United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Gisela Zamora
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a taped interview with Gisela Zamora, conducted by Amy Rubin on June 1, 2003 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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GISELA ZAMORA
June 1, 2003

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Gisela Zamora, conducted by Amy Rubin on June first, 2003, in Scarsdale, New York. This is tape number one, side A. If you would just begin by telling me your name, and when and where you were born.

Answer: I am Gisela Zamora. I was born -- my maiden name was Eckstain, in Battenberg unda Aida in Germany.

Q: And tell me a little bit about Battenberg, and your family.

A: My mother's family had lived in Battenberg at least for two or three generations. They were known as the Lanksdorfs. My mother was a born Neuberger, and sh -- I'm sorry, she was an -- a born Marx, and the Neubergers married a Lanksdorf, and the children all came, more or less from that family.

Q: And what was -- what is -- can you describe Battenberg for somebody who's never --

A: Battenberg is a beautiful little i -- town, it's actually a village located at 800 meters elevation, and was considered in Germany sort of a spa, what they called Luftcore art. And it had approximately, I would say, seven or eight Jewish families. My grandfather Marx, Moses Marx, came from the Rhineland, Achen, and established himself there, married my grandmother, and had a -- a shoe business. He sold sh -- shoes all over the area. He went by bicycle many times, and we had the -- a regular store at the bottom of our building, which was quite big.

Q: So this sounds like a very small Jewish community.

A: Very small Jewish community, definitely.

Q: And did you know everyone, all the families?

A: We knew everyone, and some were even interrelated. I'm in touch with the second cousin, that lives across the river, in nua -- Nyack, and we see each other occasionally.

Q: So tell me a little bit about -- I -- I remember you mentioned your father's work. What -- what was your father's work?

A: Yeah, my fa -- my mother was introduced to my father, she was a youngest daughter of some Marx's, they had six children, three boys, and three girls, and she was the youngest, and felt after my grandfather passed away, she had to take care of her mother, Beena Marx. And Sevra stayed in Battenberg. My father was born in Fleet bachin Hesse, sort of a s -- bigger town, which was what you call a Christstadt in German. And he went to a technical school to learn agronomy. And he was employed by a man named Louie Marx, who was my mother's brother. Ne -- not Louie Marx himself, but his -- his firma, which was at that time called Deutsch and Marx or something like that, I don't remember. And Louie Marx took my father once up to Battenberg, and this way my mother met him, and they became engaged, and married in 1926.

Q: So tell me about you.

A: So my father, who was an academic man, had during the early years a very good job with the Whymara government, inst -- instructing the farmers how to slaughter, when to slaughter, the right time to sow, or to reap, because Germany was very much interested in having a good agricultural f -- f -- what you would call a method, to feed it's people without too much imports at that time. But in 1933, when Hitler came to power, my father lost his job, because he was government employed. And he took over my fath -- my grandfather's shoe business, but at that time already, it was going downhill, and he couldn't really make a very good living from that. So this went through a couple of months, even I would say a year or two, and the anti-Semitism came to Battenberg very early. It was really a nest -- I call it a real nest of Nazis, and trying to

get rid of all the Jews, and specially confiscate their business. So my mo -- my father decided it was better for him, and for us, for the family, to move to Friedberg where his parents had a home. At that time in the Judengasser, which was at -- at very early times in the 16th century, ghetto. But it was quite a nice little street, the houses were one on the -- one on the other, and we had the three floor house, my father put in plumbing, which by that time they didn't have there. And we children, I had a brother by the way, his name was Norbert, who was born two years after me, in 1930, went to school in Bard Nowheim, which was a spa approximately three kilometers from Friedberg and had a Jewish cabearks -- ca -- gaminda shula, excuse me. A -- a s -- a school that took in all the children from the surrounding area. It was located in a beautiful area, and had very good reputation as a -- a school of first class. And we went to this school till 1938, I would say -- '39, I'm sorry.

Q: Do you mind if I back up for a moment?

A: Yes.

Q: I wanted to ask you, just in brief, to describe the personalities of your family. Your parents, and you had one sibling, your brother.

A: Yes. Well, unfortunately we were children, didn't realize the difficult times my parents went through, especially raising us, bringing in the money to send us to school, and to feed us and so on. My mother was very fragile, but my father was a very strong man. He was an officer in the first World War, so he was wounded, and had a paralysis on the right hand, and the right arm was completely stiff. He was wonderful, he was able to do everything with his left. And made sure that we children go to school, was -- got very disciplined, and my mother sort of was weak in this. And we -- when we wanted something, we always went to our father, especially me. I

cannot talk to -- about my -- my brother, we sort of at that time were very young, and had many little fights, or spats, I would call them.

Q: And you remember Battenberg even though you were young, you remember living there?

A: I remember very much living there, and I loved the area, because it's in a what's called Throwtargabeerga in German, and on the Aida, which was the biggest -- had the biggest dam, about 10 kilometers away in Germany. As a matter of fact, it was just finished when Hitler was in power, and he made a lot of propaganda for it. He wanted to imitate the Hoover dam at that time.

Q: Did you have also, non-Jewish friends there? It --

A: Definitely. I have a non-Jewish friend who is writing me regularly, we are in contact. But we only got in contact three years ago when I went back to Battenberg just to see the town, and I didn't recognize it, it had changed so much.

Q: But you also -- you also remember anti-Semitic incidents?

A: Very -- yes. The one thing we had there, we had a neighbor who was -- his name was George, I don't remember his last name, he threw stones into our windows all the time, and we had constantly to repair windows. They were -- and we children were persecuted. We had to walk approximately one and a half miles to school, I would say, since we lived on the upper part of the town, and the ch -- the school was in the lower part. So children were already throwing stones at us, and we were ostracized. As a matter of fact, at the end they put us in the back row in school, next to the Gypsies.

Q: And did you feel -- you were very young, I mean, maybe you can remind me how old you were by the time you left Battenberg, but you -- you felt this impending persecution.

A: I felt this very much.

Q: Right.

A: I -- I -- I felt this per -- persecution, and an incident happened, I should really not tell this here, but it's -- since these Gypsies sat next to us, there were two boys, they all the time exposed themselves towards us, and played around with their sex organ, and that left a terrible impression on me all my life. And there was one Jewish -- one non-Jewish boy, who was the son of the physician in the town, who went up to the teacher and told her, and she actually did nothing about it, because she was part of the Nazi party. But my father realized it's time that we have to go. And since our immigration was pulled here, and pulled there, because of my father's injury during the first World War, it was s -- rejected by the US at that time, and we tried other countries, and you needed an awful lot of money, and since my father was not employed since 1933, it was very difficult. We lived really, on a very wealthy aunt, who send us money and -- and bought us clothing, and helped us all along, as long as she could.

Q: How old were you when you left Battenberg?

A: 10 years. Wait a minute, yes, I was born twen -- 10 years.

Q: So at that time your family was aware enough of what was happening, or what seemed to be happening, to try to emigrate, to try to leave.

A: Yes.

Q: And -- and couldn't, and then the next step was to go --

A: To Friedberg.

Q: To Friedberg. So what are your memories of living there? How different was it from Battenberg?

A: It was much more -- less tense, and much more liberal in a way. And there were a couple of half Jewish people, families, that helped us during the night. We had -- my father was a -- a -- a -

- a special person to an old woman, who was in her 70's at that time. She came in the middle of the night to bring us some food. She was very di -- attached to my father. And the town itself is larger, it's like White Plains, New York. As a matter of -- see, it was a -- it's county seats -- the county seat of Hesse, Nassaw.

Q: Tell --

A: Actually Hesse, not Nassaw, Hesse.

Q: Tell me a little bit about your family's connection to holidays, religious holidays. How -- how was that in your home, was that --

A: My mother was very observant of the Jewish laws, and she cooked kosher, and ub -- I would not say that it was overly kosher, but my father was very much on the other side, since he used to go to farmers, and they used to give him pork and sausages when he was an agronomist and worked for the government. So he didn't believe in any of these dietary laws. And sometimes he took us children along, and we tasted pork, and he said, "Don't tell your mom." The first thing when we came into the house, naturally children say, "Do you know where we went? Daddy took us to this and this farmer, and we had a wonderful bratwurst." And my mother almost exploded. But those were incidents that were still pretty good. And i -- when we were then in Friedberg, my father had a lot of friends. School friends, and he was a good athlete. He used to play very good football, and he used to belong to a league, and some of the Germans that tried to contact us -- or contact him, did so. But it got less and less as time goes on. And --

Q: And tell me -- and tell me a little bit also about -- about religious holidays for your family.

A: Well --

Q: And your favorite ones, what -- what you remember.

A: I don't know if they didn't leave any spa -- the favorite one was probably Passover. Well, naturally Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. At that time I was too immature to know what it is. Now, in my old age, I'm searching for my background, and for different, and look into different religions, and I'm comparing it to, specially Yoga, Redunta and Buddhism. I'm very much into that right now.

Q: So -- so now your family -- and tell me the year when you moved to -- to Friedberg, tell me also about you going to school in -- in Friedberg.

A: We -- we -- well, we went to school in Bad Nauheim, we took the train every morning, which was only 10 minutes. And the schools there was also a children's home, where children who -- who pa -- whose parents were already separated, or immigrated someplace. It had a children's home, but at the same time it took all the children by -- how would you call it, coming there from the surrounding area. You didn't have to live in this children's home to go to that school. It was called the besere -- Bitseerik shula. That means of the whole county, Jewish children could come by train, by bus, whatever. And I remember I have a very good friend, Eva Forest, whose -- whose maiden name was Warburg. She was brought by limousine still, since she was a relative of the Warburgs, a wealthy Jewish family.

Q: And when was this? What year now?

A: I would say it was '38, '39 and maybe beginning of '40, but then they closed that school, the Nazis closed the school, and if you wanted to further our e-education, we had to get to Frankfurt amine. So through the joint Jewish community of the German gu -- [indecipherable] German Reich, at that time, made sure that children that didn't have the means to lodge there, to place them in homes, and also children's homes. And I would say we went there in beginning of '40 for about a year and a half, which was a wonderful experience. Frankfurt is a big city, very

liberal for German standards. It was always against the -- the Kaiser, and had some prominent non-Nazis. So some of the Jewish institutions were still working, and one of them is the philanthrop -- was the philanthropine, the school that was boser [indecipherable] and a -- a part of the school taught even in English, you could get your diploma in English, and regular German folkshula. Ma -- my husband, by the way, has a diploma, or let's say high school f -- liseum diploma from philanthropine in Frankfurt.

Q: Oh he --

A: He was several years older than I was, so --

Q: So you never met there?

A: No, never. He was seven years older than I was.

Q: So we're already up to 1940, it sounds like. Can we go back for a moment, and can you tell me did you -- do you have recollections in 1938 of Kristallnacht?

A: Oh definitely, I remember that, and so well. In the morning they came for my father, and he was rounded up with a lot of men to Buchenwald, which we later found out that, we didn't know at that time. And my mother, since we had that three story building, had a big attic, my mother put us all the way up into the attic, and said, "You be very quiet when they come here." And they did come, but they never went the s -- above the second floor, but they threw out all our -- my mother had a lot of miesen, and porc -- other porcelain, crystal, threw it out of the windows. Demolished the dining room, and living room, sort of furniture threw out of the window. But physically we were not apprehended, because first of all they never knew where we children were, and weren't interested. And my mother, I have no recollection where she stayed. She must have stayed on the third floor also, and just watched. But my father was gone for about four and a half weeks, till he came back from Buchenwald. And I remember my mother preparing a bath

for him. At that time we didn't have bathrooms like here, except we had a flush toilet. And she made hot water in a sink ba -- basin, and washed my father from top to head, because he was smelling so much. And the -- we continued to live in Friedberg during all this time, going to school in Frankfurt, and my parents living in Friedberg, coming occasionally to Frankfurt to visit us, to see how we are doing. And also on vacation time we went home. And in 1940, or '41 -- I have a friend who could -- who knows the exact date, but I don't -- I don't remember.

Q: That's okay.

A: The schools were closed, all Jewish schools, all education to all J-Jewish people was -- was eliminated.

Q: How did you -- how did you feel not only then, but also after Kristallnacht, after what your father went through, how do you remember --

A: I was --

Q: -- personally feeling? Did you feel that things were getting worse? How did you feel about it?

A: I did not realize this, and we were too young to realize it. I was barely 14, my brother was 12. So we felt it in a way, but not really that it -- it harmed us in a way. We still had Jewish children to play with, till later on everybody immigrated and very few children were left. That was the greatest thing that I feel now is that was very sad, that I had nobody to play with, to talk to. Only my brother.

Q: When did that happen?

A: During the year '40, '41, that was sad time, and people still could immigrate.

Q: So do you remember your father telling you about what happened at Buchenwald?

A: Never, never, he -- they were absolutely don't tell the children. My mother and my father kept this from us. They were very protective. I would never have known. I didn't know till I myself

ended up in Auschwitz, how these things might have been. The one thing that happened during that time, my father was one of 12 children, and he had a brother, the oldest brother really, who was married to a non-Jew, because he learned watch making in Switzerland, and he met this woman, and got her pregnant, and my grandfather insi -- my grandmother insisted on him marrying this girl. And she came to us in 19 -- goes back to 1920 -- '28, I guess. I wasn't even born yet. So she was part of the family, and he was with my f -- my uncle was with my father in Buchenwald, and he was the first one to be killed there. They send his ashes to his wife, who was Swiss born, and all her children, the children that they had, had half Swiss citizenship, so they couldn't do anything to them, they survived.

Q: And did you hear at the time how he was killed, or what happened?

A: Yes, somehow or other we heard about it, as -- as children, but it didn't make much impression.

Q: I mean, it seems like you were still young enough that you didn't really know how to understand all these things happening.

A: That's right, that's right.

Q: And school was generally -- when you were still in school, was it a good and positive --

A: A very positive experience, because I was with only Jewish children.

Q: And did you still have non-Jewish friends otherwise, at the time?

A: No, not -- not at that time any more. A-Also, there was a half-Jewish couple, he was non-Jewish, and she was Jewish, but they were -- were Communists, very Leftist, and he was, at one time in the Wymar Republic, like a delegate to the Congress in Berlin. And they came to see us, and he was not afraid. He was a non-Jew, his wife was a Jewish woman. He was not afraid of them, and he had many bouts with them -- the Nazis and at the end he was also brought to

Dachau, but he survived. And I lived with them till I came to this country. To -- with him, his wife was killed. But that's after the war.

Q: Okay, so you were going to school in Frankfurt, your family was still living in Freidburg at the time?

A: Yes.

Q: And you were not separated from them, or you were, you were living with another family?

A: I wa -- at first I was in the children's home, and then they placed us in families, because they -- they had such an overflow in the kinderheim, that they had to take -- they had to get Jewish family that had enough room, were wealthy, to take in some of these children. So I came to one wealthy family in the west end of Frankfurt who owned a -- a palatial home, which was naturally confiscated while I was there, by the Nazis, and they had --

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Gisela Zamora. This is tape one, side B. Okay, continue to tell me about the family you were living with. Also, will you tell me --

A: Say --

Q: -- when this was, and how long you were separated from your own family, not living with them?

A: Well, I was never separated really, only by small distances at that time. I still could go home. It meant you had to take a train from Frankfurt to Friedberg, which was possible. Even so, we were -- we wore the star, the yellow star already, and we had to be s-sitting in a certain compartment. And it was very shameful for us kids, somehow. I mean, we were a little bit

intimidated, sitting where we were sitting. And -- but what I remember about this family is they had a housekeeper who came from Battenberg, and she had a terrible nervous condition, and shook with her hands, and her head, and this is now coming into my mind when I think about myself getting old, and sometimes I have these anxiety attacks, and I start to shake a little bit, and that brings me back to that time.

Q: What was her name?

A: Selma Lermenstein. I don't think she survived.

Q: So this family, their home was confiscated, what did you think at that time?

A: They went to Theresienstadt where we were transported at that time too, in 1942. But before that, they already -- since the schools were closed, they already were placed in a -- an -- an old age home, more or less, and I don't know what happened to Selma Lermenst-stein. We children came back home, and waited for deportation.

Q: And what do you remember, when did you start -- when did you need -- when were you forced to wear the -- the Star of David, the -- and it was a yellow?

A: It was yellow star, with black rim. Well we -- we had to, as soon as we went to school in Bad Nauheim, already we had that ta -- I think in 1939, right away when this -- before the war yet. I would say '39, after the war with Poland had started. It came slowly, everything came slowly. My mother had to part with her fur coat, with her silver, and her jewelry. Every year there was, or every couple of months there was a raid that you had to bring certain things for the possible war that they are going to fight against the allies. And this was a very hard thing for my mother, to -- dawa -- to part with material possessions. I think I learned from that. I am giving away already now many of my possessions, and I am very grateful that I had a husband who made

good money during his career, and I had a nice home, but I know that I will have to leave it, and I'm trying to learn non-attachment to material things.

Q: Did your -- did you -- did you learn very much about the beginning of the war in Poland? What did you learn, and -- and when?

A: We -- we weren't allowed to listen to any foreign stations, but this Communist, this -- who was married to a Jewish wife, used to come and tell my father what was said, because he was listening clandestinely, apparently, in -- in a group of people, and used to tell him what happened. But at that time the Germans made big progress into Poland, then into France, and by that time a lot of Jews were already deported to the east, and we were lucky to be there yet till '40 -- lucky? I wouldn't say lucky -- till September '42, when we were rounded up. And as I said, our luck was that my father was an officer in the first World War, and he had the Purple Cross, the German ahtler, and whe -- we were privileged to go to Theresienstadt. And needless to say, for my parents it was a very terrible thing, but we children didn't realize what it meant for them. We came to Theresienstadt, and we saw a lot of children, and we were able to play, and congregate with them, and that was very important for my psyche, because I was so excommunicated from -- from children in Germany, let's say, or separated. I don't find the right word I want to express.

Q: So you -- you actually felt initially, when you were at Theresienstadt that things felt a little bit better for you?

A: Mu -- yes, better for me, and at -- the good thing was that my father, since he was also an academic, and he had a background in the Whymara government that he got a job in the Judenrat in Theresienstadt, which was a big privilege. Also, he was a very minor, minor official. My mother used to say he probably has to sweep the floors of the -- of the Judenrat, of the bigshots

there. That's about all that -- but that enabled him for us, between my brother and myself, to get us into kinderheim. At first we thought we both were going to go to the kinderheim, but somehow or other there was such an overflow of children they didn't have enough room, so we had to choose between -- my parents had to choose between my brother and myself, and they decided that I should go to the kinderheim.

Q: Do you know why they decided that?

A: I have no idea, my -- I -- I couldn't get along with my mother so well, like girls do with -- sometimes, with mothers. My father thought that I was the older one, that I should go. That was actually for me a wonderful experience, since food was naturally the first thing on our mind, but being with the same group of people, being able to communicate it, to learn. Because in the kinderheim, every room had a sort of a teacher that had to keep us busy. And I remembered we had a girl named Hoyman -- Eta Hoyman, she was very well known in Germany in the Zionist movement. And she read books with us, we learned history of Palestine, and it was a very good, wonderful experience. However, it didn't last, like nothing lasts. Unfortunately, my brother during that time became sick with typhus and was quarantined. My mother was terribly upset about it, and I had to try to cheer her up a little bit here and there, and I have made acquaintance with a pianist in Theresienstadt, and she was in the entertainment part, and she got us tickets to various performances. And my mother liked it very much, and I used to go with her in the afternoons or evenings.

Q: So there were certain cultural activities?

A: Yes, only in Theresienstadt. It was the -- as everybody knows, the camp that they -- the ghettos that was open to show how well the Jews were treated.

Q: What are your first recollections of seeing, or meeting Nazis, even before, perhaps, before going to Theresienstadt?

A: I -- my mother always said, “As soon as you see these black shirts, or the brown shirts marching down the main street,” in Battenberg when we were small, because that was a nest of Nazis, “you come straight into the house.” They -- they put a -- a fear into us children.

Q: And did you have any personal interactions you recall?

A: Only as I said, when we walked to the school in the morning, many times children of -- of Nazis were trying to persecute us, and hit us, and -- but somehow or other, I had sort of a lucky star, and I don’t remember the real bad, bad, bad episodes, except that at night we always were afraid to go to sleep, because of the stones that came into the window.

Q: And that was still in Battenberg.

A: That was still in Battenberg, in Friedberg that never happened.

Q: And also later di -- in your -- in the schools you were attending, I read something once that said the Gestapo was already monitoring these schools, like in Frankfurt the school you attended. Did you -- did you see any officials -- Nazi officials around your schools?

A: I don’t remember, I really don’t remember, but it could well be. I have a book here from the phila -- about the philanthropine, and maybe we can look it up.

Q: I was just curious if any of that -- you know, if you remembered.

A: No, I don’t remember that, I only remember that in the last few months I did not go to school any more, I stayed home with my parents, and I helped out in a old age home, washing floors, I was 14, and they made me scrub the floors. Had to kneel down -- was backbreaking work for a 14 year old.

Q: And that was after you were no longer allowed to go?

A: Na -- just -- it's a school. Between '41 and '42, till our deportation.

Q: So when you were deported, what did you know about what was about to happen at that time? What were you aware of at the moment that they -- you know, describe to me sort of that -- that particular part of your experience of being deported.

A: The de -- de -- deportation was a horrible experience because we were all taken to a point in Darmstardt, which is south of Frankfurt, a major city, and apparently they had Quonset huts there, and they rounded up all the Jews from the arou -- surrounding areas, all the people from Hesse, Frankfurt, and the bigger cities nearby. And we were sort of divided in groups, and it depended on your status in Germany, and as I said, my father had that luck, that we -- wasn't the luck for him, unfortunately, he lost his life, but that we were on the -- so that we are put on the side to go to Theresienstadt. His brother -- and we were very close to them, this -- this is not the same brother as the one that was killed in Buchenwald -- well, that was really later -- a younger brother, who lived in Bad Nauheim with his family, they had two boys, and they were put on the side to go to the east. And my father tried everything to -- for them to be with us, but it didn't -- he couldn't do anything about it. So then the actual, when we find -- I don't know what we ate there, I've no idea what -- what the rations were. The rations in Germany already were very poor. For us poorer than for the general public, but we -- we depended on potatoes, cabbage, and what do you call these? Halloween --

Q: Oh, pumpkins?

A: Pumpkins. I mean, they were not like -- they were not quite as big as pumpkins, but some kind of --

Q: Like a turnip?

A: Like a turnip, that's right, it was a turnip, a sort of a winter vegetable that you could still s -- keep over the window, and the Germans had warehouses of these things, apparently. Potatoes by the -- they had to, because they had nothing else. And finally, two or three days later, we were put into a -- a -- into a railroad. Naturally the -- what do you call them, the wagons that had no windows, and they are used for transport of good and animals. And we got taken to Theresienstadt.

Q: What did you bring with you? What were you able to bring?

A: We had each a -- a -- I would say s -- we were allowed certain amount of pounds, I don't remember, maybe 50 pounds in the suitcases. Food, my mother packed up some food, clothing, and everybody, we had to carry our own. My parents -- my father ke -- tried to carry my brother's package, whatever, and we came to Theresienstadt with our own clothes yet. Whatever we could take along. We left many things behind.

Q: And when was this?

A: In 1940 -- September 1942.

Q: And how long did you stay -- you were first taken to -- it was sort of a transit center?

A: [indecipherable] centers -- transit center, that's exa -- darmshtart.

Q: And how long you were there?

A: I wouldn't s -- I don't remember, maybe a week or two.

Q: And from there? And people were taken from there to different places --

A: Yes, yes.

Q: -- and from there you were taken to Theresienstadt.

A: Theresienstadt, that's right.

Q: And the trip itself you remember pretty vividly, or is it hard to remember?

A: Yes, I remember it was a beautiful fall day, and somehow or other, I -- I looked out -- I don't know if it had windows, or just holes, and I saw the landscape, I was very much impressed, because he went along the Elba, down to S-Sudatenland, which is today Czechoslovakia. It was a beautiful, scenic area, always was impressed by nature, because Battenberg was such a beautiful, beautiful situated town.

Q: So -- and you didn't know where you were headed at that point?

A: No, I didn't know. When we arrived -- I don't know, maybe my parents knew, but I doubt it. When we got to Theresienstadt, we were all put into a -- a compound, and my father, as usual, was able to get to a compound where there were prominent Jews, like lawyers, and professionals. They sort of had this all divided there. And we stayed on the floor, and we had straw sacks to sleep on, maybe -- it depended on the room how many people, 20 - 25, and that is not very nice.

Q: And how long were you staying in that situation?

A: As -- when -- when my father finally -- I would say about less than a half a year. Then I was able to get to the kinderheim.

Q: So for the first six months at Theresienstadt, you were in these cramped, crowded living conditions?

A: Yes, definitely, and there were a lot of Slovakian Jews, Czechs Jews, and Jews from all parts of Germany, some Austrians, and later on we also had Dutch Jews. And somehow or other there was ill-feelings sometimes between this Jews, where they came from, what they did, and so on and so forth. I have to think of this today, cause humankind does not learn from -- from these things, apparently. It continues, and continues in this world.

Q: So you were able to stay with your family, together?

A: Yeah, together till I was put into the na -- kinderheim, which was just a couple of blocks away, but that was a revelation for me, and I loved the learning there. It -- it was something that -- and spiritually it helped me to be with other Jewish children, en masse. There was competition in school, in writing, in reading, and knowing certain answers and so on. And I always had a drive to be -- I had a big ego to be on top, whatever, which naturally I had competitions there very much, but it kept me alive.

Q: The first half year, was it depressing to you?

A: Yes, because a lot of the old people around us passed away. They just couldn't take it. And we saw that, even in our room, and every morning somebody was sick, had even -- had diarrhea, and it smelled, or vomiting, and awful -- awful things. This was very, very bad for us children, but since I later on decided in this country to be working in the medical profession, when I think about this now, it really is part of human suffering.

Q: So you were -- you were in the kinderheim, you were feeling -- I think you wrote that it was an intellectually prosperous, or fruitful --

A: [indecipherable] time.

Q: -- time for you. And it sounds like what you were able to learn there was not censored, or restricted, it sounds like --

A: No, it was between ourselves, since we had Eta Hoyman, we learned a lot of -- about Palestine, the history of the Zionist movement, and she wanted to inflame in all of us a desire to go to the homeland of the Jews.

Q: Did you feel that interest, and -- and --

A: Unfortunately, I don't know. I -- I did and I didn't.

Q: But you still enjoyed learning everything?

A: I enjo-joyed learning and reading classical novels. She read to us every night for at least an hour. And some of the children, naturally didn't pay attention, but I was there, I -- I couldn't pull myself away from that.

Q: And did you get involved in any cultural performances or activities?

A: I don't think so, I had a -- a flair for gardening, so they selected me to work in what they called the [indecipherable] garden. And I had a girlfriend, passed away not so long ago, we both were working there, we raised, for the Nazis naturally, tomatoes and spinach, and -- but we were able to eat here and there a tomato, when nobody looked. And they noticed that I made very nice beds, you know, the flower, not -- the beds for the vegetables, so they selected me to rake -- to rake the beds nice and straight, and make them four or five inches high from the ground, and so on. And that I enjoyed very much. And every night I went home, putting a tomato, or a potato under my armpits. If we had been caught, we would have been sent right away to some prison. There was a prison nearby, but I brought this to my mother, and she was forever grateful when she had something like this, to feed my brother.

Q: So tell me your -- your --

A: But it was a short time, it was maybe one summer, and one fall. Is it finished?

Q: You want to take a break?

A: Yes, please. I --

Q: I just want to make sure before we continue talking about your experiences, would you just make sure to tell me the full names of your family members, your parents and your brother?

A: Yes. My father's name was Bertholdt Eckstain. My mother's name was Bertha Eckstain, born Marx, M-a-r-x. My brother's name was Norbert, N-o-r-b-e-r-t Eckstain.

Q: And you originally had a middle name, it sounds like that was also from your family.

A: My middle name was Bina, B-i-n-a, which was my grandmother's name, on mother's side.

Q: And how did you -- and how about your first name, did you get that from someone in your family?

A: Yes, I had an aunt, she was more German than the Germans, very wealthy woman, married to a very wealthy horse dealer, in -- Jewish horse dealer in Germany, and she was thinking it should be a German name. She had a preference for me. She as herself couldn't get children, so she named me Gisela.

Q: And would you say that your family in general was very assimilated into German society?

A: I would say so. They were very assimilated, especially my mother's family. You had to be if you lived in a small town.

Q: Okay, so now to return to I think where we left off, we were talking about sort of the early time period when you were in Theresienstadt, and I actually have a map, and I would -- I'm wondering if you recognize sort of where you were.

A: I know that I was in L four -- 414 in the kinderheim, but before that --

Q: This looks like the main square.

A: Yeah, I understand. And near there was a kine -- it doesn't say there.

Q: This may not be detailed enough.

A: Yes, it was on the right side of the kinderheim.

Q: This apparently --

A: [indecipherable] children's home.

Q: So when you first arrived, where were you in terms of this main square?

A: We were -- we were in the Hanover barracks when we arrived, till I got to the kinderheim, which was L fear hundred -- 414, the German kinderheim.

Q: And at that time you were then separated from your parents, or did you see your family?

A: Oh, I could see them any time. It was a little walk to get to them, but most of my time was spent with the other children. We were always busy. We were kept busy from morning till night.

Q: And then -- and then you stayed in the kinderheim for how long?

A: Till we were deported.

Q: So you were there for the rest of the time?

A: Yeah.

Q: So, in looking at this example of the map, just so I have a better understanding, were you usually -- did you usually stay in a very small portion of the overall area, or did you wind up in many different, you know, parts.

A: Oh, it -- when we were allowed to go out without -- we could go anywheres without guardians, Jewish guardians. So we once in awhile went just through to the main square, or went to a concert, or something that was offered at that time.

Q: And the garden, you worked in a garden, is that?

A: Yes, I worked -- we worked in the Veshalie garden, which is outside the ghetto, we were marched there, and we were marched back. And I --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: And occasionally we're examined if we took anything into the camp, so everybody was very afraid if you took a potato or two, or a tomato or two, or some spinach underneath our clothing.

Q: So --

A: That we brought -- I brought to my mother, she was very grateful for this.

Q: So would you tell me --

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Gisela Zamora, conducted by Amy Rubin, on June first, 2003, in Scarsdale, New York. This is tape number two, side A. So I was just about to ask you if you could describe to me the daily routine or what a -- a day was like for you there. I guess we're talking about the time that you entered, you know, the kinderheim, and -- and you were working in the garden. What was a typical day like for you?

A: Well, we had to get up early in the morning, get our ration of food, whatever it was, and we had a very string -- string -- strict -- I'm sorry, strict teacher, that led us to -- in -- in to a sort of a circle, we sat down on the floor, and she told us -- she read to us, and we had naturally, intervals where we could go to the bathroom. Many of us had diarrhea from the food, from unsanitary conditions. We slept too many people in -- on one bunk, and usually on the -- on Saturdays we were free. And I had my first experience of relationship with the opposite text -- sex. That means only platonically. He was a singer from the Czech opera, and I happened to be, on a nice sunny day, in a new outfit that my mother made for me from some rags. And I sat myself down on some stones, and there comes this man, sat next to me, and I recognized him right away, and told him that he was at the opera. So he gave me a kiss, and hugged me. And he promised to be there the next week, and unfortunately I arrived, waited there for an hour with tears in my eyes, and I never saw him again.

Q: Do you know his name?

A: I am sorry, I forgot.

Q: But you had a little crush on him?

A: I had a crush on him. That was my first crush.

Q: And how old were you at this time?

A: I'm going on 15 --

Q: So the f --

A: -- or f -- almost 16.

Q: So -- so you were enjoying yourself in school, but the food situation was not very good, right?

A: No, we always were hungry, and if we could somehow or other catch anywheres a little bit extra, that was special.

Q: And otherwise you saw your family in the evenings?

A: Yes, and sometimes in the afternoons, and then when my f -- my brother got sick with typhus, I was not allowed to go there for awhile, because it was disinfected, and my mother didn't want me to come there. So I met them on the outside once in awhile. But generally I was so happy and -- to be in the kinderheim, that I had not this desire that I would have today to see my parents. We were young, and so wrapped up with being young, trying to learn and enjoy ourselves. So, these horrible things were left sort of not to dwell on. We saw every day wagons with corpses going by, because we were right on the main street, and they were being taken out of the ghetto to a mass grave. But your -- every day you saw at least two or three wagons with several people in there. Mostly elderly people.

Q: And did you give much thought to it at the time?

A: None at all. We were so -- we were so childlike. I think today's teenagers would think different, but we were so ignorant.

Q: And what did you hear -- I -- I get the impression that Theresienstadt was unusual, that sometimes people could write letters, and send information from the outside. Did your family -- were you aware of your family receiving packages or letters?

A: No, we ne -- I don't think I remember anybody sending us packages, because all my family from my mother's side -- [phone rings] Ah, I'm sorry. [indecipherable] where we were.

Q: Does this map look familiar to you, or not very familiar, actually?

A: Not at all. I know the main square.

Q: And this says post office.

A: Street.

Q: Street, or [indecipherable]

A: I don't remember. The only thing is maybe this --

Q: Number 13.

A: -- teen was what? SS billets, no. Let's see why -- what.

Q: Let's see now, maybe if we read this, it might tell you something that you would recognize.

A: I look -- children's pavilion during the embellishment. No, that was not [indecipherable]

Q: That was in preparation for the Red Cross.

A: Yeah, no, we were put there. We were taken there when they came and inspected us, and we -- we all were fixed up with beautiful hairdos, flowers, and new clothing if -- if they had.

Q: Did you understand what was happening at that time?

A: Not at all. I-I can't even remember.

Q: But you know that something was different, you know that you were given --

A: Yes, yes, later on we heard that this was an inspection for the Red Cross, for the international Red Cross.

Q: And did you meet anybody from the Red Cross at that time, or see anybody coming through? Were you aware of their visit?

A: I -- no, I -- a ve -- we -- you know, I was way in the back, and there were a lot of children, a lot of people that they brought there. I think now I'm finds it. L -- Main Street. We were on the Main Street. I would say maybe here, these two buildings, one was for just Czech, Slovak people, and one was for the German Dutch children.

Q: So when -- so what else do you remember, if anything about the time period right before -- well, when did the Red Cross come to visit, and what do you remember about that whole time period?

A: I do remember nothing very much, except that I was happy to be in company with my own grade -- kind, and I was not a good eater before we left Germany, and that's why my -- my hunger, probably was not so bad that time. I didn't feel it. Or I felt it, but whatever we got at that time seemed to be a little bit sufficient, even though probably it wasn't sufficient. But I think it was sufficient for me if they ar -- selected me in Auschwitz to go on labor.

Q: And you were --

A: Even so, I was small, skinny, not very tall compared to a lot of other girls that were hefty, and tal -- and robust, muscular and so on.

Q: So what were your -- what were your actual barracks like, and -- and how crowded were they?

A: Well, as I said, the barracks where my parents were e -- were first brought, where one family was put in one little compound, in a corner, next to another family, another family, another family and so on. And as I said, it was th-the more elite part of the ghetto that we were brought to. There were only lawyers, doctors, and prominent people. I remember even one of my mathematics teacher from Frankfurt with his family, Dr. Naleftchuwitz, that he was right near us, across this -- from our compound, the same big room. Then there was a famous lawyer,

Lervenstein, whose daughter Ruth Lervenstein? I forgot her first name now, was a very accomplished pianist, and performed on the stage in Theresienstadt, and she took me to many of her concerts. What I remember most is that a -- the last night before our deportation, my mother and I -- that means my father was deported already, a month later my mother and I went to a performance of Hayden's Creation, and I never will forget that. Next morning we were all rounded up for Auschwitz. .

Q: And the night before you were very happy, would you say, or --

A: Ah, yeah, it impressed me very much to hear that chorus, and I have a ticket to hear it at Lincoln Center a -- a -- on August 23rd, and I wonder what reaction it gives me.

Q: So did you have many interactions with any of the Nazis overseeing, or I believe there were some Czech gendarmes who were also the guards?

A: Yes, the Czech gen -- gendarmes were with us in the Vesherie garden on the outside. On the general they were very humane, let's say as humane an -- as they could be. They let us work, we -- we naturally had to work, but they were not like the Nazis.

Q: And you did see Nazis inside Theresienstadt?

A: I never really -- I don't remember. I really don't remember.

Q: When -- when were you aware of your father leaving? Did you know beforehand?

A: No, all of a sudden they said tomorrow -- this is -- in this time my father and lots of other men have to be ready to go on labor on the outside, and they rounded up all younger men in their 30's and 40's. My father was at that time -- born in '93, f -- about 51 or 52, but very tall, and not overweight, and he was amongst those that were selected on this first trip to Auschwitz from Theresienstadt, the first men's transport.

Q: And when was that?

A: August, 1944.

Q: Had you heard anything about Auschwitz at this point?

A: Nothing. Maybe it was mentioned, but nobody could make any il -- illustration how it would look. I don't think I heard anything about it. They only talked about labor camps for the Reich.

Q: And you did not know your father was going to Auschwitz?

A: No, no. As a matter of fact, they duped us when one month later, they said all wifes and children of the men that were transported last month will now be able to go to the labor camp, and live with their husbands. So it should be an enticement to go on this trip. I don't know if my mother f -- did that out of her free will and registered us, or if we were just selected.

Q: Did you have any -- do you remember any holidays, religious holidays in Theresienstadt?

A: Well, as we -- as we had a very Zionistic, and also religious hofsayren instead of teacher, Eta Noyman, a prominent Zionist and Judaic scholar, she made sure we had a nice celebration on the various Jewish holidays.

Q: So by the time -- oh, I wanted to ask you -- here, I can take that -- I wanted to ask you, when you were, you know, studying and learning, and this was a fruitful time for you, did you have any dreams, or aspirations for what you would like to do later, as you grew up?

A: I don't remember, but I was so -- so hungry for knowledge, for knowing things. I was always competitive even in Frankfurt in the ha -- in the school we went to. And I basically was not a top student like my friend Eva Warburg, but I was a good student.

Q: What were the subjects that you liked the most in school?

A: Science. I was good in mathematics. That was my father's influence. He had us do arithmetic when we were four years old. And I remember as a child three years, or four years old, playing around with w, because I liked that letter, and made out two v's and turned it around to make an

m. All these things, and the n, I made into a u upside down. And those were sort of -- I think ingenious ideas that not every child has.

Q: And -- and you were -- it wasn't necessarily every other child around you who was as hungry for knowledge, right? It was sort of unusual.

A: N-No, no, that's true. But I sought out those kids that had the same interest.

Q: And who were your closest friends at that time in Theresienstadt?

A: As I said, Eva Hashkowitz Goodman, who just published a book in German. Ouse wonderum forloifish nish merklish. She was a good friend of mine, and it was by coincidence that we were -- met again in Auschwitz, and she gave me a half a loaf of bread, and I'll never, never forget that.

Q: Any other good friends in [indecipherable]

A: Oh yeah, I had a lot of good friends in Theresienstadt that came from my neighborhood in Friedberg. Her name was Ruth Wertheim. She married a Mitchell Bakehow, a lawyer in Detroit -- in Pontiac, Michigan. And we were lifelong friends. She saved my life on several occasions in Auschwitz by being like a mother, very protective.

Q: Before you were sent to Auschwitz, you also had another job in Theresienstadt.

A: Yes, I was washing children's diapers in cold water. I remember it was fiercely cold that winter, and my hands used to freeze, and I'm surprised I don't have any frostbites or anything. That was part of my job.

Q: You did that outside in the winter?

A: We did it -- we -- I don't remember. No, we did that inside, but no heat. Cold water only.

Q: Oh, and in -- in your living arrangements after you were with your parents all together, then you are with other young women your age, and --

A: Yes, a -- as I said, the twins -- the Hashkowitz twins were on my ps -- on my bunk.

Q: And was it very uncomfortable, was everybody crowded in? Was it hard to --

A: We sort of maked go -- do. I don't remember that, but I know we suffered from the -- from lice, and from bedbugs. Bedbugs were s -- I was terribly allergic to bedbugs.

Q: What happened to you?

A: Oh, my -- my body was full of pustules. They treated us with disinfectant, whatever they had, but that was not enough, it was so endemic. And the lice, they were all over our head, and no washing and cleaning could bring that out. So this was one bad thing.

Q: But everything got better for a little while when the Red Cross was going to come, and then did things change back to the sort of normal, the Jewish --

A: Yes, and right away after that really, the deportations from Theresienstadt started.

Q: So the day that you were deported, what do you remember that day?

A: It was in September, I think it was September 17th, and my mother said, "It must be Rosh Hashanah," when our -- Rosh Hashanah just passed. I don't remember exactly what she said, and we were together in wagons again, coal wagons, or whatever they were, and taken to Auschwitz. That was a terrible trip. There was one pail where we could go and defecate and urinate, and at some stations the SS came, and somebody had it to empty them. Then the trip went on, and it took about two or three days to li -- to get to Auschwitz. Luckily, it was cool, and we didn't need too much water. But I remember that sitting in the -- in -- in the middle of the wagon, without any backrest, or so on, was very painful. My mother must have suffered tremendously, because when I think about my back now, and it's -- bother it gives me, I think back how these older people suffered.

Q: Did you eat, or have anything to drink?

A: I don't remember, but as I said, my mother took some things along, probably, because everything was confiscated in Auschwitz then. But till we got to Auschwitz, we did have something. I don't remember what it was.

Q: And were you scared? What did you think?

A: T -- well, I wasn't scared, just ignorant, we all were ignorant. Maybe the older people knew, but basically I wonder what other testimonials people give if they have -- young people, if they have had i -- any idea what would happen.

Q: I think it seems that most of the time people either didn't know, or couldn't believe that this would be truly happening.

A: That's right. I could -- I could not believe. I absolutely was stunned.

Q: So when you arrived, what did you see?

A: I never saw the crematorium, that was later on pointed out to me, after we were in -- in -- in our bunks already. But we were on this platform, and Mengele makes the selection, and my -- my mother, my brother were taken from me. I was taken t-to the other side, and luckily my friend Ruth Wertheim was there, and we two held hands, and kept together, and were put into the same barrack, slept on the same bed. There we met another girl. Her name was Hannah Laura Breaker. She immigrated to Israel a long, long time ago. And the second time I came to Israel, she had passed away already. She was very much taken, and suffered greatly from her experience. She took it in very, very much, and I think that led her to an early death. Also my friend Ruth Hershkowitz Goodman, and her sister -- can't think of her name. I'll look it up after. The twins. Not identical twins. She also was selected to our area, but sin-since they were twins, were taken out to be with -- for experimentation. But somehow or other they had the luck that Mengele left -- let them be for last, and used them as messengers. So that they were able to get a

little bread here and there, and once when I met Ruth Hershkowitz on the way out of Auschwitz, she gave me a half a loaf of bread, and she mentions it in her book.

Q: Did -- did you know this -- this doctor was named Mengele at the time, or --

A: No, no, not at all, didn't know.

Q: It's much later when you learned.

A: Yes, who know -- knew anything. We knew our -- when we got to the labor camp, we knew the German woman that was our -- a -- a real terrible bitch, if I can say that she was. Inhuman. Inhuman and how would I say, a -- had no scruples whatsoever to hit us, or to kill us, or whatever. She always wore a revolver in her polster, and was ready to shoot anybody.

Q: And who was she? Who -- what's her name?

A: That wa -- I don't remember her name. I think her first name was Ilsa. I only remember when we were liberated by the Russians, some of the Polish girls in the labor camp took her and shaved her hair, and gave her over to the Russians. I don't know what happened to her. I was too sick at that time.

Q: I wanted to go back for a moment, one thing I didn't get a chance to ask you. When you were still in Germany, and growing up, and moving from one place to the other, once Hitler came to power, or even right before that, what -- what was your awareness of Hitler? Had you been hearing anything he said over the radio? Did you parents talk about this person, Hitler? What did -- what did you know, what was your awareness?

A: You know that since we went to -- still to German schools in the beginning, we took all these things in, and when all the young people were selected for the youth -- the Hitler yugen, and for the gymnast -- gymnastic classes and so on, no Jews were allowed to enter, nor half-Jews. And

that was really the only thing that bothered me. Everything else, we copied, sort of. When they sang German folk songs, and we went right along with it.

Q: Did you feel that sense of German nationalism then, that --

A: I -- I didn't -- you know, they -- they said the Polacks, the Polish people, and the French people, they are so dirty, they don't wash themselves, they had all kinds of preconceived notions, or -- that was drilled into the German youth. And we staying there, and being with them, believed the same things.

Q: And you felt very German?

A: And we felt very German. After all, my father was more German than the Germans, I would say. He -- he belonged to the Reichpont yudizhafront soldaten. That means the ri -- the reich -- the club of the reich of the Jewish s -- soldier of the front.

Q: And so you, for a while you actually had non-Jewish friends who were joining the Hitler youth, and you were wondering why --

A: Oh yes, all the time.

Q: -- Jewish people weren't allowed to --

A: Yes, yes. And then, after awhile, they -- their -- their parents said, "Don't talk to this Jewish girl any more. Don't -- don't play with her. Stay away." So we were really alone. We were sort of es -- ostracized then, really.

Q: And do you remember hearing Hitler's speeches at all?

A: No. But my husband told me he went, when he opened up the airport in Frankfurt, he went with his father to hear him, and that gave him the first time an idea that this man is a dictator. My husband was seven years older, and had much more knowledge, was very brilliant. And he told

me this later, when we were married, naturally. He said that he could not understand it, that German people were so after him, spe -- especially some women that were enamored in him.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: -- morial Museum interview with Gisela Zamora. This is tape two, side B. This is also a map here of Birkenau, and I think this is around the time when you would have been there, it says late October --

A: Mm-hm, yes.

Q: -- ’44.

A: Yes.

Q: When did -- when did you arrive? You arrived in September, ’44?

A: In ma -- in September ’44, and was shipped out of Auschwitz in October, late October, to --

Q: To --

A: -- Mattsdorf [indecipherable] to work at Krumstar, Maidna and Franna.

Q: Do you recognize where you would have been in the maps here?

A: No, no, no, they were so close together, I could never tell this. I -- I have absolutely no recollection.

Q: But you were in Birkenau, you were in Auschwitz two, right?

A: Yes. I -- I really didn’t know at that time that it was Birkenau, but in the mornings we used to stand at the barbed wire, and we used to see naked men, and real musselmen go by, and waving and sought -- were -- were scr-screaming across the wire if they knew of this and this person, either their wife, their mothers, or whatever.

Q: They were on the outside, asking --

A: They were -- yes, they were in the men's -- in the men's camp.

Q: So you were there for approximately four to five weeks?

A: That's right.

Q: And dur --

A: Longer I wouldn't have survived.

Q: And during that time you said at one point you did become aware of the crematorium, when was that?

A: Yes, the girls, first of all -- the first -- after the first night in Auschwitz, we got out on appelle, to be s-standing in line and being counted. There was one girl missing, and we saw her at the barbed wire, she had committed suicide. And there -- there was a big to-do in that camp, in our barrack, what happened, there's one missing. And then finally somebody got up and said, "She is lying near the barbed wire."

Q: Was this a real shock to you?

A: Yes, it was a shock, I saw it. I saw the woman. A very good looking, Czech, Jewish, a younger woman, maybe in her early 20's.

Q: And did you already have a sense that this was a very different place than Theresienstadt?

A: Yes, yes. We talked among ourselves that -- we stood outside for hours, and I didn't -- I was given one shirt, sort of, that went down to my knees. It was a little flannel inside, thank God. No socks, no underwear, nothing. Somehow or other, later on somehow, I got a -- a rag somewheres, and I used that around my -- my sp -- private par -- parts to be like an underpair of -- under -- pair of pantyhose, or panties. I was always cold in Auschwitz, I cannot remember that I wasn't cold, and suddenly I noticed that I -- my breathing started to be short, and I realized I had fever,

and was coughing. Those were the first signs of having TB. I didn't realize it, and my friend Ruth said, "Don't say anything, just stay and we'll take care of you."

Q: So do you feel like at this stage you were starting to feel more depressed or hopeless about things, or -- or did you still somehow not realize what was possibly going to happen?

A: We all didn't know what was going to happen to us, but we felt -- we -- we smelt a stench from the crematoria. By that time we knew that there was gassing going on. I mean, that was the -- the underground informed us. "And if you don't behave you're going to go there too," they said, "so just do what they say." And since I was the smallest, or one of the smallest, I was always hidden by taller girls, and good looking girls. And somehow I escaped, this way.

Q: You think this helped you, to be small?

A: It -- it helped me at that moment, yes.

Q: Were you searching for your mother, your father, your brother?

A: I -- I would have liked, I wasn't -- yes, I was trying to find out what happened to them, but we were so occupied in our own psyche, that it was just self-determination to stay alive, that we didn't think about anybody else.

Q: Did you help each other out, the -- the women you were with?

A: Oh, I must say, these -- we -- the three girls that we were -- Hannah Laura Breaker, Ruth Wertheim and myself, we were like three sisters. We helped each other.

Q: You shared food, and you --

A: Well, the -- the -- this comes later, when -- after we left Auschwitz, naturally we -- we couldn't share foods, we each got our plate of soup, and a piece of bread, and everybody said, "Don't hide your bread, it's going to be stolen, eat it as soon as you get it." And that was the truth, because some of the girls, if they hid their bread for the night, or for whatever, they were

gone. Some of the other mates were so hungry, and at that time you were doing anything you could to get more food. Later on, when we were already deported to Mattsdorf and Reasonkeperga, which happened at dusk, really, it was almost dark in October, very dreary day, and maybe Mengele didn't see how small I was, and said I was being selected to go out, because there was nobody among those girls that was as small and perishable as I was. So emaciated, I would say already, and coughing. And that's when I red -- I met Rose Hershkowitz with the half a loaf of bread. And we went out of Auschwitz that night, and arrived in Mattsdorf, it's a krumstin maidnon farflanna parachute factory. And right away we were put in our bunks, and assigned to work for the next day. I was put on the machine that was absolutely one of the worst. You had to take raw flax, which came from the outside, the door was always open, and they threw that flax in and I had to lift it up and put it into the machine, to take off the seeds on the top. They had to be put in a certain way into the machine. [phone rings]

Q: Okay. Okay, before we move on to talk about the labor camp, just a little bit more of a sense of what it was like day by day in Auschwitz. Did you ever do any work in Auschwitz, or every day you were just sort of fighting to -- to stay healthy? You know, what was -- what was --

A: We were -- first of all, I spent an awful lot of time on the latrines, I had terrible diarrhea, and I took every minute I could to run to the latrine, which was not always allowed, and it had a permanent affect on my bowels, which I suffer today. We -- we were asked by different older supervisors of our -- our kind in the barrack if we want to bring the soup up. It was a steep little hill, and I volunteered a couple of times, but I found it very, very hard to shlep maybe 20 liters or more of soup in the barrel. And I remember that as the worst labor for me in Auschwitz. I -- we didn't do anything, we just stood at the appelle morning and night, cleaned the barracks if

possible, if they let us, and waited for our meal. We were just the reserve for going out, and not employed in any way in Auschwitz itself.

Q: Were you worried about being sent to the crematorium at that time?

A: I don't remember, I don't think so.

Q: And --

A: Sometimes one wished already that it's -- it might be, but the self-preservation within one was so strong that you wanted to survive under any circumstances.

Q: Did you think that your -- your family was still alive?

A: I s -- I thought of it till the end of the war, and that's why I went back to Friedberg. The Russian soldiers, and the Russian Jewish officer wanted me to go with him to Russia. I said, "No, I have to go west."

Q: Did you ever -- later, did you ever receive any confirmation of exactly how they died?

A: Yes, when we wrote to Garovstein and we found out that this -- the day when they arrived in Auschwitz, that's their death day, that's the [indecipherable]

Q: And that was your mother and brother?

A: Mother, and my father also, before. I have all the -- the documents about this. The funny thing is, my poor husband never could find out where his mother was, and we have a letter that they don't know where she passed away. We think -- or he thought that she died in Litzmannstadt, in Lódz, in the ghetto.

Q: Did you -- the documentation that you have about your family, did you ever send copies or any of that to the museum?

A: I think they have it. I'm sure -- my husband did all of this, I am not aware of it.

Q: Okay, so -- so now tell me about -- tell me about the day that you were sent out of Auschwitz, and -- and the circumstances. What -- what exactly happened that day?

A: We were up -- we were rounded up, about 800 - 900 young girls, Hungarians, German Jews, Polish Jews. The German Jews were a minority -- I was among those, and Czech. Our Czech brothers and si -- our Czech sisters that were -- came from Theresienstadt with us, we assembled on the plaza, and then gi -- Mengele came and selected about four to 500 women. Among them was me. I had held the hand of my friend Ruth Wertheim, who probably pulled me over, because I was so small, and sickly already. And he might not have seen it, it was dusk, and gray and evening, and we were put on the train, on the last wagon again, a closed train, and were taken to Mattsdorf and Reasonkeperga. We arrived there the next day, and were unloaded, and the thing was they didn't have enough room for us, so they quickly built Quonset huts on top of the factory, and that's where we were located. That was a -- an plus for us, because the heat rises up from the machinery that went on 24 hours a day in the factory, and we felt the first time a little warmth. And also, the factory had to get rid of dirty water that -- hot water that came out of the machinery, since they were cooled by water, and we washed ourselves, and we kept ourselves pretty clean during that time. But that was a time I got sick very fast, and a doctor came and put me in the infirmary. I was coughing, I had a mastitis which was draining. My l-le -- ma -- in ma -- on my ri-right breast for eight months, even after we were liberated yet. It gave me terrible pain, and I had absolutely no incentive or will to live at that time any more. But my friend Ruth Wertheim, and Hannah Laura Breaker, both kept me going. One day as we were standing there and talking in appelle, somehow or other, the foreman of the factory came by, and he said, "How come you girls speak so well German?" So we said, "We -- we are Germans. We went to

German schools." He couldn't understand it. So next day he brought us an apple, and we divided the apple in three. And that was the first time that a German showed some kind of compassion.

Q: Was he an SS?

A: No, he was a worker, a -- a -- the foreman. Not -- not an SS. If the f -- SS would have known, probably he would have been fired, or whatever. But at that time, it was towards the end of the war, and they were very much wrapped up with the Russian front that was very close to us. We heard the shooting all night long.

Q: Can you describe, approximately where -- where this labor camp was? You -- you were saying --

A: It was very near Gross-Rosen, and right across from us was a labor camp of French prisoners of war. They actually wor-worked in our factory, too -- do -- to -- did some heavy man's labor. And some girls even sort of befriended them, or made some kind of contact with them.

Q: So in your factory it was only for women, is that right?

A: That, yes, that part was only for women, where -- where the flax was made into -- mixed with a certain synthetic material for parachutes.

Q: And you were telling me before, when the tape ran out, the exact job that you were doing.

A: Yes, I was -- as the raw flax, which -- which made sores on my hand because they are stalks, and you had to be fast putting it into the machine. My hands were always bloody, and injured from this job. And the seeds went into a bucket used for something else, and the stalks w-were put through other machines, and refined towards cha -- changing it into a material.

Q: And this was pretty hard -- you know, difficult labor, would you say?

A: It was very difficult labor. I was on one of the worst machines. My friend Ruth Wertheim was lucky, she was actually in a part of the sewing part, where they already mixed the nylon, or

whatever they had, some synthetic type of process, with the flax material. And it was easier. So, actually, I was on the worst end of the labor. That's why I got sick very fast. The -- the door was always open for the flax to be thrown in, which was also done by girls, and some French prisoners brought the heavy bundles. And this went for eight -- almost eight months, from October to May, 1945. We almost worked towards the very, very end of April in -- fully on these machines.

Q: Were you hearing any news about the war?

A: Yes, we heard that they were coming nearer, nearer. The French soldiers warned us that they might blow us up, so one morning all of a sudden, all the Germans were gone. They were -- the factory was locked up, all Quonset huts were locked up, and everything. We thought they are going to blow us up, but nothing happened, nobody was around, nuth -- nobody came. That went on for 24 hours, and we searched for food, and there was really nothing left. And then finally we saw a Russian soldier come on the bicycle, and s-somebody yelled out of a window, or whatever, and he came and alerted the Russian army. And the first thing the girls did -- I was too sick, slaughter a cow, or sa -- or a -- or something, or [indecipherable] just to get some f -- real good food into us.

Q: There was a cow nearby, you mean, or --

A: Oh, there were farms nearby. It was a very beautiful area. Oh, besides our regular job, many times in middle of the night, some of us were taken, every time a different c-cloud to shovel coal, to di -- ti -- when the coal wagons were brought in, we had to empty them so they could be used right away. And I remember one night was terribly cold, snow on the ground, and we found something that looked so red, we took it, and was a liver from some kind of an animal, or whatever. And we took it into the barracks, and my friend Ruth put it on some kind of a heating

mechanism, maybe a radiator, or a machine that had heat, and sort of fried it a little, and the three of us divided it and ate it.

Q: You were with a third friend as well there?

A: That Hannah Laura Breaker, three of us.

Q: How was -- you said there was one woman in particular, she was a -- a German guard there?

A: Yes, that -- that was in Auschwitz. There too, there wa -- there were two Polish girls, and they claimed that they were lesbians. Polish Jewish girls that this German woman used them for sexual whatever, I don't know. And they were put in charge of us. And afterwards we really got after the two.

Q: The two in -- in Auschwitz, or in the labor camp?

A: In -- in -- in the labor camp, not in Auschwitz. In Auschwitz I don't see -- I have seen a non -- none except SS.

Q: But in the labor camp, these two women --

A: [indecipherable]

Q: The Polish Jewish women --

A: -- Jewish women, yeah.

Q: -- were in charge of your group.

A: [indecipherable] group, yeah. A -- except in the morning that we stood outside, were counted by that SS woman.

Q: And she was very harsh?

A: Very harsh. She right away came with her what do you call, a riding --

Q: A whip?

A: Whip. And used to, if you didn't stand strai -- straight, hit you over the shoulder, on your hands, or whatever.

Q: So when -- when you were not feeling well, you were also given some medical attention while you were in the labor camp, right?

A: Yes, that was after awhile. A man came, a Dr. Hoffman, and apparently he was only a medic, he was not a doctor, we found out after the war. We searched him. He actually helped a lot of the girls. Few girls that -- that came with us to the labor camp were pregnant, and had babies there, and miscarriages. Maybe three or four, but I think two survived and took their babies. And --

Q: They were able to keep their babies there, at the camp?

A: At the -- I don't know, it was so late in the year already. March, April, I mean how -- the g -- the Germans were afraid of everything already. They knew it was going towards the end, and they were so afraid of the Russians. And no more trains, and no more gas chambers in Auschwitz, you know. Auschwitz was dismantled in January. So they --

Q: Had -- had you heard about any of those developments?

A: No, we didn't know about this. We didn't know. But the French soldiers informed us a lot about. They -- they talked to some of the girls.

Q: Now were you regularly having your menstrual cycles, or were you so --

A: No-o, I had -- that is the funniest thing, my friend Ruth Wertheim had it a few times, and she had nothing to use, she used paper, or whatever she found, even flax. I had my menstrual period once in Theresienstadt, and that was it. But one month after liberation, I had it again, and regularly till it stopped at age 52.

Q: But for almost the entire time during the war?

A: I had none, none at all. I had -- I had maybe three, four menstruations before we were deported, because I was about 14 and a half, or whatever.

Q: And you -- you did get fairly ill by the end, it seems.

A: I was very ill. As a matter of fact, it took me many -- I would say a year or two to recover. And how I ever got to Friedberg -- I walked, with French prisoners of war, with Germans, on this general exodus from the east towards Germany, and I had my yellow stripe on a jacket, and we looted some things in German houses, so I had enough cl-clothes to wear. And I went e -- west. And it was a beautiful June, I remember. Oh, first there was one month -- I'm sorry, I was taken to a -- to a German hospital that was taken over by the Russians, and I stayed there four weeks, and they sort of healed m -- healed me, they helped me to get much better and stronger.

Q: Well now, when liberation occurred.--

A: Everybody left, but the ones that were in the sick brai -- sick --

Q: Sick bay?

A: Bay. Couldn't go. So I was --

Q: How many were there?

A: Oh, there were about, I would say, 25 to 30 girls. And the ones that --

Q: So you were already there for -- how long before liberation were you in the sick bay?

A: I would say two or three months.

Q: And you were not working during that time?

A: No, I couldn't.

Q: And you had tuberculosis? What did you have at the time?

A: I've had tuberculosis, and the mastitis. And I had a fever all the time.

Q: So when liberation took place, ji -- and you were still so unwell health-wise, did you feel free and happy? Wha --

A: I was so happy, and so elated that we were free, we could do now whatever we wanted to, and it was -- this feeling, I wished I could get back. This was nirvana.

Q: So you really understood this was the end of the war, this was it. It had really happened, and you were --

A: It had happened. But then I realized I was alone in this world, and luckily when I arrived at Friedberg, I got a ride with a -- an American, with two American soldiers as soon as I came to Holf and Saxon, they gave me a ride to Birkenback in Germany, and from there some trains were leaving, going towards Frankfurt, and I took a train to Hanau, which was very close to Friedberg, because the train from Frankfurt did not go to Friedberg yet. So from Hanau I took the train to -- where I got the money from, I don't remember, but everything was on the -- on the road. I got to Friedberg, and I wa -- a-asked the stationmaster, "Do you know if Mr. Mowra, Edgar Mowra is here, and where does he live?" And he said, "He just came back from Dachau." He was in Dachau, and he told me where he was. And that's where I ended up, and stayed with him, his son, and the housekeeper till my papers came through. Actually not the whole time. He felt that I should be taken care of with my tuberculosis, and took me to the hospital in Bad Nauheim. And a very fine German radiologist said, "Well, she has pretty bad tuberculosis on the left side of -- the left lung. And we should give her pneumothorax." So I s --

End of Tape Two, Side B

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

A: They don't do it any more today, it's very dangerous.

Q: This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Gisela Zamora, conducted by Amy Rubin, on June first, 2003. This is tape number three, side A. Since we were just cut off then, tell me again -- if you would also, just make sure I understand the chronology from the labor camp, and where you went next, and then of course, tell me about the medical procedure that you had.

A: I had a medical procedure in the labor camp, by the way. This Dr. Hoffman, or medic Hoffman that arrived there, who came from Bardkissingin, which we lateler -- we later found out he was a medic with the German army corps. He made two incisions in my cyst, or whatever it was in my right breast, and the pus finally came out, and he entered a canula and this drained for eight months. But he did a pretty good job, and even though he was just a medic, not a medical physician, it helped me to survive through the other months. However, I continued coughing, suffered very much from shortness of breath, and know that I have had something -- I have something with my lungs. And when I finally arrived in Friedberg, and stayed at Edgar Mowra's, I was very grateful that he took me to the hospital in Bad Nauheim, which is known as one of the top heart spas in the world, and had an excellent, at that time, staff in it's hospitals. A woman physician, a radiologist, was very kind to me, and explained everything, and said, "You need a pneumothorax for eight -- for as long as we can do it. We collapse your left lung so it can rest." And they pump air into the cavity, but very shortly already, water filled up -- fluid, after the cavity was empty, and that's the danger of this procedure. And actually it does not help very much. After awhile they decided to refrain from that, and my lung seemed to ex --

Q: Expand?

A: Expand again to almost normal size, but my pleural covering was completely disintegrated, which I did not find out till I arrived in the United States, and had a triple bypass at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital. And due to this finding, I finally got, a month later, operation from the German government for gesundheit sharden.

Q: You got -- I'm sorry, here in the s -- States --

A: Yes.

Q: -- you got compensation, you mean?

A: Yes, finally when -- when Columbia -- when the physician from Columbia gave me the operative report, and I send it to the German authorities. I had gotten the compensation for time in camp, and for labor, but nothing monthly. And I am grateful now that I get this monthly compensation, because I am alone. My Social Security is very small. I have some resources, and own my apartment, but as I get older, I'm alone, I have to think about the future.

Q: And that's because of the medical --

A: Yes, the comp --

Q: -- issues.

A: Yes, the compensation is purely for medical reasons.

Q: So -- so after -- after liberation, and -- well, what -- tell me what happened to your close friends you were with at that time.

A: Oh, this is very interesting, too. I -- I -- my friend Hannah Laura Breaker was living pretty far away from Friedberg, where I was, and she decided -- and call -- t-told me that she will not stay in Germany, she does not want really to go to America, but she might go to America in order to get to Israel. She went to the U.S. -- she ca -- with one of the first refugee transports in 1946, at the end of '46, and stayed with her relatives in Washington Heights in New York, and then

decided to join an aliyah. And one year later went to Israel to live there. She lived in Moetine, and I visited her the first time when I got to Israel in 1963. She wa -- had married, and had children, was a heavy smoker, and a -- gained it -- lot of weight, and when my husband and I returned in 1973, we looked up again where she was living, and she had passed away. My friend Ruth Wertheim I kept in touch all along in this country. We were like sisters. We called each other almost weekly. She understood more of the horrible times we went through, and she had lost a sister before she got to Theresienstadt, because she was -- she gave [indecipherable]

Q: She was attacked, or lynched, or --

A: No, no, she hit into the -- in the face of a -- of a Nazi boy who called her something, and she was right away taken, and they hanged her. And this left a terrible scar on my friend Ruth during all this time. She married this lawyer, who was very good to her, had two children, a boy and a girl. Her son is now president of -- he was at M.I.T., a provost. He is now the president of the -- what is the Jewish university --

Q: A school -- Brandeis?

A: Brandei -- not Brandeis, another one there, very famous college in Boston, he is the president.

Q: But it's Jewish, or not?

A: More or less -- not -- I forgot. I'm sorry. Maybe it's Brandeis. No, I don't think so. My friend Ruth Hershkowitz knows, I'll ca -- ask her, and call her, and let you know, if you want to know.

Q: And -- and your friend Ruth also came to the U.S.?

A: Yes, that was -- and she had many good years, she had a good life in Pontiac. I visited her there twice. And we were like sisters, and she had the quadruple or quintuple bypass in Boston at Brigham Hospital, and unfortunately it didn't help her, she passed away two years later. I was

more lucky, I had only a triple bypass. Dr. Eric Rose, who does now only heart transplants did mine, and did a good job.

Q: When you were back in -- in Friedberg, did you also look for your family?

A: Yes, that's why I went back, and we'd searched. Edgar Mowra helped me very much to search, he went to the authorities. At that time Germany was in chaos. A lot of soldiers had vanished, even, in Russia, and po -- in Poland and -- and so on, they -- they were -- the German people were interested in their own first. But the American, and the British authorities [indecipherable]on the west, established registration, camps, and eventually I ended up in Feldafing, which was a -- in Barbaria, which was a refugee camp, but it had a TB hospital. And they send me to Bardkolegrup for re-rehabilitation, and for the air, which was in the Alps.

Q: And when was this?

A: In 1946 - '47.

Q: After Bad Nau -- Nauheim?

A: Nauheim, yes, after b -- after I stayed with the Mowras for a little while, with Mr. Mowra.

Q: So you looked for your family, and couldn't find any trace of them?

A: No, no, and I didn't know -- well, I -- I f -- I surmised they were killed in Auschwitz.

Q: And how did you feel --

A: How wa -- how did I feel --

Q: N-No, I was going to ask you how you felt being back in Germany, and after the war.

A: You know, it's a funny thing, is that I felt happy to be so liberal-lated, that I was able to -- to partake in everything. And it never crossed my mind what the Germans did to us, really. Ignorance.

Q: You think you just weren't thinking of it in that sense? I mean, you knew that the Germans were responsible for the war --

A: Yes, definitely.

Q: -- starting the war.

A: As time went on, and as I talked to American soldiers, and my uncle here in America, Louie Marx, my mother's brother, made sure that I come as soon as possible. He put everything into motion, and he asked my relatives here in Scarsdale, who were bor -- she was a born Lanksdorf, and a distant relative to my grandmother on my mother's side, to help, and they did, and brought me over in 1947.

Q: And that was also through the Offbau newspaper?

A: Yes, oh yes, they -- an American soldier, unfortunately I don't remember his name, and I never kept a record of it, he published an announcement in the Offbau to say that Gisela Eckstain is looking for relatives, and a friend from Battenberg read it, and called my uncle, she knew where he was in Washington Heights, and told him, "Your niece is looking for you." And that's how I got in contact. And I lived with them for a little while. But unfortunately my uncle had a horrible wife. She was a witch.

Q: And the --

A: But he was such a good man.

Q: And at the time you actually felt you would have preferred to have stayed in Germany, is that right?

A: You know, I was so attached to the Mowra family, they were so good to me. And the housfrau -- the -- the -- the housekeeper is one of my most -- the person that gave me the most soul input. I have to show you a picture, it's on the wall there, of all my favorites.

Q: And what's her name?

A: Her name was Meeta Oyla. She was a bastard girl apparently, and she kept the household for the Mowras.

Q: And you didn't feel anti-Semitism after the war in Germany?

A: No, but I think they didn't like that there were coming so many refugees.

Q: How did you -- there was also, I think, a document you sent to the museum, something from a Russian sergeant allowing you to go from one zone to the next.

A: Yes, I am going to show you the original.

Q: The museum have a copy of this? Do you know?

A: They have the copy.

Q: Okay.

A: This is the original, prayerbushka, made out by a Russian officer, and he was wonderful to me, because I didn't understand any Russian, and he talked Yiddish to me, or German a little bit, and he helped me so much when I was in this lotsarett it was called, in Mattsdorf and Reasonkeperga.

Q: And what does it say, or what do you -- what -- what did it help you to do?

A: That's my husband. Jewish museum in Frankfurt. That has a wonderful Jewish museum. They were trying to find his mother, they never found her. Elinore Zamoira. They changed the name from Zamora to Zamoira -- ets -- so -- from Zamoira to -- to Zamora in Italy. They were in Italy.

Q: So tell me about this document, when did y -- how did you --

A: This document helped me to get from the Polish -- through the Polish zone, to the -- it was the Russian zone, and then into the American zone. It was quite a -- a big deal to get from one to the other, but somehow or other, I kept this. I also had a document from Krumstar, Maidna and Fron,

and I think they have that too at the museum, but I don't have -- I can't find the copy. However, the German gir -- government acknowledged that I worked there, and that I got my compensation for that.

Q: So --

A: Oh I'd -- I just found this, my husband had so much -- oh, I -- I put my -- my parents and his parents in -- on the Miami Holocaust Museum --

Q: Memorial?

A: Memorial. Have you seen that?

Q: No, not in Miami.

A: It's beautiful, really beautiful.

Q: So from my understanding, after the war, you were first in a hospital for about five weeks in -- in the same area --

A: Bad Nauheim.

Q: But -- but -- but before that, were you still --

A: Oh, I was in a Russian -- I -- I mean a German lotsarett, which is like a -- a field hospital for soldiers, which the Russians took over after they liberated this area, and made it into a Russian hospital, and took in some refugees that were sick, and I stayed there for approximately six weeks. And the food I remember very well, was every day a herring, which was so salty, and grits, or something like a cereal. They didn't have much themselves. And black bread.

Q: Is that where you met the Russian sergeant who gave you this document?

A: Yes. I -- I talked to all the Russian soldiers there, and some of them were Jewish. They were very interested in our stories.

Q: And had you grown up speaking Yiddish, did you know Yiddish?

A: I learned a little Yiddish in Theresienstadt, but not really -- they -- they understood German somewhat.

Q: And did you grow up learning Hebrew?

A: No, not really. My husband did. He was a specialist in languages. As a matter of fact, he translated a book from Hebrew into English.

Q: So after -- after that is when you walked. You walked, and then you took a train in the end of your journey.

A: A train, yes, after I got this lift from Saxony, approximately, there were no trains going whatsoever, no transportation. And then finally somebody hold it for me, and gave me a lift. And nobody was afraid at that time of hijacking, and so on, so forth. They deposited me at the railroad station in Wordsport, not Werdham -- Werdham -- Wordsport, not Werdham back. And I found my way back to Friedberg.

Q: How long were you on this walking journey, were you with other people?

A: Two ow -- two weeks, with other people, we slept in hay lofts, we slept with farmers, and I even was enamored in a German soldier that walked with us. Just -- it was such a liberating idea, and everything. I didn't think what they did to us really.

Q: Did you have any feelings of resentment toward anybody at that time?

A: No resentment. I still must say I don't want to sis -- resentment to c-come into my heart. I have contact with some very fine Germans that could have been probably more helpful, but I don't know if -- what we would have done in the circumstances. Their lives were put on the edge, too, when it came to help Jews.

Q: So what is your feeling about this idea of forgiveness, or do you think about it in that way?

A: Well, today's world is so full of turmoil, and hate between various peoples. And I hope that Israel and the Palestinians will come to some kind of accord, that would be a blessing for all the Jews. But the Jews have to give also, they cannot just take all the time. And we must learn a lesson, that there are ways to find one's own salvation, and can still be active in the Jewish faith. I'm reading a letter f -- about Judaism now, very -- pretty much at the end of my life, I want to return to my original upbringing, and so on. But I have reservations. When I think about all the ceremonies that we have, and circumcisions, and these feasts. They are two, 3000 years old. They don't have to be replicated in the way we are replicating them.

Q: And you have shown an interest in studying other religions, as well.

A: Yes, I would say monotheism is not the answer, it's monism. One self above all. And everybody has some of that self, and maybe it's the same as God. And monotheism is not so far away from monism. I have learned a lot from Ratunda, I had a wonderful, wonderful teacher. A swami that was here for several years is teaching now in Chile. And what I learned through my husband -- I myself would na -- would not have come to this, is -- is not to be -- it -- it's gold to me. It's more than gold, it's an inner richness that I received.

Q: Do you consider yourself to have a religion in the way that people label religion these days?

A: No, definitely not. I -- I'm a free thinker, and as I said, I had some -- I have some friends at the Quakers, I have attended some of their sittings, just for meditation, and they are very good to me. I don't know if my family here in Scarsdale ap -- appreciates it. They are very much into the Reform Judaism, which is very good. I go with them at the Jewish holidays for service there. But it's too much materialism amongst we Jews. And they have to do much more self searching, and giving. With that I want to end.

Q: What's that?

A: With that I want to end.

Q: Oh, you want to end.

A: And I still have anot --

Q: One thing I'm wondering about is when it was that you finally felt healthy again, after the war, and after being in the hospital, a couple different places. When were you feeling healthy?

A: I would say a hundred percent healthy I did not f-feel ever. I ge -- always had a tiredness about myself. Wasn't very able to do a lot of things, and very soon exhausted. But once I met my husband, who was a mountain climber, a hiker -- I was also a hiker before that, I must say I have walked, I love to walk. He changed my whole outlook, and introduced me to the eastern philosophies, and I learned yoga, I taught it about eight years here in Greenburg, in the adult education center, and also at the high school, at -- at the co -- co-op in the Bronx, Truman High School for adult education, and also for teenagers towards the end. And I also taught yoga here and there when I was asked by some organization, or make a demonstration. When the Madison Square Garden was still in existence, I had a headstand on the stage of Madison Square Garden. Not alone, with two other students of the swami at that time.

Q: And how do you see your experiences, what you went through during the war, having affected your -- your own interest in religion? Do you think it's directly connected what you went through, and then sort of this exploration that you've been on?

A: I-I think that is a question of development. I was very much impressed first with science. But science also does not give all the answers. And I was in the medical field, in laboratories, doing research, especially in human blood, and sera, and so on, and so forth. And routine analysis of all fluids. My husband also was a chemist, and we discussed a lot of s-sciences, and so on and so forth. It left me with some questions and doubt, and it was sometimes quasi quasi, there were not

hundred percent answers to anything. When my husband branched out into philosophy and religion, I got a whiff of it, and he passed it on to me, and he would be proud today if he would be alive to see me pursue it so vigorously.

Q: Do you feel in other ways that -- that what you experienced during the war really stayed with you throughout the years after? Are there certain things that --

A: That humans can be very cruel to each other, and we talk about heart, and love, and so on and so forth, but the -- the principle of self preservation is so strong, that any human being resorts to any criminal action, even killing another human being, maybe a -- even a sibling for his self preservation. So this all has to be worked out by men. And I think I got wiser by having had this experience, and I wonder what the other side will bring, if there is another side, and so more learning, and more experiencing. We don't know. I have my doubts, like everybody else, and to erase doubt is the hardest thing of any journey, I think. If you don't have any more doubts, then you are a saint.

Q: Did you -- I -- I felt that you had told me over the phone that perhaps one -- one way that the experiences during the Holocaust stayed with you is that you decided not to have children, is that -- is that right?

A: That was my husband's decision, more or less. And then I had this toxic pregnancy, or whatever it was, it was never found out. But I had a very bad case of hepatitis, and was sick for seven weeks in Presbyterian Hospital in New York. So after that, my gynecologist, who was Dr. Gisela Pearl said, "If you don't want children, just don't have them." And the sex life was not the most important thing for me. Maybe when I was younger, yes, but not at that time.

Q: But it wasn't as much an active decision not to bring children into the world, as --

A: No, it was not an act of precision, but my husband took precaution always.

Q: He -- he felt he did not want children.

A: He didn't -- he didn't want. He had a strong feelings that the suffering on this planet is very -- he said planet earth is one of the most insignificant planets in this universe. And he learned that from Gerchiev, the Russian philosopher mystic. And he dabbled into that, and why perpetuate this race, and we really don't know if we ever will know. The real, final answer is -- every scientist is groping for it, every f -- philosopher, and ever -- every religious thing are -- is grabbi -- grabbing with it, and have their opinions, and --

End of Tape three, Side A

Beginning Tape Three, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Gisela Zamora. This is tape three, side B. Do you -- do you have any regular flashbacks to what happened during the war, is that something that comes to you in your daily life?

A: No, I must say, very little. Very little. It sort of vanished. It's not preoccupying my mind. Unfortunately, my physical body gives me a lot of problems on. I dwell on that too much. If I could get over that, and re-realize that a body is just the case of -- or the temple of our real existence, if we -- if I could bring that to a real understanding, and strong idea, I would be better off. But I have only si -- grace, I think was given to me, to survive, and to -- to learn, and to reach this country, and learn, and I'm still learning.

Q: And did you have -- do you remember having any dreams or night mares during the war, anything that came to you on a regular, recurring basis back then?

A: I don't remember. It's too bad. But I must say occasionally now when I'm -- I am alone, and I have had periods of depression and anxiety, once or twice I have had bad dreams where I jumped out of bed, and the dream is just -- flies away, and I can't remember. But these are not very nice

experiences. I don't know if they have to do with the war, because I don't remember too much about it.

Q: And what about your parents and brother, do you -- do you try to not think about them, do you try to think of them?

A: I don't think of them very much, unfortunately, I should. My brother's birthday is coming up, would -- he would be now two years younger than I am. So I think about him because he was so young taken away, and he suffered so much more by having had typhus in Theresienstadt, and -- and right away to the gas chambers, it's very, very sad. And I see him sometimes in the attic where we lived in Battenberg with me, and that night when Crystal Night took place. How we two huddled together. We were innocent, young. Didn't know anything.

Q: Well, one thing I just wanted to ask. When we started the interview I actually forgot to make sure that you stated the date, and the year you were born. So, if you wouldn't mind just repeating, saying your name, and where you were born, and the date you were born.

A: I was born on the fifth of February, 1928, by a midwife helping my mother, in Battenberg on the Aida in Germany.

Q: And finally, is there anything else you would like to add that maybe I forgot to ask, that you would like to say during this interview?

A: No, I think I talked already too much. I gave a lot of myself, and my husband always warned me, he said, "Keef -- kit -- keep it for yourself, keep it inside, it helps you to develop." So maybe I made a mistake to open myself.

Q: I hope not, and I don't think so. I think -- I think it -- I think it's also good to help others understand what you experienced. I think that's part of sharing, and --

A: Thank you, thank you very much.

Q: But thank you. Thank you very much. This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Gisela Zamora.

A: Thank you.

End of Tape Three, Side B

Conclusion of Interview