

## Lucy Baras: Oral History Transcript

www.wisconsinhistory.org/HolocaustSurvivors/Baras.asp

**Name:** Lucy Rothstein Baras (1913 – 2002)

**Birth Place:** Skalat, Poland (Now the Ukraine)

**Arrived in Wisconsin:** 1950, Sheboygan

**Project Name:** Oral Histories: Wisconsin Survivors of the Holocaust



Lucy Baras

**Biography:** Lucy Rothstein Baras was born in Skalat, Poland (Ukraine), on August 15, 1913. She was the oldest child in the family of an Orthodox Jewish leather merchant. After graduating from high school, she attended law school in Lwow. A 1933 law prohibiting Jews from practicing law forced her to abandon her schooling. Instead, Lucy learned the tailoring trade and returned to Skalat to open her own shop.

The Jews of Skalat lived in relative safety until July 4, 1941, when Nazi forces overran the city. They killed about 400 men, including her father. The Rothstein family continued to survive by working for the Germans in the family leather shop making shoes for concentration camp workers. A short time later a Jewish ghetto was established in the family's neighborhood in Skalat. Its borders continued to shrink following numerous "actions" in which thousands were murdered.



In early 1943 the family was forced to leave their home and work at the labor camp established in Skalat. Lucy was appointed the personal tailor to the Nazi overseer of the county. Lucy's husband-to-be, Edward Baras, was the overseer's farm administrator. In the summer of 1943, Lucy, her mother, and her brother escaped to the forest, where they hid for three weeks. During that time, her mother failed to return while searching for food. She was never seen again. Lucy and her brother joined a group of Jews hiding deeper in the woods. They remained there until their liberation by the Russian army at the end of 1943. After liberation, they traveled through Zbaraz, eventually to return to Skalat in early 1944 where she immediately reunited with Edward. The two were wed and a son was born in 1945.

Fearing similar persecution under the communist regime, Lucy and her family fled the Ukraine soon after their son was born. They were captured in Czechoslovakia, but escaped to a displaced persons camp at Bamberg, Germany, where they were interred until 1950. After leaving Germany, the Baras' spent nine months in New York before arriving in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. They joined Edward Baras' brother and sister, who were relocated to Sheboygan directly from Germany. Edward worked as a machinist at the Kohler Company until his retirement in 1974. Lucy worked as a part-time tailor for many years. She died in February 2002.

**Audio Summary:** Below are the highlights of each tape. It is not a complete list of all topics discussed.

**Tape 1, Side 1**

- Lucy's childhood in Skalat, Poland
- Family background and schools
- Jewish community in Skalat in 1920s and 1930s
- Her extended family, including relations in U.S.

**Tape 1, Side 2**

- Description of Skalat
- Her secular and religious education
- Lucy attends law school in Lwow
- Relations with Gentiles and anti-Semitism

**Tape 2, Side 1**

- Life in Skalat as war approached
- Occupation by the Soviets, 1939
- Employment problems under the Russians
- Lucy returns to her parents' home

**Tape 2, Side 2**

- Religious life in Skalat under the Russians
- German invasion
- Skalat Ghetto established, 1942
- Jews from surrounding areas moved to Skalat Ghetto

**Tape 3, Side 1**

- Conditions in Skalat Ghetto
- Deportations of Jews, 1942 and 1943
- Role of the Judenrat in dealing with authorities
- Neighboring labor camps

**Tape 3, Side 2**

- Labor camp created in Skalat
- Lucy tries to hide her mother from the Germans
- Russians create false front line, summer 1943
- Hiding in attics

**Tape 4, Side 1**

- Lucy flees into the forest
- Her mother disappears
- Sees partisans once
- Staying clothed while in the forest

**Tape 4, Side 2**

- Learning of the end of the war
- Decides to leave Skalat, July 1945
- Leaving for Germany, November 1945
- Capture in Czechoslovakia

#### **Tape 5, Side 1**

- Escapes Czech authorities and reaches Selb, Germany
- Life in Bamberg displaced persons camp
- Black market activities
- Religious life in Bamberg displaced persons camp

#### **Tape 5, Side 2**

- More details about deportations from Skalat
- Life in postwar Germany
- Immigrating to the U.S., May 1949
- Impressions of New York

#### **Tape 6, Side 1**

- Moves to Sheboygan, Wisconsin
- Problems being new immigrants
- Receives help from neighbors and Jewish community
- Husband's family background

#### **Tape 6, Side 2**

- Children and family life in Sheboygan
- Parenting
- Lucy writes about Holocaust
- Children's social lives in Sheboygan

#### **Tape 7, Side 1**

- Lucy's family and social life in Sheboygan
- Local Jews and Gentiles; and knowledge of the Holocaust
- Religious practice in Sheboygan
- A typical day in her life

#### **Tape 7, Side 2**

- Lucy's writing about the Holocaust
- Depictions of the Holocaust in American books and media
- Travels around Wisconsin
- Sheboygan's Jewish community

#### **Tape 8, Side 1**

- Lucy's attitudes toward Wisconsin and the U.S.
- American politics and culture
- Anti-Semitism in the U.S.
- Importance of speaking about her experiences

## **About the Interview Process:**

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The interview was conducted by Sara Leuchter during two sessions at the Baras home in Sheboygan on November 12 and 13, 1980. The first session lasted four and one-half hours; the second lasted three hours.

Throughout the entire interview, Lucy was completely at ease and felt no discomfort in talking in front of the tape recorder. She speaks with a great deal of warmth and spontaneity, and the interview proceeds in clear chronological order.

## Audio and Transcript Details:

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### Interview Dates

- Nov 12, 1980; Nov 13, 1980

### Interview Location

- Baras home, Sheboygan, Wisconsin

### Interviewer

- Archivist Sara Leuchter

### Original Sound Recording Format

- 8 qty. 60-minute audio cassette tapes

### Length of Interviews

- 2 interviews, total approximately 7.5 hours

### Transcript Length

- 144 pages

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## Pictures:

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## Transcript

The following transcript is from the collections of the Wisconsin Historical Society Archives. It is an unedited, firsthand account of the Nazi persecution of the Jews before and during World War II. Portions of this interview may not be suitable for younger or more sensitive audiences. It is unlawful to republish this text without written permission from the Wisconsin Historical Society, except for nonprofit educational use.

### Key

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**SL** Sara Leuchter, Wisconsin Historical Society archivist  
**LB** Lucy Baras, Holocaust survivor

#### TAPE 1, SIDE 1

**SL:** I'd first like to ask you some family background questions, I'd like your full name, including your maiden name, and your date of birth and your place of birth, and the names of your parents and if you can remember the years they were born and where they were born.

**LB:** My name is Lucy. My maiden name is Rothstein and my married name is Baras. Some people pronounce it "Bahrahs" and some people pronounce it "Borahs." I got used to Baras. I was born in a small city in Poland, which now belongs to Russia. Until '39 it was Poland. In '39, the Russians came in without a shot, took it over. That was at the same time when Hitler took over the western part of Poland. The Russians took over the eastern. That was September 17, 1939.

**SL:** What was the name of the town?

**LB:** Just 5,000 population, city of Skalat, S-K-A-L-A-T. The next bigger city not far from that was Ternopol which is probably better known. Skalat probably nobody ever heard. That city Ternopol had before the war I would say about 25,000 people. That's where my mother was born. Going back, if you want to know the family background, my father was born in Skalat in 1886. My mother was born in Ternopol in 1888.

**SL:** I didn't get your date of birth.

**LB:** Oh that's right, I was born August 15, 1913 in Skalat. It was Poland.

**SL:** And the names of your parents?

LB: My father was Wolf. When Poland was independent, he spelled his name W-O-L-F, like Wolf. But he was born under Russian government in the 19th century, and at that time people spoke mostly German. I wouldn't say mostly but a lot. The Jews especially. In that part of Poland where I lived, there were not many Poles. The population was more Ukrainian than Polish. I mean the Gentile population. So my father was called at that time Wilhelm. That was the German name. But during the Poland, Wilhelm was not considered a Polish name, so he changed it. As I told you, he was born in Skalat. My mother was born 1888 in Ternopol, and her name was Gusta, G-U-S-T-A, Friedman. Her maiden name was Friedman.

SL: Do you recall the names of your grandparents?

LB: Yes, I do. My father's father was Srul Leib. That's typical two Jewish names, Srul<sup>1</sup> Leib the first name. My grandmother also had two names. She was Rifka Feige. Her maiden name was Wallach. And on my mother's side, my grandfather was Judah Friedman and my grandmother's name was Leah and maiden name Goldenberg.

SL: Do you recall from what areas your grandparents came, where they were born?

LB: On my father's side, both parents were from Skalat. On my mother's side, my grandfather was from Ternopol that's where my mother was born but I don't know where my grandmother was born. In fact, I think she must have been the only child because I never heard of any of her brothers or sisters. I heard of all the brothers or sisters on the other three grandparents, and I never have heard of hers. Either she was very far, or she never had any sisters or brothers.

SL: Do you have any recollections, special recollections of your grandparents?

LB: Especially on my father's side, because they lived in the same city. You see, when I was small, I was born in the same house where my grandfather's parents lived. But, then when I was a very small yet, we moved out to a different apartment. Then when my grandfather died I was not quite ten years old, and my grandmother was alone, and we moved back to her house. I remember them both very well. My

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<sup>1</sup>A variation of the name Israel.

grandfather was a very religious man and so was my father and my grandmother. They were just average, nice old people.

SL: What was your grandfather's occupation?

LB: He had a store with leather goods and so had my father. They were not in partnership, but they were in the same business.

SL: Could you tell me a little bit about your parents and the memories that you have of them, any that stand out particularly?

LB: Of course, it stand out particularly an awful lot because I was only a year old when the first world war broke out. You know this is funny, I don't know if my parents told me the story about first war and that's why I remember them, because during the years later they kept on repeating and talking about that, but I really do remember. But once, it seems to me I remember it vividly, I must have between three and four years old. I don't know if it's possible to remember something like that. It was Saturday morning, my father and my grandparents were in shul<sup>2</sup> for services. My grandmother used to go every Saturday to shul also, because some women don't or didn't. My grandmother did. Suddenly they started to bombard the city. I don't know which was who was, because the governments kept on changing those years constantly. Between 1914 and 1918, we probably had every few weeks or every few months somebody else. There were the Austrians, and the Russians, and after '18, there came in the Communists. So bombardments started and we lived in a small, very small house and nobody wanted to stay during bombardments in such a city. Of course, there were no planes but these heavy cannons or whatever you call it. We called them in Polish armaty. My mother grabbed me and started to run to the very, very empty marketplace, because not far from that, my uncle my father's uncle lived, and he lived in a very big house and every wall was almost a foot thick there. That's what they used to say, they called it a fortress, and everybody wanted to get in there during bombardments, which were very often during the war. That I remember very vividly how my mother carried me and ran with me there and we came to the

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<sup>2</sup>Yiddish for 'synagogue'.

basement there. And I barely remember other things from the first world war, very little. But then I remember when the Russians came in.

LB: That was 1919, and then we didn't live with our grandparents. We lived on the edge of the city across the street, from the school which I attended. It was summer I couldn't get into school when I was six years old, because there were some kids who were five years older, four and many of them five years older who were not able to get into school, because schools were closed all those years of the war, from 1914 to beginning of 1918. This was 1918, so I was six years old at that time. My mother brought me to school, they didn't want to accept me. So she taught me at home and in February, when they gave out the half year report cards, my mother took me over back again to school and she talked them into accepting me. At that time, 1919, just under Communist attack. They called them Bolsheviks at that time, 1919. They attacked Poland, the eastern side of Poland. Of course they didn't, and so the school gave out the report cards about two weeks earlier. We lived across the street from school and suddenly the Russian army started to come in. Many soldiers were barefoot. It was summer. It was June. They started to camp in our front yard, which was a big garden, front and in the back. In front, we had the fruit and flower and vegetable garden. In the back it was only vegetables. Across the street the school had huge yards on each side, almost like a little park. They parked everywhere there, and people were terribly afraid of them. We kept the shades down and the kids had to stay inside. Actually, it was no reason for it, but we didn't know. My parents were afraid because when the Russians came in to us in those periods between 1914 and 1918, they were terrible. They robbed the houses, they raped the women, they did everything. Of course, people were afraid. But after a few days, we realized they would never open a door. If they wanted a little water, they would knock on the door and ask. They were quiet, so, that I remember.

LB: About my parents I only remember not only, I know that they tried to raise the children as good as possible, any nice family always want. I have a brother who is almost six years younger, and I had another brother who was killed in the war in the second world war. He was ten years younger. The



children had to study, we all were good students. They sent us to Hebrew school always, and we had to observe the Sabbath. It was a very religious home and a very correct home.

SL: I'd like you to tell me a little bit more about the job that your father had, his business.

LB: It was a job, it was his own store. It was a very little store where he sold leather for shoes. For upper shoes, soft leather; for bottom, heavy leather. Mother would help always a lot in the store. That's why we always had to have a maid in the house for the children, because she was always in the store almost all day. I wouldn't say always, because there were seasons, slow seasons, like middle of winter, middle of summer was slow. Fall and spring was busy. Then she was gone the whole day. She would leave in the morning, come back in the evening. Sometimes she would come for a few minutes or for a half hour during the day and sometimes not. So we always had a maid until the youngest boy was three years old.

SL: Was your father's store located near your house?

LB: See it was such a small city it was always near. I would not call it, no. You see when we lived at our grandparents house I would call it close. It probably was about half a mile, maybe more. But then we moved away. When I went to grade school we lived across from the school which it was at the edge of the city, then it was much farther. But I doubt it was more than a mile. I would say about a mile, so it was not so bad. I suppose if you want to know the business, that was all, my father barely made a living. We had what we needed. The children were never hungry. We were always dressed but not especially elegantly or luxuriously. There were not many luxuries in the house, but nobody was hungry and nobody was cold. In the house we always had enough heat and we had enough clothes and we bought sometimes some ice cream, which was considered in those days a luxury. We didn't eat cakes like here everyday, but nobody did. Even the rich people didn't. It was a different way of life. Cakes were for special holidays, fancy cakes. Of course for the Sabbath mother always bakes a lot baked a lot, but sometimes by Monday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday it was gone, then we waited for the next weekend for the sweets. But there were candies always in the house and chocolate and cocoa. The things that you didn't have to bake. You were not considered rich, but not poor also.

SL: Now you mention that Skalat had about 5,000 people. How many of those do you estimate were Jewish?

LB: Three thousand and they lived in mostly around the marketplace and then the poor neighborhood. There was a poor Jewish neighborhood. The non-Jews lived more on the outskirts and in the better parts of the city. But there were some Jews here and there in the better part of the city, too, and some not even rich ones. They couldn't buy a house there, but then they lived on rent. But it was spread, it was not a complete ghetto. The poor neighborhood was a kind of a ghetto almost, but not enforced ghetto.

SL: I'd like to ask you a little bit about your brothers. Could you tell me their names and, if you can recall, their dates of birth?

LB: Oh yes. My brother Joe, who lives in Milwaukee now, was born April 14, 1919, in Skalat. The youngest, who was killed in the war, his name was Milo, M-I-L-O, as I am recall. He was born August 10 in 1923.

SL: What kind of memories do you have of growing up with your brothers?

LB: Joe is almost six years younger, so it was not hard to get along. Of course, we had our fights once in a while, but you know because of the big difference in age we didn't have the same discussions on the same level. Skalat didn't have a high school. When I was thirteen years old, I left the city and went to Ternopol. At that time, he was only seven. So I would come home only for summertime, and at seven, he went to school all day the public school. He didn't go to school the whole day, like here. Our schools were only in the morning. The children started at eight. In the lower grades they went only till 12:00, then till 1:00, then till 1:30. But in the afternoon he had to go to cheder.<sup>3</sup> So actually, the boys were not home very much. The girls usually did not go to cheder, but there was a man hired who would come to the house to teach them Yiddish. But besides that, I had to study Yiddish at home, I also went to Hebrew school since I was five years old. But then I didn't study the same as the boys studied in cheder. I studied modern Sephardic Hebrew. That's the language they speak now in Israel, which didn't have anything to do with religion. The younger brother, of course, that was even farther. He was ten

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<sup>3</sup>A religious school.

years old and I always helped my mother and the maid raise him, because when he was born I was ten years old. We cuddled him. He was the baby in the house. We always considered him the baby.

SL: Did you have any family members, such as cousins, that lived in Skalat or close to Skalat?

LB: Actually, the whole family of my father most of my father's family, lived in Skalat, and I was close only with one girl who was my father's second cousin my father's cousin. For me, probably you call it "once removed." I don't know how you say it here. She was a few years older than I am but she, I was closer with her because, she didn't go to the same school, but I went to high school in Ternopol, and she stayed most of the time in Ternopol. She took private lessons. She was a very sick girl. She had a heart trouble, angina pectoris. She couldn't go to school, but every half a year or every year, I don't remember how often, she would take tests in the same school which I attended. Of course, summertime when we were home, we kept on that friendship. But my closest friends were not my relatives. I had two close friends. One of them was a very remarkable girl. She never went to high school. They were very poor. They couldn't send the kids. They had six children and out of the six only one boy became a lawyer and the others didn't even go to high school because there was no high school in that city. You had to go farther. But this girl knew everything. She read all books, much more than the men, some people with college education. Of course, there was not much to do in these small cities. Very few people had radios. Of course, there was no television. We had lots of newspapers and we read a lot, but most people couldn't afford to buy all of them so we would share them. Like two, three people would bring, would subscribe to one paper from Lwow, another one from Warsaw which is in Polish Warsawa, the capital of Poland but everybody read. So she read newspapers, magazines, books, everything. But she was also a very sensitive girl which was very much out of place in that poor home. That's why she suffered a lot because she just could not adjust herself to the poor life. For instance, she had an older sister. There were three girls and three boys in the house. That older sister married a man who was also very poor, and they had two children. That man didn't even have a store. He just had a stand in the market place. If it rained, he had to cover it or put it in a wheelbarrow and carry it home. Of course, she

always helped him. So that friend of mine, who's name was Laura, she would often treat us as her sister. She doesn't polish her nails, she doesn't curl her hair, she doesn't put on lipstick. And I kept on to persuade her, this is not part of life of such a poor woman. But somehow, that Laura thought that together with education the looks had to be in cooperation with education. Of course, I don't mean a formal education. In Europe, I knew very many people who didn't have any formal education, but knew much more than people with degrees. Of course, not many people as here went to college, and not even to high school. The high schools were almost free. But first of all excuse me, I shouldn't say free. Only the government's high schools for boy, I wouldn't say they were free; they were cheap. Not completely free. But the high school that I went was very expensive. Because I don't know if I mentioned that Poland became independent in 1918. It was a very poor country, and they couldn't build up their educational level for the country in a hurry. They didn't know if they should first make clothes for the people or provide them with food or make arms in case somebody attacks so or build schools first. So most schools in the beginning were only for boys, more schools. For instance, in that city of Ternopol where I went, there were three gymnasiums. A gymnasium is a high school with a general education. Not if you want to be a teacher and not if you want to be a minister, just general for those who attended those who planned to go to college. That's like a preparatory school for college. So they had three gymnasiums for boys and only one for the girls, and that one was a private school, which means the tuition was very high. I think we got off the subject. Yes, you want to know the family, not the friends.

SL: Yeah, well I just wanted to establish whether or not there was a large family unit that was living in the area.

LB: Yes, the family unit was large but since I was not always at home, I was not close with all of them. My father had that one uncle at home who had eight children, and the closest I was with that one. Then he also had a sister who was a widow. We would visit very often, but her children were much older than I am. They were almost, they were almost the age of my father, because they were his cousins. So that was another. And so we had an uncle, one aunt and another aunt. And there was also my mother. My

mother had relatives there. But even my mother's relatives, she was much closer with them. There was one family that mother and father were related, both of them, and with them we were the closest. Now that you keep on asking me, it's so many years ago. I forgot that we were very close with that family.

SL: What was the name of that family?

LB: Friedman. It was, the man was my grandfather's brother. But his wife was related to my father. She was my father's cousin? I don't know exactly how she was related. Not directly an aunt, maybe a great-aunt or something like that. But anyway, there was a relationship. And these people had three children, of course not my age; my parent's age. But there was hardly a Saturday that we didn't see each other, that we didn't visit. It was actually a very closely knit family with the Friedmans. Oh and I forgot, and there was another this Friedman Shaly Fridman was his name, he was my mother's uncle. And there was my mother's aunt, another one. Her name was Goldstein, Rifka Goldstein, and was her and her daughter. With her daughter, my mother was like sisters. There was hardly a day they didn't visit each other. In about 1922, they went for America, where they had children who left before the war and I still see one of those. Matter of fact, I was in Florida last winter, and I saw her youngest son who is the only one who still survived. He's 78 years old, in very good health, and we visited him and he visited us at the hotel a few times.

SL: And what's his name?

LB: Sam Goldstein.

SL: Do you have any other cousins or did you have relatives in the United States before the war?

LB: Yes, my mother had two brothers. They both left before the war.

SL: Who were they?

LB: They are both dead. One was Joe Friedman and he was the one who sponsored us here.

SL: Where did he live?

LB: In New York. The other was Dave Friedman and he lived in Poughkeepsie, New York, and that's where he died. There are children, but we are close only with one of them.

**END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1**

## TAPE 1, SIDE 2

SL: I'd like if you can for you to describe to me what your house looked like and what your neighborhood looked like. I assume that you lived in the house near the school for the greatest amount of time.

LB: Not for the greatest, no, no. See we couldn't afford to live for greatest amount of time. I told you, my parents were not rich. So when my parents got married, they lived in the same house with my grandparents. There were only, I would say, three rooms and a huge hall which probably might consider another room. So one room was where my grandparents and one room my parents. But then I told you, when I was small we moved out and we lived only two years in a different apartment. That's where my younger brother was born, the one who's six years younger. But we didn't stay there long also. See, things started to improve, and my parents decided that we can afford a better apartment and we needed. So we rented across the school a nice house, a small house, and there were quite a few rooms: one, two, three, four. In those days it was considered unusually big house for a family of four, because my younger brother hadn't been born yet. But we stayed there only until I was about twelve years old because times started to turn bad again, and my parents couldn't afford to pay, and anyway my grandfather had just died at that time. A little earlier, when he died I was not quite ten and when we left the house I was already twelve or maybe even thirteen. No, I think about twelve-and-a-half. Then we moved back and my grandfather died.

SL: Did you remain in that apartment long?

LB: Until the war, yes.

SL: Could you give me an idea of what the town looked like?

LB: Yes the town. You know it wasn't the center of the town, was what you call now a shtetl.<sup>4</sup> The marketplace was huge, to the center of the marketplace ran an alley, but in the center it was actually no alley, just a road because there were no houses to the center. The marketplace was divided in two, but the alley divided the marketplace in two halves. But all around, on one side there was mostly stores.

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<sup>4</sup>A small Eastern European Jewish community.

Many of the people had just in the back. I wouldn't call it an apartment, it was like a place to live, maybe two rooms, three at the most, or sometimes only one. In the front room they made the store. That was the northern edge of that. And all along ran like porches, wooden columns. And so that was one part, that was the northern part. On the eastern part there were houses and stores — I mean apartments and stores. And the same on the southern part. But the west part was an empty place which years, years ago, probably a hundred years ago, had contained — oh, what do you call it, what the rich people [live in], a fortress. It was actually a fortress but there was a house in the center. The fortress was so big that it had towers, what they call those defense towers, with little windows for them to stick... what do you call these holes through where they put the guns in? Some kind of firing arms. There were four of those in each corner and the center was only ruins of the house. And there were even all kinds of cracks. When I got older I was often wondering how come there was no historical society to preserve these. All they did is make that tennis place, tennis courts, there and very few people could even afford to play tennis. Those who did play tennis were the few military men, usually the officers in the army, not the lower ones, the highest, and maybe the administrators of the county. Otherwise nobody. A Jew never played tennis. Most of the people were poor. Even those that were considered rich didn't play that. So that was the west part of the market, an empty lot with a stone wall running along that lot and then these towers. The kids used to play. And that was the place — it was one of these towers... Jews were killed when the Germans came, in the basement of one of these towers. And across the street, on the corner of the marketplace, was the beautiful Roman Catholic church. So I often wondered how come all other sides are occupied by Jews, what is the church doing? But people explained later. People just talked about it; I've never seen anything written about it. That the owners of that castle — forgot to use the word castle — in fact, in the center of that huge place was the ruins of the castle and the owners wanted to have the church close by. So they built it right kitty-corner from one of these towers. That was the old marketplace. In the back of the marketplace, in the back of the church, there mostly were very small houses, cottages, and many non-Jews lived there. But a little farther toward the east was

the Jewish poor neighborhood. That was the center of the city. But if you went north of that marketplace, that was the nice street, the nice neighborhood, and they called it the Corso. Then when evening came, you know what young boys and girls did for entertainment? They put on their better clothes after supper and they went for a walk. And they walked on that Corso from one end to another, sometimes ten and twenty times during the evening that was all. If you were a little courageous, you walked out a little farther to the north, where there was no more sidewalks, and these couples who went a little bit more, they were already suspicious. People talked about them because they left the sidewalk and went out to the north. Of course, it was that kind of city where people didn't have much to do and developed lots of talk. Gossip was a great part of entertainment. If you saw if somebody saw a girl with a boy once, they said, "Oh, they probably date." And if they went off the sidewalk to the north, they probably have kissed already. And so on and so on. You can imagine. That was the kind of life that people lived in those days, and that was entertainment.

SL: I want to ask you a little bit about the religious life that you had before the war. You mentioned that your family was orthodox.

LB: Yes.

SL: Did you attend synagogue on a regular basis?

LB: Not the kids, but my father went every Friday evening, every Saturday evening. If he could, he would go on a weekday, but most of the time he prayed at home because he didn't have time to go to spend time on the weekday, had to go to the store. My mother women didn't go to services much. My mother went only on high holidays.

SL: Did you keep the traditions in the home?

LB: Kosher, yes. Everything was kosher — two separate dishes — and celebrated every holiday and every semi-holiday, like Chanukah. And my mother cooked and baked the traditional dishes for the holidays.

For Purim there'd have to be hamentashen<sup>5</sup> and for Chanukah there'd have to be latkes<sup>6</sup> and for Yom

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<sup>5</sup>Three-cornered fruit cookies traditionally served at Purim, a spring holiday commemorating the deliverance of the Jews



Kippur meat kreplach<sup>7</sup> and for Shavuos milkische kreplach and so on. Yes, that was very traditional. In fact, you know, in those days there were very few people who did not keep kosher. Among the three thousand Jews that lived in Skalat, I doubt ever there were more than ten families who didn't keep kosher, and who and there were very few who would use a carriage on Saturday, who would drive on Saturday. There were very few cars. No Jew had a car before the war. There were some gentiles who had cars but very few also.

SL: Were any members of your family nonreligious?

LB: Nope. They were all religious, in fact, very religious. Even those like my father's first cousins. There was one in Ternopol who was widow and whose mother lived in Skalat.

So the younger generation did not wear beards but they all kept kosher homes and bought kosher meats. It was a very, very rare Jew in Poland — not only in Skalat, in Poland — who did not buy kosher meat.

SL: You mentioned that you'd attended a Hebrew school.

LB: Yes. I'll tell you about that Hebrew school. That means I started Hebrew school when I was five years old. I started it before I started public school. But the community Jewish community was so poor they could not keep a teacher all the time. So whenever they brought a teacher he would stay like one year and he'd leave because they didn't have money to pay him. A year later they brought another teacher, or two years later. So I had started at Hebrew school many times. Every time there was a teacher my parents never failed to send me. But I had to start from the beginning because every teacher who changed started a new class. So I know beginning of Hebrew school and every grammar rule until now. I remember every rule but I still cannot speak fluently because I never got that high. After when I was eighteen years old already, I bought myself a self-teaching book written by Ross I think his first name

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from a plot to murder them in Persia.

<sup>6</sup>Potato pancakes traditionally served at Chanukah.

<sup>7</sup>Dumplings.

was Mosses Ross I am not sure. And I studied it on my own because I still wanted to know and there was no opportunity to go to school. Once I started high school I couldn't go to school to Hebrew school because I didn't have the time. When I was in high school, I had to teach other children from my same class the same classroom so I get paid because tuition was very high and my parents my father couldn't afford to pay all that. So I couldn't go to Hebrew school that's why. You know, I was in Israel a few weeks ago and I took along a dictionary and I thought, oh, after all I know all the basic words, many basic words at least, not all, and I know the rules so somehow I'll be able to converse. No, I couldn't, because they speak fast. You don't have time to catch on. When you talk to people you cannot tell them, "Wait until I look up in the dictionary." So actually it didn't go long, but I did start Hebrew school many, many times. My brother, who never went to study at Hebrew school but studied the Talmud and everything and Mishnah and everything. He could speak Hebrew fluently. Of course, the Sephardic words he learned here, but he speaks it fluently.

SL: Was the secular school that you attended a Jewish or a mixed school?

LB: No. It was not run by the government, it was run by a private person, Polish person, and it was a secular school, but we did have religion, even in grade school. But religion was taught not by a rabbi but by a layman.

SL: So you had Jewish religion classes and then the gentiles had Christian religion?

LB: Yes, but we didn't have any Hebrew. Like in high school we had to have the history of Jews; in grade school we had stories from the Bible, starting with Adam and Eve and all. What's ever in the bible that we had. But in high school we had the whole history of Jews up to modern times.

SL: You moved to Ternopol to attend high school?

LB: I didn't move, I stayed with my aunt. My mother was from Ternopol, as I told you, and she had a sister there.

SL: But you were living there?

LB: I was living with my aunt's family, my aunt, yes.

SL: And how long did you go to school there?

LB: Five years in Ternopol, seven years — see, the system of schooling is together, but still in the end it still makes 12 years to finish high school. But the system was different. I went seven years to grade school, and then I had to pass a special exam to enter the fourth grade of high school, because high school actually had eight grades in those years. You could go four years to grade school and then go to high school and then you didn't have to have a special test, just enter first grade of high school. But, see, if you didn't have that high school in our city, so I went all seven years. High schools grade school in those years had seven grades not eight like here. So I went seven years and then my parents had to hire a teacher for me to prepare me for the test because there were some requirements, certain requirements that I didn't have in grade school. So I passed the entrance examination directly into fourth grade, and so the next five years I attended — in fact, I even had to break it up once. I don't know if it's of any interest to you. In the fifth grade — that means my second year in high school — the financial situation got very bad in my home and I had to go back. So when I had to start fifth grade I didn't go back to school. But since I was quite a good student — in fact, I must say I was a good student because I had all A's — the principal and the teachers decided to call me back. They told one of my girlfriends to write to me that if I come back I wouldn't have to pay the full tuition. In fourth grade so when I was in fourth grade I paid forty zlotys a month, which was about the equivalent of forty dollars in a year, which was an awful lot of money for not rich people. So when I started again fifth grade, I started on the first of February, missed the first five months, and I paid only ten zlotys a month instead of forty. And then the next year they raised always five dollars — five zlotys not five dollars I mean — so I had to pay. They raised me also five. Next year I paid fifty. But in the highest grade, eight, there were no what do you call they did not grant me allowances for that. Everybody had to pay the full tuition, because they knew nobody would drop out. Just one year from the end you will not drop out. So my father paid them back. Also, as I told you before, the teachers saw to it I had private students. From my own class, I always had

some from my own class, and always recommended by the teacher, and I had to pay sixty-five zlotys a month for the last year.

SL: You mentioned to me during the previous interview that you attended law school for a few years?

LB: Yes, two years, yes. That was you know after I graduated from high school, we had what you call a maturity test. You don't do it here. After you finish the eight years you had a whole week of tests, which was just killing. It was terrible. The students sat up night by night, sometimes in bed and sometimes at the table, because they questioned you, they examined you, on all the eight years of high school. I hope they don't have it anymore. It was just impossible. But those who had A's on the subject at the end of the eighth grade didn't have to go through all that, only part. It was divided. Do you know details about the test? It was hard a long story. I better skip it. I am sure they do not do it anymore. So then I went to Lvov. I suppose you heard about it. Before the First World War it was called Lemberg because it belonged to Austria and there I enrolled in law school. When I was in the second year of law school, the government came out with a new rule that everybody, after finishing law school, must work seven years in the office of a lawyer and that type of a person was a concipient(?). Then the lawyers didn't want to pay because they knew that person cannot open an office until he has the seven years. Actually, it was not seven. The first year it had to be done in the courthouse. That was a government job and that you did get a little pay. Not much. But the next six years was supposed to be done in the lawyer's office. So the lawyers got together and they decided they will not pay because they could get the help free because otherwise he or she will never be able to open an office. And this law was aimed only against minorities, against Jews and Ukrainians. Because the Poles who finished law school, they could become judges, which was not an elected office, or they could become notary public, which is completely different from American notary public. Notary public has an office and the private man like a lawyer. But there are certain things that must go — of course, I'm talking about those days, not now — that must go to a notary public's office. And his fees were high. And Jews couldn't get these jobs. Jews couldn't be appointed judges and couldn't be appointed notary public because those are appointed jobs. Jews and

Ukraines. So that's when, I would say, at least 70 percent of law school students dropped out and I dropped out.

SL: What year was that?

LB: I tell you, I graduated from high school in '31. In '32 I finished my second year and that was the end of 1932. I would say February or March '33.

SL: When you were in school, especially when you were growing up, were most of your friends Jewish?

LB: Yes, yes, definitely. The groups were very divided and in grade school, if we sometimes had non-Jewish friends, we had to bribe them so that they don't tell the boys to hit us. The girls and boys had separate schools in grade school, but it was in the same building. As I told you, Poland was poor and they didn't build schools. So it was a grade school probably a hundred years old. The first floor was for boys and upstairs was for girls. And if some girls didn't like some boys they would tell the boys, beat up this girl. So very often we had to bribe the gentile girls. So we were not close with them. And I'll tell you another example. When the war broke out when the Communists attacked Poland in 1919 as I told you before, we lived in a mostly non-Jewish neighborhood. There were some Jews, but not many. So when the war broke out, of course the kids started to play war. The girls were sisters, they called themselves, because every nurse was a sister in those days, they were Catholic nuns. So they put white scarves over the head and painted the red cross. And the boys were the soldiers. But the gentile boys were always the Poles and the Jewish boys had to play the Communists. They would never change it, and it was very appalling, it was not a very friendly relationship. In high school it was a little better, but close friendships — I would say, I wouldn't say never, but I cannot recall in our class of thirty girls a very close relationship between a Jewish and non-Jewish girl. Most of the time they stuck to their own.

SL: What type of cultural activities did you participate in when you were in school?

LB: Zionist organizations, only. There was no other social life.

SL: Which Zionist groups were there?

LB: In high school I belonged to a Zionist group called Herzliah. We had some college students in it and it was very strictly against the school law to belong to such an organization, but we still did. We were not supposed to join to Zionist organization. In fact, every Zionist organization, school or no school, was considered a political activity and had to register with the government. Like in Skalat, and that's most cities, we had many Zionist groups. You know Jews always are divided in many. Like when I was in Israel, now they said the parliament has fifteen parties for three million Jews. So it was in Skalat the same. There were many fractions. But every fraction had to have permission from the county government to exist, like I would say constitutional what do you call it for that organization that is not constitution you call it bylaws charter yes They had to have permission. I don't know what you would call it in English language, but they had to have that piece of paper that gave them existence the right to exist and to hold meetings. That was when we were in high school. Of course the organization probably — I do not recall — I'm sure they did take out that charter from the government, but they didn't report that high school kids belonged there. But we did.

SL: Did your parents belong to any political groups?

LB: No, but they always supported the Zionist causes. The younger kids who did belong, who were active. would always collect for [Keren Kayemeth](#),<sup>8</sup> [Keren Hayesod](#).<sup>9</sup> There were all kinds of Zionist causes that the kids went door to door. Of course, I did too when I was home. I was very seldom home, but when I was, I did. You went from door to door, or you stood on the street corners, which is not very much practiced here. Sometimes downtown they do it. We stood on the street corner with these boxes and people would put in money, or we went from door to door and then we wrote down how much somebody gave us and my parents never refused such a donation. Of course, some collections were just for the poor. There were all kinds of collections. There was a welfare organization, especially a

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<sup>8</sup>[Keren Kayemeth le-Israel](#), the Jewish National Fund, a fund of the World Zionist Organization to support the purchase and development of land in Palestine and Syria.

<sup>9</sup>The Palestine Foundation Fund, the financial arm of the World Zionist Organization, which was founded to support Jewish colonization of Palestine.

Frauenverein, which means organization of women. That was purely a charitable organization for the poor, but there were many Zionist organizations. It was a very active Jewish life. Like there was a cooperation gmiles khesed,<sup>10</sup> which is I would say what do you call now like a credit union. Only Jews belonged there. It was seen among 3,000 Jews, there were many activities. My parents didn't directly involve themselves. Like first of all, my father never had the time. You know, when you have a small store this is more than a full-time job. You open early in the morning; you close late in the evening. On Sunday when the store had to be closed. That was the law the store had to be closed, but then my father would go in the back door and had to mark his merchandise, sort it out. He was not allowed to sell, the store had to be closed, but there was enough to do to clean up and to sort out. So there was social and then the families are much closer. If you didn't belong to organizations, Sabbath, as a rule you had to visit your relatives or they came to you in the afternoon. In the morning, you had services and had the big meal at noon, and afternoon usually was for visiting. Wintertime you take a nap in the afternoon. Not the kids, but their parents. My mother never took a nap. My father liked to take a nap Saturday afternoon.

SL: Could you tell me about incidents of anti-Semitism that you recall before the war started?

LB: Yes, of course. You know, like, you lived in that small city, the closest city to go to was Ternopol, which was thirty-two kilometers away, and some people couldn't afford the trip. If you had to, like my father had to go on business, usually once a week to Ternopol, the last few years were quite bad financially and many Jews would rent a wagon with horses and they would go on business. But when they would pass the villages, especially on the way back, sometimes like fall and winter it was already dark, the gentile kids would throw stones at them. It happened very often. In schools, the girls didn't fight, but in boys' schools there were awful fights. The gentile boys would attack the Jewish children and in places where kids would play football there would be some attacks. And besides some of those was a little hidden, but in 1929. I told you 1939 the Russians came, and know that, it was very, very sudden.

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<sup>10</sup> Yiddish for an 'interest-free loan'.

Because we thought any day the Germans would come, and we expected the Germans from the west. So for a day or two there was no government. We knew the Russians are coming in, but there was no government. But at that time it was quiet. But the worst part was, in 1941 the Russians left and there were about two, three days without government, there was a period without government, and we knew that the Germans are coming, and, of course, the Jews are terribly nervous and very afraid. But that was the time when many gentiles spoke up, "Oh wait. Now you'll see, you'll get it." There was many, many threats like that at that time.

SL: Can I interrupt you because I need to turn the tape.

**END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2**



## TAPE 2, SIDE 1

SL: I'd like to ask you about your own identity and how you saw yourself when you were younger. Did you identify yourself as strictly as a Jew or did you have any Polish ties at all? How did you feel about your identity?

LB: I often thought... I thought about myself as purely Jewish, but my education was mostly non-Jewish, though I studied Jewish history. But our teacher in high school didn't care much if you really learned or not. He was that kind of teacher of religion. So, I thought of myself as a Jewish person with a non-Jewish education. But I never for a moment could forget that I'm Jewish, that was first of all; and not only I but all my friends and all the Jews that I knew. Nobody ever thought of himself or herself as another person: It was strictly Jewish. I understand why you are asking this question. Because in this country it is different, there are many people who are Americans first and Jews later. But in a country where the Jew was looked down at, everybody considered Jew, the Jew first. In fact, like there were many people who dreamt of going to Palestine, which was very hard to do, because you had to have a special permission. England was the power in Palestine, what they called it in that time, and you had to get it — have a special permission, I even forgot...it was a very popular name but I forgot the name of the paper that you had to get, and that permission had a special name, and very few got it. But, the list of candidates was endless and everybody wanted to go. Of course, my parents never for a moment let me even talk about it, because they always hoped that with my — I wouldn't say Polish — my secular education, I might be able to find a job in Poland. But very few did. Even with a good secular education there were very few... especially girls... even for boys it was very hard to get a job. But for a girl it was near to impossible to get a decent job. There were some Jewish schools that hired Jewish teachers, but a Jew couldn't study. When he went to college, the only... for instance, when I started college the only place where they accepted Jews without any limitation was law and the department of philosophy, which is like now liberal arts college. But there were no jobs in these fields. Any other fields was either closed completely, it was numerous clauses, which was made limited, and official act of reduced number,

which was closed completely. So those Jewish people were students, who had money, would go to France, to Czechoslovakia, some to Vienna, Berlin. They went to different countries to get their education and those who couldn't afford to go leave the country, had to go either to law school or that liberal arts college and that was it. There were no jobs, so you couldn't. They wouldn't let you even if you wanted to forget that you are Jewish, the system didn't let you do it.

SL: What languages did you speak when you were growing up?

LB: My parents spoke Yiddish to each other. My mother spoke Polish to me, especially when I... I would say since I was small. And then we had always maids, I told you, until the younger brother was three years old, so that's why we just used the maids. Some of them spoke Polish and some of them spoke Ukrainian, which is quite alike to one another. So that's why...actually, the Polish language was always much closer to me, and much easier to me to speak than Yiddish, even after the War.

SL: So you spoke Polish with your parents?

LB: With my mother. To my father, I always spoke Yiddish.

SL: And what about amongst you and your brothers?

LB: The brothers spoke more Yiddish, because they went to *cheder*. But since I did not go to *cheder* and I was so much away from home. So I was more...and with my friends I always spoke Polish.

SL: With your Jewish friends?

LB: Always Polish, never spoke Yiddish. That's why I actually grew up with the Polish language.

SL: I want to ask you now about the changing political situation in Europe. Were you aware, after Hitler came in to power, that the situation for Jews was worsening?

LB: When Hitler came to power in 1933 we never expected that he would go...come to Poland! But the Jewish students, at that time I was still a student in college, and we organized all kinds of boycotts of German merchandise. We went from store to store and when they offered, for instance Kodak was at that time a purely German product, I don't know what it is now...

SL: What product?

LB: Kodak! With the photos —

SL: Oh, Kodak.

LB: Kodak, yes. So we would go into a store and ask what to pay for a photo or what do you call it apparatus?

SL: Film?

LB: Film or camera. And if they offered us Kodak, we'd say, "No, we don't buy that merchandise." And other German products like that; there were many German products. But we never thought it would come to us.

SL: But, as far as the situation about the Jews in Germany, were you able to get to know that that was happening?

LB: I'll tell you why we weren't able — because Hitler expelled all the German...all the Jews who had been born in Poland and were still Polish. Just like, I suppose you saw in that movie Holocaust, where that Doctor Weiss had to go back to Warsaw. So next, all these Polish people, they didn't have a place to go. You just put them on the Polish border... I don't know if you heard about that. And we would collect money and send them. Because, they used to say, they were left...they need... they were left without...they had to leave, leaving everything behind. So we knew that and little by little, these Jews came to Poland and they settled. I don't remember how it was done. I don't believe that the government helped but maybe the Jews, Polish Jews did help and they all came to Poland. Of course we knew everything at that time but the things that we probably did not know is maybe, about the concentration camps, because I understand that Dachau was opened soon after Hitler came to power. The world claims now that they didn't know about it and I do not recall ever hearing about it. In fact, when Hitler was coming to us, we knew already that Hitler was coming in 1941. Many peoples said, "Let's run eastward" with it were like, the Russians, because we had Russian occupation. The Russians would say, "We will take anybody," If you worked in Russians, if you worked in a Russian office. My director, I worked in a bank, and my director said, "I'll take you and your family." He didn't say that only to me, to

everybody, but without luggage or with almost no luggage because there was no room for it. When I told my father, “let’s leave and see the director is willing to take us, let’s go.” And my father would say, “How can we leave our home that we established for so many years and everything and run? Who knows to what we are running?” Because see, they say, “after all, nobody kills people. You probably will be hungry, there will be persecutions, there will be suffering.” But nobody ever thought of being killed. So that’s why... the night... when Hitler came to power, we imagined everything bad, but not killed.

SL: How were you able to receive the news? By what method?

LB: We didn’t receive the news until they actually happened to us.

SL: You didn’t know anything at all?

LB: About the killings.

SL: Well not, not the killings, but Kristallnacht and the persecution in Germany?

LB: Crystal Night we didn’t know, because Crystal Night happened in ’38 and no Jews came over to Poland after...at that time anymore, probably didn’t hear it until after the war.

SL: So you weren’t getting any newspaper reporting or —

LB: In Poland, I told you; it was an Anti-Semitic country. It’s ingrained in the East European gentiles, to be Anti-Semites. But, it got much more when Hitler came to power later. Much much strength and there was an Anti-Semitic political party in the Polish *Sejm*, which is an equivalent of the House of Representatives here. And they called them, [*Endeks* ? 9:53] they were very Anti-Semitic they were a political party, right wing, Anti-Semite. But they became much more Anti-Semitic after Hitler came to power. So, but still, the details — what was going in Germany — I don’t think anybody knew. Because if America had known it, we would have known it too, ‘cause we had Jewish papers. But I do not recall knowing anything. Actually, we knew the details; we started to learn the details, when they marched into us in July 5, I think it was, 1941.

SL: Do you remember if they gave any indication in the last year before the war, that Poland was going to be attacked? Did you expect that that was going to happen?

LB: The talked about it only about two weeks before the war. They didn't...the government just didn't want people to know, probably. It was only a few weeks; I don't remember exactly if it was two weeks or four weeks but it was almost sudden for us.

SL: What do you remember about September 1, 1939?

LB: I remember, yes. I remember it very well. Because I remember, it was a beautiful sunny day, like a summer day. It was summer, after all. And I, used to...I knew a Polish family at that time. They both were teachers and he was...he had been called, he was called, to go in the army. And she cried and he said to her, "How can you cry? I'm going to defend the Fatherland." But the population was so shocked. I know my personal impression was: the world is so big; there are millions of people. Why does it have to come just here where I live? On such a day, you think only about yourself and your family. And that "I", which is spelled big in English, with a capital "I" becomes much bigger for you. Because you think nobody else exists, only you and your family. The only thought was why does it have to come here? I think that was...I just couldn't...I tried to imagine how does it look when a bomb falls on the city? How does it look when a person gets killed by a shrapnel, by a piece of, by a small piece only, of metal? I tried to imagine this but I never could. I never could until the War. Really, in fact, I never did. And I never did realize how that — even now when I still read about war — I cannot imagine how this comes about. How can somebody throw a bomb when he...of course, I don't think this was planes at that time. We knew the planes were coming, yes and we heard them already. But I couldn't understand how that somebody shoot when he knows it will somewhere, farther, even if you don't see it, kill a group of people or only one person. All these things come to you when you are close to them. When you sit here and read there's a War going on in Iraq, Iran or the Middle East you don't think about details. But you know it's coming very close to you, then you start to think about it.

SL: I think I forgot to really establish what you were doing in Skalat after you dropped out law school. Do you have a few years you were living in town?

LB: Yes, when I fell out of law school, I stayed and worked and I took a course of sewing. Sewing, cutting, making these...what do you call it? Form, what do you call these, no patterns, patterns and sewing, and it was a short course, three or six months; private school where I had to pay something. And then I worked in a few good shops and worked. And I would say, oh, a few weeks before the War broke out...or it would be a year before the War broke out I came back to Skalat and opened my own shop. And that went...and I had my shop when I heard these two teachers, husband and wife, talk about it. I had rented the room from her parents. She lived...she also had, the couple had one room in the house across the hall they lived and then on the other side of the hall, I had my sewing establishment and I did sew for people.

SL: Were you living along with your family at that time?

LB: I did but as long as I didn't...no, then I — in the beginning I did, but when I opened the shop, I had my...I lived there. It was not far from our, my parents. Maybe just a five-minute walk or ten-minute walk.

SL: You had mentioned before that you expected that the Germans were going to enter Skalat, what was your feeling then when the Russians who occupied the city?

LB: Oh, the Jews were very glad. We didn't know anything about the Russians but we knew they're not Nazis, they're not Hitlerites.

SL: It took you by surprise that the Russians came?

LB: Terribly by surprise. Because on Saturday afternoon, September 16, we took a group of refugees who kept on walking from Poland. Many of them walked... most of them walked because there were no horses, no cars. Everything the Germans had taken away. If they had horses and they used them a long time, they had to leave them behind. The horse had to rest and the people didn't. I don't know how it was. Most refugees walked from Poland. And our city was flooded with refugees: Jews and Poles. So Saturday afternoon the city was so crowded that a group of us young people took a group of these refugees to a nearby village, I would say about two kilometers away maybe only a kilometer perhaps, because the villages were not that crowded with refugees yet. I remember it was a beautiful Saturday

afternoon, and the sky was so red. There was a beautiful sunset. When we came back home, it was already dark. And we thought [that] any day Germans will come in, because these refugees kept on telling us that the German Nazis are already on their heels. And these refugees hoped [that] in the morning they'll get up. And they all wanted to go to Romania, which was not far. If you went straight eastward you'd go to Russia. Well, you couldn't, because Russians never let anybody in. But it was a very small border between Poland and Romania, directly to the south of us, and they hoped to get there. And Sunday morning we get up and the Russians walk in from the east. Everybody was surprised. Nobody heard anything. They didn't have to spend one bullet, nothing. There was no government in the city. The Poles had all left. Most of the men were in the army. And those who stayed, who were still like the military or the administration, fled because they were afraid of the Germans. Nobody knew anything about the Russians, but they were afraid of the Germans. So there was no use to shoot. But we didn't know at that time that Stalin and Hitler had their secret agreement to divide Poland.

SL: When did you find that out?

LB: The Russians never published it, but there were rumors that went from mouth to mouth. The real truth we didn't find out [until] after the war — where the agreement was made and what. These details we found after the war. But somehow, I don't know, there are always rumors. And judging by that how quietly the Russians walked in, they kept going and going as far as [Pshedmestse?] and never had to use their arms. So people believed that there was... in fact, in one place they said, around [Drovno?], that the Germans had gone too far and had to move back. Because probably those who were doing it didn't know exactly where the dividing line is. So they said in some places even the Germans had to move back. So you believed then that there was a secret agreement.

SL: So you were, I would assume, more pleased to see the Russians there.

LB: For sure. Jews definitely were more pleased. Oh and how.

SL: What was the reaction of the non-Jewish population to the Russians?

LB: I don't think they even cared because they hated both of them. They just didn't care. The Ukrainians were maybe happier with the Russians. See, the nationalist Ukrainians hated the Russians, too, because the nationalists were not Communists. They always dreamt of an independent Ukraine. So the Ukrainians and Poles just didn't care.

SL: So there was no indication then that you were in a life-threatening situation with the Russians?

LB: Not in 1939 when the Russians came in, no. People didn't like the Russians, especially the richer people because the Russians had a very bad name. The Communists had a very bad name in Poland. After all, everybody knew about Stalin's terror. And people were afraid of that, but they were not afraid as much as of the Germans, because, after all, we knew we didn't know the Germans were killing. In fact I don't think there were official killings before that time in Germany. Also, whatever they did in the concentration camps nobody knew. And official killings like they did started with us pogroms<sup>11</sup> and all of that, that was not going on in '41 probably. And we didn't know even what was going on in Warsaw, which was not far from us but it was under German occupation. I read later what was going on in the ghetto and all that. But we didn't know [at the time].

SL: Could you describe your life to me in Skalat under the Russians, I'm going to ask you a few questions about what types of things you were doing. First of all you had mentioned to me that you got a job with the Russians?

LB: Yes.

SL: What kind of work were you doing?

LB: I was an inspector in a bank. That means I had to go to all the establishments. Of course, all every establishment, every business under the Russians is a government business. I had to check their credits. I was a credit inspector they called it. For instance, if they wanted to borrow money from the bank, I had to go and check if they deserved the credit. So I had to travel because the bank served three counties. Besides Skalat were two more, Skalat was actually a county. Skalat under Poland was

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<sup>11</sup>Organized, often officially sanctioned massacres or persecutions of Jews in Eastern Europe.



one county. The Russians divided it in three. So I had to go to two other cities and very often to villages to check what merchandise they had, how they keep it up, if it's in good condition. Because under the Russians, there were shortages of everything. If they brought a wagon of salt and they didn't have where to put it they'll just put it outside, and the snow will fall on it and the sand and all that. So that was my job.

SL: Did they pay you for that?

LB: Of course. According to their payments, I had a wonderful job. But, most of the stuff we had to buy on the black market.

SL: Because you couldn't afford to buy the...?

LB: There was nothing. The stores were empty. That's why you couldn't buy anything in the stores. In the stores they had bread and flour for which you had to stand in line always. But shoes was impossible to buy. Of course, we still had clothes from before, especially those who were businessmen. I'll tell you how we lived. A businessman would hide his merchandise somewhere, and then when he needed a pair of shoes or cloth for a suit, he'd go to one who was a businessman before and had his merchandise hidden somewhere in a attic or in a neighbor's house and they would exchange it, because the money wasn't worthy anything. I forgot to tell you that Russians don't have private business. Nobody was allowed to have a store. Everything was national. They didn't officially nationalize it when they came, and we had to sell out everything. Imagine those lines outside the stores, but every merchant understood that he had to hide part of it, because when he got that Russian paper money, he couldn't buy anything for it. If he hadn't hidden part of our merchandise we would have starved for the rest of the time. So every merchant had to hide something, and so did the farmers.

SL: Was there no more weekly market then as it had been under the Poles?

LB: No, just farm products. The farmers were allowed to bring out their products and sell it for any price, yes, but not the consumer goods made by factories. No, that was strictly forbidden.

SL: Did you remain in your apartment?

LB: That was our own house. If you had an apartment house, it wasn't yours anymore, and if you had more than one home, they would take away from you.

SL: So what happened in your parents' apartment? Did you move back in with them?

LB: Oh yes I gave up my [tailor] shop anyway. I had to give it up. Yes, I gave it up and I moved back to my parents and I took that office job because if you were a private — like you worked on your own — it was almost impossible. The taxes were so high. They wanted to — not they wanted, they did — organize all those craft people into what they call [artel?]. It is like a commune. You work together, you share your income together, and I didn't want to do it. After all, I knew with my education... In Poland I couldn't do anything else with my education, I had to do something, work with my hands. But I figured here I didn't know that for their money you can't get anything anyway. I figured if I can get an office job and it was only the third job from the top. Above me I only had the director and they had inspector. There were two jobs on my level, I had another one. So I was the third from top and I had almost top wages, so why should I keep on sewing and share wages with somebody? That was silly. No, that I didn't want to do.

SL: How did the Russians treat the Jews? Did they treat them as the rest of the public?

LB: In those days you didn't see much anti-Semitism. In fact, I talked to many people here and they couldn't believe me. No, I cannot say there was anti-Semitism in those days. Though it was under Stalin, terror was terrible, you were afraid to talk loud. You know, people whispered at home. In fact, you might be interested in that episode. I had a cousin in Russia. My father had a sister who married a Russian Jew before 1940, before the war broke out, and then she died. She had typhus and she died, and she left a husband and two children. When the Russians came into us, the first day, September 17, 1939, a young man walked up that Corso and keeps on asking, "Where does Wolf Rothstein live?" and everybody thought [he was] some man from Mars. "What's this? A Russian soldier?" We never had contact with Russia. Even mail was barely existing. So that was my father's nephew, my first cousin, and he even told us [that] he was afraid to talk — my father's nephew. When my father asked him questions, "Is it true

that people are so poor there that people don't have anything to eat, that people don't have anything to wear," he would never say anything. The only thing he said was nobody's naked. But he had a lot of paper money. We found out later that paper money was not worth anything in Russia, you couldn't buy anything there. So my father helped him to spend his money here. He bought a lot of stuff and sent it to his father, stepmother, and brother and stepsister that he left behind.

SL: Did you ever see him after that initial contact?

LB: We saw him many times. Every time he was close. In fact he bought two motorcycles that he kept in our house. We had to keep it in the room because there was no place to room. But when the war broke out with the Germans, they took away the motorcycles right away, so he wasn't there.

SL: Did you ever see him again after the outbreak of the war?

LB: Yes, he came back when we had the Russians the second time. I saw him once only. He did survive the war.

SL: Is he now in Russia?

LB: Yes.

SL: Is there any contact?

LB: No. He would be a traitor I suppose. No, there's no... I don't even know where he lives.

SL: I'm going to have to turn the tape over

**END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1**

**TAPE 2, SIDE 2**

SL: We were discussing the way you were living under the Russian occupation, again were you able to receive any news about the progression of the war?

LB: Nothing. Russian papers didn't print, publish anything. You never knew what's going on in the outside world. That papers are... maybe now I understand they print a little more, but in those days, especially during the war, we knew just nothing. See, that's what I'm telling you. We were afraid to ask. We were afraid to talk. People who had jobs had to write their autobiography. I would say during the less than two years that I was with them, I must have written maybe a hundred times autobiography. In the beginning we wrote once. We wrote and we thought that's it. Finally we found out that we had to keep a copy.

SL: Are you talking like about a resume type of thing?

LB: Yes, of your life. And they always asked you if you have relatives in America. God forbid if you said yes! See, my mother had two brothers here but they never dared to say it.

SL: Why wouldn't you want to say that you do. What would happen?

LB: Because then you are a bourgeois, you are an enemy of the land, an enemy of the government. Not even if you only have relatives there, you shouldn't have any contacts with America, not even have relatives there. Even if you have relatives and don't write to them, that's no good. So the best is to say no. My brother or I never confessed that we had relatives in America, and so did other people. Always was no. Relatives in other countries, it was always no. They gave you ready questions, they asked you ready questions, and they ask you to write your biography. Then they have constant meetings where they trained the people in the Communist ideologies. And all you had to do when you mentioned the word "Stalin" for instance, you had to clap. Then there were special agents, like detectives. It wasn't officially detectives. What are called the secret police. But not uniformed. They would always watch if you. Those who didn't clap, you were in trouble the next day. That's what, it was just terrible. Everything was arranged. Every meeting was arranged, every move was arranged. I understand that it's not that bad now, but under Stalin, every, all your life was arranged. Whatever you did you had to do with the

permission of the government. If you did it a little different that they wanted to, you were in trouble. But otherwise, but you were trouble if you are a Jew or a non-Jew. What is the worse part what the Russians did to the local people, was they would take many to Siberia. First of all, those military men who disappeared or were gone or were killed or were in London, nobody knew where they were. Their families were taken to Siberia, and never daytime, always at midnight. They would go to a village and tell the head of the village, "We need," let's see, "twenty wagons with horses or fifty wagons for tonight." And he was under strict discretion. If he had told anybody beforehand, he would have been taken to Siberia. So only those who were notified that they have to come, could know that they will come. They would come to a family at midnight and allow them to pack a bundle or a suitcase, even with small children, women with small children, and would take them to Siberia. Also people who had employed more than five workers. If you had a little business like my sister-in-law who is now in Milwaukee, Joe's wife, her father had a factory of bricks, don't know what they call it. They employed more than five people. The whole family was taken to Siberia: father, mother and three children. Her father died there. That was the Russian system. Terrible, oh, all the way from day to night. But the terror was just the same for Jews and non-Jews.

SL: Did they allow you to continue your religious practices?

LB: Yes, they did. But you know when they came into us in 1939, there was no Sunday. Every tenth day was off. I suppose you never heard of that. You had off every tenth day. Of course, the Christians rebelled terribly because the Christian population in that part of Poland was very, very religious. Those people rebelled that they have to go to work on Sundays. So after about half a year or so they changed it and they gave us Sunday off. But that was not only for us, you understand. That was all over Russia. I understand that when they changed, they didn't change it only for the occupied land but for all of Russia. They made another change also when they came into us the officers with the higher ranks didn't wear any insignia on their uniforms, but they adapted the American system and gave them insignias.

That's what I heard also. Those are the two changes that I remember. But that off on every tenth day, that was just terrible for the local population.

SL: What happened in June of 1941, when the Germans attacked? You mentioned of course that there were those...Could you describe to me just about that entire time period?

LB: You see, when the Germans attacked, of course the Jews were all in uproar, because we heard right away a day or two after that they were almost at Warsaw. So we knew that Poland is so defenseless that they surely would come to us. It's just hard to describe what was going on. Jews milled around from morning to evening. It barely was day outside, there were already people standing on the corners and talking and talking, "Where are the Germans? Where is the front line?" What could you do but talk and be scared? We were all very helpless and you couldn't do anything. But as I told you, some tried to flee with the Russians. Many did; many never came back, because I heard from those who did come back that journey was terrible, just terrible, so tiresome after you had to walk on foot. There was no food, and you know very well that the Germans got very deep into Russia, so how far could these people walk? Most of the time they were caught before they reached the... they were caught by the Germans. And then, you know, when the Germans came to us, they took four hundred people in Skalat the first day, including my father. But then little by little it started to spread out. First they took people to camps, and then when you were not a stranger you could organize some food, you could organize some hiding places. But these people who left with the Russians, they were in strange cities and strange places and strange villages, so of course most of them did not survive.

SL: How soon after the beginning of the war did the Germans get into Skalat?

LB: The war started June 22 and they came to us on a Saturday. I'm almost sure it was the fourth of July, it was Friday night, later about midnight.

SL: So it was fairly soon?

LB: It didn't take long because I understand that after Warsaw there was no opposition for them. In fact, wait a moment, they came to us even before they took Warsaw completely. You see, we were in the southern

part of Poland, so while Warsaw was still fighting the Germans, we had them already, because there was no opposition here. There was no army, nobody to fight them.

SL: You said the immediate repercussion of the invasion was the extermination of four hundred people that first day. How did they do that?

LB: They came in the middle of the night, Friday to Saturday. In the morning my father got up, and he put on his Sabbath clothes. He wants to go to synagogue. In order to go to synagogue, he has to cross through the whole marketplace. And we had gentile friend. He was a customer of ours. He used to buy a lot in the store. He was a shoemaker, and he used to buy a lot of leather. And he was a very nice man, real premium. And early in the morning he knocked on the door and said to my father, "Don't dare to go anywhere." My father and my brother, Milo — Joe was at that time in the Russian army — they were going to go to services. And he told us the story. He said the Germans came in the middle of the night, and this morning they killed already a few Jews in the city. Among them [was] a boy who was eighteen years old [who] had just graduated from high school, from the Hebrew high school in Lvov. And [he] was the only son of a widowed mother, a very good-looking young boy. So he said, "Stay home and hide, because they are running from house to house and taking Jews to work." No he didn't say hide, he didn't know that, I'm sorry, that came later. I don't know, I don't remember, maybe he did say hide. So my father and brother took off their Sabbath clothes and we put them in the basement. That basement had a trap door from the hall, and we closed the door. What else could we do? Mother and I were upstairs, were in the house. And then the German soldiers started to come in with young Ukrainian boys, because the Germans didn't know where the Jews lived. The two — don't forget that they don't speak the same language, the Germans and the Ukrainians. The Ukrainian knew only the word Jud, so they showed them with a finger where a Jud lived. And, of course, they broke into our house. And there were no men. They didn't ask questions. They just opened the basement and hauled out the two men. And the shoemaker came and told us that they take men to work. So my father and brother put on strong clothes. And we also heard about concentration camps. So [they] thought maybe they [might]

take them into concentration camps. So they put on good, strong clothes. My brother, I remember, wore riding pants and good, new riding boots and a new shirt and a suit coat. And my father was dressed about like that, too. And my father didn't wear riding boots, but good clothes. And that was in the morning, Saturday morning. In the afternoon they were not back, and we talked to all the neighbors. They had taken all the men from them and nobody was home, so women started to run around the marketplace and look for the men. And, of course, there were already all kinds of rumors that many Jews were killed. And some are working hard. Oh, about four o'clock in the afternoon, my brother came back in his pants and barefoot. So what happened? Where is father? "I don't know," he said. "Right away they separated us." My brother worked washing cars and trucks, so the Germans took off all his clothes, left him only his pants. They said a Jew didn't need such good clothes, and then one German told him he may go home, sent him home. But he said not everybody was sent home. That was Saturday. My father didn't come back. Sunday morning, we heard that there were bodies in the basement of one of these towers. I told you there were four towers in all. And one young boy came out and told the story. They put in a few hundred men — statistics later showed it was four hundred — they pushed all these men inside and threw a few hand grenades. And that boy was not... he came out in the morning. Nothing hit him. He just lay about among those dead bodies the whole night. He was afraid to move. In the morning, when day broke, he saw it was quiet, so he crawled out. [He was], of course, all bloody, but he wasn't even injured, and he told how it happened. That boy is still alive in New York, he lives in New York. At that time my father didn't come back, but they started to bring every day. The Germans would catch a group of Jewish men to dig graves and bury those, and at the end of the day they shot these. Next morning they... that was going on for a few weeks until finally they formed a Judenrat,<sup>12</sup> the Germans.

SL: I think I was going to ask you, because we had talked briefly in the pre-interview you told me that there was a ghetto but that wasn't really formed until 1942.

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<sup>12</sup>German for 'Jewish Council'.



LB: The informal ghetto wasn't under Poland. That was something else. We never called it a ghetto at that time. We are still in July '41.

SL: Go on.

LB: After a few weeks the Germans said there must be a Judenrat, which is a Jewish council. Rat is a word for council in German. They established, appointed one man — I don't know if he volunteered or appointed him — they called the Altester. That means the oldest Jew. With him there were about twelve other men and they started to organize, so that people would go to work without being killed at the end of the day. The Polish city, which was before under the Polish government, was now under Ukrainian government because the Germans promised them after the war they'd establish an independent Ukrainian country. So the city hall was all Ukrainian. The first few weeks they were supposed to send Jews to work. The Jews had to come everyday to the market place and they would pick people. That group will go to wash the courthouse. And that group would go to farms to work in the fields. It was summer — all kinds of jobs were divided. Men still tried to hide as much as they could. Then I had to work. Everybody had to work, most of the time in the fields. In fall it was potato digging. But then they decided they wanted a Jewish Arbeitsamt.<sup>13</sup> The Jews themselves had to send people to work. I don't know if you are acquainted with that, but the German method was that the Jews should exterminate themselves, and they would only oversee it. So the Jews had to send people to work. There were all kinds of jobs, but the worst ones in those days was work in their quarry. It was very hard work. First of all, it was far, and when people worked so long, many of them were already hungry. There was no food. Those who had something hidden could still exchange, as I told you before. But there were many people who lived just from day to day. Didn't have any savings. If you had savings, in money, it wasn't worth anything. But if you didn't have anything to sell, like either merchandise or your own clothes, people soon started to sell out their own clothes either to Gentiles or... There was even black market, went to other cities, you never know. Many of the Gentiles turned to the black market dealing

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<sup>13</sup>German for 'work office'.

and would travel to Ternopol, to Lwow, selling these things. So, jobs. It became, a time, they said, "If you have a job, you are safe." Nobody talked anymore about killing. There were, killings was out. Of course if a German met a Jew on the street and wanted to kill him, nobody could say no. That was not a crime. But most of the time they would just hit Jews. So now I'll tell you what kind of jobs they had. For instance, washing bottles, collecting rags, sorting rags. That was for winter. Summertime was a lot on the farms. Of course, the farmers didn't pay. We didn't know at that time, but of what I read from the literature now, they had to pay something to the SS, because officially the Jews belonged to the SS, were slaves of the SS. The SS got a few marks for every Jew per day. Some farmers, when you worked on the farm would allow you to take a cucumber or carrot. Some did not. Depended a lot on the farmer. In the fall there was a lot of potato diggings in the fields. But you didn't get any. You are glad that they didn't kill you or they didn't hit you. The farmers usually didn't hit, but when you worked under German supervision, that was different.

SL: Now were you living at this time?

LB: In the same house. In my grandparent's house. My grandmother died before the war.

SL: So it was you and your mother, and you said that one brother was with the Russian army?

LB: That one who's now in Milwaukee. He was taken to the Russian army in May 1941, just six weeks before the war broke out.

SL: What about the youngest brother?

LB: He was with us.

LB: Was doing forced work?

LB: You know, he was somehow lucky. In the beginning he worked like digging potatoes and things like that, but then I told you we had a store with leather, and my father opened a separate department for the boys with things that shoemakers use besides leather. Shoemakers use all kinds of things. I don't even remember what it is. Then both boys learned how to cut the upper parts for shoe, the soft leather, to sew it. My father bought the machine, first my older brother learned that, and then my younger brother

learned that, just the upper parts, and we sold that in the store. Just for us they worked. So during the war, this thing became very handy because my brother, when he did this for a farmer, you would get paid with a chicken or a few eggs, even during the Russian time. The younger brother. The older had to have an official job because he was already old enough. But the younger, when the Russians came in 1939, he was only thirteen years old, no sixteen years old, so he didn't have to have an official job. But he did that at home so he could earn something. When the Germans came in, the Judenrat gave him the same job for the Germans. The Germans were very, very hungry for leather goods. They constantly ordered shoes and boots. So my brother did. There was another one in the city. The other was a grownup man, older, but these two provided the Germans with their soft leather uppers. The Judenrat of course didn't pay us for it, but at least he didn't have to go to all these heavy jobs. Then those people who worked on the quarry complained terribly to the Judenrat that they didn't have shoes. They worked on stones, in stones, and they walked about two kilometers one way, two kilometers back way. The Judenrat had to provide them with shoes. So what they did is they bought a lot of wood soles, that is one piece sole and heel, and they used old uppers, and they nailed them on. So they needed some shoemakers to do it. So my mother and my brother went to the Judenrat and said, "Listen, I'll give you the room. Make it in my house. I'll give you my front room. Make an official shoemaker establishment there." They wouldn't work for anybody else, just for the quarry workers. And they did it. My brother was the head of it, like the director. Of course he was the youngest, but most of these people hardly knew how to write and read. So that was my brother's luck. He was the youngest and he was the head of it. So he never went, not one day, to the quarry.

SL: Did you at that time have to do any of this heavy labor?

LB: No, then I didn't work anymore. Only once I went when they called my brother. That was before he had that shoemaker establishment. Everybody was supposed to go to build railroad tracks. The Germans had to lay new railroad tracks because the Russian had narrow ones and we said, "Why don't they have to change?" And they kept on building new ones so that their arms could go to the front way. So when

he was called, I sometimes went, because when a man went to work they beat him. They didn't beat the women. So I went a couple of times instead of him. I think they even called my mother once and I went for her, too. At least once or twice they called my mother. So I went. But that was before it was made more orderly. Once they established that order with the shoemakers department I would say we were quite lucky compared to others. After we lost our father, the rest was not as bad as other people because other people had constantly trouble with going to these either concentration camps or the quarry, which was almost like a concentration camp. And with us, they didn't bother me much, no. I went a few times. That was very hard work, building that railroad. But at least it was much easier for me than for a boy. So I let him stay home a few times. But then once they established this, he didn't have to go any other place.

SL: When did it finally happen that the Jews were ghettoized?

LB: The first winter wasn't so bad. Hunger, there was a lot of hunger in the city. We can't complain. We didn't suffer from hunger and we had to give a lot. People begged a lot, even non-Jews. There was a flood not far from us and many non-Jews begged from non-Jews. The ghetto was established next summer, 1942. Before they had the ghetto, they had the big action. Have you ever heard of action? An order came from the Germans from Ternopol where the headquarters of the SS were. They told them they want four hundred Jews. Nobody knew, the city didn't know anything, but the Judenrat probably knew what for, and they tried to bargain with the Germans. So the Germans told them, "If you don't give us four hundred, we'll take ourselves, and we'll take whoever we want to." So the Judenrat had many sessions. I understand there was a lot of quarreling, a lot of decision-making, because some of the Judenrat people said, "Let's pick the poor, the old, the deaf, the sick and give them so that they let the others live." Some people said, "No, we Jews cannot be the judges. Let them take what they want." Finally that party won who said, "We should give them." So the Jews themselves collected some people, I don't know how many. First they put them in shul, mostly elderly and sick, and then when the Germans came an hour or two hours later they said, "There is no four hundred. We want four hundred."

They didn't count them. They just opened the door and said, "No four hundred." They started to run around in the neighborhoods, just around the synagogue because people were gathered in the synagogue, and they pulled out many young people. I'm sure after that they had over four hundred. These people were taken by trucks to Ternopol and from trucks, they said later it was Belgrade. So that was what they called the small action. Also about four hundred. Four hundred were killed first the year earlier, and that was four hundred more. After that small action they said, "All the Jews from the neighboring cities and villages have to move to Skalat and that will be a ghetto." So the ghetto was established the first of September or the first of October or 15 of October. Beginning of fall in 1942, they established a ghetto.

**END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 2**

### TAPE 3, SIDE 1

SL: You were just beginning to talk about the establishment of the ghetto and you can keep on going with that.

LB: Yes. So originally Skalat had three thousand people, and then when the people came in from... there were two cities around, Podvolochisk and [Dzjema?], where there were many Jews, not as many as in Skalat. And there were, also, some Jews in some villages. Not many in one village, but almost every village had a few Jewish families, and all these people came in. We had, I don't know exactly how much we had again at that time. Of course, nobody counted us, there were no statistics, no exact totals. Everything is approximately. But it got so tight that in every house and every room there were from eight to fifteen people sleeping in one room. And the Germans had established borders. So, it's not only from other villages people had to move in, but also from other streets, from other parts of the city. So, of course, we had to take in people, too. And we took in two families from Podvolochisk, another city. There was one couple with three children. Not small children; they were teenagers or close to teenage age. There was a sister and a brother. That's already five and the two of us was seven. There were about eleven or twelve people, I just don't remember exactly. Who else was there? There were more people, but they stayed only a few days, so that's why it's so hard to remember. Most people did not move from the other places until close to the deadline. Everybody from other cities, they wanted to stay in their own place as long as possible. I don't know if they even worked. They had hopes that maybe the Germans will change their mind or they just wanted to hang on as long as possible to their own house, and maybe they had other reasons. Could be some, I suppose, a sense of belonging. People hate to leave, so they tried to hang on as long as possible. So everybody who was from different city came in the last few minutes. It was just a few days before the deadline of closing of the ghetto. So they stayed only a few nights in our house. It was so crowded that I just can't even remember the faces.

SL: So your apartment was part of the neighborhood in which the ghetto was established?

LB: It was not an apartment, it was a house. Yes, our house was in the ghetto. We didn't have to leave our ghetto. Yes, that I forgot to mention. We didn't have to leave the ghetto. So after the deadline, of course nobody slept. We were expecting something terrible because we knew there's a concentration of a few thousand Jews in that small ghetto so there was no doubt. But I forgot to mention the main thing, what happened before that, when they started to talk. After the small action, they talked about that. So we knew something will come. Where will we hide? Every house built something. The whole city had an underground, suddenly. So what we did even before the small action, we had made a little something, a kind of a hiding place. What we did is just we tore off two boards from the kitchen floor. Those are wide boards. I would say about ten, twelve inches wide. There was some suspicion all, you didn't even know exactly for what reason. We took out these two boards and dug out so that we can go down to the basement from the kitchen, so you didn't have to go to the hall or to the back hall because we knew they took out both my brother and father from the back hall. So we just opened that and we'd made it so that when we'd go down, you could pull a couch over, stretch both arms out of that hole and like embrace the couch from both sides and pull it over the hole and cover the boards, while we are inside. So that day, [the] one day when they had a small action. And our windows faced the synagogue. My brother and I looked out, and my mother also, and when we saw that Germans there, we quickly sent my mother down to the basement. So we didn't even have to go from the inside. She was only fifty-four at that time, but she was gray, completely gray, and you never know. So when we saw this, we hid her. But then after the action they started to talk about big things, we decided we need another, what they call, a bunker. We had an outdoor toilet. The entrance was from the outside but the toilet actually was like part of the house. It was one wall, a door from the outside. A lock was hanging. Always when we went in, we used the key and unlocked that, like a padlock. But inside that was not a real toilet. What we did is, we made a seat and put the pail under it, it looks just like a seat, but under that seat we started to dig and we dug a crooked tunnel. But we couldn't do it fast because daytime people would hear the knocking, people would hear. We were afraid even of other Jews, because if you had the bunker where

you can put only two, three people and half of the neighborhood would come in, then nobody will get in. So we asked that Ukrainian man who had warned us the first day of the German occupation about the danger, we asked him if he knew somebody dependable who would dig us a tunnel, and he sent us a man. We paid him, and he dug a tunnel under that toilet seat. So that now how we arranged it that if we go in, we'll sit down there, we'll pull the pail back over on top, and it will look like a toilet. Then when all these people moved in and we knew that place was dug only for three because it was very hard to dig it, it took a lot of time and we didn't have much time. So what should we do? We had eleven or twelve people in the house and we have a place for three. The first two, three nights it was quiet, after the people moved in. It took, I don't know, maybe four or five nights and one morning, early in the morning — it was still dark — we hear shouts. We knew already what that meant. Because they sat and talked about other cities, like Ternopol had these things before us. Somehow communication came. We didn't have any newspapers, we didn't have any radio, but people talk and they always had to start it with a shot. The Germans give a sign, surround the city. And everybody badly slept and everybody was half-dressed because we were scared so. So all we did was put on shoes and a coat and everybody was ready to go. So we told all the other people. So, who is we? My mother, my brother and I. [We] told the other people to go into the kitchen bunker. We pulled up these two boards and told them, go in. Then one man who was the father of these three children asked, "Where are you going?" So we had to tell him the truth. We said we had another bunker, but only three people can fit in there, because we did try out that place. So he said, "You know what, why don't you take me with you, because I want to cover that." So what he did was put back the two boards and on top he put lots of bedding. The couch he moved away, so it looked as if somebody just had slept and got away. I don't know if he didn't trust us that we'll cover it properly. After all we were complete strangers. Or he just wanted to do it with his own hands. After all it was his family, his wife and three children, and we decided we'll take him, because if we can put in three we'll squeeze four. Then we opened the front door and it was so dead outside, so scary, that we were afraid to go. We couldn't see a soul, but we had prepared an emergency in case we cannot go



outside and go all around the house to that door with a padlock we should be able to go through the attic. It was foreseen and was prepared. We had made a hole in the ceiling above that toilet so that we can drop through the ceiling. So we went up the ladder, maybe we made a mistake; we pulled up the ladder with us. Once we were in the attic, the four of us, we pulled up the ladder. I don't know, we did. I always think about it. I don't know if it was right or wrong. And here that hole is open and there was a heavy rope prepared so that we can slide down on the rope. In the meantime we hear knocking. I forgot to tell you. Our house had a fire wall. You know what a fire wall is? It was a neighboring house, it was the same wall, our wall. In the attic it was only boards and between the boards were tiny openings. So suddenly we hear a voice whisper, "Take me with you, take me with you." That's that David. That's a true story. A boy who lived across the wall on the other side had hidden his family: his grandfather, his parents, and his seven sisters and brothers. All small, he was the oldest, was only twelve years old. [He] had hidden them, just like we had hidden our family. Our tenants, I would say. I don't know what to call our guests. He put bedding on top and he was alone and that was a big sacrifice because he knew that they will catch him in that open attic. There was no place to hide there. And we quickly tore the board off between the attics and took him over. We didn't ask any questions, understand. There was no time even to talk. He was alone, we took him. One by one we slid down that rope and everybody opened that... see, the side wall of the toilet opened like a door. It was on leather hinges so it could open, and everybody got in. Milo was the last one and he put the board on top on the hole from the bottom, put the pail back on and closed that side board, and we sat there for two days and two nights. Mother had prepared water and bread and a candle and matches there. They were always in there. And we heard upstairs, they had broken into the house and they broke dishes and there was jingling and clattering and everything else and then we heard screaming. See, where our basement was on the other side of the wall was the basement of that family, David's family, and they were taken out and we heard them scream. Imagine what was going on. And of course that man covered the boy's mouth so he doesn't scream because he heard all that. That started in the morning. So the first day and night and other day.

The second night it was quiet. Early in the morning the same man who recommended us who should build the bunker came. It was also prearranged. He knew where the bunker is, in which part of the kitchen. It was under the kitchen. He started to stand with his feet on the floor and started to yell, "Mrs. Rothstein, you may come out. It's over." And we came out. And then we found out that two thousand Jews were taken out on that day. That action was going on the whole day and night and another day, and they packed them all in trains and those who didn't want to go were killed right away or beaten. Like asking the question, some people say, why did the Jews go like to slaughter like sheep? What could you do? If you said I wouldn't go, if you slapped a German, they just killed you. There were many stories a woman would slap or kick a German, so he killed her. So what's wrong? They said the whole street from the city, from the synagogue where they gathered to the railroad station, was covered with bodies. So that was in the end of October.

SL: What happened to the other families that were hiding in your kitchen?

LB: They survived, they all survived. That's why I say I feel guilty to this day that we took the ladder up. Because the Germans brought a ladder from the neighboring house, they brought another ladder. And they went upstairs and when they saw the broken boards to the other house and found a large group of people there they probably thought that this is from both houses or from our house so maybe that's why they were lucky they didn't search the house anymore. Maybe if we hadn't taken away the ladder maybe they would have found us. But our bunker was really very good. And the unusual thing is the padlock from the outside wasn't even broken. Every door in the ghetto was broken and that little door — our house had two doors, a front and a back — both doors were broken down. But in the back, that small door, which was very narrow, normal height but narrow, [locked] with a padlock. Had they broken [it] off, all they would have seen is a toilet. They probably wouldn't even have gone in. Nobody would have thought there is a bunker in that toilet. So that was the biggest action in the city.

SL: Then after that the ghetto was?

LB: We had to leave our house. Our house was already out of the city limits. That was it. Because they made us. After that, [they] made the ghetto smaller again. They said there are two thousand Jews fewer, what do they need so many houses? Of course, then we left everything. We had to find another place. We went again to a place where there was so many people I don't even remember faces. I remember only whose house it was. There were people everywhere. That's how the ghetto looked. And it also didn't last long because we stayed in our house until the deadline, of course, and where the other people moved we don't know because we were glad — see, people took us gladly because we were three grown-ups. Nobody wanted children. And strangers had a hard time to find a place. Of those who were with us there were also no small children. The youngest must have been about ten. But those who had small children absolutely had no chance, so most of those lived in the synagogue, and the synagogue was open. That was the first place the Germans took over. Those out-of-towners who moved from other cities and came to [Skalat] had to go straight to the synagogue and that was always the first place. So after that second action, after that big action, in the end of October, they made the ghetto smaller. Then my mother said to me, "You know what? You are a girl, you speak perfect Polish, (which I did of course) you can pass as a Pole." Of course, I couldn't very well with my long nose because Poles mostly have pug noses and light-colored eyes and light hair. So but I found a girl from the neighborhood who did not look Jewish at all but her Polish was not very good. She didn't have a good education. She had only grade-school education. So we two decided we will buy false papers, which was not hard to get. You just have to pay the money. There were some people who arranged that. If you buy false papers... And there was a man, a Ukrainian, who took people from Skalat. He said he'd take some to villages and give them jobs. We found later out that was all lies. He took them straight to Belzec for the ovens. There were no ovens, I think, there were some kind . . .

SL: He could trade them in for certain amount of money?

LB: That could be, too, but we didn't know. So I had all my good clothes and everybody, not only me, had put their good clothes away to gentile friends. So if you survive after the war we could use it or if you

need some food in the meantime you can sell it. Or if you need a bribe, which was... Bribes worked very well for Germans, very popular. She and I got papers and we were supposed to be Ukrainian girls, which was trouble. See Ukrainians are often dark-eyed and dark-haired, but I didn't speak Ukrainian very well; she did. I spoke only Polish very well. My Ukrainian was not that good. But in our false papers we were supposed to be Ukrainian girls. We took out from hiding places our best clothes, each packed a nice suitcase and tomorrow morning that man is coming to get us. So how will he get us? He wouldn't go into the ghetto. But that man, that gentile friend, that shoemaker who helped us so much, he had a mother who lived in the place where it was the ghetto, she had to move when they made the ghetto smaller. She lived among Jews. So her house was empty and was not far from us. It was right at that time... it was already out of the ghetto because they kept on making the ghetto smaller. She had moved early out, but she even left some of her furniture. There was a bed, at least. I remember a bed and a table. So he connected us with that man who wanted to take us out of the city, and he also told us you can sleep that night, because he was supposed to come very early in the morning with the horse and buggy and take us to the rail stations of Ternopol. There was a railroad station in Skalat, but he was afraid the Skalat people would recognize us if we are Jewish. We couldn't get on the train in Skalat. But in Ternopol which was away. So he planned to take us to Ternopol. So we took our suitcases one evening to that empty house and we said good-bye. Imagine. I'll never forget the minute we said good-bye to my mother and my brother. And we went to the empty place. We slept there and before daybreak we hear a shot so we knew what it was because my mother didn't live anymore in that house; it was already past the deadline when she had to move out to the new border. So what should we do? That man, he heard that shot, he ran outside. He was already in the house, we were just ready to leave. We were just already with the suitcase in hand, just ready to leave when he heard that shot. He ran outside and the moment he came back and he said, "Action," and he was gone. He was afraid, too, because if they find him so close to the ghetto. When he said, "Action," we didn't know what to do. Each of us wanted to be with her family. So we started to run too. We were afraid we won't make it because we thought that the ghetto is

already surrounded. Because before an action they always surrounded the ghetto with soldiers. But we found out later that they surrounded the place, the north side, because that's where the SS came from. They came from Ternopol, which was the north side of the city. So the south side hadn't been surrounded yet. So she made it to her parents' house, and I made it to where my mother had lived. Her house was still in the ghetto. And when I came to that house, which was exactly the borderline of the ghetto, I didn't think I'll make it. It was the last on the southern end. My mother and brother both stood in the door. Everybody else was already in the hiding place, but they hoped that I will come back. Not they hoped, they knew, what will I do with myself. So they waited for me and they quickly pulled me in through the front door and closed the front door, and I said, "Let's go to our hiding place." Our hiding place was out of the ghetto. And I figured if I was able to come from this side, [and] it's not surrounded, we can go back out and go to our... because it was only across the street from that new ghetto. I was the first one, I quickly opened the back door and here a German soldier stands already there and says to me, with a finger like that, "Come, come." It was very close and I saw his blue, steel, cold eyes like ice, and I quickly slammed the door and he didn't go after me. Probably there was no order yet to go from house to house. It was very early. They were surrounding the city, but you couldn't get out. So we started to knock at the hiding. We knew, after all, where the hiding place is, and we started to knock. And they let us in. And they masked it again from — it was a special way of masking that from the inside — and we spent there the whole day. There were a whole lot of people I don't know. Most of them I didn't even know, there were so many people. And somehow the group survived again.

SL: Did the Germans enter the house?

LB: They entered the house, but they never entered. Oh, if they had entered the hiding place I wouldn't be here talking to you.

SL: But that soldier knew you were inside.

LB: Yes, but see, every soldier probably had a different job. Maybe he was only the guard who had to stand around. Maybe he was not one of those who had to pull people out. They say that some didn't want to.

They did if they had to. I don't know, in the literature that I'm reading now they mention here and there some better German soldiers. I have met one. I wouldn't say not. I have met one. Maybe even more. They always said it was an order. If you want examples I'll tell you examples about what kind of Germans I met. But this guy, he didn't go after me. I don't know why. I was glad I didn't have to look at him anymore. After that there was a small group of Jews left. That time they took out about nine hundred people — between eight hundred and nine hundred, I think it was — and after that the Judenrat decided that they will try to make a camp. Of course, I haven't told you anything about camps yet. They would take — constantly they kept on taking people to concentration camps because they were building roads. Most of the time there was road building. There was a road building in Borki and there was a road building in... but in that Borki where I went a few times instead of my brother I went daytime in morning and came back in the evening. Later they changed. One day the group didn't come back, only men. They made a camp there.

SL: A labor camp?

LB: See, they had before Russian POWs there; when I was there, I saw the Russian POWs. They were in a different camp. They were supposed to work, too, but they could barely walk. In comparison with them we were the millionaires. If the Germans didn't watch, we would throw them a piece of bread. They were just in terrible condition, and we were... in the meantime, at the time when there were no killings. For the very poor ones, the Jews made — the Judenrat made — a soup kitchen. As long as there were no killings, the Jews considered themselves very happy. It was quiet at least, and they were only waiting for news from the front, which came very sparingly. We didn't have any newspapers. But about the camps. So first there was the camp in Borki. When they finished that job or closed it or discontinued — I don't know what happened — there was a terrible camp in Kamionki. It's very unusual for me. I haven't read anything. I have read many, many books on the Holocaust; I would say that three-quarters of what has been published I have read. I wouldn't say everything, but a lot. Nobody has ever mentioned Kamionki. This was a camp not far from Skalat. There were no crematoria, there were no gas chambers. They just

would shoot people. [There] were only shootings. People worked very hard. Typhus was rampant. Rampant you say, right? It was just terrible. People were dying from typhus like flies, and the Judenrat had constantly to deliver people, and they also had to bribe the Germans. If they wanted to take one out, because nobody was able to stay there long, if they want to replace somebody they had to bribe the Germans. So where would they get the money? So what did they do? They would take the one that was out... Whose parents had to pay to get them out because they constantly had to feed the Germans. Not only with gold but also with clothes, furniture, carpets, everything would go. Bicycles [and] anything they needed. So that Kamionki camp was just terrible. So that after that last action where they took only about nine hundred, they decided you know what, we'll go to the Germans. I didn't know at that time they talked to the Germans, that came later. But, they tried to talk to the Germans because some were accessible to bribes and let's make a camp right here in Skalat.

**END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 1**

### TAPE 3, SIDE 2

SL: You were then saying that they decided they would try to establish a camp in Skalat.

LB: Establish a camp right in Skalat. That's what they did because the rumors were that all the Jews will be killed eventually. Those who live in the ghetto because they are useless Jews. women, children, old people, whoever was still living, everybody will be killed and only the one who works. I also forgot to mention — there is so much material I can't mention everything — all the time that the Germans were with us everybody was fighting for a Arbeitskarte. That means a works card. In the beginning they said, "If you have a works card signed by the Judenrat, it's good." Then that proved not good. So they said if you have a Arbeitskarte card signed by a German that would be good. But nothing was good. When an action came they threw all the Arbeitskartes away. "A Jew is a Jew." Some people said, "Oh, if you are what they call a [nichswichen? 1:25] Jew, they need you. You will live longer." During action there was nothing like that. So now the rumor was, if you are able to work, you'll go to a camp, you'll work, you will survive and maybe in the meantime the war will be over. So they established a camp and barracks where soldiers used to live. There were empty barracks in Skalat on the outskirts of the city. First they took only men. Of course our first plan was to push Milo in because he was young, he was just the right age for Kamionki. But, you know, we were a little bit influential. My father was very well-liked and young people my age, there were not many. Not many went to college, so we were considered a little bit more... We didn't have any money to bribe, but we were more respected. Maybe they felt a little bit sorry. My father was killed the first day. I don't know, anyway we didn't have any difficulties to go to the Judenrat and tell them, "The same like Milo worked here as manager of that that shoemakers place, give him the same job there." I don't remember even if he was manager there. I think he was. But anyway he didn't have to go to the quarry, because the same people who went to the quarry, those who survived and during all these actions haven't been taken away, kept on going to the quarry. But now they couldn't go back for the night to their own houses. Not that they couldn't. They didn't even want to because the ghetto was constantly in danger. So they went to that camp.



SL: To this newly established camp?

LB: To this newly established camp.

SL: The ghetto was still there, correct? The camp was another establishment?

LB: Was another establishment. The ghetto still existed and the camp was in the barracks. The ghetto existed because after all, somebody survived. So Milo went to the camp. The food was terrible. Of course, everybody brought food from home. Then they started to take in girls. Of course, right away, I had priority. They took me in to work in the sewing department. See there was something to sew. But the Judenrat wanted to keep as many people as possible alive. So they gave us some old bed sheets to patch and anything, and if there was nothing we made believe we did sew. Just like in any other department. The shoemakers did the same. It had to look that we are busy.

It was considered a branch of Kamionki, but we had it much better and there was a great important reason. First of all we didn't build train roads, our work was not that hard. Those who worked on the quarry, they worked very hard, that's true. I and Milo didn't work that hard, and mother would bring us food from home. But the main problem is we didn't have the German supervision constantly. That was what's the best part. They would come once a week, at the most twice a week. So at that time we really had to make it look as if we are working hard. The women had to do some washing. If there was no wash, those who belonged at the laundry had to make believe they do it. There were some probably carpenters. So it had to look spic and span. Which it was, because those who stayed in camp didn't have anything to do. So you ask me, who stayed in camp? Some went to the quarry. There was always some bad feeling because some went to the quarry and some stayed here and didn't work hard. You couldn't help that. Just like, even during the occupation in ghetto, you think there were no social differences? It's hard to believe. I hear the same was in Auschwitz. Some Jews were influential. So for whom were they influential? For the other Jews, not for the Germans. For the Germans every Jew was the same. But the same it was in ghetto and the same it was in camp. Those who came from the quarry

in the evening they were dirty and worn out and tired and often hungry. If they didn't have a supplement from home, they were not satisfied with that little bit of soup that the camp cooked.

SL: At this time was your mother still living in the ghetto while you were at the camp?

LB: Mother was still in the ghetto. That started in the beginning of 1943, that division between ghetto and camp. Then rumors started to circulate that they will finish the ghetto completely. So I took mother to camp and I would hide her. I was not the only one, there were more with mothers there. So what did we do with the older women? When the Germans came to check, I would hide her in bed. There were a few privileged ones, I would say ten or fifteen, who were allowed to have their own beds and I was one of those. Others had to sleep on triple decks, on straw. Of course, they could have their own bedding, that's true, but they didn't have a bed. But I had a bed. So I would move the bed to the wall and mother would stay under the bedding. We had that European bedding, feather beds, just so that she can breathe, nose and mouth toward the wall. That's how she would stay the whole day on the days of the checkup. Don't shake your head, that was the lucky thing! You shake your head, you think it was something terrible. She was one of the lucky mothers because others had to stay in the city, which you never knew. They talked about actions anytime and there were a few of them later until they finished up the ghetto, of course. That's what I did when she was in camp. Then there was an action once in ghetto where I was not in camp on that day. I could not help her because I got a job, which everybody considered me very lucky. I got a job with the head of the county, a German man, he was a Nazi and he needed a seamstress to sew clothes for his whole family. He had a wife and children and his wife's sister and her baby lived there in a beautiful mansion which used to belong to a Jew. When I walked into the room they had like a small store in there. I'm sure that was all Jews', the Judenrat gave them. I don't think he dealt directly with Jews, that I don't know. But if not direct for Jews, then he had that from the Judenrat. And I had to sew up. When I took a look at the material, I thought I'd probably have to stay a year or two years to sew up all these materials. There was so much there. In the morning, he would go to the city with a beautiful carriage and nice horses. That carriage would take him to his office and then

that carriage would come to me to the camp. Imagine that I felt very bad with my yellow patch that I wore on the coat, I had to leave all those in the camp and my mother, she stayed in the basement already. The Jews in the ghetto didn't stay in their houses anymore. Everybody who still lived was in the basement, underground. And I went with the beautiful carriage to his villa out of the city. It was not far from that place where the quarry was. There I can't complain, they treated me nice. There was never du. The German language has du and Sie for you. Du you say to lower people after you were close friends. Sie you say to people whom you honor and who are strangers to you. I was always Sie and there was a Jewish governess who was also Sie. But then the Polish maids and the Polish servants were all du. My husband worked there. He was the manager of the estate. He was also Sie. So personally, they treated the Jews well. They were very nice to me. I had food, I had everything. When I went home in the evening the cook, which was not Jewish, would always give me a dish to take home for my mother. But it troubled me because when I went home I had to tell the driver to stop. I had to go into the house. This way he knew where my mother was, and that was a secret because nobody was supposed to live in that house. But I don't think he ever told anybody because nothing ever came out. My mother was not alone. There were many people staying in that basement. So on the way back I usually would stop and give her the food. And one day while I was there, I said to the German woman, "I want a day off. I have to go to village to find a place to hide my mother." She didn't say a word. "Of course, why not?" My husband, who was not my husband at that time... nobody thought of getting married. Who was thinking of marriage? Since he was administrator of the estate, he knew many farmers. So he brought me to a Gentile woman to exchange clothes because when I wanted to go to neighboring village I couldn't go with my city clothes. No Gentile girl dressed like that. So I changed with a Gentile girl my good city clothes, my nice coat, even my girdle. And she gave me a skirt made from a sack and some farmer's clothes. I had a problem with my feet. I had wide feet and I had to walk barefoot. In the middle of the summer no Gentile girl works.

So the next day I went, was wearing all that farmer clothes and I was afraid to go to the village because in the village everybody knew me because I would come every day with a beautiful carriage, so everybody knew me. So I had to go through fields. Then when I emerged through the fields and the rye and corn and wheat, everything was tall. The corn was not tall yet it. It must have been June or so. The real Korn, that was rye.<sup>14</sup> I had to cross the highway both ways. So I started to look carefully, and I stick my head out and who comes? The driver with the carriage. He was not in the carriage of that what they call the Landrat, the head of the county. The driver looked at me. I was sure he recognized me. Besides the wide feet, I also had a problem with glasses. No village girl wore glasses. So here I thought again he can go straight to the Schutzpolizei, which is the German police, and tell them. But he didn't. I couldn't think of it. I thought he might or might not but I kept on going. Of course I went only through the fields. I crossed the highway, again among fields. I came in the afternoon to that village and I knew a farmer family there. Of course we didn't have much to give. Maybe if I had something. All we had is little things, household things like clothes only. Even furniture we didn't have anymore because we had to leave it in our house. But farmers were scared. The Gentile people were scared. He was even scared that I walked into his house. Maybe a neighbor saw me there and suspected. Of course I was dressed like a farmer girl, but as I told you with my glasses and my wide feet, I was very suspicious. All he did was let me stay overnight. In the morning I went back. Didn't find a place. I went back in the morning but it took me again the whole day to get there. I forgot to tell you the main thing. I didn't go back anymore to camp. I slept in the attic of that German house. You'll say, "Why?" Because a week or two before there was an action in camp. The main thing I forgot also. I suppose you'll sort it out later. There was a terrible scene the night before the camp was finished up. That scene I did not describe to you. First let me finish. When I came back it was evening already and I knocked on the back door. I was sure the maid or the

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<sup>14</sup>German for grain. As rye is the staple grain in the region of Central Europe from which Mrs. Baras comes, she refers to it jokingly as the "real" grain.

cook will open the door. So who comes up? The chauffeur, who was a Volksdeutsch. Volksdeutsch means he was born in Germany. He was a Pole born in Germany, and he was the chauffeur.

SL: He wasn't the carriage driver?

LB: No, no, he was a car driver. He drove the car. They also had a car. He came to open the back door. He didn't open it, he just looked out. I knew him very well because his wife worked with me under the Russians. She lived not far from us, and we used to walk to work and back together and I knew him very well and he knew me. But at that time he worked with the Nazis. So he didn't open the door, he went back in. So I didn't know. Should I run away? Where will I hide here in the village? There's no choice. Maybe he called the Scultzpolizei, he's calling the Schutzpolizei this minute. Maybe he's not, I don't know. No, he didn't call. He went to the maid and told her who's at the door. Maybe he didn't even know that I was working there. She opens, she didn't say a word. I thought she would say, why I'm knocking? No, she didn't. It was already late in the evening. It was dark. So I went up to my attic. Now why did I sleep in the attic? A few weeks earlier the management of the camp kept on telling us that camp will not exist long. The Germans are finishing it up. My mother was already constantly in the camp. There was no ghetto anymore. There was action in the ghetto. They finished up everybody. There were probably still some people living in their basement, in their hiding places. There were always some. But my mother didn't anymore. I managed somehow to keep her hidden in the camp. When they told us it will come any day, any day, but still nobody knew. One evening the management said — the commandant of the camp and the one who used to be the eldest of the Judenrat — there was no more Judenrat. So he was in the camp too. They all said, they told us, "We are leaving." They had prepared good hiding places, though not all of them survived. "We are leaving and you are on your own." Imagine the atmosphere in that camp. You knew that that's it, they are coming tonight. So in the evening or early at night, some young people tried to run away. They said, "What's there to lose? They have to kill us here or take us somewhere and kill us. We'll try." Many of them came back. The Gentile boys took away their coats, robbed them and hit them and so some came back. And so did Milo. He came back. Then when

it got later at night, we thought, "Oh, these young Gentile boys are probably sleeping already," like one, two o'clock. So a group of those boys decided they'll go, they'll try again. So mother and I and Milo had a conference. Everyone of us had on a string hanging a little bit jewelry. Whatever we had, we had on the string. And that was not our job. Our father did it just before the Germans came in. Whatever we had he divided in four parts and everybody had a string. We carried it all the time. It was about a year-and-a-half. So mother and I said to Milo, "You are young. Try to save yourself." We gave him what we had. "You try to save yourself." So he went and he jumped over a fence. The group didn't want to go on the main highway like they did the first time and they were robbed. They went somewhere where there was a high fence in the back of there, and jumped over the fence. We didn't know where he was then.

It started to daylight, it's breaking. Nobody slept of course. A truck full of Germans pulled up to the front door of the, of the barracks. It was so quiet in that barracks that you could hear a fly. The door was not locked. They got out of the truck, opened the door and they seemingly were scared. They closed the door and left and we notice that they were going in the direction of the Schutzpolizei, which was the local police. There were only twelve men. So we found out later they went to call the local police. If they were scared or there was a suspicious... They used to be scared. They didn't want to do.

So these few minutes before they came back from the Schutzpolizei, half of the camp left. They were mostly women. We didn't know where we are going. We left. We just walked and walked. Eddy worked at that time. He never was in the camp. He was enlisted like in camp but he lived all the time on the same estate where I sewed. So I said to mother, "You know what? I'll go to Eddy and see. Maybe he knows somebody, maybe he can hide us, maybe there's something." So when we were close to the village, in fact we approached the village from... I don't know how we made it, there was some miracle because we never went that way. We had to go through fields. We were afraid to go through open roads. Then we found a field was very tall wheat. So I left mother in one of the fields, the field, and tried to remember... the fields are so big. I tried to remember which place it is, and I went to Eddy.

I came to him, it was already broad daylight, maybe 5:30 in the morning or what, and I told him what was going on in camp and I told him where I left my mother. I was there maybe half an hour, an hour, here walks in his brother with his wife who were also coming from some hiding place. We spend the day there and what could we do? Later I didn't know if Milo is alive, I didn't know where he was. Finally we went to look. Before it got dark I went out to the field and started to call "mother." I call and call and call, I cannot find her. In the meantime Milo arrived. What happened? He made it, where would he go? He figured that we went here and so he went here. But he lost all the jewelry. He jumped over the fence and he had that in his coat pocket because it was too warm and too heavy to jump with the coat, it was summer, so he lost it. Okay. Finally we found mother, so we are all three together and what should we do? In the meantime we stayed there a day and we heard that people, that they killed all the Jews that they could catch. But those who had run away and were walking around in the fields didn't know what to do with themselves. So little by little they start to come back to the camp, so Milo went back. Mother went for a short time back to the city, to that hiding place what she had before and I stayed with the Germans. But the German lady told me I should not go back to camp because they'll do the same again. So she said, "Stay here in the attic." That attic was full of furniture. I suppose also Jewish. Beds and bedding, whatever. Furnished apartment. So I slept there and I stayed the day there and I couldn't even get to Mother. Suddenly, we hear the Russian partisans are coming. The Germans had a General Kolchack. I don't know if you heard about General Kolchack. He organized front lines, way, way ahead of the real front lines. Suddenly we hear the partisans, Russian partisans are coming. The [Russians] had a General Kolchak, and he organized front lines way, way ahead of the real front line. They're mostly volunteers. And a group of them marched into Skalat in the middle of summer, probably June, summer 1943. Many of them were barefoot, many of them were girls, young girls, and in Skalat there were only those twelve Germans. There was no army there. So they ran away. And those who ran the Camp Kamionki ran away and burned the whole camp with the people in it. And those Russians — there was a small group of them — they burned down the building where the [Germans] stayed. It was a

luxurious house, used to be Jewish. Then they went to — there was a cooperative grocery, a Ukrainian cooperative grocery. They loaded up all the groceries they needed for themselves and, of course, the Jews from the camp helped them a lot. They showed them where the places are. Oh, Jews were happy for those few days. They thought this is it. They forgot that this is only — what do you call it, like the Germans say, a foremost, means savant grade. The front was still way back and these Russians had to withdraw and they did and all those young Jews, including my brother, wanted to go with them, but they didn't want to take anybody who didn't have a gun. Any army, a knife was not enough. And who had it? No Jew had guns. I heard that later two of the boys from Skalat ran after them and, I don't know, maybe they had guns or what and they took them in, and I think one of them even survived. So after that I never went back to the Germans because the local farmers told the Germans when the Germans came back that the Jews did everything. Of course, the house of the Germans where Eddy and I worked was all robbed by the farmers. They carried everything out, even the Nazi uniforms, I heard, and the food and everything. And then they said everything the Jews did, Baras did it, Baras was the manager, which was not true, of course. And somehow I did get mother out and Milo, and Eddy found us a place in an attic of an old gentile woman. So we stayed there a few days. She was afraid to keep us. No, Milo was still in camp. Mother and I stayed there a few days. But she simply chased — I wouldn't say she chased us out. She was scared, and we didn't have any money to pay her. We didn't have anything to pay her to feed us, and she was afraid, which was really true, because when they caught a gentile who was hiding a Jew it was very bad for them. Then Eddy arranged so that Milo comes, because in camp it was very dangerous, too. So Eddy sent a message to somebody that he should come and Eddy brought him to that house where we were in the attic and Eddy went back to his work. That was before the partisans, because after the partisans Eddy didn't work with the Germans anymore. In fact they put a price on his head. Before that Milo and I and mother started to walk toward the forest; where should we go? The forest was very, very close to the village and was also great danger because it was close. First we stopped in the house of the forester. There was a tiny house, a very small house where a very poor



forester lived and was right next to the quarry where the Jews worked. And he was known that he used to help the Jews. Was a very nice, very poor man but a very good man and he would help the people who worked on the quarry. I don't know how he helped them, but somehow he did. He had a good name. We peeked into his window and saw a candle and his wife was feeding the baby, but we figured she would not let us in because every Jew would go to him. There are so many working on the quarry he knew all of them. How could he hide all the Jews? So we just opened the door to the barn.

**END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 2**

#### TAPE 4, SIDE 1

SL: I interrupted you when you were talking about going to work, but I did want to ask you one question. You talked quite a bit about the Judenrat and I wanted to know, what was your reaction to the Judenrat, how did you view them?

LB: Everybody hated them, but now I realize it was better than nothing. I know that the now generation says that the Jews did it to their own selves. But if there hadn't been a Judenrat, they would have done what they did in Babi Yar. In Babi Yar what they did, when they only came in, they took all the Jews and took them straight to Babi Yar and killed them.<sup>15</sup> At least ours dragged out longer, and once it drags out longer, somebody survived. How many Jews from Kiev survived, or Zhitomir or all these Russian cities? Of course we blamed them. For what I blamed them very much is that they got rich on this. Many Jews made money on that. I hope you don't tape that.

SL: Oh, I did.

LB: You did.

SL: Well, you haven't named any names. I mean there's no sense not putting that on there.

LB: I'll tell you what. I can name the names, most of them are dead. The only one who survived is the Altester. You know, he was not a local man. He was from out of town. So you might wonder, why did he take the job? Because nobody else wanted. The local people just didn't want it. They didn't know what kind of a job it will be, but everybody figured it will be something bad. And he was young. There were many people who were much older than he and brighter than he and more acquainted with the city than he. He was a man from out of town who married a local girl. He used to have a good name, but it seems like once you get into that business... The rumor was that they were making money for

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<sup>15</sup>At Babi Yar ravine, near Kiev, Ukraine, the Nazi SS, with the support of Ukrainian militia men, machine-gunned 33,771 Jews on September 29-30, 1941. Eventually, the site became the mass grave of over 100,000 people, most of them Jews.

themselves. I suppose they did. I'm sure they did because they found themselves good hiding places and things like that.

But they did help the people, too. For instance, I personally cannot complain. In comparison with what other people suffered, we did not suffer, and we didn't bribe them. We didn't have money to bribe them. When the Germans only came in they said they wanted a contingent of so and so much gold. We had very little. We gave them a little. They didn't press us no more. So I can't complain. Maybe they knew that there were some rich Jews and they pressed the rich Jews. If they had been so bad they would have pressed us too, and we were not rich. In fact, I told you they helped my brother a lot. They didn't press him. They called him a few times to Borki. But after all the chairman didn't call him. There was a list and they had to go by name. So you cannot blame them. Like, there's so much literature that blames the Judenrat. They were helpless. Like with that contingent of four hundred: what should they have done? Would it have been better if they had left the Germans like loose dogs around the city and maybe they would have taken out the youngest, the healthiest, the best? I don't know. Of course, it's terrible to take out the sick and the poor and the helpless, but it's also terrible if you let the enemy do the worse. So between the two devils, I cannot blame them so much. People did hate them, that's true, because the people said they take care for themselves, they live in luxuries. Of course they lived better than anybody else. They had no doubt about it.

SL: Getting back to your flight to the woods, you were talking about maybe getting to that forest.

LB: So we opened the door to the barn and there was a cow. And it was at least warm. It was summer, but it was a very cold night. So we huddled down next to the cow, and we spent the rest of the night there. In the morning the forester came in and he was very scared. He said, "I cannot keep you here." He said, "I have already Jews in my attic. I can't. And here, in the open barn." So he took us to the forest and showed us a cave that we should get in there. We still had a little money that Milo hadn't lost. The money was in a different place than the jewelry, and it was not very much anyway, so we gave him whatever we had, to the last penny. We stayed three weeks, but he would bring us a bottle of water and

a half-loaf of bread, about once a week, sometimes once in five days, so after we had stayed there a few days, I said, "You know what? I'll go and see where Eddy is. Maybe he can help us." I didn't know that he was not on the estate anymore. I wore that farmer dress still. I didn't have anything else, so I wore that outfit. And I said, "You know, in the evening, I will go." And we were not supposed to be outside when it was dark because there were militia — Ukrainian militia — and the Ukrainians were very bad toward Jews, most often much worse than the Poles. The under-government belonged to them, the Poles didn't have anything to say. So I cross a little bridge and I see an old man with a cane walking, and I give him the Christian greeting. They say, "Jesus be..." I don't know how to translate it into English. Jesus is great or something like that. I can't translate it exactly from the Ukrainian language. And he answered me in his own language, so I figured somehow, with my glasses, he is not suspicious at all. But he was old, with a cane, he thought that I am one of the village. And I went to Eddy's house, and the front hall. To the right was his door, and straight ahead the gardener lived. And there is a padlock hanging on this door. So I thought, "What should I do?" If I go into the gardener, it's like I mentioned before. He can right away go to the village and bring the police. But we are so terribly hungry that I figured I have to do it. I went in. They talked very nicely to me. They said, "Baras is gone. He had to go in hiding place because the farmers said that he did all the damage to the house and everywhere. And they put a price on his head, and we don't know where he is." I didn't say I'm hungry, but he gave me bread. I didn't tell him that we are hungry, I told him that Mother and I are in a cave. I didn't tell him where. I said we are in the forest, but he knew that every Jew is hungry, so he gave me a half a loaf of bread. And I go back with that half a loaf of bread under my arm, and here I see the militia, and they are right in front of me, and they recognize me right away. "Oh, here she is, Hafner's dressmaker." Because the rumor was that the Jews did all the damage. Of course, they knew the Germans didn't know that's a lie, but the farmers knew. "Oh, let's take her to the office." And I started to bargain with them. I kept on saying, "Please tell me, what will come out for you, what will you gain from that?" And you know that I persuaded them. We bargained like that maybe ten minutes, and one of them said, "Let her go." So I

came back to the forest, I couldn't find my cave. I remembered I bent in a little tiny tree that I know where the entrance is. I couldn't find, absolutely. I had to wait until daylight. And of course, my mother and Milo worried inside that I will not come back. It was not so hard in those days. Most people, when they left, did not come back. More not than yes. In the morning my mother crawls out. When it got a little... It was still dark, but then I knew where it was. So we had food for another day or two. We were there about two weeks and we were starving, simply starving, so I said to Mother, "You know what? I'll go to Kornel. Kornel was that shoemaker who helped us so many times. We had lots of clothes in his house and silver candelabras. Even a not-rich house has something. We had lots of household goods there, besides clothes. I said, "You know what, I'll go to him, and you'll give me something. I'll tell him to sell. Maybe he sold already. He can sell something." Because there was a big market for everything because Jewish merchandise was going for a fourth of the price, so it wasn't hard to sell. So I tell him to sell something, and he will give me some food. Mother said, "You cannot go because you look very Jewish." My hair was brown, my eyes were brown, and I had glasses. And my mother's hair was gray. And her eyes were not brown anymore, just like I have now green eyes. That runs in our family. My father also had brown eyes and when he got older the eyes turned green. Mine are now green, and my mother's eyes were not brown anymore, and her hair was completely gray, and she said, "I will go." First of all, she knew better where the man lived. I was only maybe once in his house, but my mother had been there more often, so she said, "I will go. I know where he lives. I can find easier and they will not recognize me so easily." So I gave my mother that farmer's skirt that I wore, with that whole outfit, and she gave me her dress, and she combed her hair like a farmer, the way old women did, parted in the center and two braids on the side and then you take these braids and you cross them in front, like a crown. And she really didn't look Jewish. She left in the morning and she said she's going straight to Kornel. Evening comes, she's not back, and she's not back the second day, and she's not back the third day. And we didn't have anything to eat during all that time. And then comes in that forester one day. And he tells us there was another action in camp. All those people who didn't have hiding places went

back to the camp. On that day when she left, there was an action. Until this day, I don't know why she went to camp. But later, somebody who ran away on that day in the camp and was able to save himself told me that he saw my mother on that day in the camp. Maybe she went to that Kornel and nobody was home, or she thought, "I will go to stay overnight in camp and come back tomorrow." I don't know why. But she never came back. And then that forester said to us, he simply said he cannot feed us. He was a very poor man, I knew that. So he said, "I'll show you where Jews live in the forest." He took us one night and drove us directly to the Jewish group. Many people knew where the Jews lived, but probably very few were willing to show it. I heard that when some farmer said to the Germans, "The Jews are in the forest," so the German said, "I'll only go if you bring us to their place." Because rumors were that the Jews had guns. We did that on purpose, even though we did not have guns. We played the part because some gentiles would come into the forest; in fact, some brought us food, even. And the forester knew... Not that forester, he took us too, because his forest, where he was forester, was very, very close to that village, where the quarry was. So he took us to another forest, quite far from the city, which was much better. And there was another forester, who knew about us. Without the help of outsiders and gentile people, nobody in the forest would have survived. You had to eat. That was the main problem. So he brought us to the group, with which we stayed to the end. Of course, we had to change places very often; there was danger in the forest, too.

SL: How many people were there then in that group in the woods?

LB: A different number of people all the time. When I came to that group, there were maybe ten people. And we also kept on changing our way of living. Like with that first group you would sleep daytime and live nighttime because these people thought that at night when you cook they don't see the smoke in the village. Then we moved to another group, there was just the opposite. They said, yes, you can see smoke, so we changed to normal life. Most of the time I would say the groups were about seventeen, twenty people, twenty-five were some groups. There were a few groups, not many, a few groups in each forest. There were groups there were only six, seven people. Were all sizes. There was danger. Like

summertime we just lived among the trees. At one time we had built from brush, from wood, like a little tent, but you couldn't do it often because we didn't want to break the trees. The more trees you broke, the more bushes you broke, the more footsteps you left, the more danger it was. So when you went out — like we would often [do in the ] summertime, of course, especially in fall — we would go out and steal from fields, like potatoes, carrots. So when you went out you wanted to carry as much as possible so you don't have to go often, because every footstep was a danger. Like one group was once discovered because they carried straw from somewhere. I don't know if it was stolen or maybe some farmer gave it to them. They wanted to sleep on straw. So the straw gave them away. They left marks somewhere. You had to be very careful how you lived.

SL: In the summertime, for example, did you just sleep outside?

LB: Yes.

SL: Where did you sleep when it got cold?

LB: In wintertime we dug an underground place.

SL: You prepared for it in advance?

LB: Yes. We started to dig it when it was still warm in fall, and we had a beautiful, very big place. The ground was all clay, very hard. We didn't even need any support beams, nothing. I remember once when the boys were down and dug it a fox jumped in. They say foxes are harmless but when they are scared they can harm you and the fox got terribly scared because he fell in, and he grabbed the boy by the pants, just the pants. And the boy had the shovel in his hand and he killed the fox. So what should we do with the fox now, it's dead anyway. Of course, nobody was allowed to kill the fox. It's just like here. What [do] they call these people?

SL: Game wardens?

LB: The game wardens would find out and you are fined. How would they fine a Jew? We planned not to tell the forester. We were good with the forester. He helped us an awful lot. We never saw the forester, but the son, who was doing the job together with his father. The son would come very often to the forest. So

we decided, anyway, we had that fox, we'll try to eat it. And we made the fire and we baked it and baked it and baked it, and the longer we baked it, the harder it became. We never ate it. We were very hungry, we never had meat, but we absolutely could not eat it. Maybe if you cook it on a stove in water but we just tried to bake it on an open fire. So what? About a day or two later — I don't know how these foresters find these things out — he noticed that the fox is missing. I don't know how. And he came running, and it was terrible. We had to explain to him [that] we didn't kill him, he just jumped. He finally had to believe us; what could he do? In the beginning he didn't believe, he thought we just killed the fox because we wanted the meat, which was not true. So we had all kinds of things like that.

SL: Did the partisans ever come through the woods?

LB: Never came back. That one time when the Russian partisans came, that was at the time between the first and second camp action. But they never came back.

SL: There were never any partisans in the woods?

LB: No. In fact there were never any partisans anywhere in that part of the land. The partisans kept on going. That group that was with us, which I found out later from a history book, went as far west as the Carpathian Mountains, and they were just dismantled by the Germans because those were not professional soldiers. They were cut off from the Russian supplies and in the mountains they just perished. Most of them died there.

SL: What kind of daily routine did you have, did you do anything at all during the day?

LB: Eating was the whole routine. See, when there was a group of twenty, twenty-two, you had to cook. We were a lucky group. We were comparatively the richest group in the forest because we had... there was one family with us who supplied the food. They were quite wealthy and they had connections in the city. They would buy a whole sack of potatoes, these small salad potatoes. What's the difference? And the farmer would bring it to the forest. Of course, every one of us would go once in a blue moon. Even I went, my brother and I went, to the city where we had stuff hidden away from the farmers, at the gentile



houses. And we... I once tried to go to that Kornel also, never found the place. I didn't go alone, I went with another man who said he knew the place, but we never found it.

SL: So really what you've been saying and what you've been talking about at several points is the fact that there were many people in the city and even in the surrounding villages that knew you were alive and knew you were hiding somewhere but somehow did not turn you in, did not lead the Germans to your hiding place?

LB: Yes. There were four gentile farmers on the edge of the city, four brothers had four cottages. The rich ones never let us in, never sold us anything, not never gave, never sold us anything. But the poor one, the poorest one of them, would always supply and if one of us didn't have enough money or goods to pay, he said forget about it. But none of them gave us away. That was besides the forester.

SL: So you just didn't have any choice; you had to take that chance?

LB: Well, we had to take the chance. There was no doubt about it. We had to take the chance, yes. When we went to the city, we took a terrible chance, because many of them were killed going to the city. But what else can you do? Starve yourself? There was one in our group — not in our group, in another group, but in the same forest — who was afraid to go out for food. He only ate what somebody gave him. People had pity on him and gave him something. Finally, he decided one day he will. Everybody was starving. People didn't want to share with somebody who wouldn't go. So finally he decided he will go. The minute he went out of the forest he was killed. One German and one local man, a gentile, were going hunting. They had the guns with them, and they saw him and they killed him. So it's luck. He never went out; that was the first time he went out. So everybody who went out searching for food risked his life. But still, we considered instead of starving it's still better to die a different death than starving is the worst death. The slowest and the worst.

SL: Were you able to get any additional clothing to help you get through the winter?

LB: Clothing, yes. I went to another farmer, another man, another shoemaker who used to be our customer and also used to help us and I knew that my father's clothes was there. Lots of my father's clothes was

there. So Milo and I went to him and he gave us some. So the rest of the war I wore my father's pants and my father's shirts and so did Milo. We went to him and he gave us some clothes.

SL: Would you say that the people that were in that group with you also had adequate clothing? Did you share with one another?

LB: There wasn't enough to share. Everybody had only what he wore.

SL: So some people weren't as lucky as you as far as clothing?

LB: Oh yes, everybody had something in the city and would go. If it wore out completely, you'd go and get it. But we all were in rags. For instance, I went to a few places where I had, and once I picked up my good black coat, woolen coat, and it was not the smooth material, it was wool. It had a knotty material, and we walked off into the branches. When we walked in the woods we didn't go on the main road. Of course, we tried through the thickest to go. We hid always only in young forest because the older forest have big trees and it's far from one to the other, like a foot or two. So we looked for those young forests that hadn't been thinned out yet. And you tore your clothes terribly. Especially with that coat that the material was not smooth. I had all kinds of colors of patches on that coat. I had green patches and blue patches and everybody looked like that, and you wore coats, so around the waistline you wanted to have something tight. So you had a rope if you found one, or a string or whatever. If you had a loose coat, you froze. So we really looked something, believe me. And the feet, rags of course. Nobody had shoes anymore. You had your old shoes with open soles and you wrapped them around with rags and rags on top of rags. That's what you all had. Nobody had a decent pair of shoes.

**END OF TAPE 4, SIDE 1**

#### TAPE 4, SIDE 2

SL: Alright. Another thing about living in the woods that I'd like to ask you is was there any semblance at all of any kind of religious life that went on by the wayside?

LB: Yes. Somehow they always knew when the holiday was and they even had a prayer book with them. I don't know how they got it, but there was a prayer book, and when the holiday came, [they prayed]. I don't think Saturdays, not. Saturdays there was nothing. But we were there during the High Holidays, and they prayed, yes. That was only time as far as I remember, holidays. We didn't have... there was Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot.

SL: Do you remember any discussions about religious attitudes as far as where is God now and that type of thing?

LB: No, this is funny, there were no... Let me see, I cannot remember. You know what the main discussion was? If I had a tub of milk I would put myself inside, something like that. And white rolls and milk or a cup of milk and a cup of chocolate and cocoa and something like that. But discussions about God, no, there were none. Not in our group until after the war. During the war nobody mentioned God. The prayers were mechanical. But after the war there was an awful lot of discussion. Suddenly he came to life, and the people that I knew after the war kept on asking, "Where is God?" That's all. Very few would say God punished us for that or God punished us for this. They only asked where is God? Is he somewhere or isn't he at all? That was constant. But during that time it seems like unimportant. In fact it seems like non-existing. Besides those mechanical reading of the prayers on High Holidays, I don't recall anything else. It just seems like it doesn't exist. People only talked about food, that's all, about shelter.

SL: Did you talk about liberation or your possible future?

LB: That was constant. Everybody hoped. You know, the funny thing is, I wouldn't say everybody hoped. There were always two points of view. There were some who kept on saying, "We'll never survive, nobody will survive. Germans will kill everyone to the last one." And there was always from the opposite

tent who would say, "That's impossible. Somebody must survive and tell it to the world." So there were completely opposite. I'll never forget when I went the first time out on a trip to the city and I wouldn't even say I was scared, not at all. Because I figured there's no difference. Most of the time Milo went, he never let me go. He went with other boys. But there were quite a few girls in the group and others went, too, so finally I persuaded him, and I went with him once, only the two of us. That was my first trip, and I remember it was very tiresome. Of course, and with those torn shoes to walk and your feet are cold, wet. And when I saw finally, on the horizon, the black outline of the wood, I'll never forget that feeling. "Oh, I'll be home soon, and I'll be able to rest." All we thought about was food, shelter, rest, get rid of the lice, get rid of the vermin, get rid of the rags. That was all. Nobody had serious discussions. About future of course, everybody hoped, but not many believed. In fact, I myself did not believe that I'll survive. I think it was more luck. Some people say the strong ones survive. Like the saying Nietzsche says, "Only the strong survive." That's not true. It's not always true; it's a matter of luck also. How many times was I almost caught and yet not caught, but it was not my merit. I don't know, something. I wouldn't say that God watched over me. Why didn't he watch over my mother and father? My father was such a religious man. He was killed the first day. I lost my faith, I'll tell you the truth. Completely. Can't believe in anything. How can you after all that?

SL: Were you at any time through your Gentile contacts able to learn of progression of the war?

LB: No, but there were constant rumors. We always lived on rumors. Nobody knew anything. Like in the forest I remember once we got a piece of newspaper. But the newspaper didn't say much because it was, printed with the permission of the occupying forces so you couldn't learn much from it. We didn't know anything until we started to hear the real bombs.

SL: How close did they get to you?

LB: Oh, finally they got directly to us. I should tell you also about the day of our liberation. But little by little they start to get closer. In the beginning we just heard shooting. Of course when you hear shooting, the optimist would say, "Oh, they're right here, right across the river!" But the pessimist would say, "Oh,

they're a thousand miles away." There was always that clash between the optimists and pessimists. Our forest was on top of a hill and once we stand on the hill and we saw the city burning, Skalat. Then we knew that the Russians were close. In fact, Skalat was away from us. If the Russians had come straight, they would have gone through our forest first, but they went around the forest into the city. About ten days they fought in the city. The city was not badly ruined, not many houses burned up. But no, nobody knew anything, the truth. We constantly lived with rumors. Just like under Russians. The Russians didn't say the truth in their papers. Of course, we didn't see German papers. But the Ukrainian papers, who were supposed to be the government, also couldn't say the truth because the occupying forces wouldn't let them. So of course, when the Germans started to lose the war the papers didn't say anything and the population didn't know. So our Gentile informers, like the forester or the people who lived in those cottages, these poor families, didn't know anything also until we really heard it. When we heard it then we started to believe. It still took a few weeks from the time when we started to hear the war, hear the shooting, until the day of liberation. It still took a few weeks.

SL: Why don't you tell me then about that day.

LB: The day of liberation. It was actually the night of liberation. There were already rumors and they were close and we heard it. But we had to change our bunker. We didn't have that good bunker that we had at the time, the first time where the fox went in. I think I should tell you these few details. We had a few traps and partisans would always warn us, "There will be an action. The Germans are planning to come to this part of the forest. So you run away." So once we ran to a different forest where we had to walk the whole night and hide during the day and walk the next night. But when we came back, other people were killed in our bunker. When we left... there were other groups who were not that strong. They didn't have enough men to carry the provisions and to have the initiative. So they took over our bunker and they were killed in that bunker. So we couldn't go back to that bunker. We started to dig another bunker and half, or three-fourths, of our group left. In fact there were only five. Almost all of them left. They had some farmers who took them in, and only five of us left to dig a new bunker. So for the night we would

go back to old bunker until we finished that one. But this one was not that good. We just dug a trench, without a ceiling. The other, it was all underground. And this was just a trench, and then we took some branches and threw over the top and fill the top with more branches and more leaves. That was the bunker where the liberation found us. But about a week or two before the liberation, many farmers, many gentile people, started to chase the Jews out because the Germans started to run around homes to look for food and all kinds like that. They were restless, they knew already that they were to leave, and it was more dangerous at that time to keep Jews than it was before. So out of our five, we had already again about 19 or 20 who came back, who didn't even help to build that bunker. But of course we took them in. So there were quite a group of us. One night, I am just sitting in the bunker, and I see through that opening a truck comes down. A long coat like the Russians soldiers wear. I don't know if they still wear these gowns, like a light brown, and they wear them long to ankle length. And I see a pair of boots, good boots, not our people, and a long coat coming down that hole. I didn't know if I should be scared or not because it looked like a Russian. So one from our group, one of the newcomers, he knew he would scare us, so he said, "Don't be afraid. It's a Russian soldier. They are here." Oh, those people kissed that soldier and I am telling you there was some kind of celebration. So all the time we heard shooting around but we didn't know how far. And that one man, that newcomer, walked out into the forest, and he met that Russian soldier and he brought him into our bunker. So then they found out that there was a large group of these Russian soldiers in the forest. You know how they slept in the forest, the Russian soldiers? It was late winter, February, so they broke off a lot of dry branches, put them on top of the snow. There was snow on the ground, and slept on top of that, only in their coats. That's how the Russians soldiers spent their nights during the war. They are very hard soldiers, very well trained. Of course, maybe they were from Siberia or what, that they could stand the cold. That was the first night. Then, first of all, they told us, "You cannot stay here in the forest," because we didn't have any slip of paper who we are. And everybody who has no paper and right on the front line is considered a spy and would be arrested. In fact, later we spent a whole day in — it was not a jail, but they put us in a cottage

— and didn't know what to do with us. They considered us people in the war zone without papers. So they told us to go. They told us we cannot go to Skalat at yet because in Skalat there is still fighting going on. So they told us just to go in the opposite direction. Of course, walk. We have to walk with our raggedy feet. So we started to walk in the other direction, and on the way, we were a few times stopped by military men. "Who are you?" and, "Where are you going?" and, "Where are your papers?" We had that constantly. Sometimes we [met it? 12:55]. Of course we were again very hungry, and didn't have anything to eat. So in some places the soldiers would give us food. But in one place a soldier said, "Too bad that Hitler didn't kill more." We had that too, from a Russian soldier. This way we went to another city, to Zbaraz, and we stayed there maybe a few days or a week until they told us that Skalat was free. Of course, when we came back to Skalat there was nothing to come back to. Where our house stood there were only a few stones. The Ukrainians, on the order of Germans I suppose, tore down all the Jewish houses and they sold the material to the Gentiles. The bricks and their roofs and everything was taken apart.

SL: When did you return to Skalat?

LB: That was beginning of '44. About end of winter '44.

SL: What did you do there then for the entire year before the war was officially over?

LB: Oh, the Russians came in and we got our jobs back. You worked in the same job. In fact, I even got a promotion. I became the head credit inspector because the one who was credit inspector before was a soldier in the army.

SL: So where did you live?

LB: There were some Jewish homes. The better Jewish homes they left. Not all of them but there was one, I suppose the Germans used it for some [thing] official. So we got one room in one of these ex-Jewish homes.

SL: Were you with your brother?

LB: I forgot to tell you my brother didn't survive. When the Russians came in, yes, I was with my brother and I was married too. We got married right away, and my brother had to go to the Russian army. They called it Polish army.

SL: He was forced to?

LB: Yes, of course, they had to. How old was he at that time? He was not quite 20. That was '43. He was nineteen-and-a-half years old. So he had to go to the Polish army. Right away the Russians organized a Polish army. They called it Polish. It was the same as Russian, but those who used to be Polish citizens went to that army. A year later he was killed. I think he was killed in March '45, just two months before the end of the war.

SL: Now you mentioned that you got married then right away. Was Eddy living with you in the woods?

LB: No.

SL: How did you meet him again?

LB: Right away when we came, of course. The minute I came in he found me right away. He was there, was in the city. He was there.

SL: You said earlier that you hadn't known one another and you didn't think about marriage.

LB: We couldn't think because nobody thought. No, there were no Jewish weddings. Like I read sometimes now in these books, they say in Warsaw ghetto there were weddings. Nothing like that happened in Skalat. Nobody got married after the Germans came in. Absolutely, there wasn't one Jewish wedding after that.

SL: Were you in a situation before you fled to the woods, did you realize that if you survived and came back that you would marry him?

LB: Of course.

SL: When did you get married?

LB: Right after we got out. Right away.

SL: So together you lived in that apartment?



LB: Yes.

SL: Where did your husband work?

LB: He was an agronom,<sup>16</sup> they call it. Like agricultural agent they would call it here, in the agricultural office. Also for the whole county.

SL: Why did you decide to leave or when had you made up your mind that you were eventually going to leave?

LB: Then they came out with their rule, repatriation. You must have heard about repatriation. Somehow between the big shots Roosevelt and Churchill and Stalin, they decided that after the war everybody can go to his country of origin. We were Polish citizens. The Russians had to allow us to leave. They don't allow anybody to leave. Like now, they don't want the Jews to leave, they don't want anybody to leave. But that was the agreement. So like in Germany, those who... Germans who lived in Poland had to go back to Germany. [They] were allowed to go back. They had to. We were only allowed, but they had to. I forgot, I shouldn't compare it. But anyway since we were Polish citizens the Russians were supposed to let us go. They didn't want to. They made it very hard for us. Every transport that got out of Poles and Jews that got out of the city, was like giving blood. You had to fight with them. It was just terrible. When we were already on the train, all packed with the babies, with everything, they still made difficulties. They said they don't have coal. They don't have this. It was just terrible. But finally they had to let us go. We wanted to go to Poland because we were Poles. We didn't want to stay with the Communists.

SL: Before the repatriation was announced, did you and your husband feel that you wanted to leave Skalat?

LB: If we could, we would. Even before we knew [about repatriation], everybody wanted to. Nobody likes Communists. Nobody wanted to stay there. See, the Ukrainians would have probably liked to leave, too, but they couldn't, they were not allowed. Because they say, this is Ukraine, and you have to stay. But the Poles and Jews declared themselves Polish citizens, so they didn't force us. But there was a repatriation rule that Polish citizens, if they want to leave, they can. We went to Poland. We thought in

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<sup>16</sup>Polish for 'agronomist'.

Poland at least we will not live under communism. But when we came to Poland it was just the same, communism all over.

SL: When was this exactly?

LB: We went to Poland in July '45.

SL: Where in Poland did you arrive?

LB: We arrived. First we went to Gliwice, and we stayed there for a month and we looked around and we saw that Russian soldiers were everywhere. The Communist rule prevailed everywhere. It was just the same as under the Russians on the other side of the border. Since we didn't have anything anyway, we said "Why should we stick around here? Maybe we should try to flee to the west and live in a democratic country." It was not open traveling, you couldn't go. Most everybody who went smuggled himself into the American or English zone. So many people who wanted to go . And there were many, I would call them Mafia people, who made money on that. For instance, somebody opened an office downtown Gliwice and said that they enabled people who wanted to go to the west, they enabled people to go. You had to pay them so and so much, of course, and they will take you to the west. Most of [the people who wanted to go] them were Jews, because Jews didn't have anything. The Poles wouldn't even... those who wanted to go, everybody owns something. So how do you leave everything and go? But we had nothing. So a group of about eight hundred Jews signed up. There were these two men who said they have a train and they get help from America, that it is an American-sponsored organization, and they will take us to Germany. We got on that train. We with that baby and [her husband's] brother and sister, his brother with his wife, and his sister with her husband. Three couples, and there were many others. And his cousin with his sister-in-law, [a] very large group. And most people that we didn't know. Some were from Romania, some from Austria. Most of them were Pole or German. We get on the train in November. It was snowing and cold. It was the end of November, I think. And there was no glass in the train, no windows, there were just openings. It was so cold. And when we came to Czechoslovakia, Ostrava-Moravská, they stopped the train and everybody out. On the train, there was hanging a sign,

UNRRA,<sup>17</sup> but the Russian and Czech soldiers stopped the train in that city in Czechoslovakia and said, "The whole story is a bluff. That train is not sponsored by the UNRRA. Nobody gave permission for the train to go anyplace. You have to go back where you came from." Imagine! Everybody got out, and said, "We are not moving." And we stood the whole night in this railroad station in Ostrava-Moravská. We said, "We are not moving." So they told us they are taking us to the city. His sister and brother didn't have children, didn't go with us. They ran away somewhere separately. But me with that buggy and the baby, where can I go? So we went where they took us. They brought us into a huge building, a kind of armory, one huge room, with straw on the floor, [and said,] "Here you stay." And we slept one next to the other, men, women, children, next to them. Everybody had that much space on the straw. I do not think that they even gave us straw. I do not remember maybe we used our own whatever we had I do not remember. I think they gave us straw. So the first evening a group of men got together in a side room. There was a small side room. They had a big conference, and they said, "You know, let's send out some delegation to Prague. There must be a Joint<sup>18</sup> in Prague. They must help us. After all, it's sponsored by their UNRRA. The whole building was surrounded with Czech soldiers, but the men watched when there was no soldier on the side, and four or five men jumped out of the window and Eddy was one of those men. He went to Prague and they didn't accomplish anything in Prague. They told them they don't have anything do with that. "We can't help you." They gave each one a few Czech money for the train to go back, and that's all. In the meantime my baby is sick and he cries the whole night and I didn't know what it was. They brought me a doctor and the doctor gave him some medication and a day passes and two. The other men, little by one, the one comes back and the second night the second man comes back and mine isn't back. Finally, he came back, the last one. No, he did not come back. I'm sorry, he didn't come back. It was winter, cold outside, and one day a Czech police officer walks into the front door, just stands in the door, and says to the first person who was next to him, "There is frau

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<sup>17</sup>United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration.

<sup>18</sup>The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

Baras here pani<sup>19</sup> Baras?" He spoke Czech. It's very much alike to the Polish language and it's easy to understand. And they called me to the front hall, from far away. That hall is, that armory is so big, and they called, "Pani Barasova, pani Barasova." And I go out to him just in the dress, like, that I wore. And he says, "Come to me." I look at him, "Are you crazy?" I said, "It's winter. I have a baby in there. I don't have a coat on. Where are you taking me?" He says, "Your husband is waiting for you." He whispered to me so. "Grab the child and come." I put on my coat and wrapped the baby in the blanket, nothing else. And I follow him. That was a military blanket, so heavy, and the baby is already almost a year old, is heavy, and I had a very heavy coat on, not a warm coat but a very heavy coat and I walked through that deep snow, not on the sidewalk. Nobody's supposed to know that I follow him, I just have to watch for him, but he doesn't go with me, only before me. It seems to me like I was walking for hours. Finally, I walk into a house and my husband is there and he grabs the baby and the baby is sick and makes number two all over his clothes. And there was a Czech family. She was at Theresienstadt. She was Jewish, he was not, and after the war they got together. They brought a doctor right away and the doctor said the baby had the flu and he cannot travel. So that family started to talking about leaving the baby there because we wanted to go on and get out of Czechoslovakia. So they want to take the baby. They said, "After it is settled and everything, you'll come back and get the baby." And I knew they wanted the baby because they didn't have children. So we stayed another day or two, until the baby was almost well and my husband already knew that Czech officer and that Czech officer commanded somebody else and that somebody else took us by train to the German border and that's how we got to.

**END OF TAPE 4, SIDE 2**

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<sup>19</sup>Czech for 'Mrs'.

## TAPE 5, SIDE 1

SL: So you, your husband and your child were able to get to the German border?

LB: It was not very easy. Everything was very complicated because we didn't have any papers. That was the main problem. So when we wanted to get out of Ostrava, it was still wartime or almost wartime, at least atmosphere. Everybody who didn't have papers was suspicious, if not of spying, was suspicious of black marketing. So we had that man who was supposed to take us and did take us from Ostrava to the German border. But he had to give us instructions how to travel without papers. First of all, don't carry backpack, which the Germans call a Rucksack because most of those with the Rucksacks were suspected of black-marketing. So take a suitcase. And he took a sleeping compartment for us so that we go all the way, we stay all the way in one compartment and not be bothered. He also bribed the conductor. He told them that there's a sick person in here, he shouldn't disturb us. I don't know if he had to bribe him or just tell him. Then he said also that when we get off, we were supposed to get off in the border city named Aš (Ash), a very small city on the Czech side. So we had to have all the instructions how to behave so that nobody knows that we are foreigners and nobody would ask us for papers. In that compartment where we sat, sat also a young Czech soldier, very young man. So he told that young man... first of all, before he talked to that man, he told me to take off the glasses and hide them before the soldier saw them. So why? He told that soldier that I am nearsighted, that I don't see well and I lost my glasses or broke my glasses and I have to get to this and this hotel and I don't see how to walk without the glasses. So he asked that soldier to take me over. Of course if you make a comparison, the conditions now in America, you wouldn't let a young man take a woman in her middle thirties across the city. But in those days nobody was afraid of that, like rape or what. Nobody even thought of that. All people were afraid of black marketing or spying. And the soldiers agreed. It also was agreed that my husband and I would not walk together out of the train because men were mostly suspected of being black market. No, women were suspected of being black marketers. I don't know. Anyway my husband was supposed to carry the baby because men were suspicious of black marketing

but not when they carried the baby. I was supposed to go without the baby, but the suitcase, which the soldier agreed to take, to carry for me. So my husband had only the baby. That's how we got to the hotel in Aš (Ash) or Aše. I don't remember. That soldier brought me to the door of the hotel, showed me this is the place and I thanked him and that's all and I went up. The manager knew that we are coming. That Czech man called him before so he knew. So he took me into an ice cold room. There was no heat at all. Soon my husband arrived with the baby and we were supposed to wait there for Eddy's family, brother and sister, for the two couples who were supposed to meet us there. We waited and waited the whole day and they didn't come. I don't know; we waited only a few hours, I think. They didn't come. We found out later that they were caught also by the police and interr[ogated], stopped. I'm short an English word when I need it. Anyway, so that man decided he will take us across the border himself. But was the same thing. Men were suspected that they would do black marketing across the border so that was the hardest part, how to get across the border with a suitcase. No, he didn't take the suitcase. I'm sorry. We left everything. No, I think we did carry. Yes, so my husband took the suitcase and the baby in order not to be suspected. He took the baby and they went the legal way to the border. The man hired a sled for him. They had a sled to the border, but the border itself had to be walked on foot, which was not far. And with the baby he wasn't suspected of anything. But we had accumulated already some German money in anticipation of getting into Germany after spending four months in Gleivitz<sup>20</sup> in Poland, we had prepared some German money. So how do we hide it? And if they had caught me with that money then I'm sure a black marketer. So that man took me on foot through forests. It was such hard walking and so far. I am telling you, it was just terrible. We walked a very long time, but we went around the guards. Somehow he knew the way. He probably didn't do it for the first time, maybe he did it before. Until we got into the German village and here is my husband with the baby, with the suitcase, everything fine.

LB: He hired a man who spoke Czech, he also spoke German fluently. First we went into a place where we had a drink, a cup of coffee or a glass of beer, and then we got into a sled that man had hired. Or was it

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<sup>20</sup>Mrs. Baras uses a German name for a town which is now known as Gliwice and is located in Poland.

a carriage? I think it was sled because there was a lot of snow on the ground. And those horses took, that carriage, took us to the city of Selb. That was the border city. Was it ever crowded! Thousands and thousands of Germans who were expelled from Poland, Czechoslovakia, because Poland took over the eastern part of Germany. Since it was now Poland the Germans were not supposed to live there anymore. So they all crowded into that border city of Selb. We were sitting in a restaurant with that little baby, the baby still sick, and we can't even get a plate of soup. You need a card. You can't get anything. But when the innkeeper heard that we are Jews he gave us an address where there's a Jewish committee. It was evening, the office was closed, so he gave us address of the president who lived in a private house. So we went there and he gave us a card, said you should get a room in a hotel and that you should get a food ration card, and we stayed there overnight. The next morning I wake up with a terrible toothache. Everything comes together. So we had to go to a dentist who pulled my tooth. Of course I hadn't been to a dentist for many years, for all the years of the German occupation. What was it, about two years? And then from Selb we got to Munich. In Munich there was a camp for refugees, but there was no room for us. It was already so crowded. They sent us to Bamberg.

SL: When was it that you finally arrive at Bamberg, do you remember a date?

LB: We left Gliwice in the beginning of November. We stayed in that camp, that armory, about ten days. Some people stayed about half a year or more, the rest didn't get out as quickly, we were lucky. Then we came to Bamberg, it was the end of December, of '45.

SL: After the war when you finally got settled down into Bamberg, did you discover any other surviving family members who you previously had not known were alive?

LB: Eddy discovered a first cousin in Gleivitz. From my family I didn't find anybody.

SL: When did you eventually hook up with your brother who now lives in Milwaukee?

LB: We were in Bamberg already. The first contact with him we got when we were in Bamberg. He got a hold of us right after the war. See we had, I told you, these two uncles here. When he was in Russia he found out there's no more a crime to have relatives in America because America helped and Russia

were good friends at that time, during the second world war. So it was announced that you can even send telegrams to America. He was at that time in Gorki, in Russia. So he went to the post office or somewhere and sent a telegram to America. Yes, now you'll say, "How did he send a telegram?" Nobody carried the address, but my brother has a terrific memory and he remembered the address of that uncle in Poughkeepsie. He didn't remember the address of the uncle in New York but he remembered the address of the uncle in Poughkeepsie and he sent him a telegram. So now how did he know that I'm alive? At that time after the war when we both went back to work, I worked in the bank and it was next door to the office of city administration, because the old building of city administration was converted into something else, I don't know. It was all in one building. When the mail would come in there was a lot of mail coming from these Jewish boys who had gone to the Russian Army. Everybody wanted to know what happened to their families. I was the lucky one. The mailman always brought those mails to me. I had to answer many letters that nobody survived, imagine. Then came a letter from my own brother. So of course then he knew that I survived and he sent a telegram to America and they started to send packages to me in Skalat. Most of them came opened, half of the, what was inside was gone, but I got something. Then when I went to Gleivitz I worried that I will lose contact with him because I couldn't send him letters. I didn't know where I will wind up in Poland. When I was in Gleivitz the mail didn't go to Russia. When I was in Skalat I could send mail because that was included, that was part of Western Ukraine as they called it, Zapadna-Ukraina, Russia. But from Gleivitz there was no mail. So wherever I met a Russian soldier in the street, and there were many of them, I would give him the letter, because soldiers could send letters to Russia, but civilians could not. I must have written a hundred letters but somehow some of them reached him. First I send letters from Skalat. And that time I wrote him already. I didn't want to tell him exactly. I had to go around about it so that he would get the hint that we are going westward. I didn't say directly we're leaving Russia. But somehow he understood it between the lines. So he knew that we are not in Skalat and then from Gleivitz I sent letters and letters. I think that some of them he got. But I wrote the same way. I didn't say directly we're leaving Poland, but he also



got the hint of it. Then when he left Russia, after all as a Polish citizen you could also leave, but that was much later. Then we were already in Germany, we were not in Gleivitz anymore. He stopped in Lwow, he stopped in Gleivitz, he stopped in [Karvitz? 14:30], but somehow in Gleivitz he met some people who told him that we went to Germany. So when he got to Munich they had all the names because we had stopped there and registered. So they had the exact address that we live in Bamberg. So he came directly to Bamberg.

SL: So when was that, do you remember when you finally saw him?

LB: We left Germany in '49. That must have been about summer '47 I would say. Maybe it was 1'46. I doubt very much. Most probably '47 it think so '47.

SL: So it had been at least five or six years since you had seen him?

LB: Yeah, he left in May '41. That's right. I don't remember if it was '46. I know it was a beautiful summer day. It was middle of summer '46 or '47, I don't remember exactly. Yes, that was a long time, and many things had happened in between in the meantime.

SL: Had you ever expected that you would see him again after you had broken that chain after you moved out of Gleivitz.

LB: Oh, after that I was sure we'll meet.

SL: You were?

LB: Of course. It was after the war and I knew somehow he'll find us. Oh yes, then I didn't have any doubts. As long as the war was going on, I never expected this. I didn't expect to survive. Oh no, at that time I knew. After all, I knew he will go to Gleivitz, there were some other Jews and everywhere we went we left lists and names and we registered. The central of the newcomers was in Munich. Everybody who came stopped in Munich, those who came to the American zone. Of course for some people it took years, I heard that.

SL: What about Eddy's brother and sister. Did they eventually find you and hook up to you in Bamberg?

LB: Yes, it didn't take long.

SL: The got to Bamberg too?

SL: They were stopped in Czechoslovakia and didn't take long. They didn't get to Bamberg, they got to Fürth which was only, I would say about thirty, forty kilometers from Bamberg. Not far. No, it didn't take them long. They didn't stay long in Czechoslovakia.

SL: So you were in Blamberg then...?

LB: Almost four years, almost four years.

SL: What did the camp look like physically?

LB: It was barracks also. German soldiers used to live there. So like a family didn't have a room. You always had to have somebody, another family or at least a single person. We always had a single man, a stranger, in the room. There were not enough rooms. But we didn't stay there long because people who had a child had priority to find an apartment in the city. We never found an apartment, a room. So in fact when Joe came back we didn't live in the camp anymore. We had a room with a private family.

SL: I didn't realize that you moved out of the camp.

LB: Yes.

SL: How long did you stay in the camp?

LB: It must have been, the first winter was '45-46, so just before Joe came back we moved into that room. But I don't know if it was summer of '46 or summer '47.

SL: So you were in the camp long enough to have a memory of what it was like there?

LB: Yes. It was a communal kitchen, of course. We didn't cook. No, it must have been summer '46, yes. Eddy was longer there because he was on the police force of the camp. They had their own DP police, so he went to work every other day. Twenty-four hours work and forty-eight hours off. It was like institutional life. You went down to the breakfast in the dining room and then down for dinner. Frankly, I don't remember. He probably would remember better. When we came in they would give out clothes. There was a warehouse, and we used to get... I think we had mostly dry food, because I think once a day we had only cooked meal. In other words, they would give us packages, those Red Cross packages,

where there was cheese and chocolate sometimes and crackers. Oh, now I remember, I'm mistaken, because I remember that we got once a huge can of tomato sauce, like restaurant size. We had a stove. Maybe not all of them. I had a stove in my room where I could cook one pot. There was like these stoves that these people use now.

SL: Like a hot plate?

LB: No, no, not electric. You had to put coal or wood in it. But the top was so small, there was no more room there for one. I think only the children. I remember that the baby would get every day breakfast, like in the dining room, we cooked cereal and whole milk. I can't recall exactly how it was, but I know that I was able to make something in the room, too. See, the food was so funny. A family would get such a huge can of tomato sauce. What would you do? It was not organized. You would get more chocolate than the useful stuff. But I don't remember if it was only a supplement to the meals. I can't recall that.

SL: What about the people were there? As far as the mixture of people, where did they come from?

LB: From different countries, there were many Jews. Only Jews were there. There were many from Romania, a large group, from Hungary, Poland, most of us, and that was funny. I told you about that chauffeur. The German landrat's chauffeur, he came there once. He didn't live there. He came once. He was by profession a driver so he fled Poland but he probably cooperated with the Nazis, otherwise he wouldn't have fled. He left in Poland a wife and a child. We saw him in Gleivitz. We didn't know what he did wrong. I'm sure he did something but we couldn't report on him because we didn't know what. But we asked him to our room. We tried to find out why he fled. Of course, he wouldn't talk. He would only said he misses his child. But we also suspected maybe he fled to leave because he didn't get along with his wife. There was not a good marriage. So Eddy said, "I don't know, maybe he just left just to get rid of her, but what about the child?" So we met him in Germany but we couldn't say anything because we knew that he must have done something wrong, but we don't know what.

SL: Was there much black marketing going on there at the camp?

LB: A lot, yes. An awful lot.

SL: What types of items were sold?

LB: Cigarettes, some kind of cognac. They called it "three-star cognac." I don't know if it was American or French. Seems to me it was French kind. That was an awful lot of that, cigarettes and cognac and what else—cameras. When we came to Germany, the stores were empty. You couldn't buy anything. From twelve to three all the stores were closed. Whatever merchandise they had left over from before they didn't want to sell because the German money was very, very cheap. While we were there they came out with new money, a new mark. Then suddenly the stores were full and the black market disappeared. I don't know if it disappeared completely or almost. But then there was merchandise in the store already. But in the beginning, if you didn't get something on the black market, you'll never get it. Even meat, sugar, butter. The farmers didn't want to sell anything because the German money wasn't worth anything. If you didn't have, let's say, to give them a can of cocoa for the head of lettuce, you would never get that lettuce, that head of lettuce and head of cabbage.

SL: So you were trading things that you got as rations?

LB: Mostly when we got a Red Cross package. So we would trade it. Yes, that was the only way to live. If I wanted a little milk for the kids, I had to give away a package of chocolate, and he didn't care much for the chocolate anyway and I knew the milk was better for him than the chocolate. Yes, milk. Meat especially. Oh, that was so hard to get.

SL: What about religious life in the camp?

LB: Oh, they had services. Not many. There was a group of, I don't remember if it was the Hungarian or the Romanian, I think the Hungarians had the very religious group. But at that time, as I told you, Jews weren't religious anymore, at least not Polish Jews. I knew some who were very religious before the war and I met here not long ago a Polish Jew who is a survivor and lives now in Chicago, and he is very, very religious. He is a part-time cantor.<sup>21</sup> He's a businessman. But for high holidays he would go to... they bring him here in Sheboygan to tend the prayers on holidays. And he's very, very religious. Most people

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<sup>21</sup>A synagogue official who sings or chants liturgical music and leads the congregation in prayer.

can't get over it, after all those losses that they suffered during the war. So I don't know which God is better. I wouldn't say there is no God. But if there is, there's only one, so how he — I keep on thinking, if that one prays on Friday and this one on Saturday and that one Sunday, this one prays standing and this one prays kneeling and this one prays doubled up in half like they're Muslims, what's the difference? You pray always to the same God. And I think most survivors think like I do. You can believe only in one God, you cannot believe in many.

**END OF TAPE 5, SIDE 1**

## TAPE 5, SIDE 2

SL: You told me while I was changing tapes that you recalled a few things that you really did not want to forget to put on the tape. Why don't you just talk about that?

LB: I mentioned the big actions, which means the Germans called it "resettlement actions" but actually people were not being resettled. Of course most of the people did not know. But nobody was resettled. They all went to [Belice?] where they were killed outright. There was no camp there. That was after the last action that I mentioned which was in November. One was October, one was November. Then the Judenrat saw to it that the Germans would allowed through the camp and while the people in the camp were considered safe, the people in the ghetto knew that the ghetto will be exterminated. On the eighth of April, 1943, came the extermination action and the Germans of course were sure that no Jews will be alive after that. But on that day in April 8, it was a beautiful warm day in spring. Somehow they always picked nice days for actions. They took eight hundred people, but not to trains and not even to trucks. They marched them, the sick, the old, some people, I understand, could barely crawl and the others had to carry them. A few kilometers, maybe five, six kilometers out of the city limits where trenches were previously prepared. But this time the Jews did not dig the trenches. Usually when there was work to be done they took Jews for work. This time they took Gentiles from the villages around and these Gentiles were told that gasoline will be stored in those trenches. But they took those eight hundred Jews there and told them to undress completely and put everything aside. Shoes in one pile and coats in other pile and everything. They put a few people, sometimes four and sometimes five, on one board across the trenches and used only one bullet. Of course later people said that they didn't have enough bullets anymore because the war was going badly for them and that was also the reason why they didn't take the peoples into trains. They didn't have trains for that purpose. The children they threw in the bottom without even killing them, just alive, and on top the adults fell in. The next morning, Eddy, who is now my husband, went there because he knew that his parents were in that trench. Eddy had the freedom to move around because he worked for a German, he was like an assistant to the manager of the estate.

The manager was a Ukrainian and he was an assistant so he got on his horse, which he had the right to use, he had all these horses on the estate to his disposal, and he came over to take a look at these trenches and he saw that a mound was moving and he pulled out a girl who was alive. She was about eighteen or nineteen years old, and her name was Rebecca Epstein. Then he stopped a farmer's wagon and they took her to the hospital. She lived three days. Little by little she told how the killings went on, like that the rabbi's son didn't want to get undressed so they killed him. He put on his tefillin and on top of his small tallis that the very Orthodox wear under their coats, under their shirts even I think, so he had all this on and didn't want to undress. So they killed him. Then another woman who was very short, probably under five feet, she jumped up and stuck a German soldier in the face and he killed her outright, too. So she told many of these things like that and after that, then she had another burial after five days. And all these things I described in a book. Everything from the beginning of the German occupation until the very end, by a man named Abraham Weissbrod, who's still alive now in New Jersey. He lives in Lakewood, New Jersey, and he described everything in the Yiddish language in the book entitled, A Small City Is Dying. Of course the title was in Yiddish, which sounds A Shtetl Shtarbt.<sup>22</sup> It was published right after the war. Was published by the Central Historical Commission of the Central Committee of Liberated Jews in U.S. Zone of Germany in Munich. This way you can know.

I know by now you know most of the highlights of the German occupations. I call the "highlights," the actions. But there was the other highlights were of course the camps, the concentration camps. Like we had camp of Kamionki, which was just as bad as any other camp with the difference that the killing was done by guns or by beatings or by typhus. And we were exposed to typhus.

SL: I'm glad that you mentioned that, so we have that to fill in some of the gaps then. I want to if I may bring you back to the DP camp at Bamberg, what we were talking about yesterday. You did mention a few things, we talked about the camp, the place that you lived, what kind of food, black marketing and

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<sup>22</sup>Mrs. Baras is referring to Abraham Weissbrod's Es Starbt a Shtetl, published in 1948.

religion. Now just a few more questions about Bamberg that I wanted to ask. Were there any cultural activities of any kind or any organized social life?

LB: No, to tell it frankly, no. I don't recall anything.

SL: Was there a communal hall where they showed movies or played cards or anything?

LB: No, nothing, nothing, no. The only thing was that some people from the UNRRA were going around everyday to check the cleanliness so that no diseases would come in, would attack the people. So every morning we had to keep our rooms very clean, wash the floor everyday. Everything had to be spic and span. But no social or cultural life was there. Everybody was on his own. Yes, there was a cultural life in Munich, which was the center. So and my brother worked on that paper so he didn't stay long with us in the camp. He moved to Munich.

SL: What paper did he work for?

LB: A Jewish paper, I don't remember the name, in the Yiddish language. I remember the name who was the editor and publisher of that, because he limped, but I do not remember his name. He was from Bamberg. He was the one who started the paper. He went to Munich and started that paper. I could ask my brother. My brother remembers probably the name of the paper and the name of the editor. But that man limped and that's why I remember him. And they even sent my brother one day to Nuremberg where the court was on for probably months about for the war crimes. My brother was there, because every paper was allowed one journalist for one day, the smaller ones. Probably the bigger ones had representatives constantly. But my brother had one day. Maybe other writers who worked for a paper also went, I don't know. So at least we had the paper that my brother used to send us.

SL: Did you have any interaction at all with the Germans who lived in the area?'

LB: Not at all while we lived in the camp, but we didn't stay there long. I mentioned yesterday most of '46 or '47, summertime, very probably '46 and that's the reason I remember so little from the camp. But later when we lived privately in a room, first we had one room like an attic room. We didn't stay there long. Of course we had to get a room assigned. You couldn't just go out and rent a room because there was a



terrible shortage of rooms. There were many Germans who came from Poland and from Czechoslovakia. So we had to go to the Jewish Community in the city, which was composed of German Jews, and they had to give us permission. They gave us addresses, where we can go and ask for a room. So finally we got once decent room in the city. First of all it was much closer to the camp and my husband was still employed by the camp police so he had closer to work. The room was on the street floor, not in an attic, and was twice as big as the first one. The first one was really terribly, terribly small. But no kitchen. We just had permission to use the kitchen. That was a nice woman and that time we got to know some German neighbors, yes. They all were nice to us. Once the government changes, they say, "I didn't know anything what happened before, and now everything is fine."

We got along with her, she had a son who worked in the post office in the village not far so he would come sometimes for the weekend and they loved Victor, who was our baby at that time. But he's gone now. So wherever they went, they would take him to church and shopping and to visit relatives, everywhere. They were very nice to him. And then he had many German friends that he played within the same, the landlord, the owner of the house, lived in that house who had a girl about a year older than Victor. They played together. Across the street was another family that had a full house of children and one boy was four years old. Victor was three at that time. By the time we left he was already four. These boys, two boys, were very, very close, always together. They didn't show us any anti-Semitism, but of course as I told you before, I suppose the masses accept any change very quickly. What was in their hearts, they never told us.

SL: When did you make your decision to leave Europe?

LB: We made the decision the day we came in, the minute we arrived in Germany we made the decision. We were not the only ones. Everybody wanted to leave. Of course our first decision was we would go to Palestine, which was not called Israel at that time yet. We inquired about that and especially that man who ran the paper, he had connections in Munich and he could give us firsthand information. So he said, "Only people without children can go because it is illegal." Of course, Britain didn't let Jews in, at

least only a very small number of them, so everybody had to go to the Alp mountains. He said, "You'll never make it with a child, and they wouldn't even accept him." The baby was only a year old when we came. But since I had two uncles in the states and Eddy had an aunt, so very close relatives, so we got in touch with them right away and my uncle sent us papers. But the papers were good for only such a time. I don't remember, a year or two. They called it an affidavit, I think. But we didn't get the visa, We didn't get the permission to get in. So that affidavit expired and we had to go through UNRRA or at that time the name was changed to IRO, International Refugee Organization. They enabled us to come here. But that didn't happen. Of course we were always packed. The funniest thing is we never knew when it'll come. But when the permission came, you have to leave right away. So I would say for the last at least two years we lived out of the suitcases because we never knew when we can have to leave.

SL: When was it that you finally got the permission to go.

LB: It was after three-and-a-half years. We arrived in Germany in December '45 and we got permission in April '49. But then it was always waiting and waiting everywhere. By the time they notify us and we thought we'd go right away, it still took a few days. Finally we got on the train and came to Bremerhaven. We waited about two or three weeks there for the boat.

SL: So you sailed from Bremerhaven?

LB: We sailed from Bremerhaven and arrived in New York on May 18, 1949.

SL: What kind of a ship was it?

LB: The same kind of one of the ships that took soldiers during the second world war across the ocean. It was a military ship, where women were separated from the children. Like Victor was only four years old so he still was allowed to be with me. Older boys had to stay with their fathers. We also had to work on the boat, help to keep the boat clean and do all kinds of chores while we were there. I didn't have to because I had a small child, but women who didn't have small children, and all the men had to work.

SL: Was the boat then filled with refugees?

LB: To the brim I'm sure. It was not very comfortable, especially for men who were in the lowest deck, and their department was very crowded. Where I was, was close to the motors and was very hot and very noisy, but believe me nobody complained. And the food was delicious, and plenty of it.

SL: How long did the trip last?

LB: Nine days.

SL: And you arrived then in New York?

LB: In New York Harbor and my cousin was there, the one who sponsored us. Of course his father was already seventy-five years old when we came to the U.S. He didn't come but his son, the one who sponsored us, though he never knew us and never met us, he was there. He waited for us and Eddy's aunt was there. She didn't have a car, I don't know how she came but she came I suppose. She always used public transportation. But the cousin took us to his house in New Bergen, New Jersey. We stayed overnight in his house and the next day he took us to his father's apartment in Brooklyn. His father was so poor that he didn't even have a telephone in 1949. In fact he never had a telephone all the years that he lived in the States, which was close to fifty years. So we stayed there a few weeks with him. But the superintendent kept chasing us out. He said that that's an apartment for one family, he cannot have two.

SL: Can I interrupt you for a second?

LB: Yes, of course.

SL: I wanted to ask you if you can recall what your thoughts were when you first saw the Statue of Liberty.

LB: It was all foggy. Everybody looked and looked; we couldn't see it. So everybody was on the deck at that time but I had to go down because Victor couldn't stand the noise. You know how the boat makes such shrill noise when you're approaching in a fog, so he couldn't stand it and I had to take him down. But I stood there for awhile. Nobody saw anything anyway and that's why I suppose the shrill was, because it was so terribly foggy.

SL: What were your first impressions of New York?

LB: When I got out of the subway the first time and couldn't see the sky, just saw these tall building, it was so overwhelming. I thought it was beautiful, but after a few days I didn't like it so much. First of all the smell of the gasoline in the streets would make me sick. We didn't have many cars in Poland so I wasn't used. And also in the beginning when my cousin would take us in the car because he lived about half an hour drive from his father's house and towards the end of the half hour I would always get sick in the car. And now I'm very careful. When I drive nothing bothers me, but when I'm in the car I always have to sit in the back. Though I haven't gotten sick, in fact since I'm here already thirty years I never was sick, but maybe because I never sat in the back. Like I went the other day to Rhinelander by bus. I had to transfer in Green Bay, so from Sheboygan to Green Bay I had to sit not in the back but not in the very front, just second row from the back, and by the time I got to Green Bay I didn't feel good. So I made it sure that I get a front seat from Green Bay to Rhinelander. So just me, I'm not used to cars. New York made a wonderful impression on us but we didn't have money to go and see places. But you know what, we were so anxious to see a Jewish movie. I remember once it said in the paper there is movie with Molly Picon.<sup>23</sup> We took the subway, which was in that time ten cents only, especially to see the movie. But we didn't realize that these old movies played only one day or two at the most. By the time we arrived at the movie, Molly Picon was gone and some cowboy show was on. But we did go to see Molly Picon in the theater. She still played on Second Avenue at that time. So we saw her in a show called Sadie. We were very anxious for anything that brought back memories. So we did go. Of course we went a lot to museum. My husband couldn't get a job. We didn't speak English, the museums were free, so we walked. Whenever it was possible we went to see museums.

SL: How long did you live in New York?

LB: It was nine months. But in the meantime, my brother came two weeks before us and the other uncle gave him a job in [? 20:25] He got that job in Poughkeepsie, where my uncle lived. In the meantime, while we were in New York, Eddy's sister and brother came and they were sent directly to Wisconsin

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<sup>23</sup>A star of the Yiddish screen and stage.

because they were listed as farmers. As well my husband was also actually a farmer in Europe, but since we came to New York he couldn't get a job as a farmer. So when they came here and they both got jobs, we came here. Because in New York in 1949 it was summer, a very, very hot summer, terribly hot, and my husband couldn't get a job. He did have a job and had a job there for a few weeks, temporary, seventy-five cents an hour, fifty cents an hour. Seventy-five was the highest I think he ever got. So that's why we came to Wisconsin, to Sheboygan, because Eddy's sister and brother were here.

SL: Where were you living during that nine months?

LB: Oh, the first six weeks we were with our uncle, then we got an apartment. We moved into an apartment only a man had who was married but his wife had gone to California to visit her children for four or six weeks, so we moved into his apartment and used his kitchen. Then we found an apartment on Fox Street, which is now I understand all burned out in the Puerto Rican neighborhood. But in those days we were not afraid. It was completely safe. We could walk in the middle of the night on that Fox Street. The only thing is that Jewish people, I mean white people, not only Jewish, no white people wanted to live there anymore because they were afraid that the children would get bad manners playing with the Puerto Rican children. And about two, three blocks from there was a black neighborhood. But never, never ever have I heard of any abuses or rapes or attacks. Only that people didn't like the company. So in that house, it was a ten-family apartment, six floors, walk-up and terribly hot because on the top floor the heat was just unbearable as I told you before. Three months of that summer the temperature was all the time between 90 and 98 and 100. It was a beautiful apartment but it was still under rent control, so the rent was not high. The man who lived in that apartment is now a millionaire. In fact he almost was a millionaire. He was also a refugee, but he had the [Necke? 23:00] representation now if he's still alive. He had that all the years. He must be alive. He's not that old, he was a sewing machine representative for, I don't know, I think it was Singer before the war, so when he came to New York he got the [Necke?] representation, so he didn't have to live on Fox Street anymore. So we took the apartment over from him and we paid only like something like forty-five or forty-eight dollars a month.

SL: Were you getting any money from any Jewish organizations to help you in that period?

LB: Yes in the beginning, we did for a while, yes. Because the first few months my husband didn't have any job at all. Then he worked in New Jersey for a watchmaker who had all the parts for watches and they had to put them together. So he showed him how to do it. But he never knew today if he'll work tomorrow. Since we didn't have a telephone, when he needed him he would send him a postcard to come to work tomorrow. Sometimes it would be this way: the whole week he didn't work and then he went to work and worked till ten at night when his boss got an order. It was a very small business. So when there was an order, he would work twelve, fourteen hours a day sometimes.

I finally got, in August I got a job in a factory somewhere around Seventh Avenue. A fancy place. It was a contractor, the company's name was [M. Bloch? 24:20]. Was also a small place; they employed forty people only. But it was also not steady work. I was on piecework so sometime I made a dollar an hour and sometimes I made \$1.20. But it was not steady work. Like we worked August, September to make the fall clothes. Then the factory was closed for a few weeks or maybe a few months, winter time I worked again a little bit. So finally when Eddy's brother and brother-in-law got jobs in Sheboygan, we decided to come. In July 1951 we came. Oh, I always mix up months. In February we came here. We were in New York from May till February, about nine months.

**END OF TAPE 5, SIDE 2**

**TAPE 6, SIDE 1**

SL: We got you to Sheboygan right? So we were in 1951.

LB: No 1950.

SL: Oh, you said '51.

LB: '49 we came to New York, we spent nine months in New York. In 1950 we were all here.

SL: Okay we'll have to make a note of that, on the last tape you just said '51

LB: But I also said there was nine months, yes it was nine months. 1950 we came to Sheboygan.

SL: How'd you make the trip from New York to Sheboygan?

LB: Oh, that was also quite sensational because we came by train and we put Victor on the bench to sleep, it was a very long trip, and the train caught fire right exactly under the place where he slept. So of course, the conductor came in and said, "Wake up the child. There's a fire right in this place." Oh, and we stood in that train till the fire was out and waited so long. We must have come to Sheboygan about five, six hours later and people from the Jewish Committee, elderly people, waited for us at the railroad station all the time. They were informed that the train will be late. We arrived here about two o'clock at night and two elderly men sat at that railroad station and waited for us.

SL: Do you recall who they were?

LB: Yes and they are both dead. One was Sam Solkovitz and one was Nate Ziskind. Nate Ziskind died two years ago at the age of eighty-six. Solkovitz died quite a few years ago.

SL: I wanted to ask you some questions about the first years in Sheboygan when you were first getting used to things. First of all, what were your first impressions of the city?

LB: It's clean, nice. After the dirt of New York, it was almost like I would say a pleasant shock to see that clean city with so many small houses. The first six weeks we also couldn't find a place to live. People who don't speak English or hardly speak English and have a little boy were like outlaws in Sheboygan. Nobody wanted to rent us an apartment. So we stayed in an apartment house where my brothers-in-law lived. They had two very small apartments across the hall. So we actually lived almost exact, it was one

foot in one apartment and one foot in the other. Part-time here and part-time there, because these two doors were just across the hall facing each other. And after six months a nice Jewish family gave us an apartment in their apartment house, not in their house. They had an apartment house and they had an apartment empty. Was two rooms only and a tiny back kitchen. Like it was a living room/bedroom. From the living room to the bedroom there was no door, just a curtain, and the kitchen didn't have a window and there were mice and cockroaches plenty and a bathroom in the hall for three families. But we were glad that we got that. And it was downtown right on the sidewalk.

SL: What was the address?

LB: 822 North Eighth Street. Right in the business district and no yard. Not a piece of grass. And I couldn't let the child out alone because we were right in the downtown. So we didn't have a place even to play or even to walk around and I enrolled him in the closest school. Of course in the first few days I took him because it was a very busy street. I always had to take him at least across the street. Once he was on the other side of the street he would walk alone. That was kindergarten. But before that, the six weeks that we stayed with my relatives, he was in another kindergarten also, enrolled. But in that apartment we lived only two months. About the second month we were there Sam Solkovitz came over. The Jewish people here were so nice and so good to us and they tried to help us. Gave us some old furniture. Discarded furniture but usable. Nothing fancy but at least the couch that we could sit on and a bed that you could sleep in. And probably, I don't recall, a bed for the boy too. He was already at that time over four years old, no, in 1950 five years old. Then Solkovitz said, "You know, there is a house for sale that you could have it for a down-payment of \$500." Of course we didn't have the \$500, but our uncle in New York saw to it. They borrowed us the money. They said, "You'll have to return the money." But we had so many relatives, sons and there were cousins, my mother's cousins. They sent us the \$500. Once you got the \$500 the owner of the house said, no, he will not sell it for \$500 down-payment because the people who had it now, somebody lived in here, they had bought it with a \$500 down-payment and they lived over a year, never paid him a penny, and just lived long enough to use up the \$500 and he even



had a hard time to make them leave. So he said, now he wants a thousand dollars. But he got a thousand, we got another \$500 from New York. Didn't take long for us to repay it, that's true. We bought the house for five-and-a-half thousand dollars on land contract. A clause was put in the contract that we have to pay \$50 a month or more. He says, we bring more, he should accept it, not to run after our money as interest you mean. Eddy had a job, small jobs, he always didn't make much money in the beginning. His first job was in a tannery.

SL: Are you talking about the house that we're presently in?

LB: Yes.

SL: What is the address here?

LB: 1950 North 11th Street.

SL: And when did you move in here?

LB: We bought it in May but it was in terrible shape. It took us four weeks to clean it up. June 1st we moved in, 1950. And the house number is 1950. And there was a big garden, the first few years we had a garden. Then we stopped it because for the small family it didn't pay to have such a big garden. But when we moved into the house, don't think it looked like it looks now. The water pipes were outside like in a factory. It was in such terrible shape and of course very old-fashioned beside the inconveniences. But little by little we changed it. It took us quite a long time. The last remodeling we did in 1960 when we took in the porch. See, the whole front part of the house, that now is a front hall and part of the living room, it was a porch. So we remodeled it completely. In fact some people say even the living room looks nice. We completely remodeled the kitchen also. Upstairs we didn't do much remodeling work but we papered the walls and put in tile floors. Of course most of the work we did ourselves. Besides like the outside work, remodeling the living room, we had to have somebody from the outside because we broke the walls and anyway my husband didn't know how to do it either. But whatever we could we did. Not only painting but staining and tile floor making, and some part of new walls in the bathroom. Sometimes we had to hire somebody. It was a big job.

SL: Now I can go back and ask you about the jobs, why don't you go back and tell me about the job that your husband first had and what he eventually ended up doing.

LB: The first few years he went from job to job and of course wherever he came, he was the first to be laid off. So he worked in a tannery, he worked in a furniture factory. The tannery he quit himself because the pay was very, very low. He went to that furniture factory where the pay was much better but then they laid him off. For a while he even worked as a janitor at Montgomery Ward. For awhile he worked in the junk yard. Whatever he could find. It was very hard to find jobs in those days. But then he got into the [Hollereid? 10:00] Company. The year was 1953. Then after a few months he was laid off also. In the meantime Ellen was born and we didn't have any insurance because he hadn't worked there long enough to have insurance. While Ellen was born he did not work. But then they called him back and he worked there for nineteen years and he retired six years ago, which was 1974.

SL: What type of work was he doing there?

LB: All kinds. He went through different... In 19 years he worked on machines usually, some labor work. But in the beginning sometimes piecework and later not. I don't even know the names what do you call it lathe work or something like that and polishing. That he didn't do long. But I can't name the machines that he used, you know. But we made a living, I can't complain. I did sewing at home, almost from the day we came and as soon as I was able to buy a machine. It didn't take me long to pay it up. So for years and years I worked at home. When Victor was eight years old I took a job at Pranges Department Store at an alteration lady, and I thought I'll work only part time until the child gets a little older, then I'll be able to change it to a full-time job. But in the meantime I became pregnant so I had to quit the job. Then I went back to my private customers and worked at home for years and years until about 1970, when I took a part-time job. It was the Jung's Clothing Store where I work now and it is still a part-time job.

SL: When you first came to Sheboygan in those early years, did you ever experience any anti-Semitism?

LB: Never, never. We had wonderful neighbors. We had such nice neighbors that this year. See, my husband painted this summer. He's seventy-one years old, and he painted all the windows and woodwork outside most of the house some old fashion siding that looks like bricks. You can't even buy it any more. He bought the house like that. That siding most have been made fifty or sixty years ago. The house is several hundred years old. He put up that new front that's boards that had to be painted like every five years or so and the frames of the wood, but upstairs I wouldn't let him paint himself. He painted two windows upstairs that are above the porch so he stood on the roof of the porch that was that the porch now it is a part of a living room..., but the rest of the windows we planned to hire somebody. And this summer Eddy said to our neighbor across the street, who is a young man about late thirties or forty and Eddy said to him, "Listen, could you recommend somebody who would paint my upstairs windows?" He said, "What? Why should I recommend somebody? I'll do it for you." He brought the ladder from across the street because he was on vacation that week. He brought the ladder and painted all the windows and didn't want to accept any money. So I told him, you know, tell your wife he had a wife and a teenage daughter and even for a man, I do sewing, too. So I said, I told the family [that] whatever they have in sewing I'll do it for them. Of course every family have some alternation to do. About six eight weeks passed or even do not forget it was in the middle of the summer probably July. They didn't bring anything. So just a few weeks ago, probably fall of the same month, before we went to Israel, so it must have been September or October I called. They live across the street I rarely see them. She is working I am working we do not see each other much. I called them and said their daughter was on the phone and I told her you know your father did some painting for us and told him I would pay him in sawing. She said we do not need anything yet, but he told us we know about it. They are very nice. All around, on the north side and west side and across the street all the neighbors are very nice. We get together sometimes for a cup of coffee. Only the one next because she's an eighty-year-old widow. And the next house, which is not directly my neighbor, they came in to look over the pictures that we brought from Israel, and they said, "Come over to us someday." I can't complain. In fact, last night we went out

with a gentile couple for dinner, which we do very often, and all my friends in the writers' group are non-Jewish, and we get along wonderfully. We go every year to conference, to Rhinelander every summer and some other conference besides that. We were in Milwaukee this summer, we go once in a while, and we get along very well. I can't complain. They say there's hidden anti-Semitism here but we never actually went to anything like that.

SL: Did you feel that you experienced the problems of the new immigrant when you first moved to Sheboygan?

LB: Of course. Oh, the first few years were very, very hard. We skimped on everything, especially that we had the house to pay on. We lived very, very, I wouldn't say frugally, almost in a stingy way we lived. We didn't have any luxuries. We didn't have a television until the first television we bought. That was 1956. And we had that for many, many years. And this is only our second television. And we bought this one in 1965. We have repaired it a few times but it's still much cheaper than buying a new one and still works. Of course (in our house?) we watch television very, very late. Also, there is lots of reading going on and very little television. We watch only news from five until about twenty after six. Unless if there is something unusual. We do not get TV Guide we just look up the paper and if there is something unusual on educational channel then that very often would watch.

I would not say often, but very much.

SL: Did you ever feel that you were taken advantage of when you first came here because of language differences or because you were new to the area?

LB: No, see, when we came here we were not taken advantage of anything because there was no opportunity to do it. Like Eddy couldn't get a good job, [but] other people didn't also. In fact, oh yes, I forgot to mention, he also worked on construction at that time. And with him worked another Jewish man who was much younger, American-born, American-born wife. And he couldn't get a job. He also worked on construction. Then he went to Montgomery Ward, got a job as a clerk, and now he is a teller in a bank. So Eddy worked for construction not because he was a newcomer and didn't speak English.

As I told you, a Jewish young man born here, with good English, also worked on construction. It was just the times like that at that time. No, I don't think anybody did take advantage of that. Maybe if there had been opportunity maybe they did. We didn't give anybody opportunity to. We didn't mingle much with people in the beginning, only with the newcomers in the beginning.

SL: Could you elaborate perhaps on the type of help that you received from the Jewish community in Sheboygan?

LB: First of all, all the old furniture. Well, the furniture of course none of them is left now, we have everything new now. And advice; they would recommend jobs, where to go. And not only where to go, they usually put Eddy in the car and went with him because we didn't have a car and didn't know where to go and couldn't speak. At that time I did not look for a job because Victor was so small. I didn't think I could have a job, I couldn't go away and work. And then they went for us to look for apartments. The late Sam Solkovitz burned up a lot of gasoline to look for apartments for us. And David Rabinovitz, who's a local lawyer and at that time was the head of the committee, burned up a lot of gas also to go find jobs for newcomers, not only for Eddy but also for the others. Yes, and he had... co-chairman was the late lawyer [Joel] Fiedelman, but most of the job David Rabinovitz did. You must heard of his name he was a judge for awhile. And the wives' jobs was to bring clothes for the family, for the children, and dishes. Everything that the family need they would bring us and some of the clothes were good, and since I know how to sew I would alter a lot, not only for myself but also for my sisters-in-law. They know a little bit sewing but I have to help them, and they didn't have sewing machines in those days, so I would do most of it for them.

SL: Can you recall any particularly special acts of kindness?

LB: Oh, there were so many that it is hard just to point out some. Oh, it's hard to think of that. Of course, the biggest, I think, was that they came to the railroad station. They waited in the middle of the night at the railroad station for us and then they brought us to the house of my brothers-in-law who lived in the same house and stayed for quite a while there. I think that was very big for older men. They were not

youngsters. Oh, they were not so old after all. Probably in their middle fifties in those days. Sam Solkovitz was probably older than that. Sam Solkovitz could have been almost seventy at that time. But here, oh, there were so many things. If you had told me before I would have thought of something. But they all were... they kept on looking in the ads in the paper where there were jobs or where there were apartments, and they also would give us cash. The first time we came in they gave us some cash for the things that they couldn't bring us and that we had to buy, like about ten, fifteen dollars for the main things like, you know, a person needs a broom or that. These little things they would give us. I can't think of one, of course that's so many years ago. And the Solkovitzes constantly invited us to their house. We were very, very often their house. I don't know, I think that whole period was terrific. Of course, we never repaid them that. You can't repay something like that. I just can't think this moment of anything special.

SL: That's okay.

LB: Like one of them was, and he wasn't even on the committee! There was a man who was a peddler and, as I told you, he wasn't even on the committee. But when we moved from 822 Eighth Street to this apartment, to this house, you think we have to pay a mover? Harry Levitan took his truck, with which he peddled. Of course, my husband and his brother and brother-in-law, moved everything and then had Harry Levitan... There's a walk-in closet upstairs, which could have been considered like a tiny room. It's not much bigger than a bed. And he said, "Oh, you have such a big closet here, but where will you hang up the clothes?" Next day he worked peddling and in the evening he comes over with a big pipe. "Here you have a pipe. You can hang up your clothes, so you'll be able to hang up your clothes." Things like that happened constantly. And as I told you they weren't even on the committee, but they lived in the same apartment building where my brothers-in-law lived. They always helped then, too, with things like that. He's still around, but his wife is dead. There were many people like that.

SL: I'm going to get a little information about your husband since we've been talking about him, could you give me his full name and his date and place of birth.

LB: Yes. His name is Edward and he was born in Ternopol, June 21, 1909.

SL: How did he end up in Skalat?

LB: It's only thirteen miles from Ternopol. Before the war his parents lived in a village not far from Skalat. When the Russians came in 1939 they said that all the farms have to be turned into communal farms, what they call kolkhoze in Russian. Eddy's father worked for an estate. The estates were dismantled from almost the day the Russians came in because that's absolutely against their communist rule. So of course his father lost a job and moved to Skalat and Eddy got a job right away with the agrarian department in Skalat.

**END OF TAPE 6, SIDE 1**

**TAPE 6, SIDE 2**

SL: When was Victor born?

LB: January 1, 1945, in Skalat.

SL: I find in this family an unusual situation because of Victor's life. Most of the time we just ask where the children are now, but I think maybe if you just told us a little bit about him that would be the best.

LB: Yes, because you know that he's nowhere now, so I'll tell you more about him. I shouldn't say he's nowhere now, that he's not anymore. In Germany he played with German children. At that time I didn't realize that he was above average, but he spoke two kinds of German. We spoke German to him at home. But I noticed that when he played with his friends, German friends, he would speak the Bavarian German, which is not a literary form. I knew German enough because I had eight years of German in school, and I didn't know any Bavarian accent until I heard it in Bamberg. So I once told him, "How come when you speak with?" I told him that he shouldn't say "Puter" instead of "Buter," which means butter, and he shouldn't say "Forhrat" instead of "Fahrat," which means bicycle. So he said, "I have to speak like that with my friends because otherwise they laugh at me. They don't say "Fahrat" and "Buter;" they say "Fohrat" and "Puter." So then I found out that he spoke both kinds of German. And when we came to New York, in a few weeks he spoke a fluent English. But still I thought it was normal. I thought children learned so fast. When we came to Sheboygan and we enrolled him in kindergarten, that the kids called him "German boy" because they knew that he came from Germany, but he never spoke a German word to them. He even told me that he didn't like that they call him "German boy." He said, "I don't know why they have to call me German boy because I speak English." And he did. His teacher told us that he didn't even have an accent. When he started first grade, after a few months, like in the middle of year he would come home for lunch and would cry that he doesn't want to go back to school and I couldn't understand. He said he was not interested in school. So I went to the teacher and told her what he told me, and asked her what's wrong with that boy. "Could you tell me what's wrong with him that he hates school?" She said, "I wouldn't be surprised, he's above average and he's not interested in



what we are doing in first grade because he knows everything what we are doing." So she told the principal and for a few weeks he went to the principal. Instead of going to class, he went straight to the principal's office and they gave him all kinds of tests and that took quite a few weeks. At the end of those few weeks they called us, the parents, to the office and told us that this boy doesn't belong in first grade and that end of the grade he'll get a report card that he's going directly into third grade and we shouldn't tell anybody, not even him until the report card was out. That's what we did. When he started third grade and our friends found it out they said, "Oh you shouldn't have done that because when he'll be older he'll be behind. He'll be the last in the classroom and always socially and he will not feel good because he will be the youngest." Of course they were wrong, because he as always ahead academically and socially. When he was in high school already, in his senior year, they didn't have a course for him in math so he took correspondence courses from the university. Of course the school paid for it because they were responsible for his education. And when he finally took the entrance exams for college he scored 800 out of 800 in math and English. And only in German he had something like 600. Then when he had a terrific career in college, undergraduate and graduate school.

SL: Where did he go?

LB: He went to Cornell and his junior year he got to live in Germany. Of course it didn't cost us anything. When he graduated from high school he was offered scholarships in the amount of \$32,000 and that was 1962. Of course, he was not able to accept all of them. He accepted the one who was the best for him and he figured it was the best school. Why did he go to Cornell? Because he spent his summer vacation, between junior and senior year at the Telluride Association. Telluride Association is a kind of an association only for gifted children. Even there are children of millionaires, they still are accepted, they don't have to pay anything, and they spent a summer. At that time the Telluride Association had one camp in Stanford and one in Ithaca. So he wanted the one in Stanford. They studied world problems, humanity, and at that time every one of these students who was there had the right to apply to be accepted, to the Telluride Association right on the campus. And at Telluride building they didn't

have to pay for room and board. It was a luxurious villa founded by a millionaire named [Mann? 7:10] in the early twenties for especially gifted children. When Victor applied to Telluride, he was accepted. And, of course, once he was accepted at Telluride, he applied to Cornell and was accepted. And he didn't even apply to any other schools because he thought he would like Cornell so much. And as I told you he got a full scholarship for Göttingen and spent a year there. At Cornell he majored in math because he was always very good in math and he won many contests in math while he was in high school. He was one of the top math students in Wisconsin, when they had the state contests. And when he was fourteen years old he was sent to Florida. That was the year the Russians launched Sputnik. America got scared and they established I think at that time the National Science Foundation or something like that it's called for gifted math students. So he spent seven weeks in Florida at the age of 14 already. Of course, there he studies math, physics and Russian language. But at Cornell he majored in math and that's why we were very surprised that while he was in Germany he kept on writing letters about world events, current events, a lot about Communism and western style of life. So we asked him one letter, "How come you don't mention anything about your math studies and talk so much about world problems?" So he answered, "Because I can study math back in Cornell, but while I'm here, I want to take advantage of studying German problems." Since he was so close to East Germany, he made a few trips to East Berlin. Never stayed overnight. I think he couldn't, it was not allowed. And when he came back he switched to humanities and government, under the influence of Professor Allan Bloom, who influenced not only this math student but many other math students and physics students. But then he also thought that he would have to become a junior again instead of being a senior. It was his fourth year in college because he figured he didn't have enough credits because he didn't study the same problems. But while he was in his fourth year of college, they called him to the Dean's office and they told him that he did have enough credits. They looked over his record. He had to make another application because first he had made an application to become a junior, now he had to make another application about Christmas time in his fourth year to become a senior again. He did graduate with honors after four years, and enrolled

right away in Cornell graduate school in government and political science. And again in his third year of those studies, he spent in Germany, in Munich, where he had access to all the war papers. His specialty became Communism in East Germany. I am sure that since we lived with Communism... You asked us if there was a possibility. I'm sure that our life influenced him because we lived under Communism for such a long time that we were able to tell him many details. Anyway his doctorate thesis was on the subject of the German revolution or revolt, I wouldn't call it a revolution, it was only a revolt in 1953 against the Communist system. On basis of that book it wasn't, I shouldn't call it a book because it's never been published, but it is in a form of type book and he got his doctor's degree on the basis of that book. Then he got a job. He taught for a few years at Wellesley College. He got a job when his doctor's thesis was not quite finished yet, but it was conditional. He was supposed to finish it during his first year of teaching and he did. While he was his first year at Wellesley he got his doctor's degree officially and he stayed there for a few years and he liked the job very much. He traveled quite often. He had many speaking engagements in different parts of the country. I remember once he was in Oklahoma and once he was in Minneapolis, many places. He would always send us clippings from the local papers. But finally he was simply bored there because it was a small place and socially he was bored. He played cards with some elder doctor and elder lawyer and most of the staff were older people. He had only one young friend there who did marry a student. But Victor was that kind, he didn't want to date students because he knew that the faculty frowned terribly of that. That friend of his who did marry a student, the friend was Jewish and the student was not and her parents were very much against it, that friend still sends for the high holidays a donation to Hadassah in Victor's name. It always comes before the high holidays and we got one this year. So then he started to look around for another job and he found a job with the New School for Social Research in New York. He went for a routine check-up. It was the first year of his teaching. He went for during the winter of his first year teaching. We were after him all the time, "It's time to get a check-up. You haven't had any for a few years." When he took that check-up they told him that his blood count was too low, the white cells were too low. It was only 4,000 and

should be 5,000. So they told him that he probably had a cold in his system. And he should come back in two weeks. And for quite a long time he would come back every two weeks. It was always the same, not lower and not higher, only 4,000. My doctor here in Sheboygan told me that 4,000 was sometimes normal. Some people are even born with that. But with Victor it was different. For a long time they didn't know what it was. He went to different doctors and finally took him to the Mt. Sinai Hospital, which he didn't tell us until he had to, that he had been in the hospital for ten days for check-ups. And they found out that he had something called hairy-cell leukemia, which is actually a lymphoma, but they call it leukemia for some reason. I know the reason but it's not necessary to mention. It didn't bother him, he felt fine. But they told him right away that the time will come when it will start bothering him. His white count might drop yet more and all the components of the blood will probably drop and he will start feeling weak. So during Fourth of July weekend 1977, he got a cold. Couldn't get rid of it. They gave him of course medication and the blood counts started to drop. Not only white cells; hemoglobin, platelets, everything dropped. They gave him a transfusion, got better for a while and started again. So he felt weak and tired, was always sleepy and he slept a lot. So finally they told him that they had to remove the spleen. They didn't promise him much but they said after we remove the spleen we'll see. It might improve. It might turn toward better, though they weren't sure. But he on his own read whatever was possible on that disease. He had people who translated for him articles on that disease from French and Japanese, from Italian and later I found out that there was a long article on that disease in the New England Medical Journal<sup>24</sup> which my niece who's a pharmacist gave to me after he had gone, he was dead already. She knew before but she didn't want to show it to me. Then I found out that he did read it also. So he knew what it was up to. He had a wonderful girl friend who was and probably still is a freelance writer. They planned to get married and she told me later that the day he went to the hospital, we were not there because our plane was late, it was foggy in Milwaukee, we couldn't get there in time, so she and her mother went with him to the hospital and she said he was so peppy when he walked up

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<sup>24</sup>The New England Journal of Medicine.

those steps that you would have never believed what he really had. He had to go to the hospital two or three days earlier so that they could prepare him for surgery. So while he was in the hospital he made tapes for his students so that other the other teacher who would taught would use his tape. And he was in very good mood and we came to the hospital when he was just out of the recovery room. They took him out, brought him out in the recovery room and the doctor said everything went fine and we can hope for the best, the surgery was successful. The next day it got worse and worse and worse. And a week later, the surgery was on Tuesday, and Sunday he was gone. The diagnosis was he had a staphococcus [stapholococcus] infection. Of course we blamed the hospital because he was supposed to be under special care since they knew that he couldn't fight the disease because his while blood count, but white cells were so well. They kept him in a room with four patients, with three other patients, and everyone had a private room and everyone had visitors and imagine how many people walked through that room. Tuesday was the surgery, Thursday they took him to a separate room, they wanted to take him to Intensive Care but there was no empty bed, it was too late, way too late. Everything they did was too late. They took him too late to Intensive Care and Saturday the doctors said, "That's it." Of course these doctors said they didn't know how long it will last. He was hooked up to machines in a coma and they said sometimes it lasts months and months, but it didn't. That was that for my son.

LB: Of course, we also have a wonderful daughter, though she is no genius, but she is bright and smart. She has a Master's degree. She was born here in the states in 1954. She has a Master's Degree in Business Administration and has a nice job. She is twenty-six years old and lives in New York. Has bought a condominium.

SL: She lives in New York?

LB: I'm sorry. Yes, she's in Chicago. At least she's not that far. He was in New York, which we never liked because we considered it so far. At least she's not so far. So that's the story of my children.

SL: Let me ask you another question about Ellen if I may.

LB: Yes, of course.

SL: Could you tell me the date of her birth?

LB: March 16, 1954.

SL: And she graduated from what college?

LB: She got her bachelor's in liberal arts from Northwestern University and master's — they don't call it business administration, the Northwestern Business School calls it, has a special sophisticated name, but it is the School of Business Administration. She went to that. That's a two-year course. So she got her master's from the same university. I don't remember the exact name of the college.

SL: What is she currently doing in Chicago?

LB: She is a business researcher, for GATX.<sup>25</sup> That's a big company right in the Loop.

SL: Now the questions that I want to ask for the rest of interview are the types of questions that we ask of everyone, or control questions. Many of them revolve around the life that you had with your children in the home growing up, although it may not be the way it is now because your children are grown up, if you could remember and try to think about the way that you were living when they were younger. The first question is, did you speak English in the home once you moved to the states?

LB: Not in the beginning of course. We had to learn it first. So when we came to Sheboygan we thought, since German is a foreign language, we tried to keep up the German language so that Victor would know it when he went to school. But he didn't want to speak German. Actually, he taught us English. When he got to high school and took the German language, he didn't know very much. He knew a little bit of course, then we were able to help him. That's why he picked German for a foreign language because they also offered Spanish here and maybe French, I don't remember. When Ellen went there was no French. But anyway, he thought he would pick German so that because his parents can help him. Of course we helped him a lot also with Russian. I told you at the age of fourteen he took Russian. So he kept up Russian for all those years and he was to Russia. When he was nineteen years old he was in Russia for three weeks and he subscribed to Pravda for all those years while he was in college and after

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<sup>25</sup>The General American Transportation Company.

that. He would get a Pravda right to his dorm. In fact, he said it was even cheaper than American papers. Then when Ellen was born, then we spoke already English so there wasn't much of a problem. But that's why Victor understood almost everything in Polish also because that's what he heard a lot at home. But Ellen can understand very little of Polish because at that time we spoke already mostly English.

SL: So now and between you and your husband you talk to one another in English?

LB: We often, we sometimes do speak Polish sometimes. Yes, we speak Polish.

SL: How much did you tell your children of your experiences?

LB: Everything, everything. They knew everything. Of course I'm sure I skipped some details but here and there once in awhile they would hear many things. I cannot say "everything" because, even you we didn't, you can't tell everything. But they knew a lot and Ellen knows a lot too. And of course, now she knows more because of the book that I wrote. She read it. I think I mentioned, I have memories that I wrote down just any way. In fact, I knew barely English at that time. I looked it over later, for a beginner it was not bad English actually, but it doesn't have any form. Just if she someday wants to look it over or even write about it, she has the [25:36] material. I thought someday maybe I will write a book for adults, but not it's out of the question. At my age I will stick to children's writing.

SL: Do you think that your children may have faced any problems in school because of your unusual family situation, in that you had no extended so to speak of?

LB: They didn't face anything bad, but when Victor was small I heard him once talking to a neighbor kid. There was a neighbor boy who was his age next door and they played a lot together. One day they went inside to play and I was out on the porch and the other boy Peter said, "Today we will not play. I'm going to visit Grandma." Victor didn't answer and he just said to him, "Don't you ever go to visit Grandma? Don't you have a grandma?" and Victor said, "Nobody lives forever." That struck me. And he was only about six, seven years old. That was the thing, because he never had any grandparents and he never met any family. But otherwise, frankly I don't know. I don't think anybody treated our children different

because of that, no. In fact, they had many friends. Victor had many friends and so does Ellen. Ellen still comes back. There's a whole bunch of friends. Most of them are not in Sheboygan. But like once in a while maybe Christmas they would get together, when they are all home, and have a little party or a little get-together. In fact they all non-Jewish I must say, so Ellen's girlfriends are all non-Jewish because the Jewish community in Sheboygan is very small.

**END OF TAPE 6, SIDE 2**



**TAPE 7, SIDE 1**

- LB: When she was in high school there were only two Jewish girls and one boy in that class. So there was not much of a selection. Each had separate friends.
- SL: In comparison to other families do you think that your family is closer to one another than the other families that you see?
- LB: To me it seems always that every family is good. I don't know. I can't answer this question because I don't know how other families are, indoors, in their living rooms or in their kitchens or in their house. On the outside they might seem a wonderful family and they're not it could be just the opposite. So how can I judge other people this way? I know my kids are very close. Victor was very close to us and so is Ellen. I don't know how other children are with their parents. It's a question that I just can't even answer. I can answer only for myself, not for others.
- SL: Do you see yourself as a more concerned parent than other people that you know of?
- LB: That's what Ellen says and Victor used to say, too. Victor always used to say, "When I am away and it's cold you probably worry if I wear long underwear or not, but you shouldn't. Other mothers are not like that." That's what he would tell me. Ellen's just the same. If she's supposed to call and she didn't, she knows right away that I would worry. Like one day she called that she's coming and she didn't arrive until afternoon and I told her later, "You should have called," because she stopped in Racine to see somebody. She wasn't alone, she went with friend, she gave somebody a ride as far as Milwaukee. I said, "Then why didn't you call me?" "Ah, you always are different! Don't you know that at my age I can stop somewhere or something like that?" That's what Ellen also said. I don't know, I can't believe it. I don't consider myself more concerned. I think every mother is like that.
- SL: When your children were young, what were your greatest concerns for them?
- LB: Of course, first of all it was the problem of health. I'm that kind of, not only mother, but with myself and my husband too. If I don't know what it is, you call a doctor or ask a doctor. But if it's a repetition, [if] I had that same thing before and you know it's nothing, then you let it go. And I did the same with the

kids. They had all the vaccination that was necessary. Health was always a big problem and I think I worried about everything.

But in our house the first thing was always education. I remember when Victor entered high school, with every child a chart goes along from grade school. He went eight years to grade school. In those days the school system in Sheboygan was like that. Now they changed it. Then he had to go to high school. The high school sent along the chart. On each subject there was like a graph. Well he stopped. The math graph couldn't go any farther. See every parent had a counselor, but our counselor was the principal himself. He said, "Oh I see in math he is just terrific. Now," he asked us right away, "do you think he'll go on to college?" When he asked that question I thought he was crazy. I thought to myself, "What do you mean. When you have a kid like that you ask us? Don't you think it's natural?" That's what we always thought. There was not no doubt in our minds that kids have to go to college. But we always worried. See, in that time we didn't have money and we were afraid. "Oh, college is so expensive. What will we do?" Of course, we didn't have any problem. Ellen, though she's not a genius, she also had scholarships. But she also had to have loans that she is still repaying. So health and education that was after all, food, we were not short on that. I told you in the beginning we had to count our pennies but we always had enough food, and we had simple clothes for the kids. And when Ellen was in high school, that was much better already. She even had very nice clothes already at that time because Eddy's jobs kept on improving and improving and he made more and more money and I made a little, so we actually didn't worry about anything because we knew what we needed. We worried a little bit what will we do when the kids will come to age school but, as I told you, when Victor was in high school in senior year we knew already we didn't have to worry because his scholarship really was plenty. It covered everything. We never had to spend any money on him. Ellen we had to help a little but she was, at that time when she went to school the school was very expensive. When she was that first year in college the tuition alone was only \$3,000. That was '72, and it went up every year.

SL: Right now, are your closest friends, would you characterize them as Jewish or non-Jewish?

LB: Non-Jewish. Oh no, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said non-Jewish. Oh for goodness sake! We have a Jewish family here, one couple, that not only we are so close but they are such wonderful people. They have only one daughter also, but they never had more. She's married to a Gentile, and these people are terribly religious. Unbelievable. So here you have that paradox. And we are very, very close. There isn't a holiday... Since they have a kosher home, they cannot eat as often at my house, as they celebrate the holidays in a very lavish way. And every holiday, including Passover seder,<sup>26</sup> we are invited. Not every, because she has a brother here so they get together. But there were two days of Passover, so one day they spend with her brother and one day they invite us and another couple also. With that third couple we are not that close; it's only they are that close. But we just had them for dinner last Sunday. But when I invite them, I must have fish. That's the only thing they would eat in my house. I mean, they will eat eggs, but I would not give them eggs for dinner or cheese or what. If I have them for lunch, that's... But usually I have them for dinner. They are very nice people.

SL: For the most part, numerically speaking, would most of your friends be non-Jewish?

LB: Yes, numerically speaking, but the closest is this family. Then we have another couple. They are quite elderly. She just had a very serious operation. In fact I should call her. He is eighty-four years old and she is about seventy-six. But we don't get together with them as much as with that other couple.

SL: Are there any survivors in Sheboygan with whom you are friendly?

LB: No, frankly not. We are friendly, we're not on bad terms, but not close. We are good with all of them, whenever we meet them, but we don't go to their homes to visit them and we don't invite them to our home. But we are friendly with all of them. The first year or two we used to get together. But somehow it was not my cup of tea. I don't know how to say it. There are two, one I told you about. I don't know, it's somehow different people. They are nice people but still there is a "but" to it. Oh we went once, they invited us. A son of one of them got engaged. The wedding was in the East. But the girl was here and

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<sup>26</sup>The Passover meal.

the girl is not Jewish also, but they gave a big party, invited many people to meet the girl. Only on that kind of occasions do we meet.

SL: Do you belong to any organizations of survivors or landmannsshaften?<sup>27</sup>

LB: No, we don't have any in Sheboygan. There are some of them just like that in Milwaukee, but we don't go to Milwaukee very often and we don't like to drive at nighttime. So when we go to Milwaukee to visit my brother and we have some friends. He just died not long ago, and since he has died we haven't seen the widow because he died in San Diego visiting a daughter. So, no, we don't go very often to Milwaukee, so we don't belong to any Milwaukee organizations.

SL: How would you characterize the contact that you do have now with the American-born Jews in the community?

LB: The contact? Very cold. Always was and still is. No, they stay away from all the newcomers. Now, in the beginning, when we needed help, they were very good to us. But once we got on our own. Of course, like big parties: again, like one family celebrated their fortieth wedding anniversary. They invited us. They didn't invite all the newcomers, but some. Things like that. Of course, in those organizations, sisterhood of Haddassah, some of the newcomers belong, also not all of them. That's a different story, then you see them. But I told you, since I have lived here, I haven't gone. I haven't been active at all. Not only not active; I don't even go to meetings because... Somehow, I think there are two reasons. First of all, all the meetings are in shul and I don't even like to go to... I used to go sometimes to Friday evening service. And now I don't because there is a memorial board, and Victor's name is there. I just can't look at it, so I just don't go. And I can't meet people also. You know, I don't mind going in a crowd where people don't know me. I can't take the crowds where everybody knows me, that's my problem now. That's why I don't like just to go to go to sisterhood of Hadassah or just to services even, because everybody knows what happened to me and it seems to me like everybody thinks we're still alive and he is dead and how come? In fact, what happened to me, I think that I can never get over it. When we were

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<sup>27</sup>German for an association of people from the same town or region.

in California my sister-in-law, Eddy's own sister, said to me, "You know, Herman," who's her husband, "Herman said to me yesterday he cannot understand how you can walk and talk and get dressed and go out." See, I didn't tell it to him for maybe a year after that. Maybe a year in late March after that I told him and I told [Alex? 11:35]. I couldn't bring it out to tell it to him that my own sister-in-law she didn't say, she asked her husband my brother-in-law cannot understand how I can be alive after losing such a son. So that's why, I just can't face people. I'm always afraid of such a question, direct or indirect.

SL: Do you think that the American-born Jews that you talk to, understand the experiences that you went through during the Holocaust?

LB: Most of them don't. That family, those Shapiros with whom I meet, they do, but they are different kind of people. That's why they understand us and that's why we are close. I'll give you an example and you judge for yourself. You know I did sewing at home. I don't anymore. Now I go out to a store. I had a customer, a mother and daughter. The mother was at that time close to eighty and the daughter must have been in her fifties. They knew very well we are newcomers, and once one of them asked me where I came from. I told them, "I came from Poland; I was born in Poland." I said, "Don't you know I am a survivor of the Holocaust?" And her daughter said, "What is the Holocaust? What does it mean?" That was only a few years ago. And the mother said, "Oh, I know what it is. I read about it." Interested in that? No, they don't like to talk about, they don't like to hear about it, they hardly read about it. The library is full of those books. Besides me, I don't think that many people have read those.

SL: How would you compare that to the reaction of non-Jews?

LB: They know even less. I'm talking about the average man. There are some people interested. Most of them, my own Gentile friends, don't read and know very little.

SL: They have not asked you about your experiences?

LB: No, they ask very little. They know I'm survivor of Holocaust, but you know why? Because I have read one chapter of the book to them. They know I'm survivor, but they don't know. Once we had a guest at our writers' meeting, an elderly gentile man, he must be in his late seventies, and he wanted to hear

what kind of class we have because he writes about horses. He raises a special kind of horses, something very unusual. Of course, I don't know anything about horses. And he started to talk about that the horses you raise, the way you pair the unusual horse with unusual horse, even if it's mother and son or sister and brother. And he talked about it, and, of course, with humans we don't do it. And somebody mentioned Hitler and one of the people said, "Okay, Lucy is a survivor of the Holocaust" because he was a new member he didn't know. But before that he had said, "Not everything that Hitler did or that Hitler said was bad." But the minute he heard that I am a survivor of the Holocaust, he stopped. That was the only case since I moved in the States that I heard something like that. I was very furious, in fact I was mad at her. I said, "Joy, why did you tell him? If you wouldn't have mentioned that I'm a survivor, maybe he would have told us what was good about Hitler." He never came back to the meeting. Maybe he wanted to compare the raising of horses to the pairing of people, I don't know. But Hitler tried also to produce some. That man is producing an unusual race of horses and Hitler, of course, wanted to produce unusual race of humans. But I never found out what he meant, because he found out that I am a survivor of the Holocaust, he didn't talk anymore.

SL: I realize that maybe you will have two answers to this question, because they way that you changed your thinking about things since Victor's death. How do you think you would feel if your children married non-Jews? I don't know if your feelings would have changed.

LB: I'll answer this question. Victor used to date a Italian girl, [? 16:55]. I never met her but my nephew who is a doctor in California, Eddy's nephew, he's a very bright boy. Once he went to visit Victor. I don't know if he had a convention on the East or he just went to the eastern. He went to Wellesley to see Victor, and that girlfriend at that time had a job in Washington, DC. My nephew had never been to Washington, DC. Once he was in the East he wanted Victor to take him to New York and to Washington to show him the cities. Of course, he met Maria. And when he came back, I talked to him on the phone, he said, "Oh, if this girl was Jewish, I would like to meet such a Jewish girl. She is something unusual: highly intelligent and her beauty and her personality, something unusual." We knew Victor had that girlfriend. We don't

know what will come out of that. Once Victor called, and he said, "Listen, Maria is in Washington. I'm in Wellsley, and she starts to date other people. After all she's a girl and she wants to get married. What would you think if I married her?" And I said, "Would she convert? And he said, "No, she wouldn't convert because she comes from a princely family, related to the old royal Italian family and there are princes and priests in her family and she wouldn't do it." You know that he dropped her? So at that time, I wasn't ready for it, though I never was very religious. But I kept up what I call a front. If you are Jewish, my thinking is this way: it all depends an awful lot on the American Jews. If the American Jews don't keep up the Judaism, who knows what will happen to Israel? And I figured if the only thing that keeps the Jews in America together is that synagogue. So if you are religious or not, you have to keep it up for the sake of Israel. Of course with Victor, which I call my second Holocaust, I dropped the feeling of religion. I still consider myself very Jewish nationally. I am an American citizen. And I don't consider myself... the only thing I have in common with Israel is that I would support it. I think it must exist for the sake of all those Holocaust survivors who are there because where would they go, what would they do if there is no Israel? But if it comes to religion, it wouldn't bother me very much if Ellen married a non-Jew. Of course, as I told you, she dates a Catholic boy who was born Catholic, but he's an atheist now. It would bother me much more if he were still religious and I would be very much against it because I wouldn't want my children to pray to Jesus, or to pray to Mary and all the things. But since he's not religious. So that's why if you ask a question, "Would you mind or wouldn't you if your daughter or son married a non-Jew," you also have to stress [that it] depends how that future son-in-law or daughter-in-law feels about religion.

**SL:** There's been a traditional animosity between the eastern European Jews and the western European Jews in the way they viewed one another. Did you ever experience any of that animosity?

**LB:** An awful lot in the camp when were in the DP camp. Every group of Jews was separate and for themselves. The Romanian Jews had their corner. The Hungarian Jews had their separate. Of course the Germans, we didn't meet them. German Jews were not in our camp. But I understand in the big

cities, even in Milwaukee, the German Jews consider themselves something better than the Polish Jews, and we had the same division in Israel even more. The guide who took us around to Israel told us the Polish Jews consider the Yemenite as something lower. The German Jews don't want to be friends with the Polish Jews. You know Jews are always divided. I hope they will not always be, but they are.

SL: Do you currently belong to any political or social groups?

LB: No, no, just as I told you, I'm a member of Hadassah sisterhood although I do not attend meetings. But I am a dues-paying member. Social groups, I belong to writers' club.

SL: Two or three more questions then I'm going to ask you about your writing so you can tell me about that then. Just a few more questions about your religious life, you say now that you go to synagogue very infrequently?

LB: High holidays for a short time, and I never stayed for Yizkor,<sup>28</sup> which I'm supposed to stay and say Yizkor, but I will never say Yizkor for my own son.

SL: What about the traditions in your home, do you do any celebrating of your own such as Passover of Channakuh or anything like that?

LB: When the children were home they would light candles, but not anymore. Passover, I buy matzo, that's all.

SL: Did your children receive Hebrew school education?

LB: And how, outstanding. They went to bar mitzvah, graduation, confirmation. Ellen spent two summers in [Camp] Ramah. And when Victor was in college he could read Jewish, Yiddish, not only Hebrew but Yiddish, Eddy taught him Yiddish.. So he said, when he was here from New York for a day or two, he always was serious to talk to all generations of Jews. So he said, "Once I did a trick. I bought a Yiddish paper and sat down on the train and read it and that's the way a Jew came up and started to talk to me." He felt very Jewish. He was in Israel and he was in Germany the second time when he was in graduate school, he went to Israel for under ten days. I must also tell you that Victor was five times in

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<sup>28</sup>A service in memory of the dead.



Europe. The first two times, the whole year. The other times he did some research work during the summer, and the last time in '76 he spent a whole summer working as a researcher for a German company in Hamburg. He got paid for it. That was not scholarship. He was already out of school.

SL: Could you describe to me a typical day in your life right now?

LB: Yes, they all are the same. On days when I work, I would eat brunch. My husband likes to skip breakfast. I like a cup of coffee in the morning. Usually when I work, I have to start at 12:00, so we'll eat brunch at about fifteen before eleven, or eleven and then I got to work from twelve to five and when I come home I make dinner. He watches news. That's the time of news so I always have to miss it, I only hear it, I can't see it. Unless it's something unusual, then I would run to the door and take a look. Since he's retired, he washes dishes. He sometimes goes shopping also. In the evening, sometimes I take a nap for ten, fifteen minutes. Especially since we came back from Israel, I still seem to suffer from the jet lag. Especially the first two weeks it was just terrible. I was so tired in the evening. But then we spend the evening reading, day after day the same. If I don't work, that's about the same. Of course there's washing and ironing and cleaning. Eddy does the vacuuming and washing dishes. That's what he does indoors. But the rest, after all the other days, I do my housework and not much [about it 26:10]. In the evening we always read and that's about it.

SL: What about on a weekend?

LB: Saturdays I work, every Saturday I do work, and I have to work every other Sunday. So for us Saturday and Sunday and Tuesday and Wednesday are all the same.

SL: Do you ever go out to dinner or to a movie?

LB: Oh, like last night we went out with another couple to a restaurant to dinner. Movies we haven't gone since the funeral. We haven't been to any movies. We used to be members of the Community Players Theater in Sheboygan and we were faithful members for, I would say, at least twenty years or more. But we haven't bought membership tickets for the season for the last three years. We just gave up everything for the last three years, almost. Besides writers' club, I gave up everything. **END TAPE 7, SIDE 1**

## TAPE 7, SIDE 2

SL: Can you tell me a little bit about your writing, how you got involved in it, and what you've done with it?

LB: I never thought of it even, but I just wanted to improve my English. I thought, kids go to college, parents have to write letters to them, so I wanted to know English better. But I couldn't, I didn't want to go back to... I tried, even many years ago when Ellen was still a baby, I think, I tried to get my papers back from Europe so that I could continue my education here. So I went to the Red Cross and asked them and they told me, "We don't have any foothold behind the Iron Curtain." That was during the Cold War time. Now, in the later years I think there was [time for me? 1:25] improvement. Because first of all, I'm sure there are no papers because probably everything was burned out because there was terrible battles in Ternopol where I went to high school and in Lwow where I went to college, to university. We didn't call it "college" because we went straight from high school into law school. There was no four years of college or three years of college before you go to law school. So I doubted very much, but I thought I would like them to try. So the woman told me, "Oh, you can take some courses here and take exams in high school." I said to her, "When I went to school, the atom hadn't even been split. How can I take courses in math and physics and pass an examination?" So I gave it up. Then I looked in the papers if I can find something where I can take an English course. I found an ad in the paper, it was not an ad it was an announcement, that the university will give a course in creative writing. So I figured, "After all it's the English language, so let's try." I went there, and think I mentioned before I took that course, and I figured at least he'll correct my English. Some of these people were members of the Writers' Club and one of them said to me, "Why don't you join Writers' Club?" After she heard the teacher reading my first story. I thought she was crazy. I said, "How can I take it? I'm just learning how to use the English language properly." Of course, I knew English but not as well as I wanted to. But she said, "Come over and take a look. Come to the first meeting and take a look." I came and I liked it and I started with them maybe in February. I have a good friend, my best writer-friend, the one with whom we went out last night for dinner, she writes books for children, for the very young, three to eight years old. She has

published fifty-five books in hundreds and hundred of little stories for different magazines like the Sunday school newspapers or all kinds. These are mostly religious papers. Like she told me yesterday, she sold a religion books called [Mr. Mug? 3:44] which had maybe three hundred words. Including the royalties she had made already \$4,000 on that book. She teaches every year in Rhinelander in the school of art. She doesn't even have a college education but she has the imagination. She doesn't even have to use big words. She doesn't have to know how to spell big words. But you have to have the knack of that to use the proper words for children. So she said, "You know what, girls," to the members, I'll give you a course on writing for children. She's never jealous if you also sell. So I wrote my first story and she looked it over and she said, "I think you can sell that and she gave me ten addressees where to send on simultaneous submission. That's how the religious groups... And I got four dollars for the first story. The first. I even said to her, "I heard if you sell on the first time it's a bad sign." I was right. The next story I sold, it was a few years later, and I had written a story about how we were hiding out in that bunker under the toilet. I considered it a purely Jewish story. I went to a writer conference in Green Lake. Of course we had many discussions so he knew me already from the discussion groups. And a man approaches me, I knew he was the editor of a magazine called Together, which was at that time a Methodist magazine. He asked me, "What do you write?" I said, "Oh, you wouldn't be interested. I write only about Jewish life." I told him what it is and he said, "Why don't you show it to me?" I had given it to somebody else and somebody else was reading it and he had to leave that day or the conference was over. So he said, "Why don't you send it to me." He gave me his address. "It doesn't mean that we don't accept it. We are interested very much in," what do you call it, "human behavior stories", something like that. I did mail it to him and about two weeks later I had a letter from him, "We like it and if you accept \$125, we'll take it." So it was published. That was 1971. Of course, I cannot say I do write because when I did sewing at home I sometimes worked in the sewing room sixteen and eighteen hours a day in the season. So I just cannot say I really do write. Now since I work in the store I don't spend that many hours. That's why I quit home sewing.

SL: What about this book that you've written?

LB: This book I wrote mainly when I broke my wrist and didn't work for four months. That's when I did it. I had started it before. I had a chapter or two and I took that chapter to Rhinelander and showed it to some professional and they liked it and they said, "You should go on with it." It happened so that after that I broke a wrist, so I had four months. Not four because the last two weeks we were with friends in Florida. In the first two weeks I couldn't work because it was very painful. I broke the left wrist and I am right handed and I never typewrite anyway, I always write long hand. So that's when I did that book. In the meantime I won a few contests within the writer's groups. Like the one I told you, I wrote one that was also on the survival in the forest for which I got the first prize. Little things like that that happen. Once I won a prize from the Raconteurs in Milwaukee. They had a meeting in Whitewater. And so little things like that. But I cannot consider myself a writer because I just don't spend enough time on writing, and I also waste an awful time on reading. But you know when I came in the evening from work, I'm too tired to sit down and write. But I can read. I'm not too tired to read and I read an awful lot.

SL: That leads me right into my next question, what kind of things do you like to read?

LB: I can tell you what I don't like. I like most everything. I don't like horror. I don't like, care much for mysteries. But if there is no horror involved then I don't mind it. But I don't like what you see on television now. Or these modern books, most of the movies are made from books. I very seldom read best sellers. I read Sophie's Choice. But you know why? I read a lot about the Holocaust and I knew that what it is all about. So like that was funny. I caught one thing in that book, the author says that Rudolph Hess is dead, that he was hanged. Did you read the book? The author, William Styron, he hanged Rudolph Hess. Rudolph Hess is still alive. He is in Spandau prison in Berlin. So this is something funny. But even what I read now, of course this is from my son's library, but still I'm interested in that kind of books. Maybe because I lived with the Russians so long. So I like a lot to know what is still going on there. So I read a lot about the Holocaust.

SL: What is your reaction to Holocaust books? Do you find them mainly accurate? Any books on the Holocaust, what kind of reactions do you have?

LB: You see the problem is that all the books that I read are of a completely different type than what I survived. Like Auschwitz and Buchenwald. I wasn't to any of those big camps, but if I read about the Warsaw ghetto, of course that was a huge ghetto but it's more to what I went to in the small ghetto in the city. I find them quite accurate, and what they write about Mauthausen or Auschwitz, I just have to believe them because it was different than what we had. Like now, I just finished a book by Kuznetsov, which is the first time I read something about Babi Yar.<sup>29</sup> I thought Babi Yar was only to kill but he says there was also a camp and there were many non-Jews in the camp, too. So every time I come to the library I find something that I never heard of. Of course I heard of Babi Yar, but not in that detail. In that book, the Russian author who was not Jewish, describes the life of the whole city during the German occupation, life of the non-Jewish people more than Jews. Of course he had a lot about Babi Yar.

SL: What newspapers and magazines do you receive in the house?

LB: Right now I gave up Newsweek. I don't know, when we lost Victor, I just lost the interest of reading. We had Newsweek for many, many years. Newspaper, we have only the Sheboygan Press. But we go up to the library and sit down and get all these, see our library is so close. It's right across the street from the store where I work. I can go earlier, I can go after work, the library is open till nine. Now I don't want to get any more magazines because I don't want to be tied down to one. When I go to the library I read many of them. I read one article in Time and one in Newsweek and one in U.S. News and World Report. I have a greater variety, so I'm not planning to go back. The Newsweek that we got was in Ellen's name because she was in college at that time and we got it a little cheaper. So I just wrote in that she moved from Sheboygan to Evanston and she gets it now.

SL: Did you watch the television program Holocaust?

LB: Of course.

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<sup>29</sup>Mrs. Baras is referring to Anatoly Kuznetsov's Babi Yar: A Documentary Novel.

SL: What was your reaction to it?

LB: I think it was twice on TV and I saw it both times. Oh, it was very accurate. Of course in Germany was different than what we had. Because for us they came in '41 when they had more murderous tendencies than they had in 1939. But of course, as I told you, the Germans had different methods. What I read about the Germans in France also were different methods. Like they would come and tell the people to come with suitcases. In Skalat that didn't happen. You couldn't make it and they would take you. They never told anybody to take any luggage. It seems like the more they went eastward the worse it was, and the later in the time the worse it was. Germany started little by little from '33. Even '39 was not as bad. Warsaw was '39. In the beginning, in every city they came in they started from a massacre, from a pogrom, and after that it quieted down. It was like that in Warsaw, it was like that in Lwow, even in that little Skalat, I told you. After the first pogrom in the next few weeks, the first of them was four hundred and then everyday the people who buried the part of the four hundred were killed. Then it quieted down for a while. So there was some similarities but not exactly the same. As I told you, because '41, it was much worse than '39.

SL: Did people become more interested in your experiences after the show was broadcast?

LB: No, nobody asks questions. That's what bothers me so terribly and that's why I keep on telling Ellen, "Someday maybe you'll do something in those memories because people keep on forgetting. That's why I would like so much to sell that book of mine so that the younger generation would know and when they get older, maybe they will remember, because the later it gets the more people forget. In fact my best friends, those Shapiros, don't like to talk about it, but they have a different feeling. He's a very sick man, he had many heart attacks. He would never say so, but she more. They don't like to talk about things like that. She's always afraid that will hurt him too much. Even just he talks about diseases. Like they were here last Sunday and somehow we started to talk about some diseases, and then she said afterwards, "Let's change the subject." But once he was here and I had one of these books on Auschwitz or something like that, and he said to me, "Why do you always read these sad books?" I said,

"You know why. You know I'm interested in that." "Oh, you have enough sadness. Don't read those." I notice that many people don't want to read those books because they are so sad. Nowadays, you know, here in this country, you see everybody must be happy. The television, 90 percent comedies. Songs, happy songs. Everything has to be; theater, Broadway. Just at our last writers' meeting we had a speaker who used to be an actress and a producer. And what is the best type of plays that had the most popularity? Neil Simon, comedy. I don't know, we turn away completely from the real side of life. We want only to keep ourselves happy. Sometimes I think people are right in starting to say we live like under the Romans where the leadership wanted only to keep their people blind and deaf about the real problems and they should only see the circus and things like that. Maybe that's true. I think it is. But I think people should not forget what happened in Europe how many years ago. It might always happen, even here in this beautiful country, we are not sure. You don't forget that masses always run after the leadership. I believe very much in the blindness of the masses. The masses are blind in Europe. Look how they ran after crazy Hitler. When he was the top nobody said he was crazy. They feared the leader. How can so many people believe and make almost a God out of one person? Russia under Stalin was like that, too. So, we have to continue to do things like that, like you keep on making tapes and writing about it. It should be engraved even in the future generation to prevent it otherwise we'll never prevent it.

SL: I feel funny asking you these next questions, it's not at all about what you were just talking about.

Where have you traveled in Wisconsin?

LB: Oh not much. We saw the House on the Rock twice, that beautiful House on the Rock. What else?

SL: You mentioned that you were in Rhinelander.

LB: Rhinelander I have been quite a few times, I think four times. You see, 1978 was the first year there was no Victor so I didn't want to go because I had to drop, in fact I didn't go to Writers' Club for more than a year. Didn't attend any meetings. But I have these Gentile friends that I told you. They kept on visiting me here. I didn't go the meetings, but some of them would come to the house and bring me flowers,

some of these plants. Some of these plants are from them. But then Eddy called that Donna, the one who writes these children's books. Ellen called her too when Ellen was home, that you should see that I go to Rhinelander. Eddy and Ellen wanted it like a vacation for me. So I did go to Rhinelander that year but I was not enrolled in class. That's when I started that book because when Donna and all the others went to meetings, classes, lectures, whatever you call it, so at the same time I went to the library. They have a beautiful building where these classes are held and they have a beautiful library. So I would go to the library and started that book. The whole week I spent, didn't attend any lectures or any meetings. That's when I started it. Then when I broke my wrist I finished it. Of course that was the bulk of it, because I didn't have much to start with.

SL: How much does Wisconsin remind you of the area around Skalat?

LB: The climate is the same, but otherwise nothing. The city's completely different. Our city, Skalat was such a poor city and so crowded. No canalization,<sup>30</sup> the houses next to one another, poor little.... There were some nicer houses, too. The tallest [20:13] house was only a two-story building, downstairs and upstairs, that was all. Nobody had bedrooms upstairs. If there was an upstairs it was a different flat. Somebody else lived there. And people lived in such crowded conditions, so poor. There were many poor people. There were some rich ones but if you can take them percentage-wise, it was very small. The middle-class would be considered here very poor. So there is no comparison. Climate is the only thing that we have in common.

SL: How satisfied are you with the cultural aspects of Sheboygan?

LB: Oh, it's not any different from any other place in the United States seems to me. But Sheboygan is trying really hard. First of all we have a terrific library. Two sisters, teachers, died and left them quite a bit of money. They don't use the capital; they use only the interest for special projects, and they have very many special projects. So there's a library, there are two nice high schools. There are many good schools. They keep on building new schools. I think that in comparison to a big city with culture of the

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<sup>30</sup>Sewage system.



poor people in New York or Chicago, of course a small city like Sheboygan is much, much ahead. Of course, you know, some people think that you can get a good education only in a big city, because when Victor came to college that was... see every summer he was sent somewhere on the first special schools. First he was in Florida on a national, what do they call that? Scholastic Society scholarship. The second year he went to Ohio, I forgot the name of that college, to Kenyon College, still as a mathematician. They thought that Sheboygan is a suburb of Milwaukee and they were very surprised when he told them it's a small city. "Then how were you able to get such a good education," they asked him. But I think it's not only the big city. You can get a good education. Of course you have to be willing and work and work. And you know that he never worked? You hardly saw him working. He got everything right in school. He didn't have to do much homework. I wouldn't say not at all, but not much.

SL: How much happier would you have been living in an area of a greater Jewish population?

LB: I suppose we would have been much happier. But once we learned to live without, it doesn't bother me anymore. In the first few years it would have been much better. When you are very new and not acquainted with the country and don't know the language well. But on the other hand, maybe it's turned out better. I probably would never have gotten to read so many books and so many magazines and know so much about the world, and I listen an awful lot to the radio, too. I never listen to music, I mean not much. If I had [? 24:10] and playing mah-jongg and all that stuff and looking at my nails if they have polish or not. I never know.

SL: How do you feel about living in Wisconsin with its high percentage of ethnic Germans?

LB: As I told you before, masses go after leadership. If we had the leadership, God forbid, what they had in Germany, they would have been Nazis. In America, there are Americans. My next door neighbor, the one I told you, the eighty year old woman, when we came here she said, "You'll never learn to speak English because everybody will speak German to you." But now they're Americans. I even forget that they are ethnic Germans. It doesn't bother anybody and I don't think they consider themselves Germans, they consider themselves Nazis. I think after so many years, unless your religion is different

like with Jews, then you remember. But the Germans and the Italians and the Greeks, since they pray to the same Lord Jesus, they consider themselves Americans. Of course we consider ourselves Americans too, but the Judaism a little bit separate. No, I consider myself American and I consider my neighbors the same that we are and I don't think that makes much difference to them that we are Jewish. Doesn't seem so to me.

SL: What effort have you made to acquaint yourself with Wisconsin history?

LB: Frankly, not much. I knew in person, the famous Wisconsin writer, [Goberland? 25:10]. I did meet him. In fact he was the one who gave me once an award for something at the Raconteurs' Club. He was the guest of honor at that time. But I've never got his books. I don't feel good about it because on our club we have some people who write about Wisconsin history. But since I figure I don't know nothing but American history, I pay more attention to general American history than Wisconsin's history and I think I don't know enough even about American history generally. Of course it's all Victor's books. I have Lincoln's biography. He has it in paperback. I forgot the author, such a famous, known author. Whenever I get to it I'd rather read about Lincoln or Washington or things. I think I should know this before Wisconsin. I know, I heard a little, but not too much. When we get together at writers' conferences, there's always a book sale and there are many books written by Wisconsin writers about Wisconsin. I mean contemporary writers, not famous writers. Like who belonged to our group. I should get sometime to it but I don't know. I am so behind. I always consider myself so behind in my reading list. I have list like that long and I am always behind. So some day I'll get to Wisconsin history.

**END OF TAPE 7, SIDE 2**

**TAPE 8, SIDE 1**

SL: How do you feel that you have contributed to the Wisconsin community?

LB: I don't think I contributed anything. What did I contribute? Nothing. My sewing ability, but I get paid for it.

SL: Do you feel an obligation to Wisconsin for having given you an opportunity to start a new life?

LB: Of course. And how. Without the help of the people of Wisconsin I don't know where I'd be now. I tell you what, we consider ourselves as lucky. We have everything we need. I talk to many people and I tell you again, if I had my son, I'd consider myself in paradise. That's all I can say because we have everything we need. We have our health, we have a wonderful daughter. All that's missing is my son. And we don't have any financial troubles also. If we want to go to a place we go. We were in Florida; we were in Israel; we were in California. Of course, we have relatives there. But the only thing missing is my son.

SL: What was your reaction when the American Nazi party planned to march in Milwaukee?

LB: In Milwaukee? I don't know about it. I know that Ellen called the other day and said they planned to march in Evanston and then she called and she said they did start to march, there were only about six or seven Nazis. The other groups, unions and the others, simply chased them out. There was no fight, nothing. But I didn't know they were planning to march.

SL: I think it was right around the time that Victor was sick. You probably just didn't know about it.

LB: Years ago, that I don't even remember. But I know about those marches they wanted to have in Skokie. They tried many times in Skokie and just a few weeks ago they tried to march in Evanston. She gave me the name of that place even where they started out, a park or what. I think they got permission, but the people just didn't let them. So I said to her, "Were there only Jews who prevented them?" "No, there were other people. There were all kinds of unions and all kinds of organizations." They simply chased them away.

SL: So how do you feel about that?

LB: There was only a very small group she said, there were maybe six or seven people there, those Nazis. So, how do I feel about that? Though they are only a few people, I am very scared because that's how they first started to grow. Only from a few people. These things when they are let loose and not controlled, they can grow and as I told you before and I mention again I strongly believe in the tendencies and the blind tendencies of masses of people. At that time, when they form a mass, they don't think. People as a whole group never think. Single people can think. If you can identify them. But as a mass they have one empty brain and they'll go after anybody who is willing to lead them. I really am afraid of the Nazis, of the Ku Klux Klan's and even of the, what do they call them now, Moral Majority?<sup>31</sup> Is this the name? They are dangerous too. So they consider themselves the contemporary conservatives who should have respect for human rights but they don't.

SL: How satisfactory do you find the American system of government to be?

LB: I always say there's no perfection. Not in government and not in private life. You have to strive for the best. You know, idealism doesn't exist. Idealism is God and unreachable. Ideal is not within the reach of human beings. But I still think that the present form of government in the United States is a better form than anywhere else. More democratic.

The only thing that I do object is that they cannot bring together more understanding between Congress and President. The executive branch with the legislative branch have so many rubbings, misunderstandings. There should be a better word for it. I never can find the right word in English, yet, after so many years. There should be some easier way to keep these two branches closer together. But even Carter who was a Democrat and had a Democratic congress couldn't patch up their differences. Just think about it, what will be now with Democratic House of Representatives and the Senate is already Republican. I am no specialist in government, but I think there should be some way to improve it. But otherwise, you know, it seems to me there is no other country in the world where the president has as great a power as in the United States. Which is sometimes good and sometimes bad, as I told

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<sup>31</sup>A right-wing political pressure group active between the late 1970s and mid-1980s.

you before. Depends which way you read it and what you need and which party looks at it. But I think it's still a good form of government.

SL: How do you feel about the prominence of Jews in American society?

LB: I'm afraid of it. I'm scared of it. As long as there are rich Jews, it's okay. But I'm afraid that causes anti-Semitism because some people, the anti-Semites, have a tendency to say that the Jews occupy this, the Jews occupy... Like many say the Jews rule the banks, which of course is not true. The banking business is absolutely not in Jewish hands. But there are plenty anti-Semites that say so. There are many, of course we know that. Television and literature and probably art also. I don't know enough about art. I wouldn't say it's dominated by Jews but has a high percentage. Anti-Semites say it's dominated. I only say they have a high percentage. But what can the Jew help if he has the ability for it? You should let him use it. Then they'll say, okay, some people say the Jews are pushy. No, I don't believe it. You know, I do not believe in ethnic divisions and I do not believe in special ethnic abilities. But there's one thing I believe: the Jews have a high percentage of intelligentsia, of academicians, of intellectuals. And the reason is not the merit of the Jew. The reason is that for centuries and centuries the Jew was not allowed to do anything else. In many countries like Russia, Poland and probably many others, he was not allowed to own land. So what could he do? He stayed indoors and studied the books the holy books, and I think this is inbred, it's hereditary, and that's what developed the high intelligence. So I say it's the merit of our enemies that we have so many intellectuals. They simply forced us into it but not letting us do with anything else. Not us, I mean our forefathers. But of course, some enemies can turn it to the bad and say Jews occupy the literary world, Jews occupy televisions, Jews write the scripts, Jews write the books, Jews can write articles. Can you blame them for that that they know how to do it?

SL: What do you see are the most important issues facing America today?

LB: You mean just the United States, you mean socially or politically or altogether, anything? I would say... I am so forgetful, how do you say it when the money is losing the value? Inflation. Inflation, I think, is number one. Many people think unemployment is one and inflation is two. But I would say inflation is serious because people are losing money and that have to [lower? 09:58] to spend it. Of course, it is a complicated problem, because if you try to fight inflation, unemployment goes up. If you want to build roads and give employment to people, where do you get the money to pay them? Everything is so intertwined that you know very well even the specialists can't get out, why do you ask me? I should give you the answer?

SL: To what extent do you believe there is anti-Semitism in the United States?

LB: I am sure it is. With many people it's deeply rooted. Even unconsciously. But it is deeply rooted, there's no doubt about it. Though I have friends who don't show me this, but I don't know how they talk about me at home when I'm not there.

SL: How secure do you feel as a Jew in America?

LB: I feel secure. Right now I feel very secure, but I don't know if it will be secure fifty years from now, but nobody knows. No, I feel safe.

SL: What are your feelings about Germany and present-day Germans?

LB: I'll tell you what I heard from Victor. He was there many times. He said the younger generation is liberals, but the older generation is still pro-Hitler. It's the same as in America. There's a small group of the neo-Nazis and they are a danger, a danger to the world because they have to be watch very closely to make sure that they don't grow. Just like here, just like in France, any other country.

SL: Have you ever received restitution?

LB: Altogether we received \$1,800, that's it.

SL: It was just one time?

LB: At one time, yes. And that was just for our, for the loss of freedom. We never received any restitution for material losses because our houses were in Russia, so there's nobody to pay the restitution. It was Poland, now it's Russia, so the Germans only paid us for the loss of freedom.

SL: Have you ever returned to Poland?

LB: No. No reason. What for? In fact our home, as I told you, is now in Russia and I never had anybody in Poland. I don't have anybody in Skalat also. What's the use of going there? The mass grave is left. That's all.

SL: Do you think it's easier now for you to talk about your experiences than maybe it was five years ago?

LB: Five years ago I was already able to talk about it, but fifteen years ago I wouldn't have the nerve. Time heals. As I told you yesterday, but not at night. At night I still have those nightmares. But at day it's much easier. No, fifteen years ago I wouldn't have. Five years ago, probably yes.

SL: How do you feel about the increasing awareness in this country about the Holocaust?

LB: I don't believe it's increasing awareness. The awareness is only among those who write about it or play them in the movies or on television. The rest of the people, seems to me, is just as indifferent as they were ten years ago.

SL: How do you feel about the fact that part of the funding for this project has come from the federal government?

LB: I approve of it and I appreciate it and I think it should keep up, not only now, but always. Later when they stop it, they should keep on renewing it every few years as a reminder. But I also think if you put those objects away and nobody knows about it, that's no good also. There should be a way to notify other archives, libraries, that something like that exists. Let's say fifty years from now somebody wants to write about it. And somebody should, not fifty years from now, constantly. Somebody should have access to material like that, because otherwise people will forget and the biggest danger is if the world forgets.

SL: And why do you feel it's important for you to participate in an oral history documentation like this?

LB: For the same reason that I answered the previous question: keep the story alive, keep the truth alive for future generations so there is no repetition. I think I answered this in the previous question already. Of course, I didn't know that would be next.

SL: Actually, I've come to the end of the questions that I had prepared. If you have anything you want to add, please feel free to do so.

LB: I cannot say that I would add anything, because if I would want to add, you would have to sit here for days and days and days. And don't think that I told you everything. It's just impossible. I just appreciate that you gave me the opportunity to say that much, and I'll repeat that is only a very small percentage of what I really could say.

SL: Thank you very much for sharing it.

LB: Thank you for asking me. I wouldn't say it was my pleasure, but I was glad to have the opportunity to do it.

**END OF TAPE 8, SIDE 1**

END OF TRANSCRIPT