

8-15-1984

# Lee Fishman interview for the Emmanuel Ringelblum Collection

Lee Fishman

Julie Orenstein

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Lee Fishman  
8/15/84  
by Julie  
Orenstein

TO THE READER:

THIS IS A SUMMARY OF THE INTERVIEW. WE HAVE ATTEMPTED TO REPRODUCE THE CONVERSATION IN NARRATIVE STYLE, HOWEVER IT IS NECESSARY FOR THE TAPE COUNTER NUMBERS TO CORRESPOND WITH THE SUBJECT BEING DISCUSSED AT A GIVEN POINT ON THE TAPE. FOR THIS REASON THE ORGANIZATION OF THE MATERIAL RETAINS AN ELEMENT OF THE "STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS." WE APPOLOGIZE IF THIS IS CONFUSING.

FOR SPECIFIC REFERENCES, PLEASE REFER TO THE INDEX WHICH FOLLOWS THE SUMMARY.

ANY OPINIONS EXPRESSED IN THIS SUMMARY ARE THOSE OF THE INTERVIEWEE.

## Lee Fishman

### Begin Side One

Lee Fishman was born in 1929 in Glenboky, Poland. Because Glenboky is in an area often seized by Russia Mrs. Fishman also called it a Belorussian, or White Russian, city. It was a medium sized rural town which acted as a trade center for the outlying smaller towns. Her family came to this town from the outlying areas. She had two brothers and two sisters. Her parents had a bakery at which all of the children worked. Her father also acted as a supplier of various items such as chickens and farm supplies. Her mother spoke English and had some form of higher education. Her parents were Orthodox. They belonged to a synogogue which they attended regularly and they kept kosher, in fact when the family went into hiding in the forest, Mrs. Fishman's mother wouldn't eat anything that wasn't kosher. The language spoken at home was Yiddish, as well as Russian and Polish. They were neither rich or poor. Owning a bakery meant that they had a constant supply of food. Mrs. Fishman's mother had brothers in South Africa who sent them money. Her parents had more Gentile friends than Jewish. The Temple was not a place for socializing, although everyone was religious. Her parents didn't belong to any social clubs and she doesn't remember any entertainment except the circus. There were movies in town, but her parents felt she was too young to see them. There was no political activity in her town, just day-to-day living. She never felt deprived although she had to begin work at an early age. She went to a private Hebrew school, or gymnasium, which was all Jewish. Teaching was done in Hebrew. She has no outstanding memories from her childhood.

The war began when she was 18. She didn't notice any anti-Semitism around her. She speaks English, Polish, Russian and German.

She socialized with Jewish children from her school and had no Gentile friends. She read the Jewish newspapers, but didn't believe what she read about Poland. At that time Glenboky was across the Russian border. She had no idea that there was any danger until the Germans invaded her town in 1941. The Russians had invaded in 1939. At that time they had confiscated her father's bakery and moved other people into their house because they had allotted each person a certain amount of space and they felt that Mrs. Fishman's family had more space than they needed. She and her father went to work for the Russians at that time. The Russians were not bad, according to Mrs. Fishman. They at least allowed people to live and work. One could be arrested for saying the wrong things, but for the most part the Russians were very fun-loving and enjoyed having dances and parties. When the Germans came they announced that they were going to kill everyone. She had no idea the Germans were coming. She thought the Russians would keep them safe. The first thing Mrs. Fishman knew about the German's invasion was when a German walked into the store next door to hers and told the shopkeeper that all the Jews would be shot. They waved a gun at the shopkeeper, but didn't hurt her. Then they took several men out into the street and killed them. They moved the Jews into a ghetto and set up a place for people to come to register for work assignments. Most of the people who came to register were shot and thrown into open graves.

Mrs. Fishman's family was moved into the ghetto and her father was made head of all the bakers. There was a lot of random killing in the ghetto. Mrs. Fishman found out that the Germans wanted to arrest her family because one of her brothers had escaped and was hiding in the forest. Her father didn't want to go, but they joined her brother and

hid for two years. The family lived in the ghetto for one year, during which time Mrs. Fishman prepared potatoes for the Germans. She met her husband when he came to stay with his grandparents in Glenboky. He ran off to the forest with her brother. The two boys came back occasionally to take other people out or to get weapons. Many people lived in the forest, but they were always in danger of being turned in or killed by farmers. In the ghetto Mrs. Fishman lived in a house with five or six other families. She slept on the floor. There didn't seem to be any reason for any of the killings, they were just random. People who came to register for work would be killed and put in open graves. There was no opportunity to have friendships and life was in no way normal, because people had to hide to avoid being noticed and shot. There were two ways to get employment. One was to register at the Judenrat, which was where the people were killed. The other was to answer calls for workers, which were genuine and apparently safe to answer. There were frequent calls for young girls which Mrs. Fishman answered. Her employers were always nice to her. Many such employers hid the girls who worked for them. Mrs. Fishman's employer gave her food and hid Jewish girls. It was unfortunate that the people who helped in this way were often caught and killed.

There was no pay for this work. The men in the ghetto were often beaten or tied to horses and forced to run or be dragged. A friend of Mrs. Fishman's was beaten to death.

The family went to the forest to escape the Jewish police which enforced the Nazi's rules due to their fear that individuals who broke the rules would bring punishment on the entire ghetto. Mrs. Fishman and her father were asked to come to the police offices and register after her brother escaped, but when they came no one was there. Mrs. Fishman decided

that they should not even reenter the house, so the whole family left the ghetto and went to hide with a farmer they knew. He wouldn't let them stay so they hid at the next farm. When they woke in the morning it was obvious that the farmer had been in the barn and had seen them, but he apparently didn't report them. They hid during the day and moved at night. Mrs. Fishman's father knew the forest well [although after we were done with the interview she told me that getting lost was a terrible danger during this time and that her father was lost for three days once in the winter]. They walked for two nights to find a man who knew where her brother was. Mrs. Fishman said the forest was on an island. [But I think she may have meant it was like an island, in other words an isolated stand of trees] They dug holes like graves and hid in them. They were safe at night. They stayed in the forest until the Russians returned in 1944. They would hide during the day, listening for footsteps or shots. The men would gather food. The group numbered between 15 and 20 and consisted of Mrs. Fishman's family, her fiance, and other people. When the Russians came the young people left, but the old people stayed behind. She and her husband were married in Glenboky in 1944 and then they moved to his home town of Postowy. Her husband became a supplier of stores in a warehouse for the Russians. They were the only surviving family in town and soon realized that there was no future there or in any part of Eastern Europe. Mrs. Fishman's sister died of dysentery because there was no medical attention to be had in the area. The town was completely burned by the Germans and the open graves they left behind had never been covered. There were rats everywhere. Her husband had lost his mother, father, three brothers and a sister. When the Germans first arrived they had begun by killing people in the small towns. Those they didn't kill they brought to the central ghetto in Glenboky. When the Germans began

killing people in Glenboky they killed Mrs. Fishman's sister, her sister's husband and their two small children, so Mrs. Fishman lost both her sisters during the war. Both her brothers are in Dayton, Ohio and her parents also spent the last years of their lives in Dayton.

After Mr. and Mrs. Fishman stayed in Postowy for awhile the Russians began allowing Polish citizens to go west which the Fishman's registered to do. They had to pay to cross the border from Poland to Czechoslovakia and had to go at night. From there they went to Austria and Germany.

They literally travelled in cattle cars, for they brought their cow with them and rode in the same car with it. They spent three years in Ulm, Germany in a Displaced Persons camp. They passed their time working in the kitchens and doing odd jobs. They came to Germany in 1946 and left for the United States in 1949. In the DP camp they got whatever food was sent from America through UNRAA, because everything in Germany was bombed. There were no jobs that paid, they just helped out while they waited for a country to let them in. Her oldest son was born in Germany. She didn't care which country they went to. Mr. Fishman had two uncles in Dayton and an aunt in Akron who signed for them after Truman passed the DP Laws [1949]. They had some trouble getting papers for the child and this caused a delay. The child was born in regular hospital outside the DP camp and Mrs. Fishman feels she got good care. She had a doctor and a midwife caring for her in the camp. Her son was 2 ½ when they arrived in Dayton. The entire family was in the DP camp. Mrs. Fishman's parents and her younger brother joined her mother's sisters in Haverhill, Massachusetts. Her older brother went to New York. Mr. Fishman worked for a company in Dayton and they lived with his cousin due to the scarcity of apartments in Dayton, especially for people with children. Mr. Fishman's uncle found



them an apartment in East Dayton where they lived for three years. Mr. Fishman died in 1975. His uncle had taught him the trade of buying and selling paper and this was what he did for a living.

The Fishmans loved America and found the community friendly especially after what they had been through.

When she was in the forest the Germans would occasionally blockade an area and comb the woods with dogs. Often she and her family had to run and hide as the soldiers shot at them. If they couldn't get out of the woods to find food they would go hungry. Sometimes they went several days without food. She remembers that when she was still working in the town she worked near the place where people were shot. She could hear the shots and hear the soldiers shouting, "Another one gone, another one gone." Once in the forest the Germans came within 30 feet of a place where she was hiding with another woman. She remember the woman held her head down because she kept looking up to see where the soldiers were. The woman probably saved her life. The Germans never came very far into the trees so if the fugitives didn't run they didn't get shot, they just hid and kept still. She can't really describe what happened because she finds it hard to believe herself. She kept wondering if there wasn't someone in the world who knew what was happening to them. The Germans killed Gentiles as well as Jews, all for no reason. As they left a town they would burn the houses and food until there was nothing left for anyone to use. It seemed to be a game to the Germans. In her town, with a population of 25- or 30,000, everyone was killed and the town was levelled. People were laid down in the town square and shot.

End Side One.

Long gap at beginning of Side Two.

Begin Side Two.

Despite the fact that she wondered if anyone knew of their plight, Mrs. Fishman didn't think that anyone could help because of the volume of the machinery and guns that the Germans had. It seemed most shocking to her that the Germans killed even doctors, lawyers, the "beautiful people" with money. They even killed the Russian soldiers they caught. She remembers starved people like skeletons piled on trucks, either shot or dead of hunger. Even as they retreated from the Russians the Germans

destroyed the towns by burning them. Mrs. Fishman and her husband didn't want to stay in a burned town where everyone was dead. Mrs. Fishman's mother would starve rather than eat non-kosher food. She tried to eat, but wasn't able to swallow the food, so they had to carry her when she became weak from hunger. She had her own pot to cook in and she ate

only potatoes and bread. Mrs. Fishman cried the first time she had to eat non-kosher food, but she was young and was able to get used to it. They had no candles to light for shabbat, but they got flour and made matzot for Passover. Some of the boys knew how to light fires. She doesn't remember places of worship in the DP camps. Her husband's uncle got them into Beth Jacob when they arrived in Dayton because they came in August right before the holidays.

Mr. Fishman was a very good-hearted man who suffered terribly over the deaths of his parents and young siblings. Mrs. Fishman feels that their deaths wore at him and caused his early death at age 55. He never applied for restitution money because he wasn't willing to be paid for his family. Mrs. Fishman is a member of Beth Jacob Synagogue which recently

changed locations from Dayton View to Englewood, and changed its affiliation from Orthodox to Traditional. She feels there is no significance, it is still Orthodox. It is' no longer possible for her to walk to services because of the distance, so she has to drive on the sabbath as do many other Beth Jacob members. She buys kosher meats, but is not concerned about reserving some dishes for dairy and others for meat. She feels that the war changed her outlook. She got too far away from the practices of Kashruth and she lost much of her belief.

When the Germans first invaded her home town they killed the Rabbi's two daughters. Mrs. Fishman was talking to a neighbor woman about it, telling her that she couldn't understand how two beautiful, young, and very religious girls could be killed. The neighbor woman said that they had been killed first so that they wouldn't have to suffer, but Mrs. Fishman began to wonder if there was a God at all. The Germans would taunt them and ask them, "Where is your God?" Now she believes that there is someone "doing all this thundering," but she wonders how He

can see the things that happen in the world and let them go on. Now she is a widow with a severely handicapped son and this makes it more difficult for her to believe because she married her husband after they went through so much together and now that she has lost him too it makes her wonder where God is.

End Side Two.

Lee Fishman  
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*Holocaust History*  
*date of Interview 8/15/84*  
*Transcribed by R.K. Feist*

*LF = Lee Fishman, the Interviewee*

*JO = Julie Orenstein, the Interviewer*

*JO This is an interview with Lee B. Fishman by Julie Orenstein. This is August 15, 1984, and we are in the kitchen of her home. Tell me your full name, please.*

*LF My name is Lee Fishman.*

*JO Would you tell me your age?*

*LF I was born in 1921. I am 63.*

*JO Where were you born?*

*LF Poland.*

*JO What city?*

*LF Lubawskie (transcriber cannot find this city on a map, but he was able to locate "Lazdijai", which sounds somewhat like what LF said, which is located at 54. 13N, 23.33E - this agrees with later location).*

*JO Did you grow up there?*

*Lf Yes.*

*JO What type of town was that? Was it small?*

*LF Not so small. A little bigger than a really small town.*

*JO Was it industrial or rural?*

*LF I really don't know. I think, mostly farming.*

*JO Do you know how your family came to be there? Have they been there for generations?*

*LF My mother had been raised in that town. I don't believe that they had been there for generations. They had come from smaller towns to this bigger town. It was, as shall we say, Columbus surrounded by smaller towns, but it was a bigger town.*

*JO Did you have any brothers and sisters?*

*LF Yes. I had two brothers and two sisters.*

*JO Did any other family members live in your house besides your parents, brothers and sisters?*

*LF No. We were all kids at the time and we were all living at home. JO bid you have any uncles, aunts or grandparents staying with you? if yes, we had aunts and uncles, not staying with us, but in the same town. My mother's sister and brother with family. None of them, no one survived.*

*JO What kinds of jobs did your grandparents have?*

*LF My parents had a bakery at that point. My father did the selling, my mother did the baking and all of us used to help.*

*JO Did his father also have the bakery?*

*LF No, his father did not.*

*JO What did he do?*

*LF Oh, my grandfather / believe he bought all kinds of cakes and chicken and sold them.*

*JO Oh, kind of a wholesale businss.*

*LF No, he was first buying things at the market, such as at a farmer's market, and then selling to different people, mainly in the houses.*

*JO What kind of education did your parents have? did they go to elementary school?*

*LF I really don't know. I know that my mother had a little more education because she could write English. She had a Russian higher education (prior to the end of WWI, this was Russian territory).*

*JO Were your parents very religious?*

*LF Yes.*

*JO Did they live pretty much in a Christian neighborhood?*

*LF I don't know about the neighborhood. you know the towns were not so big, so we all belonged to a synagogue. My mother was very religious.*

*JO So your family attended synagogue?*

*LF Oh Yes.*

*JO Did they keep a kosher home?*

*LF Sure. My mother lived here, in this country and kept kosher. My mother was in the forest, even then she never ate anything which was not kosher. She would not eat what we wanted her to eat so that she could survive. We were all hiding in the forest for 3 years.*

*JO What language did you speak at home?*

*LF We spoke mostly Jewish, I mean Yiddish.*

*JO Did you speak any other languages?*

*LF Russian and Polish, we spoke mainly Russian because where we lived it was in White Russia.*

*JO Was that Beylorussia?*

*LF No, we called it White Russia (that was its name prior to 1946).*

*JO you said that your mother spoke English. Did she teach it to you?*

*LF No, she didn't teach it. We could write the address in a letter, to the U.S. She would do it for other people. She couldn't speak it to us because no one spoke the language. She had English books.*

*JO Did you think of yourself as being among the rich people in your town or amongst the poor people in your town? When you were a child?*

*LF No, we were not rich and we were not poor. in Europe, when you had the essentials; when you had a bed, when you had a cow and a lot of chickens, so we were not doing badly . We sometimes had some help from South Africa*

*where my mother had 3 brothers. They would send us money twice a year. So, we were not poor. My father ran his business so we made out. We got a little help.*

*JO Did your parents have mostly Jewish friends? Did they' have any Gentile friends?*

*LF Oh, we had more Gentile than Jewish friends? In this town-there were farmers who used to be very good to us.*

*JO Did they attend a lot of social functions at the Synagogue? Was it a big center?*

*LF Oh no, nothing special; what we had were holydays. That is where I used to go with my mother and father, and the rest of the kids. They were religious as they were all over the country. In our country everybody was religious.*

*JO Was the Synagogue a big center for the community to get together in?*

*LF No, no. Strictly for use during holydays, or special events.*

*JO Do you know that other formal activities your family, your parents, were involved in in so far as such things as social clubs?*

*LF No. They had to make a living. That is all for which they had time. You know that it was a different life in Europe. It was a hard life. You had to provide for your family, and work for that.*

*JO Was there any kind of entertainment? Entertainment which they enjoyed?*

*LF I don't know.*

*JO When you were a little girl, were there any you could remember.*

*LF As I told you, I don't know. I don't remember any entertainment. I remember, though, that the circus used to come to town. I don't believe that my mother and father attended the movies. They used to tell me that I was too young yet for them; that I had plenty of years ahead of me to do it.*

*JO Do you remember anything about their politics? Were they politically active at all?*

*LF Not at all. There were no politics. Life was going on from day to day and you had to make a living, that's all. You had no time for politics.*

*JO You said that you helped in the shop when you were little?*

*LF Yes, I helped!*

*JO You started working when you were very young?*

*LF Naturally, when you have a business like that you pitch in. We all had to do our things.*

*JO Do you feel as if you had been deprived as a child?*



*LF No, not deprived. We just had to work and do our homework after school. You couldn't just sit around like some other people. We had to help. My mother had to take care of the house with 5 kids. I was one of the older ones, so we had to do all of this.*

*JO When you went to school, did you go to public school or was it religious school?*

*LF As far as I know it was a private school. It had to be paid for also. It was like the Hebrew School in Dayton.*

*JO So, it was run by the Jewish Community.*

*LF No, not by the Jewish Community. They got teachers and they ran the school. It was like a "gymnasium", for higher education. It was all in Hebrew.*

*JO So, it was all Jewish?*

*LF Yes. It was the same thing which we have here.*

*JO Do you recall any special events during your childhood? Anything outstanding which happened?*

*LF Nothing that I know of, only that the war started in 1939.*

*JO So you were 10 years old then?*

*LF NO, I was not 10; in 1939, I was 18.*

*JO Do you recall if the anti-semitism increased at that time in your town?*

*LF I don't know. I really didn't know much.*

*JO Did they single you out as a Jewish person?*

*LF No. I don't know anything about that.*

*JO What language was spoken at your school?*

*LF Hebrew.*

*JO What languages do you speak now? Languages which you understand?*

*LF English and I speak Polish and Russian, and German.*

*JO Did you associate very much with Gentile boys and girls?*

*LF No, we didn't.*

*JO Mostly with the Jewish kids you went to schools with?*

*LF Yes, that is right.*

*JO Prior to the war, to that extent were you aware of the NAZI'S intentions?*

*LF We used to read the Jewish papers like the "forward". It used to be delivered. I read in the paper what was going on, even in Poland. You see, we were close to the Russian border (not far from Minsk). We didn't believe that was going on. We read about it, but that didn't tell us that really went on.*

*JO At that point did you begin to believe that you were in danger.*

*LF The minute they walked in. When the war started in 1939. Actually in 1939, the Russians came to us. In 1941, the Germans came.*

*JO What happened when the Russians came?*

*LF. When the Russians came, they took everything away, like my father's bakery. Then my father was just working for them, and I was working in the office for them. We were not allowed to keep our own, even our home. We had a big house. We were not supposed to keep it because they said that it was too big for a family. you were just allowed so much. It was not so bad. My father worked, I worked. We had food. The only thing which was bad is that if you sold anything and they catch you at it, they put you in jail.*

*JO Was that because you were Jewish? Or, because they just took over?*

*LF No, we were not singled out. At this time, the Russians did not discriminate. They were very proper. They liked the Jewish girls. They were very polite to people. They always came with music. They had dances every Saturday night for people of my age. After the Russians left and the Germans came, we appreciated the Russians. When the Germans came, they said that they were going to kill everyone. They said it right away, the minute they walked into town.*

*JO So you had no anticipation that the Germans were coming? They were suddenly there, or did you know that they were coming?*

*LF We didn't know that they were coming because we were under the Russians. At the time, we didn't know because the Russians were there. Then they chased the Russians and the Germans came. Under the Russians, we were happy-go-lucky. When the Germans came, they were going to kill everyone, that is a little different.*

*JO What did you do when the Germans came? I mean, you were in immediate danger.*

*LF The minute they came in, they walked into our next door neighbors and they said: "you see this?" They showed the woman next door. "This is the garment which all the Jews will get."*

*JO Did they hurt her?*

*LF They did not hurt her. No. But the minute they walked in they started killing, that is all. They took away some men from the houses and they killed just whoever they wanted. for nothing. Then they created ghettos and they put everyone into the ghettos and they called for everyone to come and register. Whoever was able to work had to work. Whomever they wanted they took away and they said that they would take the rest later. They burned them.*

JO So you were put into the ghetto?

LF yes, I was in a ghetto with my family.

JO Did they arrest anyone in your family?

LF They did not from my family, my family was lucky. My father was made the chief of all the bakers.

JO So, what was the situation in the ghetto?

LF In the ghetto, they were killing everybody. They were taking them out, telling them that they must come out to work, and just killing everybody. However we, my father, my husband and I, actually, we were just going around together, we were not married yet, We were just trying to find out when they were going to arrest us, because they knew that we had something to do with the people, the boys, who ran away. That is, the boys who were running away to the forest.

JO So, people were escaping to the forest (the area around Minsk contained many acres of forest, which at that time had not been harvested, except in small, well defined tracts). Some Russian troops had also escaped extermination.

LF So, my brother & my husband to be, went into the forest when we found out that they were going to arrest us. So we just went into the forest. There is more than this to the story. We all went away. My father didn't want to go. I started crying that I didn't want to stay any longer in the ghetto. We then were for a couple of years in the forest, hiding.

JO What kind of work did you do while you were in the ghetto?

LF I worked for the German soldiers, whatever needed doing, such as peeling potatoes, or whatever. I had to work there.

JO Were you assigned that job?

LF yes.

JO How long did you live in the ghetto?

LF About a year.

JO you were dating your husband at that time?

LF Oh yes. My husband was from a different town. He came to see his grandmother with his father. They were not far from our house. I had known my husband from before then; from the time when he was a boy, when he came to his grandmothers'. He stayed in our town until he ran away with my brother into the forest.

JO How did you know how to find him? You found him in the forest when you went, right?

LF We had contact with the forest. Somebody from the forest came to get some other people, or to get something from the town.

*JO Did you supply them with food?*

*LF No, we did not. We supplied them with some things they needed. Once they were in the forest, they went at night to get some food from the people. It was not easy. Farmers used to catch people from the forest and kill them or turn them over to the Germans to kill. The young people used to go away into the forest, and the farmers would get them and hold them until the police would come and get them.*

*JO When you were living in the ghetto, what kind of a house did you live in?*

*LF Oh, they put everybody in a house. 5 or 6 families together. Some people were sleeping on the floor. Just so that they could survive. Until they killed the people, and the houses were empty.*

*JO Did they kill people for any reason, or just decided?*

*LF They didn't have to have a reason.*

*JO They just seemed to randomly choose the people?*

*LF That's right. They pulled the ones they wanted from the ones who registered for work, or whatever. They just took people away and killed everyone. People just didn't come back from where they took them. That was all.*

*JO Were you able to have some friendships? Was there any kind of normal life at all?*

*LF How could that be. There was no normal life. You had to hide all the time. We had to go into the attic of the bakery and hide. Some other people came to the bakery because they thought that was a place where you could survive because they wouldn't come looking. We lay in the attic and heard how they were shooting the people.*

*JO So, you were hiding?*

*LF yes, hiding all the time.*

*JO Put then you had a job?*

*LF Yes, we had a job. Not truly a steady job. They would send us to different places. you had to register every time at the Judenrat (that is the organization which the NAZI had set up to govern the Jews for the Germans) and work in one place or another, in a different place, wherever they called for young girls to come and work for them. But in most of the places where we worked, they did not treat us badly. As a matter of fact, some even tried to hide some young girls, so that they could survive. However, they couldn't do anything when the entire thing was going on. We had a good German man. He would supply us with food and things. He felt sorry for us. He was hiding some Jewish girls and then, when the others found out, they would kill these people, especially because that fellow had hidden them. So, although he was a good man, he couldn't do anything, because the rest of them would go after him. So these girls were specially killed.*

JO Did you receive pay for your work?

LF No, we didn't, get paid. Nobody got paid. People got hit, if they didn't work enough. The girls wouldn't get hit, the men got hit...they got always hit. My brothers, my husband got hit. They would ride them, as if they were horses, and they had to run, as fast as horses. Whoever didn't run fast, they would beat him up. They beat our neighbor so that he couldn't survive. He was black and blue all over, all swollen up from the way he was beaten up. He had bad legs so that he couldn't run. My brother and my husband, at the time, were young boys, so they could run fast. They would whip the horses, and the people would have to run as fast as the horses.

JO When did you decide to go into the woods?

LF We decided when the police was after us. They were after us because we had connections with people who had run away and were in hiding. They found out about it, and they searched for us. So we were really afraid that the Germans would find it out and that then the entire town would suffer. They had those who truly kept an eye on things, and they had to report what went on, because, if they didn't report us, somebody else would report. So there was a moment when they sent offer me to come with my father to register. They said that they wanted to talk to us. We went to talk to them, it was about 6 o'clock, supertime, and no one was there. So I went home with my father, and I said: "I am not going to go into the house." So my younger brother came out, running, all excited about that was going on. So I said: "Send out my mother and my younger sister". We walked to the house and I said: "We are going to run away." So we ran away.

JO Was it hard for you to get away?

LF Oh, it was very difficult. We had to run to a farmer whom we knew. We came to him and he wouldn't let us in because he was afraid that the people would know where we were hiding. He gave us a piece of bread and told us to go further. So we went into another barn where we stayed overnight. The next morning the farmer came in and he took some hay. We thought that, maybe, he knew that we were there and that he went to report us. So he took the hay and he went to town and when he came back - seeing that he didn't report us, we stayed until dark and then, after dark, we started walking further. My father knew the forest in that area, since that was the town where he used to live, which was not very far. It was about 50 or 60 miles from our home town. We walked for 2 nights and 2 days. Actually, we couldn't walk the days so we just walked the nights. Then we came to one man who knew where the boys were hiding. This man took us into the forest. It was on an island, all surrounded by woods. They had like little dugouts where we would hide in the daytime. At night we would improve our location. It was mainly

*during the daytime that we were afraid. At night we weren't so afraid.*

*JO You stayed there for 3 years?*

*LF Yes for 3 years. We left from there in August, in this month in 1946, when the Russians came back, to our part of the territory. Then we ran across the Russians.*

*JO Can you describe to me an average day in the woods?*

*LF What do you = an average day? you just got up in the morning, you just hid close to the trees and listened for shots or something else which told you that someone was working. Usually the men, such as my husband or my brother would go to get food. My father and mother were there and so were my younger brother and my younger sister.*

*JO So was this just your family?*

*LF No, we had several single people who had also run away. There were about 15 or 20 people. Later when the Russian partisans started coming. So since my husband and I were young people, they took us in a group with them. They left the rest, the older people, behind.*

*JO So, just you and your husband left the camp with them?*

*LF yes. We went with them like soldiers. That went on until 1944. That is forty years ago, that we were liberated, as you might call it.*

*JO When did you and your husband get married?*

*LF In the forest, before we came out of the woods.*

*JO Where did you get married?*

*LF It was in the compound where I lived and then he went back to his town and we lived there for a couple of years, in 1946.*

*JO What was the name of the town where he lived?*

*LF It was Postovlior (or something which sounds like it but the transcriber can not locate it).*

*JO Did you work in that town?*

*LF No, I didn't work there, my husband worked there.*

*JO What kind of job did he have?*

*LF He worked for the Russians as a supplier. He worked in a warehouse.*

*JO What made you decide to leave?*

*LF There was no future for us there. We were afraid that we would lose everything, in case there would be another war. The whole town had been burned. There was no family, nobody was left. We were the only family in town, the only ones who survived. After the war, one of my sisters died, since there was no medications. She had diarrhea. She had eaten something and her stomach swelled up. After the war, it was easy to eat something wrong. So, she got dysentery, and it was all empty..there is nothing we could do.*

*When the Germans ran away they just burned everything. There was nothing left in the homes. One house was so close to the graves that all you could see were rats. The graves were open. They never even bothered to close them. The whole town, everything was gone.*

*JO So your husband lost his entire family?*

*LF Yes. He lost his mother and father, 3 brothers and one sister. He was the oldest of the siblings. He was 20 years old at that time.*

*JO Did you ever find out what happen to them?*

*LF Yes. They were all killed before he ran away from there. They killed them in his town before they killed them in our town. What they did is that they killed all the people in the small towns. They brought everyone who was left into our town and then they killed everybody in our town. They killed my older sister, they killed my brother-in-law. My sister had 2 little children, and they were killed.*

*JO So that entire family was killed? This sister had moved away from home and married.*

*LF Yes. My other sister died after the war.*

*JO So you had just the 2 brothers left?*

*LF My brothers live here in Dayton and my parents died here in Dayton. My mother died in '63, my father died in '77.*

*JO Where did you go when you left the little town of Postov?*

*LF After the war? The Russians annexed Polish White Russia. If you were a Polish citizen and wanted to emigrate into Poland as of the borders of 1946, they allowed that. So we did register that we wanted to go into Poland.*

*JO That was further West.*

*LF yes. Another time we heard that people would be able to immigrate someplace. (The U.S. was accepting "displaced persons" at that time.) So we had to pay to cross the border from Poland. From Poland we had to go to Czechoslovakia, we had to pay for that, and cross the border at night. Then from Czechoslovakia, we came to Austria and then to West Germany.*

*JO How was your travel?*

*LF Oh, we traveled in boxcars (enclosed freight cars). That was the only traveling which was possible. We were allowed to take a cart with us and we took that on the boxcar. We were in Germany for 3 years.*

*JO Did you travel directly, from Poland to Germany?*

*LF No, we didn't make a straight trip. We had to cross the borders and we had to pay for crossing the borders. It was not so easy.*

*JO You didn't stop and live anywhere on the journey?*

*LF Oh no. Not until we came to Germany.*

JO What town did you live in in Germany?

LF (Here the transcriber is not able to understand the name of the town, except that it is located on the Donau River. It sounds something like Wilhelm on the Donau). We lived there for 3 years, in a camp.

JO In an internment camp?

LF It was a displaced Persons (DP) Camp.

JO How was life in the camps? What did you do with your time there?

LF We worked around and we cleaned and we helped in the kitchen. We did whatever work there was to do in the camp. We were there until 1949. We had come to Germany in 1946. Then, in '49, we came to this country.

JO What kind of food did you have in the DP camp?

LF We had whatever the Americans provided because Germany didn't have much food then. It was right after the war. Everything had been bombed. All the food came from the UNRA (United Nations Relief Association). Then, if you had somebody in the U.S., they sent you something, a few dollars or whatever.

JO So there were no jobs with pay or anything like that?

LF No, you were not supposed to work. You waited for days.

JO What were you waiting for?

LF Until they would have you here (in the U.S.) or somewhere else, that some country would let us in. Nobody did. You had to have papers, and this and that. Then another time, my oldest son was born. Then they didn't let us in. So altogether we waited for 3 years. 3 years went by until we came here.

JO Did you have any idea what country you wanted to go to?

LF No, we really didn't. Just as long as we went someplace. Then Truman got legislation passed which would let us in. My husband also had family here.

JO What relatives did he have here? How were they related?

LF He had an uncle, actually 2 uncles. He had an aunt in Akron, Ohio. They prepared papers for us. They wanted him to come right away in 1946. The papers did not move so rapidly because I had my oldest son there (in the DP camp) so they just wouldn't let us go because he was a little baby. There was always something. So we got to stay there until 1949. Then, we came in August, 1949.

JO Well, did you have your son in a hospital?

LF In Germany? Yes, he was born in a hospital.

JO Did you feel that you got good care?

LF Oh, I guess so. There was nothing to complain about. I think that everything was all right.



JO Was the hospital in the DP Camp?

LF No, it was a regular hospital. We had doctors in the camp. I didn't have a doctor. I had a midwife.

JO So, when you came to the U.S., that was, you, your husband and your son, who else came with you then?

LF That's all. My son by then was 2' years old.

JO Were any other members of your family in the DP camp?

LF yes, all of my family who survived. They all, went different places because my mother had sisters near Boston. She went there with my father and my younger brother. He was about 16 years old then. They went to Haverhill, Mass. (42.427N 71.05W) and stayed there. My other brother went to New York. We came here to Dayton. We settled here and my husband worked for a company here in Dayton.

JO So one of your husbands uncles lived here?

LF yes.

JO Did you live with them at first, or were you able to set up housekeeping?

LF We lived with them for a month or two. you couldn't find any apartments in 1949, particularly if you had a boy not yet 3 years old. you just couldn't get any apartments. At least that is what they said. Particularly with a young boy, you couldn't get an apartment for any money. So the uncle found an apartment for us in the East end of town. We lived there for over 3 years, then we came over here. My husband passed away in 1975.

JO What work did your husband do?

LF He was in business for himself. First he was in business with his uncle buying some scrap metal and some paper. They bought, and sold that.

JO What were your first impressions of America?

LF We had a good impression. It is a beautiful country. It has been nice and friendly to our family and we have enjoyed it for years. That was so especially after what we had to go through. If I stay with you the entire night, I can't finish about it. We were at the pool, just last Sunday, with my sister-in-law. I started telling her stories about what went on in the forest, when we had blockades (that was when the Germans took one section or the other of the forest and surrounded it with troops and searched through that section for run aways, and shot those they found, on the spot). How the Germans used to come and how we used to run. How many days we were without food, because we couldn't go to the farmers. You know that there is more to it than what I can tell you just here, because if I tell you for 2 days and 2 nights, I still wouldn't be able to tell you all we went through, and what we have seen. How the Russian soldiers killed and how they were sadistic and how the skin was on the dead

people. How the Germans said: "Another one is gone and another one". They were just killing people like nobody's business. It would be hard to truly tell what we went through and what we have seen. I was in a blockade when the Germans surrounded the forest. I was laying there with a woman. She bent my head down...it was not a big forest because we could hear how they were coming through the village. We were hiding in a little forest with a couple of sick people, or rather wounded, because they had gotten shot. I could see the Germans clearly like, from here to the street. So this woman bent down my head so that he couldn't see us. Later on she got killed where we were laying. It was just a matter of luck, it was the way my head was down. There were just going through the forest to look for everybody. So, if we would tell all that we have seen, all that we have gone through, all the scares, it would be too much. As I told my sister-in-law last Sunday, It is impossible to realize what we went through; we can't believe that it has really happened. They would just kill people because they were alive. If there was something they didn't like, they would just kill people. They burned villages. The villagers were not Jews; they just burned them. They told everyone to leave their houses for work and the people never returned home. When we went to the villages to find some food, you found the potatoes burned. Considering how little they were, there was nothing to eat. For 3 days we had no food, absolutely nothing. When we went to the villages, the people had all been killed. They just killed. To them, that was just a game, just like kids do at a playground. In the town, there had been maybe 30,000 to 40,000 people and they killed just a lot of people, including non-Jews. And burned them. They burned every house in that town. The houses where we used to live, my sister's house had been next to ours, were just leveled. We couldn't even recognize where our homes had been. It was a war which concerned all the people. If you haven't seen it you can't believe all, that went on. They picked people up like here, in a square, and they told them to lay down, and they shot, they just started shooting.

JO You mentioned, while you were talking that you wondered if there wasn't someone out there who knew that was happening. Did you feel that sometime the Russians, or someone else, would come back and would prevent this from happening?

LF We didn't think that anybody would stop it because when we had seen all the machinery, and all the trucks and all the cars, all the tanks, all the ammunition which the Germans had. Seeing all of that we thought that nobody

would be able to stop them. They just are going to kill everyone, and that is all there is to it. They were going at it day and night, with the heavy artillery and the heavy machinery. The tanks and all that made us feel that there was nothing we could do. We just wanted to know if anybody would report that was going on, if anybody would stop to see that went on. We were wondering about that because they were killing everyone. There was just no answer. Doctors, lawyers, beautiful people of all kinds were being killed. I was a young girl at the time; I was not important to the state of things, but doctors, lawyers, professional people, all beautiful people, nice ones with money and everything, they told them to lay down and just killed them for nothing. They killed just because they found people who were alive. They just killed, that is all, because they wanted to. They even killed all the Russian soldiers whom they captured (that is that drove the Russians in the forest and started the Partisan movement). They picked the Russian soldiers up and used their ammunition on them. You could see how they had the skeletons on the trucks, you know on the wagons. They did not feed them, but starved them. Some of them, they shot, and some of them they starved until they died of hunger. We felt that people were doomed and that there was no end to it. They came in shooting and killing and that is just what they did, until they got out of the city. They burned the entire city and burned everyone in it. When we came back, there were a few people left in the entire town. There was no house which had a place where you could sleep or anything else. When my father got back there was one barn left. We stayed in this barn until we fixed up one house which used to be on the outskirts of town. We fixed it up and we stayed there until we left. We didn't want to live in a town where all that was left were rats running around. They had so many rats because they never buried the people.

JO You said that your mother would not eat anything which was not Kosher?

LF That's right

JO So, there was some sense of religion still in all that?

*LF* Yes, my mother was very religious. I have witnesses here who were in the forest with my mother, they are people who survived. I was just talking last Sunday about the fact that my mother would not eat anything. We begged her and we tried because we knew that she couldn't survive if we had to hide or run, or something. She was not regaining her strength, she was so weak. My father begged her because he said: "I cannot carry her all the time". She tried a few times but she said "No! I rather die than to eat anything that is not kosher." Of course, she would eat potatoes and bread. My father and brother and husband and other young boys would bring food for her. She had her own little pot and what she would do would be to cook for herself. She would put her food into this little pot, and that is all she would eat. We were young at the time, we eat whatever we could. Still, I cried the first time when I ate something which I was not supposed to eat. Then, we younger people just adjusted ourselves to a different life.

*JO* Were there any other kinds of religious observances? Did you manage to light candles, or anything like that?

*LF* No, we didn't have any candles. All we did was to prepare the best way we could for a Holyday like Passover. I don't really know. We got flour and we just baked matzos. you know, we had plenty of wood for baking. Of course, it was hard to start a fire. Not everybody could do it. There were some young boys who ran away. We would find them in the woods. They were hiding. They came from different towns. Our boys took them in and some of these young boys are in Israel now. They used to light a fire for my mother, she got some flour and that is what she ate.

*JO* So you tried to eat something else?

*LF* Sure, I tried. The rest of the young people didn't care as long as they could get something to eat, they could survive.

*JO* Were you able to worship in any way in the DP camps at all?

*LF In the DP Camps?*

*JO Was there a service available to you?*

*LF No, I don't think that there was any worship there. I just don't remember.*

*JO So really you didn't have a temple to join until you came to Dayton?*

*LF That's for sure.*

*JO Was that one of the first things you did?*

*LF Sure, we came especially to our uncle here, in Dayton. We arrived here in August so the Holydays were upon us. He belonged here to Beth Jacob Synagogue, and he got us in there and that is where we belong since we came here. I belong there and so do my boys. My husband is buried in their cemetery. My husband passed away when he was 55 years old.*

*JO That was very young.*

*LF Yes. It happened. He was always concerned because he was the only survivor of his family. There was not another survivor of his family. He was the only one. He was a very good person and he always worried because everybody was dead, from that beautiful, young family.*

*JO You think that that was some of the stress he felt from losing his family?*

*LF Oh sure, that is something he could never forget. When everybody in & many applied for this Wiedergutmachung (the compensation which was made available as compensation for the crimes of the NAZIS, The State of Israel was declared as the heir of last resort for those who did not survive)..they called him about it. He said that he was not going to apply for it, and he never did apply, because he said: "They are not going to pay me for my mother and father and my brothers and sister" He never did.*

*JO He just never did? He just didn't want the money?*

*LF No I could apply for it today and it would be kind of handy for me; but he never wanted to apply. That was his idea. It would be nice to have such a sum.*

*JO So you always have been a member of Beth Jacob.*

*LF Yes.*

*JO I am curious about some of the changes which Beth Jacob has incorporated over the years. It was Orthodox?*

*LF It is still Orthodox.*

*JO I thought that they were calling themselves "traditional" now? Does that have any special meaning for you?*

*LF I don't think so.*

*JO I was wondering because in the old days you couldn't drive at all, to Beth Jacob, now you just about have to (it is now located fairly far North of the City of Dayton)*

*LF They are not allowed to drive, but that can you do if you live further. (Distances were obviously known before the new Sanctuary and parking lot were built). I have here a cousin of mine who is very religious. He used to walk to services. Now he fell and he broke his knee and he can't walk. He was walking because he is religious. Not everybody can walk. Many people don't want to do that anymore.*

*JO Do you keep kosher at home?*

*LF I keep half and half. I buy kosher meat. I just prepare some dishes. I don't know, when the war started, and since then we have lived through so much, I was close to my mother and she was keeping her eye on me about it. I still couldn't be 100% after the war. So I got away from a lot of things and I just couldn't go back to them, the way my mother wanted me to. I don't know, after seeing that happened to people and now, that is going on, I just don't believe in a lot of things.*

*JO Did it change your belief in God?*

*LF yes, it changed a lot. I talked to a woman when I was in Poland yet, and they were killing everybody. They had just killed our Rabbi's 2 daughters. They were beautiful girls. I said to this woman: "Where is God?" Then she answered: "I don't know. How can God see this what is going on. Why would He allow the killing of such 2 beautiful girls...they are innocent and*

religious and everything." This woman was very religious, always. So I said: "Here are beautiful girls, religious girls and they are the first ones they killed." She said: "Maybe they killed them because they shouldn't suffer." That was her answer. So once you go away a little of what is going on you just can't believe that there is a God. A lot of times, even the Germans said: "Where is your God?" you know people are people. Not even every German wanted to see what was going on (The NAZI atrocities). I believe that because I have seen some very nice Germans who really believed that these things shouldn't happen; they didn't want to kill. The ones who did the killing were the SS (that is the black shirted SchutzStaffel who formed Hitler's elite guard, manned the concentration camps and the behind-the-lines atrocities)..they belonged to the special SS units. They were the ones who killed more than anybody else.

JO Do you believe in God now?

LF I know that there is somebody. I really don't know if it's God, but whoever it is, I believe that there is somebody who is doing all this pondering. Sometimes I think that there is no God. Here there is so much going on, that one wonders: "How can God see all, this stuff". Particularly what I have seen with my eyes. Such as when my husband passed away so young and then I have a sick boy. I am trying to believe in this, but sometimes I ask: "Where is God? Where is God really?" You know that is quite a question because we had to go through so much. Still, I have to go through so much like losing my young husband after having gone through the war with him. It is not as if we did this for money or for something else to gain. We were both together during the whole war and he cared for me. That is the story which sometimes leads me to ask: "Where is God?" That is what we have seen.

JO I think that this is a good place to stop.