


August 2010

Sonia "Sala" Wasserberger oral history interview by Chris Patti, August 11, 2010

Sala Wasserberger (Interviewee)

Chris J. Patti (Interviewer)

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Scholar Commons Citation

Wasserberger, Sala (Interviewee) and Patti, Chris J. (Interviewer), "Sonia "Sala" Wasserberger oral history interview by Chris Patti, August 11, 2010" (2010). *Digital Collection - Holocaust & Genocide Studies Center Oral Histories*. Paper 180.
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Holocaust Survivors Oral History Project
Oral History Program
Florida Studies Center
University of South Florida, Tampa Library

Digital Object Identifier: F60-00037
Interviewee: Sonia “Sala” Wasserberger (SW)
Interviewer: Chris Patti (CP)
Interview date: August 11, 2010
Interview location: Tampa, Florida
Transcribed by: Mary Beth Isaacson, MLS
Transcription date: January 10, 2011 to January 11, 2011
Audit Edit by: Kimberly Nordon
Audit Edit date: January 18, 2011
Final Edit by: Dorian L. Thomas
Final Edit date: March 15, 2011

[Transcriber’s note: During much of this interview, the interviewee reads from a document she has written about her experiences.]

Chris Patti: Okay, today’s date is August 11, 2010. I’m interviewing survivor Sonia Wasserberger. My name is Chris Patti. We’re in Tampa, Florida, in the United States of America. The language is English, and the videographers are Nafa Fa’alogo and Richard Schmidt.

All right, Mrs. Wasserberger, thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed today. I’m just gonna start with the basics. Can you tell me your name and spell it?

Sonia Wasserberger: Okay. My name is Sala Wasserberger, S-a-l-a W-a-s-s-e-r-b-e-r-g-e-r.

CP: When did you start going by Sonia?

SW: I believe it was—they called me different names in different countries, I think, during the war in different places, so it went Sonia. Yeah.

CP: And when were you born?

SW: I was born December 12, 1931, in a small city of Poland by the name Goworowo. It was on the River Narew, close to Warsaw, like—I believe, but I'm not sure—fifteen kilometers or less from Warsaw.

CP: And do you spell that G-o-w-o-r-o-w-o?

SW: Correct.

CP: Okay. And can I ask what your age today is?

SW: I will be seventy-nine in December of 2010.

CP: So, tell me a little bit about your family and your parents when you were growing up.

SW: I had wonderful parents. They were young, and we were young. I have a sister, two years younger than I am. We had a good life growing up. I remember I had a wonderful life. We used to go on vacations—(phone rings)

CP: That's all right.

SW: We used to go on vacations for three months. My father was a very good provider. I was very happy. I was a very happy girl.

CP: What did your father do for a living?

SW: He was military, but when he got married, obviously, he started looking for what to do. So, he used to be involved in a bank, he used to do some real estate, and he used also to work with a needle, like a tailor, but this was after the war. Excuse me, this was in the war, when the war started. And he saved us by doing the work to survive, because he could make a dress and he got—I'll tell you this story later about him. He got, I would say, some flour or kasha or whatever for his work, so we could survive. But this was in forty-three [1943]; we were away from the Nazis.

CP: Do you have any other memories that stick out from when you were young, happy memories before everything changed?

SW: Yes. I went to a Catholic school in the morning—this was elementary—and to a Jewish school in the afternoon. I had quite a few friends, and we had a great time. I liked the Jewish school a lot, because we prayed; it was a religious school. We prayed, and on Saturdays we came and we danced and sang. The Catholic school, for me, was very sad, because the teacher called me Sara, and when I wanted to answer a question he hit me on my fingers. It was not a good time for me.

CP: Was that because of the anti-Semitism that was evident?

SW: Correct. I remember mostly, of course, thirty-nine [1939], thirty-eight [1938], where I—not just me, but I saw—especially the boys. We had, I would say, six kids, six Jewish kids, in the class. And the boys suffered the most, especially in the wintertime. They used to hit them and call them names. It was rough. It was sad.

CP: Do you remember any of the names that people would be called?

SW: No, I just remember that they came into class with some blood. They made balls from—this was wintertime—from snow, and they put probably a stone inside and they hit them. I remember a boy—I don't know his name, but I know who it was—that used to have a candy store, his parents. That's all I remember.

CP: When you were that age, did you have any sense of the kind of chaos that was building at that time?

SW: Oh, certainly. So, we were afraid, mostly, and a lot of teachers became sympathizers of Hitler. They called them Hitlerows or whatever in Polish. So we knew it, we smelled it, we could tell, even being young and so on.

CP: Do you remember hearing any stories about how Jews are evil or they killed Jesus and that kind of stuff?

SW: Yes, yes, yes. “Oh, that's why we don't like you, because you killed Jesus.” I didn't understand at that time what they're talking about, but when I told my parents about it, they said, “Well, you know, people have different ideas, different sayings. If they don't like us, they will say all kind of bad things to you.” That was it.

CP: You mentioned in our previous interview that your parents are pretty important to how you remember your experience from when you were younger. Did you talk—when you got older, did you talk with your parents about what happened during the war and that sort of thing?

SW: During the war with my parents?

CP: As you got older, did you speak with your parents about your experience?

SW: Yeah, mostly my mother spoke about the war. She used to say, “Do you remember, Sonia, this and that that, whatever happened?” She reminded me of a lot of stuff, growing up and being in the war. We had time to talk.

CP: And just so that we can get it on the record, can you tell me your parents’ names?

SW: Yeah. My mother’s name was Leah, Leah Cymerman. They spelled it C-y-m-e-r—

CP: —m-a-n?

SW: —m-a-n. And my father’s name was Moris Cymerman.

CP: When did things start to change? When did you notice things started to change from the kind of happy childhood that you had, and then all of a sudden—?

SW: Well, of course, when the war broke out, September 1 [1939]. September 7, they came in. Hitler’s army came in to our city. I’ll tell you from—

CP: Please, yeah.

SW: Yeah, from this. (rustling papers) I like to—all right?

“I am now the voice of the lucky few. This is my story. I was born in a small town near Warsaw, Poland, Goworowo by the River Narew. The population there was

predominantly Jewish. It was a very lively town, with schools, you see, was Beis Yaakov schools for girls only. My family was very observant and joined the Sabbats with all our traditions. September 1, 1939, the war broke out and all our hopes and dreams vanished. September 7, Hitler's armies came sweeping in and our city was taken over by the Nazis. My father and uncle were taken to a concentration camp in Germany. My mother was left with two youngsters and elderly parents.

“The same Friday night, my mother lit the Sabbath candles at our home, covered the windows, and told us—said it was too dark, that we had to leave. We left and took our grandparents with us to a mikveh far away from our home. By morning, the Nazis find us and pushed us out to the marketplace. In the market, on the way, we witnessed people lying wounded in the streets, people we knew personally. The marketplace was filled with old people, women, children. The German soldiers surrounded us with their guns pointed. I will never forget my mother's face. She was white and trembling. I could read her lips reciting the Shema. In the background, we could see our city being set on fire. Smoke was everywhere.

“Now the Nazis decided to kill us in a quick way. We were thrown into our synagogue, where people were sitting motionless on the ground. Many were shot and wounded. (inaudible) They frantically handed out their names with hopes of being remembered, as well as pleas of saying Kaddish for them.”

CP: Would you explain the Kaddish for us? Can you explain that, what the Kaddish is, for us?

SW: The Kaddish is for the deceased, so they have—like they go in peace, they have peace now, you see, because life is not easy. Okay, that's what Kaddish is.

“The room was filled wall to wall with people—this was in the synagogue—crying, praying, and saying their goodbyes. As I say this—saying their goodbyes. The doors and windows were boarded shut, and the smell of kerosene filled our nostrils. Suddenly, a small back door opened. We all fled as fast as we could and escaped through a nearby river. We found a field to the west and stayed several weeks without food or shelter. Again, the Nazis dehumanized us and shot us, as if it were a game. The few of us left were taken to a ghetto nearby. No one could enter or leave. Several times daily, Nazis came in, gathered us around, and ridiculed us. On Rosh Hashanah they took the rabbi and cut off half of his beard and took pictures, laughing. Every day new people were ordered out, and we never saw them again. As our suffering continues, my mother told me, ‘Don't lose your hopes, my child. God will spare us.’”

You know, when I tell you the story, I see pictures of my life.

CP: What do you see?

SW: I see those people—

CP: You see your mother?

SW: —sitting and praying and begging: don't forget their name is so-and-so, and to say Kaddish and so on.

“Soon after, we were reunited—oh, my gosh—with my father. This gave us a whole new meaning to what my mother had said. My father was released from a German concentration camp as part of a Russian prisoner exchange. They told him he had twenty-four hours to get out of the German territory. So, we had to leave. We continued our journey until we reached the Russian border, occupied by Soviet Union, the city of Bialystok. The Red Army occupied the eastern part of Poland. Bialystok served mainly as a sleeping place for refugees, who were arriving in the thousands. When we arrived there, there was no room, not even for one more family. Again, we had to leave.” I don't know if I missed something or not. (shuffles papers)

“My father's friend, who lived in another city, heard of our plight, and he invited us to come and stay with him in the city of Hancewicze. We settled there for a while, but our future remained unknown. I went back to school and I was happy. It was 1940. We were living in the Russian occupation zone of Poland.

“My grandfather went to the synagogue often to meet with other Jews. They talked and shared the news, and he came home and told us that Russia is a communist country and would not allow worship, prayers: they don't believe in God, he said. And this was against everything my grandfather believed in, in prayers and belief in God. So, my grandfather made the decision not to register as a Russian citizen, and so did my parents. I was kind of upset about it, because I was in school, I was in a play, and I had fun. It was different. But, of course, the decision was for the grown-ups, not for us. So, the middle of the night—we registered to go back to Germany, meaning German territory.

“So, in the middle of the night, we were awakened from our sleep by the Russians knocking loudly on our door. ‘Get up!’ they ordered. They gave us five minutes to get our clothes. My father grabbed a sack of corn to take with us. I did not know why he did this,

but my father was a wise man. We thought the Russians were taking us back to Germany, but the Germans did not want more Jews, so the Russians said. So, they said, if you don't want to become our citizens and the Germans don't want you, so you are spies. Therefore, we're going to Siberia.

“They took us to Siberia. It was a terrible trip. My family was herded into a train, along with many other people. It was a cargo train. When we entered the car, the doors were closed, locked behind us. And the car was crowded, filled to overflowing with refugees, cramped and uncomfortable, no facilities. After about two days of hard travel, we were taken into a big open field. Many flies swarmed around us and bit us. In the field, I met a beautiful girl named Hannah. Hannah had long pigtails, and had attended a school in Poland which I always hoped—a very prestigious one, with uniforms; she had a special uniform, and I loved the uniform and I always wanted to attend, hoping when I grow up to attend this particular school.”

CP: You said it was a gymnasium?

SW: Yes, it was a gymnasium, so it had a special outfit.

“And I was standing in the open field waiting for the uniform, and the school did not seem so important. Then we were placed in boats. The journey was very dangerous. It seemed to take forever. The boats kept filling up with water.” We were given cups to—

CP: Bail?

SW: “—bail out the water of the Northern Dvina River. Finally, we reached an area of many islands. Our journey ended at what seems to be the end of the world, the cold land of Siberia. The first island we arrived had no room for us, so they took us to another nearby island, which was heavily forested. The tall trees towered over us. I felt so small and insignificant.

“Each day the men were taken into the forest to chop down trees, while the women cleaned the trees. This was manual labor, hard labor. Our people were mainly educated professionals; they were not accustomed to chopping trees. It was backbreaking work with no rest. Our island was populated by criminals, who had been sent there for many years. My father gave the chief of the island the bag of corn that we had brought with us. The man, in return, gave us a better job. Father didn't have to chop trees, but was assigned to place numbers on the trees [that] the men had chopped down. Mother was

also given a better job: she was assigned to work indoors in the kitchen, all because of the corn. It was 1941. I was ten years old.

“One day, our group was asked by our captors if anyone knew the Russian language. I raised my hand. I was chosen to record people’s names in the books. It was a good job with privileges. Occasionally candy was passed out, and I got the extra candy. I did my job well, and I was elevated to the position of mail for the island. One day, carrying mail to another island, I met Hannah again. I was so thrilled to see her. She was equally glad to see me. We hugged; we kissed each other, happy to be reunited again. We shared what’s happening in each of our lives, and agreed to meet again.

“My father became friends with the island chief and his wife. The chief gave Father permission to go to small groceries, small grocery store, to shop. It was a rare privilege to be allowed to enter a store and make a purchase. Father shopped, brought us some food and meat. Father was an excellent tailor. He created well-made outfits. The chief gave them sewing machines to make clothes. They stitched *kufajka*.” I don’t know if you know, America adopted *kufajka*, which is—it’s like a jacket, could be also a coat, from both sides stitched. That’s what *kufajka* is, yeah. “And he made *kufajka* tops made with layered fabrics and sleeves, which helped to keep us warm.

“While we were in Siberia, my parents were only in their early thirties. Because of their young age, they were able to adapt and survive, but older people could not. The Siberian islands were close to Alaska. During the summer, it was daylight all night long. We lived in barracks. Our barracks held about thirty people in one large room. In the cold Siberian winters, there was no heat in the barracks; our people were very ingenious, so they built a stove for the room, but you had to stand near the stove for warmth. Our beds were simple: they were made of wooden planks. There were no mattresses. They were very hard. I had to choose between wearing my coat to keep warm or sleeping on it for comfort.

“In 1941, the war started between Russia and Germany. All the overseers—no. All the overseers and the men who had lived through—oh, oh. All of the overseers and the men who lived on the island before our arrivals were called away to war. There was a mass exodus from Siberia. There was no one left. Suddenly, we were free!” Which means they took all those who took care of us to the war on the front, and we didn’t have nobody there to give us orders or whatever. So, we were free.

CP: All the guards were called up?

SW: Yeah, so we were free, but not knowing where to go or how to make the trip, because we were on three islands.

CP: You're stuck in Siberia.

SW: Yeah, it was water all over. So, one man who was very industrious, they decided to build rafts from fallen trees and have the journey on water. So one day, my father, sister and grandfather went for a ride on one of those rafts. Mother and I didn't go. My mother said, "I'm not going on it," and I said, "So how are we gonna go?" She was a very religious woman, and said, "I go with God. God will show me the way. And please come, Sala," as she called me. So, I went with Mother and my father—my grandmother died before; she died. She died before we got free, in Siberia: she died in Siberia. But I didn't put it in.

CP: Do you know how she passed?

SW: Pardon?

CP: Do you know how she passed?

SW: Yeah. One day, they took us away—because we got a little tiny room, the size of a bathroom, a small bathroom. One day, they took my sister and me away from the room. My *bubbe*, Grandma, she was in bed. So, I didn't know why they took us away, but this was—they saw the end of my grandma, and they didn't want the kids to see how she passes.

CP: So she was just tired and old, and maybe sick at that time?

SW: She was constantly in bed, as long as I remember, as long as we were in Siberia, which was over a year, I think. She was always in bed. But lovely, lovely lady, wonderful. Um—

CP: You were talking about the raft.

SW: Yeah. "So, a tragedy occurred that day. Grandfather fell off the raft into Siberian waters, and died. A young man—it's always miracles, as they said. We find a young man

we knew from Poland on the way, who helped us to pull our grandfather out—his body—from the water. He was a gentile, not a Jewish guy, but he was a good one. (laughs) I carried the water to wash my grandfather for his proper Jewish burial. I remember running, because they hired a horse and buggy to put the casket on—which I don't know if it was just two-by-fours or whatever; it was no casket—and we were running with the water, following the horse. So, of course, I lost a lot of water. His body was buried in Siberia, far from home; only a stick marked his grave. My grandfather did not live to see freedom.

“My father hired a little boat for our trip from Siberia. We left Siberia down the same river we had arrived on, but we were faced—to choose still—it was a long, difficult trip. Many people became ill. England became engaged in the war against Germany, and General [Władysław] Sikorski, a Polish general of England, recognized Hitler as a threat to world freedom, not just to Jews. He fought relentlessly against Germany to get rid of Hitler. So, we were faced, as Polish citizens—which they called us—the Russians made us Polish citizens. At least we had a name. But we didn't know where to go, again, from there. So, a bunch of people who remained started thinking, and they decided—I don't know. They had a little map, I remember, and they saw where the war is in, where the war is going, so they decided to go more south to Uzbekistan.

“So, this was our way of going. So we had to take, again—we decided to go to Uzbekistan. The city—the name of the city was Bukhara. It's the main city in Uzbekistan. They have Tashkent and other cities, I remember. We find a city full of refugees from Russia—this was in Bukhara, in Uzbekistan. We find a city full of refugees from Russia, Poland, Romania, most neighborhood countries. It was a lot of Muslims, a veiled city with Middle Eastern architecture.

“My parents rented a place for us to live. All the belongings for the family were packed in two suitcases. We used the suitcases for our beds. A man who said he was from the city came to our home. He took our names and told us we must follow the rules. I remember this. In each street—this was on the communist regime. In each street, they had—I don't know. They gathered special men who, I believe, [were] spying on us or whatever. I don't know exactly. He came to our street to check us daily. So, I don't know what.

“The houses were built out of straw—I'm just telling you how Bukhara looked, yeah—from straw and cement. They offered little privacy or security. One night, someone came down through the roof into our home. It was frightening. Food was rationed during the war. Mother went to the market to try to buy something to eat. At the market, she met some people she knew from Poland, not knowing that they were smugglers. It was normal for people to smuggle merchandise, but not in Russia. It was a jail sentence. They asked my mother if they could sleep at our place. Eventually, they got caught, and the police came to our house—they find out where they are—and searched our house and

took my father's \$520—I'll never forget it—that he had saved carefully folded. Oh, he might come to America or wherever, just to keep us going.

“They carried my father and me to jail. I remember it like now. We stayed in jail overnight, and they separate me from my father.”

CP: What did your father—do you remember what he said to you when you were being taken to jail? Did he say anything? What were you thinking?

SW: Well, because they couldn't take my mother—my mother became ill when she knew they took the money and we knew we now don't have nothing. And they couldn't take my sister; she was younger than me. So, they took my father and me to jail, and they separated us. They separate me from my father and interrogate me.

“My father was wise. They took me—I remember like now—and they said, ‘Do you know how to write Russian?’ I knew it, a little, or whatever. So they put me—all right, give me a piece of paper, and said, ‘Okay, write. First, tell us from where he got the money.’ I knew at that time this was—I was already maybe twelve, thirteen, or more, so I understood the fear that they might take me—not as much me, but my father, away. But I made up a story.

“My father was wise and listened at the keyhole. He was afraid of me; he wanted to know what they do to me over there. In Europe they have the big keys and it was a big keyhole, so he was looking in the keyhole and listened to my stories. It was crucial for our stories to match. If our stories were not matched, I don't know what would happen to us. Probably no one would have ever seen us alive again.

“So, it's all miracles, you see now, my life. Our stories were the same, and they let us go because my father listened to what I said, so he knew I was old enough to know what to do. Okay, our stories were the same, and they let us go and told us to come back daily to sign a paper. This would prove that we were innocent and not trying to escape or run away. So, we came every day.

“Then, it happened: an outbreak of typhus fever spread through the whole area. The streets of the city were lined with six people lying all around, on the street. I remember like now. Everywhere looked terrible. I became ill myself, and they took me to the hospital. Oh! And I was diagnosed with typhus fever. I was running a high fever, and it was no doctors was available, or medication. While I was in bed, I had a scary dream that I see a man dressed in black, and wanted to kill me, and came after me with a knife. He

kept chasing me until he caught me. I cried and begged him to not kill me. I told him I am too young to die.

“When I woke up, the girl next to me was covered with a sheet. She had died while I was sleeping. Most people in the hospital died. Some people came to me and prayed. I don’t know who they were, but I got better, and I was one of the fortunate ones that went home.”

CP: That’s pretty amazing that you still remember that dream.

SW: I will never forget it. When I first told the story, someone—I was hysterically crying, but now I’m not crying.

“On the way home from the hospital, Hannah’s sister saw me. She blessed me with happiness and ran to tell Hannah. Hannah came to see me, with happiness, and we had a wonderful reunion.

“We were young and resilient. In our youthfulness, we soon found ways to enjoy childhood activities together and made the most of the situation. But life continued. We learned to adapt to my present circumstances, and I found ways to enjoy life, and still liked school and enjoyed learning. Math was my favorite subject; it turned out to be a big help. My mother was proud of me. (laughs) One day she met a man and told him that she has a daughter, and maybe he needs some help—he was a bookkeeper. So he said, ‘All right, send her in,’ and I went in. I listened to my mother. We started talking in the office. Okay.

“So in the summertime, when I came in, he hired me and he gave me a summer job, bookkeeping. There was many levels of bookkeeping. Of course, I started as a helper, and loved it. I finished the work and I loved what I was doing. Later on—first of all, he gave me to write, I remember, names, because it was a big manufacturing business, to write names of the workers, then, like, to pay the people—how you call this? To pay. It was a form from the names of the people and their paychecks.”

CP: Payroll?

SW: Payroll, right. So, this is what I used to do first.

CP: How old were you at that time, maybe like twelve, or eleven?

SW: No, it was forty-four [1944]—

CP: Okay.

SW: —it was forty-five [1945]. It was close to the end of the war. Yeah. And this is—now this was forty-four [1944]. I have it. Forty-four [1944], Uzbekistan, so I was a big girl. I was thirteen years old, right?

CP: Mm-hm.

SW: Coming from school, I was—during the summer I worked helping the bookkeeping people, whatever I would call them. “Coming from school in Bukhara, I noticed a truck parked on the street with the imprint on the door ‘USA.’ I was extremely happy. I ran home to tell my parents that Americans are here—I was really so happy!—and they are here to help us. This was a beginning of hope and survival, where people there were dying of hunger and typhus. This was the time, in forty-four [1944]. Now, forty-five [1945], the war ended, and I was still in Bukhara.

“The war ended. In order to return to Poland—we were Polish citizens, as I mentioned earlier—we needed papers, and it wasn’t easy to get papers. It was a problem. So, you had to know somebody who could help you get papers to emigrate from Russia and go to Poland. So, with good luck and with good people [who] helped us, we were able to get our papers. We took a train; again, it was cattle train, extremely hard trip. Again, no facilities and no water, no nothing, and three families were travelling together with our car, in the car. Three families were there.

“One day the train stopped, and I jumped off to get some hot water from a pot. Suddenly—I had the water already, and I start running to the train and the train start moving. I could see my parents, because the door was open. They were hysterical, crying. So I started running with the water, and luckily, a military officer, a Polish officer, heard the commotion and jumped off the train to help me. He picked me up and threw me in the train car. It was wonderful. ‘I lost the water,’ I said but I was reunited with my family thanks to this wonderful officer.

“When we arrived in Poland, my father did not know what to do. Our city had been burned during the war, and most of our families and friends had died. The devastation of

war was everywhere. Now we all decided to keep on moving on to a city named Szczecin, Poland. It had been part of Germany before the war; but the war changed many things, including national boundaries. A cousin of my father saw us and was shocked to see we were alive. We had a place for us to stay, he said. There were many refugees from different countries. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee—”

CP: I think this might be—

SW: The JDC—

CP: I think this might be a good place to stop so we can switch tapes—

SW: Oh, sure.

CP: —and then begin again. So your family—you made it back to—

SW: We made it back to Szczecin. I talked of Szczecin? Yeah, Szczecin.

CP: Yes.

SW: This is still a Polish city, right. Okay.

CP: So, we can take a break and then pick back up.

SW: Wonderful.

Part 1 ends; part 2 begins

CP: Okay, this is tape two with our interview with Sonia Wasserberger. Mrs. Wasserberger, you were telling us about your miraculous story, the very rich, vivid story that you’ve written down and you’re remembering for us. Your family had just made it back to Poland; you said it was a destroyed city, devastated by war, but miraculously you found your family members. Can you tell us more about that?

SW: Yeah. Thank you. (shuffles papers) Um—I'm looking for where I am. "We arrived in Poland. My father didn't know what to do. Our city had been burned in the war, and most of our families and friends had died. The devastation of war was everywhere. Now we all decided to keep on moving on to a city named Szczecin, Poland. It had been part of Germany before the war; but the war changed many things, including national boundaries. A cousin of my father saw us and was shocked to see we were alive. He had a place for us to stay. There were many refugees from different countries. The American Joint Distribution Committee, JDC, helped refugees after the war. They were our angels. Many were dying daily, and they helped us with food and different necessities. We did not stay there very long. Our destination was unknown, but we trusted the Joint. They were in charge of helping refugees.

"So, here we are in Berlin: they took us to Berlin from Szczecin. And in Berlin, they helped us to get a place. We lived in a little kitchen. It was a refugee, and the Joint was in charge of helping refugees. They occupied a part of the military ground where the Germans had lived, and we registered and my father got our IDs for the first time. We became humans again. We settled in Berlin. It was freedom. We arrived with our lives only, and our family is with our God. The Joint helped us and took care of us, provided kitchen soups, different items what we needed.

"Berlin was a new beginning for me. Life began to settle into a somewhat normal rhythm. I returned to school. I took music lessons. I was accepted in a business school. Berlin was fun for a young girl. Although it was in ruins still, Berlin offered cultural events in 1948. The Cold War was between us—the Cold War between America and Russia. This was in 1948, I believe. Yeah. Provisions became restricted, and the DP [displaced persons] camps were closed. We could no longer remain in Berlin.

"The Joint took us to Bavaria by planes. This was a big event for me, to ride in a plane. Often they took us by trucks to other DP camps. After we landed, they took us to Bavaria in trucks to a city named Deggendorf, Bavaria. As we drove by the facility, I saw a lot of young people watching us. A young man saw me and tried to find out where I was taken to. He was the head of the welcome committee. We became friends, and in December 1948 we got married, under a JDC chuppah. Nineteen forty-nine, we arrived in USA and raised a family. I was blessed with four wonderful children. Thank you." Now I want to —(shuffles papers)

CP: Before you say the last thing that you'd like to say, I was wondering if you could talk to me a little bit more about your relationship with Hannah.

SW: Oh, yes.

CP: Is her name Hannah Adrozinski? Is that right?

SW: Adrozinski.

CP: A-d-r-o-z-i-n-s-k-i?

SW: Yes.

CP: You have a very special relationship with her.

SW: Very special. I told you the story. This was before we left. Before we left Russia, the communist country, we decided to—became like—she was like a sister to me, and continue our relationship. So, we said, “Okay, you have”—she told me about her uncles. She dreamed to go to England, where they were, and I dreamed to go to America, to my uncles. So, I gave her my uncle’s address, I still remembered, and she gave me hers in London.

When I came to Berlin, we were free, of course. I decided to write a letter to the uncle in London. Luckily enough, I got an answer from him with the address where she was. At that time, she was in Cyprus. They were going, a bunch of our people, mostly young people, before we got the independent [state] of Israel. They smuggled like unlawful to Israel. They risked their lives, and their boat was taken to Cyprus. So I wrote to her and we got in contact again from Cyprus. From Cyprus she went—I believe she was in Italy, and in Italy we had contact. She sent me letters to Berlin and I sent her back, and she sent me packages with food. From then on, we kept in contact until she reached Israel, and from Israel, of course—this was in forty-nine [1949], and we had already our country (phone rings) which we dreamed of for thousands of years to get it.

I don’t know how to stop it [the phone].

CP: It’s okay, we can wait.

SW: Okay. And one day, when I was already—we already lived in Tampa—I decided to go to Israel and meet her. It was a beautiful country. I was there two weeks. And from then on we communicate, and she decided to come to Tampa and visit me. But it was a

sad story and a sad thing for me. Two years ago, I heard the news that she passed away. It was terrible thing.

CP: She was your sister in the war.

SW: Later on, my parents even immigrated to Israel, and she was like a daughter to them.

CP: Well—

SW: But I lost her. So, it was sad.

CP: Well, thank you for sharing that with us, because now we can remember her, too.

SW: Right. Now I want to say a few words. It's our faith and spirit that gave us hope, even in the most dreadful of moments. This, I feel, is what makes our people so resilient and so successful. Right now we can only rely on education to ensure that something this tragic never occurs again. And whatever we may endure as Jews, I know that our innate pride and will to survive will carry us eternally. Also, let us also remember being forever united in working together with all people of good will to fight religious and racial hatreds, so we can say, "Never again." Thank you.

CP: Thank you.

SW: Thank you. The memory you left with us—I talked to my parents. The memory you left with us and the love you gave us gave me strength to carry on your legacy. Thank you.

End of interview