to me. The man who replaced Mr. Isehkin as leader of your teacher's school in Pskov, was he also Jewish?

RF                                No.

WS                                Ischkin was Jewish; but some other teachers were Jewish also?

RF                                There were two other teachers who had been sent from Russia.

WS                                The school operated under the Russian system?

RF Oh yes, on Russian territory and operating under the Russian system. Pskor was in the old Polish territory which was taken over by Russia at the end of WWII. This long time. It had been German just for a little while (actually that border was moved back and forth in 1559, 1648, 1714, 1763, 1772, 1793, 1834, 1871, 1914, 1919, etc. so you couldn't talk about well determined nationality).

WS This was the fall of 1944 and what I was wondering about was Ischkin was the head of a school! Were there a lot of Jews who had jobs in education at that time?

RF Yes, a lot. At that time, a lot of doctors and people with the best qualifications were from deep in Russia because for a lot of the locals the Russian language was not their native tongue. We didn't have time to educate the teachers in Russian then. However, in 1944 - 1945 we felt that we were different.

WS Different from the Soviets?

RF Yes. We had always said that we were the Westerners as compared to Russia. The White Russians were Westerners to the rest of Russia.

WS I was wondering whether there had been a lot of Jews in the teaching profession and why they were replaced. I gather that the replacement was not made because they were Jewish but because of the language?

RF No, this fellow got the job because he came back from the army and he had been wounded in the army. He was like a hero. He was not all that bad but he was not as good as Ischkin. Ischkin had been very good at his job, however, someone decided to make the replacement.

WS Did the Russian army have the choice as to who did what job?

RF No! It had nothing to do with the army. At that time did we not complain because the war was still going on. He had been wounded in the army and he was discharge so they had to give him a job. The real Russians liked to have a job in that part of the country. There were more things available in our region.

WS Another thing which I want to come back to: I didn't hear any mention of anti-Jewish persecutions or pogroms or anything like that at that time at least.

RF You see the Russians had an anti-Jewish policy. However, it wasn't all that evident. They would tell it in a joke imitating the way Jews talked. For example, in 1939 when the Russians came over to our side of Poland and they took over, that was the time when my father had just died and we had a lot of worries. They requisitioned rooms in our

homes for soldiers. One man, he was Jewish who was in the army, told my mother, "wait and see what they will do to you yet. They will analyze every human being and see what everyone is doing. It won't be all that easy." We didn't think about that. We were children and it was fine until the Germans came and we were happy. We still much rather have had the Russians than the Germans. Then in 1941, one good thing which they did that we Jews should never forget, they opened the door for anybody who wanted to come - not like Americans who did not let in refugees-including all the refugees who came from the western side of Poland who left for our part because they were being overrun by the Germans. They gathered them. As a matter of fact, we had some of them in our home. A couple who were refugees. It was in September 1939, the beginning of a cold winter. In one place and, I strongly believe this but I couldn't swear to it, that place was one of the three synagogues and they plainly told the refugees, "let us know where you want to go because we have to get you settled someplace". They were human beings who came even from Vilna and other parts of Lithuania. They were afraid even at that time that the Germans would be coming so they ran away. A lot of these refugees said that they would be wanting to go back so that they would not make good citizens. So they sent them to Siberia. Siberia was considered to be a punishment (however it turned out to be a clear haven from the Nazis). Two people from Vilna would up in Siberia because of that they wanted to go back to Vilna as soon as it was settled. Of course, eventually the Russians took over all of Lithuania. So then later on, they were transported back home. However, in the meantime, they were sent to Siberia. Let's not forget that these people are alive. All of this could happen because we were under the Russian regime for almost two years. So it was much better for them. Then, in 1941, when the Germans started the war by invading the Russian territory, my sister, she left us to go to Russia. Even my mother and I wanted to go but we couldn't because we waited for my brother to come back from school. A lot of Jews left in June 1941. A lot of Jews just packed up and whoever could get a horse and buggy left. They left just like typical refugees. They all survived the war and they came back.

WS                                    They went pretty far east?

RF                                    Yes. Even half of European Russia was taken over by the Germans but the Russians took all the refugees. I have a friend of mine, here in Dayton, Mr. Schmeller, he is a Polish Jew and they rail away from Poland until they got to Russia. He was really in an equivalent of a prison. He went through a lot. He went through not working because he had been an anti-communist before the German invasion. However, in 1943, all the political prisoners were freed. One thing they didn't do to him, they didn't draft him. Jews or non-Jews were taken normally into the army. All the young men went to fight for Russia during the war. The Russians allowed everybody and really because of that a lot of Jews are alive. Entire families survived the war and

came back to Poland. This was a very good deed which the Russians did for us Jews. What was said about anti-semitism, you could feel it because in the summer of 1945 my sister came back home from the army. She had served in it for four years. When she came back she got discharged. Another woman who was in the army in charge of a group and had joined the party said, "that if you are in the army for so many years and come back with all the medals and you wouldn't be a Jew it would be easy to get a job". We already felt this antisemitism.

WS                               It got worse after 1944 didn't it?

RF                               Yes. You see, it is not like what they say now. Although we don't know what really goes on but we felt that. As a matter of fact, I was young. I was in school when a Jewish Soviet officer brought his family to Pskov to live. I talked to them, about us western Jews, because prior to the war we lived in Poland, about the fact that we could leave the country. We had a right to apply to leave. In Russia normally you can't leave just when you want to leave. You can't go any place you wish anyway. You can move in Russia freely but you can't leave the country. We had been told that for the next six month whoever want to leave Russia, all the Polish Jews and non-Jews, whoever; they can leave". Having been Polish we could leave Russia if we wanted to go to Poland. That was rule which started in 1945.

WS                               For a period of six month?

RF                               Yes, it was for a time and two years later they allowed it again but not for so long. You had just a specific time to apply. At that time, my friend who was a Russian said, "I envy you for that, so that you can leave." and he added, "go, go. You are young. Leave your school. There is nothing for you here!! Go to the free world."

WS                               Why did he say that?

RF                               Because he had seen things. He was in the Russian army. He had been in Poland and Germany. He saw that there is a different life elsewhere. He was just as cooped up in a little cage. As big as Russia is, we could travel. Of course, I couldn't because I didn't have the money to go nor did I have any place I wanted to go to. But for him he was already in Russia for seven years. They couldn't go anyplace. So he repeated, "now that you have the opportunity -leave!!"

WS                               When did you get the idea to go to Israel? Was that always in the back of your mind?

RF                               When the war was going on, no matter how bad we had it, my mind was being built up already and I felt that there was no place like going back there although at that time, there was no Jewish state. It was

Palestine. We knew that somehow that is how we had been brought up. There was a hope that someday there would also be a Jewish state. Someday that would be a place to live. At that time, when I was really young and went to Hebrew school, we knew one thing, "there is our home". Even though it was not a country yet. During the time of the German occupation, we always hoped that if we lived we would go to Israel.

WS                                Was it just a religious idea or was it also a political idea?

RF                                It was our idea but we really didn't know. It is not really a religious idea. It really has nothing to do with the religion. It is something to do with Zionism.

WS                                Was it organized?

RF                                Yes it was organized. I did not belong to any organization because I was too young. They had Zionist organizations in every small and every big town. All over Europe. They usually had the Mapai, which is the party of Begin now, and there was socialism like the labor group now. We called Begin's group "Ha Lou Ziv - Pioneer". The object was to go to Israel and to build Israel and drain the swamps. Even if there was no party. My cousin couldn't go because of her health. But these pioneers they were being organized everywhere. Their objective was to get the money needed and send a young man or young girl to Israel. They took them to whatever places they were needed. It might be a kibbutz. It was idealistic. It was not just that they had to. As a matter of fact, they didn't have to. This is really what Zionism is all about. "A dream which will come true". Even my father, whom I knew only as a child, I remember telling that he was in so many places, in so many countries while he was young but he had never been in Palestine. He used to say that he hoped to send one of his children to Israel. He hoped to send my older sister perhaps to Israel. That never happened. However, she is now in Israel. Of course, when the war started in 1939, every endeavor to send any one to Israel or Palestine had to stop.

WS                                The Russians were against all religion?

RF                                Yes, I guess so. For example, if you joined the Cominsul, which is the Communist youth movement, you have to swear that you don't believe in "G-d", that all you believe in is the party.

WS                                Were there Jews in the Cominsul?

RF                                Oh yes! I had to join it. I had to be a pioneer which is the first step. When I was ten or twelve years old. Then when I was older the war was there. I was actually not forced but I was told that it is a shame not to be in the party. You see, if you want to get ahead you

have to do whatever they say that you have to do. But when I got back from the woods that was it and I had nothing to do so I left. They asked me why I left so I told that I only want to go to the west. That I had lost nothing there and that I just want to go.

WS                                Let me back up if I may. I hate to reopen this question but some of these points are not clear. Your mother was killed in 1943, then you finally came back to Kurzeniez in 1945. Was it at that time that you went looking for her body in the forest?

RF                                No! I brought her back but that is a long story. In the Jewish tradition, a person who is killed has to be buried in a separate place. That applies also to persons who commits suicide. They are not to be side by side with the rest of the Jews. Actually, when I got back to Kurzeniez they hadn't even had the chance to put a stone up for my father so I couldn't find his grave. But, anyway, I was not supposed to bury her in the same area. So I did the best I could. Nobody was there who could help me. My sister was already back home from the army. But at first she couldn't break away from what she was doing. Later, she felt that she hadn't helped. She had a job so she couldn't leave. The husband of the woman who was killed with my mother, in the same location, he went with me. We hired help for the area of Margi, from Kurzeniez, but we got two people to help us from Margi. You see, we couldn't do it in one day. We had to stay overnight.

WS                                Were there a lot of people at the funeral?

RF                                There were not too many. A lot of people had left for Poland of those who survived. I also knew that I had signed up to leave for Poland and of course, I knew that I would never come back. In my mind I had always said, and I really meant it, when she was killed, if I will survive and I ever get back home, the first thing I will do is to give my mother a proper burial. I couldn't do it then of course, since at first it was not really safe to go back there. So, I waited. One winter went by, then during the second winter, it was actually in March 1946 but there still was ice. I knew that I was going to leave from Poland before May. So we went from Kurzeniez to Margi with a horse and buggy and the caskets. They helped us but I did a lot with my own hands. That is what I did for my mother so that she could rest in peace where she should be rather than in the woods.

WS                                Millions of people were not that fortunate.

RF                                Yes, nothing could be done for many Jews who were killed in the forest. Nobody even knows who lies where. For me, that was a relief.

WS                                I wanted to catch clearly on the tape when you were able to do that. Another question which I had was that you met Abe's aunt in the woods. You had already visited with her in the woods.



RF                            Oh yes! I had met Abe's aunt and his mother and his sisters, They were all together in the woods. You know the woods were very extensive. It wasn't like a little forest as we have here. The woods occupy an area which altogether is bigger than the entire Dayton area. There is a very big forest with little villages in them,

WS                            Did people stay more or less in the same area all the time?

RF                            The people often traveled because of the blockade (obviously RF is not referring to the natives of the villages who, as was described earlier build homes, including saunas, farmed and elected (?) mayors). They tried to stay in groups and move by groups. Like for example, Abe's mother remained with the same group. She had something like a bunker together with her family. She had help. One daughter had a boyfriend who helped them. She also had cousins who were with the partisans and came and brought food. However, I had no relations. After my mother got killed until my brother and I got together, so I traveled any which way I could. However, none of us stayed in one place. Families also stayed together whenever they could. Two families, for example, stayed together and built a bunker together.

WS                            Did it ever happen that a group of people stayed together the whole time?

RF                            Yes! It happened that they stayed together without even being partisans. Nobody had to be a partisan. Most of the men, the young men especially, they wanted to do something. They thought that even if they can't kill a German, at least they can harm somebody who works for them or disturb the German army. I am certain that you remember the group which I called the supply group which made things for the partisans. They sewed. They had a shoemaker. That was needed also. That is how everyone participated. I, for example, I didn't want to join the partisans. I was a young girl. I was afraid of being involved further than I wanted even though for some it was okay. But one of the girls was shot by her own people. Sometimes it was shocking.

WS                            Then in the spring of 1946, you had met Abe. You had gotten together and you began dating and then you decided to get married?

RF                            Yes. Then we did not get married in Pskov. We left together and got married in Szczecin (Stettin). We stayed there for just one week after the wedding or ten days. After that, we went to Germany. We were then members of an organized group. It was a Zionist group. The main purpose of this group was to take young people out of Poland to the DP camps in Germany and eventually to Israel.

WS                            Did this group have a Name?

RF I don't believe that it had a special name. It was a group organized to make it easier for young people to get out. We paid money to join the group. From Szczecin, they took us someplace else and put us on trucks. We hid inside these trucks and they took us to Berlin in the French zone. From this French zone of Berlin we went to West Germany by train. Once we were in that zone of Berlin, they no longer were afraid of us being stopped. It was illegal to leave Poland. That was what the Polish government had decided. The DP (displace persons) camp we stayed at was probably an old army camp. There were barracks.

(Reference to French and British Zones in Berlin are somewhat hazy, as are other divisions of Germany)

WS Could you work or did you just wait around?

RF We waited. Other people worked. I could have had a job. I was offered a job by a fellow who was from Kurzeniez. I met him there and he offered me to go to school in West Germany and to be a teacher there. You see, I knew Hebrew (besides Polish and Russian and German) and they tried to teach Hebrew to children. However, we did not stay in that camp very long. We were fed. We had a room for ourselves. It was like a transit place. We were there five or six weeks. That first place was not truly a DP place. It was just a transit place. From West Berlin to the British zone, we went by train through the Russian zone. They made sure that we didn't talk Russian. They even gave us new passports. In the English zone we were in Hanover. We were on a farm near Arland (or a place which sounds like that), that is a few miles from Hanover. The only city is Hanover. That is a big city. It is beautiful. The farm was a Jewish farm which had lovely orchards and we worked there. It was like a little kibbutz (a kibbutz is a communal village where everything is owned in common and the decisions are made by the inhabitants together, generally as a result of a vote). There were only young people on the farm. A whole group of young people. We stayed there until late fall. Then we went to Ulm after receiving a telegram that both Abe's sister and my sister were there. So we went out without asking anybody. We just told them that we were leaving. We had no passports with which we could travel so we stopped at the border between the English and the American zones, you see, we were traveling without proper papers. I was caught and taken to prison. You see, we were not supposedly man and wife. We were each traveling under a different name since we had to have something to go through the border. The Americans took me off the train and held me overnight in the station of Heidelberg. I had no passport. I had nobody to talk to until I established a connection to Eschweiler \* That was a Jewish DP camp. We had been there already (this was mentioned on a previous tape). So, until I received a name and a passport from the Eschweiler people, which certified that I was from their group and that I was not doing anything wrong. In the meantime, I was almost two weeks in a prison, a regular prison! I couldn't speak English. I could only speak German and Russian so they got somebody to translate. Still, I had to go twice to the authorities. They told me that until everything will be clarified, I would have to

stay in prison. After that, they got the information and they told me that I was free to go. From Heidelberg, I went by train to Eschweiler, which was in the US zone (see the footnote for the previous tape about the towns of Eschwege and Eschweiler. Here it is identified as US zone which leaves Eschweiler out of the picture). Then we got permission and we went to Ulm. Then we heard that they just opened a new DP camp. A whole transport of Jews had come from Russia, from Poland or wherever and they brought them into Wasser-Rauschingen (this place could not readily be located during the earlier tape was made to Bad - Rausingen which supposedly is close to Ulm. It is presumed that both are the same place). We settled in that camp. We told people that we were from the same transport, after all, who knew and what was going on, as long as you get a place to stay someplace. There we got an apartment. Actually, it was one room in a house but they were beautiful homes and there we got jobs. I was teaching Hebrew school in the DP camp. Actually the German government certified me to teach. We had a bona fide German teacher who got the job. So we made it. We received food. Actually, we were well fed and everything we needed was paid for, so we really couldn't complain. I had my first baby while we were living there. We had wanted to go to Israel earlier but we left only when the baby was six months old. That is when we signed up to go to Palestine. It was Israel by this time, that was 1948. It was in 1948 when the Jewish state was established. I could have come here to the US at that time because the same people who sent the affidavits to Abe's sister would have sent them to us also. If we had wanted to come. However, in our minds there was no question that we wanted to go to Israel. That decision was in our heads. We were afraid to remain in the Diaspora (that means the Jews living outside of Israel). We didn't want to take that chance. Why should we change one Diaspora for another. We were certain that we would stay in Israel.

WS                                So you stayed in that camp near Ulm for about one and half years?

RF                                We stayed there from the end of 1946 to the end of 1948, about two years.

WS                                Were people who were living in that camp pretty hopeful?

RF                                Oh yes! The people were free!! That was a good place really people were hopeful. We all waited for something. In the meantime, people had everything they needed. Everybody was busy doing something. There were all kinds of businesses. Some of the people even opened shops up. There were tailor and butcher shops. Everything you needed for life. However, you knew that it wouldn't last, since the camp itself was only temporary. Some people were truly happy to hear from relatives in the US. To get papers to immigrate here. Of course, until the papers were complete, it always took time. So they had to wait maybe even for a few years to come to the US. The same thing was

true for Israel. We had to sign up (however, there never was a wait of "a few years" or even several months, once the state of Israel had been established). We would have signed up sooner but we would have had to leave earlier. As it was, we got to Israel in Oct 1948 (her baby was then five months old).

WS By boat then?

RF Yes. We went to France by train from Germany. We stayed in France for three weeks, while they were organizing us. They had all kinds of groups of people all with people in charge. Then people told us in the evening, even at that time, it was illegal for boats full of immigrants to Israel to be leaving Europe. We went by a terrible boat. The boat was truly terrible. We left from Marseille. They took us again by trucks to the ship in the evening and loaded us up like cattle. Actually the ship we got on was a cattle boat. It took us six days to go from France to Israel.

WS That was in Nov 1948?

RF It was Oct or Nov. It must have been Nov because it was already cold.  
Yes, we left Germany in Sep and we got to Israel in Nov.

WS You landed where?

RF In Haifa.

WS And then on to Ramla? How long did you stay there?

RF Yes to Ramla. We didn't stay there long. We wanted to go to a bigger city. We met Abe's cousin not far from Tel Aviv. Then we started to look for a place to stay there. We went and stayed with that cousin for a few days. We looked around and found a nice home. That was the home of some Arabs who had run away. It was empty so we settled there and started to work the land to farm. It was just outside of Yaffa. Yaffa was a big city by itself.

WS Did you rent the land you were work?

RF We did not rent the land, it was "Yetush Hamatush". That means that it was land taken from the Arabs who had abandoned it. Occupied Land. The Arabs ran away from all their lands and belongings. It was only in Yaffa that Arabs remained. However, most of the Arabs left. Then a few of them who didn't leave, they stayed and continued as before. Some of these had orchards and especially orange groves. They had beautiful homes in these orange groves, nearly palaces, truly beautiful. These were the rich Arabs. Poor Arabs lived in little shacks. Something like tin cans which they would cut open out of which they made hovels about the size of half a garage. There were some

of these shacks scattered all around the fields. They left because they were very poor. They had been working for the richer Arabs.

Even these Arabs fled. So, actually the land had been truly abandoned and lay fallow like a dessert. We didn't have a lot of land to farm but what we had we really put it to use.

WS                                    You lived there for ten years?

RF                                    We lived there for eight years. In the same home. We operated a chicken farm. Then we decided that the chicken farm was not good because of sickness of the chickens. We decided to sell it. To liquidate it and we bought a restaurant. There we stayed for two years. By then we had had enough and decided to leave altogether and come to America. After all this dreaming and having a dream which we had when we left Europe. We had enough.

WS                                    The reality was not quite what the dream had been?

RF                                    It is not that, that is not it! You just get tired of war. You get tired to be stabbed in the back. We had two boys growing up and we thought, "who knows, next year there might be another war". Even though at the beginning of the state, we had hoped it hadn't really changed all that much. Now (1978) it is worse. Of course, since the 1967 war fighting has been endless. Then, during the night someone else got killed or got injured and all the places were surrounded by Arabs. Even more if you lived closer to the borders. They didn't have night and they didn't have day for resting. Somehow you get tired and you don't want to wait. That was particularly so after Abe's sister arrived and told us how beautiful it was here. She said that it would be easier for us and that our children would have more opportunity. So we decided, "let's go! Let's try it!" That is why we applied for the visa and we came to the US in 1958.

WS                                    Did people talk about the years back during the war?

RF                                    Always! Even now, here when we have all of our friends here, you know the refugees of WWII, they are pretty well settled. All our friends in Dayton are well to do. They have beautiful homes. When we come together we have everything which anybody could ask for. It is nice! You can't ask for a nicer life. However, whenever we talk, we find ourselves somehow recalling the concentration camps and about all of those who got killed. We finish our conversations with the same theme and the same subject.

WS                                    Do you ever find out something new? Something you didn't know before?

RF

We find out that they had it worse than we did. Everyone of our friends here who now live in Dayton went through so much that when they start talking and I realize that those two years, when I lived in the forest, as bad as they were, including the cold and living in the bunkers and not knowing what the next day would bring, even during the blockades, the villagers were kind of nice to us, at least we were free to go and move around; of course at times you couldn't go. Most of the time we could go from one camp to the other camp. We couldn't always go far. We could go further in one direction than in another because of danger. However, within the forest we were free to move around. Naturally winters were tough. Then we had to stay in most of the time. At other times, we did manage to get together. Sometimes we played cards. Sometimes we played musical instruments and sang songs. Such as balailaikas. The youth, especially the youth was somehow kept alive because of this interchange and being able to decide for ourselves. We did not go to pieces. It was not like in a concentration camps we talked about. One of my closest friends here, she was in Auschwitz, we saw the number on her arm. When she is talking about what she went through, what she had to do for a piece of bread. They killed a child for a piece of bread! You couldn't hold on to a piece of bread. If you did somebody would find it and would steal it. We didn't have that! We truly didn't have hunger. At least not very much. Of course, we went through our own hard times. We had our own suffering. It was different! Although, we have friends here who were not under the Germans but under the Russians. They had their own problems. It was a war. A long, terrible war!! However, at least they were safe. Nobody walked behind them to kill them!

WS

Such things remained on peoples mind. It is hard to get around it!

RF

Constantly! ! We shouldn't forget!!!! That is a thing which we cannot forgive and we cannot forget!!!! It is impossible to forgive or forget because so many families were lost. There is no one alive to remember them and to tell about them. And even just to remember their names. For example, we were lucky. My mother had three sisters and four brothers and no one of their children or their children's children is alive except for one cousin who went to Israel prior to the war. Today she is alive in Israel. Not one of the others is alive to talk about their families like my brother and I talked when he was here. Okay, my mother did not live in the same town with her sisters but she knew about all of them. Her older brother was already a grandfather in 1941 when the Germans came. Then, they were all exterminated. All of them! When we went to the Yad Vashem (this is part of Museum of Remembrance in Jerusalem dedicated to the memory of six million Jewish victims of Nazism next to Mt Hertzl and to the military cemetery) and we said the prayer for the dead for the entire family. For all of those who were killed. However, I don't know how many of that particular family were killed since I didn't know how many they were.

There were a lot of people of that family whom I had never met. How many families in Kurzeniez did I know from which families, no one but no one survived. That is true for some families even if you extend them to the most distant cousins. That no one survived! No one is around who may have even any ideas about some of these families. Some of them have no trace from their families ever having even existed except the inscription on the walls of the Yad Vashem. During the war my sister, my brother and I were in different places and survived in different ways. That is, until we got together again. We were just lucky that was just luck. How can you forget when you owe your life just to luck! Even here in the US where we all have it so good, we always wind up talking about the same thing. We always come back to that time. No matter what other problems we have and we all have problems, I still hope that some day my children will hear about it. That they don't forget because they also should remember what we suffered.

WS Do they know?

RF Yes, they know.

WS In a general way or do they know all the things which you have been telling me about?

RF No! I say no but they know a lot of things. For example, a few years ago there was a paper in the Jewish Chronicle and in other publications about Dayton but that was only short. Just an article about us that is Abe and I. My younger son, who is now a dentist, he said, "Mother, I never knew what you went through!!" I told him you never listened when I talked. I guess when they were growing up they never quite understood. Now, they ask. Now they know better. Now they really want to know what went on including how many relatives were gone & about whom nobody knows enough to mention the names.

WS Maybe they would like to go to WSU (Wright State University) to listen to the tapes.

RF Maybe they will someday. I have a friend who is a native American, probably at least a third generation American with whom I was talking. She said, "when I think that I saw the TV series 'Holocaust' that was terrible". So I answered, "well for us that is just a toned down version of what happened. Yes, we also watched it but we went through so much more. The Germans in the beginning were not as bad as they were later. Later on, they had been so brainwashed with Fascism that they had to do it once; that they had to have a little blood on their hands. Then nothing was too hard for them". And that is all true! So then she said, "now I can imagine what you went through". I told her, "you know what? We went through even more because we used to live peacefully together with the Christian people. Nobody used to care

who used to be Jewish and who was not Jewish. After the Nazi's came in these people did more against us than the German people and that is what hurts!! Why did they do it? We were so good to them! We never did any harm to these people! They could have saved us but they didn't. I don't say that that was the case with all of them but most of them did not. That hurts!! Even going back to the woods to run away. On the day when the Holocaust hit us for real, the "liquidation day" as they called it, we didn't know where to go to. Later on, because of the partisans, they helped us. They did it but only them and far away from the towns. But how did we know where to go. To begin with, we didn't know the forest but of course, we had no choice. Anyhow, we wound up in the forest and there the people helped us. These are the people we have to thank for us being here. You see, my friend who helped get my brother out of the Vilna ghetto, she now sent papers in order to bring a Gentile, a Christian family to the US for a visit. She wanted to do something good to compensate for what these people did for her. She said that it would cost a few thousand dollars but she wanted to do it so they sent them the tickets. She said let them come, I want them to see us. I also want the whole world to see what these people have done and to pay them back for a little of that they did. I want people to see that these are good people, however, the Russians would not let them out.

WS                                Were they worried that they wouldn't come back?

RF                                No! Not even that. You know the Russians, they don't want people to go out to see the free world. The Russian people don't understand, they don't know that there is such a world where you are free people. Where you can say what you want to say. That you are free as long as you don't kill, as long as you don't do any harm to others. But then we didn't realize that either before we came. We didn't know either! They don't know that there is a world like this. Over there, you are always under somebody's eyes. That somebody is always watching over you. Those people did a lot of good to us and toward them I would like to use the expression, "my hat off to those people"!

WS                                What made these people different? Were they just worthy people?  
Could they get something back from being kind?

RF                                No, what could they get back? They didn't have to do anything for us.  
They gave us when we begged. Most of these people didn't see the city life. They lived two lives really. They used to live lives withdrawn from the city. They went to the city every week to see whatever they produced such as the butter, the milk, the cheese, the eggs and chickens, wood. You know most of the Jews used to buy from them. That is how they used to make their living. However, in general these people were different. Some of the people read the Bible better. Maybe their churches were different? You see the churches in the cities were to blame for many things really. We have a friend who was



a Protestant minister. You see the Protestants were not divided into denominations as they are here. There was a Protestant church and a Catholic church, that was it. He didn't live far from us. As a matter of fact, this minister's daughter dated my uncle's son. That was actually not allowed so they did it secretly! You see, the city churches in their sermons constantly blamed the Jews. That predisposed a lot of people to take things out on the Jews. That was the start of many a pogrom.

WS In the country churches there was not that kind of prejudice?

RF No. Probably not because they didn't even know about Jews. Those of the country churches always used to call us during the war when we were in the forest, "poor Jews!" As if they were saying, "what do they want from them!" They just felt sorry for us. On the other hand, the city people they couldn't after all do much about it. At least in the beginning before there were a lot of partisans. The partisans came to take away things from them. The Germans came and even took more. So most of the villagers were just afraid that they would lose everything. The Jews just came and begged. As a matter of fact, once a couple (we always went by couples) came out of a house next door to where I was begging. They gave me a can of peas. To another one they gave a piece of bread. To another, a potato. People came constantly everyday. However, these people always gave something even though they didn't have much to give to begin with. In the city, on the other hand, the city people took all the goods which used to belong to the city Jews, that was right until the time we came back (that was also the case in other countries that people took things from Jewish families, whom they knew, when the Nazis caused them to flee or arrested them). The people from the villages didn't do anything like that. Who can explain the differences? Of course, the villagers took chances whenever they kept us in their homes. They were killed if we were found.

WS When I reviewed the last few tapes again ending with the interview of Jan 2, 1979, I became pretty much aware of things up to the point when you came to the US. What I remember from these tapes is that when I asked you why you left Israel to come here you said that part of the reason was that you wanted to get away from that tension and to improve the chances for the boys.

RF Yes, I had two little boys. One was ten years old and the other was six. There did not appear to be any future for these kids. Everyday there were small fights somewhere between the Fedayin, that is what they were called at the time—they didn't yet have the PLO--and the Israelis. Actually, they had such attacks every night and then we had the full scale war of 1956. We came in 1948, and there was a war.

Actually we came during the war. By the time the war of 1956 came we already had made out papers. The war delayed the papers and then the time for the papers had run out so that we had to reapply.

WS                                So you started the process to come to the US already before the war of 1956?

RF                                Yes before 1956. Then we had to wait again for six months for my husband to come. At that time, over twenty years ago, they didn't let an entire family immigrate. My husband could come just because his sister was here and she prepared the papers for him, her brother. (Actually, there were no regulations against entire families coming but affidavit of support, or other proof of support, were required for each individual and that required a fairly high level of taxes having been paid the previous year.) Then later, he had to prepare papers for me and the children.

WS                                So he came here first?

RF                                Yes, he came here first. He was here six months before the papers were processed. That is why it was 1958 until we came. So it was actually two years later.

WS                                I see but there was all that tension, were you in Jaffa then?

RF                                Yes, we lived in Jaffa. We had it pretty good. Not very good. However, we just had gotten established during the first years we were there. We worked very hard. We were both young. When we arrived in Israel, I had just one boy. I worked very hard on the little farm while carrying the guns. We made some money from everything we did and we were successful in a way but it wasn't much and we couldn't see a future for our children. I was just afraid that something might happen to them. Abe's sister wrote us various letters in which she said that it would be easier in the US and that we would be together. That was in spite of the fact that my sister was in Israel. But the deciding point influencing our move was the thought for the future of the children. We finally, six months after Abe got here, we four were reunited and we started a new life. It was not easy though to start all over because of the language. My boys didn't speak any English at all. They had only spoken Hebrew. My younger boy, age six, hadn't started any school yet but the older one had had five years. Of course, for the older one, it was strange. After we got here, they asked us constantly for a few months, "mom, when will we go home?" They thought that we came just for a vacation. Just to visit.

WS                                I guess at the ages of five and ten they were not ready to make a change.

RF                                Yes.

WS Did you come directly to Dayton?

RF Yes. We just stayed in New York and New Jersey to visit with friends.

My sister-in-law with her husband came to take us to Dayton by car. So that summer, we were driven from 144 to Dayton. I have been here since. This is a nicer place for us. Really. Because at that time, Israel was not as big as it is today. It had about 700,000 inhabitants (she seems very conservative since the 1948 official population for Israel included 758,702 Jews and an estimated 120,000 non-Jews) when we got there in 1948. We lived in a small place. At that time, Dayton looked to me, as NYC does today. It is quiet and green. We arrived here in August. On our first morning here, I woke up to see it raining. We never even heard of rain in Israel between May and November (they used to take the windshield wiper blades off in these months). I loved that. I truly loved it! Naturally, there was a hardship with the language. It was hard for the children. I took English lessons privately from a teacher in Israel. However, here when I got here, in the summer there were vacation and then in the fall I went to classes a few times but it was too hard for me. We didn't have a car, we didn't drive. I didn't even know whom to ask to be a baby-sitter for the children while I went to classes. So, I didn't go often. I just learned by myself with the television and then I learned with the children. The children really learned fast because their teachers were so good. It was amazing!

WS They went to public school?

RF Yes, they went to public school, to Jefferson. We lived not far from school. We had rented an apartment at Lexington Avenue at first. It was just a few blocks, maybe two, from the school. The children's teacher was a Mrs. Esterbrook. She took my little one in first grade. She took my little one and she babied him and she taught him privately. The teacher for my older son, in the sixth grade, was good also. It was hard for the first few months but the teachers, one especially, used to come half an hour before school actually started and she taught him and a girl who came from Poland, those two children privately. After six months they knew English and they talked English and they even had began to forget their Hebrew. That is how fast they learned. They were very good students.

WS Did you continue to speak Hebrew at home?

RF Yes, we kept speaking Hebrew because we didn't want them to forget.

My ten year olds would be Bar Mitzvahed soon and we didn't want him to have to start all over again. He, he didn't forget. As a matter of fact, by now he is 31 already and he still knows and remembers the prayers in Hebrew. He also knows a little Hebrew. The younger one, he is the middle one now. He forgot Hebrew except for the little bit

which he took in college as a foreign language. He took French and Hebrew. As far as making a living here, I got concerned. Of course, I knew that we would make a living when we came here because we were young and wanted to work. We are not afraid of any kind of a job. I was only afraid of how things were going to go for my children. How they would take it. Writing on the other hand, was not so simple. Hebrew you start writing from the right to the left contrary to what we are doing. However, they adjusted without problems very fast. Later on, my children were straight A students. We had neighbors you know, Americans, and the kids of these neighbors came to ask for my children how to do this and how to do that in Math and even English. After the first year of living on Lexington we moved to Cambridge where we bought a house. It was really a pleasure to see how our kids had caught on to schoolwork. The children really adjusted well. They soon stopped asking me when we were going to go home. They soon knew that this was our home. That made it easy.

WS                    You lived then on Cambridge for another couple of years?

RF                    Almost ten years. Then we moved to another house, in another neighborhood. I think in 1967 or 1968. Then we moved to Denlinger Road. We bought a simple home there. Life went on and we, ourselves, adjusted. As I told you we both only learned English by speaking to people. We are not afraid to speak although I make mistakes as I am doing now. I started to do a little sewing in my home. I decided upon that since the children were small and I could not go out to work. With this sewing at home, I could be there when the children came for lunch. I was always there to serve them lunch. So, I learned to speak from the ladies who brought me their work. They spoke English and I had to answer in English. I tried to speak Yiddish to some of them, they knew only very little Yiddish. Right away we also started to read. First the newspapers and then books. It is now easier to speak in English although I speak English with an accent and it is easier for me to read in English than in any other language which I know.

WS                    Do you still keep up your Polish and your Russian?

RF                    Yes, we speak Russian. As a matter of fact, we meet the New Russian people who are coming over now. We also have a friend who came the same time as I did; she came from Poland. She is a Russian girl and we speak Russian together. When we meet at gatherings, we speak Hebrew with people who are just coming over from Israel. We try not to forget that language and we speak Yiddish and English at home. The only thing is that I know nobody who speaks German. Actually, I am not all that anxious to speak German. Sometimes, at night when you see an old movie you hear the Germans, then I start shaking. I get the

feeling that I hear them again and they are coming, they are running, they are going. You DO RELIVE the same life as you did thirty three to thirty five years ago.

WS                   The German language has been spoiled for you?

RF                   Yes, it brings back the yelling, the toughness. The German language itself brings back memories which are painful. Really!! The other day I saw a movie on TV and their talking German upset me so much that I did not want to watch it. It is not easy to adjust to the way of life in a new country. For example, the way of life here is so different from what it is in Europe. It is altogether different even with all the luxury, with everything we have. You are missing something when you come here. All the people who come even those who come now, they still say the same thing. I am the one who has to comfort them and say that they will get adjusted. It is not as bad as the loneliness and the emptiness. People are staying home. People don't go outside. People don't even go for a walk. You see the streets downtown. They are busy during the business hours but in the evening in the city you see nobody unless there is a movie. A special movie or theatre. You see in Israel, for example, the only entertainment is to dress up and to walk back and forth and go out into the streets and the parks. Each city has parks. It forms like a center of the city where people go and meet their friends and they go for a walk. In Israel people can't afford to go to a movie or to a restaurant and sit for a few hours. They also can't afford to drive to visit their friends and their relatives; because of that, people in Israel walk a lot and that creates kind of an outdoor life. When I came here everybody was inside. The only time you see people is when you are out in the yard, walking in the yard and the neighbor comes into his yard. They you say "hello" to your neighbor. Otherwise you don't see them. Over in Israel they knock at the door and ask "may I come in?" The neighbor is there then and you have a cup of tea. Over here, unless you invite them, they don't come. That is actually what we truly need. In the beginning, it took me a long time to adjust. Now, I am already a real American. When I started to go to school for my citizenship, that of course means Abe and I, it didn't take me all that long to study what I had to study for the questions which they are supposed to ask you. I even had read all about some of those questions before. The only thing was that with my teacher I had to call her on the phone a few times. I just could not comprehend the two parties. That is, the Democratic and the Republican parties. What the teacher said did not satisfy me so I asked a lot of people. Nobody could explain it to me. I still don't understand it now. Okay, the teacher felt that I was rather inclined to be a Democrat and she was probably a Republican. She just talked to me and talked to me and tried to talk to me about it. Eisenhower was President then, a Republican. She tried to tell me how good things were and that everything was beautiful. And I somehow felt that I didn't care. I didn't care for the President.

That made me speak to her and that was good. She told me that I was "brilliant". That I was so "good!" That I should read a lot and know what is in the newspapers. I used to tell her, "I don't know why everybody talks so well about the Republicans, they do the best they know for the people and so do the Democrats. However, we got along, we got to know more and two years later came the time for the elections and I said that I don't know who gets elected as long as he is really a nice person who cares for the people. Just as long as the President does good for the people. That is how we got into the swing of the American system.

WS                                Were you able to talk about all the experience in the forest, about all the people being killed by the Germans to the people here? To talk to them freely?

RF                                Yes, I could! The only thing which I regretted to see was that here the young and the middle aged, I should say, people don't appreciate what they have. The age of the young kids who went wild. I used to say that that happened because they had it too good. If they had to go and serve their tour in the army and just to fight for survival they wouldn't do what they are doing. They would be glad that they have this beautiful country. I heard that from friends who are not Jewish who got acquainted with our entire family. We got talking a lot about my past. About my going through my life the way I did.

They invited us to their house for dinner. Especially so that I could see her Christmas. I also wanted her to see my life. We were so close and we could speak about everything; about her religion, about my religion, what I think about, the only thing she said was, "Rachel, in a way I envy you the fact that you appreciate life in the US more than all of us here". They were very nice people. Now they have moved to Centerville. They are not here anymore. We used to talk about our experiences to a lot of people because we as people, not I especially but all of us, of my age we didn't have a youth. The main youth of the three years where the Germans were there, for me between the age of fourteen and seventeen went for nothing. From seventeen until nineteen, I went to school and I had barely made it to have something on my body. That means something to cover my body and where to get the next meal from. That was my life until I got married because at that time I left Russia to go to Poland. So you see, my life wasn't easy. Getting married so young. Not having the youth. Not having the fun which young kids have. So, I missed a lot but I also learned a lot. I grew up separately from my age. When I was twenty I had had more experiences than many people have when they are forty. My life is so full of everything in the world I went through. It made me grow up faster than normal children do. Normal children who live in an environment of everything, so called a normal environment. Just as my children, for example, they grew up normal with everything. Abe started out working when he first came here. He started out making only \$62.00 a week and it wasn't easy work. Out of

that we had to pay rent and to buy things. We came by plane from Israel so I didn't bring much. We had to buy new clothes and we had to buy things for the children to go to school. Somebody called me from the Jewish Community and they said, "somebody told them that my kids go to school without coats". By then it was already late in the fall. I told them that I didn't need charity that I would buy coats for the kids. At that time, my husband was without work. They had fired him from his job after six or seven months. So, I told these people from the Jewish Community that what I needed was a job for my husband. That I didn't need charity. I did not come here for charity. The coats were not important. My kids were still warm from Israel. As a matter of fact, we had coats. We had bought beautiful coats at the rummage sale. There were very beautiful coats. Not winter coats but coats which were good for fall, as we have here. People were very good to us and the kids. Really, better than the family which brought us. People brought us beautiful things. A lot of people took us out for a drive to see something new, for the children to go on a merry-go-round. I don't even remember where it was. The children enjoyed that a lot. Another couple used to come and take us out to get some ice cream. The following week, I found out that I was pregnant with the other son whom I had here. So then I was busy again.

WS                    You found a friendly reception?

RF                    Yes. Friendly indeed! I don't think that any country could be so friendly. First of all, people here have patience. After all we were not talking the language. The few words which I had learned were just broken English. The people had so much patience with us. For example, when you go into a store because you have to buy something, after all, I was on my own, no one went for me or ran errands for me so I had to go. I had to shop and I had to buy. Naturally, I had to speak to the people there to get the salespeople to understand me. Their patience was outstanding. You would think that the people wouldn't care what the woman who wanted to make a small purchase and couldn't talk wanted. Just the opposite. They took me, they wanted me, they showed me, they talked to me, they explained to me. You know, when you first come, it makes such a good impression to feel that you are not alone that you are not going to get lost.

WS                    Well, as you say, you have a lot of things behind you. Things most people did not have to go through. I am glad to hear that most of the people you met were receptive to you and your needs. So, if you wanted to talk about your experiences, you could.

RF                    Oh yes! We talked in general.

WS                    Were people interested in hearing your story?

RF                    Oh yes. We always talked about the experiences. Even now, I have been here for twenty-one years and most of my friend are in the US for over thirty years already. They are all fairly well off. We still talk about the event of these years but we keep these conversation private. We know that we all went through hell, however, people who didn't go through these experiences, they still understand what it is all about.

WS                    For the most part I don't believe that it was hard for you to tell all of the remembrances. Of course, it was hard when you talked about your mother.

RF                    Yes, this was hard. Particularly, since recently we lost a grandchild, one of the twins. It was just one month ago on Passover weekend. A friend of mine just called and asked, "how are you taking it, Rachel? Is it getting easier now?" Yes, it is easier now. Time takes care of a lot of things, however, the pain is still there. The baby was taken ill while they were here. They took him to Children's but they could not save him. It is the same with my past. The pain is there while we talk. Of course, it is not as sharp, not as fresh as it was. It is like putting a little salt on a wound. It still makes it smart but since the wound is not as fresh, it does not really hurt. It is not as fresh as it was thirty years ago. It is easier since time takes care of much but you cannot forget!! As a matter of fact, we shouldn't forget and even more, let our children not forget!! We are not going to be here forever. The middle age which we have, while our children are still young, we have to utilize to let them know. To let them believe that it happened!! Some don't believe that it happened! Some people just don't believe. You can't say in words just what you have been through unless you can show it. If you see the movies that shows it, some of these movies may overdramatize it or at least you think that it is. Actually it is not. It was something that now even for us (who have gone through so much of it) is unbelievable!!. How could we live through all of it? How could we have been so strong? You see, this is what it is, talking, I believe mentally, probably not physically, is good for us. So that it does not remain inside of us. I went just recently to a doctor and the doctor took me to the hospital for x-rays and tests. I am happy that they didn't see anything and didn't find anything. My doctor said that it is the past which bothers me in my stomach, that is where the pain always is. That it is the tension which comes when I think about it. He says that it is better to write or to talk to someone about it then to think and pile it up inside. After all these are private nerves and that is true. That is why I say that it is not dead. He said to me, "write it down, write it in a letter to a friend and tell them whatever you have on your mind. If you feel like crying, do cry. It will make it easier.

WS                    It is better to cry out than to keep the pain inside.



RF Yes that is right.

WS Do you do that? Can you do that ?

RF No. I don't do a lot of letter writing. I went back to my doctor a few weeks ago. I told him that I don't do the writing but since the tragedy with my grandchild happened, the main thing is not to worry again. If my constitution got over the holocaust experiences, it will go over that now.

WS Yes. Sometimes such very painful thing can reawaken the feelings.

RF Yes. It has done that. Sometimes you wonder how many children, how many infant children like mine! He was just seven months old, perished!

WS What was the little boy's name.

RF Josh! Joshua. And I think of the many children who died without doctor's care just because they were babies born to Jewish parents. Here, with my grandson, it was just a thing of "G-d". "G-d" meant it. He didn't give him life to live. Something happened, who knows? We had a doctor who did not recognize the symptoms.

WS It would probably have been just as hard if you hadn't all the experiences when you were young.

RF It is hard to lose a grandchild. It is hard! It is a terrifying experience. The other grandparents, they are not Jewish, they came here. It was Easter Sunday. We telephoned Chicago from the hospital and they arrived here Sunday. Their hearts were just as broken as mine because it was their grandchild also. However, the other grandmother did not cry as much as I did. I still do. Maybe it was because she didn't go through as much as I did, through so much pain.

WS That is what I was wondering about.

RF You see, I am not crying now. I do a lot of crying.

WS I was listening to one of the earlier tapes. You were telling me that sometimes you would wake up with a dream as if the Germans were chasing you.

RF I still do. I do that even now.

WS Is that coming out a little more now, after the loss of your grandson?

RF I still have the same dream and always somebody, either the Germans or the police.

WS Is that a particular person who is running after you in the dream?

RF Yes, and I see the same people. Do you know that not just in the dream, the same dream, I go up a stream which is so strong and I am running so fast. Here is a stream of water and here is a clearing, an empty space where there is no place to hide and I just want to reach a place where I can hide. Here I jump over a big huge rock and again, there is water. They are all the same places through which I have actually been. They are chasing me and I see them running after me. They want to catch me, however, they never catch me!

WS There was the one time when you were by yourself going through woods? (Going back to Margi, etc after being dismissed by the partisans). Is that what it refers back to? At a time when you had no friends around you?

RF Yes. That and also when I went to look for my brother and before that, where I was living underground when we were eighteen people in one hole. Within walking distance from there we could walk it but the place was wet, not a stream really just a swamp. This is the same place which comes back to me. It does look like it is the same place. Then I go into the trenches and there I always get to a place where they no longer can find me. It is not just me. I see the same people whom I had seen alive and we knew each other. These people are not alive any longer! You are with them and then you are, all of a sudden, back by yourself!! That is not only once in a great while, the dream happens often. After that I wake up with a scream. You wake up thinking, oh thank you, it was only a dream!! I am here in a beautiful bed, comfortable. Why am I so upset about it all? It does make you kind of weak. It makes you feel as if you were going through the whole thing in a few seconds. That is all the time it takes for a whole life because of a few seconds is what a dream takes all together.

WS You have probably told your doctor about this dream?

RF Oh yes. That is why my doctor asks me to write about it. He say, "write about it. Talk about it. Don't write and mail the letter. Write it and read the letter to yourself then tear it up. You don't need to keep that letter and reread it. And then he ten me that I don't have to read books which are depressing. I tell him that I don't read about the Holocaust. That I read a lot of books and they are not really pertinent. Most of the books are not really fresh as if they happened. They are not interesting to read. They are just about sex. They are not real. It is not a good book if it is not about troubles, if it does not include despair and you don't have a love of affair



RF                                   For the first time in a very long time. The last time was when the baby got taken ill. That night we had a lot of guests. Two of my sons are married and one has a girlfriend. My oldest son's in-laws from Milwaukee, WI were also there. They were all in the house. I had a very full house. It was beautiful for the young people and they enjoyed it. Abe and I slept in the basement. We have a bed there. I gave up all the rooms and all the beds. Then I had a bad dream. Somehow, I shouldn't believe and I know that it is nonsense. I woke up in the morning from a hard bed with very hard feelings. I remembered that during the night I dreamed something unusual, with a train going by. That someone stole one package from me. He took it away from me and I was yelling, "why are you taking this away from me? It is mine!" Then I held on to the other package. You see, that was Friday night and on Saturday morning the baby was very sick and we took him to the doctor. He didn't say much of anything. He just said that the baby had bronchitis. Actually, the baby had double pneumonia and that evening he died. There is something in a dream that is real. The same thing is true with the dreams which I have had, by my running in front of the same soldiers and the same police. Wearing the German Swastika (she speaks about Hagenkreuz which is the German name) and I am running away from them. I am running so fast, that sometimes when I wake up, it feels like I have been exerting my body. Like I am at the end of my strength. So many times, I feel that I cannot run any more. That I will have to give up. However, I never actually give up and I run fast so that they never catch me. This is something which reoccurs because it is something which is in my mind, I believe.

WS                                   I believe so. I can't explain it any other way. Telling about it does not seem to help

RF                                   I talk about it. We talk about it. However, it still comes back. We talk about it with our friends, who have been through similar experiences. Through the Holocaust. They all have dreams. Not exactly like this but they all still have nightmares. They all dream things from the past, from running away from camps. A lot of people really dream. Maybe they all think a lot about it. Then at other times such as the Holydays we relive and miss our past, our homes. Even though they were poor, it was so beautiful (at least in our memories). It is something which I cannot explain:

WS                                   When your father comes into your dreams, what kind of feeling do you have for him? Is he calm or is he agitated?

RF                                   He is fine. He is calm and I don't remember what he say to me but he is in such a good mood. I see him and I am so glad about it. My father died now over forty years ago. Just on the day on which the war started, September first. Of course, he had been sick the entire summer. He was in bed and I was the only one at home. I was young, only twelve years old then. Of course, I saw him quite a lot. At

that time, in Poland, it was not like here. You had to lay in bed and someone had to take care of you. I was so glad that he came (to me, in my dreams) and that I saw him. That I didn't forget his face. It was so good! It was something out of the blue! I hadn't even thought about my father recently.

WS                                Was this dream after the child died?

RF                                The dream with my father was just last night!

WS                                Oh, just last night?

RF                                Yes, just this past night. I had just that dream. I was just so glad. It made me feel good, that I see him. That I miss him and that I love him. That I didn't forget his face when he appeared to me. For example, speaking of dream. When I went from Germany to Israel on the ship and I am not a deeply religious person. I had never had time to pick up the religion except for what I remember from my mother. This dream about which I am talking was in Marseille, France where we were waiting for the ship. I met a man with a long beard and I could not recall what my grandfather looked like. Anyhow, somebody, a man with a long beard came to me in my dream and said, "child, why don't you kindle the Shabbos candles? It is Friday". It was actually not Friday but I ran right away to the man who was in charge of our group and told him about my dream. The man gave me a box of candles. After that, even on the ship and the ship was going up and down and frontwards and backwards, so badly that everything slid all over. I lit candles every Friday evening. I have never stopped. It is a religious custom to light candles on Friday evening and I will not do otherwise, and maybe because of that dream I still kindle Sabbath lights. I believe that I would do it otherwise also. After all, it is not a big deal to do and it looks beautiful in the house.

WS                                As you know, your fathers name is on the tape. It is Avraham Avarowicz. So, when someone goes to the library and listens to the tape sometimes or consults this transcript, his name will be there. I believe that that is important. I am so glad that you told all these things on the tape so that we have a complete story. Now, what should we tell the children? That is, to the children for whom all this is new. So new that they will hardly be able to believe it. Perhaps all they know is the TV show "the Holocaust" and maybe they don't even know that. What shall we tell the children?

RF                                The children should be told the story the exact same way we are telling it now. I say in it plain language, not just dramatized from a television show. The people who went through that period, they can't retell it exactly. I, myself, as being a young person then, could not recall or tell about each single day. In one day, you could tell a story for hours to relive it. Actually not just in one day,



in the house for those two days attempted to give your hiding place away?

RF                    No, the lady who said that was the lady who used to take care of us when we were small children while my mother was busy in the shop. She was from a village not far from us. We could walk over a little stream and we were there. It was a small village with a different name. It was a tiny village, just all on one street. However, they had farms and land suitable to be farmed. This lady had a truly beautiful orchard. She lived in a beautiful place. She had seen us growing up and kind of nurtured us. She was so very good to me!! She felt that if she could save me it wouldn't be all lost but she could not even do that! She was afraid of her own neighbors. She did not have a place where she could hide me.

WS                    I am glad that I asked because I had confused the two ladies.

RF                    No, no! The other one was our next door neighbor. She lived just next door and whose son worked for the police. She is the one who said, "the Jews are in the attic". But who fortunately could only say it in White Russian dialect.

WS                    Do you know whatever happened to the lady who took care of you when you were small?

RF                    I don't know. When I came back to Kurzeniez I went through that village but I didn't see them. They were not there then. I never did find out what happened to her.

WS                    She was not Jewish, was she?

RF                    Oh no! I don't remember what kind of religion they were. Thinking about it, she was Protestant and her husband was Catholic. You see, then it didn't matter. You see, at that time when I was very small child it didn't matter that much. Things were still quiet in Poland. Religion was not an issue then. People were neighbors and even if they were not neighbors, we were living in harmony. Nobody really cared as to which church you went to. However, later which I vaguely remember as I was getting older after Pilsudski died (In May 1926 Marshal Pilsudski seized power in Poland after a two day military revolt and made himself dictator. He had a new constitution drawn up in 1935 shortly before Pilsudski's death. He was followed as dictator by Marshal Smigly-Rydz who governed with Josef Be and a group of colonels). Starting in 1936 and 1937 the antisemitism started. ( At that time, there were more than three million Jews in Poland.) It was under the influence of Germany. Germany had their people working in Poland. Then it started already but still with neighbors it wasn't all that bad. At least in our part of Poland. Remember that the entire Kurzeniez was a Staetle, A little place in which relatively many

Jews lived. There were very few Jews living in the area around Kurzeniez.

WS                                Were these people able to erase the dream of those Germans coming in to a Judenrein area (area clean of Jews). Is that dream still in existence?

RF                                You see, the problem was that they didn't have too many good people. If we had had good people like we had at the memorial for the six million Jews (3 million Polish Jews were among the victims of the Nazis') recently, many would have been saved. A young lady from Belgium, I believe (the transcriber believes that she was from Holland) she had been young in 1940 talked. If we had had ten percent of the people of Poland like her, a lot of Jews and a lot of other people would have been saved. This young lady got involved because of small children. She had been the teacher of a nursery school. The SS came and took the children away. That is when she got involved and since then she has been involved with Jewish problems. She spoke and told why and her speech was heartmoving, even though she had a strong accent. It was just beautiful! She was a beautiful lady. You see, this was the problem in Poland and in other countries also. People helped the Germans as if it was a job for them. As if they were proud to do it. The few people who helped the victims were overshadowed by all those who didn't.

WS                                As I look back on the questions which I was going to ask for this session I really believe that you talked about it all. And you did it very much better than I could have asked the questions. Do you feel, after all, you have told me and told the people who will listen to this (and who will read it) that the children will benefit by this ordeal. That all the bad memories which you have had to call upon will have been worth while.

RF                                Yes, yes! I think so. I think that if they will listen to it, it will serve as a reminder. Some of them, maybe a few, since there are always bad fish in the sea, maybe will spoil it for the rest of them. However, in the whole, I believe that the future generations will learn from it. It was a big mistake. Nothing was accomplished by it. They will never, no matter who tries, destroy the Jewish people. If "God" had wanted to destroy the Jewish people he would have done it a long time ago. He probably wouldn't have created them in the first place. No matter who will try to do it, there will always be Jews around and people who care for them and go along with them. Even help them. Especially in comparison with non-Jews, we are just a few. Really, just a handful. It is just like a drop in the bucket. There are not enough of them to make such a noise about. I could not understand why, of course, at that time, I was a child, they picked on the Jews. What did they do wrong? Hitler didn't originate his policy because we were Jews and because, as the fables



said, the Jews killed Jesus. That is a falsehood which has been repeated for so many decades, even centuries. Why should I suffer for something which supposedly happened two thousand years ago in a completely irrelevant environment and circumstance. Why should a baby today be killed by such a horrible death because of some political intrigues! We are all "G-d's" children, after all! (The Nazi's managed to kill over three million non-Jewish Poles besides the three million Jewish Poles all in concentration camps and more than twenty million Russians killed or wounded during WWII according to figures listed in the World Book Encyclopedia. Some of these killings were described earlier in this story when RF talks about the machine gunning of the Russian prisoners which caused the survivors to escape and become partisans) Look how they killed our Rabbi in the centerplace of Kurzeniez. What had he done wrong? He also was a man dedicated to serve "G-d" as Jesus Christ was. We are all "G-d's" children, even those who don't believe in Christ or who are not Jews. Even people who don't believe in anything or those who are idol worshippers. They all have their lives and are entitled to live them. Why should anybody be able to kill someone else just because they don't like them. If you don't like me just don't associate with me. That is all you need to do. So maybe children, the future generations will learn. The whole thing was not the right thing to do.

WS I certainly hope so!

RF Let's hope.

WS I am not certain that this will be the last tape we will make. I think that it will be, but please before this tape runs out, please say your father's name. Your mother's name and also the last name of each of your children and then the name of each of your grandchildren.

RF My father's name was Avraham, Abraham in Polish.  
My mother's name was Channamaya Gunemovitz  
I am Rachel and my husband is Abe.  
My children are Maurice, Isaac, Lewis. Maurice is married to June and Isaac is married to Jean.  
My grandchildren are Jason, the son of my older son whose twin brother Joshua died and Sarah is the daughter of my second son.

WS Now, the names are part of the record.

RF That is fine. Maybe someday Sarah will read it or listen to it.  
Maybe some day Jason who was just three years old last week will say, "I want to see what happened to my grandmother. What her life was like."

