

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Irene Hizme and René Slotkin**  
**April 24, 1995**  
**RG-50.030\*0320**

## **PREFACE**

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## **IRENE HIZME and RENÉ SLOTKIN**

### **April 24, 1995**

01:01:07

Q: Let's start with where you were born and your names at birth and now. Let's start with you Irene.

I: I was born in Teplice Sanov in Czechoslovakia in the year 1937, and I was named Renate Guttman, and I'm now Irene Hizme.

Q: Now what was the date?

I: 1937.

Q: No, the month?

I: Sorry, December 21.

R: I was born at the same time, half hour later. My name then was René Guttman and today is René Slotkin.

01:01:57

Q: Now you were very young during these early years of the Nazi oppression and persecution, but I really would like to see what it is that you remember as far back as you can go. Do you remember those first few years where? You were born in Teplice Sanov, but you didn't live there for very long?

I: No. We moved to Prague and were there for a while.

R: My earliest memories of being alive go to that apartment building in Prague. It was maybe a like five or six story building brick with a yard and a fence. I remember a staircase leading up to our apartment so we had to be somewhere up.

I: Yeah, I think we were on the upper floor.

R: Upper floors, and I do remember falling once and I have an injury here, which I haven't thought about in a long time, but I must have stitches underneath my chin. I still remember the burning sensation of what I guess was iodine, was the first aid that I got for that. But I do remember that apartment building. Those are my earliest, very earliest memories, my first memories.

I: I remember the inside a little bit. I remember that our crib was kind of on a diagonal, it seemed to me, it was like one room. The kitchen was like down there, but we were like in the front where we could look out the window. Do you remember that?

R: No.

I: And there was a bed for our parents also in that room. We were all in this one room kind of apartment.

R: I do remember a terrace.

I: And a terrace, yes.

R: The terrace I remember because one stormy day there were like leaves, the wind, the leaves going by and I remember things falling down from that. As a matter of fact, your doll once went over.

I: Right. I had a doll and René threw her down off the terrace and smashed my doll. I remember that, too.

R: Those are our first, I think, those are my first memories.

I: Yes, pretty much.

Q: You slept in the same crib?

01:04:22

R: I don't remember doing that.

I: Either in the same crib or right next or our cribs were like touching. My recollection really is, and I know I've told you this once before, that our mother, when she would put us to sleep she played a game with us, there was a game. She would set our hands and we always wanted our bodies to be set a certain way to see if we could stay that way all night long and wake up in that same position. So I remember that.

R: This is incredible. I'm learning this. I never heard this.

I: I remember that, yes.

Q: Did she make up this game or did you make it up?

I: I'm not sure.

R: I would think it had to be her, but that's interesting.

Q: What other recollections? Do you remember playing outside? Do you remember the people around you?

I: I don't remember the people around us so much, but I know that once René — there was a yard in front with grass and René was out there playing. I think he stepped on a bumblebee and he got bitten and I think that was —

R: That was a big impression made on me. As a matter fact, I had itches underneath on that foot even when I came to the States, which was in 1950. I always get an itch on the one, but I could never understand. But I do remember that incident. I put it together. I don't know whether it's a real physiological phenomena or just my mind playing tricks on me. But, yeah. I remember the grass.

I: You know, I also remember, do you remember that we had like conductor outfits and punching tickets to go on the train and we used to play train, train conductors?

R: Well, that brings to mind, I think there was a tram or something that ran near us.

I: In front of the house.

R: Number 22.

I: Twenty-two, right.

R: I wouldn't know it was 22 until now, but it looked like two twos, so now we know it's a 22.

I: That was one of our favorite games. I think we also — I remember we had some kind of car that we could sit in and drive. I don't — we used to race, but you used to beat me all the time.

R: See, she's older, obviously —she remembers these things.

I: I remember one particular time we used to go — our parents took us to the park. There was a park nearby. And we used to go quite a bit, but the one time that I remember especially was right after a major storm and a lot of trees had fallen and we were walking on the logs, trying to balance, and I think—

R: That must be the same storm that I'm talking about except I saw it from upstairs. We must have gone down.

I: I think we went down. I remember that, there's something about the air. You know you how sometimes that smell — it brings it back, even today, sometimes I'm out and I get a certain smell and it says — that's the park. Also, I remember that we had — I'm not sure whether it was trucks or what, but some kind of toys that we could pull, like little wooden something. And we also had wooden little blocks, tiny little blocks, and you were very good at making.

R: I was?

I: Yeah, mine always fell, but yours were good.

R: I don't remember this.

01:08:58

I: I do. I also remember some of our clothing. In the winter we had these nubby jackets like maybe made from lambs' wool or something. They're like curly. I don't know what it was, and, then on top of that, we had these harnesses with bells so you could hear us jingle and I guess that was a good way to keep track of us. Our Mom must have held on to us that way.

R: Yes, that I remember, the bells.

Q: Do you remember your parents?

R: I don't, I really don't. I've tried and even I've had visual aids since, I've gotten some pictures of them, but it still doesn't seem to help. I've tried to really. There's just one moment that I remember that happened much later with my mom that I remember, but not at that point in time.

I: I think I'm pretty — I could not, if I didn't have photographs, I don't think I could recall what they looked like. The only thing I remember is my mom's presence at certain times. I recall them vividly. And also, my dad in — one of the things that I vividly do remember is when he was taken away, and I think it was at night and some men came in uniform and they just took him away and, you know, we never saw him again after that, not to my recollection. Although, René, you've said you remember us visiting him in prison, but I don't remember.

R: I don't know.

I: No?

R: We didn't see him then.

I: I don't remember seeing him.

R: I remember going to what I — assuming was some kind of — it was a huge building. To me, any building was — it was very powerful looking, as opposed to the other buildings and we would bring — my mother and I would bring, we — we would bring packages there. So, maybe.

I: So maybe —but I don't...

R: So maybe it was, now that I'm a few years older, it could have been a post office too, but that's not the feeling I had. The feeling was that he was there, or this is where we made connection with him.

I: But you're right, it could have been a post office and perhaps she was sending things to Germany.

R: Or wherever.

I: Or wherever.

R: Wherever he was.

I: Right.

Q: Do you remember seeing soldiers in the street? Did you remember something that changed in Prague prior to your dad being taken?

01:11:53

I: I don't think I remember anything changing, but I think there was a feeling. I remember having to wait, standing on lines. I don't know whether this is a later occurrence or from that time, but I just remember having to stand on lines. It could be, I don't know from where.

Q: For food?

I: Maybe, maybe, I'm not — yes, maybe that's what it was.

Q: Do you remember any change? I know that you don't remember your mother in the visual sense, but do you remember a change in the household somehow after your father was taken or was it not that clear?

I: I don't think it was that clear. I have a feeling my mom didn't say anything to us and I think that we probably felt our dad was going to come back.

R: Yeah. I don't think there was any change. The time just melted.

Q: You were about what, four years old in here?

I: Yes.

R: Four.

Q: So that's about 1941, maybe '42?

R: No, no.

I: Well, we know now, we just found out that he actually died.

R: Three weeks ago.

I: We just found out three weeks ago from the *Chronicles of Auschwitz*<sup>1</sup> that he actually was executed December 18, 1941.

R: It's in there. The name, a number.

I: So — the soldiers must have come. I do remember it was winter, so it must have been about a month or two before.

Q: What is the next kinds of recollection that you have? Going to Theresienstadt?

01:13:55

I: My next recollection is truthfully being on a train.

R: Being there.

I: No. I remember a train.

R: You got an earlier —. I just remember being there.

I: And it seemed like a normal train. It was a train ride and then we were someplace else and I guess that was Theresienstadt.

R: I just remember being there. I don't remember getting there. Maybe I slept.

Q: And you lived with your mother?

I: Yes, we were with our mom.

Q: What do you remember about Theresienstadt? School, food? Was your mother working?

I: I really have very sketchy remembrances. I just — I remember cobblestone roads for some reason. And I remember archways — like tunnel like — I have no idea, it could be someplace else. I have this flashing thing of bodies in an open cart.

R: I was just going to get to that. I remember carts being drawn through the streets. I knew they were bodies. I don't remember them being open, but I knew that they were — don't know how, but that seems to be in the picture very, very often.

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<sup>1</sup> Danuta Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle, 1939-1945* (New York: H. Holt, 1990).



I: And I also remember there, that — I think we used to wait on line there. I think we used to wait on lines. Or maybe that's earlier, I'm not sure. And then something strange. I remember music. I remember music. Music, so that later on when I heard certain things, they like sounded like, "Oh, I know that," and I don't know it, and I shouldn't know it, because I've never heard it, like, "Yes, I've heard this." So, I don't remember what our mom did or whether we actually — I can't remember what we did during a day or —. I really don't.

01:16:28

R: No, I don't either. The only real strong memory I have is the picture taking session, and I think we have that picture of my mom and us leaning on her shoulder. I can almost feel the material on her dress. It was very coarse, rough, wool like and can almost smell it. That's my real only recollection of feeling my mother. That's the only thing. That really was very powerful. That happened in Theresienstadt, I know now. Do you remember that picture taking?

I: Vaguely, not as clear on detail as you.

R: Well, it made an impression on me. I don't remember the circumstances, but I'll never forget that feel.

I: The next memory I have shortly after that is us walking. It was night time, through the snow and our mom had a suitcase that she was dragging along and I remember I didn't, I kind of didn't want to go wherever it was that we were going. I remember she gave me a real yank, like "you just come!" That's when I remember her presence because I remember her actually pulling me.

R: I guess I was going peacefully because I don't remember the pulling. I do remember that night, though, and I remember dogs.

I: Yes, yes, there were dogs barking. Then we got on a train.

R: That train ride, I remember. This now we now know this was the train ride to Auschwitz. But the combination of heat, odor, cramped quarters, the sighs, the agony of it in the car. You heard the people just die.

I: There was moaning.

R: It was horrible.

I: And being little it was like hard to, you know, it was just — all these bodies kind of next to you and I remember I just wanted to, like, I wanted to lie down.

R: Yes, right. We couldn't lie down for some reason.

I: There was no place.

R: There was no place or there wasn't room, or it was too dirty or it was like — nowhere to lie down.

I: You couldn't. There was no place. You just kind of had to stay the way you got on. And — but we didn't cry.

R: No.

I: We didn't.

01:19:16

Q: Why not?

I: We were scared. We knew that crying was not something you did. You didn't cry.

R: I don't think we wanted to add anything to that noise there already. It was a long train ride.

I: We had already learned the need to be silent to be quiet and well behaved.

R: Probably.

Q: Can I go back for just a minute?

I: Sure.

Q: Do you think you were afraid in Theresienstadt? Do you have any recollection of being afraid?

R: For our personal safety?

I: I don't think so, no.

R: I mean, we saw these things going on and I think we just assumed that this is the way things are. I think our mother must have provided, I'm not just guessing, must have provided us with a real security type of blanket that we weren't, or it was our youth and we really didn't understand.

Q: On the train, how were the adults — well, was anybody relating to anybody else? Were some people talking or was there just a lot of noise people screaming? What other recollections do you have? Was your mother holding you? You holding onto your mother's leg?

R: We were very close to her at all times. I think everybody was into their own — I don't remember people mixing or doing for one another.

I: I kind of remember a moan or a cry here and there. But no, I don't, I think everybody was scared. I think that was the first time that I felt like, "Oh my God, what is going to happen?"

R: I wasn't there yet with that sort of thinking.

Q: Do you remember smells?

R: Oh yeah. It was strong.

I: It was terrible.

R: Every kind of smell, excretion, either from the bottom or from throw up or — there was just no sanitation, nothing. Wherever you were, that's where it happened.

Q: So you also urinated or moved your bowels there or do you have a recollection?

R: I don't remember.

I: I don't remember that.

R: My mother must have taken care of that. She always had, right?

I: I would imagine.

Q: Do you remember arriving at this strange place that now has a name?

R: Uh-hum, yeah.

I: Yep.

Q: Describe it.

R: It was night. I heard yelling "Raus,"<sup>2</sup> snowing a little bit too, I think.

I: Yes.

R: And it was refreshing at first, when they first opened the doors. I mean we had air for the first time, and it just hit you, it was good, but then the rest of it started happening.

01:22:52

I: I remember just that we had to walk a little. I don't know if it was a long distance. It's hard to tell, but we walked and then I remember finding — we all, everybody off of that,

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<sup>2</sup> Out! (German)

everybody went into the same place. We went into this big, like, barn or something. I don't know. It had a thing down the center with stones. Do you remember that?

R: No, it sounds more like a barrack that you describe.

I: Maybe.

R: That's what I was in later.

I: Well, that's where we were with our mom also and there was just a lot of other people there, as well, with families.

R: It's possible.

Q: But the three of you were together?

I: Yes.

R: You say that with great certainty, so you remember? I mean, I think we were, too.

I: Oh, yes I remember being together.

R: I don't remember my mother. I'm trying so hard to do that.

I: I remember being together and then at some point our mom even took us to the hospital to have a medical examination and this I remember because — sorry, René — you used to cry a lot. You didn't like doctors, and I was only worried that you were going to cry and something terrible was going to happen to you because I was a stoic.

R: I cried?

I: You didn't, not that time. But I remember that our mom took us. She was with us once.

Q: This was at some point?

I: At some point.

Q: Do you remember being tattooed?

R: Yes. I remember being tattooed. I remember the pain of the needle as they made the dots, and just surrounding it was this awful odor and I'm not sure what that odor was, but the tattooing comes together with an odor for me. So — but I don't remember anything else but just that needle.

01:25:31

Q: But your numbers are quite different, so you were not tattooed at the same time or you don't know?

R: I don't know.

I: I think we were.

R: I mean, we now know that the numbers that were given to girls and to boys were different so we know this for a fact now. So, the numbers wouldn't be sequential, but I don't remember anybody else being tattooed except myself. I mean, I don't remember Irene being tattooed or my mother being tattooed.

I: I don't have much of a recollection of the tattooing.

R: You don't remember the tattooing? Such a sharp —.

I: Yeah, but I don't know...

R: We remember different things.

Q: And your hair, were you shaved?

I: No.

R: I don't think so.

I: No, absolutely not. I had long hair at the end of the war.

Q: Were you with other families?

I: In the beginning, when we were with my mom, it seemed like there were grown ups and younger people and so I guess. I didn't really know. It seemed like a lot of different ages.

Q: Was it possible that you were in the family camp, the Czech family camp?

I: Very possible.

Q: Do you remember food during this time when you were still with your mother?

I: My only recollection of food is always the same. It's that black bread and something like potatoes or vegetable something, warm something.

R: I don't have any recollection of food until later when I had to — when we were separated and I had to sift through garbage to get at potatoes. That seemed to have been my favorite thing. I would get a potato, make very thin slices and put it onto that stove. Most of the potatoes were

rotten, but still, put it on the stove, and then somehow whatever came out, you ate. That's the only food I ever remember eating.

I: I remember later on, after we were separated, I vaguely remember that — I guess somebody gave the food out — and I remember I thought I was terribly clever at the time, because I would get this piece of bread and I wasn't that hungry and I figured I'd be so much hungrier in the morning, so I decided, "I'll just have bite or two and I'll save this for the morning." But, of course, when the morning came, the bread was gone. So, I think that the rats really loved me.

01:28:40

R: Rats? You don't think other people took it from you?

I: No, I think it was the rats probably. I would like not to think that. I just thought the rats, because there were rats.

R: This is very interesting, because this is the Passover season for us now and we break the middle matzo, we take a portion of it and hide it. That's why it's called poor man's bread and that's exactly what she was doing. She would take a piece of it, eat it, and then hide the rest of it and she never got to eat the rest of it.

I: The worst was that I was so stupid. I just kept doing it over and over again.

R: You didn't learn a lesson.

I: Didn't seem to learn.

Q: Do you remember when you were separated?

R: Yes.

Q: Could you describe it?

R: Well, to me it wasn't our separation to me, it was a feeling, it was a separation from my mother. She was, like, — she was taken away from us. I'm not sure what I heard or what I felt, but it was my mother and that was the only time that I felt that she was in real agony. It was a feeling, maybe a cry out or something, but I knew something was terribly, terribly wrong and that was the separation that I remember.

I: I also remember it a little differently, but...

R: Well, it's probably more accurate...

I: No, no.

R: ...from your point of view.

I: No, no. I remember knowing that something was changing and something horrible was about to take place, and I do remember an SS hitting our mom. I remember she didn't —

R: You saw this?

I: I just remember, yes, because we didn't want to let go of her and we were actually physically separated, you know, like kind of torn apart from her, pulled away. I don't know what, maybe she screamed, but I remember a slap, she was hit. I kind of —if I close my eyes, I think she fell to the floor.

R: It fits into my thinking. I don't remember it as vividly as you would. It fits.

01:31:28

I: After that, I don't remember what happened immediately after that.

R: Really we were hurting, I think I was. I know that was a very emotional time, very, very hurtful, and after that, we were, like, we were separated. I remember being separated from you but we were just in different places. I was with the boys, young boys, older boys and men.

I: I don't know where I was. I was just with other women. I just remember that your barrack, for some strange reason, I always said was a little bit over the right. It was in that direction.

R: It's funny, I remember directions too, but I have no, I never studied the map of Auschwitz or anything. I remember where my barracks was, I remember where the gates were and I remember where the crematorium were with respect to my barrack. I remember people walking into this crematorium day and night just about. I couldn't tell you just in my own circle I could tell you if you put me there again. Please don't.

01:32:49

Q: I think we should stop.

(Pause on tape)

Q: Since you were separated at this point, what I would like to do, is focus on each of your stories separately although, of course, you can talk or elaborate if someone forgets something. So, let's focus on you, Irene, and where you remember you were and what happened?

01:33:22

I: Well, again, like I said before, my memories aren't consecutive. They're kind of sporadic and, very often, things in my everyday life today kind of — when I'm doing certain things they stir and trigger a memory for me that's related to what happened to me in Auschwitz, and my major memories of Auschwitz are certainly being hungry and cold very often, and I remember watching people running to the electric barbed wire and then they didn't move anymore. I remember having to stand outside for very long periods of time. I don't know exactly for what, just — and I always tried to hide. I thought if I wouldn't be seen then that would be good, so I always tried to find somebody taller to stand behind. I remember the barrack. I remember there was this oven or something warm running down the center that you could sit on, on it. I remember people sitting on there. I remember one night I was — I felt extremely alone. I had gone to the latrines that were in the back, and I became disoriented, so I forgot on which side of this oven or whatever my bed was on, and I started groping to get into somebody's bunk, because I was scared that if they found me wandering around that I'd be beaten. What happened was so unexpected, because wherever I tried to get in, the hands were just pushing me away saying, “this is not your place, this is not your place.”

01:35:59

I: It was almost dawn before some kind person finally said, “Come in and be with me.” And it just stuck with me all the time. I can still feel so unwanted, you know, like nobody cared.

R: I don't believe — that's so — I never really heard this. I remember you saying once that you couldn't find your way back, but I never heard the explanation of it. If I may, I think just the standing in line or standing outside for great periods, I remember that too, but I remember that as roll call. There were lines, we were made to stand in lines. They might not have been the same lines, but we had, we had to stand in lines and numbers and names were yelled and down and up and down the line and the soldiers, soldier, officer, whoever very often stopped at somebody and just hit them and knocked them down to the ground for apparently no reason, but this happened almost all the time. I mean, I seen that many, many times happening over and over again.

I: I kind of also remember people being beaten or punished for whatever. I'm not sure what it was that they had done, but I also remember seeing somebody hang. I don't know where, but I remember once, I don't know what was going on, but I felt I needed to hide. I don't know where this was exactly, but there were, I actually found myself hiding with dead bodies. I don't know from what exactly either, but that's a memory. I, of course, have unfortunately a lot of memories of the hospital and the doctor's office.

01:38:37

I: I seem to recall spending a great deal of time there, and also being in the hospital and being very sick, and I know one time, when I went to the doctor's office, that they took blood from me and it was extremely painful because it was from the left side of my neck. That's a strange thing to remember. I also remember having blood taken out of my finger, but that wasn't quite so bad. I also remember having to sit very still for long periods to be measured or weighed or in x-rays. I remember x-rays, x-rays and injections. I remember injections, and then I'd be sick. Because then I'd be in this hospital, and I remember having a high fever, because I know



they were taking my temperature. Somebody was. I really got to hate doctors. I got to be afraid. I was terribly scared of doctors. I still am. They are a nightmare. Hospitals are out of the question and illness is unacceptable.

R: Do you ever remember being cut or something like that because I think you mentioned once — I never heard a lot of the things that you just said, but I remember you saying that once.

I: I remember, but this is so unclear, it sounds bizarre. I remember something with electric wires, but I just remember — because always after the war, you know me, I'm so crazy, I can't stand to touch an electric wire. I get, I actually have like an anxiety attack. For a long time, I used to have anxiety attacks when I would have to plug in an outlet and it was especially painful to me, because I went to school and I majored in biochemistry and I taught physics and biology and I would have to do these experiments with the class and I would have to plug these things in and I'd get these horrible anxiety attacks when it had to do with electrical things and magnets and things like that in physics. I was a wreck.

01:41:44

I: I remember some kind of shock, don't know. And the thing that you refer about being cut, again, it's just a vague thing of being on an icy cold table and I don't know why I keep seeing eyes, and it just I know that there was a doctor there and he had an instrument. Like, it looked like a knife, obviously, it wasn't a knife, but it was something, and I remember him just kind of touching me with it and I, that's it. I don't remember anything else about that. I think I don't want to.

Q: Was anybody kind to you?

I: I really, I can't remember. I felt no, it didn't seem to be — I always felt just outside somehow. I remember being a little jealous because it seemed like there was, there were two girls and it seemed like their mother — I don't know how they had a mother or somebody who would bring them things.

R: Little girls? They were little girls?

I: No, bigger than me, but they had somebody who brought them things, who was very close to them somehow and I remember, you know, kind of watching with great deal of envy.

Q: Did you know you were twins?

I: No, no, I don't think so. I knew I had a brother, but I had no idea of what twin even meant. In all of this, everything that happened, I always just thought this was what life was. I couldn't remember anything else anymore, and I used to think sometimes about our mother, fleetingly, like, "Well, maybe I'm never supposed to see her again — this is how things are." And then just knowing that there was René over there. And then I remember one particular night that I was especially concerned about René, because there was like a big explosion, and there was a fire and it was all off to that side, to the right. I remember lying on my bunk bed and there

seemed to be a lot of commotion and I was scared that maybe it was his barrack burning. So I remember that as a real clear scare.

Q: Did you think about him a lot?

01:45:08

I: In some way, I did. I kind of felt I had to stay in there because he was going to need me. That's pretty egotistical. Well...

Q: Do you remember other young girls in the same barrack? Were you with other people who also had these funny things happening to them, these horrible medical experiments?

I: I thought I was the only one. In fact, it's interesting, when in 1985, when we first found out there were other twins who survived Auschwitz, I said to René, "I thought we were the only kids who survived, how could there be anybody else, what you do mean there are twins?" So, no, I had no idea that anybody else was having anything done to them.

Q: Are there any other things you want to tell us about Auschwitz before the liberation?

I: I remember once in the hospital there, I was there and something was going to happen. It seemed all the patients were being evacuated or cleared out or something and I remember somebody who worked in the hospital grabbed me and hid me behind her and just said, "be very quiet." Of course I was. I mean, if I could have disappeared I would have, and that's all I know. I don't know who it was and I don't know what she might have saved me or not saved me from. And so that...

Q: Were you ever beaten?

I: No, no, not that I — no.

Q: Do you remember getting weaker and weaker?

I: Yes, I do. I remember getting weaker and weaker because towards the end just before liberation, I was on the ground and I could not even get up. And there were other people also on the ground to my recollection, and I didn't know if I was ever going to be able to get up off this floor. But I don't think I understood what "to be dead" meant even then, because I just didn't know what was going to be. I remember there were also, I remember sirens and bombings, noise, gun fire or maybe bombs. I'm not sure. Do you remember that at all? Sirens?

01:48:23

R: Yes, I remember sirens and then the hum of the airplanes and they would always get everybody in and they would stand a soldier outside our barrack, one soldier outside the barrack. Don't know why.

I: But I remember that when that happened, I got very scared, when there were the sirens and the sound of the airplanes, because somehow I understood something about bombs and, and you could really get hurt.

R: It was not a natural course of events that was happening there.

I: And also, do you remember every once in a while a siren would just go off and it was like there'd be a lot of commotion and the soldiers?

R: Right, yeah...

I: Do you remember?

R: ...but I can't put that together right—

I: Just — I, I don't know. I guess I don't either. Just a flip that came into my head.

Q: Were you liberated in Auschwitz by the Russians? You may not have known that...

I: Yes. I might not have known that that's what it was. I was literally picked up by a Polish lady who just took me to her home. I remember she carried me on her shoulders the whole way, because I couldn't, couldn't walk.

Q: You were eight?

I: Yes. Going to be eight —

R: You were, you were — your seventh year is December. You turned seven in December.

I: Oh, I had just turned seven.

R: You were just a little bit over seven. Same as me — that's how I remember.

I: Good point.

Q: Rene, let's go to you and your months now in Auschwitz as you're alone.

R: Well, I'm going to juxtaposition my things with hers. The long waits and roll calls, something that we mentioned before. The wires, yes, electric, every once in a while, somebody would go against those wires and then be still, but the wires to me were always near my barrack for some reason, were the backdrop of a hole, a long, deep ditch where I remember very often, very, very often they would just line up people and shoot them, because I remember as me and some other young youngsters, we went over to see what was happening to some of those people. I do remember one instance, where the person wasn't quite dead. He didn't stop moving. I do remember him having a big bump on his head and the people, there some of the people, actually

pulled him out into the barracks. He was still alive. But it was a curiosity kind of a thing. This was the natural daily routine there, and I remember this happening very, very often.

01:51:49

But so much for the wires. I was with others, I had to think were twins, my visits to the hospital, I don't think, were anywhere near as frequent as Irene's and I don't remember ever being invaded into my body. The only thing I remember them doing to me is measuring and I do remember the Röntgen<sup>3</sup>, the x-ray, I guess it was. "Röntgen," I remember that name, they used Röntgen a lot, and I had to stand still or sit still for a very long time for this process to take place. And it was cold wherever you were. That was just about the experience with the hospital, very minimal compared to Irene's. My barrack was, I think, one of those long things with a stove in the middle or whatever that brick structure was. I used that to bake rotten potatoes on and to sit on and warm on. Sleeping in the bunks, I just remember that smell of that wood against my nose and splinters also, because that wasn't soft wood. It was raw wood, very raw because you could really smell it. It was just about the only refreshing smell, fresh kind of an odor that you had there. It was woody, it was wood. I remember very clearly going to sleep, because I was near the wood. Cold always, hungry always. I remember asking who's the master of the world, who runs this, who's the master of the world. I was told Hitler — Hitler— but I didn't question anything. This was the norm. This was the way things were, but I did have friends, which Irene didn't. I think the men, the older men, sort of took care of one another in some special way that the women didn't. I don't know why. I do remember getting a pair of shoes once. I don't know why I know this. I got a pair of shoes which didn't quite fit. They were brown, tall, going over the ankles, but they cost somebody a loaf of bread. There must have been a market going on, but I do remember being the recipient of this once.

01:54:40

Q: There were older men in your barrack?

R: Yes.

Q: Were there older women in your barrack, too?

I: Yes.

R: And I was very close to the crematoria, because there was a constant flow of people going into this and nobody every coming out. I was very close to that road. I was, like, very close to the barracks. I always had a view of that.

Q: Could you smell?

R: Yes. The odor was just bad. It was just bad. Everything there was bad. Foul, all the odors were foul except for that wood.

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<sup>3</sup> x-ray (German)

I: I just remembered something that for years, even today sometimes that besides you — you know, you just said the smells. Yes, it always was — there was an awful smell there. It was horrible all the time, but what I remembered is waiting in line naked. Standing outside naked waiting on line to get into the showers and sometimes we'd stand out there for many hours it seemed and somehow I remember that was scary, because I don't know now, but I knew that sometimes you didn't get your clothes at the end of this shower and you weren't going to be able to come back. But again, being probably silly child, at one time I had a locket from my mother that I wore around my neck and I knew that when we undressed for the showers if anybody saw this, it would be real trouble, but I was brazen enough to think that I could actually get away with hiding this in my hands, so I do remember taking it off my neck and holding it very tightly in my hand to get into the shower and I probably lost it then right in the shower because — didn't come out with it but I remember it was an act of defiance on my part. I said “I can do this.” I did.

Q: Did you have showers with some regularity?

I: Yes.

R: I don't remember any showers at all, but that doesn't mean.... I do remember though, I did see Irene once. I saw her once across — a wire fence. I don't know whether I was walking to the hospital myself, but I saw her somewhere in the middle and I recognized her. Nothing was said and I just looked at her and I knew she was there. I don't know if she remembers the moment, but I always, from that point on, and I think maybe even before, I knew that she was alive. It was the inspiration, it was the motivation to keep me going. I knew I had to stay, stick around and do until I met her for her sake, or for whatever sake, but I knew that you were there somewhere there and in a certain direction.

I: I don't really recall the moment, though I'm really trying hard to see if I can, but I do, I must in some ways recall it on a different level, because I knew that you were alive, so I must have known because then later on, after liberation, I knew that you were alive, so perhaps I did see you and I just don't recall it.

**End of Tape 1**

## Tape 2

02:01:00

Q: Rene, you were describing — not individual people, but, in some way, the relationships there. Did you feel less alone than, than Irene described herself? Or did you feel...

R: I would have to think that I wasn't alone. I was with other people. I did not, however, think of Irene or my mother. I just accepted what was there and went with it.

Q: Did you ever cry?

R: I don't remember. I'm sure I did, but I don't remember crying, no. Just to catch up to Irene's liberation, I was also liberated pretty much at the same time, but under totally different circumstances. I remember before the end came, the end of Auschwitz, the liberation, there was an increased amount of noise, which I now know was gun fire around, and less of a German presence. We were marched somewhere from some point to somewhere and whoever couldn't do this marching, if they stepped out of line or fell down, they were just eliminated, so I knew I had to keep marching. Again, there was increased gun fire at this point, I'd have to say it was, and then all of a sudden the Germans were gone. They were just gone, and we were surrounded by these white uniformed — which I know were Russians now. That's how my liberation — I do have to insert, that I do remember one Russian soldier, officer on a horse, which to me looked pink. It looked like a pink horse to me, but that's one of the memories, and the white uniforms. Definitely white uniforms.

Q: Was it night or day?

R: Night.

Q: What languages were you speaking in Auschwitz?

R: That's a good question, because I just thought of it myself and I don't really remember whether it was or what it was.

I: Actually, we spoke German and Czech, because I did understand what — I understood what was going on around me.

R: Well, I understood too, but I never put it together. If Germans were talking, I understood, I guess I did...

I: That makes sense because our parents came from Germany, so we probably grew up speaking German and Czech.

Q: In the barrack, do you remember what the inmates were talking? Do you remember not understanding a lot of people?

I: Yes, yes, I did not necessarily understand the people. That's true.

R: I don't remember any conversations really. I'm trying to think on it now as we're talking, but no, not really. Just there were these questions that I posed to people, and they would answer it and that was it. That was enough.

02:04:45

Q: Did you also get black bread?

R: I don't remember black bread at all.

Q: So, what you remember is stealing potatoes?

R: Potatoes.

Q: You don't remember being fed?

R: No.

Q: Do you remember drinking anything?

R: No.

Q: Irene, do you?

I: Yes, something brown, but I don't know what it was.

R: There was a liquid. There was a liquid served. I don't ever remember ever partaking of it, but there was a pot, yes. There was a pot and people would sort of line of for this thing. I don't remember ever having any.

Q: Do you remember the latrines?

R: No.

Q: You have no recollection of where you went to the bathroom?

R: None, absolutely none.

I: Now I do remember, I thought at one time that I actually saw like bones in the latrine. I don't know.

R: That's strange. It's really strange that I can't, I don't remember.

Q: Do you ever remember washing your hands?

R: No.

Q: Do you remember what you were wearing?

R: It didn't fit, whatever it was, and it was all over me. It was on my head, it was all over, but I don't remember what it was.

Q: What happened to you when you were liberated, when the Russian on the pink horse came?

R: Well, I remember being marched a little further with a throng of people into a warehouse of food, and I remember getting hold of a golden looking can and rolling it. I remember that was my, that was my prize. And when they finally opened it, it turned out to be sauerkraut. That's what I remember about it.

Q: Did you eat it?

R: Yeah, tasted it.

Q: Did you get sick?

R: No, I don't remember getting sick. I understand that a lot of people did get very, very sick from eating.

Q: Do, do you remember where they took you? Did they take you back to Auschwitz?

R: I don't remember.

02:07:39

Q: And then what happened? I mean, were you there for a very long time or did someone — ?

R: Time is just totally meaningless at this point. My very next real memories — I know that I went to, to a hospital somewhere, but my next memories are in an orphanage in Košice, Czechoslovakia.

Q: What happened there?

R: This was obviously after the war. It was a Catholic orphanage or hospital, because I remember being embraced by these nuns. In fact, I remember once being embraced by a very large nun to the point where I lost one of my teeth, which had to be loose, because it was obviously an embrace of love, not a hurting kind of thing. But those are just little things. And I was with a lot of children, but there was an administrator in this hospital who took me into his



home one day where I lived with them. His name is, was, is, is still Doctor Kalina (ph). His first name, I think, was Frank.

I: Oh, it's Steven.

R: Well, Doctor Kalina. Let's leave the first name out because I don't really — Doctor Kalina — his wife's name was Helen and they had a baby girl and I lived in an apartment on one of the streets in Košice with them. They were very nice to me. I remember something very specifically that happened in that house. Like a Christmas tree, a little goat that they let me keep in the very narrow back yard. A real little goat. He had a car, a green convertible, which I know now is a very unusual thing for somebody to have. He must have been somebody important in that hospital setting. This was an orphanage hospital complex. It was huge. To me, at that point, it seemed huge. I remember every weekend I would get an allowance and I was able to buy some, ten decagrams of salami in the butcher store. Was my treat for the week.

02:10:34

Q: Did you know you were Jewish?

R: I had the feeling. I had the feeling, which really came just out a little bit later when this Doctor Kalina had to leave his home, leave the country. Because somewhere — he had to leave, and I think it had to do with Communist takeover at that time in Czechoslovakia and I started to go to school in Košice, and he left me with his sister, Edith Mann, and her husband, Joseph Mann. They had a boy, Otto, and a girl, Bibi (ph), Bibi, we lived very close to the school, and I knew I was Jewish then because, first of all, they were Jewish and I was called a Jew in the school. Everyday when I, when school got out — there was one other Jew in the entire school. His name was Sobol (ph). I'll never forget the name, Sobol. I don't know his first name, but the boys are waiting for us to beat us and stone us every single day. It was a hassle to get out of school. I don't know why it wasn't a problem going to school, but leaving school every day was a horror show.

Q: Did the family know this? Did you tell them?

R: I think they knew it, but maybe they — I don't think anything was done. The school administration, now that I'm thinking about it, probably didn't do anything either, because I do remember being exposed to Catholic teachings in the classroom and we did go to church together for whatever. I remember always trying to be at the back, so I wouldn't maybe not get in, not enough room for me to get in or something or to sneak away, but I knew I was Jewish, definitely from that. They reminded me that I was and I'm sure the number on my arm was some kind of a signal. Though I know that not only Jews got numbers, but I think most Jews had that number. I think it was an identifier and the number was there. And I was, I also knew that I was Jewish, because the Mann family did observe certain holidays. I do remember going to synagogue in Košice. I don't remember ever praying, but I do remember having fights with boys — we'd sort of like divide the synagogue yard into two areas and chestnuts would fall and we'd throw these

chestnuts at each other, making believe some kind of war was going on. But there were other synagogues though. I was Jewish.

02:14:01

Q: How long did you stay with the Manns (ph)?

R: Well, I know it was about two years. I think it was about two years, 'til just before I came, started my trek here to the States.

Q: Of course, you remembered Irene, because...? Did you tell people you had a sister?  
[Irene shakes his head] Why?

R: I think I did tell them, after first contact was made, but it came from America. I think it came from Irene's side. She's the one who somehow — well, she'll tell you how she let the people know she that had a brother, but no I wasn't making it a —.

Q: But you don't know why?

R: No, no, I knew. I mean, it kept me going, it kept me going. And I have to say that this Mann family, they took me in and they treated me just like one of their children. Very understanding woman, this Edith Mann was. She knew what a boy, a young boy was all about, and she let me do things that all boys, I think, should be doing at that point in life. They bought me — in Czechoslovak, it's kolobezka<sup>4</sup>, it's a scooter with just two wheels and a platform and a thing. It was one of the fanciest ones, and I loved that.

I: It's funny. You just reminded — we had those when we were little.

R: Really?

I: We had them.

R: Maybe that's how I learned how to ride them, because I was an expert.

I: We had them, I remember. You push off with one foot and you hold on. We had them, we had them.

R: Yes, that was one of them. They were a wonderful family but that was life in Košice. Oh, they let me do something else. She let me buy two Angora rabbits. I had two Angora, they're white rabbits with red eyes, and they were babies. So they were very cute, when they were little, but then after a while they got to be big and we had to get rid of them. So I'll never forget every weekend or every two weeks there was a market, a farmer's market would open up. All the farmers would come into a big square in the town and they would sell their product, produce, whatever. I was at one of those stands trying to sell — I don't know if I was trying to sell my two rabbits. I don't even remember if I ever sold them, but they disappeared.

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<sup>4</sup> scooter (Czech)

Q: This is the third animal that you've mentioned. You mentioned a goat, and the two rabbits. Is this something special?

02:17:17

R: I don't think so, because I'm not particularly crazy about animals, certainly not to live with them, which is apparently what was going on. There was a dog also in Kalina's. Somehow I remember a dog, also a puppy, didn't last very long.

Q: Did Doctor Kalina have a son or a daughter?

R: A daughter.

Q: And the Manns?

R: The Manns had a daughter and a boy, Otto.

Q: Were you close with them? Were they nice to you?

R: Yes.

Q: So, they all were nice?

R: Yes. I seem to be much luckier with my relationships with people after the war at least up to the Slotkins, then Irene appeared.

Q: Was eating a problem, or did you, I mean...?

R: For me, personally?

Q: Yeah.

R: No, I don't think so. I do remember doing all the normal things, you know, looking for treats and I ate everything, kosher or unkosher, which obviously, I had no idea about. In fact, I do remember now eating the unkosher things, like, whatever it is, it's called slanina<sup>5</sup>. I think it's fat, I think it's just lard or.... Shepherds used to eat this. I remember going into the fields and shepherds would have this shepherd's bag and they would pull out this big hunk loaf of bread and then unwrap this smaller meaty white looking white, mostly white and take a knife and cut. It looked so great and delicious that I had to partake.

Q: Was it good?

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<sup>5</sup> bacon (Czech)

R: Yes. I never had trouble eating, I don't think.

Q: Did you feel lonely?

R: Well, once I found out that Irene, in fact, was alive and we made some kind of connection, I just wanted to go. I wanted to meet. I don't know what else I wanted, but I wanted to meet.

Q: Irene, let's go back to you and take you up to the point — this point. So, this woman takes you on her back, she carries...

I: She carries me piggy back kind of fashion, and I'm holding on to her, and I don't have a clue to where we're going, but it didn't take too long. And I find myself in this apartment and it's facing a square, and diagonally across to the right is where the Russian soldiers are housed in some big huge building. It was like a square, there were, and her name was Mrs. Mucha.

02:20:41

R: Yes, Mucha?

I: Means fly in Polish, and I remember now always being embarrassed to say the name because I knew what it meant and — you know it's like...

R: I've never heard this.

I: I — when I first got there, I must have been pretty sick. And I remember that she had me in bed and she called, I guess, what was a doctor, and I remember having hot — this is going to — hot glasses — that were heated glasses that were like put on the body at different parts. Do you know what I'm talking about even?

Q: No.

I: It's very, very weird. I don't know what it was for, but I guess I eventually got better, because I did finally get out of bed, and I got enrolled in Catholic school and actually I think I knew, because you asked René about being Jewish, but I think I didn't want to be Jewish and I thought this was neat. It was pretty — the only thing is Mrs. Mucha was very, very, very strict, so that if I came home two minutes later than she thought it should have taken me to walk home from school, we got punished.

Q: How?

I: We got hit.

R: Who's "we?"

I: Me, myself and I.

R: Were there any other children?

I: No, she had somebody who might have been her boyfriend. I don't know. I thought it was her son, but, you know, in retrospect now, I'm thinking, maybe I don't know, you know, an adult male who would come and visit every once in a while. He used to get drunk, and he wasn't pretty when he got drunk.

Q: Did he harm you?

I: Yes.

Q: Sexually?

02:23:06

I: I don't want to talk about that. I remember going to school and going to church and I remember, that I — when the priest called — there was a time when you could go down and they put something in your mouth, you know those white thin, looked so great, and I wanted to know if I was ever going to get a chance, but no such luck. But, I do remember having rosary beads and I became very devout, very devout. You know, I really didn't want to be Jewish. I mean, I was glad, “this is great.” But I also — maybe it wasn't totally great. In the summertime, she would take me to visit. She had family in the countryside and it would be a long, hugely long walk. It seemed like hours we'd walk with this wheelbarrow or something, because then we'd bring home produce from the farm. Now, on the farm, there were some other children, but I was really devastated by them, because they made fun of my number. And I didn't know how to stand up for myself. I was very quiet and very shy and I was very obedient. I was a scared bunny. I was scared all the time. I remember one particular evening or day, I kind of got lost on the farm. I don't know, it was getting dark and I didn't really know how to find my way back, and I guess I, they eventually found me, but I remember being pretty scared. I also, interesting enough, was put in charge of bunnies, of rabbits, I had to clean. She had rabbits. Not one, not two, rabbits, lots of rabbits, hutches, you know. I had to clean the rabbit cages, but I got very attached to the rabbits, but, you see, she used them for food, like on Sundays we would have rabbit. I couldn't eat. She got very mad at me and I got punished for that too, but I just couldn't eat the rabbits. I couldn't. We had a, we didn't have a bathroom in the apartment. There was an outhouse. I remember on Christmas, she told me that if I was a very good child and if I watched the sky, I would see Santa Claus come down in his coach and I would get a present, if I was very good. I remember I fell for this, and I believed her and I stayed up the entire night looking at the sky, and I never saw. I thought I was good, but I guess I figured I wasn't good enough and I never saw him. And I didn't even get a present. Well, I guess I got a present, it was a cookie made in the shape of what do they call them like gingerbread —

R: A gingerbread house?

I: No, like a person, like a little girl or something.

R: Yes, gingerbread cookie, yes doll, girl.

I: I was so excited about this. I remember guarding this, you know. I never ate it, obviously, because to me this was my doll.

02:27:23

R: Save it.

I: Save it, right. I'm big on saving.

R: I want to ask you something. The numbers, you said the girls — the kids made fun of your numbers? Was that a Jewish thing or was it fun, playing fun, because you were different or because you were Jewish?

I: Because I was Jewish.

R: So, they were saying that you were Jewish. That's what they were saying?

I: Right. So, I had a need to want to hide these things, because I really wanted to be Christian. And some of the — it's funny, I remember, like, some foods we had. We had bread with butter and sugar. Do you remember bread with butter and sugar?

R: Yes, I remember it. Yeah. Also remember bread, butter and chocolate, and radishes — slices of radishes.

I: Yes, I remember that too. But, basically she was very, very strict.

Q: Was she ever nice?

I: Well, she did care for me. She got me through being ill and, as long as I got home on time and didn't, did everything right, she was okay.

Q: Was she ever affectionate with you?

I: No.

R: It sounds pretty rough to me. I haven't really digested all of this ever.

I: Well, you're saying it sounds pretty rough, but it was better than Auschwitz.

R: Well, I'm comparing it to what I went through.

I: So when finally — there, I, what I subsequently learned was when the Joint Distribution or Agudah<sup>6</sup> or somebody finally was sending people to take out the children from these Catholic homes and they came to take me out, I did not want to leave and I was extremely upset at having to leave, to leave. We went to Bratislava and there it was some kind of a home where there were other people. It seemed to be a waiting place where you got then sent elsewhere. This was just a very temporary place and that's where I met a very dear friend who then went to Israel and I'm friends with her to this day, and we would sit there with our rosary beads talking about how we were going to escape from this place because we'd said, "This is — look at them they're so dirty. They don't prepare things. Look at this place, it's a mess." We were real little Catholics here and she was the only person I spoke to was this friend, Miriam. I didn't speak to anybody else. I was very upset about having been taken out of this Mrs. Mucha's home.

02:30:45

Q: What do you mean it was dirty? What was it about that you can remember?

I: They weren't dressed nicely, they were schlumpy and things were left on the table. It was just messy, I guess, maybe not dirty, but just messy, and it bothered us. We were neatniks in those days. You should see my house now.

Q: But you didn't escape?

I: No, no we didn't. I got shipped to France and finally wound up in an orphanage in Fublaines, which is on the outskirts of Paris. I was one of the youngest children there, and I didn't speak to anybody, except Miriam, who was, I guess, about seven years older. She seemed like almost a mother figure in a sense to me, because I had these long curls and she would fuss with them and she just was very compassionate, and I, the other children — I was the only child there with a number, so I also felt that there was something wrong with me. I felt that I had done something horrible that I had gotten the number and nobody else did. Most of these children had escaped somehow by hiding, or their parents had temporarily given them over and some were subsequently reunited with parents and some just had family members and they were just waiting to be shipped to, and things like that. Even when I was in Fublaines, I tried extra hard to be good. I was "Miss Goody Two Shoes." I would help. Anybody needed help, I was there. And I also was a stoic. There was time when we were getting some kind of — I really should go back and say I had all these horrible boils on my body at one point when I got to Fublaines. I don't know if it was an infestation of lice, but all these huge scars on my legs. A lot of us had it, and I remember, we had to go — the couple that ran this home, the father was, I think, a doctor and we had to go to him every day and he'd put this cream or something on it, and I remember always trying to, like, be very brave and, you know, show that it didn't hurt because I thought then they'd like me a little better than all the other children.

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<sup>6</sup> Branch of the international religious Zionist organization, Agudath Israel. Richard Breitman and Alan M. Kraut, *American Refugee Policy and European Jewry, 1933-1945* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1987), 109.

02:33:50

I was a sick child. We were getting inoculations at some point for something. Somebody would come to the home and all the children would get inoculated and the arms would blow up and nobody could move their arms. And everybody stayed in bed. Everybody except me. I went down and, believe me, I was in pain, my arm was blown up too. I bring breakfast to everybody. I took breakfast to everybody. Very strange child. Anything so that I could be a little special. That's really what it was. I wanted to be special. And I was also — a lot of the children from that — it was a period of time when a lot of children were being shipped to Israel. I remember, I don't know how the sequence of time, but I remember that our Aunt Paula — we found out that our mom had a sister in England — and our Aunt Paula was contacted about us and I did know that I had René. I didn't know where he was, but I knew that I had a brother, and but I remember hearing through the grapevine that she really didn't want us. I guess she had her own, she had a child at that time. I think things were perhaps not so great in England at that time, and I guess she just didn't have room for the two of us. That was, I sort of think I took it lightly then, but maybe I didn't, because it was just another reject. And I was trying so hard to be good, all the time. And then it came time and my friend Miriam was going to be going to Israel and I wanted very much to go with her as well, but it was not my luck, because in the interim, there was a Mr. Herbert Tenzer<sup>7</sup> who had formed an organization here called Rescue Children<sup>8</sup> and he would visit, he also had connection with Barton's Candy, and we kids were crazy about him because he would bring candy and — but the best thing was American gum. That was the best. Forget the candy, American gum. That was it for me.

02:36:40

I: But it seemed somehow he — of all the children, he decided to pick me to come to the United States to raise money for the other homes that Agudah or Po'el ha-Mizrachi<sup>9</sup>, or whoever was running them. He picked me and another boy from another orphanage in France, by the name of Charles Karo, and I remember being extremely distraught about this, because I want to go with my friend Miriam. I remember I was promised, “just for a little bit you'll go to America.” — like I knew what America was, who cared? I just knew I was being taken away — “and you know then you'll come back here and we'll send you to Israel and you'll be with Miriam.” And of course, I believed them. And talking about candy just brought to mind a very early time. It must have been someplace between Bratislava and Fublaines where I might have been at another orphanage. I was very little and there was a room, it must have been whoever was running the orphanage and there was candy underneath this bed, hard candy and they all got me to crawl under and get the candy for them, and I was caught. I was caught. You have no idea. I was devastated. I knew I did something bad. It was devastating to me. I was mortally

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<sup>7</sup> Herbert Tenzer (1905- ); Jewish American attorney and congressman, founder and chairman of Rescue Children, Inc.

<sup>8</sup> Rescue Children, Inc; aid organization for refugee orphans founded under the auspices of the Vaad Hatzala in 1946. Yeshiva University Archives, *An Inventory to the Rescue Children, Inc. Collection 1946-1985* (New York: Yeshiva University Archives, 1986), 15.

<sup>9</sup> Ha-Po'el ha-Mizrachi; Israeli religious pioneering and labor movement.



ashamed. It's also while we were in Fublaines we also were enrolled in a public school there. And we didn't go very often, it seemed, but every month or so we'd make this long trek, take two or three hours to walk and we'd sit at these desks and the ink bottle well was up here. Do you remember? You'd dip the pen and, yeah, so we had some kind of learning, and also at the home. I wasn't included in much of it because I was still one of the younger ones, but I loved learning so much I used to sneak in and listen. If ever there was anything going on, I'd be there. They were also teaching us about our religion and Hebrew studies and it was only for the older girls, but I always sneaked in with Miriam and I'd fall asleep, but I remember because again I wanted to be special. I wanted them to notice that I was there.

02:39:41

Q: At that point did you decided you wanted to be Jewish?

I: Well, it seemed like Miriam was, so it was okay, you know. We were going to be together so it didn't matter anymore what, yeah, we did — and I liked it, because we did have Shabbats and I know we always got a special dress for Shabbat, which we then had to turn quickly in, because then we got whatever we wore for the whole week. I remember vanity gets in my way too, because we would get shipments of clothing items from the States or wherever and there was these red shoes. I had to have the red shoes. I remembered sandals. I remember these were with little holes in them, like a shoe sandal. I had to have them. So, when the children tried on the shoes I said, “I want those shoes.” They were too small for me but I said, “They fit great. I like them, I love them, they're my shoes.” And because of this, very shortly after that, we took a long walk into Paris, or went for a really long walk, and of course, you can imagine what happened to my feet. I had blisters. My feet were bleeding. I was in so much pain that the head mistress had to actually take me in Paris to buy me a pair of bigger shoes. I got white. I got white. They weren't red, but okay, but they weren't brown. I hated brown, and that's all that I had had before. My story with the shoes.

Q: When you were in Poland with this woman, Mrs. Mucha, you decided you didn't want to be Jewish, what was going through your mind?

I: What was going through my mind is that I felt to be Jewish was not a good thing. People didn't like Jews and it was just much better to be Catholic because that was just what everybody was. I wanted to be part of what everybody was — and gee — it was pretty.

02:42:14

R: I never knew that there was an option even for this. I sort of was always reminded that I was Jewish and I accepted that. And I knew I wasn't liked, but I accepted it. I did have though one in the very early stages when I first started to go to school and they had these Catholic priests teach us the religion. It seemed so very, so very pretty, the statues and the rays going to the heads it seemed very nice and clean, and the Christmas also seemed very — but somehow I couldn't put it together with what these people were really doing. I mean those same kids that I

went to church with were waiting for me on the outside, so I just — that wasn't an option really. Just a hint there that maybe there's another way.

Q: You then went to the United States on a boat?

I: No, I came by plane. It was terrifying because nobody had actually prepared me for a plane ride, and we came — I came with Charlie and Miss Stutz (ph) or — don't remember. Anyway, a young woman who accompanied us and, we came — that's how we came to New York. The plane ride was horrific. I remember getting sick. I remember throwing up. It was just — there was no preparation. I had no idea. It was long, it was very long.

Q: How old were you at this time?

I: So, I'm now — it's 1947, I'm going to be 10.

Q: So, you go to live with this Mr. Tenzer?

I: I come to the States and I get wined and dined. We go to the White House. We visit President Truman and like, you got a celebrity sitting next to you.

Q: You were kind of like a poster child in a way?

I: Exactly right. I was poster child. I had these long curls. I'm convinced to this day that's why he chose me. He says he just fell in love with me, he says, but I was the only child with long hair, that's the truth. And I was kind of the poster child. We were wined and dined. We went to dinners. We were on TV, early TV We were on the radio, and *Life* magazine did a full spread and a cover story and yes, they did raise thousands of dollars.

02:45:30

In the meantime, I was staying at Mr. Tenzer's home. And well — no, at the beginning we stayed at a posh hotel. Wait a minute, we stayed at a hotel in New York City, and I remember getting served white bread for the first time and corn flake cereal, which I detest to this day, because — what is this? White bread, I didn't — and the photographers were taking pictures, so they wanted us to look all excited about this, so I looked excited — but I said "I'm not eating this." So, and we went shopping in this big department store. I think it was Bonwit Teller's, and I never seen anything like it in my whole life. We got clothes and we got — I got a stuffed animal, a bear, pink, "Celeste" I called it. And then I just kind of — I got — I wasn't staying with Mr. Tenzer. Charlie stayed with Mr. Tenzer. I stayed with Bill and Eda Bess Novick<sup>10</sup>. He was

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<sup>10</sup> Rabbi William Novick, executive director of Rescue Children, Inc. *An Inventory to the Rescue Children, Inc. Collection 1946-1985*, 15.

also one of the founders of Rescue Children and she had at that time a little boy, David, and I think she was pregnant, and so I stayed with them and they enrolled me in the local yeshiva and I just wanted to know when I was going back to France, and it seems that Mr. Tenzer arranged it so I would never go back to France and I would just be staying here someplace and there was a family who was interested in possibly adopting me — and they'll remain nameless — so we had a trial, so they invited me for a weekend. They had a daughter and a son and they wanted a playmate for their daughter I guess. So, I came, and I was very shy. I was very quiet and I didn't know how to play games. I never played, and they wanted me to play dolls and Monopoly. I didn't know how to play anything, so I failed, and so after my visit with them, they decided that I was not the right child, but that they would take Charlie instead, because Charlie was very outgoing and he was funny and he had an impish smile and he had the dimples. He was cute and he blabbed and he'd talk and I only wanted to hide in the corner and disappear. So they didn't — I was a reject, so I came back to Mr. Tenzer, but then I lucked out, because then — I don't know quite how — Mr. and Mrs. Meyer Slotkin were contacted, and they actually had said they would be willing to adopt a child and they wanted a boy actually. They wanted Charlie. Actually, that was the arrangement. This other family was going to get me and they were going to get Charlie, but when Mr. Tenzer explained to them what happened, they said, "No problem, we'll take her."

02:49:08

They just took me sight unseen. I wasn't rejected. And in the meantime, Eda Bess Novick, when I staying with them, I had told her that I had a brother, so I think what happened is Rescue Children started making inquiries themselves about — I remembered his name was René Guttman. I don't remember how I remembered that, but I did, and to make a very absolutely phenomenal story a little shorter, when Doctor Kalina had to flee to Israel was about the same time that *Life* magazine did a spread on me, and he picked up this *Life* magazine in Israel and he opened the page and he saw Irene Guttman, and he said, "that must be René's sister," and that's really how —.

Q: How did they find you?

I: Well, Doctor Kalina knew where he was. So, Doctor Kalina told Rescue Children.

R: Yes, I was with his sister.

I: And that's when I told Mr. and Mrs. Slotkin — they were thrilled, they said "great." Now they're really happy, because they really wanted a boy for so long. See, they just wanted you, René. But they really spared no expense and it was a trek to get him. I mean a lot of red tape. A lot of government officials had to be convinced the justice of this. Money changed hands often and it took two years.

R: It took a long time.

Q: So, how did each of you find out that you were in a particular place?

I: We started writing once we — Doctor Kalina notified us where René was, and I had an address for him. I wrote him. In fact, I still have the letter. My mother made a copy of it at that time for me. She took a photograph of it. Some silly letter: “I go skating. I'm a big girl now.”

R: When I think about it today, these people for two years searched and, believe me, it cost them, they told me that when I got here finally in 1950, that I was actually worth my weight in gold, of course, gold wasn't as dear as it is today, but still I believe them, because for two years they searched. They sent a man, a private person just to go out there —.

I: Because René was behind the iron curtain now and it took some doing because he had to go — Switzerland, he had to go to school there. He had a good time. He skied, he learned how to do all nice things.

R: I really lucked out on this. I was in Paris, in the Grand Hotel. They would — I would go to see movies, English movies because in preparation getting the language.

02:52:29

I: Not bad.

R: It was very good.

I: I was struggling with school and stuff.

R: I saw Elizabeth Taylor in the original Black Beauty. I mean, I remember her blue eyes and dark skin. I thought she was magnificent. She was very young then – it was a real girl. Some of the cowboys, Tom Mix.

I: Lone Ranger.

R: That's much later — this is in Europe. The Abbot and Costello movies, these was what was being shown then, and I was made to go and see these, so I would catch on to the English.

I: Tough life he had.

R: Then they sent me to school in Switzerland where I learned Hebrew and to ski. It wasn't the purpose. The purpose was — They couldn't somehow get through the red tape to get me over.

Q: Were the Mann family upset in some way?

I: They were in some ways — I think Mrs. Mann really liked me. I felt that. I never knew what it's like to love a mother or a father, not even the Slotkins, even though they're angels, because I realize now what they had done. It's only when you grow a lot older that you realize that here was this family, the Slotkins, and they took an unknown 12 year old boy, I mean, think

about it, with certainly not a great background. Certainly questionable, a little bit, to just bring him and adopt him. It was like an unbelievable thing to do, but Irene paved the way.

I: I paved the way. They loved me – they figured you had to be right.

Q: Did you write to each other in Czech, German?

R: I wrote in Czech and I think it was translated.

I: Then, he started writing simple English.

Q: Tell us about the day you met.

R: It was March 29, 1950. I landed at Idlewild Airport with Mr. Enright<sup>11</sup>. It was a misty night. Did we...? It was my mother that came to pick us up, my father wasn't out there. I call them mother and father, because they're the only ones that I knew. He was out of town somewhere, but we came in, we came to the house. I think it was so late at night that we didn't see. I don't remember seeing you that night. I think we just went to sleep. They gave us their bedroom, the master bedroom of the house, Mr. Enright and myself had that, and I don't know where the rest of them were. But I remember seeing you first in the morning on that path in the front of the house. That's my first recollection of seeing you, meeting you.

02:55:32

I: Yes, I remember it was the front.

R: In the front of the house. And to me it was like when I saw her in Auschwitz, the look, didn't say a word.

I: Not a word. We didn't say anything, we just —

R: But okay, now it's all right.

I: People are always surprised. They expect that fire works went off, but it was not like that at all. It was just...

R: Very long trip.

I: But we never spoke about anything that happened. We just became very American — like that.

R: I was even in the American Army, would you believe. The National Guard, Fort Dix — that's where I had my basic training. People told me that I was really nuts, but —

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<sup>11</sup> Maurice Enright, member of the executive committee of Rescue Children, Inc. *An Inventory to the Rescue Children, Inc. Collection 1946-1985*, 15.

I: When I went to school here, I went to yeshiva and I also even here I was ashamed of what had happened to me, because they never taught anything about the Holocaust and I had the number and I always wanted to hide it, so my mom did get makeup and every— anytime in the summer or spring when I was wearing short sleeves, we would doctor it up in the morning, take an extra ten minutes of my life in the morning to do, because I didn't want anybody to know that I had been in this, because I felt that it was something to be ashamed of. And I remember once a teacher asking me — and this was already I was in high school — and he asked me this question, he said to me, “If everybody in this country were to vote that we should kill all the Jews would that still be a democracy?” He's asking me, me of all the children in that school, so I guess what I'm trying to say is there was very little sensitivity and, even among teachers or my classmates, people just didn't know what to do with it. I was the only child survivor that they had ever seen that was in that school and, of course until René came, and they just — I remember history and nothing. Never talked about this. So, I was ashamed to talk about it too, plus that our parents said, “forget about it, this is a new life, be American,” and I already had learned to fit in, so I knew how to do that. I became very American, right?

R: So did I. It was time to be drafted or join, I chose to join, but they told me, “You'll get off, just tell them what you are. You can't be near guns, near war. You've had it. I didn't feel that, I really had the fear.” So I said, “No, I'll have to go through it,” and I did. Of course, I took lot of abuse, again in the army, because of the number. Total ignorance. They people didn't know and this I'm talking about 1960, about 1960. Not so far away from the war and you'd think that people would know, but totally insensitive.

02:59:08

**End of Tape 2**

### Tape 3

03:01:00

Q: Irene, if we can just go back for a moment, when you were with Mrs. Mucha, she did something very bizarre with you. Can you describe it?

I: Yes. Every once in a while she would take me, I didn't really realize where at the time, but we would sift through ashes looking for gold teeth, and I realized that the surroundings were kind of familiar when I got there. I guess she was taking me back to Auschwitz-Birkenau and we were looking for gold teeth. And by this time, I understood that a lot of people had died here and had been set ablaze here. And it was a very difficult thing for me to do but – and I had — she insisted that I do this. I had to come up with some gold teeth.

Q: So, she didn't sift through it?

I: She also sifted. We both did.

Q: And if you didn't come up with gold teeth?

I: I had to come up with gold teeth.

Q: And this was more than once?

I: Yes.

Q: You were talking, René, about being in the National Guard?

R: Yeah. I joined the National Guard in the early 60s, maybe even '59 it was. I don't remember exactly. I was an observant Jew and I saw nothing wrong with it. I saw nothing wrong with having my arm bared, which was many times. There I remember the showers very clearly. The army showers. I had my head shaved, it was really funny, now that I think about it. I was surprised that it was only like a decade or so after the war, the World War II and the ignorance of the people when they saw my arm. They were like, "It's your phone number, it's your social security number? Is it your..." they really had no idea. And then, coupled with my wearing a hat or a yarmulke in the mess hall, and usually carrying my own food in or asking for certain food to be prepared. I was surprised at the negative feelings that I got. Well, maybe it's the wrong word, surprised. That's the way it's been all my life all over, but I thought, "In the army — the American Army, we're sharing something." I was such a good soldier. A marksman, my company commander was very proud of me. I was his only Jew, but I was the best, so, but it was surprising, that so shortly after the war, there was still ignorance and these negative feelings about Jews.

03:04:38

Q: When they asked you, “Is this your telephone number?” I mean, clearly you said “no,” but did you say —?

R: I told them what it was. I said — I explored it with them — “You really don't know what this is?” and they didn't. Then, I told them, and they still weren't quite sure what to make of that. “Was it a Jewish symbol? Did it make you a Jew?” I said, “No, this is man's symbol of inhumanity to another man. Tattooing instead of giving me a name, giving me a number.” You know, I tried to explain it. Some got it, some didn't.

Q: Tell me something. At this point, in the 60s, what did you know about where you were at that time in the 40s? Did you know it was Auschwitz?

R: Yeah, but that's as much as I knew and that's as much as I care to know, and that's as much as I discussed with Irene. We never talked about it. We knew where we came from and that was enough.

Q: So, you went into the National Guard after high school?

R: Pretty much, yeah. It was college really.

Q: Was this like ROTC?

R: No, it was not a continuous — I did go into ROTC, but I cut out of their program and that would have led me into a two year stint and I wasn't ready for it. I went on to college, after I was married.

Q: Did you go to school, Irene?

I: Yes.

Q: You studied biochemistry, you said?

I: Right, right. I am a biochemist. I never spoke about the Holocaust, because I — as I said — I had this feeling that nobody ever really wanted to hear about it. Also, our parents kind of told us, you know, “it's best,” and what was everybody's feeling, “You were young, forget about it. You've got a new life, and just, you know, put the past out of your minds.” In a way, I did that. I listened. I said, “Okay, great. I'm American. I'll put it out of my mind.” But, in a way, I was suffering twice. I had already suffered, and now I was suffering, because I couldn't even talk about it. It made me feel like maybe there was something to really be ashamed about, because nobody wanted to know about it. And as I went through high school, I remember the Holocaust was not even mentioned. We learned the world history. We learned about World War II, but — and this was a yeshiva! So, it was pretty frightening to me, I — and then when I got to college, it was pretty much the same thing. I found that my friends knew very little about the Holocaust. Nobody spoke about it. There weren't any programs yet, and I really — it just reconfirmed for me that it was something that I need to be ashamed of and I don't want anybody to know that I am a survivor. But then, when I got a little braver, and they started having some



Holocaust reunions, I kind of would venture forth and say, "I am a survivors." From the survivors I got, "You can't be, you're too young. Couldn't be. Children didn't survive. They said where were you?" I said "Auschwitz-Birkenau. Couldn't be. Children didn't survive." I said, "But I and my brother did. We did." "No, you have it mixed up." So, another negative. So, I stopped, I kind of stopped talking about it. I didn't say anything. I think my kids knew, my husband knew that I was a survivor, but I think the floodgates broke loose in 1985 and friends who had known me for years, who hadn't had a clue that I was a survivor, were shocked.

03:08:59

Q: They didn't see your tattoo?

I: Right, because I always hid it. I hid it. I wore long sleeves. I wore long sleeves, I wore Band-Aids. René never did. René always showed it clearly, and after a while, I also stopped covering it up, but I remember in particular when I gave birth to my daughter Lori, a nurse came into my room and she saw my number and she ran out terrified. She thought I was a prisoner, an escaped prisoner, 1965.

Q: Did you folks read *Diary of Anne Frank*, when it came out?

I: Yes, I did.

R: I didn't.

Q: That's in the 50s, right?

I: Yes.

Q: Did that provoke something in you?

I: Yes. I was very moved and touched by it, but I couldn't quite — I'm searching for the right word. I didn't connect to it. Her story was so very different. And in some ways, I thought it was better, you know. At least she had her family and so they were in hiding and however horrible that was, at least they had each other for a long time. So...

Q: Do you know that she went to Auschwitz from that book?

I: No.

R: I found it yesterday in the Museum's archives, in the Auschwitz Chronicles.

I: I found out sooner than that, but I didn't from that book realize that she had been.

R: Can I backtrack just once? It just came to mind that this loneliness that we talked about. When twins were in Auschwitz and they had their own sex partner with them, there — they had somebody with them. We were separate because of our sex difference, so this made it —

I: It added to the isolation.

R: Do you remember seeing girl twins together?

I: Oh, sure. I was jealous. I was jealous of them because I felt they had somebody and I had nobody. That's why I was always hiding and—

03:11:35

Q: So, they never kept the boys and the girls together, the twins?

I: I don't think so. I think maybe younger ones possibly, but—

R: I don't think there were any. I don't know.

Q: Did you talk with your kids?

I: No. I did make an attempt. At one time, I was actually at my mom's house and Lori was asking me about my number and I was trying to tell her that it was something horrible that happened and that I'm adopted and my mother got very upset. She said, "You don't have to tell her these things."

R: The Slotkins, in all their good qualities and beautiful intentions, they slipped up over here a little bit. They were a little over protective, I think. They really tried to hide the truth, in a way of protecting us, really. I don't think they had anything else in mind.

I: But it backfired, because the more they said don't talk about it, the more it was still always there, because it's always with me and not being able to express it or tell or share any of it was really hard.

Q: Let me go back for a moment. When you saw each other for the first time, when you were finally together, even though you didn't talk, did that stimulate nightmares or remembrances or bad dreams that you woke up from? I mean do you have any recollection whether there was something that happened other than safety when you found each other?

I: For me, I had some of the remembrances we spoke about when we were children. And so, when I saw him, "Now I have finally have somebody I can check some of this stuff out with." I think we did check some of that pre stuff out that we never spoke about after Theresienstadt. It was only what happened before. That's how we spoke about the doll and about the bee sting and a couple of things like that. So, that was nice to confirm.

Q: So, it didn't bring out —?

I: No.

03:14:02

Q: Now, did you become a teacher when you studied biochemistry?

I: No, I went into research, but I did teach for a while, too.

Q: So what happens in the 80s?

I: Well, in 1985, it was probably in December we got a call from Eva Kor<sup>12</sup> who was the founder and remains the president of an organization called CANDLES, which stands for Children of Auschwitz Nazi Deadly Lab Experiment Survivors, it's a mouthful, God! CANDLES. And she told us that they're going to have a reunion, a first time reunion of all surviving twins in Israel, and that we were going to bring Joseph Mengele in absentia to a tribunal and Gideon Hausner<sup>13</sup> was going to chair it and are you going to come? We were just—as I said before, I said, “You mean we're not the only children to survive Auschwitz?” But it was a drawing card, I think, for René and myself. For me, I had a tremendous need to find somebody who knew me. I wanted to be affirmed in some way. “Oh please, let me— somebody knows me, so they can tell me what exactly happened. And are my memories, they're so bizarre, can they be real?” And so, we decided we'd do it. And, you know, it's in retrospect now, because we did that and we started talking to each other and heard some of the other twins and some of their testimonies and it was like, “Ah-ha, that's what happened to me!” You know, we realized that our memories were true, as bizarre as they might be, they really happened, and subsequently, we were able to research out a lot of our past, because we started looking into history books and original documentation from Auschwitz and Givat Chaim<sup>14</sup> in Israel, we started piecing together dates and occurrences. We were also very fortunate to have a lot of photographs that were saved by our aunt for us and letters and documentations, birth certificates and such. So, it's wonderful.

R: It's like finding roots. Roots is very important in American history.

Q: Were you as surprised as Irene that there were other children? Or did you know there were?

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<sup>12</sup> Eva Kor (1935- ); Auschwitz survivor and author of *Echoes from Auschwitz: Dr. Mengele's Twins, the story of Eva and Miriam Mozes*. Eva Kor with Mary Wright, *Echoes from Auschwitz: Dr. Mengele's Twins, the story of Eva and Miriam Mozes* (Haute Terre, Ind.: Candles, Inc., 1995).

<sup>13</sup> Gideon Hausner (1915- ); Israeli lawyer and statesman who served as chief prosecutor in the Eichmann Trial.

<sup>14</sup> Kibbutz in central Israel, founded by Austrian and Czech Jews and named for Chaim Arlosoroff.

R: That didn't play such an important part because I didn't need — I didn't feel like I had to be okay by anybody. I was okay. I was surprised though when I saw the numbers. And there must have been about 100.

I: Right, about 120.

03:17:24

R: One hundred and twenty from all over the world, and some of the stories we've heard were more bizarre than even ours, believe me. Some of the stories — because I think older people — most of the people are older — one hundred percent of them were older than us, and they were more caught up in this thing emotionally. That's my own private theory, that when you're older, your emotions are hurt much more. You have more understanding of what's really going on, so you were hurt more. And the stories that they told with the emotions behind them were really, really — but I don't know, Irene, you never find anybody who recognized you?

I: No, I was the one who was looking for somebody to recognize me. But again—

R: I was recognized by people. I didn't recognize them, but they recognized me, so I must have made an impression on somebody, which was okay with me.

Q: What did that do? I mean, it's clear what it did for you probably together and for yourself, but when you came back to the United States in terms of your friends, in terms of your parents?

I: Well, our dad was already dead, and my mom, we started — I started giving talks on Yom Ha-Shoah<sup>15</sup>. It's one of the things I still do. And we were in the news media a lot at that time, and I think my mom was kind of proud, but she didn't want to hear it. She's never come to hear me talk. She never came. She's dead now, but she never came, and she never wanted to hear about it. I could not talk to her about it at all, absolutely not.

Q: Did that hurt you?

I: It's hard, yes.

R: Yeah, it's hard, because here is somebody who certainly loves you and wants to do absolutely the best, and yet somehow doesn't have enough strength or wisdom to be sensitive to understand that this other person has to express or wants to — I mean, we really didn't want to go and spill our guts out, just a little bit. I think maybe part of it was that she really wanted to play the mother role. She was the only mother. She was afraid of maybe losing that. I'm just talking now. We don't know, we really don't know. But her motivation was pure, I know that, absolutely pure.

03:20:21

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<sup>15</sup> Holocaust Remembrance Day

Q: Did it shock your friends?

I: I had some friends who were totally taken aback, they said, "But you're so American. You don't talk like a European. You don't look like, you know." And — but the truth of it is, that even though I'm so "American," because I knew how to fit in, the truth is that everything I did and everything I excelled at, whether it was in school or being, I mean, I made my parents — right, I was the salutatorian of the class, the editor of the newspaper, the yearbook, the — you name it, I did it — but always there was that feeling like I was apart. I never — never felt a part of anything. There was always a wall someplace. I said, "You guys don't know what I know." And I remember when I first even started school here. I remember the kids would talk out of turn in class or they didn't bring in the homework and I said, "My God, how can you do that?" I said, "How can you do that?"

Q: You were a good girl?

R: Just generally, I think the European school system is so different. I remember, I used to, other than the unpleasant things, I used to have to bring my own stick to school, in case I misbehaved and get hit on my hands. So, there was this big theory to get a very thin stick, then it will really sting, or get a fat stick, and it will really hurt. This was a big problem.

Q: Were you in classes together through high school?

R: Yes, through high school.

I: In our English classes we were together, but in Hebrew we were separated.

Q: Was that fun to be in school together?

I: No.

R: No.

I: No, it wasn't.

Q: Why?

R: The class was really too small. I think there were only 11 of us, because this was the beginning of a school there, we were always the eldest — we were senior class in yeshiva, right. Even if we were juniors or sophomores or freshmen, we were always the oldest. There were — nobody older than us, so it was too close.

I: It was too close. We weren't the same kind of student.

R: She was a student, I was a playboy.

I: And, you know, very often, he'd be compared to me and I didn't like that, because I really wanted to be like him. I thought it was nifty.

R: And Father thought I should be just like you, a student.

I: So there you go.

03:23:20

Q: What did you end up doing — since we know what Irene ended up doing?

R: I ended up getting married early and out of the house, making a mistake doing that, I think, but as God's ways are so strange, everything I've done in my life has led up to what we're on now. And I can see the whole picture now and it's not so bad. I paid my dues, but I have the most wonderful wife in the world, the wonderful wife, the best, and I have the best kids and the best grandchildren, so I'm happy.

Q: What did you do for a living?

I: I worked in the packaging field all my life. Packaging.

Q: Do the two of you live near each other?

I: Relatively, I live on Long Island, he lives in Manhattan. And I also have the best family, René. So, you know, I have the best kids too. I don't have any grandkids yet, but I definitely have the best great-grand whatever they are to me.

Q: Right, René was just made a grandfather twice?

R: Last week, right.

I: I also do calligraphy and write poetry.

R: She's very talented.

I: I don't know if I'm talented, but...

R: What this '85 thing also did for us, it made the two of us talk. Not during any session at home, we would not talk about it. Like in between sessions in the hotel room, we would talk about it, and that's the only time we talk about it. We'll go home now and we're not going to talk about this, but we talked about it a little bit this morning or last night on the way to the airport, and that's it. It's just something that is not really, I guess — it's not pleasant. It's unnerving. It takes a lot out of, out of you, but we've done it now since '85. We've talked because we feel it's really necessary, and the further we go away from it, the more necessary, I think, it becomes because we see a lot of funny things going on out there, in terms of did it really happen? Did it

not happen? What really happened? We'll change a little bit of this and a little bit of that and that's very, very harmful and dangerous.

03:26:14

Q: Is there anything more you'd like to say?

I: I'm going to say that this has been painful for me to do, even though René says we've been doing it now since '85. I, I'm always disturbed for days on end after I've done it, but I agree with René that it's something that we need to do for our children, so that they can pass on the story, because it must never be forgotten, and I guess that's why I do it.

R: I have to say again that what's happening today, we are meeting up with people that are using the story for their own purpose and, obviously, if they're using a story that's not true, they're changing it. That is we can't stand by, as hurtful as it is to question a survivor, because I know when somebody asks me a question, it's got to be done. It's got to be done to pollute the history of something like this, it'll lose any potential for learning something from it.

I: Well, the historical integrity of the Holocaust must really be upheld and it's got to be done with the truth.

R: And I think more people when they put somebody in the front or recognize by whatever slight means, survivor, I think at this point have to question and document that person.

Q: Well, I thank you very much. You showed your tattoo, would you be willing to photograph your tattoo? What's the number?

I: 70917.

R: That's an old looking tattoo.

I: It's 50 years old, baby.

Q: Yours is much smaller?

R: No, not really.

Q: Yours is 169061.

03:29:36

I: We've been trying to find out what my mom's number might have been. We didn't find out yet.

R: We suspect it was probably close to that number, but we don't know.

I: Okay, the photo on the left is my mom with René and myself. René is on the right and I am on the left, and I think it was shortly after we were born. It's probably 1938. The photo on the right is again René and myself with my dad, and it's about the same time. René is on the left and I'm on the right with my dad, because René has the droopy eyes. It's 1939 and we're wearing our nifty winter jackets. René is on the right and I'm on the left. It's 1941 and we're practically all grown up and it's winter and we're wearing our harnesses with bells. It's the summer of '41, it's our last picture with our father and we're in the park. This is a professional photograph taken in Theresienstadt with our mom and it's the last picture we ever took with her.

R: Just want to add that it's the only time I ever remember touching her, feeling what it really felt like, so this picture is very, very special.

Q: This was in 1942.

I: It's April 1950 and this is where René and I saw each other for the first time since the war. It's our home in America and the front walk is where we met.

03:32:39

### **Conclusion of Interview**