

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Lily Cohen
June 29, 2010
RG-50.030*0575

PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a recorded interview with Lily Cohen, conducted by Ina Navazelskis on June 29, 2010 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC 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.

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LILY COHEN

June 29, 2010

Question: This is a **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Lily Cohen**, conducted by **Ina Navazelskis** on June 29th, 2010, at the Holocaust Memorial Museum in **Washington, D.C.** Good afternoon, **Lily**.

Answer: Good afternoon.

Q: Thank you for coming to talk to us, to share your story with us. Could you let me know a little bit about the beginnings of your story; where you were born; who were your parents; what you know about them?

A: My name is **Lily Kaszamerski**(ph) or **Kaszamerska**(ph), and I was born in **Warsaw, Poland – Poland**. And my parents' names were **Ada Berlind**(ph) **Oberlanski**(ph). My father's name was **Ian Kaszamerski**(ph). I know that they both were born in po – in **Warsaw**, I'm not sure, because I don't remember them. And I also know that they – my mother had a brother – her brother, and he survived the war. He managed to escape the war in the middle of the war, and find himself in **Paris**. And after the war he opened a nightclub. He was a musician.

Q: What was his name?

A: **Zigmund Berlind**(ph).

Q: And did you ever meet him?

A: No. I met his wife many, many years later. I didn't meet him, he died in 1953. And I think that he found me around 1950 th – or, well, '49.

Q: Uh-huh. So h –

A: After the independent war in **Israel**, I think that that's when he found me.

Q: That is, he found out that you were in **Israel**.

A: Yes.

Q: But he never – you two never came together.

A: No, he didn't – but I think that it wasn't enough time, just – but he wrote to me through my adopted mother, cause they corresponded in Polish, and I didn't know Polish at the time, already. I forgot it. And the sad story about it, about the fact that I didn't meet them, n-neither his or – him or his wife at that time, I – and th-the other sad thing is that I don't have any track of that letters that gone between my adopted mother and himself. So, I don't know anything. And I think that – that my adopted mother didn't ask the right questions, because if she would, maybe I would know where I come from, street, who were my parents, what did they do. I don't know anything.

Q: Well, this was my next question, is what are your – what do you know of your family, and was he, your uncle, probably the only tie to be able to tell you something about them?

A: Yeah, but what I want, th – all the things that – all – the only thing that I always heard from my aunt was that my mother was the most ele-elegant person in **Warsaw**, but that didn't give me anything.

Q: Yeah.

A: I know about my father that he was in the Polish army. And he won the, what they call **Virtuti Militari**, which was the highest rank, highest award that been given to soldiers. And I also know that never been given to a Jew. So, he was the only Jew who got this award. And I have it, I – I go – we got it through the internet from the Polish army museum.

Q: That's quite amazing.

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you remember any – did you remember what your first language was, do you –

A: It was Polish.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: But when I arrived to **Israel**, to **Palestine** at the time, it was a mixture of German and Polish and I don't know what.

Q: So tell me, do you have any early memories of **Warsaw** at all?

A: The only one memory I have is that – I think we were very, very young age, that I am in a pram, in a baby carriage, with my father, in a – in a park. And it was snowing, wintertime, and I remember what – wearing this snowsuit, white snowsuit, with a – with thing for – they call it **mufa** in Polish, for the hand, from
[indecipherable]

Q: It's a muff, it's a muff, yeah.

A: Yeah, yeah, muff. And I was all in white, and I remember myself – I think that – I – I'm not sure whether that's real, but that's what I remember, lying in a – in baby pram with my father in the park. This is the early –

Q: And is your f – do you have any memory of how – what he looked like?

A: I just think – I don't know if – because I saw his pictures, so I don't know if it's my memory, or what ha – from what I saw. But I – I remember somebody very tall, very tall and very beautiful.

Q: And your mother?

A: My mother I remember a little bit later, I think. My mother had dark hair. Both of them had black hair, I don't know how I got my blonde hair. And – and actually, the first mo – memory of her is for – what I thought that it was the beginning of – beginning of the war. It was a – a day that I remember being in a house, and everything, all the doors were open, and i-it was plenty of movement on the street, and they're shouting and shooting, and people running. And the – I remember hearing this gunshot, this boom, boom. And the – I saw my dog, I had the **Lassie** dog, on the floor with a hole in his head and something red was coming out and I remember myself – I remember me crawling to the dog. And then it was noise and the door bin – opened and the big soldier, he was a Ukraine –

Q: How did you know that?

A: – came in – I don't know. I don't know how – how I know. But I know I – I'm – I don't know how I know that he was Ukraine. He was a big man. He lift me up into

his arms. He had red cheeks, and a horrible smell of alcohol from his mouth, and my mother was screaming, and he was laughing and holding me in his arms, and laughing. That's what I remember from them. Then the next thing I remember is being in a – quite a dark apartment. My mother was walking backward and forward in the room doing this, you know? And then I remember that it was a cupboard there, and my mother used to go into the cupboard. And –

Q: Did you go with her?

A: No. I ler – I didn't look Polish – I didn't look Jewish, I think. I didn't go with her. She was always very ha – going into this cupboard, and then one day she disappeared.

Q: And, did your father disappear from your life by that point?

A: Yes, at that time, and I th – I – somehow, I was making connection between my mother's walking so the f – backward and forward in the room, and the – doing this with the – the – the disappearing of my father. I don't know if it's right or wrong, but –

Q: But that was what you think your impression was.

A: That's what my impression was. And then she disappeared, and I was there in this house. I don't remember the people there. I just – somehow, again, I just know. And this is very strange thing, that I know things. I don't know if I've been told, cause I didn't have anybody to tell me about it, but I know that it – the – that was out of the ghetto, and I – I assume that my parents were – they didn't – they didn't

really live very Jewish life, and they probably had a lot of friends. And my – my uncle was a musician, and he had probably his own artist friends. So, I assume that that's how we got out of the ghetto.

Q: So you thi –

A: Or we've never been – I don't think that we've been in the ghetto. I'm not sure, but I don't remember.

Q: So this dark apartment, you don't know where it was?

A: Yeah, I don't know where it was. I'm sure that it wasn't in the ghetto. Somehow.

Q: Do you think that your mother might have disappeared because someone informed?

A: I think that she's captured, she been captured, because I know that she – later on – later on she was in a labor camp. She was working.

Q: And your father just disappears?

A: It was the end of my father, yeah.

Q: And you never knew what he did for a living?

A: No.

Q: And –

A: Part of being in the army, which that we knew, I didn't know.

Q: And, you don't know if, aside from your uncle, whether there were any other brothers and sisters that they had?

A: No, there is a picture that they – because all these pictures been sent to me by my uncle, and that there is a picture that they are in some resort, and there is a picture of my father, my mother, that was before they got married. It was from – because there is a date, 1936. And it was my mother, my father, my uncle, and behind, it was written, Auntie **Bronia**(ph), but I don't know who sister she was.

Q: Yeah.

A: So, who she was related to.

Q: Auntie **Bronia**(ph).

A: Right.

Q: And your mother's name was?

A: **Adela**(ph)

Q: **Adela**(ph). So it's a mystery.

A: It is. The whole thing is quite a mystery. I mean that the – the fact that the – all these years, nobody showed up, but they – they – they lived in a place, in a big city like **Warsaw**. They probably had friends or relatives, family. Nobody ever, except my uncle, nobody ever showed up.

Q: Well, from the pictures, they look very well-to-do.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: As if they came from a very upper class family.

A: Yeah, yes, yes. But still.

Q: What – what's the next memory that – that you have, that you can think of, that comes to m –

A: The next memory I have is that my mother is coming to take me from this house, from this apartment, and we are in a very crowded place in, it was probably the **Hotel Polski in Warsaw**. And then we're in a little [**indecipherable**] train, very, very small place, and people were just next to each other, and it was very hard to breathe. And people were crying and screaming and it was – it was – and I was on my – in – on my mother's arms. And then I remember that we got to a place, door were opened, and the – they took us out, you know, like a cattle.

Q: You remember this? You had this –

A: I remember this. I remember this. I remember they took us to showers, very cold showers. And were – and plenty of women together in this shower, and my mother put me on – on the floor, which was disgusting. It was cold, and the water – and wet and th – and then she picked me up. And then, when we got out of the showers, I was with her, and with a man. The story goes that my mother – that be – I been tell – told later, that it was this arrangement that the German maid with the Jewish authorities or something, that they will exchange people who had a certificate to **Palestine** for German people who lived in **Israel** – in **Palestine**, at that time. They were the **T-Templers**, tho – the big communit – German community in **Palestine**. And we know that some of them really adopted the Nazi i-ideas. And the Germans wanted to exchange them, I think. So they announce that the people who has

certificate to **Palestine** will come to Hotel **Polski**, which was a hotel in **Warsaw**, and they will take to – take us to **Palestine**. My mother found this man who had the – on his papers there were, the woman and a child. But they weren't exist any more. So she paid him, she gave him the – what she had. And we were with him.

Q: Do you have any memories of him?

A: I have a – I – I don't know, it's a – it's – whatever it's – what – my memory about him is – is something very frightening. Really frightening, he was a very frightening man to me, because he – later on we knew that he hit me and sort of abused me, not – not sexually, but he abused me. Because I – my mother been taken away. As we got out of those showers, my mother disappeared, and I left with the man.

Q: Oh, so you never saw her after that time?

A: I saw her, they took me to see her, she was in the hospital. And I thought that there is a hospit – there was a hospital out of the camp, but I know now that it was a ho-hospital ou – inside the camp.

Q: So where were you at this point, were you in **Warsaw** –

A: I was with this man –

Q: And where was –

A: – and they put me in the man barrack.

Q: And, but where was the – where was this taking place? Hotel **Polski** in **Warsaw**, or was this –

A: No, Hotel **Polski** – we took us from Hotel **Polski**, put us on the trains, and we thought that this is the end of the – of the [indecipherable] and that we are going to **Palestine**. But instead they took us to **Bergen-Belsen**, the whole transport.

Q: So, in other words, whether you had a certificate or not, it didn't matter.

A: No, that what we had in **Bergen-Belsen** – I read about it. It was – we all considered to be the Palestinian Jew – Palestinians.

Q: Okay.

A: And they put us together in **Bergen-Belsen**. But certainly they didn't take us to **Palestine**.

Q: And they didn't – and there was no exchange.

A: There wasn't any exchange.

Q: Wow, so your mother a-and this man, as terrifying as he was, both of them got fooled.

A: Sure.

Q: Both of them thought that – that this was a ticket –

A: Yeah, sure.

Q: – out, and –

A: Together with very many other people.

Q: Yeah.

A: People, yeah.

Q: And so the – so, you remember seeing her in the hospital, do you remember –

A: Yeah, I remember that somebody took me, I don't know who took me to see her.

I saw her in the bed, and then they took me away.

Q: Did she say anything to you, do you remember?

A: I don't remember. I don't remember.

Q: Do you remember anything of how she looked?

A: Yes, I remember. She looked very much like – like in the pictures, with her make –

Q: She looked beautiful.

A: Yeah. I think that she was a – that time she was very, very sick, because she died very soon after. She had **TB**, tuberculosis, so she died, and that's why did – they didn't let her to leave with all the others, they left her there. And they next thing I remember was I was on the top bed. You know they had those beds, with – and I was on top bed in this barrack and there were other people there, about three people, or – few people left in the barrack during the day, and I heard them talking. And I heard that they said something like, poor child, her mother died. Something like that. In the same time, when they –

Q: The men then, it must have been the men.

A: Yeah, but they were talking between –

Q: Themselves.

A: – themselves. And I heard somebody humming. So, always this kind of music and bad news. Well –

Q: Was it a sad kind of melody, or was it a –

A: I – I thought it sad s – I think it was a sad – it was a melody, I don't know, it was just – and that's came together with what they said, and I was lying there in the bed and listening to this. They probably didn't think that I'm listening, or didn't consider me listening.

Q: Were there other children in that barracks?

A: No, there was only me.

Q: It's so unusual –

A: Yeah, it was –

Q: – to think that there's a little girl in the men's barracks.

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And what we know from other testimonies and the stories that the women in the women barrack told – told us that they – they saw that this man is really very hard on me, and then decided to take me away from him.

Q: Well, in what way – first, let's go back to some of those memories of – of this man and – and in what way was he terrifying? Do you have any –

A: He hits me. I – I remember. I remember –

Q: You remember being hit?

A: – me crying, yeah. I remember he hit me. I was – I was on the top bed, I couldn't – I don't know if I – if I walked at the time, or not, but I – I couldn't hold my – my pee-pee and [indecipherable] and I probably did the whole thing in the bed, and he hit me. And I remember. I remember that was terrifying.

Q: Now, was he in the same bunk as you were, or was he in the next one underneath?

A: Next one underneath.

Q: Underneath. So you were in the top, and he was the next –

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you have a name for him?

A: His na – name was **Schein**(ph) [indecipherable]

Q: His first name?

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

Q: And you don't remember if you called him anything, like uncle or something?

A: No, I don't think so, don't think so that I called him anything. I just know that the women bought me for the bread rations. They gave hi-him my – bread ration, and that – you know, it was 200 grams of bread a day. And they gave it to him and they took me.

Q: Do you remember that? Being taken by them?

A: I remember mi – myself in the women barrack. Now, there is a bla – black hole. There was a woman who took me, took care of me. Her name was **Bronka**(ph), **Bronka**(ph) **Eismann**(ph) and she took care of me. Then, she was transferred to another camp, to **Vittel** in France, because she had the French papers. She was a student in **France** at the time of the war, when the wa-war broke out. And then I

was left alone again. And I don't remember her, at all. I just know because later on in life I met her, and she told me this stories about me.

Q: What kind of stories did she tell you?

A: She told me now I could – I was already married and I had my son, and we met again. And she said that she took me and I was in a terrible condition. I was neglected and dirty and crying all the time and she said that she had to – to clean me up. She stood out there in the snow, and I was full of lice. She said that she had to cut my hair [indecipherable] have real scissors, but whatever she had. She – she said, you had beautiful golden curls, and I was standing in the – in the snow cutting every curl, and with every curl which been dropped on the snow, I cried, you see. She said, where is your blonde girl – curls now? Anyway, where are they? And then she said that she was telling me stories. She was telling me about re – **Little Red Riding Hood**, was wal-walking this – in the forest, picking flowers, and I ask her what – what is flower? And she told me that she taught me how to eat properly, not like – you know, like a lady. How to – and she used to – I – I wa – this – later ons, there is some s – I don't know if this from that time or some other time, but she used to cut a piece of bread for – you know, a piece of st – she want – eat like a beast, that like – only eat like – eat like a lady.

Q: Do you know what language you spoke to her in?

A: Polish.

Q: Ah, so even though she had French papers, she spoke Polish?

A: No, she wasn't French, she studied in **France**, she was Polish.

Q: Uh-huh, okay.

A: And then she said – she told me that she – I started to walk, and she didn't want me to have bad shoes, because I will ruin my legs. So she sneaked into the shoes barrack to find me shoes. Which I think that it was, you know, it was re-real dangerous thing to do. And she found me a pair of shoes.

Q: What I'm amazed by is that a little girl is allowed to live at all in bu – in –

A: **Bergen** –

Q: – **Bergen-Belsen**. Now what – how was it – were you hidden from the German authorities, do you think? Did they know about your existence?

A: I don't know, but I know that I didn't have a bed for myself in the women's barrack.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: I always slept with someone before, but probably in the beginning it was with **Bronka**(ph), and later on with somebody else. And then she said, when she had to be transferred, and she had to be taken away, she said on that day, she said – she said that she never – she didn't talk about it, because she didn't want me to hear about it. Somehow probably, I heard. And – and that day, when she went – taken, she wanted to say goodbye to me and I dis – just disappeared. And she looked for me, but she didn't have enough time. And then when she was on the other side of the gate, suddenly she heard this scream, and she saw me running to the gate. And I

gave her something. She – I put something in her hand. She put it in he-her pocket.

And then she said, you know, you saved my life. What happened was, that –

Q: Let's hold onto this thought –

A: Okay.

Q: – for when the tape changes, okay?

A: Okay, yeah.

Q: Yeah. And it – one is coming out and another one is going in. I'm keeping the audio running so that nothing is interrupted at all. Okay, and let me say, this is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Lily Cohen**. And you were at the point where you were going to tell us about **Bronka**(ph) and having her told you many years later, that you saved her life.

A: That's what she said.

Q: And there was something you gave her, so tell us about that.

A: So, she said that, before she went away, the women and the camp wanted to pass some kind of news about themselves to the relatives, and they didn't know that she is going to another camp, they thought that she'll be li-liberated. And they sew in her coat, she – they sew names and addresses and the – and some information. And it was all been sewn to th – her coat. When she got into **Vittel**, they – they started to check – check on her. They started with her shoes, they told her to – to open her shoes. And they gone up, and she was – she said, I was so white, I knew that this is

my e – the end of me. And they said, okay, take everything out of your pocket. And it was a little statue of **Maria** and the – and the baby.

Q: Of the Virgin **Mary** and the baby. And that's what you had given her.

A: Yeah. So sh – th-the guard said, okay, that's all right, we are not that bad, we are not, you know – so she said, and that saved my life. And I saw this Virgin **Mary** with a baby later on in life, she kept it.

Q: And do you remember it, or you don't have a memory of it?

A: No, I don't have memory. I remember many things from the camp, but I don't remember **Bronka**(ph).

Q: And you don't remember the little statue, and where you would have gotten it?

A: I don't even, no, I don't remember anything of th – her stories. Was like – it is like a black hole. And I tried so much to remember. I didn't manage it. I thought that maybe that was the only good time that I have there, so it just –

Q: What do you – what – do you ha – do you ha – you said you had other memories, many other memories?

A: I have other memories. I don't remember the women who took care of me. I knew – I know that there were many women who took turns to take care of me. I don't remember their faces. I just knew – know that they were exist. I – but I do remember that it was a camp just next to ours. And I remember nights, and people are standin – men standing there with those traps. And – and the little hats, and they were always screaming and shouting and crying from that camp. And I was so

afraid to go out night to do my things. And ev – I remember this very, very vivid, I remember this –

Q: Were there other children in the women's barracks?

A: It was – there were two. It was the girl, and it was another boy.

Q: Were they about your age, or were they older?

A: They – they were older. They were older. And th – they were with their mother.

One of them, that I heard – I learned later on, she was adopted by the – by this woman, because her child was dead, and again, the papers. So she took a girl, and she just her – her son name was **Avraham**, she put **Avrahama**. And that was the girl. And she brought this girl to **Israel**. And this girl, I – I never met her, but I met the woman, because she was visiting me on a regular basis – later on in **Israel**. So I kept in touch with her til the – her last – last day. And I – I remember – what I remember from the camp and all this time I – all my memories are in black and white.

Q: How odd.

A: They're all in black and white. Only when we got – when we were liberated by the Americans, after the train, which I'll tell about it, and we got to this place which called [**indecipherable**] this when my movie starting in colors. So, the first time that I remember colors.

Q: But it's – I find it amazing that you – we don't have dates for it, but it sounds as if your beginning of darkness happens fairly soon after the war breaks out. That –

that your mother and yourself are in a – in a – an apartment where she has to go into the cupboard, and then you're in Hotel **Polski**, and then you have a train to **Bergen-Belsen**. What year could have this been, and the – the th – the other thing is, is that you must have been a small child as – a small baby anyway when you were in **Bergen-Belsen** –

A: Yeah.

Q: – you know. So, in some ways it's a miracle that – in many ways it's a miracle that you survived the entire war incarcerated, whereas most children would not have survived. They would have been found, discovered, gotten rid of. Because, how much could they work, you know, and what was their value?

A: Yeah. The only thing is the – that the children that were – and now I learned about it more and more, the only children that were surv – is survive the – all of them were with some relatives, either aunt, uncle, parents, one of the parents. I was the only one who didn't have anybody. I cannot say that I – I came with – I didn't come with anybody. Even the woman that, when we being taken out of **Bergen-Belsen** to – it was April – no, well, before April, it was the March '45. I was with one of the women, but she was killed on the train. So again, I – I left alone.

Q: Do you remember her name?

A: No, I don't remember [indecipherable] face. I just – I remember one face, I have this face in front of me, it was laughing and had those dimples [indecipherable]. But –

Q: You don't know whose it was.

A: No.

Q: By the time 1945 rolls around, it looks as if, from the documents you have, that it – you're at least seven years old, something like that. And a seven year old already can have certain memories –

A: So that's what's really – really amazed me. I know from one of the testimonies, one of the ladies, the – this woman who had the ba – the – the g – the girl, **Nuta(ph)** **Gudkowski(ph)**, that she said that I was – she knows me from the – from the beginning. Well, she was with the pe-people in Hotel **Polski**, and came on the same train, and being in the same barrack. So she said that – that I was ol – four or five, and al – when we got out. So I don't have any – again, I don't know, I really don't know. And I don't have the memory o – I – now, when all this train story came up, and I hear stories of children who were 11 years old, and 10 year – no, 12 years old, they have a very vivid memory, and memory in order, you know, they can tell a story. I don't feel that I can tell a story. I don't have it, somehow. I have pictures, I have, you know, so –

Q: Images.

A: Images. But I don't have story. I get – I – I have more of a story when we – when we went out of – of **Bergen-Belsen**, I remember us walking this much, we walked about 10 kilometers. I remember that when we walked out, it was a kitchen on the other side of the – of the gate. And with a horrible smell, you know, the –

with smell the – with the soup that they gave us was horrible, horrible smell. And I remember that somebody ran into the kitchen, somebody ra – from the [indecipherable] and he – and he'd been shot, and then somebody else ran into the kitchen, been shot as well. And my adopted mother said that I was telling her this story and I said to her that it was a very funny story, a very funny thing, cause we were walking and somebody ran there, and suddenly it was piff puff and the person fell on the ground. And there was another one, there was another piff puff, and the person fell on the ground. It was very fu-funny.

Q: Oh, a child, a child. So it's – but you don't remember telling this story, she is somebody who tells you about that.

A: That – but I told – I – I remembered – I remembered the event.

Q: Yeah.

A: I don't remember that I told them the story, but she remember it. And then I remember that there – I remember that [indecipherable] and there were times that there were many – there were German officers are picking me up on their arms. You know, probably I was a – you know, I was a blonde and blue eyes. Maybe that's what saved me.

Q: So, obviously then, you weren't hidden. If German office –

A: No, I wasn't – I –

Q: – if German officers were picking you up –

A: – I wasn't hidden, no. No, I wasn't hidden, no. I just didn't have my place, cause I always slept with somebody, but I – no, I don't think so.

Q: Do you remember anything of how you spent the days? Do you think you played at all?

A: You know what, I don't remember conversations. I don't remember people talking. I don't – part of the one that I heard about my mother's death, I don't remember, I don't remember people talking to me, or I talking to them. I don't remember me talking.

Q: I had a thought as you were talking earlier, did you feel completely alone?

A: I felt com – I felt co-completely alone all my life.

Q: That's what my other question was going to be.

A: All my life. I felt – of course, I had the love of my adopted family and the – but I always felt sort of floating, no [indecipherable] like – like alone in the world. I always felt like no – this is my – my biggest memory and my biggest feeling, being alone. At the same token, I knew that I have only me for myself, and then – that I have to rel-rely on myself. It's th – there's no trust. I couldn't trust, especially [indecipherable]. Never trusted them. When I came to the kibbutz, and th – in my kibbutz [indecipherable] they all speak he – Polish, and they all tried very hard to make me forget Polish. And I, again I was lying in the bed listening to two women speak in Polish. And they were talking about how wonderfully – wonderfully I

been, you know, recovered, and – and I was thinking to myself, they don't know. I have a secret, and I'm not going to tell the secret to anybody.

Q: What was your secret?

A: My life in different place, that I don't – I know that I live there, I knew that I was there. I knew that all the things that I – all the – my memories were exist. But I didn't want to – to tell them. I felt that I better keep it to myself. And later on I – I thought that that will be – that was my strategy to how – somehow to assimilate and to survive. Because I came to a place that there were children with the mothers and fathers and they look so healthy and so nice. All the things that I wanted to be, and I wasn't.

Q: You mentioned having an adopted mother –

A: Yeah.

Q: – later on, but let's go back in our – to the chronology of when you're leaving

Bergen-Belsen –

A: The camp.

Q: – and you're on the train.

A: Yeah, we were, again, on the train. I remember being with someone, and I remember that we weren't ri – we were riding this train, again very many, sort of – you know, many people sitting together, and there was smells. I remember smell. And – and tha – then I remember hearing booming and shooting and then the train stopped. And we went under the train. There was shooting. We ran –

Q: Was it open train?

A: – with the woman.

Q: It was an open – no roof on it?

A: No, it was a roof – the train was partly cattle cars and partly passengers car. And probably we were in the cattle car, because it was very – too cozy. And there were shooting and the train stopped, and we ran after – down to – underneath the train, and then I looked at this woman next to me, and she didn't move. She was dead. So, that was –

Q: Who was doing the shooting, do you know?

A: The German. They wanted to bomb this train. Their plan was, initially, to get rid of the plane, to bomb it. And one of their cars were full of explosions. So, what happened in the train, that the – this train, for a week was riding backward and forward, many of the railroads were bombed, so they had to go back. And on the way they picked up more workers from labor camps, so the train was full of Polish people from **Bergen-Belsen** and Hungarians and Finnish and all kind of people that they found. Were 2500 people on the train. And th – in the end the pr – the train stopped near a city called **Magedburg**(ph).

Q: **Magdeburg**, yeah.

A: Yeah. And now, I remember that it was a – a train, and it was a hill here, and I saw there a German running away, running, escaping. And again somebody, some young soldier came back and said, oh, don't blame us, we're not all the same, and

run away. And we s-stayed there. This woman next to me was dead, I was under the train. And then came the Americans. They were all chewing chewing gum. So they

—

Q: So they liberated you from under a train.

A: They — yeah, so I got out of the tra-train — from under the train and they came, and I ye — I don't remember if — but I know now that in the beginning it was one tank with two s-soldiers. And then they — they went and they brought others, because what they saw there wasn't very nice. There were plenty of people dy-dying and dead. They took pictures, there are pictures from that site.

[indecipherable]

Q: And you've seen those?

A: I don't — I do-don't see myself.

Q: Mm-hm. But when you see the pictures, have you recognized some memory?

A: I re — yes, very much so, because for years I — I always, in my memory it always was a hill. And then I saw pictures of this train, probably from the other side, which was a plateau. And I thought maybe it was, you know, my memory and it's not as accurate. But when I saw the pictures now, I saw that it was exactly how I remember it. And now the — the American came and they gave us — they — I remember plenty of — of — sort of — plenty of joy. And they gave us something very, very nice and sweet. Was chocolate. Which I never had before. And then they took us — now, I remember they took us to another camp, which was **Buchenwald**, and I

remembered it was **Buchenwald**. I remember myself now alone, standing in the – in the line for food, you know, and walking there. And then they evacuated, they took the pla – th-the people and they put them to pi – two places, **Fursleben**(ph) and **Hillersleben**. And nobody took me, so they all left the camp, and I had my little doll that **Bronka**(ph) made me, which at that time I think that was leg missing, hand missing, whatever. And I was sitting with this little doll, alone. The whole place was empty.

Q: This is **Buchenwald**, or –

A: **Buchenwald**.

Q: **Buchenwald**, mm-hm.

A: And – and then it was a woman came back, with her son. She said because they all – they had trucks and all kind of vehicles, and she came back. She came back for me. She said, give – give hand to **Tommy** and come with us. And I didn't want to. I wanted to stay. I was talk – this time I was remem – I remember I was talking to my doll. I was telling her that when everyone left, I was telling her that she shouldn't be afraid, because I am with her and I am taking care of her. So then the – this lady said, okay, again she ha – give hand to **Tommy** and come with us. **Tommy** was her son. I said, well, I can go by myself. And I went with them. I didn't give hand to **Tommy**. And I went with them, and we were taken to **Hillersleben**. And was a beautiful, beautiful place. I remember sunshine and be – remember little white houses, beautiful streets, and bougava – bougainvillea, which was – it was a –

Q: So, it was a town, or it was –

A: It was a town.

Q: Town, mm-hm.

A: It was a town that the families of the aviation forces lived. And we got the house there. I was with the **Hilde Huppert**, it was the name of the lady, and her son, **Tommy**. And the – oh, the flowers, that bougainvillea, that was the purple bougainvillea.

Q: So you saw your first flowers.

A: This was – I saw my flir – yeah, first flowers. The second time I saw this – this exactly flowers, the wa – purple bougainvillea, it was in – in another war. In the Independent war, in **Jerusalem**. So, I remember – I remember getting into this house, and they had bed with sh-sheets, white sheets. I never seen white sheets in my life. And **Hilde Huppert** put us in the bath, she put me in the bath. And it was warm, and nice, and it wasn't cold any more. It was very, very nice, I didn't want to get out. And – and she put me in the bed. In the beginning I was with my clothes, I wanted to go on the bed, and she said, no, no, you c – you're not allowed with clothes on bed. So that was a nice time there. I don't know how long we were –

Q: Who was she? Who was this lady?

A: She was – she was one of those Palestinians. Her husband had the [indecipherable] send them the Palestinians papers, the certificate.

Q: So he was – she was a – a Jew from **Poland**, or from –

A: No, she was a Jew from **Czechoslovakia**.

Q: I see.

A: She [indecipherable]

Q: And she had had those – she had those certificates.

A: Yes, all our barrack had the certificate. And some of them, like **Nuta**(ph) **Gudkowski**(ph), the one with – with the girl, her husband also – they managed to run away because the – the German in the beginning, they – they were after the men. So some of the men managed to escape, and they – some of them escaped to **Palestine**. And that's how they send us the – the papers. So, I remember – at that time I rem – I remember **Tommy** was teasing me all the time. He said, you don't have pa – father, you don't have mother, I have a father in **Palestine** and wa – we will see him, we go there. And I said, I don't care. And – and then we – I don't know how long we were in **Hillersleben**, but it was a beautiful place, a nice place. Somehow I had the feeling, I'm not sure because I didn't – **Hilde Huppert** wrote a book, "**Hand in Hand with Tommy**." And I don't remember that she mentioned it, but th – it is in my memory that she wanted **Tommy** to learn English. And she – she had someone and I was just sitting and listening to this. But again, I don't know cause I – it haven't been mentioned and I didn't ask her about it. But I – if I remember this, probably it was right. And then **Hilde Huppert** arranged – she met a Jewish rabbi in the American Army. Her name was **Neueman**(ph). And she arranged for a children transport to **Palestine**. Somehow they managed to – to find

children who were from the age of six, seven, five and 20, they're all children, and they took us there, it was a big transport, and th – we got to **Paris**. I remember –

Q: But **Tony** wasn't in there.

A: **Tommy** was with us, I was with her, and with **Tommy**. I was very much next to her, and we all went to **Paris**, and I remember the **Eiffel Tower**. We wen – been taken to Hotel **Lutetia**, which was a – still is the hotel in **Paris**. At that time it was a – the hotel that they brought refugees. And then I – no, I remember that we been taken to a beautiful place, it was in the country. And we were there for three weeks, it was some kind of rehabilitation place, you know, cause the – it was a river there, or a lake, and we were there, and it was very, very nice. And then we got on the ship, and we taken to **Palestine**. And we arrived in **Palestine** in the six, I think, sixth of July, 1945.

Q: Did you play with other children on that ship?

A: No, I don't remember myself playing with anybody. I was with **Tommy** –

Q: Did you play with **Tommy**?

A: Sort of. **Tommy** was a – sort of. I di – I don't – I remember not – not liking him because he was teasing me all the time. And – but I was very, very attached to **Hilde Huppert**, felt very close to her, and she was very, very nice. Very nice lady. She took care of me. But when we arrived in **Palestine**, we arrived into another camp, which was [indecipherable] camp with – now there were other soldiers, different uniform, but that was a camp, with the barbed wire, with the barracks. At

that time **Hilde** and **Tommy**, I remember stand – coming there, and I was with them, and it was a tall man standing on the other side, and they went with him.

Tommy said, this is my father. And to – and we went with him.

Q: Oh, so you went with them, too?

A: The – no, they went – they went with him, and I left in the camp.

Q: What a terrible feeling that must have been.

A: Was very terrible. But I already knew that I am – I'm on my own. Even when I was with **Hilde Huppert**, and even when – when I was with the children. That – maybe that I don't remember them because I didn't really develop relationship with them. I remember the first night in **Atleet**(ph). They gave us what we thought that they are Israeli – Israeli clothes. Shorts and khaki shirts, and I remember lying in bed, and this was near **Haifa**, and seeing all the lights going by and was thinking that it's an – it's another place, it's a new place. So that – that was – I don't know how long I was in **Atleet**(ph). I –

Q: Okay. We'll – time for a new – new tape, okay. We'll wait a little bit, and have a change. **[tape break]** Okay, so why don't we continue talking. This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Lily Cohen**, and you are telling me about **Haifa**, and your first night in the new camp. Who are the soldiers who are surrounding it? What – what were the uniforms they were wearing?

A: Oh, th – the shorts. The British soldiers, they have knee socks, knee-high socks. And di-different – different hats. They didn't look so frightening like the German. But they were soldiers, it was a camp. It was a line to food, and – and it was a barb wire, so it was a camp.

Q: It's – it's something in your – in the sequence of events, that it sounds like there were people who were watching out for you, but it was all episodic.

A: That's right.

Q: It was not some thread of – for example, a child alone in a camp like this, I would think there has to be somebody who was responsible for the children who are alone in a camp like this, that the child then, you know, goes to.

A: No, no.

Q: And it's just hard to imagine that there you are, a little child in a camp, and there isn't anyone in charge of the children who – whom –

A: No, no, no. I know from **Hilde Huppert's** book that she said when she saw me sitting there alone, she said, ah this is – tha-that was **Lily**, the girl, she was on her own, and we knew that she was walking around, we just saw her always alone. So, I don't think that anybody was in charge of me, except of the women who took care of me at the time. But they all disappeared, for many reasons. Probably some of them died, or I don't know, I don't know.

Q: And is there a reason why **Lily** – why **Huppert** –

A: **Bronk -- Bronka(ph).**

Q: No, no, no, no, the one with **Tommy**, what's her name again?

A: **Hilde**.

Q: **Hilde**. Why you didn't go with them? They were not –

A: **Hilde Huppert** was in that – in **Bergen-Belsen**, and – but she was in different barrack. She didn't know me from **Bergen-Belsen**. She just met me –

Q: Right.

A: – after the train and – and – you know. She didn't know me. She went – she saw me there, then she reme – she saw me that she said, this is the girl who was always –

Q: Alone.

A: – on her own, alone.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: But she didn't know me from before. I don't know how exactly this camp was, but they – I'm not sure that they will – they wer – it was big enough that they didn't know each other.

Q: No, I mean when you got to **Palestine** –

A: Oh.

Q: – was there a reason why they didn't take you there, with the family? Did that cross your mind at the time, how come they're not taking me?

A: No, no, because I – I didn't trust – although I was with her, and although I got really attached to her at the time, but I knew already that there is no n – adult person

that I should trust, that I am on – I am on my own. So, that happened before, that happened so many times during all these years in **Bergen-Belsen**, which people came and go and – in my life. So, I don't – I don't think that I should – I should have trust anybody. Wasn't any trust on my part. I knew that there – I – I have to take care of myself.

Q: Were you ever adopted?

A: I was adopted, not officially, but I was adopted by the family in **Palestine** and **Israel**. And again, when the [indecipherable] was in a kibbutz, **Ma'ale Hamisha**(ph) of **Jerusalem**, their mother, her name is **Badana**(ph) said to me, you know, you don't – you don't call me mother. Don't you call me mother, you had a mother, and you should remember her. I don't know, it probably should be something very [indecipherable] educationally, but I do – I'm not sure that it was the right thing to do.

Q: Yeah, I would agree, you know.

A: So, but that was what – that was what – what she said, what happened, and I never called her mother. I – I've really fell in love with – she already had a – a year and a half older son than me, and two weeks baby, two weeks old baby. And she wanted to adopt a kid from the Holocaust because – for the memory of her family, which been perished in the war. And I didn't feel that – that she is my mother. I – I was in love with my father – with the father, but maybe they weren't my – my parents, but the children were my brothers.

Q: Were they?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah, they are my brothers, to this ver-very day.

Q: So, I've skipped a bit in asking you about that. Let's try and get the chronology in the ne – back. When we're back in **Haifa** and you're in this camp, what happens to you after that?

A: What happened was that I was there alone, and there was a woman who works for **Aliyah Tenora**(ph), which was the youth – and –

Q: A youth organization?

A: The youth organization, **Aliyah Tenora**(ph). And she came, and she said, I'm taking you to a family wants to be your family. And she took me. She lived in a kibbutz next to a kibbutz they lived, and she took me there. And I remember the road to the – to – all the road to **Jerusalem**. And it was funny because not long after, it was the '48 war that was there. And th-the – and it wasn't the same road. And I was always thinking, was it my memory that – that I saw this hills, and this mountains? Which from the side, and I never see them again. But when, after the '67 war, when they opened this road again, there it was, exactly wa –

Q: As your memory.

A: – as my memory.

Q: So, it also sounds like another thread is that your memory has not tricked you.

A: No.

Q: In the things that you have remembered –

A: There were –

Q: – you’ve been able to find ways to confirm those memories.

A: Yes, yes, very much so.

Q: Have there been any memories that you were – had the opposite results, where you thought you remembered –

A: No, no –

Q: No?

A: – everything that I remember, and I checked – I checked up about the holo – the – the hospital in **Bergen-Belsen**, and I learned that it was a hospital. Because in the beginning they said to me there wasn’t any hospital, and I remember that my mother was in the hospital. And I remember – I remember the camp. I don’t remember – I remember – I remember the – the light inside the barrack. I remember the – the blankets.

Q: Tell us, what kind of significance do these memories have for you? What kind –

A: Fear.

Q: Fear?

A: Cold.

Q: Oh, that’s what you remember from them, yeah.

A: I remember and I – I – I think that I – I – I'm very, very sensitive to cold, to this very day. And I'm sure that it's come from there. I remember this wet, cold floor.

And – and I remember – yeah, I remember a lot of fear.

Q: It sounds though, that your memories are – how shall I put it? Because I don't want to be suggestive if this is not true, that in some ways that your memories are both something you could trust – of all the things that you couldn't trust, the memories that you had, you found out you could. And that they were the avenue to who you are. Is that so, or –

A: Probably, probably yeah. Yes, yes. Because when I got into the kibbutz, and I – I remember the first day. They put me with the other children and we all had supper. And they all looked so different. And I didn't speak the language. And I remember that somehow a – and though I was so different, I don't remember that – it was something in that – in my present that children didn't laugh at me. And the first night – night, and then few nights later, they used to – to give me this treatment for the lice. And that was with this kerosene oil, you know, they – they used to wash your head, and then –

Q: Wrap it.

A: – wrap it up, and the horrible smell. And with the – with the other chil – other three girls in the same room, and it was really very humiliating, night after night after night. And somehow, I don't know, I didn't – I don't know what did I do, or how I fel – I was presented myself. But it wasn't a laugh, it wasn't a mockery. And

I always – I wanted very much to be like them, of course. I wanted to be – I wanted to have dark hair, I wanted to have freckles. I wanted to – to speak that – like them. But after a very short while I understand – I understood that I won't be like them, ever. I had this straight, blonde hair, and a – a white face, and a – and I remember myself making decision. I remember like always lying in the bed thinking to myself, all right, so if I'm not – if I am different, I will be different. I will be different, it's okay. And I was different. And I – I – I held myself differently. I didn't let them – because I saw how there were other children who came, they were – they always came with the uncles and aunties and fa – parents to the kibbutz from the Holocaust. And they – they – I saw how they related to them, and I s – I know that th-they didn't relate to me like that, cause I was a – like my – when my brother said, you are the queen. So that was – I – I had – I – I make decision. I remember myself making decision. Never – never f – be sort of, the girl from there – from the Holocaust. So, I think th-that in a way, my – my – my childhood, which was so deprived, was an engine to me growing up in different way.

Q: Yeah. In the – was it in the kibbutz that you had this unofficial adopted family?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: They were there, and then e – it were my two brothers. And then when I was 10, my young brother was born, and they were very much my family, very much.

Q: The father that you adored so much, did – wer – did he adore you back?

A: Oh yes. I was the only g-girl, he had three boys. Oh yes, he adored me. And my mother, she was very, sort of, educational person. She was a teacher and a – always asked psychologists what to do, and she always used to say, **Shlamic**(ph), you destroying the kid. You spoiling the kid. Cause he used to bring me tea to bed when I came out – I went on holiday. **Shlamic**(ph) – and he was a – he was a wonderful man. He was self –

Q: Did he feel t – did he feel like a father?

A: He feeled like a father. I don't know what a father –

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: – should be, but he loved me very much, and yeah.

Q: So, did you trust him?

A: Ver – yeah, I think I trusted him.

Q: But you didn't trust her.

A: I-I – I don't think so. I learned I – there were very her – very tough times for both of us during the years. I think only when she got really old, and now we are in a wonderful relationship. But, on her 80th birthday – 90th birthday, I – I talked, and I said that, in spite everything, she was the only mother I know – I knew. So, she was my mother and she is my mother. I don't call her my mother. I don't call her my mother, but she ki – she is.

Q: Do you think she – do you think she said this in a clumsy way, i-in that she wanted to be your mother, but she also wanted to honor the one that you had lost?

A: I think that she want – wanted me to honored my mother, my parents.

Q: Yes.

A: She wanted me to remember them and honor them, that's what I think. It wasn't clumsy. She doesn't do anything clumsy.

Q: Uh-huh. By – by that I meant that, in a way, her saying it that way almost was, I'm not going to be a mother to you, I don't want to do that. And every child needs a mother. So, it – it could be that – that – I guess what I'm asking is, despite such a statement and it – what it sounds like, a complex ties, did you feel that she wanted to be your mother, even with not the name?

A: I – I think that – I think that she wanted to be. I don't know if she wanted to be my mother. I think that she – she is a very moral person. She – she's a very beautiful person, and I think that she wanted to pay respect to – to the family that perished. And I think that – that I was – I think that – that she – I think that she wanted to – I was symbolizing for her something much bigger than me.

Q: Yeah.

A: S-So – and she also wanted me to remember that I had a family. She didn't want me to forget it. And that's was her main – main reason –

Q: That's so diff – you know, that's so very different than many adoptive parents. Many people who adopt children don't want their ado – their – their children to remember the former family. They want them to become more integrated, and –

A: So on the a – one – one side, she wanted me, because that – that's why I don't speak Polish this day. They never spoke Polish to me. And she said in the beginning I [indecipherable] Polish – I spoke Polish, but very di – very quickly, I really forgot it. On the other hand, I think that she, because she has such a family duty, and her family is a very, very [indecipherable] very famous family in **Israel**. And so – so the f – upper class of the Jewish families, her family is, is I think that together with this, she respected family. She didn't want me to forget that I had mother and father. I can understand it, I just don't know if I could accept it at the time, but I can understand it.

Q: Yeah, yeah. In what way are your brother your real brothers?

A: Oh, they are my brothers. They were always my brothers. Also, my mother, my adopted mother **Anna**, her husband, they were very – my mother is – was a very idealistic person. She worked for the others, she always had duties. She never was at home. Even for her own children, you know, it's – it wasn't any difference. And he was the head of – the kibbutz had a – a guest house, so he was the head of the guest house. And on my 70th, we – we celebrated my 70th birthday, what we thought it we – it is, just last October, and – and [indecipherable] December. And my brother got up and he said, we – we didn't have parents, we only had each other. Said in front of her, in front of all the guests. It was a surprise fa – party. We only had each other, and I had the eldest sister. So yes, we were brothers. One of them was killed when he was 18 and a half.

Q: What happened?

A: He was in the army, was in this commando unit, and got killed. And so we – we left, the two of them and me. And we are very, very much – very much attached to each other. So, it was a family. Their family, they have a very big fa-family. My mother – my adopted mother had a very – has a very big family. So there wa – I been accepted as a family, completely. And they – and so much so that they used to say that I look like my father. They were [indecipherable] oh, it show.

[indecipherable]

Q: And why is it you think that they didn't want you to speak Polish? Do – were their – were their family roots from **Poland** –

A: They didn't want me to – they didn't want me to speak Polish.

Q: I know. Why? Why, do you think?

A: Because they – they thought at that time that it's better to forget. I think that it was their idea of, for all the children that, you know, sort of start new life, and just erase what happened there.

Q: Were they also from **Poland**, or had they been in **Palestine** –

A: They are in **Poland**, yeah, the ma – the kibbutz – the kibbutz mot – founders are all Polish. And few of them came – my adopted mother, her name is **Badana**(ph), the – the – her family had the school and kindergar – garten in Hebrew, in **Lódz**. So, their first language is Hebrew. And the – some of the people in the kibbutz, they were in the kindergarten and in the school. This is the **Katznelson**(ph) family which

the **Katznelson** [indecipherable] family which was [indecipherable] very, sort of known family. So, they didn't want, because that was their idea in that time. And there were very, very sad stories because of that. Nobody ask questions, nobody talked. We didn't talk. Of course, I didn't talk, because I want – I – I wanted to be like the rest, wanted just stories that I'm telling. And – and also, I was – I am – I – well, I remember very early in my life that I was thinking that I probably did something horrible, if that's what happened to me. So, if I don't have mother and father, and no – so, that was a thought that walked with me quite a long – many years in my childhood. Then, there were – people used to come to look for their relatives, the first years. And each time when they came, I was already – already was thinking that maybe one day, you know, the door will open and my mother will come in, or my father. And for years and years I used to daydream and night dream – no, night dream I was dreaming about horrible things and I was a – afraid of getting out of the – of the bed. Was quite awful, the night dreams. But during the day I used to daydream that they – they will come back. They will come for me. So all – each time when somebody came, you know, it was a new hope. But then **Badana**(ph) said, that's it, stop. I don't want it any more. And then, when my – when we heard from my uncle, I think that it was after the – no, it was before the war, before the '48 war. He discovered me through **Aliyah Tenora**(ph), through the youth organization. And he started to write letters, and s – and send me all kind of beautiful clothes, because at that time we all had – all the children had clothes from

people from **America**, from [indecipherable]. Only me, I didn't have – also, I wouldn't have because my adopted mother was a very idealistic person and she wouldn't accept it, you know, that – but he did send me things, beautiful things. And also, **Hilde Huppert** used to come to visit me, and **Nuta(ph) Gudkowski(ph)**, this lady with the child. She – they both used to come to visit me. And **Hilde** used to bring me all things that she was knitted, cause she was a very good knitter. And I have a picture of myself with the knitting sweater that she have. And so, in this sense, I – I felt okay with the other children. And then was the '48 war, was another war. So from war to war, and the – again, I think that I was on my own. I was – I was – not on my own at that time, because – but then a – was the kindergarten teacher, so she was with the other children. That what my brother meant when we were alone, with [indecipherable] parents. And I remember sitting on this truck with my six months old brother on my lap, when all the other mothers were sitting with their babies, with their children, and I was sitting with him. So, I was on my own.

Q: When did your story – when did you start becoming interested in the story of your early years and your family? How did you start piecing it together? Clearly when your uncle wrote, that was a big thing.

A: I didn't relate to it. I – I – I think that at that time, and many years later, I really wanted to detach myself from a – the whole thing. And so I knew that I couldn't deny to myself that I was there, I didn't want to be part of it. I read books, I saw

films, but always sort of dissociation of that, you know, not being part of it, and I didn't want to talk about it. I never talked. I didn't talk to my children.

Q: When did you start talking about it?

A: I start talking about it when my granddaughters were at school. I have twin granddaughters, my son children. And they did this work, you know, what they call root work, family. And I wrote to them. I wou – I decided that I – I will write to them. And I wrote to them, and telling them sort of in a children language, that I was bor – born in **Poland**, and I was in a camp. That was the first time that I really –

Q: How old were you, approximately?

A: Approximately. Approximately tho – that was about 11 years ago, I think.

Q: So that's very recent.

A: Yeah.

Q: Very, very recent.

A: [indecipherable]

Q: Okay. Well, that's not unusual. Many people don't want to say things, don't – aren't ready until their children ask, or their grandchildren ask. And only then do they feel that it's something that they'd like to share, you know.

A: Yes, but with my children, to this very day, I don't talk. I don't think that they want to hear. I think that my s – my son has a big problem with it. I think that my son doesn't want to talk about it.

Q: Do you want to change the tape now? Okay, let's do that. As we're changing the tape, I can ask you this; why do you think he does?

A: I don't know, I think that – that somehow I missed the train. You know, maybe I – I had to talk about it – I had very special relationship with my son. I ga – gave birth to him when I was 18 and a half, and I probably grow – grew up with him. And I never wanted to [indecipherable] It's okay?

Q: I got it.

A: I never felt – I never felt the right moment. What am I going to tell him, how? It – no, it – it didn't come. And he knew, but it was like he didn't know. I think that a few years la – a-ago, he said one day, he said, what your father di-did for a living? I said, I don't know, I – I found out that he was a soldier, but no – no more than that. I didn't want to – even now, when – he said, cause I went – we went to see [indecipherable] and then here, I said, well, have some fun, it's – not everything is the Holocaust, you know? Immediately, he was sort of –

Q: So, it – it – do you think that he thinks that you are so – that that's all that goes on in your mind, and that that's what rules you, in some ways?

A: No, I don't think so. I think that – that he – he – he wasn't part of me getting with the d – with the granddaughters. And one day I took the – my granddaughters to visit **Hilde Huppert**. I took him – I took – they came with their mother, not with him. He never met any of the people that were connected to me.

Q: That's so unusual. It sounds so unusual.

A: Yeah, I thi – I – I don't think – he has a big problem about it. I think it is a second – it's like me, I wa – I am first and second generation because of the age, and he is a – quite a typical second generation in this sense.

Q: You're ready? Okay, we can go. This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Lily Cohen**. I'm trying to get a – when you became active to try and find out bits and pieces of your story, was it after you talked to y-your twins – grandchildren wanted it, and then you yourself became proactive?

A: Yeah.

Q: Or was it even before, but you couldn't find out things?

A: Not much before.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: I think that I – I think the first time that I really suddenly was talking openly, it was to my friend **Linda** in – in **Manhattan**, it was this horrible restaurant, downtown man – **Manhattan**. And I think that I was talking to her because she was a stranger, she wasn't anybody who was connected to me. Cause I really didn't talk about it with people. Somehow I – I grew up and I was thinking to myself, okay, I can do – do thi – good things, I – I think that – the thing that I was very concerned about, only life that I have to be the best, th-the – the biggest, the – you know? I have to prove myself all the time.

Q: Did you? Were you?

A: Yeah, yeah I did.

Q: What did you –

A: I don't know if I was always the best, but I wanted to be.

Q: Okay. Well, what was your – how did you do it? What – in what ways did it show itself?

A: It was some kind of, you know, competition with myself, you know? Oh, and I was that – I – I went to the music and dance academy, and I was looking at the girls who were dancing, and I said, if she can do it, I can do it.

Q: And you did.

A: Yeah. That – but I – I do think that it was one of the things that I, since very early childhood I had to prove myself all the time. This – that was my feeling. I have to prove myself.

Q: To yourself.

A: To myself. But maybe to others, you know.

Q: Yeah. What was your profession?

A: That I'm not deprived. That I'm not deprived, in spite my background

[indecipherable]

Q: Yeah. Well, had things not turned out the way they did, you wouldn't have been deprived. You would have been in a very comfortable family, had there been no war, had there been no Holocaust –

A: Yes

Q: – had there been –

A: Sure, sure, sure, sure, sure.

Q: – you would have, you know, it was like taking a child who would have had everything, and then putting her on the edge of extinction, you know. and just by strokes of luck, you know, were you spared death, you know?

A: Right.

Q: By some people who had come by at a crucial moment.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: What was your profession? Did you have a profession?

A: I'm a teacher. I am teaching [indecipherable]. I'm a master teacher. And I am – I'm teaching **NLP** and like, this neuro-linguistic programming. I'm teaching it, and I'm giving courses and I also a therapist with neuro-linguistic programming.

Q: Wow, that's impressive. That's very impre –

A: So, I am a teacher.

Q: And, did you ever go to **Poland**, to **Warsaw**, to try and find out anything?

A: No, no.

Q: So you – everything that you've tried to find out is from a distance, geographical distance?

A: When I alla – when I decided, but I – but still, I – I know that [indecipherable] mother and her two children went to **Poland** together; that was her second time. I didn't go with them. I didn't. And the feeling, all these years my feeling was, if I go

to **Warsaw**, what am I going to look for? I don't have any thread of information where to look, or what to look for. I can – I don't have a address, I don't have names, I don't have any – anything. And it was just another feeling of being sort of here, not being down there, rooted, just being –

Q: Floating.

A: Floating.

Q: Floating.

A: Floating. Which is even worse, it's the worst I cou – I go there.

Q: Your father, you said you found out that he was a military officer through the internet, is that how?

A: Yeah. **Linda** found it.

Q: Wow. What – tell – bring me up to date chronologically. After you belonged to this family, an-and had two wonderful – three – three bro –

A: Three wonderful –

Q: – wonderful brothers, how did you grow up, when did you marry, who did you marry? Who were your chil –

A: I grew up – I – I – again, being different, all the children in the kibbutz had to learn the piano. It's a Polish kibbutz, and nice Polish girl have to play the piano, of course. So, we played the piano, but I wanted to dance. And they brought some dance teachers to the kibbutz, but that wasn't enough. So, **Badana**(ph) said, all right, I will fight for you. I will get you this. Yet, you have to carry on with the

piano, because a dancer is not only with her legs and feet, she has to know. I said okay. So I was the only kid who used to go to **Jerusalem** at the age of 10 and studied in the conservat – conservatoire at that time. And I studied dance. And there – I always knew that I was – I want to be a dancer. I knew that I want to be a musician because they – I – I always was very much intrigued by music, and –

Q: And you had an uncle who was a musician [indecipherable]

A: And I had an uncle who was a musician, that's right. But I remember one day sitting in the children house in the kibbutz, and the – we had the radio, and the radio was playing **Strauss** waltzes, and I knew the music. I was very young, eight, or – and I was humming with the music. And everyone asked me, what di – what – how do you know this music, what do you [indecipherable] from? And they don't know. I knew the music. I knew the music.

Q: I understa –

A: Probably not from **Bergen-Belsen**.

Q: Probably not.

A: Yeah.

Q: Probably not.

A: So, I – I always knew that there was – there are things in me, that I have a secret. I don't know what – that I have secrets. So – so, in the kibbutz, I really – I really got what I wanted. And then I started with – to work with the – with the children – children – children, young children. I started to compose and to choreograph them.

And I grew up and I choreographed all the holidays. So, from very a – early age.

And then I – I – I finished school early, that I went to the army, but – but I didn't – it wasn't for long because I had the rheumatic fever. And I had – I been released a bay – by then, I already met the man that I was married to, that I got to – married to. And he was a yon – young officer in the army. We got married, we, of course didn't stay in the kibbutz. I didn't want to stay in the kibbutz. I mean, I knew that I will never live in the kibbutz. And my mother used to say, **Lily** doesn't like frames. She cannot be in a frame, she has to be out of the frame.

Q: Well, you were in a lot of frames, you know. You were in a lot of closed enclosures –

A: That's right.

Q: – for a long time.

A: Yes, I was. So the kibbutz was –

Q: Yeah.

A: – the one place that I had to get out of it, and I got – I got married, and we had my son. And then – it was so – so much, is such – such a l – a long story, because we got married, we didn't have money. We lived in this remote place. My husband was in the – in the official army, but then he decided to leave the army, and we lived in a remote place, completely alone. I – I wer – raised my son. It was nothing, it was like a desert. Nothing, an-and we were completely alone. And well, this was – this alone feeling, which was always with me, you know?

Q: Do you still have it now? Do you still have it now?

A: Sometimes, yeah. Yes.

Q: Sometimes no?

A: No-Now, this feeling of – the only – I – I have it and I – I – I always have to remember that I have my family, I have gre – my dre – granddaughters and my children, I mean, this is my really, anchor. These are my anchor, my granddaughters.

Q: Did you – did you have another child?

A: I have a daughter.

Q: You have a daughter? And –

A: From a di-different husband.

Q: Uh-huh. So –

A: I have a daughter and she has a little daughter. So –

Q: But the twins are your son's children?

A: The twins, they're my son's children and he has another daughter. So there are three daughters there, and one daughter on my daughter's side.

Q: Side. I see. And so, your daughter is how much – how many years younger than your son is?

A: Ten

Q: Ten.

A: And my daughter, when she went to the – that was really strange, because a – again, I didn't talk to her about it. But when she was around 13 or 12 age old, I – she came with me to **Israel**, it was my son's wedding, and I took her to **Nuta(ph)** **Gudkowski(ph)** and **Nuta(ph)** took her and told her about the camp, and she didn't tell her so much about me, but **Nuta(ph)** was talking – you know, I – I always divide the people – the Holocaust survivors to f – to two. There are those who ta – were talking, and those who didn't.

Q: And how do you view those who talked and those who didn't?

A: **Nuta(ph)** **Gudkowski(ph)** said that she will talk until the – the day she will close her eyes, she will tell – tell about it. And many, many others didn't talk, and many children – I think that most of the children didn't talk.

Q: Do you think that one was better than the other?

A: No, I don't judge.

Q: Okay.

A: I don't think that there is a judgment about what happened there. I know that many people, when they came to **Israel** after the Holocaust, they been ask, why didn't you do this, why didn't you do that? And you cannot judge them. There is no judgment there, because you don't – it's so unbelievable what's happened there. You cannot grasp what happened there. So you cannot judge.

Q: **Lily**, what happened now, chronologically, so that we have the full story, you ha – you got divorced from your first husband –

A: Yeah.

Q: – is this what happened? And then you married a second husband?

A: Yeah-huh.

Q: And who was he?

A: He was a dancer.

Q: He was a dancer?

A: [indecipherable] dance company. We met in the – in the theater, we danced together in the theater. And then he – it was again this long thing. He had a – when my daughter was five months old, he had the car accident, and he was in the hospital. And I was with my daughter. And then when he was a – back home, after awhile, she – she had – she was born with a hernia in the diaphragm, and she was in the hospital for two years. So, from the age of one til the age of three she was in the hospital. And he had to s – really come back to his senses after this car accident. And I was with her, and that again was this alone feeling. That I was with her all the time in the hospital. I was like one of the requisite, you know, chair. Another chair in the hospital. And this was ch – very, very familiar feeling, you know, that there's nobody there. She was three times dead, clinical dead, and – and I was there all the time, and that was just me. Was ma – my f – my war, my battle. Again, to fight for something, as if this is my fate, you know? Always fighting. And that was – that hit me very, very strongly among all the other things that happened with my daughter, that was one of the – also I remember, before she was born and my son was small,

when he was just born and I was sitting – I was waking up in the middle of the night. And I know that many mothers always going to their children to see if they are breathing, but I was sitting there thinking, where was I, this age? And I – I – I was so scared, I used to spend na – nights and nights and nights next to his bed, just waiting for them to – to come and take him. So that's when things came back, but I didn't want to talk about it, cause whom I going to tell? What am I going to say?

Q: Well, people also have to be ready to hear. And sometimes they're not.

A: Right.

Q: Yeah.

A: Right.

Q: And when you feel like they're not, then that's when those questions come up.

A: It's true, very true.

Q: Yeah.

A: Very true.

Q: That's very lonely.

A: Yeah, very lonely.

Q: Is your daughter more receptive?

A: My daughter, she had a time when she went to the university, after she spoke to **Nuta**(ph), she came – we lived in **England** at that – at that time, and she had to do this essay about prisoners. So she wrote the whole essay like a script, as her being in a war, age of 13. And of course it ha – it was happy ever after at the end, was happy

end. But she wrote this script which was really now, breathtaking, and she won the first prize, and everything. And I was thinking, gosh, where this came from?

Q: Yeah. Somewhere in the silence, it was there.

A: Yeah. And her – her subject, on her **B.A.** was hidden art in Nazi **Germany**.

Q: Where did she go to school?

A: In **England**. And she did – her **B.A.** was in – in **England** in **Goldsmith** College.

Q: Oh yeah. And do you live in **England** now?

A: No, I live in – I came back to **Israel** after 14 years. She lives in **England** now.

Q: I see, okay.

A: But my son did his **PhD.** in **England**, in **London** School of Economics.

Q: Oh, that's my **alma mater**, yeah.

A: Yeah, yeah. [indecipherable]

Q: What did he – what is his **PhD.** thesis?

A: In political – political science [indecipherable]. And he's the dean of **NYU** in **Israel**. Proud mother, Jewish mother.

Q: And why not?

A: I know.

Q: Why not, yeah.

A: And there – there – one thing he did, he went – what was happening is that they sending students for three months into different countries. The – **NYU** has branches. So they – the first lot of student came, and some of the things they studied

was about the Holocaust, or Nazi **Germany** [indecipherable]. And she came to me and ask me if I would like to talk to them, to those students.

Q: Your son did?

A: Which was – yeah, which was really unusual for him. And I did. I said yes. And when I came and they stood in front of this very, very young guy, used to – Israeli students are always 22 - 23, because they go to the army, and here they were 18 years old children. I was looking at them and I was thinking, where do I begin to tell the story of my life? And I decided not to talk about the war, and not to – I se – I – I was thinking that they can read about it, they can learn about it. What I chose to talk about was how do you live with this story, and how you grow up, and how y – how you make your life and how you became a how – mother.

Q: In what ways do you think it strengthened you, in what ways do you think it sup – took something away that you couldn't replace?

A: I-I think that what strengthened me was the idea that I overcame, I – I won something, and I wa – survived. I think that surviving is the be – the biggest thing in me. I'm a – I'm a survivor. And whatever happened, I knew that I can stand on my own feet, even now, these days. So, I – I – I have this strong feeling about it. I think that what been taken away from me is my past. I have this feeling that I don't have a past. That's why I didn't –

Q: But you – but you don't know it.

A: I don't know it.

Q: Yeah.

A: Not that long ago, I wanted – the – there are many people in **Israel** are applying for passports [**indecipherable**] in different countries because they want to be part of the common market. And – and my granddaughters asked me to apply for a Polish passport because th-they might want to learn in – abroad. So I called this woman, I gave her – I got number. I got it – call this woman, she's th – an Israeli speak – Hebrew speaking. She works for the Polish embassy. I called her and I told her my name, I told her that I was born in **Warsaw**, and they – she said, date of birth? I said, I don't know. So she said, wait a minute. She went, she looked for something, then she came back to the phone, she said, you are not exist. So immediately I said, for the German I was very exist. So, this is – this is the thing; I don't exist. That's why I do – I didn't want to go to **Poland**, that's why I don't – maybe now, I don't know. I have a friend in – in **England**. She's Polish, she's not Jewish. Polish th – couple, they are making films. And she said to me, you know what? I'll go with you to **Poland**, to **Warsaw**. They really rebuilt old **Warsaw**.

Q: It's true.

A: So she said, we will go with the life, not with the death. We will go to the – to the cafe they will – they might sit on the way to the theater, to the – to that restaurant, to that restaurant that you – they used to dance there. You know, this where we should go, on [**indecipherable**] to the theater. And I will go with you.

Q: And does that thought intrigue you?

A: I – this – this I could accept, you know. I couldn't accept that I would go to something which is not exist any more. And then – but I do have this feeling that it's been taken away from me, very much so. Maybe this is the reason that I didn't want to talk to my children, because I – what could I tell them?

Q: My gosh.

A: They didn't have grandmothers that they could relate to, grandfathers. They didn't have – they didn't have any family they could relate to. The only thing that I knew there, I knew the names, and by then I have pictures.

Q: Are these your only pictures?

A: No, I have some more. Some more pictures.

Q: But probably not a lot.

A: No. I have a – pictures from my – of my uncle in **Paris**, and I have the pink – picture of him standing on the s-stage with his clarinet. And that was five minute before he died.

Q: Did he have a heart attack or something?

A: Yeah.

Q: And there was one thread lost, yeah.

A: I know – I know why he esc – why he escaped from **Poland**, of course he escaped.

Q: Yeah.

A: But th-the main reason we escaped, I know – this I know from him, that that one of the things that my mother told me, that he had to be in the **Judenrite**(ph).

Q: Mm-hm, **Judenrat**.

A: **Judenrat** in the ge – ghetto.

Q: Mm-hm. And he didn't want to.

A: So he managed to escape, and I'm sure that he had many friends.

Q: Who could help him do th – did you ever see the movie, "**The Pianist**?"

A: Yeah, sure.

Q: Did you think of him as you were seeing that?

A: I was feeling – not only about him, I was think that the first scene there is **Warsaw** from above.

Q: Yeah.

A: And when I saw this, I said, this is the **Warsaw** that I was born to. That was the click.

Q: Yeah.

A: That was the **Warsaw** I was born –

Q: I've been thinking about that as you've been speaking, you know, that there's something in there that really connects.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: That was the place. The other time – and I was thinking about him, because he wrote some very well known music [indecipherable]. Where is my **shtetl** of bells, you know?

Q: I don't know the music, but – but that's very interesting.

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah, we found him on the internet. [indecipherable]

Q: So these fragments, these bits and pieces. **Lily**, is there something I haven't asked you about that you think is important to include in this part of the story?

A: I – the reason that I r-really wanted to come here and to do it – it, because I really wanted that my family would be somewhere. Because [indecipherable] I'm not [indecipherable]. So I wanted there to be some –

Q: There couldn't be a better reason. There couldn't be a better one. Thank you.

A: Thank you.

Q: Thank you very, very much. This concludes the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Lily Cohen**. Thank you.

A: Thank you.

Conclusion of Interview