

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Esther Fol
November 8, 2008
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a recorded interview with Esther Fol, conducted by Christian Url on November 8, 2008 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Alexandria, VA and 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.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

ESTHER FOL

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Question: This is a **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Esther Fol**, conducted by **Christian Url** on November 8, 2008, in **Alexandria, Virginia**. **Esther**, first of all, thank you very much for taking the time to give this interview to the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum. You were kind enough to fill out the questionnaire. Why don't we start talking about the earliest memory you have of your childhood. What's the first memory you have?

Answer: I do – I can't answer exactly what first because my memory is not – I – I remember a little bit here, a little bit there, but I cannot put them together, and I cannot say which one first, and which one is second. But I remember when I was in the children home, very, very young, the Germans came in and start shooting the kids. And they – that part left me in such a horror, so when I came to **Israel**, I would always think about a fox who – who killed the kids except me. And when I met the [indecipherable] here, I ask her, why they shoot the kids? Why they didn't kill me? So she said, the kids were boys who were circumcised. You were a girl so you were not circumcised, that's why. So the Germans were looking for circumcised boys to kill them, and they killed them right there at the spot. And luckily – I was wounded also, with one of the shots, and I still have – I have a s – in my leg, a problem with that. Both legs, yeah.

Q: Wow. And when was this?

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A: They shot me too. That's happened – I do not know the year, I mean, I was too young to say what year. That's was during the war. In **Slonim**, in **Alberton** – in **Alberton** Children Home in **Slonim**. But the name of the children home was **Alberton. Slonim, Poland** at the time.

Q: Yeah. Do you have any memories – how did your mother explain to you the situation you were in? How did she explain to you why these things happened to you? What –

A: My mother – I never knew my mother, I did not know my father.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: My mother, when I was very, very – when I was six months old, she put – what's happened is she put me in – on the footsteps of a home where – that's was a nursing home. And the woman, who was a good friend of her, a Christian woman – woman, her name was her – **Helena Westerly**. And she had a plan. She gave my mother two identities, two passports with false name, and had put me in a – in – in a footsteps of that nursing home. My mother was behind the bushes of the nursing home, looking what's happened to me. And in the morning the cook came in, and they saw a baby, and they said, what we going to do with this baby? And they decided to put me in a children home. They – **Helena Westerly**, who was there too,

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she pretended she did not know who I was. And I was given a name, as **Onay(ph)** **Vidoma(ph)**. **Onay(ph)** **Vido** – **Vidomska(ph)**, which is mean, the unknown.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: And they put me in a children home, as unknown child. Nobody knew who I was.

Q: Mm-hm. How old were you when you learned what had happened to you, or to your parents? Where was your father at the time your mother gave you to this nursing home?

A: My father? He probably was dead already.

Q: Oh, okay. Okay.

A: I was before it in a ghetto. My mother did escape with me from the ghetto, and somehow we're back in the ghetto. We escaped, we went to different countries, and some – I do not know why she returned back, what's happened, the circumstances exactly, I was too young to know. And she returned, and a – back to the ghetto.

Q: So your mother was able to escape –

A: Yeah.

Q: – from the ghetto, with a baby, so to speak?

A: Yeah, and – yeah. Eventually she joined the partisans, and in a z – ava – in the woods around **Slonim** – in **Slonim** area of **Poland**. And in 1944, she – she went –

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they were raiding the partisan, the Germans. At one point I do remember that I was in a train, I do not know what's happened exactly. I was on a train and that – in a train, a lot of people were there. They couldn't move, nothing. And I saw people jumping off the train, escaping. And I was told to be quiet. And then the train got hit by a mi – by a mine or something they threw. The partisan attacked the train, and the train could not go any farther, and I don't have no more memory after that, what's happened. This is one of the things I remember. And I remember I was in the woods with a man, a tall man, and he told me to be behind the tree, to wait for him, he'll going in the woods, not to move. I stood behind it – a wide tree so nobody can see me, which I waited there, and the man never came back. So I went to look for the man, and I saw him lay on the floor, with blood in his mouth, and his eyes open. So I start talking to the man to take me with him, and why he doesn't talk? Why he look at me and doesn't say nothing? So suddenly a woman come out from the woods, and she told me, this man is dead. I said, what does it mean dead? And she told me, a person that cannot talk, cannot breathe, and cannot speak and can do nothing. That's it. And I ne – I do not know who was that man.

Q: And this woman took you with her afterwards?

A: I don't remember no more.

Q: Mm-hm.

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A: I don't remember if she took me, and I don't remember any more who she was, and what was it.

Q: Your mother – when did you learn about your mother's fate? Do you know the circumstances, or –

A: I learn – I learn in – after a – I learned in 1960 in **Israel**, 1960 or 1962 in **Israel**. But I did not know much about my mother, nothing. I just knew that she died, my parents died.

Q: What exactly had happened to her?

A: That she joined the partisan, and the Germans attacked the partisan, and she was guarding at the time the partisans, and they shot her. They – she was fighting with the Germans, and she killed quite a few Germans too, I was told. So it wasn't like she just went and they killed her. There was a big fight between the partisan and the Germans, and she got shot off. She was fighting with them – against the Germans too, at the time.

Q: Let's go back to your – to your experiences in a nursing home.

A: So, I look at her as a hero.

Q: Yeah, you should.

A: Yeah.

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Q: We all do. Let's go back to th – your experiences in the nursing home. Can you describe the life there, it is –

A: I do not know the nursing, I was in – I was in a children home, not nursing, yes.

Q: Excuse me, children home, yeah.

A: The life in the children home? I don't remember very much, I only remember that they used to beat me up with a stick, because I was doing – something happened, I stopped making pee-pee. I urinate in a bed. And they used to beat me up with a stick, a big bamboo stick. They used to go and have the kids surrounding me, and especially bef – during the – a Christian holiday, they beat me up so hard, and they make – made the kids and every – the kids were getting present, except me. I didn't get nothing. And they used – the kids used to make fun, hey, I got this, and I got this, and you – what you got? And that's it. So they used to beat me up ev – particular almost every day, until they told me if I stop screaming from the pain I got, then they'll stop beating me. So I had to stop screaming, and then they stopped beating me up with the stick.

Q: Were there other Jewish children as well, or –

A: I do not know, I'm not – I don't recall it. I'm the one that was – happened to me.

Q: Mm-hm. So you –

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A: And sometime my ass was so painful, I couldn't even sit on it. That's what's happen. And – and th-the nun used to do that, the one that worked there. The nun used to beat me up. She used to wear the white things, and she used to beat me up so hard. So I used to hate the nuns there, yeah.

Q: The nuns and st – the other children.

A: Yeah, yeah. No, not to others, to me.

Q: Y-Yeah. And I'm saying the nun beat you up –

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah, beat me up.

Q: – and the other children in the – yeah.

A: Yeah, in front of the other children.

Q: How much time did you spend in this home, do you know?

A: I think that was until 1946 or '45, I don't remember exactly.

Q: So you were still very young when you –

A: Yeah, I was very young, yeah.

Q: What happened afterwards, after this experience in –

A: My uncle, **Max Pajewski**(ph), he's a brother of my father –

Q: Mm-hm.

A: He was fighting during the war against a rush – against the Germans at the Russian front in **Russia**. And then the war was over. The Russians allow any Polish

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citizen to return back to **Poland**. So, he was allowed to return back, so he went back to the city. And **Helena Westerly** was looking for him, because they said, **Mina Pajewski(ph)** did not come back from **Poland** – I mean, from the war. And what's going to be with **Sonja**? My name was **Sonja, Sonja Pajewski(ph)**. What's going on with **Sonja Pajewski(ph)** is still there? And so – and that nobody came to pick her up. So she went to the bazaar places to look for somebody from the family, and one day she met my uncle there, and she told him that – that – where I am, and he didn't even know I was born. And – because he left the place in 1941, before I was born. And he – the Russian took me. They move into a remote area, that's why. So meanwhile, I was born, and all that, and I – now he found out that I'm – that he has a niece there. So he went to the children home, and he told them that he is my father. So they let him to take me out, and he went with me – he did tell me that he bought me a piece of – a bread with piece of butter – with – a bread with butter to eat, and he says, somebody came and stole the bread from my hands, and I cried. Now he did say that I had a lot of bruises all over my body, and I suffer from severe malnutrition, I looked so bad. And he – we went to **Poland**, to **Warszawa**, **Warsaw**. And at that time, I think **Slonim** became part of – part of **Soviet Union** already, I think, at the time. So we – we went to rush – he brought me to **Warszawa**, to – and he's staying some Jewish place, the Jewish agency helped two

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of us, and there was a place they were – they helped different de – different refugees, and so they helped me and my uncle. And he told me that I – I slept in bed – in one bed, because they didn't have enough beds there. And I again did wee-wee on the – you know, pee-pee on the bed, and he got all wet from that. And that's was my problem at that time. Then he – he was very sick, so he couldn't take care of me, and he – he sent – he gave me to a Jewish agency, and tha-that was to send me to **Palestine**, at the time was **Palestine**, not **Israel** yet. So the Jewish agency took me and put me in **Lódz**, in a children home. I do not know where in **Lódz**, what city – I like to know all these particular. If you can find out this information, please allow me to know that.

Q: Yep.

A: All right. In **Lódz**, I was staying sometimes there, and – until maybe '48, and then we – we traveled from one place to another place. In the middle of the night the – they brought big truck, military truck came up – came in, pulled me out of the bed, put hand on my mouth and said, don't talk, be quiet. And they took me and put me in that truck, and they told me we going to **Palestine**. But meanwhile, I don't – I don't remember if they took other kids or not with them. It – I'm not really remember very well. But they took me and they – we went to different places, I do not know where, what. From one place to another place, again traveled through

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Europe again, illegally, just like I did with my mother when my mother escaped from the ghetto and went and traveled, and somehow went back to the city, I think to her husband. That's why she returned back, because she couldn't – nobody help her there and she couldn't do nothing. So she had to return back. But she – I was in **Belgium** before, and **France** and other countries, and somehow we return back to **Poland**. I mean, that's when my mother was still alive. This time I was moving from one country to another country. And the paper, according to the paper, they put me on the ship **Sylvania**(ph), and they – we – to **Palestine**. In the boat, I had a friend, the name **Natala**(ph), and she is in **Israel** today. And she was in my children home too, because I visited **Israel** in 2004, and we see that we [indecipherable] together, **Natala**(ph) and me. And on the boat, I do not know – the British caught us on the boat when we were close to **Palestine** – everybody was so happy – the British caught us and arrested us and put us in a prison. So, I think I was about six year old at that time, I became a prisoner of **United Kingdom**. And I don't know how long we were, but in a prison for long time. I was freezing, was not much – I remember they put fences there, and we were sleeping in a tent in **Israel** because there was not enough space, and – and it was very cold and freezing, and not enough food over there to – and, by the way, on the boat to – to **Israel** was not enough food to eat also, and every day we ate only fish. And I hated fish so much

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because all – every meal was only fish, too, there was no other food to eat, any more left. And that was very tough, and that boat was also – people were, I think, Turkish, Arabs, Turkish were on that boat, too. And they wear the red hat that Turkish wear, and I think they were Turkish, and I used to be afraid of them so much. And somebody was saying on the boat that they stealing the kids, too. So I always frightened from them. Anyway, on the way back in – back to – I mean **Palestine**, and then **Israel** was declared as a state, I was taken out of the prison and later on they send me to a foster family in **Israel**. And the name of the family, **Goldschmidt [indecipherable] DDR [indecipherable]** near **Netanya**. And I had foster family, and that was – life was not easy beginning because I had – I had to get used to new – to a family life, which I never had family before. And a home I had never had before. And they were very tough, they were Germans from **Germany**. And – Jewish Germans, and they were very, very tough disciplinary people, and they discipline me with the – a lot of hitting. I got again a lot of hitting. And I did, again, pee-pee in the bed. And they hit me for that also. And so the wa – life wasn't easy. But then first grade I didn't do good because in the school, first grade, I used all the time to dream about the fox who eated the kids, except me not. So I couldn't concentrate in the class, and I was – I didn't do good in school. So they decided I'm going to be left over, and take the class first grade again. So the

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foster family said no, she cannot. I'm going to sit with her during the summer, and don't leave her, because she has friends there now, and she used to them. And this will be a crime for her to – to move to new fr – kids, and again the same class. So my foster mother sat with me every day, teach me math and teach me to read and write, and believe me on that, by the end of the summer I took a test for the first grade, I passed it. Second grade I became the best student in the class.

Q: That's fantastic.

A: Yeah. And from then on I became very, very good student, and I focus on school very much. When I became a – when I became a – a 10 year old – so far they knew my name was **Esther Pajewski**(ph), but they – they did not know anything about my family, and they thought everybody died during the war, for me. And I took their name, their name was **Goldschmidt**. The father name was **Elie Goldschmidt**, and the mother name was **Shoshanna Goldschmidt**. Both were from **Berlin, Germany**. They immigrated to **Israel** in 1939, but they lost all their family in **Germany**. In 1939 they still were able to immigrate to **Israel**, and that's why they survived, this family. And in **Israel** they worked in agriculture. The – and they had a house there, and it was a nice village, I – the life – and they were very, very disciplinary people. Everything had to be just right. Everything on time exactly, and I got used to all this. If I came five minutes late, was almost like a crime, how you

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did such a thing? You have to be exactly by 12 o'clock for lunch [**indecipherable**] exactly. Well, I got used to all this, and that was very nice. But then I had something happen at the age 10. I got sick, and they took me to the hospital to take x-rays, something happen. And the doctor over there say, you know what? There's a doctor by the name Dr. **Pajewski(ph)**. Maybe he'll relate to this, because my last name **Pajewski(ph)** was. And they say, well, the do – the doctor in that hospital in **Netanya** say, you know what? We'll come talk to him, and see if he related to her. A – after – within short time, Dr. **Pajewski(ph)** come with a **Jeep** to the village, and they – he wanted to see **Sonja Pajewski(ph)**, which is me. And he came and found out that we are family members. And then he contacted my uncle in **Italy**, the brother of my father was station – was in **Italy** at the time. And I think it was 1950. And – 1950, and then I got a letter from **Italy** – they got a letter from **Italy**, and that was written in Italian. And, that he, my uncle, and he's happy that I'm alive, and all that. And then sunny – one day came somebody from **United States**, a man, that he say he my uncle – he – I have an uncle here, and he is – his name is **Isaac Makowski(ph)**, a brother of my mother, and he want to meet me. And he came to see how I am, and to meet me finally. Not my uncle, but he send somebody else to meet me there. And tha – to – to see I'm alive, he found out that I'm alive. That's happen after the accident with the – that – th-the Dr. **Pajewski(ph)**. So, they

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discover I have family members. Now became another problem. My uncle in – **Isaac Makowski**(ph), who lives in – who at that time lived in **Brooklyn, New York**, in United States, he was not happy with the family that I was living, because they were not religious Jewish. They were nice people, Jewish, but they were not Orthodox like he was. He was Hassidic Orthodox Jew. So he contacted [indecipherable] my uncle, my other uncle, and – and he ask him to sign that my parents were Orthodox, and they wanted me to be Orthodox. So my case became in a court, in Israeli court, and it took long time in Israeli court, and finally the Israeli court decided that I have to be removed for religious reason from – from **Goldschmidt**, from my foster family. So, after living in the house four and a half years, I was ordered by the court to remove, if not the ca – the fa-family would be arrested. So the family had to give me up, and they put me in a – in a Orthodox boarding school in **Israel**, and that was in a – and I'm thinking a la – not **Ramat Gan**, that's was in **Benai Brak**, very religious place, and they send me to a religious school there, public school, a religious public school there, and to learn the religion. Well, my uncle aimed to bring me to **United States**, that was in 1953. And I refused to come to **United States** at the time because I hated him for doing what he did. So that came another family, and they told me that my uncle died, and they wanted to bring me to their house, to give me a home. I do not know who they

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were. And that family had twins. Babies, two ba – twins, and I do not know. I found out later on that – that my uncle just send me a letter, that couldn't be that he died.

So, it didn't work out. But then [indecipherable] so it didn't work out that way.

And then I moved to **Ramat Gan**, that's another religious boarding school

Ra'anana. Ra'anana in **Ra'anana – Ra'anana**, I'm sorry, in **Kfar Batya**,

Ra'anana. That's a boarding school that I lived there, a elementary school, I was there a few years until 19 – until my first year – I finished there my first year high school, and then I asked to be moved to kibbutz. I went to Kibbutz **Yavne**, that's a religious school, high school, my second year high school in **Israel**, and I wasn't happy there. I didn't like the place. So – kibbutz life, whatever it was. So I took a test and I got into a school, for lab technician school. That's a high school combination with a profession with a lab. So we had four year – four hours a day, five days a week laboratory, and the rest is a – mainly was concentrate on chemistry. That's how I started my [indecipherable] learning chemistry. Well, it started in high school. I was very good in math and sciences. And that's due to my foster family, maybe, they taught me the – when my foster mother was sitting with me every day to teach me, when I was living in their house, and that's how I got good in all these areas. I now focus a lot on school now, no more – I didn't have nothing else to focus on, so it was school. I was a very good student, and I lived one

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year in – in the Kibbutz **Yavne**. And then I went to **Ramat Gan**, to another family, a family that was also Holocaust survivor from **Hungary**, I forgot the names. And they had the number on their hand. She was one of that that made experiment on her, that doctor –

Q: Mengele?

A: Mengele, he made experiment on her so she could never have children. Now, her sister had five children, and when her sister had the sixth one, and she bought some – a nice outfit for the baby, she used to tell me, this, I don't want to leave it to my sis. I really want – I'm thinking maybe I could have another chi – maybe I could have a child one day. I would like to have it for my child. But, that's how the reality. I felt sorry for her. But anyhow, I lived in the house, and I went to the lab technician school in **Ramat Gan** every day. And when I finished school, two years was, I got a job in – in **Israel**, in the **Weizmann** Institute. I work there two years in **Israel**, and after two years – after two years in **Rehovot**, **Weizmann** Institute in **Rehovot**, after two years I decided I wanted to come to **United States** to meet my family. I never met my family. Meanwhile, my uncle from – from **Italy** immigrated to **United States**, and he lived in – in **Detroit, Michigan**. So I came to **United States**, and they send me the visa, my uncle in **Brooklyn**, a brother of my mother, and **Isaac Mikowski**(ph), and we met in **Ellis Isl – Ellie Island**. And I tell you, I do

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not know – they did not know how I look, I did not know how they look, but somehow we met. I did tell them what I'm going to wear, so they'll look for a gi – a girl tha-that wearing so and so clothes, and tha – this, and special for them I would dress up in clothes so they can recognize it, not clothes li-like other people, otherwise they will never know who I am – where I am, right? So we met, and th-they – I went to their house. I stay in the house for two months, and we didn't get along, they were too religious, Hassidic. And I – they found out that I'm not religious [**indecipherable**]. So they didn't want to see me, and – and they wanted me to move out of the house, and to – they will rent for me a room in a family, and I'll leave them, and they'll pay for it. And at that time I was already 20 year old. I didn't want it, so they decided to send me to **Michigan**, to my uncle who was married to Italian woman, not Jewish, but she converted, she became Jewish, and it – they're not religious, so it would be good for me. So I went to **Detroit, Michigan**, and I went to a – I went to a **midrasha** to become Hebrew teacher while I was there in the house. But I didn't get along again with my uncle, **Max Pajewski(ph)**, so I stayed very short time with them, and then I contact with the Jewish agency, and they found me a woman that wants somebody to have companionship at night only, for a free room and board. I say, I'll take that deal. No pay, free room and board. So I live with that woman and I went to the **midrasha** to become Hebrew teacher. On

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the side I did a little Hebrew teaching, I was not allowed to work, but I did on the side, teaching Hebrew. And so, it give me some money. All right. And then, meanwhile, I – I went at the same time, I took a test for college, and I went to **Wayne State University** to become a chemist. So here a Hebrew teacher and here's a chemist.

Q: Yeah.

A: And meanwhile, I – I met my husband, was **Paul Cohen**, and I met him, and we got married a-at the same day when **John F. Kennedy** was shot. Civil marriage, not Jewish marriage. And at the same time, the same time, 10 o'clock, the same time when he got shot. So when we got married I went to the car, and suddenly I'm listening to the news, and I say, oh my God, **John F. Kennedy** was killed. The same date, the same time, everything. So that's was a disaster. All right, my marriage also, my marriage lasted 10 years, and then after 10 – and then I took a job, I worked as a – as a lab technician in a hospital – in a private lab, and then in a hospital in – in **Detroit, Michigan**. And then – but the marriage wasn't working, my husband was abusive husband, and I had to leave him quick, because he didn't treat me right. So I – I left him, and moved to **New York**. From **New York** to new j – **New Jersey**, I got a job in **New Jersey** in a hospital as a medical – as a leptic – no, oh, in **Michigan** I – I went to internship for medical technology, and I became a

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medical technologist also. And when I move out of **Michigan**, I got a job in **New Jersey** as a medical technologist in one of the hospitals. So I was very happy.

Meanwhile I used to come to **New York**, and I met my o – my other husband, **Ralph Fol**, I met – I met him, and so I went to **Dominican Republic** to get my divorce, and I divorce my ex-hu – my ex – which – Mr. **Cohen** –

Q: Yeah.

A: – I divorced him, and I married my husband, **Ralph Fol**.

Q: During all these years, had you been in contact with Miss **Westerly**, or ha – did you hear anything from her?

A: No, I never knew yet nothing. Remember, at that time, **Soviet Union** was a communist country and you couldn't get in touch. I-I knew this story, that there was a Christian woman who saved my life during the war. My uncle wrote me a letter. I got this information from my uncle, **Isaac Makowski(ph)** that there was a woman that saved my life, but they didn't know who – what's her name was. And so my uncle, **Max Pajewski(ph)** told me the same story. And what's happen, in 1999, this learning organization from **Israel**, they came to – meanwhile – meanwhile what's happened, the **Soviet Union** was dissolve, I forgot what year –which year, 1990- what – '99? Something in the 90s, the **Soviet Union** dissolve. So different countries, **Poland**, then become **Belarussia**, so my city **Slonim** became part of

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Belarus now. And so I am – my uncle went to **Belarussia**, my uncle **Max Pajewski**(ph), he went to **Belarus**, and to the s – to s – to **Slonim**, with the **Slonim** organization from **Israel**, and – to put monument for the dead people who died during the Holocaust. And there is coming a woman by the name **Helena Westerly** looking for Mr. **Pajewski**(ph). And she found him, and she ge – to – ask him – she told him who she is, and she ask him about **Sonja Pajewski**(ph). And he told her that – where I am, that I live in **United States**, he – they talked. And he say, please ask her to write me a letter. She gave her address. So he, when he came back to **United States**, he send me a letter and he told me she asked to write her. So I start to correspond with her, and in 1999, I – I wrote her a letter, I'm coming to unite – to **Belarus** to meet you. So, we – there's a person by the name **Jakob** – he's living in **United States**, Russian, that he is – he – he claimed that he is a president of the **Belarusian** jewelry – Jewry. The Jew – all right. So he helped a lot of things to do with the cemetery of – of the Jewish cemetery, so they don't desecrate the Jewish cemeteries and other thing. So I got in touch with him, he lives in **Brooklyn**. I got in touch with him, and we arranged for me to go there. I went to **Belarus**, I said, when you go to **Belarus**, I meet him – now you – I meet him in **Belarus**, and which I did, and he arranged for me to be on **TV** in **Belarus**, which I did, and my name – it was [indecipherable] in the newspaper there too, the story of me coming back to

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Belarus to meet **Helena Westerly**, that she saved my life during the war, etcetera. And so we had – we been corresponding ever since, and is a – I remember that woman when I was young, the same face, she was a very fat woman. Now she was very fat. And she seemed to be that her face, the – the features similar to what she was at the time, because of the fat that she had in her face now. And they – I ni – all these years, I had somebody in my neighborhood look like that face, and I used to look at her. Every time she pass by, I would sen – and stop and just stare at that woman. And then I start to understand why I did. I knew somebody by that – by – that looked like her. And **Helena Westerly**, and we became good friends. I look at her like somebody important to me, that was important because she did visit at me, not every day, was too dangerous during the war, while it was in a children home there, in **Slonim**. But, very occasionally. It was too dangerous to come, otherwise, they will be suspicious that she knows me.

Q: When you – when you m-met Miss **Westerly**, could she provide you with one more detail –

A: Oh, she did.

Q: – of your background story, your mother, your background, where you said, this is wonderful –

A: She did.

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Q: – that I could learn this –

A: She did.

Q: – after all. After all these years.

A: She did tell me about – I spoke some German, I knew German from the foster family because they spoke German. And – but my German was not that good. But I learn Russian by myself, before I went to **Belarus**, because I know eastern **Europe**, they're all speaking Russian, so what I need to learn Polish? Polish I forgot already, when I lived in **Israel**. And when I went to **Belarus**, I found out that everybody there speak Russian. So I was very pleased that I learned Russian. I was able to read and write Russian, but not much, because just – I learn a little bit for myself to get along, just to be able to move around, so I could [**indecipherable**] different thing, but not a lot. So with the Russian and the German, we were able to communicate. Meanwhile, there's a – was a – a woman there, a – a – a daughter of her friend, that she major in English in **Belarus**, and she became interpreter.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: So, that cost me plenty of money to do interpreter, believe me, they all want money. They all take opportunity to do that. But that's okay, it didn't matter to me. I was very happy, so she to – I had also a lot of thing translated – I mean, a lot of thing on the tape in Polish, on the tape I have that – that she spoke. Now, she died

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March 2008, unfortunately, and she never met my daughter. I wanted to bring my daughter there, and she died, it's too late. But –

Q: Did she tell you something – was there – do you remember some things she told you, where you said, oh, thank you s –

A: She explained me certain things, yes –

Q: Yeah.

A: – she did. When I told her that the – the kids were shot and not me, and she explaining what's happen. The kids were Jewish who were circumcised, that's how they know that they're Jewish. I was a girl [indecipherable]. She did say I did have – I was [indecipherable] headache a lot, because I did have malnutrition. I suffered from very severe malnutrition, she say. I look so bad, so when my uncle came to pick me up, he – she say he – it was like seeing a ghost, that's how bad I looked. But basically – and when I was a – a – now, what I'm doing now, I'm semi-retired from my full time job, and I teach in college part time chemistry, and I have a daughter who is now 29 year old, from Mr. **Fol**, not from Mr. **Cohen**. Mr. **Cohen** did – never had children. Basically, that's what it is. And I came to the conference here to meet – maybe to meet some people, to see what is the conference. But I'm still working, teaching in college part time. And I just lost my husband, Mr. **Fol** a year ago. And so right now I'm alone, and I'm – I lost my best friend, I – he was

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my best friend really, my husband, **Ralph Fol**. He was original – **Ralph Fol**, my husband, he was from **Russia**, he was born in **Russia** in 1916. In 1917, his father, **Ike Fol**, his name was **Folchuk(ph)**, he escaped from Russian revolution in 1917, he came to **United States**, and he was unable to get a job as I – **Ike Folchuk**. So he cut – he split his name to **Fol**, and that's where the name become **Fol, f-o-l**.

Q: Ah.

A: Now you know. Because nobody wanted to hire somebody who come from **Russia [indecipherable]** and they call him Russian communist, with the name **Folchuk(ph)**. So that's why he did.

Q: That's interesting. I had one more question about – I'm just thinking about your being on the ship and going to **Palestine** –

A: Uh-huh.

Q: – back then. So your uncle was with you during this time? This was the only per –

A: We – no. My uncle, no –

Q: Who was the person you could relate to during this –

A: The – during the what was – they put me with a family –

Q: Mm-hm.

A: – in the – on the boat, on the ship.

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Q: Mm-hm.

A: And the family told me this way. We have the same last name, **Pajewski**(ph). But always remember, you are not our daughter. And they went with me to **Palestine**, and then, after the British arrested us and all that, I never saw them again. So I do not know who was that family, where they went to and who they were, and I would be happy to find out. What I'd like to know from all this, I want to know who were the passengers on **[indecipherable]** boat, and tell me information about these passengers. I would like to know if somebody that knew who I was, and – and my journey from **Lo-Lódz – Lódz** to **Palestine**, what year, or when did I left children home in **Lo-Lódz – Lódz** is actually **Lódz, Lódz, Poland**, and – and how I traveled to go to **Palestine**. And I want to know also, I'd like to get also, information about the – the – the court order about removing me from **Goldschmidt**, my foster family, and by the way, I'm still in touch with my foster family. Their parents died, but I'm in touch with their son, **Suri**(ph) **Goldschmidt**, he is like my brother, I look at him as my brother, and his sister, **Newey**(ph) **Goldschmidt**, she died about a month and a half ago. They called me up and they told me she died. And that's basically what is told, and –

Q: There was no further family, so your mother was – apparently you were the only child. Your father died very early.

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A: I was the only chil-child, yeah.

Q: So there was no further fa –

A: The whole family wiped out.

Q: Yeah.

A: The-They killed the whole family. There's one Dr. **Pajewski**(ph). He is a relative, he is not very close family, he is a relative. I don't bother with the family at all. We had a lot of feud in the family because what's happened, taking me from **Goldschmidt**. So it became a feud in the family because of that. So one side don't like another side because of that. So – and I'm in between, so I'm – neither one good friend with me, and this is how the family ended. And, unfortunately, that's what's happened. And –

Q: It's interesting, if you think of it being a child with a strange family on a trip, leaving your country, going to **Palestine**, I wa –

A: I don't know who they were.

Q: Do you have any – any memory what the ship was like, what – what was life on the ship.

A: It was a very big ship, oh yeah.

Q: You s – you said you had nothing to eat, it was fish. How would you prepare the food? Was it raw fish, was there any –

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A: They – I did not know what – oh –

Q: Did you have any devices to prepare the food?

A: They – they prepared the food there, and every meal was only fish.

Q: Fish, raw f – did you –

A: And I – for many years I wouldn't touch fish.

Q: Yeah, I can imagine.

A: For many years, if you showed me fish, I would run away from it. Because fish is one thing, I hated that. And just the word fish is – was enough to hate, be-because o-of all this. But anyhow, one thing I remember on that boat was, there was a – like a – a big place with water, and they used to go and threw in the – with a net, some people to the water. And I didn't understand what ed – why, and what does it mean? So some people – now people tell me could be people who came from a concentration camp were afraid to take shower because a – a – they were taking shower in the gas, and they got killed in concentration camp. So people were afraid to take shower because they were thinking that's what happen again. So maybe they threw them to – they forced them to wash themself, to throw them to the water. So, I do not know, I'm just telling you what I saw. But life on the boat, I had one good friend on the boat, **Natala**(ph). She came with me to **Israel**. She was in **[indecipherable]** also, **Natala**(ph), and that's all that I know of. But she was a little

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bit older than me. And that's how it is, but I went back to **Slonim**, and I went also to **Poland**. I went into the archives of the Jewish History Museum, and they got my pictures in the archive, and on the picture is say, **Sonja Pajewski**(ph), in Yiddish. So I'm happy, I ha – that's the first time I have pictures from – that I'm a – little.

Q: Oh, this is fantastic. One cannot – I can't even imagine how it must be, to be, you know, on a ship in a strange world, being on this long trip.

A: But I so got used to move from one place to another place.

Q: To the 'nothers, yeah.

A: Yeah. But one thing I'm lucky I had the family, because when I arrived to pa – to my foster family, how tough they were beginning, and I was very fortunate, because they – yeah, I was afraid beginning, because the Palestinians would come to – to the village. We lived in **Kfar Yedidya** next to **Netanya**. And they would come at night, the Palestinians, to the village and steal cows, and do all time sabotage in a lot of thing. So I would be so afraid. They would send me at – in the evening, purposely in the evening, to bring newspaper from the neighbor, because at that time people didn't have money, and they share a newspaper bet-between three, four different families. So one family read the German newspaper – the – the newspaper was in German. So, the all – the – the village were all come from **Germany**. They all either **Austria** or **Germany**, but they all were German origin

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and they all spoke German. And I didn't speak German. I felt very bad that I couldn't catch the language. And they tried to teach me and I couldn't catch the language. I couldn't learn one set from the a – Polish language became th – and I know only **[indecipherable]**. Language became very difficult for me to learn. And this was my problem, language. And they – they would send me to the library, th – the family had the books in German, and they will say, you have to bring a book, and they would teach me how to say it in German. And by the time I get there, and I said book. And I had difficulty say th-the rest of it. So they knew that I have to bring a book for them, and that's how it was. But I got used to all this, but when I came to **Israel**, they have the – I remember I was with my friends, the neighbors were my friends, and they were the same age I was, and they – the plan was, that time, I think, after the war of '48, or whatever, I do not know, the plans was there from the **[indecipherable]** that everybody tells me, you got to go down on the ground. So, I was still, at that time, so I went on the ground, until the plane go. So, all kind of things that. And then we see that the British, and the British left. Some places we found a lot of bullets, ammunition that the British left i-in the – in our areas. So we were the kids that played with those things, and one of the kids got wounded from that. So this kind of thing –

Q: You – you had experienced a lot of violence –

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A: Yeah, right.

Q: – during, as a long chi – as a young child, you know.

A: Yeah, a – a lot of [indecipherable]

Q: Do you remember the shooting th – Miss **Westerly** was talking about? Do you remember any details about this when she said you were not her –

A: No, I – I only remembered –

Q: Yeah.

A: – I was – I was two year olds, two.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: Yeah, how can – two or two and a half.

Q: Yeah.

A: I just rem – from the –

Q: Could she give you more –

A: When I was in a class, sitting in school, first grade –

Q: Yeah.

A: – always I was thinking about the fox with the black boots, and the black – the black fox, as animal, because I was afraid from fox, and the fox were always in the woods there, in the – in the village **Kfar Yedidya**. So I would think always, the fox eating all the kids except me. It came in my head as a fox, not as the Germans. So

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when – when I met her the first time, I ask her, tell me, what's happened to the kids, why they were killed? I realized that something happened with the kids, that's why it's come as a fox. And she did tell me yes, the kids were shot. And she explain about they were circumcised, and you were a girl, so you didn't have to worry about.

Q: Mm-hm. So, you were the only girl among a group of – of boys, Jewish pop –

A: I do not know the only girl, there pa – there [indecipherable] others.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Were there more survivors, could she tell you if there were more children who survived?

A: Well, we – I tell you interesting, in the village **Kfar Yedidya**, there were a few [indecipherable] from **Poland**, and there were – there were – she went th – a lot of families in that village took children from **Poland** at – to – to be foster parents. And they became as a family. In my situation, my family took me out of there because of the religion. But these children stayed with them until they – all the time with them, and all the years. They didn't – nobody took them out. But later on, when I came back to **Israel**, 2005, I went to reunion in **Kfar Yedidya**, near **Netanya** there, and I met all [indecipherable] of people that I went with them to school, and I went – it was very nice, the reunion. And they're all about my age, maybe some a little older. And then I found out like a na – one neighbor who was from **Poland**, he was

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adopted by the Polish family, only one Polish family in that village. And that was one Polish family adopted one from **Poland**, his name was **Chaim**. And he – he found out that he has a family too. He send to the newspaper in **United States**, and here they responded to him, that he had a good family in **United States**. And then he found out that he have a family all these years in **Netanya** also, near the village. And the – a person who, uncle who looked just like him. So, he was telling me that story. And then somebody else tell me a story that he went – he – when he went to the military, he – he had met a good – he met a ba – ha – had a good friend over there, somebody about his age, and they became very good friends. Later on they found out they were brothers.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah, they did not know, because of the war. So, different people had different things happening. And, very interesting. So, that's a wonderful, wonderful to hear in the village, different thing – different people found their families. But I – when I live in **Kfar Batya** [indecipherable] is a boarding school, a very good ed-education was there, and a wa – I remembered there were people who did not know who they were. None of them knew who – I have a few people that I knew, they picked them up from the woods, and bring them to is – to **Israel**, but they never knew who they were. They gave them names and everything. They're little kids with nobody, just

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in a wood by themselves. So they take and send them to **Israel**. They figure that children of Holocaust survivors also. So, otherwise they would die alone in the woods.

Q: Yeah.

A: So, there are people who do not know who they are. That's how it happened. So, there are a lot of things happen that in a – I think a – I think what you're doing is a wonderful thing, take information. I think that information should be left to the next generation, so they know that there was a Holocaust, whoever deny the Holocaust, they hate **Israel**, and the one destruction of **Israel**. That the hol – that the Holocaust – I believe the Holocaust – the purpose of the Holocaust was to create the state of **Israel**, because that's how the state of **Israel** was created. That's what I believe.

Q: This is a fascinating story. You've experienced many, many interesting things, from a very young age on. I thank you very much.

A: You're very welcome.

Q: Is there anything you would like to add?

A: Yeah, I want to say, I like to have a copy of the tape.

Q: Okay. Certainly, certainly, we're going to take care of this.

A: Uh-huh.

Q: Certainly.

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A: I'd like to know more things about me; what year I arrived to **Israel**, I do not know; and what year I arrived to – I would like to write a book about my life, really.
So –

Q: You can definitely submit a request, we can take care of this –

A: Yeah.

Q: – with the registry of Holocaust survivors –

A: If they can find –

Q: – to find more information about the ship, and the people and the time. So we have the resources in the museum –

A: I cannot put the times to frame together –

Q: Yeah.

A: – when or wh – or why, when this happened, and what these – I know so many things happened, and – in a – and that a lot of things happened to me, but when I ca – that's what I wanted to say. When I red – arrived to the foster family, after – I was beginning getting to be very sick in my head. I could – I could like hear something saying to me, and I said, go away. And – and I didn't want nobody see it. But it took time and eventually I got healthy. I di – I had good food, I put weight on. I no more look like a – a starving – and then I had a good life there, and I become

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healthy again, without going to doctors and without anything, just with the right environment. Right food and right environment was good. So that's important.

Q: In your homeland.

A: Yeah.

Q: Thank you.

A: You're welcome.

Q: This concludes the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Esther Fol**.

A: **Esther Fol**.

Q: Thank you. Yeah. Thank you very much.

A: Okay, thank you.

Conclusion of Interview