

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Renee Schiller
November 9, 2008
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a recorded interview with Renee Schiller, conducted by Stephanie Blyskal on November 9, 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.

RENEE SCHILLER
November 9, 2008

Question: This is the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Renee Schiller**, by **Stephanie Blyskal**, on November 9th, 2008, in Arlington – in **Alexandria, Virginia**. Good morning.

Answer: Good morning.

Q: Thank you for joining us. Can you tell me where and when you were born, and what your name was at birth?

A: I was born in – in **Horodenka, Poland**, which is now the **Ukraine**, and I was born on April 25th, 1936.

Q: Mm-hm. And what was your name at birth?

A: **Rena Koch**.

Q: Okay. And what was your family like? What did your parents do for a living?

A: My father owned a textile store, my mother was with him in the business, and we had the housekeeper at home. And I had an older brother, who was four – four years older than I was, and we – basically, she took care of us at home.

Q: Was your family religious?

A: Well, my father went, you know, in – in **Europe** basically most people were religious, at least that's what I was aware of.

Q: Mm-hm, right.

A: My father did go to temple, and prayed every morning and did go to temple on Saturdays. Of course, kept kosher. And I wasn't really aware of that much more of what religious meant; I thought all Jews were religious.

Q: So you celebrated the holidays, and – and –

A: Yes, oh, definitely, this was part of –

Q: – and Shabbat, and –

A: – Shabbat, yeah, that was a-all part of life and I felt that that's the way it has to be.

Q: So, how old were you when you s – did you start school where you –

A: I never started s –

Q: You never did.

A: – I never went to school until after we were liberated. So basically, at that point I was almost nine years old before I went to school, without knowing how to read or write.

Q: So, when the war started, you – you were on the Soviet side, or you were on the Polish side?

A: We were on the Polish side, and then the – the Soviets came in in – I guess in 1940, maybe, I think.

Q: Right.

A: And tha – and of course, and then the Germans came in. The Soviets, we were a little bit afraid of the Soviets, not to be taken to – my father was afraid that they'd

take him to **Russia**, whatever. And we thought that maybe ca – jer – he thought that maybe ki – when the Germans came in, they didn't – they weren't going to harm Polish Jews, only their own Jews, you know, maybe in **Germany**. But of course we discovered very quickly otherwise. And after awhile, which I don't really remember how long, they formed a ghetto in my hometown, and everybody from all the villages and different neighborhoods – our house was in the ghetto. And many people came to live with us, and there was a lot of starvation. Cause I remember people basically dying, I don't know how long it took after the ghetto was forming, but on our doorstep there would be dead people that have – from hunger, you know. And they were looking in garbage cans for potato peels or onion peels. And we basically, since we were in our hometown, I imagine my – my parents may have stored some food, so I don't remember being hungry at that point. Maybe I was too young to remember hunger, you know, and then we had three acti – **akcjas** they call it, you know. The first one we – we had relatives outside of town, they – we went there, to outside of town. My father, I think, remained in town, but my grandfather, when we came back, we discovered my father's father was killed, right across the street. He was shot right across the street from our house. And then the second one, we went into hiding someplace outside of the city. But the third one, my father brought us to a Christian family, and he – they said that all workers should come and register, and he felt that he was young and strong, and he was going to register. And after a day or two, he will come and get us. And it took about a week and he

never came back. So my mother worried, she took us out and we started walking out – out of the – their – wherever they hid us, in their barn. And they were shotti – shooting after us, you know, when we – they saw that we were, you know, Jews, I guess. And we went back to our home, but eventually this **akcja** must have stopped, or whatever, but they came into our house and they chased us out. Out of the house. And I was, you know, very young, but my mother told me to grab – she had a – her girdle, which she had gold dollars sewn into it – to take that. As a child I was able to sneak by with that. And this is basically – that eventually saved our life. And then they made **Judenfrei**, our town was **Judenfrei**, but my grandmother on my father's side had survived, and then an aunt, my father's sister. And we went into the woods, and we – I guess my mother must have known that across this river, was called the **Kinester**(ph), there were Jews, were still Jews there. And you – you were able to get there. So we were in the woods right across – from the river, and hiding in there, and a young student came across. He knew my mother, and he said, you hide, he says, but during the night when the water gets shallow or whatever, he says, I will come and – and take you across. He carried me across, because I was the youngest one. My brother, my mother, my aunt and my grandmother, they walked across with packages, if they had – whatever they had. And we came to a little town, **Potok Zloty**, and before we know it, you know, a couple of days later, they made **Judenfrei** over there. And we went on to **Buczacz**, and in **Buczacz** we lived with a family that was in the ghetto, there was a ghetto there. And there were also many

akcjas and I remember that we always had to watch at night, people were watching. And I would go out during the day, of course, and play with other children. And right after the **akcja** I'd come out and they'd say, the children are dead, they're – they're gone. Or – and one day I came out and I saw a wagon full of dead children, with bleed – blood coming out of the – the wagon. You know, when – so I was always ready, I was afraid I'd be left behind, being the – the youngest one. So as soon as they – I'd be – at night or whatever, I'd be the first one to get dressed and hold onto my mother to go into hiding. And basically after this – you know, after – I'm – I'm not sure of how much time passed, they made that town **Judenfrei**, and my – and we had an-another little town, my ki – father's relatives, cousins were there, and they – I don't how they communicated with my mother, but she decided to go there. And we went to **Kopieczynce** was that name. And we went in – we stayed with them. And of course then it started over there; the – the killings started over there. And my f – relatives' son, they – he was 17 or 18 years old, with other boys they built a bunker from that house that we lived in to under the street, and we felt it was very safe, you know, in the basement it was camouflaged, in the basement, and we were there. There were a couple of **akcjas** there, but this was like the last one. We we – all went into this bunker, we were 30 some odd people that went in there. And they must – they built a air – you know, some type of air, to give us air in the street. And either the noise or whatever, they discovered that we – that there was a – that we – there was a bunker under there, so they started digging from

the other side the street and came in that side. And then they realized that there had to be an opening in a – in the house, you know, that we – how we got in there. So they discovered us on both sides. They pulled everybody out, and they started throwing hand grenades into the bunker. And basically, I don't know what happened to my mother, she either, you know, went to another part of the bunker, whatever. A – but I was holding onto my brother. And people died, and the dead bodies fell on top of us. And when it had quieted down, people came to rob, you know, the dead, to see what was there. And they hit my brother over the head with an axe, you know, to try – they thought that he was still alive. But I was covered with bodies, so they pulled my foot, and they pulled off my shoe. And basically, I survived with that one shoe on, through the war. And then we – we – when – after we were discovered, we were the only ones, they thought we were already dead, or whatever, they were all dead people. At night we snuck out of there, went into a – into another building, out onto a roof. We stayed there for a long time without any food. Being the youngest one, my mother worried, you know, my – my throat was closing up from not eating or drinking. But there was like a – a – a rusty tub, or whatever with the – with the water was leaking from the roof. And she found a straw and made me drink the water with a straw – through a straw, because it was feathers and dirt in that water. And then we were discovered there. But if – they only robbed us. There were some other people from the bunker that survived, another three men, I think with us. And – you know, and they let us – they –

they told us, this is the end, they're gonna – going to keep killing until all the Jews are gone, he says. But there is a labor camp outside of – of – that some Jews are working on the labor – in the labor camp outside of town. To us, of course, it was a strange town, we weren't there very long. It was a ghetto – walled ghetto. But we – these two men that were with us on that roof came down with us and looked for a place to go over the wall. And they found like an old couch or a chair, I don't know what it was, and my mother was able, and my brother, to get over. They threw me over the – th – over the fence, and we started running away from the ghetto. And it was – a man was leading a cow, so he told the guards at the – the gate, the Jews were escaping, and they start – they shot after us. Well, we were able to get to – I think one of the man got – you know, was shot, but we were able to get into the fields, and there was – the wheat was very high, and we hid there for a couple of days in – my mother had the feeling that we were heading towards that labor camp where Jews were still working. We got there and we – we s – we got there at night and there was nobody, the Jews used to run away at night. They were always afraid that at night they'd come and get them. We were in a building that wasn't quite finished yet. They came to rob us again, and they – my mother had – at this point she had slipped the gold dollars into her shoes, she wore a high, like a boot, and they touched her boot that it was there. So they hit her to get off the boot and she refused. She said, we'll scream. They were allowed to kill Jews, but they weren't allowed to rob. So they got scared and ran away. And then morning came, and my

mother went into the camp, into that labor camp and ta – find out if she could work there. And the man that was in charge of labor – my mother happened to have been a beautiful blonde woman, so he picked her she could wash the floor in her – in his office. And he started talking to her, and he said, you know, you could pass as a Polish woman. So she says, but I have two children. So he said, two children, he says, do you have a – so she says, I have a son and a daughter. Says well, no son, I cannot help you with a son, but with a daughter. But a couple of days later he said to her, I – if you have any money left, he says, if you have any money, I have a friend that would be willing to hide you outside into – in a – outside in another farm. And my mother said she didn't – she was afraid to say that she had the money with her. But she said, I have money in the ghetto, and I will sneak back in the ghetto and dig it out. She wanted to make sure that he meant it. And sure enough, he did have a friend, he sends a worker from that other farm to pick us up, you know, to – to take us – he wanted gold dollars, he didn't want – so we were very lucky to have gold and not paper money. And they took us to this other f – to this other farm, or to – you know what – what it was, it was – was a lot of people working for him, he was like the boss. And they put us in the room, they – it was an empty building. And there was a man that was assigned to bring us food or take out our waste, or whatever. And he – the man didn't tell us that he was Jewish passing himself off as a – he was the bookkeeper on that farm. But he was a Jew, and he passed himself off as a – you know, as a non Jew, but he was the one to provide us whenever he

could. I mean, mostly it was potatoes. And being the youngest one after we were there for eight months, and then they started – rumors were he ki – brought back rumors saying that the Russians were coming, that the Russians were winning the war, and they were coming closer. And the partisans were in the woods, we were hoping we'd get liberated. But eventually, of course, the – the war came closer, and I think that they – that somebody must have discovered that there may be Jews in there. So they moved us to a still. But the – and the still in – these big barrels in a still, and – and then we went up to the – the roof, I don't – and they were going to bomb the Germans when they were leaving, they were going to bomb that buildings because they didn't want the Russians to get ahold of the liquor that was in there. And we heard them talking outside, you know, that this is next, they were going to [indecipherable]. And then the bombs started falling all around, they ran away. And we didn't really know if we were – if the Russians were coming, if the rai – so we stayed there for quite awhile with no food or anything, because they – they couldn't bring it to us over there. Eventually they came and they told us you're liberated, you're free. And at that point I was swollen, my stomach and my feet were swollen. And we got outside and we hitched a ride with the Russian soldiers as they were advancing to the next town. And – and that town they were – some Jews started coming out of – you know, there were a couple of families came out of hiding, and we stayed there. So basically, that was our liberation. And then we started running because the war was going on right near us. We tried to go closer to

the Russian border. And other people were coming out of labor camps, and they had typhus, and my mother and I both got typhus. And we – that part is completely like way – vague in my mind. I know that I couldn't walk, that I lost my hair. But I, you know – and eventually, as it quieted down, we worked ourselves back to our hometown, hoping that there would somebody be left, somebody would be – you know, we didn't know what – the fate of my father, we just –

Q: Right.

A: – knew that he didn't come back, and my mother's sisters, grandmothers, everybody. You know, so we came back to town and some Jews finally unfil – you know, came back. Some of the Jews that – we stayed there for awhile, and that's when the first – when it got a little bit – they wanted the children to go to school –

Q: Right.

A: – so that was my first experience to go to school. And it was a Polish school at that point –

Q: Right.

A: – but it was the Russians – within weeks they changed it to Russian school. And then we ha – we – since we were Polish citizens, we – we were able to get – go to **Poland**, since this became **Russia**.

Q: Mm-hm, right.

A: And they got us onto trains, you know, we got into a train, you know, all the Jews, and we were – went to **Poland**. And in **Poland** we were in **Bytom**, in a town

Bytom. And without having schooling, and I was – guess there was no food, my mother put us in an orphanage in – in **Poland**. I forgot the name of the town. But next – ex – actually, the next **[indecipherable]** there wasn't much food in that orphanage. The next town, and the next, it – we went to an orphanage in **Zabrze**, and the – and stayed there, but th-the funny part is, when I went to **Houston**, I – some people came and they were searching for people, they fa – had – had a picture of – when they didn't remember of why they were there –

Q: Right.

A: – of what they were there, and I was in the picture with them. So actu – there's one woman here, **Ida** from **Chicago**, who we found each other in **Houston** through one of these meetings.

Q: Oh wow.

A: And there was another man, **George Hoffman**, he's not here today, we were in that orphanage. And eventually we left, of course, for **Germany**. And I was in the **DP** camp in **Bad Reichenhall** in **Germany**. Went to a school as – there was Zionist organizations formed, I was really hoping as a – as a young child to go to **Israel**, you know, I wanted to be – to be a soldier or whatever. But my mother put is in the – in the orphanage **Preen(ph)**, which many children it was like a transit thing to go to the **United States**. So as the – of the orphans quota we – I came in 1949, I came to the **United States**, and was sent to **Minneapolis** as a foster child. And I lived with a Jewish family until my mother came to the **United States**.

Q: And was your brother with you, or –

A: My brother was with – with me all this time.

Q: So you two were together the whole time.

A: He was – together, thi – that time, yeah –

Q: Yeah.

A: – we were all together at that point, just my brother and I.

Q: Right.

A: There are a lot of people here that have been to **Preen**(ph) yeah, which was – yes.

Q: Right. Did you ever find out what happened to your father?

A: Eventually, yes, a man in our hometown who survived, he was with my father in th – in that camp where they gathered them all when they discovered that it wasn't really a work thing –

Q: Right.

A: – that they were to register, but they were going to take them to concentration camp. My father was 41 years old, a strong man, so he s – looked out the window and he saw two policemen, Ukrainian policemen that he went to school with. So he spoke to one of them and he said, I have two watches with me, I'll gladly give you my watches, and I'm gonna jump out the window. He didn't do it, but he pointed him out to the next man, and as he was running out the window he was shot.

Q: Did any of your other family survive?

A: Basically, you know, my mother was one of seven sisters. I-I have one cousin.

We were – on my mother's side, we were 19 cousins. Wa – one cousin survived, he
s – he lives in **Florida** now, too. And now my mother has died, my f – brother has
died, and I – I have my children, that's it.

Q: Mm-hm. I want to go back a little bit.

A: Yes.

Q: I guess this would probably be pre-war. What was the first thing you really –
what's the first memory you have as a child?

A: Basically going visiting – to visit relatives. In the summertime going out to the
country, and you know, all wonderful, wonderful memories, you know.

Q: Yeah. And when the war started, I guess I'm wondering –

A: I went also to pre-school at one point, and it was a Hebrew – it was a Hebrew, I
guess, a Hebrew pre-school, and I was – the thing I remember is they taught us on
the blackboard, you know, they made like – and they said **sus(ph)**, so they made a –
a – you make a – a – you make a circle, you make a – a straight, you know, a – a
line, and a little dot, and another circle. And that's **sus(ph)** and that means horse,
that's – that's the extent of my education.

Q: That's a good – I like that.

A: Yes.

Q: That's great. Do you remember your mother – I-I guess I'm just – you were such a young child, what – I mean, that was only, really the only life you really knew for a long time.

A: Yes.

Q: Do you remember your mother just being – she sounds like a very strong woman. Do you remember her just being terrified all the time? How were you – she was always looking out for you and your brother.

A: Always looking out for – for us and –

Q: Right.

A: – you know, fo –

Q: Did you get the impression that she was scared?

A: [indecipherable] we were all scared –

Q: Yeah.

A: – we were all scared, so I'm really not sure where the fear came out of, but the fear was constant, you know, that's constant, of being discovered, of being you know, seen, of being left behind, of being killed, you know.

Q: Right.

A: In fact we – in that **Buczacz**, in the town where I had seen these dead children on the wagon –

Q: Right.

A: – there were some relatives of ours that were there too, and they had a baby. You know, they had – had a baby. And right after one of these **akcjas** my mother sent me and my brother there, to see if they've survived, and when we came in there, their baby was in the crib, de-dead in the crib, shot in the crib. You know, so that's constantly fearing that I was youngest one, that maybe, you know – you also heard that parents ran away, left their young children. They wouldn't let them into a bunker, because you may cry. In **Buczacz** we were in bunker, there was a baby that cried at us, we – they were searching and we heard them. The mother put a pillow over him, and he died. It was a baby of – six weeks old baby. Was – was – you know, choked right there in that bunker. You know, so it was always that fear of, you know, of that.

Q: Was that the – I mean, was the biggest fear losing your family, or –

A: I don't – you know, this is so very strange that I don't have – I was just speaking to a friend of mine who's also – who is my age. She interviewed yesterday and she said, I don't remember, did I miss my mother, father, my sisters? She says, how did I feel? I feel the same way, did I really? All I remember is years later, you know, if I was angry at my mother I was – always felt my father's gonna come, he's gonna come back. You know, an-and for many years actually, I was already an adult, I – knowing already that he had been killed, I always thought maybe it was wrong, he's gonna come back.

Q: So you came to the **United States** and you lived with a foster family.

A: Fa-Fa-Family in **Minneapolis**.

Q: And how was – I mean, did they –

A: They did it mostly for money, it wasn't, you know –

Q: Right.

A: – they – I don't know if they were in great need, or whatever, but they took – we were not the first set of foster children that they had taken in from this – I – I think it was the group, the **Joint** or the **HIAS**, or whoever, sent us there. When we got to **New York**, actually, they asked us if we had any family in the **United States**, if we wanted to stay; we had nobody.

Q: Right.

A: So I – and it was very, very hot. I came from **Germany** in a wool outfit with wool socks, and it was like 98 degrees and humid, I had never experienced humidity before. And I said, just send us away, as far away from **New York** as possible. So they sent us to **Minneapolis**.

Q: Did you – what language are you speaking at that point? Were you only speaking –

A: I – Polish and Yiddish.

Q: Polish and Yiddish.

A: And yeah, of course I understood maybe German, you know, wa – this is part of, you know –

Q: Right.

A: Yeah.

Q: So when you got –

A: And no English –

Q: No English.

A: – no English at all. And I remember going with my foster mother to the supermarket. As a child I must have been learning very quickly. And a man approached and asked me something, and I understood, and she was so excited that I understood what he asked me.

Q: So, what language were you speaking with your – with your foster family?

A: Yiddish –

Q: Yiddish.

A: – probably Yiddish, yes. I think Yiddish.

Q: Yeah.

A: I have this friend of mine here and I said, you know, who – I know her from the **DP** camp. And I said, what language did we speak? She says, Russian. I says, I di – never spoke Russian, so you couldn't have been speaking to me in Russian. So we m – stis – we discovered it must have been Yiddish too, that we spoke to each other, but I thought we spoke Polish, you know, or whatever.

Q: Right, right. And so you started going to school.

A: I started going to school –

Q: And –

A: – of course they made – advanced pretty quickly. They put me in – in

Minneapolis – of course, I went to – in the **DP** camp, I went to school in **DP** camp.

And that was a – really an accelerated course. So when I got to **Minneapolis**, I think it was sixth or seventh grade that they put me in immediately. I'm not sure of how well I did, but I was there. But coming back then later, when my mother arrived and we came back to **New York**, I went into ninth grade in junior high school.

Q: Right.

A: And there was a Jewish teacher and he must have been very – and I remember writing for Thanksgiving, it was my first Thanksgiving in the u – you know, maybe second Thanksgiving –

Q: Right.

A: – in the **United States**. And I wrote my story in my broken English or whatever, but he praised me so much, it gave me so much courage. He thought that I did so well, you know, of what I was thankful for.

Q: Yeah, that must have been – that must have been kind of – I don't know, I guess –

A: Very, very hard, you know.

Q: Yeah, culture shock, really.

A: Every ti – culture shock. Every time they call on you in class –

Q: Yeah.

A: – or they put me in the – and this was in the **Bronx**, there was a – everybody was taking Spanish at that point. I had never heard Spanish before, but they handed me a book. And of course, reading was very easy because it's the same as you would Polish. You know, I read – the teacher didn't discover that I didn't know any Spanish, probably for weeks. She just thought I was very – I read very well, better than the American children, because I – it's the way you – phonetically.

Q: Right.

A: It was so easy for me.

Q: So you – so you went to school. Did you go – did you want to?

A: And then I went on – then I went on to, you know, into high school, in **Taft High School** in the **Bronx**. But I got married, of course, very young. I was 17 years old when I got married.

Q: Wow. And how did you meet your husband?

A: I needed a dental for – for school. They wouldn't give me – they wouldn't – you had to go – you know, you wouldn't get a grade in gym, unless you got a dental. So I went – my mother took me along to a dentist, and he spoke Yiddish, and that's why my mother, of course, chose him.

Q: Right.

A: And he was a young man, and he said, if – I'll only give you a dental if you'll meet my cousin. And this was his cousin, and eventually I married him.

Q: Wow. You hear a lot of stories like that, it's – it's so neat, and how everybody was matchmaking through – throughout **New York**. Did you – did you eventually grow to like **New York**?

A: I never really got to liking **New York**. I mean, of course I did – eventually, we lived in the **Bronx** and I had children and everything. But I was very happy when I – when we moved away. We moved away to – first to **Rutland** county, and eventually we, for many years we lived in **Poughkeepsie, New York**. I was very happy outside of – I also didn't mingle that much with – because there weren't that many survivors, you know, my husband was American, so I didn't mingle that much with, you know – but I was happy, I blended – I thought I blended in, I – I n – I never admit it. If they didn't ask me, I never said I was a survivor unless they asked me.

Q: Right. And so you don't really remember did –

A: What –

Q: You know, that's always – always one – something I – I wonder about is, how did you explain it to people when they did ask, who didn't know about it, necessarily?

A: People knew, but I – I basically never told my children never told my husband. This is – today is the first time that I'm ready to speak about it. I – when they called me from **Spielberg**, when they would come to town, three times I cancelled my appointment. I never – I still don't feel very comfortable, and my children know it.

They've never asked, because they felt it was painful for me. But now I have one of – little grandson, who – he lives in **Houston**. He – I think his parents came back of seeing a movie about the Holocaust, and th – we discussed it, and he realized that it was me. So since then he's been prodding me, when can you tell me the story? I always tell him, not today, hi – I'm not – not today, some other time. And every time I come to town, or he comes, he says, I – is – is this the time yet? And I always say not yet –

Q: Right.

A: – it's not – the time is not yet. In fact, I remember going to a Seder one time, and one of the young – the – asked me, knowing that I was a survivor, asked me some questions, and I – and I told him a couple of things that had happened to me, and my husband sat there and he was amazed that he had never – after many years being married, he had never heard this from me. And he also never questioned me of what I went through. My mother did a little talking, you know –

Q: Yeah.

A: – and she spoke to my children too, but I –

Q: When you ra – and did your brother talk about it? Did you and your brother talk about it?

A: My brother – my bro – no, we never spoke about it. The two of us to – to – to each other, we never spoke about it. But I think my brother was a little bit more affected by it, whatever. He was a little depressed, he was – he got married, he had

a family, but he definitely had a lot of the syndromes that I see in survivors. He was – he was four years older than I was.

Q: Right.

A: He was definitely, I felt, more affected by it. In fact, I don't even like when people, you know, whatever is wrong with me, when people thi – say, you know, oh, it must be due to the Holocaust, I don't like to –

Q: Yeah.

A: – blame this on the Holocaust.

Q: And you never experienced any kind of like nightmares or anything like that
[indecipherable]

A: Oh yes, yes, yes, they – to this day I get, you know, and I'm amazed that after many years, you know, I find myself running, or you know, or – or shooting, yes, I – I do. The nightmares have never really stopped.

Q: Yeah. I – I want to go back a little bit to moving from town to town. You were – you said you were ready at any moment to go.

A: To go or to hide or whatever, yes.

Q: To hide, to hide. It – if it – do you remember at any point just getting tired of – of moving, or wanting, liking a particular place where you were?

A: Oh, yes, yes, every time, every time we would get settled as a child, you know, if we had a room, I was, in my little ways, I would take a – a kerchief and cover the table, I wanted it to be ours, you know. Like to set the table, to do something to

decorate it, to make it ours, because we never – never experienced that, definitely.

Every place that – if we stayed for long period – a longer period of time, even – I wanted this to be my home, definitely.

Q: Do you remember how long you stayed in the – in the – the longest time you stayed in one place? Do you –

A: Well, once we started running, it wasn't really – I can't – I don't really –

Q: Right, right, so young.

A: – I can't tell the time, I can't tell the time.

Q: But it was just –

A: I know that, you know, over – from 1942, basically to the last month – to the – to the – we were liberated in March, the end of March of 1940 – '44.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So we were in all these places, but I can't – I don't know of how long in each place, I really can't tell.

Q: Yeah, yeah. And did you have – did you – were you allowed to bring something that was yours –

A: I never had a toy –

Q: [indecipherable] Never had a toy.

A: – never had a toy. Never had – basically, most times we didn't have a s – didn't have a pencil. And so when we were hidden, you know, my mother tried to, you know, take a straw and try to, like do something with me, or – or teach me numbers,

you know, talk to me about numbers. I never learned the alphabet, of course, until after we were liberated, or learned to read. But she tried to – numbers, you know, addition, subtraction.

Q: Right.

A: She tried even the multiplication tables, you know, to teach me. This was all because most of the time, nothing. I never had –

Q: Do you remember any of the people that you were hidden with? Have you – have you gone back to **Poland** to look where they were, or –

A: No, I've never been back to that part of **Poland**

Q: You've never been back.

A: I've been back to **Warsaw**, but I – **Warsaw** was not a – you know, for me, no meaning, it's just because I took a tour, and it went through –

Q: Right, mm-hm.

A: – **Warsaw**, I was there.

Q: But you – have you –

A: I would like to go back, I just would like to s – you know. But it's the **Ukraine** right now –

Q: Yeah.

A: – it's not easy, whatever else –

Q: No.

A: – but there are people from my hometown in **Israel** who said at one point they were going to make a trip, and I said that I would love to go to. But I don't think it ever happened. They may have gone individually, but that's never happened.

Q: And the people that you were in hiding with – well, I went back to this –

A: Well, I –

Q: – to this – to the farm.

A: Yes, yeah.

Q: Were you the only Jewish people who were – he was hiding, this **[indecipherable]** gentleman that was – was helping you?

A: I – yes, my mother – my father's cousin, whose family – whose son had built a bunker for us, his family at that point got killed too, and he was with us, and he's the one probably that helped us jump over that fence –

Q: Right, right.

A: – or to ma – he was hidden, and eventually my mother married him, after the war, my mother married my – married him. And he was a first cousin of my father's.

Q: Right. And the other families that were working on the farm, were they – were they –

A: Oh, we never saw –

Q: You never saw –

A: – we never saw, on the farm we never saw –

Q: You never saw them.

A: – I don't even know who they were or whatever, you know, that – than that –

Q: Do you think they were Jewish, or –

A: Oh, which one? The ones that w – n-no, the only Jews there was – by the way, that Jew that helped us, that brought us the food, right after the war he was dis – but he went – when he exposed himself that he's a Jew, he got killed by the Ukrainians in the village.

Q: Oh, gosh.

A: He went by the name of **Verber**(ph), you know.

Q: Right.

A: And he was from **Lvov**, but he – whatever his identity was, he said he was a Ukrainian, he was, you know, whatever.

Q: Right, right. But do you – do you have – aside from people who were in the bunker, do you have memories of any of the people who you were hit – hidden with, in some of the larger places, or were you always just separated out when you were in hiding?

A: No, no, we were with o – with other people –

Q: Right.

A: – but they didn't survive, you know.

Q: They didn't survive.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: In **Buczacz**, this family that we lived with, their daughter had survived and I did get to s – get to see her in the **United States** eventually, but I'm not really sure. She lived in **New Jersey**, then I tried to get in touch with her recently, the last couple of years, and I don't know if – what happened.

Q: Yeah. I'm trying to think, there's – there's so much in your story, and – I mean, is there anything specifically that you – that you want to say to us, y-you want to talk about your experience –

A: I just –

Q: – or is it – is it –

A: Well, I – basically I feel that it's my responsibility to – to talk, and I feel guilty that I have not been able to – to speak all this time that has passed, and I have not spoken. And this is why I am here today to tell my story as best I can.

Q: Right. Is it because you never talked about it with your family, or –

A: I f – I felt guilty, I've been feeling guilty about it that I can't talk about it.

Q: Right.

A: It's not that I am trying not to talk –

Q: Right.

A: – about it, it's just that I can't do it. I couldn't – and yet I feel guilty that I should pass it on to my children, and now the gr – my grandchildren are getting older and they should know –

Q: Right.

A: – you know. And I want them to carry on this.

Q: Well, we're very grateful that you decided to talk to us today. I know that this is going to go into our archives and can be a very important part of our – our collection, as well as yours. And I just want to thank you for being –

A: There's a lot of more into this, you know, little incidents that happened. We were discovered and we were beaten, and we were – you know, but I just – you know, it's just – I just –

Q: Right.

A: – wanted to get across this, so –

Q: Yeah, I mean, I do – I don't want to – I don't want to push you too much, and –

A: No, I – I – you know, f – I've never really – you know, maybe if you're prepared and you write it down or whatever. My friend who was interviewed yesterday, **Ellen Kaidenow**, whose never done this either, she talked me into doing this. She said – we both have felt the same way –

Q: Right.

A: – that we didn't want to talk about it, and we – we know each – we've – we met in the **DP** camp in **Germany**. And we've kept in touch all these years.

Q: That's fantastic.

A: So, we've – you know, so she is the one, you know –

Q: Right.

A: – who – who said to me, I've finally told my story, you better go and do it. So I came down yesterday and registered myself.

Q: Well, we're very grateful, and –

A: Thank you.

Q: – you know, if you want to add anything, we'll be – we'll be more than happy to –

A: Thank you.

Q: – amend your – your interview here. But thank you again.

A: I didn't take the drink, but I do need it.

Q: So this has been the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Renee Schiller**.

Conclusion of Interview