

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Holocaust Project

Personal Experiences

O. H. 753

EVA JACOBS

Interviewed

by

Barbara Crowley

on

February 2, 1981

## EVA FUGMAN JACOBS

Eva Fugman Jacobs was born December 28, 1929, in Pionki, Poland, the daughter of Jankiel and Esther Fugman. She attended public school up to the fifth grade, when in September of 1939 the German Army attacked Poland. At that time, Jewish children were expelled from the public schools. The years (1939-1942) were a time of moving from one place to another for the Fugman's. In January 1942, a ghetto was proclaimed in Pionki, in which the Fugman's lived until August 18, 1942. After that, Eva worked in the Pionki labor camp for the next twenty-three months. At that time, Eva was sent to Auschwitz. She was imprisoned there until September 1944, when she was taken to another work camp, Baumlitz near Bremen.

In November 1944, Eva was taken to Belsen, where she remained for two weeks. The last camp in which she was imprisoned was Elsing, where she worked making parts for hand grenades and time bombs.

Upon her liberation, April 20, 1945, Eva had no desire to return to Poland. She spent a year in Belgium and then returned to Germany, where her sister was living. On February 11, 1947, Eva came to the United States, first to New York, and later that year, to Youngstown, where she completed her education.

Eva and her husband, George Jacobs, have two children, Esther and Joy. Mrs. Jacobs has written her memoirs, telling of her life and her ordeal in the camps.

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INTERVIEWEE: EVA JACOBS

INTERVIEWER: Barbara Crowley

SUBJECT: work, family, courage, Aushwitz, Poland, survival

DATE: February 2, 1981

C: This is an interview with Mrs. Eva Jacobs for the Youngstown State Univeristy Oral History Program, by Barbara Crowley at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Jacobs at 2485 Barth Drive, Youngstown, on February 2, 1981, at 1:15 p.m.

I want to ask you, Mrs. Jacobs, just a few questions. First of all, where were you born?

J: Pionki, Poland.

C: What was your family background, you father's trade?

J: My father was a businessman. My mother helped out at the business.

C: Your religious background?

J: I am Jewish.

C: How long has your family been in the country?

J: I have been here for 34 years. It will be 34 years on the 11th of February.

C: What was your education like?

J: I went to school for a while in Poland up to fifth grade. When the war broke out, my schooling was terminated. I didn't go back to school until 1947 in Youngstown in junior high school and I graduated from high school in Youngstown.

C: Growing up, were there any incidents of anti-Semitic nature or anti-Jewish nature?

J: This is very true. It never stopped.

C: Is there one in particular that you can remember or a few?

J: The children, not being allowed to attend school. During the war I was in concentration camps. I guess that you realize that there were plenty of those.

C: Yes. Nothing in particular stands out?

J: It is a very big subject just to involve a few words as you can see. It goes back many, many years.

Where I came from in Pionki, Poland, near Radziejow, it was one of the worst places around for anti-Semitism. I had one great-grandmother or a great-great-grandmother and in one of the pogroms her husband was killed. She was wounded and had hepatitis, but she lived to be 113 years old. This was before I was born. Like I said, this goes back a long time.

C: If you could just think of them chronologically, there was so many. I read in your memoirs about how you would go and make deliveries and no one would be around or you would be bothered as a Jew.

J: They would call us names and throw stones at us.

C: What about during school?

J: When I went to school, it was the same thing too. I felt it the most in public school. We did not have to stay in the class. We were out. School was on for six days in public school. We were Jewish, so we didn't go to school on Saturdays. This cut us from a lot of things like art and music. It was on Saturdays. We never had any because we never attended Saturday school.

C: Oh, I see. I didn't realize they had school on Saturday. When the war started, were there any changes in your life style that stand out?

J: We weren't allowed certain things; for instance, we didn't go to school anymore. School was out for us.

C: That must have been a big change.

J: Our parents couldn't move around freely, so the children had to bring in things and do the dealing and wheeling.

C: Could you tell us anything about the things that went on? I hate to bring it up before you do about how you smuggled.

J: I didn't smuggle. I just brought in from the streets. That is all.

C: That is what it was called in the notes.

J: Yes. It was just making a living. We took things out to the ghetto like clothing, shoes, or spices and sold it to the Christians. We brought home other things like flour, sugar, and salt.

C: Could you explain because the other people listening to this tape won't have the understanding.

J: I would go out to the ghetto two or three times a day. They brought 20 or 25 pounds of flour. It was wrapped up like a baby.

C: That is what I read.

J: I used to walk in and out. I was lucky enough to be kept. The people that got caught got killed.

C: Didn't you feel that you were in danger, though?

J: All of the time. I guess I was too young to realize what danger meant.

C: That is what it said in your memoirs.

J: You didn't want to see your family starving, so you did things that normally you wouldn't even risk your life for.

C: When the Nazis came in how did your life change then?

J: These are the Nazis that I am talking about in the ghetto before the war.

My father wasn't allowed to do any business anymore when they came in. A Jew was beaten up and thrown in jail and killed. We children had to step into certain things.

C: So, you began to grow up?

J: Quite fast.

C: Do you remember anything that really stands out about the time of these incidents?

J: Well, I don't know what to start out with. They moved us around from one apartment place to another. The Germans took over the building. We had to move out and then onto another building.

C: How did that feel to be moved all of the time?

J: You had no choice. Then in January of 1942 we were moved to a ghetto. It wasn't a Jewish neighborhood at all. It was a Christian street. They started to work us in the factory that

had small homes. They pulled them out and put the Jews on the streets. We weren't the only ones who were displaced. Other people were displaced too. That went on for six months. I used to go in and out of the ghetto. I was always dealing and wheeling in the ghettos. I don't know. I guess I didn't look as Semitic as others, or maybe I did and didn't realize.

C: What do you think made you able to go there?

J: I guess my feelings for my family.

C: Just sheer determination?

J: Yes. After my family was gone, I didn't give a damn about it. I never did any business or things like this after my family was gone. If I didn't need it, I gave it away. I didn't deal with it anymore.

C: When were you deported and where?

J: August 18, 1942. They took me to my hometown where there was an ammunition factory. They took me into work. There were so many people working in the factory. Before the war the Jews weren't allowed to work in this factory. Under the Polish government, the Jews weren't allowed into the factory. As children, we used to deliver meat and things like this to the factory. My father wasn't allowed in there.

During the war, the Germans were saying they took so many people to work. A child could be left behind instead of being sent out and things like this. This was August. My sister was held back. I didn't want to go. My father insisted on it. He said, "I don't want you to die among Polish people. I want you with the Jewish people." Most of the Polish people, the teachers, priests, and people like this were already gone. The intellectuals were gone. The Germans had cleared them out. What was left was mostly trash. Anyone that could sell you would for 5¢. That is why my father wouldn't let me stay behind. I went to work in the camp for close to two years.

C: What occurs to me is what do you remember about your father and your sister then since that was such an important time?

J: Well, we found out the evening before that the ghetto was going to be dissolved. We didn't sleep all night. We cried. We cried and didn't know who was going to go where and what was going to happen. They took me to camp and the rest of the people in the ghetto were taken to another place in another town, Zwolén. Because of the ghetto and things like this, there were railroad stations and railroad lines. Pionki had a railroad station, but they took out the people from Pionki to take to Zwolén, a small city where there was no railroad line. There they kept them until late September when they took them to Treblinka.

C: This was your father?

J: My mother and two of my sisters and two of my brothers. My father went into a camp and I stayed.

C: He stayed?

J: He stayed in an indefinite working community. I think they were making like an airport or thing like this, airfield.

C: Okay.

J: Then they called them out to the camp that I was in. He had to go back a few weeks later. They took the people out and killed most of them. There weren't many survivors in this particular camp. There were about 15,000 professional people in this particular camp.

C: You were separated from . . .

J: My parents, two brothers, and sister. My sister couldn't take the hard work. She missed my parents and decided that she wanted to go back to Zwolén where my parents were. They took her back there with a lot of others, the ones that they didn't think could work. One of my older sisters who was married to a Christian had a child. The night of the deportation from Zwolén, she ran away and somebody took the child to his mother to help out. She asked for help when she came into the camp where we were. We weren't supposed to be in this camp. If you were in this camp, your life was spared for the time being. About July of 1944, the Russians were coming closer. The Germans decided to evacuate us again.

C: So you had to move again?

J: I didn't move. They moved us to Auschwitz. They closed off the water and light in the camp. We didn't go out to work anymore and they closed us off all together and we waited the whole week.

C: I know you were in other camps before that.

J: This was the first camp.

C: Auschwitz wasn't the first?

J: Auschwitz was the second. Pionki was the first; Auschwitz was the second.

C: What was life like in that concentration camp? It is such a simple question.

J: Our people, the ones that came with us, were 2500. There were about 700 women and 1800 men. This was the only camp in Poland.

All of us went into quarters. We were placed in places, again, into certain things. Only one child and one old man went to the crematorium. He held this grandchild in his hand, his arm. He went down to the train and the German didn't like the old man holding the child. This was the only camp, I guess in the history of Auschwitz, that I can say everyone survived, except for those two people. I did not know of those two people until just three years ago when my uncle told me about their deaths.

C: It is really remarkable.

J: This particular man that died was a father. The lady was married to a cousin of mine.

C: You found the guy?

J: It was a cousin of my uncle. This is how I knew. I was talking to my uncle and I said, "Everybody went off of the train." He said, "Oh, no. Those two people didn't."

C: You didn't know about them before then?

J: No. I didn't get a chance to find out what was going on. When an officer told you something, you didn't stop to ask questions.

C: I know from reading when you thought about your survival, you accounted it more to luck than brains. I am not too sure about that.

J: I wanted to survive to see what was going to happen to the Germans. This was one of the things that we used so we didn't give up so fast. The other survival was you lost your families. It didn't matter one way or the other. You just wanted to see what happened to them.

C: I want to ask more about your life in the ghetto before we go on with the interview. What was it like to be out? It sounded like almost a prison to me from reading about it?

J: The ghetto was closed then. You were fenced in with a wire. They gave us a certain amount of food. The rest of it you had to see for yourself what you could get. Otherwise, you starved. A lot of people couldn't survive on the food they gave you.

C: Can you remember anything in particular?

J: One time a mother and a son went out to get some wood in the forest to cook something for themselves. The SS came around to Pionki and killed those two people. Another one died out there and those two people. It was a big thing. There weren't too many people in the ghetto at that time. Later on what they did was take people from surrounding villages and brought them



into our ghetto. If you had a two room apartment with eight people, you ended up with 18 or 20 in those two rooms. They just kept pushing people in.

C: Was that the first time with the incident of the mother and the little boy that you remember happening and that you saw or were close to?

J: The boy was about 13 or 14 years old. Two of his brothers today live in New York. Once in awhile when I am in New York I will see if they are there. I always see those two people.

We were only in Auschwitz for four weeks. We were considered the ammunition workers. We were from the factory from home. We worked in the ammunition factories.

C: So you had papers that you worked?

J: We didn't have papers. I guess they wrote a letter of recommendation with us to Auschwitz. Like I said, we were placed in barracks. There were 600 or 800, who knows how many. You couldn't count the people. There were ten or twelve of us in one room sleeping. When one wanted to turn over, we all had to turn over. Outside they would be counting us and counting us. We were fenced in by electric barbed wire, then forced to the crematoriums. I was in Birkenau. Most of the crematoriums were in Birkenau, not in Auschwitz. Birkenau was a branch of Auschwitz. We were there for four weeks. In Germany, they needed people for factory work, the same kind of factory that we came from in Pionki. The city was called Baumlitz. They sent us out there. The time that we travelled, it was 48 hours in a cattle train.

C: You said in your memoirs it was cold most of the time, and of course there wasn't any . . .

J: When I was in Auschwitz it was hot because it was summertime. They took us from Auschwitz to Baumlitz. Baumlitz had gotten cold already. It was not far away from Bergen-Belson. It was the northern part of Germany.

C: What was it like being so close to the crematorium? I read that you couldn't sleep of course?

J: There was the smell of the flesh burning. You could see the flames and all of those things. You wondered when your time was going to come.

C: Was there some kind of emotional strain or some kind of numbness?

J: That is right, numbness. You just didn't care.

C: It was more like survival?

- J: Yes, survival. You couldn't do anything about it. You were closed in with electric barbed wire.
- C: Did you hear of people running away and what happened?
- J: Not in Auschwitz. In Auschwitz you could run as far as the fence. Then you would stop for good because you were there.
- C: How about in the other camps?
- J: In Germany? Where could you run in Germany? You were still always patrolled. Our camp was still fenced with electric wire. I would go to work and come home from work. We were led by SS people. You were never left by yourself. A leader had to work. They were watching us on the jobs.
- C: You never heard anyone escaping?
- J: No, not from our camp. We were six weeks in Baumlitz. I guess the work was too hard. Most of the jobs they gave us in Baumlitz were done in Pionki by men. We were women; there was mostly girls. The food was poor. When we started out the food wasn't so bad. As time progressed, most of the Germans stole the food they were supposed to give to us. They decided that we weren't performing and they sent us out to get on a train and sent us to Bergen-Belson. I was waiting two weeks for another place to go.
- C: You were able to do some of the jobs that other women weren't?
- J: I was young. I was always more physical at home. Work didn't bother me so much as the other people.
- C: I wonder why.
- J: From childhood on I was always in gymnastics and things like this.
- C: So, you were a physically strong person?
- J: Yes.
- C: That must have helped a lot?
- J: I was never a big eater and I am still not. I adjusted to those things.
- C: Is there anything else you can remember? First of all, in the factory that you worked in in Pionki and Bergen-Belson, what was it like to work in all of those factories?
- J: You worked for twelve hours on day shift or night shift. You took 30 or 45 minutes to walk to work and back from work. When you came home, you got to eat or have coffee or a piece of bread and sleep. If you were on night shift, they always found some

kind of things to wake you up in the middle of the day.

C: Like what?

J: They wanted to count you, clean up the deck yard, or something like this. You never really got too much rest.

C: Did you sometimes work at night?

J: Yes, on shifts, 12 hour days and 12 hour nights. That was for six days a week.

C: Did you usually work the day shift or night shift?

J: You worked one week night and one week day.

C: Is there anything that you can remember? It seems to me that there would be guards watching you work and be quite abusive?

J: You just minded your business. You did your work. A lot of people were burned on the job because they forgot they were working with the gunpowder. In the factory there was gunpowder. The smallest spark would start a fire and your face was gone.

C: I remember you were wearing a uniform, regular clothes, that had some of the liquid explosive on it?

J: This was at the last camp that we were at. This was after Bergen-Belson and we were in a different camp where we were making hand grenades.

C: You were told to change your uniform?

J: I was told to change my uniform. I went into change in the warehouse. A Ukranian lady was working there. She said, "You Jews always want new uniforms." She gave me a torn up thing and I said, "You can keep it." I went back to work in the old uniform. The boss saw me and said, "Why didn't you change?" I said, "The war will be over soon. Maybe I can keep it for a souvenir." I never changed it. I never kept it anyhow. I threw it away. I should have kept it.

C: Did you come into close contact with the guards very much or did you just mind your own business?

J: You didn't talk to the Germans. They talked to you and you answered them. You didn't go up to talk to them.

C: I meant, did they ever stop you?

J: No, not in particular. I read a lot and I am still reading other people's writings about all of this. Everything that I read talks about Dr. Mengele. I don't know if you ever heard of

Dr. Mengele? I was in those places and nobody introduced me to him. I guess they discriminated against me. I wasn't introduced to Dr. Mengele. Most of us didn't know who they were.

C: He was mentioned more than once, but I didn't get to exactly who he was. Who was he?

J: He was a physician who did experiments on Jewish women.

C: I have heard of so many horrible things there.

J: That is why they are still looking for him; he is still alive.

C: Where do they think he is?

J: He is alive someplace.

C: Have you seen anyone else who was in camp with you since?

J: You mean from the Germans or the Jewish?

C: From the Jewish people.

J: Yes. There are some in New York. There is one lady and one man from Youngstown that were with me in the first camp. Later on I didn't talk to anyone that was in camp with me.

C: They seem to have the same feelings about it as you do?

J: Why not?

C: That is what I was going to say.

J: Especially this lady, if you read Dr. Friedman's book--his last one--Amcha. He came across this lady called Aberbach. I don't know if her name is Aberbach or not. She lost a child. She was in my camp in Pionki.

C: Was she?

J: She ran away from Pionki. She didn't go to Auschwitz.

C: That was the selection?

J: This was Aberbach, yes. This was in Pionki, my hometown. She ran away. She was from a different city.

C: Was that the one who was selected?

J: The boy, she hid him in the back room and then he heard somebody calling him out and they got him.

- C: Did you hear much about that? It happened around you, of course. Could you tell me anything about that?
- J: Very few children survived. Three of my cousins survived which were in the Pionki camp. They didn't come in with us to get into the camp. They were hidden for awhile and then they brought them into this camp. Those three survived. Normally, very, very few children survived.
- C: If you would go into a different camp all of the time . . . First you were in Pionki, then in Auschwitz, then Baumnitz.
- J: And then Bergen-Belson. Then from Bergen-Belson they sent us to another camp, Elsing.
- C: Each camp that you would go into, you would be afraid that you would be selected?
- J: When we went, there was only seven hundred women. Three hundred were still from my camp.
- C: You were usually with the same people each time?
- J: Three hundred of us were together from the same camp. This is very true. There were seven hundred women in Germany from different camps like from Cracow, Ketrzyn and different things. They added on people from these and Auschwitz they sent away. The three hundred of us knew one another.
- C: I don't understand? I know that selection was going on and I wondered . . .
- J: Not among our people. We were there three days in Auschwitz when they took out four hundred from our camp in Pionki. Four hundred of the women were sent away to Germany. Three hundred were left. I was among the three hundred that were left. We thought that we were going to stay there for good. We were there for four weeks. Another company from Germany came in and selected us for work.
- C: Since you were experienced with munitions and the factory work, you didn't consider it happening?
- J: What, selection, crematoriums and things like this?
- C: Yes.
- J: In the last camp that we were in, we were making those hand grenades. This was a branch of Buchenwald. As 1945 came around, the Americans were pushing from one side and the Russians from the other side. Buchenwald was taken by the Americans. The Americans changed it around and gave it back to the Russians this part of Germany. We were there until the last minute.

We could already see the fire and so on and then the Germans evacuated us again. We were on the train. We went again for a whole week. The Germans didn't have anyplace for us to go.

C: Then it seems that it was partly fate that also you were experienced in the factories? Do you think it was?

J: They needed us. They needed people to work. As long as the war was going on, they held onto us. The children and all of the people who couldn't work, they didn't hold onto them. They didn't want to feed you for nothing.

C: I know your age must have been 12 or 13 in the ghettos?

J: Yes.

C: You were an older teen in camps. Did you latch on to certain younger girls and kind of protect them?

J: Yes. We had one little girl; she is some place in Boston right now. I don't know where she is at now. I lost contact with her. She was in Auschwitz with me and my sister. She was just a little kid about ten years old. She was a plump kid. She went up to the Germans. I wouldn't have had the nerve to. She said, "My sisters are going. Can I go with them?" They looked at her and said, "Which ones are your sisters?" She pointed to me and my sister. He said, "Okay, go ahead. You can peel the potatoes." She was thrown into it. She worked in the kitchen.

C: Having somebody in the kitchen was a help?

J: Yes, it was a help. I helped people and people helped me. I tried. I never had any complaints. I never complained about any "luck out of" this or that. They didn't bother me. As a matter of fact, luck held us in Auschwitz with a Czech-Jewish girl. After the war, they came into Germany. When the trials were going on they let her go. This girl had the same thing. She was about eighteen years old when she went to Auschwitz. She was three years in Auschwitz. If she survived, she must have done something.

C: Then you knew another man who was in three years.

J: It was a brother of a friend of mine. He didn't know me and I didn't know him when I came in. His brother must have told him about me. They didn't cut my hair and they gave me somebody's clothing to put on.

C: Could you explain how that was? What happened to you? You didn't have your hair cut.

J: Well, it was because they cut it with the Jewish people that

were already in the camp longer. They knew one another already.

C: Which camp was it that you were first going to have your head shaved?

J: Birkenau. I had my head shaved finally later on and this was my own doing too. We were working in this second camp in Germany, Baumlitz. This is where the Italian and French were working. We never worked with them, they would just deliver things. The German woman didn't like the idea that they looked to us and they decided to get our hair cut. When we came home from work we had to go and get a hair cut. It was raining outside. The girls were pushing. Nobody wanted to be the first. I said, "The hell with my hair. I don't want to get pneumonia out in the rain." I went first in line and got my hair cut.

C: Your hair would grow back?

J: Yes, my hair would grow back. When I came out, everyone was crying. I was laughing. You may have heard things about people talking; they never lost their humor. If you lost your humor, forget it.

C: That is what helped you survive?

J: That is right. We were still telling jokes and singing. If nobody was around and we did as we pleased, they couldn't stop us from telling jokes or singing or criticizing or cursing.

C: You said there was one woman who always had jokes for you. I think that was in Pionki. Wasn't it? Maybe it was another incident that I read about. Someone would always have a joke.

J: Yes. We always used to read the German papers. We found old papers. We never read the paper and what it said. We always made up our own things. They used to call me, in the last country, the propaganda minister. I used to come home and the sick girls would ask me what was new and I always used to tell them that the Germans were getting a licking and so on. I didn't know more than they did. We always kept boosting up our morale.

C: What kind of stories did you tell?

J: The Russians were on this side and the Germans, and the Americans were close. We had to make up our own stories. We never gave in.

C: You were a teenager in these camps. Being a teenager is such an emotional time. I was wondering what that was really like?

J: You grew up fast. You forgot that you were a teenager. You had nothing to be a teenager for.

C: Teenage years are usually fun. Do you feel that you missed it?

- J: Sure I miss it. This is six years out of your life that is no fun. You were living in fear and working hard. You didn't have the proper clothing or proper hygiene. I didn't have a toothbrush for two years. That is why I have a lot of cavities in my teeth.
- C: Let's go back and touch on some things. Let's go back to when the Germans invaded Poland. I know it was September 1, 1939.
- J: That was when the war started.
- C: What was that day like for you?
- J: The bombs started falling. It was like I told you, in that city where the ammunition was made. Everybody was saying that if the bomb fell on the factory there was nitroglycerin and things like this, and the city would blow up. We stayed home the first day. The second day my father put us in a wagon and sent us away to a village. He couldn't go away because he was in the civil defense, so he couldn't leave. We went about seven or eight kilometers away from this town. We stayed there a few days and finally the Germans were in, coming in.
- C: I know you went to your grandparents'.
- J: Yes. We went back to our grandparents for a few days. Day and night the army was going through, but they didn't bother any one of us.
- C: Didn't somebody approach one of the German soldiers at this time, your little brother?
- J: Oh, my brother gave them tomatoes. My grandfather said, "You did a good job a ridding my things."
- C: When you were trying to leave and couldn't find him . . .
- J: This was the first half of the war, the first day. The Italian prunes at home were just picked the day before. You weren't allowed to eat them because they were too hard. He was only a year old. He stole them. He went into the pantry and came in the back and the people didn't know where he was. He had this face full of prunes. He started calling, "I want to get out."
- C: He wasn't allowed to eat then?
- J: No.
- C: Since you mentioned your father staying behind at that time, it started me thinking. Can you tell us anything about your father? It sounds like he was a pretty remarkable person.
- J: He was a very, very good-hearted man. He never let a child or



anybody go hungry.

C: He said something about you or he never wanted to see . . .

J: He had a feeling that if anyone survived it would be me. I guess he was right.

C: Did he have that feeling?

J: Yes.

C: What made him think that?

J: I don't know. I was always handling things at home. In the ghetto I used to bring the flour, bake bread, and sell the bread, and things like that. I took on a lot of things. He was in prison back in the beginning of the war. He was in prison for meat smuggling.

C: Oh, yes.

J: When he was away, my mother didn't know how to bake bread, so I took over certain things.

C: Your mother had kitchen help?

J: Oh, yes. I baked the first few. My knuckles were bloody making the bread. The flour was coarse flour.

C: You kind of took that over?

J: Oh, yes. I never gave up as long as my family was living. I brought her lots of things from work in my hometown. I worked in a garden in my hometown and brought buckets of tomatoes, potatoes and gave it away. Other people would sell it. I never did. I didn't need the money. I had what I wanted, what I needed for myself. If I didn't need it, my sister would be the one who would give it away. I was always told that if I offered somebody something, it would insult them, you know, make them feel bad. I used to bring it home and my sister would give it away.

C: Oh, you let her do it?

J: Yes.

C: Since you mentioned breaking the bread, it makes me think. You said it really wasn't smuggling, but that is what it was called wasn't it?

J: Yes, that is what it was called. It was a law by the Germans.

C: Could you explain just what it is?

J: You couldn't deal. You couldn't have stores or things like this. We couldn't go into the store and buy bread or something like this. What you did was when we still had grocery stores, we had things left over like pepper or all-spice, and things like this, which you couldn't get during the war. You made little bags up with a few things in it and went out to farmers. Farmers wanted it. You would go out to the farmers and the farmers would give you bread or flour, and things like this. You would bring it home.

C: You traded for other things that you needed?

J: Yes, trading.

C: Then you got kerosene because you had no electricity?

J: Yes. We had a quart of kerosene from Polish people who stole it at the railroad station and things like this. They didn't have any electricity in the ghetto. They took away the electricity. I guess this one evening when I was coming home on Friday night and looked out and the Polish people had, I don't know how many gallons, five or six gallons of kerosene. I bumped into a German patrol and I said, "Excuse me," in Polish.

C: Did you think you were going to get caught then?

J: At the moment, you didn't have a minute that you thought you were safe. You lived with the fear of it.

C: You were really still a child.

J: You knew what was going on, child or no child. You knew what happened to the people. You needed it, you wanted it, you did it. Nobody told you what to do. I did it because I wanted to do it for the family.

C: What did your parents say? They didn't want you to go back then after that?

J: No. There were times when those people were killed that I was out. My parents were standing at the gates thinking that I was killed. They were waiting for them to bring me on stretchers or something like this. I came in a back way and my father kept saying that I was never going to go out again; that was the end of it. It only took a few hours and I was out again.

C: They must have been worried every time you left there.

J: Yes.

C: Then at the one time you couldn't get the . . . I don't know how big the tank would be.

J: It was a big tank.

C: Nobody was waiting for you at that time?

J: My father was in prison at that time.

C: Yes.

J: I yelled and I threw stones at the house and nobody heard me. They were sitting there playing cards. They were all in the house.

C: That must have been aggravating. You were risking your life.

J: Finally, I made it somehow. I don't remember how. I came into the house. It was a Friday night and the candles were burning on the table. I got so mad that I grabbed the cards and tore them to pieces. I was screaming and yelling. It took quite a while to calm me down.

C: I can see why.

J: From then on, if I was out, everybody was watching.

C: You showed them.

Has anything else occurred about life in camps?

J: The last day in camp, an American plane was shot down. I saw it coming down burning. We went to work in the morning. I guess they got orders to evacuate us. They brought us home. They brought a lunch down to the factory. They didn't feed us anymore there. They tried to take us home. They got us out and got us home. When we came in, we saw a plane burning in the sky. An American plane was shot down. Normally there were a lot of air alarms.

C: You mentioned a plane blowing up in the sky?

J: This was the last day in the camp. This was the day after President Roosevelt died. When President Roosevelt dies, one of the Germans came out to tell us that President Roosevelt died.

C: What did you think?

J: We were worried about what was going to happen to the war. President Roosevelt died, maybe the Germans were going to stop hiding and push the Americans back.

C: So, this plane exploding meant what?

J: It meant that they were finally reaching us. Until then, we never saw a plane there. We heard alarms that the planes were coming, but we never saw any bombings. Most of the crafts were camouflaged. They were built in mountains. Every roof of the

factory had trees growing on top of them. They brought us home about noon time. The boss of the camp, the SS man, there were mountains of clothing, shoes, and everything thrown up and he said, "Go and pick." We were there for seven months in this camp. They gave us wooden shoes. We walked in wooden shoes. They had those things all of the time and never gave us anything.

C: When you were ready to leave they brought this over?

J: Yes. He said the enemies were coming closer and they had to take us out. He got very protective about it. The English and Americans were very close and they said we had to leave this place. He ordered us to go ahead and get clothes and what we wanted, but nobody touched anything. We knew that the end had to be very close.

C: He was the . . .

J: Commandant.

C: The commandant who mentioned you were like his children. He was kind of crazy?

J: Yes. He would put our lights out when he wanted to practice the air shelter with us.

C: What was that like? Was it small and sort of cramped?

J: Yes.

C: What happened?

J: He beat up on everybody. If somebody broke a light bulb or something, he would give us black and blue eyes.

C: He wanted everyone to get into it and practice that? Why?

J: He used to start us out on Sunday when everybody was home. Normally, there was only half of us home and half of us working. On Sunday, everybody was home. He was trying to get us to have something to do, so he was practicing yelling "air shelter" with us.

C: Do you think he was really a psycho?

J: Most of them were psychopaths.

C: Oh, I know that. I mean him in particular as to the other people who were the heads of camps where you were. Was he the strangest one?

J: Well, most of them were. A few hours later the trains were

waiting for us. We loaded up and they kept us for four whole weeks. We couldn't go anyplace. They just shipped us from one line to the other. We ended up about 20 or 30 kilometers away from Berlin. There, the biggest part of the war was going on. Then we found out about the bombings.

C: I see. What was being bombed then?

J: Everything. They put us on a wide, left line. We stayed there for three or four days. We had no water. We had some bread and a piece of salami.

C: That was in the woods, right?

J: Well, this was not in the woods. It was a big station like Chicago. It was a tremendous station. There was a lot of military equipment and everything down on the lines. It was going towards Berlin. It was then the end of April, the 20th of April. We got bombed out. We got bombed out on a Thursday. I was listening the other day to the television about Hitler. I don't know if you watched it.

C: No, I didn't watch it.

J: It was "The Last Days of Hitler." They mentioned some days that were very familiar to me.

C: Well, what happened on those days?

J: We were bombed out on this Thursday.

C: What other days?

J: When President Roosevelt died they were talking about it too. The last days of Hitler's thing. Finally we were bombed out. A lot of the girls were killed. They locked us up on the train and they ran away.

C: When you were locked in the car and they left, what did they leave for? That is when you got to escape; you made this happen by getting out of the car.

J: They left us and we heard bombs falling and we couldn't get out. One of the German SS men was from Romania. The one was sitting out on the grass or something and he gave me a little crowbar. He said, "Maybe you can use it someday". When the bombs started falling, the grills threw me out. I broke the gate on the window. There were iron gates like on the little window. The girls threw me out and I broke the lock on the door and opened the door. About three hundred of our girls were killed in this particular thing. Later on, I ran away from this. I ran and fell into a hole where bombs made a hole. It took me a while to scramble out.

C: There was a hole right beside the car?

J: Yes, I came out and looked around. I saw people in trains killed by train engineers or whatever you call them. They killed them by stabbing them.

C: Oh, really?

J: Yes, it was terrible. This particular place was like a firehouse station. It has heavy equipment and everything; soldiers, and everything was right there.

C: You mean it was like supply house?

J: Yes. I ran away and I can't remember what place. The house was smashed. There was only a fence standing. Next to the fence was a bicycle. I just took the bike. I didn't have any shoes because I left the wooden shoes in the train.

C: So, you were in your socks?

J: I took the bike and went into the woods. I saw a German picking up some of our girls. He mentioned to me to come and I saw that he didn't have any gun or anything on him. All he had was a police stick in his hand. I said, "Hell, no, I am not going back." I got on the bike in the opposite direction. I ran away. I got attached to some Russian family that was in a camp too. I don't know if they were white Russians or whoever they were. I stayed there overnight. I was talking to a German during the day. I was sitting with another German little girl who ran away from home because of the bombs. Nobody could mistake me for anything else; I didn't have my hair; I was in uniform. There was a German sitting with us and told me, "Better for you than for me because I still have to go to Berlin."

C: He said, "The war is more over for you than it is for me"?

J: Yes. He gave me an apple and some cigarettes because I was smoking already then, too. I was smoking leaves and something like this and a couple of cigarettes of his.

C: Can you remember anything else about that particular day? What was it like to feel that it was almost over? Did you still feel numb?

J: That was the only way, but you still knew what was going on. You just had to elude them because they were still there and you knew that others were coming in. The Russians were coming in. They stayed all night long until about three o'clock in the morning because the woods were crowded with German Wermacht. There was German artillery and things like this that were going into Berlin. I guess I fell asleep outside. In the morning, the Italians came around. They told me they found a young girl,

crying; she lost somebody. I said, "I will go and see who she is." I went and it wasn't the one that I was traveling with.

C: Yes, I know. You thought it was the other one.

J: The Germans were still around and we had to hide out in a farmhouse, the two of us--a friend of mine. They put us in there. They put my bike in there, too, into this farmhouse. It was someplace out in the field. We stayed there for a couple of days. We didn't see anybody or hear of anyone. We decided to get out. When we came out, all of a sudden the Russians were going through. We laid down on the floor to watch them go by.

C: Why did you do that?

J: We were afraid. The patrol didn't ask questions.

C: Did your father tell you something about the . . . Was there some reason why you particularly hid from that patrol?

J: The patrol usually wanted to clear away. They didn't want anybody in their way when they looked out. We went back. I found a German penny on the ground, in the forest, in the woods. I said, "Let's go back." We went back. About a half an hour later, three fellows came around. They said, "The Germans are out. Let's go into camp." There was an international camp where people from all of the countries were that weren't prisoners; they were workers in Germany. They were in this camp.

C: Yes.

J: They took us into this camp. The next day the Russians came in. Russian tanks moved in. We were freed. We started living in Germany again because the front was still there and the fighting and they were bombing the places. We couldn't stay there. We couldn't go there; the roads were closed to some places. We just kept on traveling. We went a certain way, then we had to turn around and go someplace else. I was separated from my sister. My sister was in one wagon and I was in another wagon. Her wagon went through and my wagon they didn't let through. We went in different directions. Then I still didn't want to go back to Poland.

C: She was on the Russian side or the American side?

J: No, no. This was the Russian side altogether. The front was still going on strong. I guess some kind of detachment of Germans and something were fighting. They closed up the road. They didn't let anybody go through. She went through and I didn't.

C: Oh, I see.

J: I had to go down and take another road. That is how I got

separated from my sister. She wanted to go back to Poland and I didn't. I wanted to go to a better site. I didn't want to go back to Poland.

C: So, when did you see her again?

J: Five years ago. She wanted to visit us from Poland.

C: Did you talk about it?

J: Yes. There were a lot of places that she did not remember. She had trouble with her memory for awhile. Right after the war, she spent six months in the hospital.

C: She is your older sister?

J: Yes, my older sister.

C: She was in the hospital after the war?

J: Yes, after the war. She had trouble. It was a nervous breakdown or whatever it was. She didn't get back to Poland until September; we were freed in April, but she didn't get back to Poland until September.

C: I want to ask you why you didn't want to go back to Poland and about you being political when you were even a child.

J: I am not political.

C: You said that your sister wanted to return to Poland after the war.

J: She had a child to return to. She had a child born in the ghetto. The child was about three years old already by then. I didn't go back to Poland. Since I was a young child, all I could think of was to get out of Poland. Once I was out, I didn't want to return.

C: Why not?

J: I don't know. I didn't like Poland. I liked Poland as a country. I didn't like the people that I had to deal with. The scenery, land and this was what I liked in Poland.

C: Could you explain why though?

J: It was beautiful in the hills, the lakes, and everything else was beautiful. I knew it from childhood. I knew where to go and pick blackberries, blueberries, mushrooms, and things like this where we were raised.

C: It was really ideal for the childhood?



J: It was beautiful out there. Face it, nothing was sent up to you. A lot of the land was government land that we were allowed to go on and pick blueberries and so on. We did a lot of walking. My grandmother lived about seven kilometers away from us. It took an hour to walk. We used to go over to grandmother's through the woods.

C: What was the weather like?

J: The same as here. The summers were warm and cold in the winters. It might have been a little colder than here.

C: You were political as a child. I know that.

J: I don't know that I was political. I listened to everybody. I had big ears. I was a small person with big ears. I used to like to listen to the men talking, the neighbors and so on. I used to listen to that too.

I don't know if I said this before but when I was in high school, one of my history teachers remarked that Poland was one of the most democratic countries in the world.

C: Yes, I remember that.

J: But she didn't live in Poland.

C: What did you tell her?

J: I started telling her . . . My sister in the 7th grade read this book. It was a Polish book which said that the window of the world must have been very small. They sure didn't allow certain things like, for instance, the factory in our hometown. A Jew was the director of this factory, but he was a convert. You couldn't work unless you were converted to Catholicism. A Jew wasn't allowed to work in this place yet; it was a government-run factory. It wasn't a private thing. The government was the one that discriminated themselves. That is how I guess the Polish group got encouraged by it. How can you be any other way than be political about certain things? There are certain things. If you wanted to go in and you were about thirteen or fourteen, you could go in. Otherwise you had to have a policeman go in with you because you weren't allowed to walk in there.

There was a movie theater in this particular place. It was only for the Polish people. If I wanted to go into a movie I had to go in with the class, the school class. I couldn't go there by myself.

C: I see.

J: The city swimming pool was there. I couldn't use it because

I wasn't allowed there. This is what you call democratic?

C: Did many convert then?

J: Yes, there were quite a few who converted in my hometown.

C: How did you feel about that?

J: I don't know. I was Jewish.

C: Did you feel hurt? Did you feel angry towards them?

J: Yes, I felt bitter towards them. You could be just as good as somebody else at something, yet you are not allowed because of your religion.

C: As a child you kind of resent the Polish people when the war ended and you didn't want to return?

J: No, I didn't want to return. I didn't have anyone to return to. I knew my parents were gone.

C: Could you explain the situation with how the Polish people didn't support those who were in the ghettos?

J: The people who returned from camp to my hometown, the places that they were living, they were burned down--their houses. You see, there was nothing to return to. I am glad that I didn't return. I didn't have to go through the same thing.

C: Is there anything else that you can remember about why you saw certain incidents of this and Polish people . . .

J: Maybe it was because my community wasn't so Jewish. There weren't so many Jewish people. People, I guess in big cities, that lived among Jewish people associated with the Jewish people. They didn't have to associate so much with the Polish people. They didn't see certain things, anti-Semitism. I am sure that they saw it, but not on the same scale as us. Let's say there were two Jewish girls in the class of 40 or 50 people. You know that you are more or less a minority.

C: Oh, yes.

J: One of my girlfriends had a Polish girl call her a Jewish pig. She said, "If I am a Jewish pig then you are a Polish pig." She got expelled from school for two weeks.

C: Your friend did?

J: Yes.

C: I wasn't sure which one you meant and which one got expelled.

I was hoping it would be the other one.

J: No, the Jewish girl got expelled.

C: Could you tell me anything about when you found a coin. I know you were going through one of the exchanges from one camp to another. You could have escaped with this.

J: This was the week that we were waiting for the train to come to take us to Auschwitz. Somebody let out a thing that the trains were there. It wasn't true because they trains weren't there yet. Somewhere I got a . . . I decided to go into the bathroom or the latrine or whatever you call it. It was an outside house. When I came in, there was a five gold piece on the floor.

C: How much would have it been worth?

J: It was up about \$50; it was a Russian five ruble.

C: People were telling you that you could escape?

J: Anybody who could find something like this had luck. They were lucky enough to have something like that to hold onto and protect it. If anybody found something like that, they were lucky. When I was brought up, I knew the place. I knew it like my hometown.

C: You could have really left?

J: I could have went away, but where to?

C: I want to talk to you about why you felt that way about it.

J: A lot of people that ran away . . . There is one man here in town who was in my hometown. After we had left, he stayed in this camp. They kept a few of the people behind to clean up. They said that the Germans were going around with Ukranian police. We had a lot of them in this camp. They were going around with machine guns and shooting at the ceilings in case somebody was hiding out. Somebody suggested to him to run away. One day he went and picked up and walked out from this factory. He came outside and saw so many people dead all around. He turned around and said, "Now, I better go into Germany instead of getting killed here."

C: So he went back?

J: He went back into the camp. Later on after they cleaned up the camp, the Germans sent him up to Germany. He lives here in Youngstown.

C: How did you know him?

- J: He was in my camp. It happened that his first wife's brother was married to a cousin of mine. He was the first man to be shot in my hometown camp. This man had a couple of potatoes in his pocket and was shot.
- C: That is why he was shot?
- J: Yes.
- C: There must have been so many of those incidents.
- J: People were hung; people were shot. I was ready for it at one time. I had the typhoid fever. Twenty-one of twenty-two people were killed. There were only two of us that survived it. A brother of an aunt of mine, and myself survived it. We had somebody. They didn't say they were going to kill us. They said they were going to take us out to a hospital. I refused. My uncle went in; he was a shoemaker. He worked for the Germans. He went in and said, "Well, you are going to send away one of my nieces." He was talking about my sister. He said, "You are not going to send her away anywhere." At the last moment he called for me and for this brother of my aunt to be left behind. We were half-dressed. They took us off the beds. They put us in a stall where they kept twenty people in one room. One of the girls didn't have her boots on yet. She didn't feel like dressing anymore. She said, "If we end up going, we are going to be dead." It was like death. It was a very sad thing. They were young people, eighteen or nineteen year old kids.
- C: They said that they were taking you to the hospital, but you were sure . . .
- J: I wasn't sure. I didn't know anything. My uncle must have known something. Who knows?
- C: You were fortunate.
- J: I was almost through the typhoid. The fever was almost subsided with me. I was through the crisis and so on. They took her out with two girls and twenty men or something like that. They just took them to the next plot. They took them to a gunpowder department. That is where they shot them. A few minutes later they were back, the Ukrainians. They were talking and bragging about how many were killed and so on.
- C: That man was killed for what reason?
- J: The cousin, the first one? He was killed because he stole a couple of potatoes.
- C: I wondered if you could remember anything more about your father?

J: Where shall I start.

C: We will skip over it then.

J: He was a good man. He helped people as much as he could. He never wanted to see a child go hungry, not only his, but any other child. He used to have outside in the barn a big box of shoes. They were shoes that we outgrew. We never threw out a pair of shoes. We always gave them to a child from another city or something. He would go out and fit them with shoes and feed the children.

C: Did he tell you that he wished to never see you go hungry?

J: He used to say, "If I have to see my child go hungry, I would rather not live." He never lived to see me hungry.

C: Is that all you want to say?

J: I guess so.

C: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW