

MEMOIRS OF
DORA NESSELROTH

wealthier than Poland. Nevertheless, Poland not only survived but, most important of all, it preserved its individuality. It is, therefore, evident that a nation able to overcome such tremendous obstacles, including many disasters and its own mistakes, was endowed with great potentialities and the ability to develop them.

In November 1918, Poland gained its independence. At this time a revolution broke out in Russia. The Red Bolshevick Army took over Russia. This was dangerous for Poland. Warsaw, the capital of Poland in modern times, became the symbol of the fate Polish nation and its spiritual force. In 1920, during the Battle of Warsaw, the Polish army conquered the Bolshevik invaders, who had overrun the country. This victory decided not only the future of Poland but probably the future of all Europe as well. This came about because Germany, just emerging from the chaos of its defeat in World War I, was ready for revolution and the eventual fulfillment of the manifesto of the commander in chief of the Red Army, "Over the body of Poland, we shall go to the heart of Europe."

Poland's neighbors, before World War II, were Germany, West, Prussia also Germany, north-east, Lithuania and Latvia, north, Russia east, Czechoslovakia and Rumania south, Baltic Sea north.

The government at this time was democratic. After World War I, Poland began to prosper. There were plenty of jobs and there was only a fraction of unemployed people. This prosperity did not last long. Inflation developed in Poland as well as in the whole world. As it is known, economical fall is usually an aid for different political groups on both extremes to make bad times worse. At this time, an illegal Communist Party developed, backed by the Soviet Union; however, it did not succeed. The result of the

Narrator: Dora Nesselroth

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is with great honor and pleasure that I am here with you. I am only sorry that my words will not exactly describe my feelings.

My heart beams with pride and my eyes behold the miracle of this gracious country. My tongue lacks the words that describe what I feel.

Irving Berlin said it all. "God Bless America, Land that I Love." I am an American by choice, and I am proud that America has accepted me. I just recently became a citizen.

Now I'll try to tell you briefly of my experience and why I feel as I do. My childhood before World War II was happy and serene until one madman turned the whole world into hell.

I was born in a small town in Poland where life was flowing smoothly without trouble. I was surrounded with love of my parents. In school, I was a good student. I always enjoyed books, and I owned quite a few. As a girl, I was very idealistic and fair. Respect and truth for others I gained from my parents, who were wealthy and tried to give me a good education.

After I finished grammar school, I went to high school for which I had to pay. There was no high schools without tuition. I finished high school the same year that the Second World War broke out.

Let me introduce to you a little history and geography of Poland. This history is such that turmoil and wars flourished because of its geographical position. The amazing facts are that Poland as a state lost its independence for over one hundred twenty-three years as a result of partitioning by Prussia, Austria and Russia, which were all more populous and

economical fall brought Hitler to power in Germany and Mussolini in Italy. As I mentioned before, the economical crisis brings chaos, and ignorant people uprising.

Looking back, I see Nazi fascism on one side and dangerous Communism on the other. Democracy was in danger! To tell you how Poland tried to prevent the chaos, I want to use my father as an example. As you know, poverty is a good nourishment for propaganda, riots and hatred, which destroy human minds. My father wanted to prevent this. He organized a bank which did not charge interest. Through this bank, small businesses could grow and organize. My father also helped to open night trade schools for unemployed people without an education or knowledge of a profession. He established a library and an amateur theatre. He encouraged young people to work together and live in brotherhood and love.

World War II interrupted his activities. After the annexation of Austria and the destruction of Czechoslovakia, it was clear that Hitler wanted to isolate the eastern European states in order to attack them later one by one. Poland had consistently refused to cooperate with Germany in the attack which Hitler was planning against Soviet Russia. The international picture was clarified when Russia suddenly on August 23, 1939, signed a treaty of non-aggression with the Germans. Germany, without any declaration of war, invaded Poland on September 1, 1939.

A Soviet-German treaty was signed in Moscow on September 28. The German and Soviet armies divided the territories of Poland between them. A Soviet-German treaty was signed in Moscow on September 28. The German and Soviet armies divided the territories of Poland between them. The eastern provinces, including purely Polish territories, were incorporated into the

Soviet republics. The western part came under German domination. The western Polish territory under German occupation became the scene of terrible persecutions. Germany divided conquered Poland into two parts: one part was incorporated into the Reich, and these lands were destined for complete Germanization. The remaining territory was organized as the Government General. This territory was to be used mainly as a reserve pool of labor. Then Hitler ordered a transfer of population. Great numbers of Poles and Jews were expelled from the Polish territories, incorporated into Germany and deported to the Government General. In the Government General, the Germans closed all Polish universities and high schools. Polish property was confiscated and constant deportation of workers into the Reich enabled the Germans to solve their growing problem of manpower. Hundreds of thousands of Poles were sent to Germany as slave workers. Concentration camps were established where the inmates were deliberately and systematically tortured and murdered. More than a million Poles perished there and about three million Polish Jews. The worst of these concentration camps was the one in Auschwitz. The Jews of Poland were systematically exterminated. The Jewish population in Warsaw and other towns was herded into a ghetto, isolated, starved and finally deported in groups to death camps. In April 1943 an uprising occurred in Warsaw ghetto, which ended with total extermination of the Warsaw Jews.

The position of the Poles in the eastern areas occupied by the Soviet Union between 1939 and June 1941 was no better than under the German occupation. All Polish political leaders, together with the bulk of the education classes (about 1.5 million) were deported to Siberia, the polar region, and Central Asia.

Many thousands were killed in Poland and the property confiscated. Later, all businesses, houses and land were also confiscated. Polish schools were destroyed and others were reorganized along Soviet lines. Political and military reasons led General Sikorski to make a pact with the U.S.S.R. in 1941.

I want to tell you some of my own personal experiences at this time. When the Nazis entered our town and took hostages and put them into prisons, my father fled, because his name was on the list. He took refuge in a nearby village where he worked for a farmer as his helper. Two months later he returned. He wasn't free long. Soon he was taken to a concentration camp where later he was murdered in Buchenwald.

I also want to tell you a few facts about the existence in a concentration camp, how people can turn into horrible devils and destroy human beings and turn them into the slaves. These devils killed innocent people in Germany because they weren't Nazis and the Reds killed because the people weren't Communists.

In the concentration camps all over Europe, especially in Poland, the conditions were horrible and cruel. There were 1,500 women in one barrack. There was cold and filth. Each morning at five o'clock, we had to gather outside, even in the winter freeze with very little clothing. The only thing on our backs was a dirty thin uniform. Nothing under our uniform was allowed. In lines we were lead by music march to factories where we worked for twelve hours. Wasn't this ironic? All day long we were watched by a Nazi guard who beat us regularly. Our daily diet contained one quarter pound of bread and a cup of coffee or a bowl of soup, which was mostly water.

Monthly, the Nazi eliminated those unable to work and slaughtered

them. Each and everyone of us died slowly inside anytime a life was lost. There was hunger and at times we couldn't remember our own names. I was beaten once because a small gold fish which was under my care died. This fish was my responsibility so I suffered for its death. Even though I believed that justice and truth will overcome barbarism and hate, all through this hell on earth, I existed because of the guidance of my father. He was my spirit, my God, as well as my loving father.

January 16 1945, I was liberated by the Red Army. I believed that finally I was free. I believed that now all the evil will be destroyed and good and happiness will come again. The first few weeks after the liberation, I only thought of food and wish for my stomach to be completely filled. I began planning my future from the start. I started working and at the same time I studied at a Medical Technical Assistance School. People began coming back from Russia to Poland. I realized that they were threatened the same way in the Russian concentration camps as I was. The only difference was that the Russians had no gas chambers; that was too expensive for them. I had a question in my mind: from whom do these murderers learn their barbaric ways; was it from each other? How could the Communists announce their greatness and humanity? They were lying and still are.

Soon I got married. My husband and I opened a factory which employed twenty-five persons. Our wages were higher than that of the government and the working conditions were much better. The Communist regime began destroying private enterprise. There were always government inspectors meddling and agitating the workers against their bosses. Life again was unbearable. In 1950 the government confiscated our business and all our profits. We decided to move away to a bigger city where we would be more at

ease. My husband's crime was that he was a capitalist and I was looked down upon because my philanthropical ideas were in me. To the Communist government we were dangerous. Ignorance was their only aid to develop and to become a great power. The Communists are destroying the human minds through propoganda and brain wash. People's prides are destroyed. They teach young children to believe in Communist Manifesto instead of the Bible. Tell me--does this wonderful America give what a person needs? Does she protect us from injustice and dictatorship? Yes! For this we Americans should protect this wonderful country and fight for her to the last drop of blood. Having lost freedom before, I can greatly appreciate this great country and try my best to make everyone here realize how it is to lose freedom and then regain it here in America.

God bless America and her people!

Q. So you were in Poland before the war and after the war you stayed...

A. Still in Poland. I was liberated in Poland, and it became Breslau. So I lived there and in 1946, you know, it was pogrom in Poland. From that time we tried to immigrate to Israel, to Palestine at that time, out from the country. But the Polish government refused to give us passports. They didn't give us the passports, for no reason; they didn't tell you why; they just refused. We apply about five times.

Q. This is after the war?

A. Yes, before the war I was very young. When the war broke out, I was seventeen years old.

Q. And what happened...but if you'd rather not talk about it...

A. Why not, it's good for you. I finished high school, the year of 1939, and the war came and it was terrible. In 1940 they start the ghettos, and they put us in the ghetto, you know. They came in...my father escaped because he was on the list of hostages there to prevent from rebelling because otherwise the hostages would be killed or something. When he found out that he's on the list of hostages, he escaped, and he went into villages to farmers, not as a Jew. He escaped there and worked there until they find out he's Jewish. He had to escape from them and then he came back to the ghettos.

Q. Is this in Poland in 1940?

A. In Poland. Yes, when the Germans came in, then later in 1942, they liquidate all ghettos, in Poland. And I was taken to a labor camp, because in this little city there was a munitions factory and they need a lot of people to work. They took about one hundred fifty young girls to work there. We used to march about three miles to the factory and back with a

Narrator: Dora Nesselroth

Q. First, where did you come from?

A. We came from Poland.

Q. Both of you?

A. Yes.

Q. What city?

A. We came to New York City.

Q. What city in Poland?

A. We came from Breslau. But this was a German city that Poland took over after the war, part of Germany, and Poland gave up the east side to Russia. So, because most the Jews in Poland—they concentrate in big cities—they didn't go back to the little cities because it was dangerous, one way, and the other—it was the memories of the Holocaust, that nobody could live in the same little town or city where so many Jews perished during the war, you know. So we settled in Breslau, and we lived there. Life there was—for Jews—even by the Communists, it wasn't what they preach—that every man is equal—it's not true. Because my children, Rosalee was about seven years old, she went to school; she was a brilliant student in school. And when they asked her what is her name, she only mentioned her first name, Rosalee. Nesselroth looked like a Jewish name, and she didn't tell them that her name was Nesselroth. And I never teach her that way, and I asked her why didn't you tell them that your name is Nesselroth. Oh, they would find out that I'm Jewish, and I don't want them to know.

Q. Let me make sure I'm clear—were you—you were in Poland before the war?

A. Yes, I was born in Poland. I was in concentration camp.

guide, Ukrainian. They were terrible, and we used to get up at four o'clock in the morning and work for three hours. They would count us back and forth with big dogs like German Shepherds, and we used to march back and forth. After three months marching back and forth, they locked us up. We couldn't go back.

Q. And where was this?

A. A munition factory in Poland. Most of the camps were in Poland, like Auschwitz was in Poland. So, it was very bad. Meanwhile, I find out the ghettos are going to be liquidated. My parents were very young at that time, thirty-five, thirty-eight years old.

Q. Where were your parents at this time?

A. They still were in the ghetto, and then I find out, a German came in—and if to die, to die together—take your parents if they're young to work with you. And it was a very unusual thing, you know. So I went to my boss in the factory where I work and I said you need so many people to work you, would you take, I bribe him, send him to the ghetto—tell him to take things from the house and please take my parents to work. Then he says okay I can take them, but you have to go to the director of the factory, if he would agree, it's alright with me. So I went there to him and I told him that we have paintings hidden, very famous paintings, in the house that he can take, or other things like silver or things like that, and please take my parents to work with us. So he went to the ghetto and took everything possible. Anyway, we left it, we find out later we cannot take anything with us. So next, I had to go to the commandant of the camp where he's supposed to live and with him—the same thing—the same way. He went and he took leftovers of the house and some things we hide by the Poles because they were free, not free exactly

but they could move around. So my parents came to this camp to this factory and they work. But I had a sister--she was four years old, and she, they couldn't take her, because they took to this camp only people who were able to work. So we had Polish friends who took her and you know, they hide her but my mother couldn't stay there. She was afraid that she would endanger their people and her daughter. So we had to go back to this commandant, not of the factory but of the camp, to bribe him again and tell him the whole story to let my sister, she was four years old, back to the camp. Not legally, you know, if something happened, he would hide her, he would take her out. There was a few children there who did, a little older than she was but you see this was a commandant, his name was Haas who had a sentiment with children. But he could come over and with his gun kill people who were lying around in the camp. You cannot understand the psychology of them all, the kind what they could do. Some inspectors used to come in to inspect the whole camp there. He used to take those children and hide them in a...they lived in a mansion, you know, a beautiful section. They had maids and they took care of the children. The children were always afraid maybe the next day they would come over because they were afraid there. In the camp we used to share what we received too, our food with her because she didn't work. She didn't have the ration of food what we used to have so her dream was maybe tomorrow Haas would come over and take her away and maybe she could eat the normal food. So we worked there for a few years, from 1940 until the Russians came through the front. They start winning the war, so they evacuated us, and this was in 1944. The whole war went at that time. The Italians break with Germany and Japan as axis. But some Germans--they used to come over. I used to work in the factory in the office, because I spoke very well German, and I worked

we stopped. I used to jump out but at that time the soldiers were so disoriented; I think I could escape very easily, but we were afraid. I had my mother, my father, a brother, my sister, there.

Q. Did they take your sister, the four year old?

A. Yes, they didn't count, everything was so disoriented. They thought that the Russians were coming after them. But the Russians stopped on the river near Warsaw because the Poles had the uprising at Warsaw, and they didn't want to halt them, and they wait until they would kill them off, they think. Politic is a dirty thing, and I hate the Russians for that, for everything what they have done. But we could survive, Jews especially. In our factory, was about twenty thousand, and only survived about three or four thousand, because of the Russians—they stopped there and they evacuated further in Germany, and they starved. It was cold and in wintertime, and so many thousands of prisoners, not only Jews but others. Meanwhile, they stopped there on the river. They wait there until everybody is killed, then they could march in. They were afraid that the Poles would win the uprising, they wouldn't let them establish a communist or socialist regime in Poland. This was the excuse. But then in 1945, two hours before they liberated us, they took away my father, two hours only, and he died in Buchenwald. And we survived; we escaped almost because again the evacuation was...they didn't know what was going on. And we were so scared, to go with the evacuation because we remember what they did to us when we came to the camp and they call a group of people and they throw bread in the whole group and who was stronger—they had bread and who was weaker—they always said no, take it and go. And we went back to the barracks, and we didn't want to go. And then in the middle of the night, January 15, 1945, some people start knocking at the

there as a prisoner. It was much easier for me, and I could have more information. I was not so much overworked. I used to go to people and tell them, sometimes lies, that the war is...going alright. Because the men, especially the men, they couldn't adjust, women are more physically and mentally adaptable than men. Men are very fatigued in circumstances like that. We used to have the uniform and they give us some babushkas, you know. And I used to take it out—a piece of material to make a little white collar, to look a little better in this circumstances. I used to work in the office. I used to steal a little red paper to make...to look a little better because every month they have selections and they took out the people that look sick, were dead, because they needed people who could work, not sick. But women are more stronger in this kind of circumstances. They can wash themselves, and the men used not to wash themselves. Even though we didn't have soap, enough soap to wash ourselves, but we always did something to ourselves, and we lived day by day, I think to survive. We didn't know what was going to happen tomorrow, we want to live by day and this helps a lot to survive. What you need in this circumstance are things when are unbelievable to believe. We used to steal...everything that was possible to survive, by the Germans, and we didn't think about it that it's wrong. And this happened until 1944, we were evacuated to another ammunition factory. The evacuation was terrible; they used to put us in trains you know where the cows—what do you call this?

Q. Boxcar?

A. Yes, 120 people in one box. They gave us this cheese, you know this American cheese, no water, no bread. People are completely...a lot of people died in this thing. Normally we supposed to go about three or four hours. It took them three days and three nights to go to this place because

door. We are free, come out, come out and we left. So my mother and my little sister, and I, a cousin and a group of people and we walk out from this camp. We didn't know where we are, and the Germans still they are escaping. They are running from the Russians, they ask us what we are doing here. So I told them that the camp was in flames, we don't know where to go. We are scared of them too, and they say don't go to the city because the Russians are there. So that was a relief that the Russians were there, so we went to this city, and no one would let us in. They were afraid that the Germans would come back and find out that they hide us or something like that. But finally a lady opened the door; she says it's okay, come in, and I find out that my sister--she's working without her shoes. It was winter, terrible cold. The next day in the morning we found it used to be a German hospital, not a real hospital, but a temporary building they took over. But it was a hospital for the soldiers, so we got a room there. So we stayed there. After the war I went back to school, in Poland. You know, life goes on, a big tragedy, it was terrible. This is a very hard thing. I don't know how to...and then I went to school, to medical school, and I had to support my mother, and my sister, so I dropped out. So I went to work; I worked as a correspondent in a Polish agency, for the newspaper, for the government. It was not like here or Tass, in Poland they call in Polish agency paper. So this was a very good job for me, because the past, what I went through, was terrible. Everyone who went through should use a psychiatrist, but this kind of work was better than a psychiatrist, because I used to go all over Europe as a correspondent. I used to meet people. I used to sell things like that back and forth, and I was wanted. And success, this helps a lot, so until I met my husband...I married my husband in 1947, we moved in..we had a factory. So in 1949, 1950,

Q. How did you finally get out of Poland?

A. So, in 1962...I have a brother here and my husband has a brother...so they gave us the affidavit from there. We waited about five years for the visa. Meanwhile, they didn't give us the passports anyway, but finally we got our passports and we left in 1962. We came by train, we went to France and from there we came by ship.

Q. Were there any restrictions at that time?

A. Yes, you couldn't take anything with you, not nothing but little things. Anyway, the last minute when we received the passports we came from Warsaw home. We had a message from friends who work in the passport department, "Max, you have your passports ready?" he says, "Yes", so leave as early as possible. This was Christmas time, it was a good time to leave, because half of the persons didn't work, half were drunk, you know Christmas time at night. And Christmas eve night we passed through the border, legally, but very scared to death, and then to Czechoslovakia we had to wait for the train from Prague to Paris. And we were scared to death when every policeman came through that maybe that would take us back because this is also communist country. The minute we passed through the German border and this was a trying time too, because in the concentration camp they used to call me by a number or name and then when we passed through the German border, "Frau, oh, we're so glad you are getting out of Poland and going to the United States," they are friends with me again, and I start crying and I couldn't answer again, you know, extreme it was. So we came to France. It was a beautiful time. Oh, at France, we had a funny thing also, my sister, who is a doctor, medical doctor, she was in New York City, and she left Poland about four months later. She came in May, so she's supposed to send a telegram to cousins of ours in France

the beginning, they came in and they closed the factory, with the money, with everything we make about three hundred thousand dollars worth. You know, at that time they (the Polish government?) started...we had a very hard time. In the beginning they ask everybody to help to move into this part of Poland, where they took over from Germany, and to show the world that this is Polish, and they will help. They will let you operate everything. They will not make you pay taxes, or something like that, and we paid. So people...most of the people who had to leave the part that the Russian took over, moved also to this part. I mentioned before that I would never go back to this town where I was born and lived there because to me this town was a cemetery. And memories you cannot...if I remember to get my birth certificate--my husband went, I couldn't go there. So we had this factory, they took away everything. So at that time we moved to Breslau to the big city and my husband took a government job.

Q. This is still in Poland?

A. Yes, the whole time is in Poland. To Germany I would never go either, you know, because it's...and another thing that you can do psychologically to yourself--after the war I promised myself that I would never speak German, never in my life. You cannot imagine now I cannot speak.

Q. And you were fluent?

A. Fluent, I used to make my boss' homework. He used to go to night school, to school, and I had to make his homework for him, so I had to. I was very good. I was in this office for everything, a bookkeeper, everything that they want. This is also something I cannot understand, if you believe in God, you said God gave you so much knowledge, so much energy, because the will of surviving or the will of life is so tremendous that you

didn't think that something came out that you worked for, you wanted. And so many things that I used to do there that I didn't know how I did it. I couldn't understand. My knowledge wasn't so tremendous but during the time when I worked in this office I was too smart. In normal times I couldn't do it, you know when everything is no work right now and they asked me to do this work I never have done before and there I did it. So we moved to Breslau from the factory and my husband works. I also work in a hospital. I'm an X-ray technician. Finally, I finish school later on after I got married. I work as an X-ray technician in a big hospital and meanwhile we are still trying to immigrate from Poland. I couldn't stand it, I didn't want to stay. So all of my friends they received a passport, but we didn't because he was a chemist, he worked with the government, they thought...later we find out that they were afraid that he would give to Israel or some place else the secrets that he found in there. Finally, the last time when we applied for passport and I have a brother—my brother survived also, he was in Germany. He immigrated to the United States in 1948, I think. He wrote us a letter applied to the United States, maybe this will help.

Q. How did he get there?

A. Because he was liberated from the camp, and they took him back home, and he's not going to stay here. So at that time was a Zionist movement in Poland was very strong, and he took the youngsters and they wanted him to go to Israel and they took most of those people to Germany. So he went to Germany. They closed the borders and we were separated.

So, as a youngster he came over and joined HIAS. We had a few relatives in the United States, and he was then eighteen years old.

to wait for us at the railroad station in Paris. But she makes one mistake, she sends the telegram that we are coming to Warsaw--Paris, and we came not Warsaw--Paris, we came Prague, Czechoslovakia, into a different completely railroad station. And I never saw this cousin in my life. I know we have cousins; we were in touch with them, but I never met them personally. So we came in, in the morning and we wait for our cousin to pick us up. Nobody came; nothing happened. The Polish government gave...you can buy five dollars per person. So we were four of us, we had two children; we had twenty dollars to leave the country. So what you do with twenty dollars? The children--I want them to have a hot meal because it was wintertime. So we bought for them dinner on the train going from Prague to Paris, so we had left fifteen dollars. We get to Paris, we have fifteen dollars, the luggage is all around, people coming looking, and nobody came to pick us up. So there was information desk. There they spoke in three languages. So I had to go there and ask her...I didn't have his address also because I was afraid when they find on me the addresses, we were too scared, you know. Maybe it wasn't that way, but we were too scared. We have a message that maybe my husband will have to stay and they will take away our passports. So I didn't have nothing on us, names or nothing. So she gave me a Jewish institution where I can call and seek for help. So she gave me the HIAS, so I call up HIAS. And the lady who spoke to me, I speak Yiddish, and they are French girls and they speak French Yiddish, and I couldn't understand. So I ask her if maybe you have someone from Poland, or somebody I can communicate with them. I didn't speak French, so she says, "Yes there's a gentleman here from Poland", and so he came and talked to me. And I introduced myself, and I told him the story that we are here, and I have a cousin here and all this whole stuff. And meanwhile

the children got sick with temperature, and I don't know what to do. So I called, he asked me, "What is your name." I says "Nesselroth." "Your husband's name is Max Nesselroth?" I say, "Yes". "Has he blue eyes?" "He's very handsome." I say, "He's the handsome in the whole world." And I understood who this man was. What happened is my husband was in concentration camp in Russia during the war and this gentleman was his best friend. They went through together the whole thing and he was a lawyer in this institution, a part-time lawyer. He used to come to HIAS three times a week and we were so lucky...in five minutes he came to this railroad station. Oh, you can't imagine how it was; they both cried. His name was Boruch Bordenstein. I asked if this was Boruch Bordenstein, he says "How do you know me?" I say, "Oh, after the war, my husband is looking for you, he was searching for you. He was writing newspapers, maybe somebody... It's miracles." So he took us to a restaurant...we took the luggages in a locker there and we had spent another five dollars. And we didn't only have ten dollars there in a strange country, a strange city, with nothing. So he came in, he took us to a hotel. He gave us a lot of money, enough to stay three weeks. We stayed three weeks, we borrow from him the money. We gave it back later, but he didn't ask us. And he drove us around and we are in a hotel, and at the same time the cousin was smart enough to call the same organization. And the organization told him where we were living.

Q. Amazing?

A. And then I had another cousin who came from South France to see us. And meanwhile we had friends from Poland, Polish people, who lived there; they came to see us. We had a ball there! So after that we came by a ship to New York City. My brother was there; his brother was there. The first day

the language when she went...the older one, not the younger one. The younger one the next year. The younger one pick up much faster, because she was younger. And she came back with...completely...she was crying there a little bit, but she got her English.

Q. When you came to New York did you have a place to stay?

A. Yes, we stayed with his brother for a while but the minute my husband had his job we had an apartment. My husband earned sixty-five dollars a week. The apartment cost seventy-five dollars a month; it was good. After three weeks they found out that this is not his job because they can use him with his knowledge, even though he doesn't speak English. So they doubled his salary. So we start buying furniture. And I had to go and take my exams as an X-ray technician to receive a license. So I went and I tested about a year later. And I work also, first in a hospital and then in a clinic, Park Avenue, in New York. And they both, the children start going to school. They became a little happier, after a while. Rosalee skipped a year, because she's a brilliant girl.

Q. To go back a little--what was your religious life like in Poland?

A. Before the war, it's a little city. My grandfather was a Rabbi, but my father was a Zionist, a very famous one. The Orthodox in Poland didn't want to mingle with the non-Jews. They were completely separated. They didn't even send to the Polish schools to learn the language. And my father finished Yeshiva and after that he says forget about it. We have to live as if we live in the country. We have to take the same culture, as I say he was a very active Zionist, not religious, knowledgeable in the Talmud and everything, but not religious. He was a man who...a philanthropist, you know,

was very good; the second day was good; the third was good. The fourth days, when you have to go and buy yourself something, and you don't speak English, and you don't have the money, it's terrible. We didn't go nowhere. After five days my husband got a job. The children had to go to school. This was a tragedy also for them.

Q. How old were the children?

A. Rosalee was ten years old and the youngest was seven years old. So Rosalee was a very brilliant student in Poland and here she came in, nothing. Everyday she had a headache. In the morning, she had a sore throat, she had a headache and she was crying. And I said Rosalee, you know if you want to shorten your time of being a good student you have to go to school. I know you cannot make it, but if you go to school you can learn the language. With me you cannot, because I speak Polish to you and what's going to happen. She was crying every day and she went to school. So finally I went to school, and it was a young lady teacher. It was a Jewish lady, and I don't know how I speak to her. I went with somebody, and I asked her a favor, maybe she can take care of her and tutor her after school. She gave her twice a week, a half hour after school. In math she was ahead of the other children but to understand everything you have to speak English. So we came to the United States in January and in July I sent my daughter to a camp. And everybody around me, my neighbors and my relatives said I'm not a mother, I'm a murderer. Why do you send your child to a camp by herself, with English speaking children? I said this is going to be the only way that she will learn to speak English with the children she has to do everything that they are doing. She has to listen to them. And after she was here in the United States from January to July, she picked up a little bit, but finally she got

the Communist Party in Poland for the Jews especially, we had a very poor economy, not rich Jews. They used to say that every Jew is rich, so they drove those youngsters after they finished high school. They didn't have a job, they drove them to the Communist Party. So my father organized trade school, night school, technical school. He organized a bank, non-profit, for the little businesses, for like tailors and shoemakers, to build up the economy.

He was a very active...he was in touch with Ben Gurion before the war. Months before the war I remember...what is the big shot, the Zionist writer? He visited all the big shots from the Zionist world, they used to stay in our house. It was a very good home.

Q. And when you came over here to New York City, what was it like? Was there any problem being Jewish?

A. I was what you call it quarantined, my mind was quarantined. I thought that this was the end of the world, that I have to start from all over again. And the most important thing...we left Poland because of the children. I didn't want them to be assimilated. There were so many people that my children were going to marry the non-Jew, you know. I don't want it. I want them to come back to be Jewish, and to be free. And I came over here and I was afraid that my older daughter was studying four years, four or five years, when she was five years she was studying piano, and I came over here and everything is going. I don't have the money. I don't have anything. We worked and worked to start...everything I have here I bought it from the beginning. And I forced them to go to school and to finish college.

Q. How long did you stay in New York?

A. About three years. My husband was transferred from New York to here (Birmingham) and this was a good thing.

Q. How did you like Birmingham and what did you think of the South?

A. We had very bad information about the South. Because when they find out that my husband is coming here and they says no, fight with them, don't let them go. And I says I cannot fight with them. I have to see for myself. The opportunities here are much better than New York. He used to travel to work from where we lived in New York to his place about an hour and a half in the subways and three hours it took you to go back and forth. And here you see it was much...and I want to see by myself. So my husband left New York in March and I stay by myself with the children until they finish school there from March to June, July I think. And I took my vacation at the office there and I told them that I'm going to Alabama because my husband was transferred there and I will come back until you find somebody else to replace me. So my husband wrote me a letter every day, saying it's marvelous, people are very, very friendly, help as much as they could. The neighbors here--I wouldn't move from here. The neighbors are marvelous, very good. The first day I came over here they asked me who I am. I says I came from New York, but I'm not a Yankee. I was a foreigner. I came from Poland and I'm Jewish, you know, the first thing. And why did you move in here, why don't you move to Mountain Brook, you know, because the Jews are all living in Mountain Brook? And I said what are you talking about, we had rich Jews and we had poor Jews also. So I moved here because I'm afraid I cannot afford to live there. And I don't regret, absolutely not, because this is the reason my daughter went to Israel. Because in Mountain Brook, you have Jewish and non-Jewish. She

A. With us it's so different. I don't know, I'm not afraid to say the truth, what I think about it. I am very honest to them. We discussed it a lot, in my poor English, but I did discuss with them. And I explained to them what Hitler can do to a country. Those prejudices are a sickness of our society, and I feel sorry for people who think this way. First of all, how can you hate somebody you don't know, please hate me later, now I would like you to know me a little better. At Passover I used to ask him to come over for Passover dinner. It so happened that every time there was a war in Israel the people used to inform me how the war goes. To this day they didn't think about it because they didn't know a Jew, they became interested in a Jewish life. So I think that we should open our arms like my grandfather used to say, how can they know what we are until you socialize with them...you can understand what kind of culture we have and what kind of culture they have. We took over culture from them too because we went to school...but you have to be with them and don't be afraid to tell them the truth and discuss with them God or Jesus Christ or something like that. It was one time a discussion--the Jews killed Jesus Christ. I said if Jesus was God, how can he be killed? You cannot kill God. Moses could also be God, but the Jews don't think he was God. This kind of discussion with the non-Jews...I like the idea what Jesus preached but none of you are taking over. He was a very loyal person, who teach everybody supposed to be equal, love each other and you hate. If you don't believe in Jesus you hate this person. How can you do such a thing, in name of God, to hate somebody, or in the name of God to kill somebody, because it's not nice? We joke you know, so we have a very nice relationship here. Everyone who we met, a non-Jew and they didn't know about Jews or something, they became interested at least in our life. My husband has now...we became

used to go to a school, she was one of only three Jewish girls who went to the school. I was praying one time, and I said okay it's good, and I asked the Rabbi what am I going to do. Because of them I have to move to Mountain Brook; I cannot afford it, what can I do? But one thing I prayed to God about someone would tell you, you are Jew and this is not going to not happen. One thing she was in a beauty contest; she was congeniality queen. Only Jew; it was some big thing. But I always told her if you fell in love with a non-Jew, I cannot help it, but remember one thing—I'm not going to like him. I'm not going to feel the same to you, because we lost six million Jews. You don't have the right, because your grandfather asked me the last minute they took him away, "Tell the world, don't forget what happened, let them know what happened. And you as his granddaughter will marry the non-Jew is the end of the world, is like you accepting what Hitler did."

Q. Does she feel the same way you do?

A. In the beginning she didn't want to listen to me. The psychology of a young person you have to understand. Parents used to say it's not going to work, why should I bother to talk to children, and it's not true because about...it's okay five percent, fifteen percent, twenty-five percent, fifty percent. She used to go out with boys; they used to come into the house, and I always tried in a diplomatic way to tell them that I'm Jewish and how it was and how it happened, in a very diplomatic way to those boys and girls because she has boys and girls coming over here, non-Jewish, that to make them understand that she's Jewish.

Q. To the rest of the community, was there a strong distinction that you were Jewish?

friendly with a representative from a research laboratory. You know, he never met Jews, and we became so close that the other day a few weeks ago he heard about Begin, the Israeli Prime Minister. And he said, I was listening to his biography, and you are similar because he came from Poland. And the background is almost similar, and he came over and told us, he's interested and this is a very healthy thing. And I say tell me everything you think about me; I don't want to be a hypocrite and say you're beautiful, because nobody can be beautiful. Everybody has their faults and nobody's perfect.