

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Sara Sherman**

**May 16, 2014**

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PREFACE

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Transcribed by Carilyn Cipolla, National Court Reporters Association.

**SARA SHERMAN**

## May 16, 2014

Question: This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. Sara Sherman on May 16, 2014 in Washington, D.C. Thank you, Mrs. Sherman, for agreeing to speak with us today. I really appreciate it. I'm going to start the interview from the very beginning, so we'll talk a little bit about your childhood and the circumstances in which you spent your childhood. And then we'll take it from there. So I'm going to begin with asking you when you were born, the date you were born, where, and what was your name at birth.

Answer: Okay.

Q: So when were you born?

A: I was born on August -- August 8 -- in 1938.

Q: 1938. Where?

A: In Kamenets-Podolsk in Ukraine, in Russia.

Q: And what was your mother and father's names?

A: My mother was Batia, and my father -- my birth father -- his name was Greesha Grechko.

Q: Greesha?

A: Yes.

Q: Greesha Grechko.

A: Yes. Or Hersh in Yiddish.

Q: Or Hersh. Tell me, was Grechko also your maiden name? The name you were born with?

A: I assume -- yeah.

Q: Okay. So it would have been Sara Grechko.

A: Sonya Grechko.

Q: Sonya Grechko.

A: In Russia, they called me Sonya --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- Grechko.

Q: I see.

A: And then I heard that Grechko is a well-known personality. In Russia, he was something in the politics or army. He was a cousin of my father or something -- my birth father.

Q: Do you have brothers and sisters?

A: I would have, but unfortunately, my younger brother -- three years younger -- he died in the war.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: He had scarlet fever.

Q: What was his name?

A: Mishal.

Q: Mishal.

A: Or Mendel.

Q: So you were born in 1938 in Kamenets-Podolsk --

A: Yes.

Q: -- which is in Ukraine.

A: Yes.

Q: And, in '38, there was no war yet, but it was almost going to happen. Do you have any memories of Kamenets-Podolsk? Do you remember what it looks like?

A: I remember very little. I know there were a lot of bridges. Because, whenever we walked or drove, it was bridges there. I remember when I opened the door, my apartment -- or I don't know, it was a house -- I stood there and the buildings looked so huge, like never-ending, very tall buildings. And I don't remember the others, or whatever, but it was in the middle of the city.

Q: So Kamenets-Podolsk was a city.

A: City -- a big city, yes.

Q: And it wasn't a town or village; it was an actual city. And your mother lived in the middle of it? That is, you lived in the middle of the city?

A: I don't know in the middle, but she always told me I was born in Kamenets-Podolsk.

Q: Okay.

A: That was the year -- I think it was not a farm or a little city, because she told me it was --

Q: Okay.

A: I should plan to go and visit her. I have. It's a very nice city.

Q: So you mention before that your birth father -- so does that mean you didn't know him very well? What happened with your father?

A: Well, the war started. They took him to the army.

Q: Who did?

A: The Russian. He was in the Russian army. He was a Russian citizen. I think he was also born in Kamenets-Podolsk. And that's it. And I don't remember his face. See, they took him, and then my mother got a letter or message that he was killed. So I don't remember very good his face.

Q: Mm-hmm. Do you have any early early memories from being a little girl?

A: My mother was very protective me. She didn't let me go by myself, be by myself -- or whatever. I don't remember I went to a nursery or kindergarten, because the war started. And my mother took me and my little brother -- he was younger maybe -- a year and a half from me. And then we went to her mother. She lived also in Kamenets-Podolsk there. And we went there to be together, because she didn't want to be by herself, you know?

Q: Did you remember going there? Do you have a memory of going to your grandmother's house?

A: I know she rushed us to come and we went there.

Q: Do you have a memory of your grandmother?

A: I don't remember her. The only thing I remember that we were -- we were there, and my mother's younger sister was there. She was not married yet. And then the older sister -- my mother had two sisters -- and the older sisters, she was also two girls, and I and my brother. And the youngest sister, she wasn't married yet.

Q: Mm-hmm. But you remember this -- you remember being there in that house?

A: Yeah, I remember and the names my mother used to tell me about them, you know? My grandmother from my mother, her name was Soshe.

Q: Sosha. And her last name?

A: Her last name was -- [pause] -- Reider, Reider, R-E-I-D-E-R. Reider.

Q: Reider. How long did you stay in your grandmother's house?

A: I don't know time, but it wasn't seem very long because then we left. I don't know where my mother used to tell me always that, when she took us both and run out, there was bombs. They started to throw bombs, the Germans.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: And she run fast. And there were some bombs that didn't exploded. And there were some places that they were bombing, they exploded, and people were killed. It was a terrible thing. My mother was wounded from a piece of -- I think steel or something that flew but -- and she went to grab a piece of white linen, put on the hand. And some people rushed her and said, "Take it off, because you are seen by the planes -- whatever. Take it off."

Q: So they would see it. They said the planes would see her hand?

A: Yes. Somehow we run away. And I don't know who took us there, or whatever, but we ended up at that time in Chelyabinsk.

Q: Chelyabinsk --

A: Chelyabinsk -- that's Siberia.

Q: That's far away. So, from Kamenets-Podolsk, you end up in Chelyabinsk.

A: Chelyabinsk.

Q: Do you remember how you got there? Was it by train, or was it by truck, or?

A: It's -- it's like a dream. Very clouded. Very clouded.

Q: Yeah.

A: But I know that in Chelyabinsk, my mother worked in a factory of ammunition.

Q: Okay.

A: And she looked -- she used to leave me and my brother with her younger sister when she wasn't working. When she was working, she was working as a telephonist operator in a station -- a telephone station.

Q: Mm-hmm. So that meant that -- that was the younger sister who wasn't married.

A: Wasn't married. Her name was Hannah.

Q: Hannah. And what was your grandmother?

A: My grandmother was Soshe.

Q: No, but where was she -- was she with you?

A: No. I think she died, because she didn't run with us. She died. She was killed or something. And then all the aunt -- all the -- which was Feige, her name -- my mother's sister Feige. I always heard -- my mother used to tell me -- that she had two girls, but one girl was killed when a bomb fell in or exploded nearby or something. So she was left with one daughter.

Q: That's you.

A: No, no -- not me. My mother's sister.

Q: Oh, your mother's sister -- excuse me.

A: Yes. She had two daughters, but one was killed right away. You know, my mother used to tell me, but we were a kid and this. My -- I was born thinking, "Where am I going to play?" You know? But anyway, in Chelyabinsk, we were live there, how long I don't remember, but I know that was a lot of snow. And I don't remember that I started school.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: It's too early. And then from there -- I heard somebody say "it's fire, it's war." We wanted to Uzbekistan. And my mother brought in a farm. She was collecting tomatoes.

Q: Harvesting tomatoes.

A: Yeah, yeah. But I remember it was a frightening experience, because you know at that time was already -- right before this my brother got sick before we went to Uzbekistan. He got sick -- I don't remember she had a chance to take him to the hospital, no? Maybe she took him to the hospital, but he stayed there for a very short time. He died. After he died, I got rheumatic fever.

Q: You got rheumatic fever?

A: Yeah. They took me to the hospital. When I was the last one, they put me in. It secluded -- seclusion, because it was very contagious, and they didn't give us antibiotic. They didn't have at that time. So they put me on the second, third floor where they were. They didn't let in my mother to go in. And I was standing on the steps to talking down from the window and talking sign language with my mother. One thing I remember something was my mother -- the nurses came in and gave me a plate with a beautiful tangerines -- mandarinos or something -- which in Russia, it was very unusual -- the war, winter especially -- they said, "That's from your mother -- you eat it." So this I remember was long time, over 40 days that I stayed there.

Q: Fourteen?

A: Forty -- four, zero.

Q: So over a month. Over a month you were in this hospital.

A: Yeah. Yeah. She used to say to me that she's so sorry she couldn't see me, you know?

Q: That they don't let her in.

A: They don't let her in -- yeah. This was in Siberia in the Chelyabinsk.

Q: What language did you speak with your mother?

A: Yiddish.

Q: You spoke Yiddish with her.

A: Yeah. And then, after my brother died, we decided to go to Uzbekistan. We went to Uzbekistan. She was working for an Uzbek. His whole head was bald, but the only thing that I remember is a beautiful braid -- a long, long braid. And he had a very big mustache, but the head was bald.

Q: So a bald head with a braid.

A: Yeah -- one braid -- a long braid from the center. And he had a mustache, you know? He had -- so she was working in the field, and I was running around. And [laughing] it was -- I did a mischief. I came over. I grabbed a beautiful tomato, and I bite the end. And that guy, Uzbek, came with a piece of wood, and he warned me, if I do it again, he will beat me up. He scared me. This face -- his face I remember. That I remember. So we stay about -- and then we went back to Chelyabinsk.

Q: Oh, really?

A: Yeah, we were in Chelyabinsk. And my -- at that time, it was war, but somehow, which was now my stepfather, they came from Polish Ukraine, from Sdolbuno, Rovno.

Q: From Rovno.

A: I don't know they -- they get -- they passed the borders. I don't know how they did it. He and his brother. His name was Moishe.

Q: Your stepfather's name.

A: Yeah -- yeah. And I think it was two years after my mother knew that my father's dead, whatever. So he met my mother.

Q: In Chelyabinsk?



A: In Chelyabinsk. And my -- he came with a brother. His name was Israel. Israel.

Q: Israel.

A: Yeah. His name was Moishe. And he met my mother. My mother's sister -- the youngest sister -- yeah. And then my mother got married. One day -- where I don't know, but I remember she got married two years after my father died.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: And my aunts, that she was the youngest -- yes -- she married for his brother, Israel -- yes.

Q: So Moishe married your mother, --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- and Israel married your aunt.

A: Hannah, yeah.

Q: What was your stepfather's last name?

A: Lumdan [?].

Q: Lumdan.

A: Yeah. He was from a little town in Polish -- in Ukraine, Poland -- Poland.

Q: Yeah.

A: And they were family of -- Lumdan in Hebrew is 'learner'. And they were from a family of learners and rabbis, and -- very, you know, in the Jewish religion very important.

Q: So they were religious people.

A: Yeah. Lumdan is the name. And he married her. I became, instead of Sonya Grechko, I became Sonya Lumdan. And we continued to live in the same barrack -- we lived in barracks. Every people, they shared barracks with -- you know what's a barrack; it's a little hou -- a little building built from wood.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: It's like when you see in the pictures or something -- like, if you see little buildings that -- little -- like, you build for children in the back.

Q: That's right.

A: You know.

Q: Like a little shed.

A: Shed -- there was a shed. Yeah.

Q: And why was it that you lived in such places? In such a place? Was there no other room anywhere?

A: No -- there was no room. We were lucky that we had room. And my mother back to the board, and my aunt Hannah, she also got back there. I think we lived in the same barrack, you know? Part of the barrack was ours. Part was half. Every few families in the barrack was divided. And we lived there. The most that I remember was the snow was so high. A lot of snow. My mother used to walk me -- snow come up to here. It's very very cold and very snow there.

Q: Was there enough to eat?

A: I know that my mother used to bring some, but it was not regular food. You know, she -- they gave her for work, you know? So she brought for me, because my brother died earlier. And he survived me.

Q: How long did you stay there?

A: I know in 1945 they say that the Polish citizens are allowed to leave Russia.

Q: So it was until '45 that you were in Chelyabinsk?

A: Yes. So my stepfather was allowed to leave, and he took me and my mother, and we left. And also his brother took my mother's sister, and she left children there. Yeah. But I forgot to tell this -- my mother had a younger brother. And I think he was -- he was sent to the army when he was 17. And then my mother, when I was Chelyabinsk, that he survived, but he's wounded.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: And they told her -- my aunt -- that he's in one of the hospitals. So they went and walked from hospital to hospital, and they found him. He lost his right hand. They let him go. It was still war, but they let him go.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: And then he came. He stayed with us for a while. And then, when he was still in Chelyabinsk. Then he -- he met a Polish woman. She was a widow, but she had a boy. She had a boy -- she had a boy two years younger than I was -- I was two or three years older. And he got married with her. So that's the family that I knew.

Q: And so they -- you all left to go back to Poland; is that it?

A: So yes, my father -- my stepfather was a Polish citizen, and the wife of my uncle, Mishal, was also Polish citizen. And then that's the way we could leave Russia. So we left Russia.

Q: By train?

A: I think it was train. And we went to Bratslav in Poland.

Q: And this is after the war.

A: After the war. And they let out the Russian -- the army let.

Q: Do you remember anything about that trip, or about what Bratslav looked like?

A: It was buildings there. And they were -- some of they were injured. They were, I think, bombs or something -- I don't know it was what. Anyway, we settled there for awhile. So my uncle Mishal (indecipherable). And then -- and he had a boy from his wife, you know? Settled there. And we stayed there for a while. And we had to decide what we're going to do. So we were really seeking to go to Palestine, because nobody wanted to stay --

Q: -- in Poland?

A: -- in Poland, yeah.

Q: So your stepfather went back to Rovno. Did he ever go back there to see what it was like?

A: No. He didn't go back. He went to Bratslav.

Q: Okay -- Bratslav.

A: Yeah. And they said that there are camps for people -- what they called the DP camps --

Q: DP camps --

A: -- in Germany.

Q: And what are DP camps mean?

A: People that were -- what's it called? Dispensed from their houses, from their place, from their -- from the (indecipherable) born or whatever. And they went there, because they heard that from there, it's easier to go to Palestine.

Q: So you were in such a camp?

A: So we left Poland, and we went to Germany.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: And we were ended up in Pocking, which I was told is -- the biggest camp was there. The biggest camp.

Q: Can you tell me the name again?

A: Pocking.

Q: Pocking?

A: Yeah. Pocking.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: P-O-C-K-I-N-G. It's a big camp -- was a big camp. So I and my stepfather and my mother, they lived there.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: And we also -- also they -- my aunt Hannah, she left later than we left. We left first. The Pocking.

Q: So you were at that point seven years old or eight years old?

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you ever go to school when you were --

A: Yeah, in Pocking I started to go. They established -- it was a camp -- established some Hebrew schools. And my stepfather, he was a learned -- he knew Hebrew. He knew -- he was teaching Hebrew, when he was even in Poland before he came to Russia.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: Was a learned man. And he tried to teach me Hebrew. I know he want to teach me Hebrew, so I'll understand and learn Hebrew. So yeah, they sent me. I remember I learned something from there. And then -- yeah, and my uncle that was wounded in the right hand, --

Q: Right.

A: -- he also joined when he came to Poland. So we decided to go to Germany, and we stayed in Pocking. But my aunt, Hannah -- she stayed. She was left in Poland for a while. I don't know what was the reason. I think her husband started the war there or something. So she said, "You go. I will join you later." So we were in Pocking. And I know their desire was, because every Friday they used to get together and were singing and dancing. So my mother and father heard that there is a group that came from Palestine. And they

are trying to arrange a group of people that they want to go to Palestine. So we -- we joined the group. We signed up. Not everybody was accepted. But they were making a big, big group of people to form the ship to show the world against whom are the British fighting? Because the British didn't let the Jewish people to come to Palestine. And they were supporting the Arabs. They tried to prevent the Jewish people to come, but they didn't want to let them take over the land. So --

Q: And where -- if you were in a DP camp in Germany, how do you get to a boat? How did that happen?

A: I don't know who took us -- the train or something -- but I heard, they say that in Marseille is going to get together the people that they decided to go to Palestine.

Q: Okay.

A: And we applied. And at that time my mother was pregnant. So we applied. And they accepted us. And then my uncle, he was wounded. He applied also. He was accepted. So we decided we went to Marseille. How we went, I really don't remember. But I know I think that -- my mother told me that we were lucky that we were accepted. So he went to Marseille.

Q: Do you have any memories of what Marseille looked like?

A: I think we came at night that time and they told us that we had to -- at night in the evening we had to one day go to the boat and -- what I remember is the boat was staying not far from the beach in Marseille. And they made like -- like, like a rub. How to say? We put holes. It was a wooden --

Q: A plank?

A: Yeah.

Q: A plank with a rope?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: And they say that everybody has to walk on this in order to get to the ship. It was a big ship there I saw, but we have to walk. And my cousin -- my uncle that she married -- and the woman, she had a boy. So he walked -- I mean, my mother walked. My father walked. My uncle walked. And we walked the first, I think. And the boy, his name is also Moishe. He walked before me. And he showed that he was courageous, because I was afraid to walk on there. And he walked. And I was look -- he told me not to look down to the ocean, not to look to the sides. Just to look at the person -- follow my eyes the person that walking. So I was looking at my cousin. He was walk straight. And so,

he showed himself, you know, courageous. So I -- walked after him. It looked like -- it passed like a whole month -- you know, because it was very scary.

Q: When you're little and there's water on both sides.

A: Not to look down, just to look sides.

Q: And so, you got on the boat?

A: Yes. But I forgot to tell that my sister -- step-sister -- was born in Bratslav. And she was little that time I think -- two years or something. So he was walking, and he had a bag, you know? Bag with stripes. And this was tied potty for a child, you know? [laughing] It's my cousin -- his name is Moishe. He used to call "Moishe with the little potty." That's the name that was till he was the adult.

Q: Really? Oh, he must have hated that name.

A: The funny thing is I was watching him walking with this. I used to laugh to myself. That is my memory of this. And I walked. I finally got to the ship. The ship was so big and crowded -- very crowded. And they put like shelves -- shelves, this, no more place. Everybody said, "Go in the shelf and lay down." You know there was room. Many people, they have to squeeze in. But my mother had belly so big, she couldn't go in. She didn't have room to slide in.

Q: That's right.

A: So they let us sit on the floor near where you have to step off to the shelves. So I went -- entered the ship and we went there. Whoever was lucky could have slide in -- could have laid down -- but we were sitting there.

Q: Yeah.

A: And they started to give out chocolate mint for the children, big pots. And every time that they went near us thus far -- I mean, not every time, but it happened many times that they slide or something and all chocolate fell --

Q: Spills.

A: Funny things that I remember. I think I don't want to remember the bad things what happens.

Q: Yeah. What was the name of the ship?

A: The ship was Exodus.

Q: So it was the Exodus ship?

A: Yes.

Q: Wow.

A: I didn't know that it was such an important name, but anyway, we were on the ship I remember. They accepted special families that there were pregnant women. A lot of pregnant women. A lot of orphans, they survived the war, and they were -- their parents and everybody was killed. So there was a woman, she gave birth on the ship, but something got wrong. I don't know exactly what happened, but what I remember is a big piece of wood, and they put it near the edges of the ship. And she was laying on this.

Q: She died?

A: She died. And they slide her down. And I said, "Oh my God -- my mother is also pregnant." Since then, I had a horrible feeling that my mother is going to die also, and they will slide her down. Thank God when the ship arrived -- but then they didn't let us in. The British -- the British.

Q: They didn't?

A: The British surrounded the ship the minute she left the port of Marseille, and they followed her. And that was the biggest ship that was supposed to (indecipherable), you know? But they attacked the ship and corner of the ship was broken down, but they got the ship inside. It was a big strong ship. And it was almost four and a half thousand people -- something like this. But anyway. The ship did not drown. The ship didn't drown.

Q: It didn't sink.

A: Didn't sink. And we came in. There was few wounded. There were young people that they were fighting in the building. They were throwing fish or -- different cans of this. And they were fighting the British. And the British were throwing tear gas and using tear gas, smoke, and smoke -- yes -- and different things.

Q: On to the ship.

A: Yeah. On the ship -- yeah.

Q: Did they realize that these were just people there -- regular civilians?

A: Yeah, but they didn't want to let us in. They didn't want to enlarge the population of Jewish in Palestine. And I remember they brought -- what they call it when you lay down a sick person? The stretcher?

Q: That's right. They brought a stretcher?

A: So my mother was on the stretcher. And my father was walking near the stretcher. And I couldn't walk there, because there was a lot of water in the ship. Ship started to get

water. It went up here, here, here, here. And [chuckling]. For me it was too deep, because I could have drowned. So I remember two people with uniforms. I think it was the British people -- soldiers -- one of them took me on his arm, holding me. We were in Germany. They gave us portions, and they gave also cigarettes. And my mother told me she had -- cigarettes is a good thing to bring to Palestine, because she can sell it and make some money. I have very good coat. Nice coat. And I had a lot of pockets. And my pockets were full of cigarettes she put. So she said because the suitcases -- whatever we have -- they say to throw over the ship, and they will be picked up from other ships and will be taken to Cypress. But she said, "They won't throw me in the ocean -- on the port on the ground."

Q: Right.

A: When one of the soldiers picked me up somehow a pack of cigarettes start to fall down and then another one. And they were joking saying, "Look at this girl."

Q: All the cigarettes.

A: She may sell cigarettes or something. It was a funny moment, although I saw my mother's legs, she was in labor.

Q: Oh.

A: She was in very bad pain crying. It was the time. And also the smoke that was on the ship and the noise, this caused her maybe earlier -- the beginning of the ninth month or something. So it was scary, and it was funny, because I didn't know that my mother putted pockets in the lining --

Q: Yes.

A: -- to be able to --

Q: -- have some cigarettes.

A: Yeah.

Q: But tell me, how did the British soldiers end up on the ship? Did they -- did they attack and board it?

A: They boarded to the ship -- yeah. They boarded the ship. They boarded to prevent every single --

Q: Person.

A: -- yeah to get to the ground of Haifa. Because they were on the way, and they will settle there. They didn't want to let them in in Palestine. They made up their minds. But there were cases they had to, because some youngsters were wounded so bad that they



gave immediate help. And my mother was this. She was in labor. And she was sinking in the water. I assume that the lower floors were full of water. Because I know they took me -- I didn't want it, but they lift me up in the arm and they took me to take me out. So yes. So they brought us to the Rambam Hospital. Rambam Hospital -- I believe I know it's a nice big hospital. But.

Q: And it was where? Where is the --

A: In Haifa.

Q: In Haifa. Okay.

A: They let us in at Haifa, because they couldn't take us right away back to --

Q: -- Marseille.

A: Yeah. And they left us, and left a few -- tens of youngsters. They were wounded.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: I know some were dead later on I heard. But -- and they brought us to the hospital -- Rambam Hospital.

Q: And did your mother give birth there?

A: She gave birth. It was a boy. And he survived maybe one day or two and he died. He was poisoned with the smoke and all the gases that they said they -- they put gas I heard it. In Germany, the concentration camp, they took people to the gas chambers.

Q: Yeah.

A: I thought that my mother -- she was horrible. I was afraid that they would throw her in the ocean like the other woman.

Q: Yeah.

A: She was in labor. But, you know, good thing that she survived. But there were other women that they gave birth on the ship and was fine. So we were in the Rambam Hospital a while. And she gave birth, but the baby died. At the time that my mother was in the ship. And we were in the ship. And they let us out, but they put us in the camp in Atlit. It was a camp.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: And, when I was visiting Atlit, I saw it was like a prisoner's camp with high tile that you cannot go out. So we are prisoners. They put our fingers, and they took pictures left, right, profiles and everything. And they sent us in Atlit. In Atlit, we were -- I don't know -- a few months, whatever. But, being in Atlit, we were listening to the radio. And they

announce that they decided to establish a Jewish state. But when I was in Atlit -- we were in Atlit -- I saw many people started to dance and clap and everything. And it was a happy occasion. And, you know, the people were unbelievable. That was the same year that we arrived. I don't know -- we arrived, I think, in the summer. You know, it was summer.

Q: 194 -- ?

A: Seven. It was called the Exodus. And in Hebrew, it was the Sea of Teropa[?], leaving Europe like sea of Mizraim where the people left Egypt. Therefore they called it Exodus. So anyway, they were dancing there in the camp. It was such a happy occasion when they went. And we stayed there -- and, I don't know -- it was the end of -- the end of --

Q: Okay. Sorry for the interruption. So you were dancing in the streets because -- ?

A: Yeah, I walked out, see everybody's dancing in the street. It was -- you know, for me the politics in that age didn't impress me, but impress me they were dancing in the streets.

Q: Of course.

A: Yeah, in the camp when I was. Because my stepfather, he was a teacher in Poland for Hebrew. So he taught me, and I was in school there in the camp and learned Hebrew and everything. He prepared me. And I was quite a good student.

Q: Was -- were you close to him?

A: Yes.

Q: So he was a good father.

A: Yes. And you know what? Especially my mother, my father, we went to the hospital; I thought I'm going to have a brother or sister. And I remember a few months before this I started to call him tatsy. It means 'father'. It's funny like, "I say -- Okay, I'm going to have a brother, sister, he's going to be my father." Start to call him tatsy. My kids don't tell the story that he is my stepfather.

Q: Yeah.

A: But I loved him very much, because he was very dedicated. He was a very good person. He had a wonderful character.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: I --

Q: What kind of a person -- was he a very -- was he somebody easy to be close to?

A: Yes.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And he had stories from the Old World. And he used to love to teach and to show. He was working as a teacher. Wherever he had a chance, he was working as a teacher.

Q: So, in this camp, what did your parents do while he was teaching you? Did they have to work, or did they just wait until they'd be allowed in the country?

A: They gave us some food -- whatever. And my uncle that was wounded, they started to deal, to buy -- I don't know, some stuff. They went to the -- when we were in Pocking.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Oh, you're talking when we were in the --

Q: In Israel already -- in Haifa.

A: Oh, in Israel -- I forgot, when we were in Pocking --

Q: Yeah?

A: -- my father used to buy and sell to the farmers there, concentrated food, whatever they gave us. The udra they gave us.

Q: They gave you food.

A: Yeah.

Q: They gave you rations.

A: Rations -- whatever we didn't use, we sold it. My uncle, they go to the farms and exchanging it for other stuff that's, you know?

Q: That you might need.

A: Yes.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: So my stepfather and my uncle, he was very young when he was wounded in the war, you know? So they were like going out to the farms and exchanging food and buying and selling and whatever. And I -- even then I started to go to Hebrew school. It was a school.

Q: Yeah?

A: And he was going to -- to come in also some time as a teacher -- this and that. But okay. So I told you that they got to the ship. They came, but they took us -- even though

my mother was in labor and everything, and then they took us in the hospital, and she gave birth and the baby died.

Q: Yes.

A: Baby died. Some time they sent us in the camp Atlit.

Q: Yes. In Atlit -- what did your parents do in Atlit?

A: They were prisoners. They didn't do much.

Q: Okay.

A: My father was volunteer to -- to work with children, to teach them Hebrew a little. When you come into a new country, he wanted them to know the language. He was teaching me. He was teaching a year. And there was a synagogue. He had a wonderful voice also.

Q: Was he a cantor?

A: He was a cantor -- yes. Before the war, yeah, he was -- in his hometown, Sdolbuno, Rovno.

Q: In Sdolbuno.

A: Yeah. It's a little town in Rovno -- near Rovno.

Q: Aside from himself and his brother, was there anybody else from your family who survived?

A: No, just them -- the two brothers -- because they run away from Poland.

Q: I see.

A: And they came in the Russian border.

Q: Yeah.

A: They go to the Russian border. They took him in. And they put him in also working as a [pause] -- labor work -- like a prisoner; they let him work.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: So then they gave him freedom, because I know that he say that he had to work. And he -- he was freed. But that was already I think in 1945.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah. So anyway, I'm going back and forth.

Q: That's okay. But we know now you were talking about the Soviet Union. And now we're back in Israel when your parents are in Atlit.

A: Yes, it was Palestine. Yes. And the British put us in the Camp Atlit.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: And you know, when I went to visit Israel, I saw the tile -- the steel tile -- steel around the camp.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: It's exact.

Q: The barbed wire.

A: The barbed -- yeah. And you know what? It's like the memory came back to me. Yes -- you couldn't go, and you couldn't come out. And you stayed there a few months. It was October, November they announced Israel became a state. So I was there quite a few months -- yes. And --

Q: And then what happened to you and your family?

A: They let us -- they let us out, and we went in Haifa, and we were there -- we had a little money, and we rent an apartment. No, first we rent apartment. They gave us a room -- in Jewish agency, they gave us a apartment from the Arabs that run away. They gave us old apartment -- yeah. Downtown.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: We went there -- yes. My father start to work. My mother went to work. She went to work to clean houses. And we -- we went to work to the port -- to Haifa port. He was working there -- electrician or a watchman or something. But anyway, and we live there. And we -- we moved from downtown to up. There is Carmel, and there is also part is called Nave Sha'anan, which is a -- it's a very nice neighborhood. So we entered the apartment. We lived there. And I started to go to school.

Q: Did you live in Haifa your entire time in Israel?

A: All my life that I know I lived there -- yes.

Q: In Haifa?

A: Yes. And we lived in Haifa, and I went to school. And I was a good student -- because my stepfather -- I call my father. My kids, my grand don't know it was a stepfather. I didn't want to bring up this, but I wanted -- you know -- to tell the history of this, but he was a wonderful man.

Q: Did he and your mother ever have any more children?

A: No.

Q: So the baby who died was the only --

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. And then you had your stepsister -- yes?

A: No.

Q: No, you didn't.

A: No.

Q: Okay. I'm -- I --

A: My brother -- not the step -- my first brother was younger, maybe 20 months or something.

Q: He died too.

A: He died in Russia --

Q: Right.

A: -- scarlet fever -- which I got scarlet fever after him.

Q: I thought you said your mother gave birth in Bratslav.

A: No, Bratslav -- her younger sister did.

Q: Oh, her younger sister did -- okay.

A: And she didn't want to go with us to Pocking.

Q: Okay.

A: And my uncle, Israel, which is the brother, he started to work there -- something -- in the office, something -- I don't know. And they came to -- Israel was already Israel.

Q: I see. I see.

A: And they came legal. We were illegal -- I, my father, and me -- and then my mother's youngest brother that was wounded in Russia.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: We came on the Exodus -- yeah.

Q: Okay. I've got that now.

A: Yes. So when Israel -- my father worked at the port Haifa. It was hard. It was very tough times it was.

Q: And so, you went to school -- in high school -- in Haifa?

A: I went to school -- yes -- in Haifa I was -- it's called Amami Aleph. Elementary Aleph. First elementary.

Q: Okay.

A: And then I went to the high school there.

Q: Now, at home, did you still speak Yiddish, or had you switched to Hebrew?

A: We used to speak in -- they talked Yiddish, my mother and my father, but I -- then my father used to speaking with me also, and my mother, yeah, because we lived in Israel from 1947.

Q: When did you meet Mr. Ezra?

A: I met him in Haifa.

Q: You did?

A: Yeah. I -- I -- we were -- he lived in -- he lived in Haifa downtown. And my youngest aunt lived in -- it was a building that the Arabs left. And their neighbors was my husband's brother -- older brother -- lived there. Older brother.

Q: Right.

A: My husband had an older brother, so he survived. He had other siblings, but they died in the war.

Q: That's right.

A: He told me about it, but he run away.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: So anyway, we went to visit them a lot, because it was my mother's sister. And we never went to visit -- he was seeing his brother. So here and there. And then, he invited me one time to very group of friends. Then we started to go out. It was -- when I met him, I was 16.5, almost 17. I met him. And we started to go out, and I went to high school that time. And few times he took me to high school. But anyway, when his brother moved out, we moved in. So we lived near my uncle and aunt.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: Which is, my uncle was my father's brother, and my aunt was my mother's sister.

Q: Close.

A: Yes. And my aunt had -- I had cousins who was a boy named David.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: Yes, and he died -- I think last year of cancer. And his sister Leah -- Leah, yes -- she is also a teacher. She is a teacher for Hebrew. But anyway.

Q: So you met when you were 16?

A: Almost 17.

Q: Almost 17?

A: Yeah, I was invited to an event with him, so we started to go out.

Q: When did you marry?

A: We married -- we wanted to get married -- I graduated high school, and I was planning to go to the -- to college. And, when I graduated high school, it was -- what year was it? 1947? '56 or '57 -- something like this -- yeah. And I signed up for the University. We went out already, it was almost two years.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: So Ezra say to me, "Let's get married." But at that time started the Sinai War. Before this was problems. We postpone, postpone, postpone till it was December 25th. Funny thing that I didn't know it was December 25th. For me, it didn't say a lot, because I lived in Israel. And I was going to the university. And, when we got married in Haifa in Windsor -- in Windsor Hotel.

Q: Windsor Hotel.

A: Yeah. When we came out of the ceremony and everything -- the wedding was a very nice wedding -- the ships of port Haifa started to blow their horn. And it was. I said to my husband, "I don't know -- [laughing] are they celebrating our wedding?"

Q: Exactly.

A: It's funny, you know? Because I know those things started -- if I don't want to be -- if I don't want to be negative, I have to remember the happy occasions and the funny things, right? So I said, "What are they --

Q: Celebrating your wedding -- yeah.

A: So we married in December 25th. People ask me, "You didn't know that it's Christmas?"



Q: [laughing].

A: I said, "Sorry, I didn't know." I didn't know.

Q: So your wedding anniversary is every year --

A: -- on Christmastime.

Q: -- on Christmastime.

A: Yeah. I'm celebrating Christmastime. See? Although I'm Jewish, but I'm celebrating and it's very nice. But the thing is I'm going back. When my mother gave birth -- yes? When she was in the ship, in the hospital, I was expecting -- I was expecting to have a brother or sister, but my dream fell apart. So I remember that when we finally settled in Israel, I said to my mother, "I would like to have a brother or sister."

Q: And what did she say?

A: She said to me, "I'll see. Maybe." It didn't happen.

Q: Did your mother tell you stories about her childhood in Russia? About what Kamenets-Podolsk was like? About the early days when you were little? Did that ever happen?

A: Well, we were in Russia. I tell you, it's -- it's like a blank I have. I don't know why. Because I didn't have enough time to --

Q: Well, you were very little. You're very little. But did -- afterwards when life settled down somewhat, did she then tell things?

A: In Israel.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: She would from time to time say that, you know, it wasn't easy life. It was not easy the life. And it was some 70's in there.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: And, when she left Russia, she was still a young woman -- yes. So she was open for her new life, for her new beginning, you know, the Exodus.

Q: How long did she -- when did your mother pass?

A: When we lived in Israel --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- some people that from my husband's hometown came to visit us and to say to us, "Come to visit America." And one of them was my husband's neighbor. And they -- so we went to -- and they came to visit us. And then we decided to go to America -- left the three children with my parents.

Q: Oh, with your parents.

A: Yes, in Israel. And I went -- I think it was '68. 1968.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: And I went to America. We went to visit here. We stood here for two months. And one family, they convinced us -- they were my husband's neighbors before the war. And they start to convince us, "Come stay -- come to America stay. If you live here, you'll feel better -- this and that." Although my husband told to me, he was very active in fighting for Israel. He was in Palma, this and that. He said, "Okay. I gave enough of myself. Maybe I'll do it." And he convinced me to go to America. Which it was difficult for me, because I didn't want to leave my parents. But then he said, "Don't worry -- we'll come and be established here." So we agreed. And that what happened. We came to America. First to Long Island.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: He had a friend. We lived there. And then I remember it was like a year later when we came, and I told my parents that I want them to come. It was the Passover Seder, and they came. And my father conducted the Seder. And my house, it was so many people -- friends and neighbors -- and they really had a wonderful time. My father chose in Philadelphia. I remember I bought a huge table, many chairs and everything, to be able to celebrate the Passover.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: So my parents came, and they stayed with us. And then. Somehow I don't know what happened. I think they were -- they had an apartment, and they left everything. They came to visit. Then they said they want to go and give it up and do whatever. And they went back to Israel to give it up. And I remember that time my daughter Hessy was in Israel. She convinced them to come back to America.

Q: Ah.

A: You brought them there back. "You brought them back."

Q: Yeah.

A: She brought them back after a few months. Then they stayed here.

Q: Did you and your husband ever return to Europe to visit those places where you grew up and he grew up, or anything like that?

A: He went back with a friend from Israel. My children were little when he went, --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- so I couldn't leave them. So he went. I'm still planning to go. We'll see. That time the kids were little; now my husband says he's too old.

Q: [laughing] Never the right time. That's right.

A: There's no happy medium, you know, between this and this. My kids grew up, and then the grandchildren came. And I always said to him, "I will go if you want to come." He says he will not remember it. But you know what? He told me that this little town didn't change much. Never did told me. Now, I didn't see my town that I was born. That I would like to see it -- yes.

Q: When it quiets down there a little bit.

A: Yes. Anyway, that's the funny thing that we always plan -- not always it comes out. Anyway, my parents stay with us.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And my mother died in 1998, which was -- she was 80 years old when she died. She got Parkinson's, and she started to be in bad shape, so she died. And my father lived till 2005 --

Q: Wow.

A: -- seven years later than her. Beside that he was older than her at least 10, 12 years.

Q: So he was almost 100 years old?

A: Yes -- he was 97.5. But it's funny. His voice was unbelievable. He had a wonderful voice. And wherever there was a chance, he used to sing. (indecipherable). But that was such a happy occasion. He used to sing, and everybody started to dance.

Q: Oh.

A: People long in Philadelphia. Survivors group. It's called the New American Holocaust Survivors -- yes. (indecipherable). Somebody was invited a few times there and whatever and was occasionally started to sing and everybody clapped. He was a happy person.

Q: When I was talking with your husband, --

A: Yes.

Q: -- it was clear that he didn't speak about what he went through for many, many years.

A: He didn't want to tell me and all the children. He couldn't talk.

Q: And so, he didn't tell you details of what it's like?

A: Lately he started to say "When I was in the forest." It's not like -- like a history thing that you tell this and this year -- a progressive. He remembers somebody told you that they decided to talk now.

Q: Well, not just now -- before -- a little bit earlier. But it had took many years. It was not something that --

A: Yes. They couldn't talk. They could not.

Q: What about you? Did you tell your kids what your life was like until you got --

A: I told them I was in the Exodus and that's it. I didn't talk much about it. But Exodus -- I mean, Exodus was well-known ship.

Q: Yeah. And there are, you know --

A: And I -- I start to tell them I was in Exodus. And then they throw that woman that was pregnant. She gave birth to a baby. She died. Yes.

Q: And you saw them bury her at sea.

A: Yeah, it was scary.

Q: It was scary -- sad and scary.

A: Yeah.

Q: Is there some --

A: My mother tells me that the people, some people that were from the Exodus and there were some women that they -- after they left the Exodus that they gave birth, and this. So, when they saw this, they say to her, "So how are you doing after you have such a trauma?" She said, "I'm trying to survive." Because they had their children with them. They gave birth after. She was -- my mother started in nine month. Never happened with her. Anyway, that is the story of Exodus. Yeah. I don't know how much in new museum. Did they have really -- did they have really places that they took pictures from the boat or something? I don't know. I wanted to see that.

Q: I don't know. There might be. But the post-war part of the story -- the post-war part of events is something that is not the main focus. The main focus is, of course, what

happens during the war and the Holocaust during the war. Is there anything you'd like to add today that I didn't ask you about?

A: What I want to add is that now I understand that the -- that the ship that was very crowded and my parents, I mean, they're very uncomfortable sitting on the floor for the whole trip. I mean, you couldn't stretch -- whatever -- it was there. But, after she came to Palestine, then we came Israel. She became a symbol of fighting the British government. Although above her declaration was to give a state to the Jewish people, but it seems that the British ignored it. It's funny, because (indecipherable) was the first that came out, now the Jewish people have to have a state of their own.

Q: Yeah. Yeah.

A: And didn't -- didn't -- there's a lot to -- that the ship would be drowned. I know it was in water. When I came down the ship, they carried me out. Yeah. But that's the politics. Yeah.

Q: What would you want -- what would you want your grandkids and their kids and future generations to understand about your life, about the people of Israel who survived - - many who were survivors and who had come from World War II -- what would you want them to understand about their lives?

A: Nothing comes easy. Life is a battle, you know? It's a struggle. When you succeeded this -- you succeed like they prove the whole world that the Jewish people are very stubborn and won't give up. Although, the British are very bad. I know that we lived there -- my mother said that that was attack from the Arabs. Was fiery I think -- something. And they -- there was an action -- something. And that was the time the Jewish people --

Q: Stop.

A: Yes. And also there were a lot of crimes, a lot of -- that the people suffered a lot also.

Q: Fight for the freedom.

A: Yeah, oh -- the fight for the freedom, everything, yes. I remember that we came -- we came and we lived at Haifa among the -- in the houses that the Arabs left; they run away. But at nighttime, although the Arabs -- they had leaders -- and at nighttime they started to dissel [?], and they got together and tried to do different things to harm the Jewish settlers. It wasn't easy.

Q: So there wasn't security even there.

A: No, there wasn't security. It was -- every day was a struggle --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- but you know.

Q: But you had three children --

A: Yes.

Q: -- who had their own children. So now you have a family that survived and thrived, it sounds like, you know?

A: My poor mother -- she lost two boys. One younger than me a little bit and one, he was a baby. She paid a lot. She used to call me, "You are my only eye in my head." I said, "Why? You have two eyes." And she said, "No."

Q: Oh.

A: It's a shame.

Q: Well, she did pay a price.

A: Yeah. She did pay a price. But she -- she died in 1998. So Justin, you were already how old? Six. >> Justin: Grandmother made it to my bar mitzvah.

A: And how was he? How was it; do you remember? Huh? Perfect. He was such a happy person. He was the center of a party -- always. That's what I remember. And my mother also had beautiful voice -- soprano -- which I remember. And then our Seder was very nice. Our getting together and everything. I have a good memory from that. That's what it is. Thank God -- yes.

Q: Broken?

A: Yes. And although I have no brothers and sisters, but we had a nice life. And now we have a nice life -- the children and their children.

Q: Well, thank you.

A: I hope they will not have to struggle like me, you know? They will have their lives easy-going.

Q: Well, without such -- without such challenges and threats.

A: Yeah -- oh yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: My husband also I told you about, he had a lot. He started as young boy and a long time to struggle.

Q: So --

A: I hope peace will be in the world. That will be the most thing that we can accomplish.

Q: Okay. Thank you.

A: Thank you very much.

Q: Thank you very much.

A: Yes. You know, I didn't want to talk, because I didn't see that I have all the picture straight, you know? It was for me a little bit there, a little here, but it came.

Q: It came.

A: It came to me.

Q: Thank you very much for what you shared. I mean, and it came well. We got a sense, and we got a picture of your life and your Exodus and your odyssey to Israel and beyond. So thank you.

A: You're welcome, and I appreciate you gave me those pictures. You developed the history. You got a view of the history. That's very nice.

Q: Yeah.

A: Thank you, everybody.

Q: You're welcome. You're welcome. And this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. Sara Sherman on May 16, 2014. Thank you very much.

A: Thank you.

### Conclusion of Interview