

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Gertrude Flor
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PREFACE

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GERTRUDE FLOR

May 29, 1996

Question: I want you to begin by telling me your name, your date of birth and where you were born.

Answer: My name is Gertrude Flor. My maiden name, Gertrude DeGranierer(ph). I was born in Saraguda(ph) Romania in 1921, September 28th.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about your childhood and your family life before the war?

A: My mother came from Prague, Czechoslovakia and her parents lived in Prague. My father came from Czernowitz, which was about 10 miles from where we lived and his parents lived there. I went very frequently with my mother to visit my mother's parents and we spent every summer in one of the nice spas in Czechoslovakia, like Francensbat(ph), Cardelsbat(ph), Marinebat(ph). And so I was very close to my mother's...

Q: What do you remember about your childhood, what distinct memories do you have?

A: My most distinct memories are that I was much closer to my father than to my mother. He was a very well-educated man who was very interested in education and since I was an only child, he gave me a lot of attention in this area. He had returned from the first World War with a shrapnel in his hip which was not properly removed, so he was not well, he didn't walk easily and was very sedentary and his greatest joy was to teach me. Geography, history, languages. This is how he instilled in me a great love for education.

Q: Did you come from a religious home?

A: No. I have no recollection, others that, maybe once a year, it's a high holy days, my parents went to the synagogue. But other than that, no.

Q: Did you identify as a Jewish person or Jewish girl?

A: Not at all. It was, I don't know how to explain it, but it was just not very important. Although I do remember that my parents contributed to, to Zionism. We had in our house a certain, I don't know how you call it, piggy bank, where we always put money in and this was with, in the shape of, I don't know if it was apart, but it was white and blue. And we always put money in there and I

have no idea where that money went but it was explained to me as a child that this is for, for Jewish people who needed it. That's all I know.

Q: I guess I assume that your friendships were very mixed?

A: Very mixed, our neighbors left and right were not Jews, but there were also quite a few Jews among them. It was, until 1937, I was not at all aware. I shouldn't say that because I do remember now that on Memorial Day, which is a holiday for everywhere in the world and schoolchildren went to the cemetery but the Jewish schoolchildren were separated from the others and went to the Jewish cemetery. That is when I became aware that, that there was a difference between the other children and me. That's all I remember.

Q: But nothing that made you feel terribly different? Were you, were you ever aware of anti-Semitism, early in...

A: Yes, yes, at that time I became aware of anti-Semitism and particularly in 1937, there were times where in our town, soldiers, Romanian soldiers and particularly Romanian officers, who probably often got drunk, were roaming the streets with guns, with the revolvers in their hands and yelling loud words against Jews. Yes, I was, that was when I began to be very much afraid.

Q: Did, did that attitude affect the, your Christian friends? I mean, did they pick up the spirit of that?

A: No, not particularly, as a matter of fact, I remember one incident where this one Romanian officer was running through the streets and yelling, "I'm going to kill all the Jews." A couple of friends of my father's, my stepfather, this was in 1937,'38, a couple of friends who were not Jews, tried to approach this officer and to talk reason to him and they were, I had completely the feeling that they were on our side, that they were not against us and they were two of the leading people in town. So I didn't have a complete feeling of being betrayed by every Christian, you know. But, I can't describe it too well, this is how it began.

Q: And then at what point did it get worse?

A: Well we heard then the speeches that Hitler gave on the radio and we kept thinking, well it's not going to last too long, because sane people would not accept this and all, and anyway it's not here,

it's somewhere in Germany and then it was in Austria and then it was in Czechoslovakia, but and then it was in Poland, and Poland was pretty close to where we lived, but we still couldn't believe it, we still didn't think that it would find us. I can't, when I think of this now, I just can't understand how my parents did not accept my uncle's offer to leave. They, they simply didn't think that anything could happen to them. And we saw a number of Jews from Poland coming to our town and we made room where we lived for them to sleep and we saw how it happened, but we still didn't believe it. And then in 1940, when Hitler and Stalin made this pact, we had not very much of a choice. We thought, since we knew what happened under Hitler to people, that we would in fact be better off to stay where we are and very many people were glad that the Soviets came. Of course, we didn't know what would happen. It was hard.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about life under the Soviets? I know that you've told me before that your home was taken away from you.

A: Yeah.

Q: What else?

A: The interesting part was that their propaganda was so efficient, they, there were concerts, the people danced in the streets. There were speeches that there is no better quality of life than in the Soviet Union. The children got their education for free. The older people got their medical help for free. People were taken care of from their birth to their day they died. They never had to worry. And all of this wonderful thing happened because the Communist government knew how to take care of it's people. And in the meantime, during the night, people disappeared. And this, this was very, very difficult, because it hit us almost immediately and then one of the Soviets, who moved into our house, told me, first of all he said to me, "You know that there is no God." And you know this, for me, even though I was not brought up in a strict religious sense, it was awful thing for me to hear. And then when my father was taken away, this man, whose name I do not know, I don't think I even knew it then, this man said to me, "Look, you are a young person, you have the best chance for a wonderful life in our country, but you have to put an ad in the paper that you want to have nothing to do with your father, who is an enemy of the people." And of course I didn't do it.

This is how life was under the Soviets. We saw a big poster, said, was seen in many places. Stalin was holding on his lap a child and giving the child a wristwatch, because that child had informed the teacher that the parents at home had spoken against the government. And what the parents had said was, "No eggs today for breakfast." And the father had said, "Again no eggs?" And this was regarded as counter-revolutionary talk. The parents were arrested and the child got a watch. The parents disappeared. That was how life was.

Q: Did, were Jewish businesses taken away, were people allowed to go to school, did sort of every day life change?

A: People went to school and Jewish businesses were taken away, all businesses were taken away but the difference was that the Christians who had businesses could, under the pack that Hitler and Stalin had, could say that they are false Germans, which means that their ancestors were of German background and therefore they were not arrested. They had the right to be resettled into Germany and while the Soviets took away their houses in Sattagura(ph) or in one of those towns, when they were resettled, they got an, an equivalent house or apartment in Germany. And I even know about one man who was taken the same night as my father, who was a Christian and who was a merchant, a businessman. He, he dealt with, he sold ham and, and kielbasa and had pigs and made them, made, made these foods at home and then sold them. Well he was regarded a Capitalist. He was taken the same night, but he said that he was a false Deutschner(ph), he was not, he was actually a half Polish, half-Ukrainian Christian. Well he was taken out of the prison and sent to Germany. And he escaped, my father didn't.

Q: Just for the clarification here, we're talking about your stepfather?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Was there fear on the streets, was it better or worse than the Romanians who were hunting down people?

A: Yes and no. A very difficult thing to answer. The people who were not arrested and who were friendly towards the Soviet Union, didn't feel that they had anything to fear. They thought that it would be just the very rich people who, who should be treated that way, because they, they really

shouldn't be so rich. But very slowly, it became clear to everybody that you couldn't talk. Even though they said you had freedom to say anything, you knew that you couldn't, you couldn't even think against them.

Q: Now you were about 19 years old, what were you doing at the time?

A: I had just finished the conservatory. It was, I believe it was June 12, 1940.

Q: The conservatory where?

A: In Czernowitz. Which was the larger town. It's some 10 or 15 miles away. And two weeks later, June 28, is when the Soviets occupied our town.

Q: And you were back home in Sattagura(ph)?

A: Yes, yeah.

Q: Tell me just a little bit about Czernowitz because it seems like you spent quite a bit of time there.

A: Czernowitz was a wonderful town. It was, I believe there were about 100,000 people and a great majority of them were Jews. Very well educated, very motivated towards education and very proud to, to read a great deal and to be considered intellectuals. Czernowitz was considered the little Vienna, whereas Bucharest, as the capital of Romania, was considered little Paris. In Bucharest, the second language was French, first was Romanian. In Czernowitz, the first language was German, because it had belonged to Austria, to the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, where most educated people spoke German.

Q: It was a good life there, huh?

A: Yes, I think it was. The parents and grandparents kept talking about the good old time of Kaiser Francioseph(ph). They loved that Kaiser. And they were very assimilated. They, in fact, didn't believe that anything could happen to them because they, in the first World War they served as Austrians, they got medals and awards and they were proud of that, they, they just couldn't believe that this could happen. They also couldn't believe that a civilized nation like Germany could do any harm to people. It was strange.

Q: Do you remember the German occupation?

A: This happened one year after the Soviets had occupied us. The Soviets had done a very thorough job to deport a great many people, particularly thinking people, particularly. The deportation took place on June 12, 13 and 14 I believe, 1941. This...

Q: This was an involuntary deportation?

A: Yes. And it's interesting that we had, when we came to the United States many, many years later, somewhere, we had found in a, an old issue of the New York Times, that a very small article that said that people of the Buchavina(ph) had asked Comrade Stalin, had requested to be resettled into the interior of Soviet Russia, for fear of the Nazis. And that Comrade Stalin had agreed to it. And this was the deportations that happened in the middle of the night against, nobody was asked, nobody asked to be resettled.

Q: So when the Germans came in, what was happening? Were you, you were in Sattagura(ph)?

A: No. When the Germans came in I was already married to Sam and I was in his apartment.

Q: Okay then let's, let me backtrack a bit here. You have explained as well as Sam has explained how you got married.

A: Yes, yeah.

Q: Didn't really know each other.

A: Yeah.

Q: You knew of him?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Did he know you?

A: I don't think so, but I don't know, I don't know.

Q: Because you had studied at the conservatory?

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: It's, do you have any remembrance of what was going through your mind? You went there to find work, you went to the conservatory to find work and you immediately got married.

A: Yes. Yes, I do have memory of that. My, first of all, I was terribly afraid because I had left my home, my mother had said run. And she had given me a brown bag with some black bread and I

believe it was lard. And also she had told me to put on two dresses, one on top of the other because I could not carry anything. I have to run and nobody should know that I'm running. So I put on a summer dress and over it a winter dress and made my way to Czernowitz.

Q: Why were you running there?

A: Because the, this was the Soviets. Because the, a neighbor had said, who was friendly with a Soviet soldier, that he had told her that this night they are going to come for the whole family, after they had taken my father away. And so my mother had said, run and go to Czernowitz and stay with this family, trying to remember their name, Isinger(ph), Isinger(ph). Well, it wasn't easy. First of all the fear. When you are under curfew, there were everywhere soldiers and when they saw somebody moving they stopped him and wanted to know where are you going. Well, I knew the area very well, I managed somehow to make it to the next town. All night it took me. And when I came there, the Isingers(ph) told me they could not put me up because there was a raid in this apartment house and a number of people, whole families, were taken away. At that time they didn't know where to. We know now it was to Siberia. And so I had nowhere to go but to the Philharmonic, which also housed the Conservatory of Music, which also housed a movie theater, which was called Keynote Central. When I came there, I was dead tired, because I'd walked all night and I knew the building very well. I went up into this projection room, from the movie, knowing that nobody would be there at that time and I feel asleep on the floor. And I thought when I wake up in the morning, the only thing I could do, was to try to see if I could find a job in the conservatory, because I had just graduated, you know. So when I woke up it was not morning, it was closer to 12 noon. I had slept several hours and when I came to the office of the conservatory, this man was just closing the office. It was 12 and in Europe between 12 and one is lunch hour and I said, "Could I come in for a moment, I'm looking for a job." And he looked at me and he said, "A job? At 12 o'clock noon? This is time for lunch, not for a job." You know, he was very flip and I was not in the mood for, for this type of conversation, so I said, "No, no, I want a job." He said, "What, what job?" I said, "Well, I've, here's my paper, I have graduated from the conservatory and I am a pianist." He said, "Well, now look, how much money do you have?" And I said, "Three

rubles," something like 75 cents. And he said, "That's enough." And I said, "What?" I thought for lunch. "No," he said, "It's enough to get married." And I said, "No, no, please don't joke with me, my mind is not on that." He said, "Well I am not going to open this office door until I come back at one, but if you want to, you can come with me." And I trailed after him and I thought we were going to eat something and we went into some building. See, in the, at that time, every building was different from what we were used to. So we went up one or two flights of stairs. [End of Side 1 of Tape 1]. So we went up there and a young woman, around 17, asked, sitting behind a desk, asked, "Do you want to get married?" And he said, "Yes." And she asked him, "Do you live with this woman?" He said, "No." "Do you live with another woman?" "No." "Do you have children?" "No." "You have children with this woman?" "No." "Do you have children with another woman?" "No." Then she asked me the same questions and to me all of this was an insult, because I never even had a date. And when this procedure was finished, she called over a man who was sweeping the floor, whose name I don't know to this day and he was the witness who signed and we got a piece of paper and we went downstairs and as we went downstairs, naturally we spoke German. He asked me, in the very formal German, _____ "By the way, what is your name?" And this after we got married. And so we went back to the conservatory, he enrolled me as a pianist accompanist and gave me right away work to do in a certain room with a choir, and told me at five o'clock we meet in front of the building and we go home. And no more running around. He never asked about my background, he never asked me what happened and he told me he had a mother and a sister at home, which I didn't believe, but I had no choice, I had nowhere to go. And at five o'clock I went with him and when we came home to his apartment, there was a mother and there was a sister. And now it was up to, it was their turn to be shocked because here was their famous son and brother, who had left in the morning a bachelor and had come back and told them, they asked, "Who is this?" And he answered, "This is another Flor in the family."

Q: Didn't this seem mildly crazy to you?

A: Yes, but I, I was very, very frightened. I had, it felt as though I had lost my equilibrium completely. You know, it was unbelievable how that had worked on me, the fact that they took my

stepfather away and my mother went every day with food to a certain place where many women stood in line, their husbands had been taken the same way. Or maybe their sons, or brothers. And I think there were mostly men that they had taken at that time. And then one day, my mother came, maybe she had already been six weeks, every day and one day there was another guard and he said, "He's not here, he never was here." You know that.

Q: Yeah. Let me ask you something, this is just sort of an interesting point, I mean if the men were taken away first, this, didn't this put the women of these towns in a completely different role and situation now? I mean in terms of their responsibility and...

A: Sure, sure, cause they had to do everything, they had to fend for themselves. But that didn't make them more assertive, they were very courageous, but women were not very assertive to begin with. So it was just a matter of survival.

Q: Did you see a change in your mother after your father was taken away?

A: No, no. And, and even when my mother survived 17 years of Siberia and even after I found her again and she came to us here in the United States, when I tried to discuss with her what happened there, she never wanted to talk about it. And she said to me, whenever I asked to tell me about it, she said, "No. No, no." And then I said, but, one day I got very angry and I said, "They took your husband away and they killed him and you don't even know where he's buried and you don't want to talk about it?" And she answered very quietly, "He was an enemy of the people." And this was the man she loved and believed in. So they had done a very good job on her. I finally got her to tell me that she would, she had promised that main chief there never to talk about this event. He had said to her, "If you ever want to see your children again, you will forget all that you lived here, all that you saw here." And she never wanted to talk about and to this day I do not know. Except here and there a little bit. She told me about this guard who had a child. I think it was probably only one child, one little boy and when he knew that she knew languages, particularly French, he wanted her to speak French to him and he gave her a glass of milk a day. And she, her living quarters were slightly improved, she shared a room with a lady from Czernowitz whose husband was also taken away, but he was taken because he was a leading Zionist and his name was Weiselberger(ph), very

well known. I think he was a lawyer, I'm not sure. So with this Mrs. Weiselberger(ph) she shared a room in Siberia and then when Kruschev came to power and somehow permitted people over 65, if they had relatives in Israel...

Q: You actually told me this.

A: Yes, to, to come out, so Mrs. Weiselberger(ph) came out and brought along a letter from my mother to her brother in South America.

Q: And you were able to?

A: Yes, that's how we...

Q: Some of these areas that we've recorded, I'm going to skip over because in the interest of time and your energy.

A: Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

Q: So, you were married.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did that, I realize many, many years later that it was a good marriage, but in the beginning was that terribly awkward for you or not?

A: I can't say how it was, I was completely dead inside. You know, it was often an irony to me, that when the Germans took us into the concentration camp a year later, the Soviets had done such a job on me that I was not able to be more shocked, more afraid. They had already killed me, inside. It was unbelievable. To me, you know, the word Siberia, as you may know in all of Soviet or Russian literature, usually meant that people never returned from there. So, I don't know what else to tell you.

Q: When you say that the Soviets had already destroyed you, you're talking about by taking away your parents?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Not any personal brutality?

A: No, no. Just by, and you know, it was so strange to think, why do they have to resort to such terror? If life is so complete that each person is taken care of from the day of their birth to the day

of their death, why do they have to, to terrorize people by taking them away? If they want to take away a house, why must they send this person to Siberia? If they want to take away somebody's flour mill or somebody's business, why must this person be destroyed? You know, almost all these people would have been perfectly satisfied to become employees of the, of the government in their former own place of work. But, as I think back, I know that the reason must be that they had to destroy the middle class and that's what they did.

Q: What happened when the Germans came in? You were in Czernowitz at the time?

A: Yes. When the Germans came in, it happened very fast, so fast that the Soviets could barely run as fast as the Germans followed them. Our town was by that time already, they had undergone the, the Soviet terror of a large group of them being deported and nobody knew where to. Only now do we know where to. And, of course the coming of the Germans meant that they will first of all go after the Jew that were still there and so most of the Jews tried desperately to run with the Soviets.

Q: You and Sam, what were you doing?

A: We were, we, we knew that if we stayed, the Germans will kill us, but we also knew that there was no way of running with the Soviets. And, but still, we went down to the bridge and there were guards, but you couldn't get through the bridge to go east, because these guards were there to make sure that first of all, all the Soviet Russians should get over the bridge. So they didn't let us through and we, and we went home and we said if we have to die, we'll die in our own bed. A friend of ours, who is a, an opera singer, his name is Paul Marco(ph), he had come from Bucharest to Czernowitz when the Soviets came in, because in Bucharest, under the Romanians who were allied with the Nazis, he had no future at all. Well, he was able to get over the bridge, together with a group of Russian singers. And his story is unbelievable. He knew, the more he got into the Soviet Union, the more he wanted to get out of there and couldn't, couldn't. Anyway, we went home.

Q: Were there bombings? How did the Germans come in ?

A: We heard bombings, we heard the noises of war, but we stayed in our apartment and one or two days later, I think was that they came in and took all the men out, I think Sam may have told you about this and took them to what the Soviets call the _____, the Palace of Culture and there, I

believe that, I was sure that I'll never see Sam again, but he has told you that, that he managed to get away from there.

Q: Well, you've told me as well.

A: Yes. See I don't think... They used Sam to dig graves for, I don't know how they did it, to count one, two, three and every third person, I don't remember exactly, but somehow he found his way out.

Q: So at what point did you have to leave your house, what happened?

A: You know, I don't know, I don't exactly know when it happened.

Q: Well wait, let me, do we have a sense of whether it was a few weeks later, a couple months later, a few days?

A: It was, I think a few weeks or months later, not immediately.

Q: What happened in these few weeks or these few months, were, would you go about your business, could you go out on the streets?

A: No. We were permitted one hour a day to go out and to get some water from a well, which was about a half a block away from where we lived and we went only women, never a man. We were sort of in hiding, but we really didn't have where to hide, we were in our apartment. I think this was a few weeks or months and then came the...

Q: So the men didn't go out on the street at all?

A: Right.

Q: So basically life stopped and you were...

A: Yes, yes, yes. And then we had to go to the ghetto. We...

Q: One day, there was, there were signs all over, posters, that said all the Jews must go, find a place to live in the ghettos, it's the ghetto was really the collection point for the future deportations to Transnistria(ph). We had a friend who lived in one of those streets, in that ghetto and we went there and stayed in her apartment. This friend is now also here in the United States.

Q: How long did you live in the ghetto, approximately?

A: That's very difficult. Not long. Not, not very long. There was a, trying to remember, there was a mayor of Czernowitz, who was a very decent guy. His name was Tryon(ph) Popovitch(ph). I think he did all he could to help the Jews. I think if he were alive, he would be called a righteous gentile. He did help a, a number of Jews. He had the right of requesting, for, for work, a certain, a few thousand such papers, you know, to, to say this Jew is absolutely necessary for our work and in this way he saved about, I'd say, 20,000 Jews. Only temporarily. And...

Q: I'm curious what your daily life was like in this ghetto, could you go in and out?

A: No, no.

Q: Was there food, was there...

A: You know, I do not recall anything about this. I, I recall less about this even than during, than later on in the camp. We, I have no idea how we were, I know we, we didn't go out. I know we were absolutely paralyzed with fear, because we didn't know from moment to moment what was going to happen to us.

Q: What did you eat?

A: I don't know. As I say, we were in this apartment that belonged to my friend. I imagine that there may have been some food because that was a different proposition than later on in the camp, but I can't explain how we did it and what we did.

Q: Were, were German guards present, were Romanian guards present?

A: Romanian, Romanian guards.

Q: So they were actually doing the work for the Germans?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And what were they like?

A: We were afraid of them.

Q: Why?

A: Because they were the authority and we were afraid of any kind of authority.

Q: Did they abuse people, were they nasty?

A: I don't have a recollection of that. I do know that, that Romanians, I don't know, it, it, see, I don't want to say something that I'm not sure about. The Romanians were often helpful when you could bribe them. They were not as vicious perhaps as, let's say, the, the Lithuanians for instance, or the Ukrainians, they were terrible sometimes. The Romanians you could, once in awhile they could help you. It's very difficult to recall all of this after you've tried so hard to forget it.

Q: Now did you know anything at this point about camps?

A: No.

Q: In Poland or anywhere?

A: No, no. We knew nothing and we knew that one day, some day, we would be deported, but we thought that it would simply be a work camp, where people have to work. After all, there was a war going on, so if everybody had to give their share, probably we had to work, we didn't think of anything else.

Q: Need some water? Now you were probably in the ghetto for about six months or so, is that right?

A: I guess so.

Q: And did you have any, did you know anything about deportations, did you think you would have to leave at some point and go somewhere?

A: Yes. We had heard that there were people in Morgalev(ph), this here and that probably when our turn comes, we will go in the same route, you know. And then one day, they came for us and, and we went. And we were put into cattle cars and I do not recall how long the trip was, several days, several nights and finally we came to this place which was called Carrera(ph) di Piatra(ph).

Q: Do you, did they take the whole ghetto population or did they take certain kinds of people at first?

A: That I don't know, I don't think they could have taken the whole population at once. I imagine they took parts of...

Q: Do you know how they prioritized that?

A: I've no idea.

Q: Who were the, who were the people you went with?

A: I know only that I went with Sam and his mother and his sister and other than that I didn't know, for instance this girlfriend of mine, in whose apartment we lived, I don't recall that she went with us, at that time. I know she did go, but not at that time.

Q: So maybe they came for you...

A: Later, yes.

Q: ...first because you were the intellectuals, or...

A: Yes, probably, probably that's what it was. Because our entire group that was deposited on the stone quarry were the intellectuals.

Q: Do you remember the mood or how you felt on this train?

A: Terrible. Unbelievable, unbelievable. First of all there was so many people that you could not move and of course we didn't know where we were going, we didn't know what expected us, we didn't know what to expect. And of course the people who had to relieve themselves couldn't do it and had to do it and then after several hours when the train stopped and then opened the doors and they permitted and, people to get out and relieve themselves, they all relieved themselves right there, in front of each other. It became suddenly just so humiliating, so terrible, our life was worth nothing. (pause)

Q: All right, so continue.

A: I don't know where.

Q: Well, you were just talking about the experience of being transported to Carrera(ph) di Piatra(ph).

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Were people hysterical?

A: Yeah. Some were hysterical, some were very quiet and depressed and on the Carrera(ph) we saw naked people lying, some were dead, some were not dead, emaciated and the insane people hunching over them and eating them alive. And on the Carrera(ph) there were a few buildings that had no windows, the war had gone, had happened there before this happened and in these few

buildings, we were, I would say, 20 or 30 people in a small room, so that, and we slept on the floor. It was so tight that when one person wanted to turn at night, everybody else had to turn. No trees. There were, it was a stone quarry. Some grass grew between the stones. That's what we used to just try to have something in our mouths and we still had some, a few things that we brought from home, like a, a piece of salami or something and people were very, very frightened and once a day, certain people were permitted to go with a pail of water downstairs, this was, the stone quarry was like a mountain, you know and you, or a hill, you went down and down on the bottom was a stream and on that stream...

End of Tape 1.

Tape 2

Q: So you were at this Carrera(ph) di Piatra(ph)...

A: Yeah.

Q: ...for a short time?

A: Yeah. I would say maybe one, two or three weeks.

Q: And they, you didn't work, you really didn't do anything?

A: No.

Q: How did you get out of there, did you have any thoughts on what would happen next?

A: No, we had no thoughts, but one day they came and made the roll call and at that roll call they set aside a man who was a glazier, a man who was a carpenter, a man who was a, I don't know, builder, a doctor who was a surgeon and they called Professor Samuel Flor and he didn't move, because they separated the people that, these few people, the builders and that were in one corner and all the others were put on this side and we knew this side meant across the book and Sam didn't want to budge and the man said, "Are you Samuel Flor?" And he said, "Yes, but I'm not a professor, I am a dentist." So he put him, he told you this story, he put him in the corner together with the surgeon and with the few people who were supposed to fix up the hospital, ____ was in the vicinity, we didn't know where. And then Sam said, "I do need a person who, who can help as an assistant." And this uniformed man said, "Do you have one?" And he said, "Yes, I know one girl who is a good assistant." And he took me. They didn't know that we were married and this is how we began to walk. We walked from Carrera(ph) di Piatra(ph) probably two or three days until we came to a point, which was LaDijing(ph) and then we walked a little further and we came to Toolchin(ph) and that is where they had to fix up the hospital.

Q: Who went to this hospital, who was the hospital for?

A: The hospital was, I imagine for Romanian soldiers and maybe occasionally for a native who lived there, you know. We were put into a ghetto in Toolchin(ph) and in this ghetto we had to stay and every morning we were taken out to the hospital and in the evening we were brought back by guard. And in the hospital we, we worked to clean it up and to, to make a hospital out of it.

Q: Did you have any sense of freedom at this point?

A: No, never. Because even if we were in the hospital, we were not allowed to leave. We were brought there and we were brought back. No, we never had a sense of freedom.

Q: Were you afraid or did you feel somewhat safe there in Toolchin(ph)?

A: We were always expecting the worst. We never felt this is good, or this is, nothing can happen to us, no, this, this was impossible, to think that way.

Q: Was, was this a large ghetto or organized?

A: Yeah. It was, I think it took place in Toolchin(ph) in a couple of streets where Jews lived before, the Soviet Jews, because they, they, some of them remained there, not all of them ran with the Soviets, some of them were older people, couldn't run. So this was, I would say, as large as, maybe three or four blocks. One street. And houses were demolished from the war. Most of the houses didn't have windows, I mean they had windows, but no glass. And when we came there, we lived a sometimes four, sometimes six to a room. When we were settled, we were, let's see, Sam's mother and sister lived in one room and we found a possibility to move into another room, Sam and I. And for a short while we lived alone and then they brought a man very sick with Typhus and nobody wanted to let, to have him, cause it was very contagious. And we were very young, we didn't care, we didn't have, we were not thinking that something could happen to us in that way, so they put him into our room and he shared the, this was not a bed, it was made of a piece of wood, you know, but it was not directly on the floor, it was a little higher, so we shared this with him, what do you call this? Not a bed.

Q: Platform?

A: Yeah, something like that. Well, the man died after a few days. Sam had a wonderful conversation with him. He, he said to Sam, "Someday when you survive, I want you to play the violin on Yom Kippur for me and to play ____." And you know, Sam did it, last year. He went over here to a synagogue, to a Rabbi Holien(ph), told him the story and the rabbi said okay and he played it and it was beautiful.

Q: I want to do something, just a minute. How organized was this ghetto?

A: Yes, it was organized. It was organized. But I don't know very much about it. I know that there was, there were a couple or three more prominent men who ran it, so to speak, Jewish. But I have no idea what their function was.

Q: Who guarded the ghetto?

A: Well, I think it was Romanians and Germans, because, more Romanians I think, the Romanians had more of an authority there.

Q: Were there Jewish police?

A: I don't recall that.

Q: Was there a system for you to get food or get medical help or anything?

A: I think there was some sort of a system that the Jews among themselves made, to have a soup kitchen, I think there was that. But I do not recall whether there was medical help.

Q: Were there any activities in the ghetto, did people at least privately, worship or sing or anything?

A: Yeah, maybe there was. I don't recall exactly what it was, but I do recall that there was one very talented poet who sort of made little ditties pertaining to the ghetto and put them to music and sang it for us and making fun of our lives, yes there was some.

Q: So there was...

A: Not all the time.

Q: But so there was some, some humor and some way to compensate for...

A: Yes, yes, yes, that was.

Q: Do you remember anything about conversations or whether people had any thoughts about what was happening, whether or not they'd be, get through this or how to get through it?

A: Nobody. I don't recall that anybody talked about this. I know that when I discovered the hole underneath our floor and I knew that the time would come when we have to run because we already could hear the, the shooting, the cannons and you could hear that they're coming closer and these things don't happen overnight, not in one day. And we knew that the Ukrainians, who lived outside the ghetto would not hide any of us. They would simply, even if they wanted to, they would be afraid to do it because they would know that they couldn't get away with it and we also knew that

you couldn't even hide in a tree because they, it was winter, there were no leaves, you couldn't hide. So, so the only way that I had the idea was that we should cut open this floor and hide underneath, which everybody thought was insane.

Q: Did you have contact with the local Ukrainian population?

A: Yes, a little bit, very little. There was one dentist, a Ukrainian who came to the hospital and when Sam needed, for instance to make a crown for somebody, he had to give it to this man, to this dentist, who was a technician, who made it and brought it back to him. This, he seemed like a very decent guy.

Q: Do you think he shared information with Sam?

A: Never, never. He never spoke about anything but the dentistry.

Q: It's, in a way it seems a little far fetched that Sam, all of a sudden one day became a dentist.

A: Yeah.

Q: How did you pull that off?

A: It was unbelievable, but you, but it was a matter of life and death. If, if he didn't say he was a dentist, he would have been killed. He would have been sent across the _____. And the, he didn't, he wasn't so frightened because he had next to him this good friend the doctor, Dr. Rard(ph), who was a very prominent surgeon and he was sure that Dr. Rard(ph) would pull all the teeth for him. And you know what happened to him. Dr. Rard(ph) had to operate on a German captain who was brought in from the front and he died on the operating table and Dr. Rard(ph) was taken out and was shot. And suddenly Sam was without his friend and the only thing we could find was an old book in the Russian, which we had to study, a dentistry book. We found it in the hospital and I read it to Sam and translated it for him. That's how it was.

Q: So every day you'd study a little dentistry and he figured it out?

A: Yes, yes. He was brilliant as a dentist. He pulled two of my teeth, I don't know if I told you that.

Q: _____ you all decided not to stick with the profession.

A: He didn't want to, but they offered him at the University of Minnesota, a scholarship or fellowship, they were so impressed. He gave them a speech about his experiences and they wanted him to study, he didn't want to.

Q: I'm going to wait for this airplane to pass over. Your sister and mother-in-law at this point were with you?

A: Sam's sister.

Q: Right, your sister-in-law.

A: Yeah, yes.

Q: So they were able to come to Toolchin(ph) as well?

A: Yes.

Q: I'm going to jump ahead...

A: Yeah.

Q: To the Czech army experiences. After liberation you joined the Czech army?

A: By the way, the liberation was awful. When, when we finally didn't hear any more shooting and we were downstairs, some 78 people, I don't recall exactly how many, we expected 18 people to be downstairs because those 18 people knew about what we were doing, you know, they were in the same area. But when the Germans really had to retreat, they began to shoot people and so all of a sudden they came in, came in, came in and we were 78 and you know, we were, right above us was our room and we, on the floors there was just straw, you know and then suddenly, we, we heard heavy boots like German boots, you know, you can't mistake that, above us and we were as quiet as possible and we heard them speak German. We knew at that moment that they must have found us, but it wasn't. They happened to have entered this room and they put a cannon in front of this room and they used that room to sleep over and we were underneath. At first we were quite sure that they knew we are downstairs and they are going to just kill us all. But then, the next morning and you, we were so quiet, you could just not imagine how quiet you have to be and the next morning they left. And after they left we were still there, quiet and then we decided we couldn't stand it any more, we could begin to feel smoke coming through and we decided we couldn't do anything but at that

time they had left. And when we came out we were just pale and green and, and there were a few Russian partisans, maybe boys of age 13 or 14 who came and they looked at us and they said, in Russian, _____, "And who are you?" They didn't know who we were. And we asked them, "And who are you?" And they said, "Me Russki(ph) partisini(ph)." Then all we could think of was to get home. But that, that was impossible. That was not possible, we had no way how to get home. Then, one or one trucker came by and had heard that there are some Jews who, maybe Jews have something to give to them, maybe they'll give them a ride. And he said, "If you give me some vodka, I take you to _____." So we, so a group of us got together and whatever we still had, a top or a blouse, or something, we exchanged with some peasants for vodka and we gave it to them and they took us. And they took us maybe two or three kilometers in a forest and dumped us in there and said, "The Germans didn't do a very good job with you, they should have killed you all." And then we had to start walking, that was our liberation.

Q: Did you believe you were really liberated, I mean did...

A: No, we couldn't believe it, because first of all the war went back and forth, it was not just in one direction all the time. The, the Germans had left, the Soviets came back and you could think, okay, that's it. No, then the Germans were lucky or there were not enough Soviet soldiers in that one spot, they came and took back part of that area again. It was awful. We were, we were absolutely torn back and forth, we didn't know from moment to moment when the Germans are going to be back. It was unbelievable.

Q: At what point did you join the Czech army?

A: When we came back to Czernowitz, in the hope of getting back to our apartment, Sam's apartment. I never tried to go home to Sattagura(ph) and at Sam's apartment were some people who said, "You better get away from here before we call the police, because if we call," these were again the Soviets, "if we call them, you're going to land in Siberia." And we had heard from other people that this is, in fact has happened. People who had survived concentration camp and who could think of nothing but to return to their home, returned to their home where some people lived, who maybe paid nothing for that apartment or for that house, but considered it their own and had a powerful

weapon, that all they had to do is to say, "These people are no good, they are enemy of the state." And that's all. So we quickly disappeared from the, from this apartment, didn't pressure them or anything and it so happened that the Czech army passed by Czernowitz at that time.

Q: Want to ask you a question, before you continue. Did you think that maybe you'd be, your mother would return at this point?

A: I didn't even know whether my mother was alive. I didn't know anything.

Q: But had you thought of going back to your hometown in case she was alive and coming home?

A: Never. I never thought of going back to the hometown. I couldn't even think of going back to this small town. In that small town, we had heard, this long back that the Jews that had not gone away with the Russians were killed in the one night before the Germans came to occupy the town, by the native people. They were all herded together on one hill and they were all killed, I don't know how, I don't know whether they were shot or with knives or what, but they were all killed.

Q: So you just had no thought of going back?

A: Never.

Q: When, at this point did you have more information about the other camps and the killing centers, did you learn anything more at this point?

A: We knew that there were, there were camps, we knew about Mogilev, you know Mogilev and some other places in the vicinity, Bareshot(ph), I don't know if these, this means anything. But we didn't, there was no time to dwell upon what happened in those other camps because you were constantly busy trying to survive.

Q: What does that mean?

A: What does it mean? I don't know what it means because really you...

Q: Busy trying to survive.

A: You were not involved with what went on somewhere else, you also didn't know it, there were no newspapers. You depended maybe on the rumors and in fact, you didn't want to know too much, all you wanted to, was from day to day to see whether you could make it. I don't know how else to explain this.

Q: You've told me a little bit about the Czech army before. I'm, I'd love to hear a little bit about some of the places that you liberated with the Czech army.

A: Yeah?

Q: What kind of experience that was.

A: Yes. We were, in the Czech army, I have to say, it was a moment of a wonderful feeling, to not be less than a louse, as we were in the concentration camp where they had power over us and we had nothing. In the Czech army we were constantly facing the enemy, maybe one or two miles away, no more. The Germans were in front of us, the Soviets were behind us or next to us. We were allied soldiers of the Soviets. But, the sense of camaraderie between the people in the Czech army was absolutely magnificent, these were Jews, but not all of them were Jews, there were quite a few non-Jews. These were people who had run away from Hitler into Poland, when Hitler occupied Czechoslovakia. In Poland, they didn't know that the Soviets would occupy that part of Poland and when the Soviets came, the Soviets regarded these people as unreliaables and put them into Siberia. Cause they said they weren't sure who they are. And in Siberia, at a certain moment in time, there was, everyone who was Czech was asked to join the Czech army. The Czech army consisted of all kinds of people, Jews and non-Jews, but mostly Jews. Women, children, old people, sick people, anybody who could walk, joined the army. It began in Boosoulouk(ph), in the, in the very interior of Soviet Russia, where, where the majority were concentrated and there were about 5,000 people who made up this army. These people were so magnificent, most of them very, very well...

[End of Side 1 of Tape 2]

Q: Okay, you were talking about the Czech army?

A: Yeah and this man, who had run away from Prague, his name was Ed Haas, H-a-a-s. When he came, when the Soviets got hold of him and he said he was born in Prague, Czechoslovakia and they found him in Poland. He said, they asked him, like they ask everybody, what is your father's name, because you know in the Soviets, the father's name is always part of your name and he said,

"My father's name is Adolph(ph)." "Adolph(ph), three years." Simply because this was the name of Hitler.

Q: But tell me a little bit about, for example, you liberated Prague, what was that like, what happened?

A: It was very, very wonderful. First of all, we lost many of our soldiers before that. We started out in the Ukraine and went by way of Ducla(ph), which is a pass in the Carpathian, in the Tatra(ph). And the Ducla(ph) pass, we were held up endlessly long, it was difficult to get through and it was held by very few Germans but they were on the top and they saw us and we were on, in the valley. And anyway, many, many weeks it took before we could take the Ducla(ph) pass and then, then we were, we ended the war, the war was at an end when we liberated Prague. What was it like? It was for us very wonderful and for the people of Prague I don't know. They must have had mixed feelings because they also didn't know what is in store for them. One thing that I remember that turned me off and made me want to leave Europe for good was when we, we had survived concentration camp and was now in the Czech uniform and when we came to the first city in Slovakia, Koshitza(ph), we got orders to arrest anybody in the street who speaks German. And I said, "Sam, this is not for me. We were in a situation where we were persecuted for no reason at all, I do not want to be part of a group of people who persecute somebody for speaking any language. I don't want to live there." And that is when I decided, no more Europe. That was the time. And by the way, when President Benish(ph), who was the President of Czechoslovakia, returned for the very first time from London to Koshitza(ph), to the first town in Czechoslovakia, it was Sam who conducted the orchestra for his welcome and he still has the program to show.

Q: But when you went into these towns, I mean you weren't a soldier before, what did you do?

A: I was a soldier.

Q: Then.

A: I learned very fast to be a soldier, but what did I do mostly? I used my languages very much, I translated from all kinds of Slavic languages to German or vice versa and they needed people who did that because when they, when they took, they were the Czech army and when they were in need

of to talk to someone who spoke German, that's what we did. We also used our musical gifts whenever we could. Sam conducted an orchestra, but not all day, only in the evening and I collected folk songs in Czech, in Slovak, in Russian and sang them for the soldiers. And I knew, when I was sent out with this, I would be singing a concert for about several hundred or thousand soldiers and the next day I would be sent to a hospital and find, this was a small army, I knew many of these soldiers personally. Found them without arms, without legs, that was kind of tough because you see the terrain that we got to work on was, the Russians gave us that terrain which was very difficult and it was very much mined. There were lots of mines there. Many of our friends lost their eyes and some got killed.

Q: So you were really in battle?

A: All the time, all the time.

Q: And you had a gun?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you use it?

A: I didn't use it, but I learned how to use it. I was lucky, I never was in a situation to just face, because I have a feeling they would have killed me first. I don't know, I don't think I could kill a person.

Q: But you came in contact with, did you come in contact with an opposing army?

A: We were, we were, one night, I'll tell you this, one night we were in a peasant's hut, sleeping and it was summer, windows were open and I woke up, I've a very light sleep and I saw a, a German helmet sneak by the window and I pushed Sam and I said, "The Germans are here." And he was very tired, he said, "Let me sleep." And I didn't say anything, they didn't come in. You know what we found? That some chickens, that the previous day we had organized, they had come by and they had stolen those chickens. And that was, that was a moment where, had he been awake, maybe I wouldn't be here to tell it to you. Yes, that's how it was.

Q: Were there a lot of close calls?

A: Yes, yes, there were a lot of close calls. Once Sam and I, because we speak German, were sent to across German lines to let a group of generals who were on a meeting and were encircled by the Germans, to let them know that help is on the way. And we had to, to, to, to go on a highway that was completely patrolled by Germans. That was very close. We were just lucky.

Q: You were in a truck?

A: No, in a, what do you call this? You know, the, a little, no come on, what do you call it? A, a, a, can't think of the word. Not a truck, the smallest vehicle.

Q: A motorcycle?

A: A motorcycle with a sidecar.

Q: Well you said that when you entered Prague, it was exciting for you, but you don't know how the people felt...

A: Yeah.

Q: Is that the general reaction when you went into...

A: Yes.

Q: ...Levov(ph) and you went into all of these place?

A: Yes, yes. We liberated Levov(ph), we liberated _____ Krakau.

Q: And no reaction from the people?

A: Yes, yes, there is always a reaction from the people, there are always a group of people who come out singing and then there is always another group of people who sit at home and don't know what to expect. That's how it is.

Q: Were any of these cities that you went in destroyed?

A: Most of them were destroyed.

Q: Prague was not?

A: No.

Q: What was it like going into cities that had been devastated?

A: I, I can't say that we were shocked because we had already gone through so much and the people who lived there had gone through so much. What was it like? I think that we did not spend very

much time to think what was, what is it like because we went through this and continued going, we didn't stay.

Q: So the act of liberation was basically being there?

A: Sure, sure.

Q: Because the, you were, the Germans were already ahead of you.

A: Yes.

Q: And you didn't stay long enough to get any direction of the people or?

A: No. Or if, when it may have been another company, you know, that gave direction. All I know, we were always the first, you know, to come in and then as we came in, we continued. I have a cramp in my leg, oops.

Q: When you left Europe, your intent was to go to South America because you had an uncle there?

A: Yes, yes, yes. We waited in Paris for six months and when that first boat left, we were on it, that was the _____. The boat came to New York, we never dreamed about going to New York, but we had no choice and in New York I asked Sam, "Do you know anybody in New York or in America?" And he said, "Yeah, I think a sister of my mother went from, many years ago, to New York and married a man by the name of Sitomer(ph) and I think she lived in the Bronx." So when we came to New York and were in the hotel, I looked into the phone book, not knowing that New York has many phone books and I saw only one, that was the Manhattan phone book, cause we were on 96th and Westend(ph) and I looked for Sitomer(ph) and there were five of them, so I called the first one and it happened to be the aunt and when we told her who we, who we were, she had seen Sam when he was five years old. And she said, "Where are you?" And I said, "96th and, and Westend(ph)." And she says, "Don't move, I will be right there." Turned out she was on 85th and Broadway and she was there in five minutes and when she came she went to the phone and she called somebody in Philadelphia and said, "Harry, you wouldn't believe it, my sister's son Sam is here." And two hours later, Harry Good(ph) was with us. He put us in the car and brought us to Philadelphia. And these are the two people I showed you and they were so wonderful, we spent a wonderful day or two with

them and then they brought us back to New York and then we were on the way to South America and all I could think of was I want to live in the United States.

Q: What were your first impressions of New York, other than you were fortunate to find people and...

A: Yeah.

Q: What were your impressions of New York or America?

A: Fantastic, I kept thinking, how is it possible that in, on one and the same planet, there is one place which is hell, Europe and then we come here and this is paradise. People were so friendly. You know people, everybody said, "How are you?" And everybody answered, "Just fine." I couldn't believe it. Everybody was just fine. I hadn't heard things like that in years. It was an unbelievable atmosphere. I loved it, I fell in love with this country and it's lasted to this day. I have a tremendous feeling for this country.

Q: Were you surprised by the abundance of everything?

A: Yes, yes. But it was less the abundance, although it, I was very impressed. It was a great deal of feeling, that people could be so nice. You know, when you are under great stress the way we were and under great disappointment from many people, it is hard to, to, to believe again. And these people here in the United States, made us believe again.

Q: That quickly?

A: No, not that quickly, not that quickly, but it was gradually. But one thing I knew, I said to myself, if I can I want to come back to the United States.

Q: So your visa was to go to South America?

A: Yes.

Q: And so you could not stay?

A: No.

Q: You would have if you could have?

A: No, I don't know that because our, our destination was the uncle. And I didn't know ahead of time, how it is there. But I found out very quickly that I never wanted to live there.

Q: Okay, so you went where?

A: We, we were, we had a visa for two weeks.

Q: Two?

A: Two weeks and from here we went to, to Miami beach and in Miami beach we were another few days, we took a hotel which was next door to the place where we could go and ask when does our flight go to, to Barankia(ph).

Q: Columbia?

A: Yeah. And probably two or three days later we went, we flew to Barankia(ph) Columbia and we came to my uncle, who was not there, who was on his finca(ph), which is a, a plantation, a coffee plantation in the Sierra Nevada. And he had left word with someone there to bring us to him. And so we went, this was a, quite a trip, for the first time in my life, on a very small airplane, like a double decker, I don't know. And this plane wouldn't take off, it couldn't take off and every time it took off we stopped again and then waited a few hours until they repaired it and then the same thing, Well anyway, we came to a small village, an hour later and in this small village we, there was a man who was a friend of my uncles, who, who brought us to a place where there were several natives with horses and they put us on horses and I had never been on a horse before and we went for about six hours through the jungle and they went ahead of us and cut, cut open the jungle to make room and you could see behind you how it closed again and you know, I saw my first snake there. I have a snake here. You don't want to see it, no? And, not live. And we came to the uncle's finca(ph) and that was our first time here in South America. We stayed there for six months. Couldn't stand it.

Q: Why?

A: There's a different way of life. My uncle did not want me to have anything to do with music. He was a businessman, very highly respected in the community, he was a very rich man and he also didn't want them to know that Sam was a musician and it was all so very unpleasant because of the way they looked at things, the attitude. And one day my uncle said, "Somebody told me that they saw you in the street somewhere with a violin case." And he said, "Yeah we went to this family

____, who has a piano and were going to try to see how much we still remember." And my uncle said, "No, I don't want to hear that any more. If you need a piano, I'll buy a piano and it'll be in the house. I don't want you to go to other people to play." And each day I liked that place less and less and then I found out that I was pregnant and I decided I don't to have a child born there. But I did know that I wanted to have a child born in the United States. And so I went every day to the consul until one day he told me, "Yes, now you are ready to go." So we came here and our Gloria was born here.

Q: I'm a little bit curious when you, when you, well I guess both when you first arrived to New York, but more when you got to Columbia. Did you talk about your experiences at all, did your uncle want to know what had happened?

A: I came to, I didn't, I don't know if I ever told you this, when we were in New York, my uncle had sent \$200, so that we should have some money if we need it and this was December 22, 1945. It was a blizzard and we were without, we were in uniform and without a coat, Czech uniform, we didn't have anything else and Sam and I went out, to one block away, to Broadway and we saw this drugstore with a display of soap in the window and we hadn't seen soap for three years and I said to Sam, "They are also swindlers, they put, they put something into the window to pretend it's soap, but I'm sure it's not soap." And I could speak English, he couldn't. So I went inside and I wanted to see what the man will say to me if I wanted to buy a piece of soap and I came in, nobody was in except the man and I and I say, "I want to buy a piece of Sweetheart soap," cause that was what was in the window. He said, "One piece, wouldn't you want to have two for 29?" And I thought to myself he's stalling, he's stalling. What is he going to say? I said, "Yes, I could have two." So he disappears behind the counter and wraps something up and says, "29 cents plus tax." I don't know what, 32 cents and he gives me a package and I pay and I come out and I didn't believe that he really gave me something so right out in this blizzard I open it and I smell it and I nearly fainted, it was soap. And I said, "Sam, you know, he didn't see you, he doesn't know that you belong to me. You could go in and just say soap and you can say two soap and we could have four pieces of soap." He went in, he comes out with two pieces of soap. Now we have four pieces of soap and we walk a

short block and there is another drugstore. And now I said, "You know, they don't know here that we bought it there." So I go in and I buy again two pieces of soap and then he goes in. To make a long story short, we spent all that money on soap and we came to my uncle in South America with a, we had to buy a suitcase to put in the soap and we brought this soap to my uncle in South America. And he, who thought it was wonderful that we came, and we told him nobody should know, look what we have and he looked at that and he knew that we were nuts. He knew that something was very wrong with us. He told this to me many months later. So, this was the impression my uncle had of us.

Q: But he was nice?

A: Oh, he was wonderful, he was very wonderful.

Q: You didn't even have soap when you were in Paris?

A: No.

Q: Not in Europe?

A: Because the people had to have coupons and we didn't.

Q: Was, did you talk at all about what had happened to you?

A: I couldn't. Sam did. I don't know how much Sam did, I couldn't stand even being in the room.

Q: Did your uncle want to know?

A: Not really, not really.

Q: Did your relatives in the States want to know?

A: Not really, they said they wanted to know but, you know, when he started telling them, you could see their eyes were glazing over and they, when is this going to finish?

Q: They believed it?

A: Yes. They believed it when it had to do with the Nazis, they did not believe it when it had to do with the Soviets. We had a lot of hard, a difficult time with that.

Q: So they didn't, he didn't want you to play music?

A: Yeah, he didn't want me to teach, he didn't want me to play. Women in Columbia play Canasta all day long and men, who work during the day, I mean work, this was, my uncle was a very rich

business man. The evenings they spent playing poker and drinking whiskey. And I couldn't stand this life, I just, I said to Sam, "I don't want to live here." And my uncle was flabbergasted when we said we are leaving. "What? You are leaving for the United States, you have no idea. They have musicians there to feed the pigs." And I said, "If there are enough pigs, that's okay." And then, "What will you be in the United States, nothing but a number. Here you are a, a señora. I said, "I want to be a number among numbers, instead of a señora among slaves. Can't stand this life." And then I said, "We've lost already too many years. I don't want to lose any more. We've had to be in the ghetto, we've had to be in concentration camps. We have had to do things that we didn't want to do because others wanted us to do them. I would like, before it's too late, to leave so that I should live the way I want." And so he didn't say anything and we left. And that's how we are here.

Q: Was, was that lifestyle, do you think, especially difficult or offensive to you because it seemed frivolous?

A: Yes, yes. And I couldn't understand how those people can live like this. And it seemed so frivolous because of what we went through that even when we came here, I had serious doubts that I will ever return to playing piano. I thought to myself, "Piano playing is very frivolous. It is." But somehow my love for music got the better of me and I am glad. But it is very difficult.

End of Tape 2.

Tape 3

Q: When we stopped you said that when you first emigrated to the United States you thought you'd probably never play music again because it seemed frivolous in comparison to the life you had...

A: Yes.

Q: ...gone through. What made you pick it up again?

A: It seems that the love of, for music somehow returned and began to give me comfort. And it was a great deal of, a very important part of my life before and somehow I felt that I needed it.

Q: Did you play the same music that you had once known?

A: Some of it, but, but I, it took, it took quite awhile before I could really want to play. I really felt too much that it was frivolous.

Q: Did it evoke memories?

A: Yes. Yes it did, but in the end, it restored me.

Q: Did it make you feel kind of a closeness to what you had lost?

A: Maybe. I never thought about it. But I think yes, maybe.

Q: Now that sounds like that would have been saddening?

A: I can't say for sure, I think somewhere I had decided that we had to pick up the pieces and go on. And with that decision I think I didn't want too much to look back and maybe it was good that way.

Q: Do you know how long it took you to come to this decision?

A: Very long. 10 years at least.

Q: So how did you, how did you live and what did you think about within those 10 years before you had made that decision?

A: I don't know. I don't know how to explain it. I lived. I continued to live in great fear, I had nightmares, I was afraid that one day they will kidnap me. I was no longer afraid of the Nazis, but I continued to be afraid of the Soviets.

Q: Even in this country?

A: Even in this country. And it was very difficult, very difficult.

Q: What, what do you think helped get you through all of these very, very bad years?

A: I think two things. Being young and in good health and my education.

Q: Education was usually a drawback.

A: I didn't see it that way. And I don't understand it.

Q: Well, I mean normally, when Nazis went into towns, they got rid of the educated people right away.

A: Oh yeah, in that respect. And so did the Soviets, they did not like thinking people. But it was, somehow I can only think of it that way. Maybe I didn't appear so educated as they left me alone. I don't know.

Q: Well you've described how your language skills...

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: ...helped.

A: Very much, very much. I translated books, which, which I did much more at that, when we first came to this country because this, this was for me a wonderful exercise in, in coming back to all these languages. Some of them are published and I enjoyed doing that. Just like I enjoy music.

Q: When you were in Europe, did you think about music, did you sing to yourself, did you hear music?

A: You mean in the camps?

Q: In the camp, in the ghetto?

A: Not often, not often. You know, it's too, the situation was much too depressing. Usually when you think of music, you, you have to be a little lighthearted.

Q: So music you put on hold?

A: Yeah.

Q: In all of this, did you think at all about religion, did you resent it, the fact that you were Jewish?

A: Yeah, there were times when I thought to myself, what did I do, why am I punished? I didn't do anything wrong. And yes, it was difficult to accept the fact that by doing nothing, you are being punished. And I didn't have, perhaps the support that people get when they are, from early childhood, educated in the religion. On top of which, the Soviets did their share of indoctrinating us

that religion is the opium of the people, if you have heard this expression. And the Soviets have replaced it with their own kind of religion, their ideology. Yes, I went through all of these difficulties.

Q: Did you, do you have a sense of religion or, today?

A: I can't say. I have a very strange and interesting sense of humanity in me. I don't have a sense of, I think when I hear of organized religion, which, which produces hate, like the Ayatollah Khomeini, that is, I think the most awful thing that you can imagine. It seems to me that a, a sense of humanity and ethics is what I would consider my religion.

Q: So you never returned to Judaism in any way?

A: I do not know really what I am, but I do know that I have the highest feelings for Israel, for the state of Israel. And the greatest pride that there is such a state. If you can understand how this works, I don't know. But I could, I've been trying to think about it and it is difficult to understand, you know, when I was a child, there was this teacher, Hebrew teacher, who was trying to teach us to read Hebrew, but he neither explained each word by itself, nor did I know what he was saying. And he never bothered, or maybe he, maybe that was the way it was taught, but I, it remained out of my ____, where in my mind I was always curious about languages and I would have liked to know more about this language, this man was not forthcoming to give it to me, so I gave it up. And that is all I know about Hebrew. I didn't want to learn to read Hebrew when I don't know what I'm reading. Because it did not coincide with all the other languages, 10 of them, when I read them, I know what I read, unfortunately.

Q: Was it difficult to begin anew here?

A: It was not difficult, it was magnificent. It was, we were so full of hope that we are in, in a new country, not just country so, the whole way of life is so different. We went about it, we were very excited. And we had a baby and the baby was born here in Philadelphia and Sam, who couldn't speak English, found a job to play the violin and everything was wonderful. No, it was not difficult. And we never felt that we had to ask somebody for help. We were so proud. You know, it took

years and years before I ever heard that there was such a thing like a, a family service, who helps people, so we never did. We were really very strong, I must say.

Q: Wasn't it hard to get over what you had experienced?

A: Yes, there were those nightmares. I couldn't talk about it and when Sam talked about it, I couldn't stay in the room. But these were, as time went by, less and less. But it took about 10 years.

Q: What were your biggest challenges? You must have had some, I mean you were starting a new life here.

A: I can't, I don't know.

Q: It couldn't have been that easy.

A: I don't know, we had a wonderful attitude, I think.

Q: Were there certain kinds of activities that helped you connect with the life here? Certain things you did?

A: We didn't have money. We lived in a very poor neighborhood, in a one room, not apartment, one room in a house of a man who wanted me to write receipts, he was a landlord, write receipts when the people brought the money. And for this he gave us a room, where the one window went directly to another wall. So we lived very primitively and we were as happy as can be because it was still so much better than what we had before. You know, everything is just relative. And I taught Sam English, I read to him books, endlessly. And our, our best way to entertain us was to go to the library. It didn't cost anything and we kept on reading. That was our beginning.

Q: And he was playing music _____ music?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And he became a very well acclaimed...

A: Yes, yes...

Q: ...musician.

A: Yes.

Q: Was it easy to make new friends?

A: I don't know. Yes and no. I don't, I don't think that we have ever, we've been the two of us, rather self-sustaining because of the circumstances and after that, also because of circumstances, maybe it's a baby and then his mother came and was very ill. She had cancer of the stomach and died in our house and at that time, she was ill about eight months, the doctor gave her six, and we had no insurance, it was tough. But somehow, the fact that we had survived the Holocaust and that we could be here in this country, we just thought nothing can hurt us any more.

Q: Is that true?

A: Yeah.

Q: Was there any sense of, I don't know, isolation or being different because of your experiences?

A: Yes...

Q: At least in the beginning?

A: Yes, it still is, even to this day. We have a few friends, but we are very much aware, they didn't go through what we did and it's different, it's different.

Q: Did you, you said you couldn't talk about it much, but did you talk with Sam about how you felt and what...

A: No. No, because he was not receptive to talk about it, I would have liked to talk, more recently, but he just, is not, I don't know how, how to put it, he's not interested to talk about things that you can't change.

Q: Now this is probably an unusual question but, I'm curious, there have been, now that you've been in this country for 50 years...

A: Yes.

Q: Were there certain historical events that you think you experienced differently or were very significant to you because of your background? You know, when you think about, you know, what went on, the, you know, the Cold War and, and, and the Soviet Union, McCarthyism, Civil Rights, the Eichmann(ph) trial, anything?

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, one of the most wonderful feelings I have to this day is President Truman, because he happened to be President when we came and the first time we, we met some

people and they said, "Truman stinks," I was so frightened that I said, "Sam, we didn't say it, but we heard it." And we immediately left their home. We could, I didn't want to stay in their house. And I took it very seriously and today I know that they keep on saying the same thing about every president. It's sort of a way that Americans like to talk. They, they don't take it as seriously as I heard it.

Q: Well you thought you would be found out as an enemy of the state or something?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Do you remember when Israel became a state?

A: Yes.

Q: How you felt about that?

A: Very excited. Very excited. I thought it was wonderful. And we know some people here who befriended us, who are Jewish, who think Israel should not be a state. And you can't imagine what a shock this was to me, why? And they said, "Because it's not necessary." And I will never understand that and I had to accept the fact that if I wanted to continue being friends with them or at least seeing them, I must stay away from this discussion because it just bothered me.

Q: Did you feel that by Israel becoming a state that there was some refuge, some safe place for Jews finally?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And you still feel that way?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you remember the Eichmann(ph) trial?

A: Yeah, sure.

Q: I mean, I guess what I'm asking here is, were these events a little bit different for you than they might have been for me?

A: I don't know about the Eichmann(ph) trial. It's too difficult to know what went on, you know. You know, it's very strange, this whole thing with Eichmann(ph). We had maybe different

Eichmann's(ph), you know, not that particular one. And his trial was very far away from us. I have no idea how that affected me. I can't say one way or another.

Q: Well, let's talk about something recent. The situation with the Palestinians.

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you have any feelings about that, the way that they have been thought of or treated or anything _____ ?

A: I, I have some feelings, I don't believe that by giving away land you will have peace. I can't believe it. This is a very small country, Israel and I don't think that the Palestinians or any one of, of these people who wish Israel ill are going to change their colors, their attitudes. I simply can't believe it. It's hard.

Q: On the other hand, Palestinians are living in pretty rough circumstances.

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you have any sympathy for that?

A: This is hard for me to explain because I know very little about it and I've not spent much time thinking about it.

Q: What about, do you remember the period of McCarthyism?

A: Yes. By that time, we were very new here and I did not understand it very well, because in some ways I thought there were a few Communists here. So I don't know, I, whether I thought I, I didn't like the man and the way he went about it and I didn't quite understand what he was after, but I, but I thought that the Americans were very naive about their, about what goes on in Soviet Russia. I still think.

Q: But I think, you know, when you talk about how he was going about it and what he was after...

A: Yeah.

Q: ...it's really the concept of the witch hunt.

A: Yes, yes. Guilt by association and I, it's, it's, it's bad, you know. And particularly in a country like this one, where freedom of speech is so important or freedom of thought.

Q: Any thoughts about the civil rights movement?

A: No. I don't know.

Q: Okay, okay, I won't pursue this ____, but you know, it's just, it's just interesting because these were all very significant events in American history.

A: Sure, sure, absolutely.

Q: I just didn't know if they impacted you...

A: Yeah.

Q: ...differently. What sort of, well you went on and you went back to music and you taught?

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: Here in Philadelphia?

A: I taught here in Philadelphia, I taught at Temple University and at Settlement School.

Q: You taught piano?

A: At Settlement School I've taught piano, at Temple I taught diction in foreign languages for voice majors.

Q: What's, you've mentioned a few things, what sort of long term impact did these early experiences have on you, in terms of maybe how you raised your daughter, your values, the way you, your sense of trust or security?

A: I don't know. I think that I continue very much to have the attitude that I had when I grew up. I am hopelessly old fashioned. I am not in favor of living together without being married. What else should I tell you, you would be shocked.

Q: No, tell me.

A: No. I really think that these values that I've had and that I've never rammed down my daughter's throat, but somehow she had witnessed in her life near us, what is important to us. And it feels to me that they, that these values have given me a strong sense of being steady. Sometimes I had a feeling that I was on an ocean tossed back and forth and, and if I didn't have the strength, I couldn't survive it. And I had the strength and I think that's why I survived. And I continue to think that way, old fashioned. That's how it is.

Q: Basic values?

A: Basic values, terribly important.

Q: Do you think that you raised your daughter differently because of your Holocaust experiences?

A: That I don't know. I suppose because of these experiences I have often found myself a little bit impatient. Impatient with stupidity. I can't stand it when, when I detect a little less than common sense. All I'm asking is common sense. I don't know if that makes sense.

Q: Well, I'm trying to understand how that relates to your experiences or where that came from?

A: I don't know if it comes from that or if it doesn't.

Q: Do you think that you might, you might have been more and maybe you weren't this way, protective or fearful or any of that sort of thing, because of what you had gone through?

A: It could be, I don't know, I don't know. But I do know that I am, for a long time I have been very much aware that I have to be one step ahead of danger. I used to walk in the street in New York and I used to have a feeling, if I heard the same step behind me for a couple of steps, that this is surely somebody who is after me. I had this for a long time, couldn't get rid of this.

Q: So that even here, you didn't feel entirely safe?

A: Absolutely, absolutely.

Q: Are there certain sounds or smells that bring back memories?

A: Not now, not any more. Used to be when a, when an airplane was, was coming by real low, that I would shrink, but not now any more.

Q: Are there certain images that haunt you?

A: No, but I cannot watch on television anything that has to do with killing, can't stand it. I don't even want to hear a story about it, I don't want, not only not see it, I can't, I don't like it on the radio, I don't like to read it in the newspaper and I find it absolutely unbelievable that in this country, where it's possible to live like human beings, that there's so much crime. And I don't have in my house any guns and I wouldn't have one.

Q: Do you think that, having these experiences influenced the way you decided to live your life?

A: I don't know that. Because when it happened, when it began to happen to me, let's call it since 1937 it began, because the anti-Semitism in Romania was already rampant at that time, this was the

_____ time. And I was 16. That's when, that's when it began. To be, it, when it became conscious. It happened at the time when, I don't how I would have turned out had this not happened, I have no idea.

Q: Did you and Sam ever think about hiding and pretending you weren't Jews?

A: We were offered a hiding place by a Catholic priest and we were hiding one night in the organ in the church and the next morn...

[End of Side 1 of Tape 3]

Q: You were hiding in the organ?

A: Yes.

Q: And what happened?

A: A priest, a Jesuit priest in Czernowitz, offered us hiding. His name was Father Komorovitch(ph) and at first we thought this could be our salvation and we said okay and we went and we were one night. The next morning we couldn't stand it. The thought that Sam's mother and sister were in, at home in the apartment and that they would be taken, I couldn't stand it and so we said goodbye to the priest and we went directly home and maybe an hour later they came for us and took us into the ghetto, yeah.

Q: If you had to, the word survivor probably means a lot of different things for different people.

A: Sure.

Q: That if you had to summarize a commonality that survivors share, is there something? Either in terms of experience or in terms of, how it, how that life changed people?

A: I have no idea. This to me is so incomprehensible. I wish I knew. I have no idea what makes a person a survivor and another one not. Of course, you have to have health. If you don't have that, we have seen too many people perish, just simply falling by the wayside. You have to have that. Everything else, I think you have to remain with a cool head and I always thought that when you are in such danger, you have to have an even cooler head and see if you can be one step ahead of them. But I have no idea how that works.

Q: What about, when I use the term survivor in the sense of having gone through these experiences, was there a commonality to the experiences?

A: I suppose so. I suppose that when you find, in the experience of the concentration camp, people who befriend you. They, they'll be most wonderful and do everything and you will do everything. And then you will find others who take everything away from you. So it is, I think it is the same, like in the rest of the world.

Q: Was there something in the process of dehumanizing you, of having, somebody having this control over your lives and abusing that control, that you think is common to the experience perhaps? I'm not trying to put words in your mouth...

A: Yeah, yeah, no.

Q: ...I'm just trying to understand, your experience is different than many other people I've talked to and yet you've all had your lives torn apart, disrupted, lost family...

A: Yeah, yes, exactly, exactly. I think a personal experience of someone controlling my life like that, I, I can't think. But I also thought that, because of Sam, who protected me, I think that I was only too willing to be protected and too grateful and to this day I'm grateful to him. But I have no idea, I think I, I think that in some ways we were also fortunate with the way things came, were. But, whether we were fortunate or smart, I don't know.

Q: You know, it's interesting to me that you refer, you've referred several times to the concentration camp and how awful it was and yet as I understand it, you really were only there a few weeks. And this seems to be such a...

A: You are, you are talking of Carrera(ph)?

Q: Yes.

A: But the ghetto in Toolchin(ph) was also a concentration camp.

Q: Ah, okay. Because I was...

A: Yes. We didn't call it a concentration camp, but it was a concentration camp. Only the fact that Sam was used in a certain profession and I was used as his assistant and that we were taken every morning and brought back every evening, maybe it made it a little easier, you know, but it also

made it a little more dangerous, because every time Sam would have made a mistake on one of the soldiers or officers, that would have been the end of him. So, so he was in very big danger and I call that a concentration camp, even though it was called a ghetto.

Q: That's, I guess that was maybe what was confusing me. I want to ask you to talk about one other thing which I know is not easy, but it's very, very telling. And that is, you know, we talked earlier about how as people get older, a lot of these memories flood back and I know your husband hasn't been well lately. Can you talk about that a little?

A: Yeah, ask me.

Q: Now your husband Sam has, he's had a stroke, or?

A: A couple of mini strokes.

Q: And so his mind is not always clear?

A: Right.

Q: But can you describe how when his mind is not clearly grounded in the present, what happens?

A: He talks about, as though he were back in the concentration camp and he gets, he could be in, among 20 people, like in that senior care center and he'll take off his shirt and start scratching and the doctor asked him, "Sam don't do it." And he'll say, "I have to do it, I have all these lice." And the doctor said, "You don't have any lice." And he says, "Yes I do, yes I do and we always have them in the camp." So I know that he's there and this doctor tells me that there's no use that I should try to convince him that he's not there because he believes so in it. And this has happened a number of times.

Q: This happens at home as well?

A: Yes. At home and with people and here at the table, with guests. And he'll say, "When are we going to leave this place and go home." And I'll say, "But this is our home." And he say, "No, don't tell me this is our home, this is not." And then he'll say, "We are going, we have to go back to this camp." And I'll say, "No Sam, we are not." You know. I can't convince him.

Q: So after all of these years, 50, 55 years.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: What he's left with.

A: Yes, yes. And that for me is the saddest part of his illness. You know, anything is easier to deal with than this. Yeah. There is such a sadness in him. I wish I, this is, this is the one thing I wish I could help him with and I can't. Yeah.

Q: Sam is how old now?

A: 88.

Q: Is there anything else that you want to add or you can tell me, that we haven't talked about.

A: I think I told, I think I've told you everything. I can't think of anything.

Q: Okay.

A: All right?

Q: Thank you.

A: Thank you.

Q: Okay.

Conclusion of interview.