

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. Renee Grosman on December 19, 2015, in Manhattan, New York. Thank you so much, Mrs. Grosman, for agreeing to speak with us today. We've met once before, but we had only a very short, short interview. And today, we have the opportunity to learn more about your story.

Thank you.

So I'm going to start, and some of the questions I have may be a repetition, but they will be the building blocks for where we go.

Not a problem.

So tell me, what was the date of your birth?

Well, actually, I have a little confusion in it, because I never had a birth certificate. Recently, the Polish government is giving some compensation for people that had been to Holocaust-- Holocaust survivor, ghetto, et cetera, and I couldn't-- I did not have a birth certificate.

So my friend, which is Sophie Winston, is a wonderful person in the internet, and she found out by writing to Poland and taking a lot of energy, found out that I was born in Warsaw, which I never knew about it, because I lived in a small town in Demblin. My passport is made completely different, what I have. But it doesn't matter. All my papers and everything is going by this when I travel or I use it.

It was just my 80th birthday, and according to [? is ?] a difference probably of a few months more or whatever. So I keep it-- I keep still my birth at my passport. And my daughter just had quite a wonderful 80th birthday for me.

Aw.

So here I am, an old lady, and trying to make the best out of it.

Well, tell me, what is the official date in your passport of your birth?

My official-- my passport reads January the 12th, 1933.

And what did your friend--

She found out I was born on August the 12th.

1933?

1933.

I see. So it's a question of, oh, more than half a year.

Yeah.

And did you always think you were born in Demblin?

I was always thinking I was born in Demblin. I never knew. According to my memory or memories or stories that I was told is that my mother had a very hard time in a small town. She had difficulty become pregnant and being pregnant with me. And I think this probably was the main reason why she went to Warsaw for my birth.

I see.

We also had a residence, Radzyminska 162 in Praga. But when I was there at one of the gatherings and I went there to see the place, it does not exist. It does not-- it's shambles. There's no house. There is-- something else was built. And that's how much I have memories of that particular address.

OK.

But my mother and myself lived in this small town which is called Demblin, Powiat Lubelski. My mother had an enterprise. She had a store of china, which supplied most of her glassware and stuff to the Polish army.

Oh, I see.

We were financially-- my mother was financially very well. As for my father, I was with both of them, mother and father in two concent--

We'll come to that. We'll come to that. But I want right now just to get a sense of who your family was. So I still have a few questions to ask. The first was your date of birth, which we have now kind of made clearer.

Well, it's not really clear.

But-- or--

But here is the confusion of it. But it really doesn't matter, you know?

And what was your name when you were born?

I was born Reginka. And I was also-- as I traveled, I lived in Israel after the concentration camps.

OK.

I became Rivka, Renee, Regina. My name changed, but my Grosman never changed. My Grosman always was with one S.

Oh, you were born Renee Grosman-- Regina-- Reginka--

No, I was not. I am sorry. My apologies on the interview. My maiden name is Aurbach.

Aurbach. Aurbach. OK. So you were Regina Aurbach.

Correct. Then I married the Grosman.

I see. OK. We'll come to that too. But now we're still at the very beginning. And you say that you lived in Demblin, but your family also had this address in Warsaw in the District of Praga.

Correct.

All right. And you were born in Warsaw, but you grew up in Demblin.

Correct.

Tell me, how far is Demblin from Warsaw?

Logistically, I have no idea. I guess I think maybe an hour. I don't know. It's--

Oh, but you can travel there easily.

You can travel, yes.

Yeah. OK. So it's not like it's at the other end of the country.

No, no. It's not.

OK. And what was your father's name?

Itzak.

Itzak Aurbach.

Correct.

And your mother's name?

Braha.

Braha was her first name?

Right. And her maiden name was Rosenberg.

Braha Rosenberg.

Correct.

And tell me-- we'll talk a little bit about your mother in a minute, but tell me a little about your father. What was his line of work?

OK. My father married my mother I think in the 1900s. I don't know exactly, because probably someplace there is some identification, but everything was lost. My father came from Biala Podlaska. I think so. I mean, as much as my memory holds. It was a big love affair. I never had any siblings.

You were the only child.

He married my mother, any he worked with my mother in the enterprise that my mother had. The Rosenbergs, the whole family of Rosenbergs were in the iron business. They had stores of iron and they all lived-- all the sisters and brothers lived in this small town. But they were all-- they went to all concentration camps and none of them survived. Only one cousin, which recently passed away.

So you didn't know your--

Irving Rosenberg.

Irving Rosenberg.

And then there was another cousin that lives in California, and I am in touch with his children. Was actually my mother's brother's-- he was not my mother's brother, but his father was-- he was--

Related to--

No, he was my mother's brother's son. Both of them were children of my mother's brother's children.

So you're first cousins.

Correct.

And--

Do you want to know the situation? I had a very interesting situation.

I want to know about your childhood.

Yes. Oh, that's what I'm going to tell you now.

OK. Tell me about your childhood.

I was the only child. I never had any siblings. My mother had-- on top of all the brothers that were very successful, there was one sister that she was a communist. And she was very close to my mother, almost like a twin. And my mother was extremely fond of her and helped her financially. And what happened during the war living-- my mother was financially in very good shape. She was not.

There was a child that was born almost at the same time I was born, and the two children were very close to each other. When the concentration camp happened in our town and they started to do [POLISH], which means taking people out of the houses and take them to concentration camp, there was made a decision between the two sisters that they send away their children to be hidden by Poles.

Mm-hmm. That means yourself--

Myself and the little girl.

What was her name?

Mincza.

Mincza. OK.

And Mincza-- the decision was made. And then my mother prepared someplace better, someplace underneath, some big money with coins and metals and stuff like this. They gave the Polish lady-- I don't know her name. I don't know who she is and what connection I have with her. This is totally a lost memory for me. They decided to send out first one child, and the decision was to send my--

Cousin.

--cousin. And on the way, she was dressed very pretty and everything. And she got very panicky and she cried. And when she was underway to the Polish lady-- I don't know, but I can just as much from stories, I understand. She got very panicky and she sent the child back. And on the way back, she was killed by a German officer or a Polish officer. It's unknown to myself.

And my aunt kept her for three nights and didn't bury her. So my mother made a decision not to send me. That's why I stayed with my mother and my father in that town.

OK. That already brings us into the war years and what happens after the Germans come.

This was all during the occupation.

Right. I'd like to talk about before the occupation. I'd like to talk a little bit about-- or find out a little bit more about

your first years, your very first memories to find out what kind of home you lived in. Tell me about your house.

I have a picture now if you want to see myself and my-- and me. I'll show you.

No, no, no, no, no.

I am three years old.

OK.

And we used to go to the-- not the mountains, but the-- it's called Ciechocinek or some kind of country where my mother and my grand-- my maternal grandmother used to send me out. And I was about three years old. I have very little memories about those years, and if I ever had, I swept them under the rug. I also hardly remember my grandmother. I remember she was a husky, beautiful, typical Jewish mama.

She worked with your mother?

I have very little memory about my father. I remember him. He was great. Actually, it seems that I have here a picture, which you should show it.

We will at the end.

Yes.

At the end--

Of my father and myself that was sent to Israel before the war. I think maybe-- must have been 1934 or '30-- '38. I don't know.

You say your mother had a store, yes? Of china.

Right.

And so on. Do you remember being in that store?

None. Not at all.

Do you remember the home that you lived in?

Not at all.

Oh, wow. Do you remember anything about family holidays or get together with the relatives, or anything like that?

Very little.

Very little.

I just remember that particular going into the country away. This, I do remember.

Did you like it, do you think?

I'm sure I loved it. There was no question about it. I know that I was extremely cherished, because my mother had a very hard time having me, and I was very much loved by my father and mother.

And since I was an only child, I was very well pampered, because I just look at the picture, and I recall that little sweater and dress that was imported for me, that I could wear it when I was a baby. And not a baby. I must have been-- in this picture, I must have been about two, two and a half years old.

Did you have a favorite toy?

Don't remember any.

OK.

Sorry. Don't remember absolutely any.

Do you have any memory of Demblin or of the--

Very little. Very little.

Or Warsaw?

I remember once, maybe two years old, we went to visit-- I know it was an apartment building. It was not a-- it was-- my little. It's totally-- I have an itch in my nose. Would they--

We can cut. So what would you say your own earliest memory might be?

I remember very well already during the war the place where we were hidden. I know did my aunt saved me because she brought me food. She was a dressmaker, a very special shirt maker. And she used to bring me food, because during the night I was hidden under the--

So you remember that?

--barracks. Yes. I remember that we cooked. My parents worked in ammunition and in potatoes. And I remember they brought raw potatoes, and we cooked them in the steam. I remember that.

My mother made a very major decision, which is important for my life history that after the war if I survive, I'm going to be her child. And that's how it happened. My mother remarried and stayed in Israel, and I have stepbrothers which I'm very close to and stepsisters. And I stayed with my aunt as her child. My children had called-- I always called her in Polish [POLISH]. I came to visit my mother, but she was really my mother.

OK. I'm confused by this point, but let's-- but we'll come to that. Let's explain now and talk now-- this is probably not a direct memory for you, but tell me how the war happened and how it affected your family and what happened that brought you into this place where you do have early memories?

Well, we were-- the only memory I have that my aunt was killed right before they took us out from our apartment in June, the camp that was in Demblin. Demblin had a milder camp. The people were working and they got a ration. That's all what I remember. I have total blanks on everything else.

So you're saying Demblin didn't have a ghetto, but it had a camp?

It just a ghetto, or I think it was a camp, as much as I remember.

And you remember being taken from your home?

Yes. With my mother and my father and with my aunt. But my aunt worked in the-- my mother and I think my father worked-- or ammunition, I think. Or ammunition, or they worked with the potatoes. I don't know the difference, and I can't remember that.

But you say that an aunt was killed in front of your eyes.

No, my aunt. My aunt's daughter.

Oh, your aunt's daughter.

We're talking about the daughter.

OK.

But my aunt survived. And my aunt was out of the ghetto, and she was sewing collars. She was a specialty-- into men's collars was her specialty.

OK. Hang on a second. Your mother had how many brothers and sisters?

Probably six.

And did she have more than one sister? No. The only memory of-- yes, she did. She had her sister in Warsaw.

OK.

She had a sister in Warsaw and a daughter that lived in Warsaw. And she was actually killed after the war in Demblin. They came back, the NKVD. The Polish NKVD they came. And she was married already. She survived on Polish papers. She was the oldest daughter of my aunt, which I remember very vaguely, but I know her very well and remember her. And she lived in Poland.

She came back to her residence. And the NKVD, the Polish guys that were cooperating with the Germans after the war came in. There were pogroms, and it's known in history. And the husband came out for two minutes. They killed her and her husband's mother. I do not remember who else was killed. So she survived. She was the only daughter of my mother's oldest sister.

So she had survived the war--

--Pole. She was on Polish papers because she lives in Warsaw.

OK. But when you say the Polish NKVD, that would mean that they were cooperating with the Soviet Union.

No, they cooperated-- they were still part of the German-- they were Poles. It was called-- they were the Kielce pogrom, and that was the pogrom in our small town.

Uh-huh. In Demblin.

Yeah. And you know who else was killed in those that I just refreshed in my memory is the husband's sister. And he emigrated to Sweden after the war and remarried. And for some reason, I lost contact with him.

So that would have been her husband who is-- of the girl who was killed.

Correct. Which was my niece-- my mother's sister's daughter.

So your cousin.

I do not remember if she had any more children, but I know her very well because she came back to us after the war.

I see.

And she moved back to the town where we lived. That's why-- my mother and us never went there anymore, because they were killing people constantly.

OK. So there were two sisters. Your mother--

Three sisters. One in Warsaw that lived that has this one child. My mother has the sister that became later my mother.

OK.

And then there were three or four brothers.

All right. Your mother was--

Then there was another brother that emigrated to Brazil, if I am not mistaken, before the war.

OK. So your mother's name was Braha.

Correct.

And your-- her sister's name that she was so close to was--

Feiga.

Feiga. And the oldest sister-- what was her name?

Don't remember.

OK. Doesn't matter. It's OK. So it is that your parents and you are taken from your home and you're put in this labor camp. And your aunt is with you at that time?

Yes, and her husband.

And her husband.

But her husband-- I have very little recollection about him. I just know that by the end of the war, my father was sent to Buchenwald. And there is a testimony in the archives about his death almost-- he died under last March before liberation.

That's your father or--

My father.

Your father. And her husband?

I have absolutely no memory about him.

OK.

I just know her because she helped me survive. She used to bring me a portion-- an egg in her mouth and food so I would eat, because during the day I was all hidden. At night I was allowed to go out from underneath.

So tell me about-- so your aunt, by the time you're all together in this camp, her daughter had been shot. Her daughter



had been killed.

Correct.

And it was-- you were the only child. And were there any other children in the labor camp?

I think so.

You think so.

In fact, I have a good friend, Bella, Bella Davis that was with us in the concentration camp. And then I think Bieniek, which is-- I am not positive, but I think which I am quite in touch. He lives in Houston. And our mothers were very good friends with each other after the war.

And tell me, how were you hidden? Can you explain how you were hidden?

We were-- during the day, I was not allowed to come out underneath.

Underneath what?

Underneath the barracks, you know? Pryczes they're called. You know, those wooden thing that people were sleeping on them?

Oh, these planks.

Right.

OK. And so you were underneath one of these planks?

Right. And at night, I was allowed to come out. That's why I'm so short. I never grew.

So do you remember staying there quietly during the day?

Of course. Of course. See, and this loss of memory of that period is very-- it's almost like I swept it under the rug. When Spielberg asked me for an interview, I never did it because-- my mother did and I never did it, because I didn't want to have anything to do with it. This is my first interview in all the years of my memories about my life before the war, my life right after the war. I just can recall the times that we were liberated.

So why did you change your mind to give an interview now?

Because I feel-- I think I'm at the end of my life, and I want to have some interview. In fact, my children have asked me, why didn't I do it? And the reason was I wanted to sweep all my memories as much as I could. I almost erased that time in my life.

Mm-hmm. So if you were to begin your life-- that is, where would you start it if you had your choice? Where would you begin your story?

I think when we came out of the concentration camps and I arrived to Israel, to a beautiful country, to sunshine, to warmth, to love. And I think this is much-- I remember more my memories there than my other ones. I still have vacant points about what happened to me a long time ago, but it's like I didn't want to remember it.

Tell me what you can about your mother-- not your aunt, but your mother-- in the camp. What--

She was very loving. In fact, she saved my life, because when the Russians were coming in to liberate us-- it was in

1945, end of the war-- I was very little, so she kept me under a big skirt. She got a bullet to her ears. Shaved her ears. Almost shaved her brain. And that's how I survived.

You mean they shot her?

Yes.

The Russians shot her?

Yes, yes. Not the Russians. It was a time when they started to get-- took my father to Buchenwald, and they separated the women and the children. And that's all what I remember. I remember after the war, she was telling me-- because she survived with me, the war.

Are you talking about your mother or your aunt?

My mother and my aunt. Both of them survived.

Both of them survived the war?

Correct.

OK. So let's-- but let's go back still to the camp that is so hard to recall, because we need to get as much sense of it as possible. You were hidden from 1939? Is this what we're saying? 1939 until 19--

I think-- I don't know for sure, but I have to look in the archives. What matters is when we were taken out from Demblin from our apartment to the local-- to the city concentration camps. I think-- because my mother was supposed to be such a-- she supplied the Polish army and she had to-- I think we were, like, the last to be shipped to the concentration camp. And they needed my aunt because she was an excellent dressmaker.

The Germans needed your aunt?

Yeah.

OK. So your mother and your father worked either in munitions or gathering potatoes, one or the other. And your aunt-- and your aunt worked as a dressmaker in the camp.

Correct.

OK.

Outside-- she was there a whole day, and then she was ushered in. I think that camp was a little more mild than any other concen-- because there were some children there.

Yeah, that was one of my questions, is--

I think there were some other children. It seems that my friend, my cousin that lives in Paris, and my-- I don't know how much he knows, but my friend in Houston I think has a little more [? thing. ?] And according to him, they were [NON-ENGLISH]. You know what it is? It's an arrangement for my cousin that was killed that he would marry her or she was his girlfriend.

Some story appeared recently when I was there. I was just on a conference in Houston, and he's already not very well. He couldn't see too well, so I helped him out a lot. And he was telling me these things. So I get bits and bits of my time that I have very little memory about it.

So he was supposed to marry--

Supposed to be. She was his girlfriend. That's what he had mentioned to me on my last time when I spent there now in Houston and did the interview.

Yeah. But tell me, which cousin would this have been?

She was the one that was killed.

But she was a little girl.

It doesn't matter. They usually do it when they're very young. It's called [NON-ENGLISH]. You promise that you're going to marry that person, or whatever. I mean, that's a story that comes across.

So this is something that adults make, adults-- or the children.

Yeah, no, that's what the adults made. It's a story that came through my mind. I mean, I'm trying to find out bits and pieces of my life.

I understand.

And this is where little bits of my memory is.

Can you tell me about your father in this camp, what he-- how he acted, what he did?

I have very, very little memory about it. I know he was very loving, but I have a total blank on it.

How sad. He was your dad. He's your father.

Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah.

I actually, when I got this picture, which I want you to show it again--

We will do that. We will do that.

And I looked at him. I only started realizing what he meant in my life and who he was. And my grandchildren, one of my grandsons has his name. And now when I look at the picture, there is some little flashes that come back to me, but very faint. Very, very faint.

Do you remember--

I just know that I was very protected by the both of them and very loving. That's all I can tell you.

OK. So your father disappears as far as you--

No, he was-- he was sent to Buchenwald.

No, but for a child, did you-- did you know where he went?

No. No. Completely, the memories disappeared.

Yeah. Yeah. He just leave-- he vanishes from your life.

Correct. Not vanished from my life because I wanted so.

No, no.

Vanished from my life or memories.

Yeah. Yeah. And he's sent to Buchenwald, and he dies in the last days.

Yes. I found in the archive of Buchenwald-- the archive in the museum of Washington his testimony, his work in the concentration camp because Germans, whatever they were, they were very correct. And his date when he was sent on the last March. Whatever I have some memory or somebody told me, I think had sugar or water. He died from hunger on the March.

So what the documents that you found at the Holocaust museum filled in some story, some pieces that you didn't know before.

Exactly. Exactly.

What kind of feeling did you have when you saw those documents?

I was devastated. Absolutely devastated. I mean, sometimes I think in my life, maybe because I am a very strong character, I fought it. Sometimes I have dreams which I try to erase as much as I can about what happened to me. And I very seldom talk about.

I think there are very few people in my lifestyle now know where I come from and what-- I mostly talk about my immigration from one country to the other. I mostly talk with my friends and acquaintances and maybe business associates. Very much Jewish. Love Judaism. I'm not Orthodox, but very-- a very believer. And some people that met me don't believe that I really went through that much. I think I am a survivor. And I cherish this.

Mm-hmm.

I made a goal of myself. I got extremely successful children. I invested a lot of effort and love and devotion to them, as I may say. But I'm reaping now wonderful things about them. My son, the physician, has a nice family, a wife and two children. Very successful. My daughter is a gem for me, and I love her to death, as well as my son, of course. But especially she has been a moral and a financial and every support that I could get from her.

Well, that's a lovely tribute.

And she is-- she's everything any mother could dream about.

Tell me the names of your children.

My son is Irwin Grosman, I-R-S-- I-R-W-I-N.

And your daughter?

And my daughter is Raquel, R-A-Q-U-E-L, Raquel Grosman. Married. And she has this little boy, only one child, Jonas, which is-- not only him, but all my three children are--

Your grandchildren--

--love of my life. My oldest granddaughter, Hannah, she's extremely intelligent. Just finished college. She went to Emory. And my little son, which is now-- little son-- he's just going to go to day college as well. He's just accepted. And

my little boy, which is-- I call him my favorite. Adorable and wonderful, and that's it.

Did they ask you-- did you children and your grandchildren ask you about your childhood, your early life?

My mother-- I'm sorry-- my daughter is very much involved, and she knows all my history. And my son constantly reads my mother's testimonial. My mother made a testimony, but I never did.

Well, tell me. What kind of a testimony did your mother make? Well, there is-- on the internet, there is her testimony.

What is your-- and so-- Braha?

Braha [? Winchester. ?] Her second-- she remarried after the war.

OK.

She is Braha Rosenberg [? Winchester. ?]

Uh-huh.

And so I am Renee Grosman Aurbach.

OK. Aurbach-- you mean Renee Aurbach Grosman.

Correct. I'm sorry.

That's OK. Now you mentioned something that your mother and your sister-- your mother and her sister-- that is, your aunt, Feiga-- came to an agreement of some kind. And tell me a bit more about what this agreement means, and what was it?

The agreement was that after the tragedy with the child that was killed, if I survive and she survives, I will become her daughter.

You're talking about your aunt, if your aunt survives.

Yeah. If my mother's survived, if I survive, and if-- all three of us. So I actually became her daughter. I lived more years with my aunt. I married an American citizen. I came here. He was a survivor of Schindler's list. And my children were born here in the States. I took me aunt with me with her second husband, and she lived here with me in the United States.

OK.

My mother remained in Israel with her husband and family. And my aunt, my children knew her. They always call her aunt, but they knew they were her grandmother.

OK. That confuses me.

Yes.

That confuses me, because why would your aunt become your mother if your own mother is still alive?

Because this was torture, that after the tragedy of losing her own child. Which in my mother's mind, they were so close to each other that they would share me. And in order to share me, there was this dedication that I live together with my aunt, that I take my aunt under my wings.

Rather than you-- she takes you under her wings, you take her under the wings.

Correct. And I lived with her.

So your father disappears, your--

He did not disappear.

I know, but he disappears from your life. He goes to-- he's sent to Buchenwald.

Yes. But this is a memory that disappeared in my mind.

Yeah.

But it had nothing to do with love or devotion.

No, no, not at all.

Just the opposite. I loved my mother, and I was very close with my mother.

Your mother or your father?

Both of them. But my mother survived. I'm talking about years after the war--

Yeah, yeah.

--more than what happened before the war. I was so little and I have very little memories about it. But my memories are after the war.

OK.

And after the war, my mother remarried a very nice gentleman with children. I was very close with them. I lived with them in Israel. But when I married, I remained with my aunt and took my aunt with me to this States.

OK. I'll come to that. I'll come to that. But right now, still, before the war ends, I want to ask a few questions. And I started putting it this way, that the two men, the two adults are no longer there, the male adults. Your uncle is no longer there and your father is no longer there. It's only the two women, your aunt and your mother who are left, and you who is hidden for so many years under those barracks.

Correct.

Now your aunt and your mother, they were never sent away from Demblin camp?

They were-- they needed-- my mother was working there. No, they didn't.

OK.

And my aunt was a dressmaker, and they needed her.

I see.

So the only time when the Russians-- they sent us-- the last two years, I think they sent us to Czestochowa, to the HASAG concentration camp.

Uh-huh. And what was in the HASAG concentration camp? How was that different?

[LAUGHS]

You don't know.

I don't know.

You don't know. It's OK. That's OK. But nevertheless, you go with them.

Correct.

And when you're being transported, you're seen. People see you when you go from the one camp to the other.

Of course.

OK.

So it could have been if they didn't want to have children along, you could have been taken at that point.

I guess my mother protected me. I don't know that much about this, how events happened. And what did mother do to really-- I think my mother and my aunt both were watching over me and trying to protect me in every way of all.

OK.

How events happened-- how could anybody even in such tragedy, even a shock of the world or a shock I was young, I was--

Do you remember being liberated?

I don't-- I guess yes, but I guess no, you know? It's difficult to say.

OK.

I mean--

OK.

I had mentioned to you that I remember more things that happened right after the war than I remember a lot from the war time.

OK. But I ask sometimes questions in a different way, because sometimes that can juggle a person's memory.

Like I said, I told you a few stories about some were told to me. Some-- they flashed on me. But there is really very little memories about those years.

And your mother-- now she said that-- you told me that you were hiding under her skirt, and her head was shaven.

That was-- yes. That was I remember the only thing that she got the bullet-- should I show it with my hand?

Yeah, yeah.

Through her ear and it came out. And--

So somebody shot at her?

Yes. I think that must have been a German, because maybe she tried to run away. I can't really make any statements that is not really exactly the way it is, you know? Or the truth. I mean, it's the truth, but--

You don't know the circumstances, all of it.

Correct.

All right. So you know that she got a bullet and that it went through-- near her ear and out.

Correct.

Did she suffer from hearing loss after the war?

Yes, many years. Many years. And I have a problem with my hearing as well. I inherited it.

All right. So let's go to that place where you start having memories. Do you remember traveling from Europe to Israel?

Yes. I remember we came after the war to Poland, and it happened, that tragedy, with my mother's oldest daughter. She remarried right after the war. And the NKVD, they were the whole few Jews that-- maybe they're afraid that we're going to take away their properties. And since my mother and my family was very affluent in that little town, they came in that day-- did I repeat myself?

That's OK.

The husband came out just to buy something so he was safe. They killed his mother, his wife, and his sister. And after this tragedy, we ran away from Poland.

Oh, so you were in the town as well, yeah.

Yes. But we were actually liberated in Czestochowa. So we stayed, because they transferred us from Demblin to Czestochowa to HASAG. And when they transferred us-- that's all the details I know. And when we were in the HASAG-- so we remained-- I don't know if we stayed a long time in Czestochowa or not. I can't recall this.

OK.

But I know that I-- let me just refresh my memory. If-- I don't remember. I think we went from there to Lodz, and we lived a while in Lodz before we emigrated. My mother remarried and we went to Israel. But there is-- I have much more memories about this period of time than I have--

OK. OK. So you don't know if your mother remarried--

Yes, my mother remarried I think right after the war. Maybe 1945 or 1946.

In Israel already, or still in Poland?

No, in Poland. In Poland.

So when you went to Israel, it was as a larger family?

Correct.

And did your aunt go with you?



My aunt went with me, yes. Yes.

All right. And do you remember anything of the trip, going to Israel?

I think we went on a train through Europe, and we stopped someplace in Europe. And I remember we took rations with us. We took cans of food and eggs, because there was [INAUDIBLE]. It was a period of Israel that food was very scarce there. And till today, I cannot throw out food or I-- [LAUGHS] it's funny. And that's really almost a story. Throwing out food is not one of my favorite things.

Yeah. Did you ever remember feeling hungry?

Of course. Of course. And this is a flash memory, of course, of course. That's why food have a tremendous importance in my life psychologically. I will make sure that food is part of my being. Actually, my children even tease me about it.

Oh, really?

Oh, have you eaten? I feel wonderful if I can feed my grandson, which is a very poor eater.

[LAUGHS]

I feel great if I give away food to somebody. I love to do it. It's almost a happening to me. And sometimes it's embarrassing to push food on other people, but it makes me feel good.

In some ways, it's like giving life, because food sustains you.

I share a lot of food. I do. It's part of my charity. I know it's not charity really. Really pretty generous.

Yeah.

You know? I'm very much involved in the Holocaust and things. I go to all the conferences, and very much part of it.

So tell me a little bit about how life developed for you in Israel.

Well, I went to a nursing school and I finished a nurse.

No, but that's later. I'm saying when you first arrived, you're 10 years old.

Oh, when we first arrived, we stayed in tents in Ma'abarot, which was a place where they-- I lived with my mother and stepfather. My aunt at that time already was remarried in Poland and she had her own place.

So she didn't come with you?

She came with me when I went to the States.

I see. But she--

I still saw her on a regular basis all the time.

All right.

And I saw my mother. I lived with my mother actually and stepfather in a building that was-- we had rooms there, because we had an aunt after the war, which the cousins I'm very close with. They gave us part of their residence in a room.

Where was this? What was--

This was in Lod-- no, this was in Israel.

What part? What part of Israel?

We lived in Tel Aviv, in the Tel Aviv area.

OK. So you had relatives there who let you stay in part of your residence? And this is with your mother and your stepfather?

Yes.

OK.

And your aunt, Feiga--

Yes, and she lived with her husband in a different residence, but I--

Also in Israel.

Correct.

OK. Because you mentioned she stayed in Poland.

Well, she stayed in Poland. She married in Poland, but emigrated with us.

OK, that's what I thought. That's what I thought. OK. So your aunt and your mother are living close together and you're staying with your mother.

Correct.

All right. And so that's in the beginning. Do you start school in--

I did a little schooling in Poland, a few grades in Poland, and I finished primary school in Poland.

Oh, did you?

Yeah. And then when I came from there, I enlisted in-- I stayed in the kibbutz a very short period of time and then went to a nursing school. And I worked in Israel in a hospital, in the Beilinson hospital as a nurse. And peds-- I actually finished-- there was a special program for children-- will that show that I touched my face? Is that something--

OK. So you were in nursing school in Israel.

Correct. And worked in a hospital in Israel.

OK. And how did you meet your husband?

I met him through mutual friends. They were from my same hometown. And they came to visit, and that's how I met my husband. Can you stop it? I have such an itch in my-- You think? OK. All right.

So you met your husband through mutual friends.

Correct. And when did you-- when did you marry?

We married in Israel, and I came as an immigrant to this country.

When? In what year?

In 1958.

OK. And were your children born here?

My children were born here.

All right.

Actually, in '57, I think.

OK.

'58, '57.

And when they became teenagers or so, did they start asking you questions about--

Because of my husband being a Holocaust survivor, there was a lot of Holocaust issues in my family in the first years.

So did-- and you told me he was on Schindler's list?

Survivor.

And where did he come from in Poland? Did he come from Poland?

Yeah. He came from Krasnik. [POLISH].

Mm-hmm. And what was his story?

I was very much involved with this group with everything. Most of my friends were all Holocaust survivors, and a group-- all of my friends mostly was Holocaust survivors.

And did your husband tell you his story?

We didn't talk a lot about it, but we had a lot of-- I think his behavior was very much Holocaust-connected. When the child used to go out, he was very worried. He was quite scared. Very scared. He actually, when we lived in the Bronx, somebody had-- I mean, they mugged him, but I think he was never the same after it.

I think the Holocaust had a much deeper effect on him, because he was about 10 years older than I was, than it was on me. I think a lot of his behavior and stuff was Holocaust-connected. Today, I swept it under the rug. And for him, it was Holocaust. So there was a lot of Holocaust in the house.

A lot of the talking was about that.

Not talked-- it was action more than talk.

OK. OK. And did he ever give a testimony to anybody?

I don't know. Possibly. I don't think so, because Spielberg-- the Spielberg group, I was very much in the group, and they

wanted to interview me, and I don't want to have anything to do with it.

Yeah.

It's why I have a blank on all the-- on the first year of my life.

I understand. Now, your husband's first name was what?

Morris.

Morris. Morris Grosman.

Correct.

And what of his story do you know about his life before the war? Where did he come from? What kind of family--

He came from a small town of Krasnik. I probably know a lot because I associated with a lot of his friends socially. We used to-- they have a cemetery, and we used to go to the cemetery. And we were socially involved with a lot of his people.

So tell me a little bit about his story, his life. You say he was 10 years older than you, so that would be--

I had a wonderful marriage. He adored me.

Mm.

I think I was the power-- power in that relationship. I think the Holocaust, the fear-- he had an unsurpassed fear. He used to dream a lot about the Holocaust. And I think in his life, he lived more Holocaust than I did. Without details, but it-- really, really Holocaust was part of his being.

So it affected him throughout his life afterwards.

Much more than it-- I don't know, it affected me.

You told me that sometimes you have dreams.

Yeah.

Do you remember what those are of?

They're not pleasant dreams, you know? Dreams of fear, of hunger, of disease. I actually-- till today, I can't watch shooting. I hate to tell you, but German shepherds are a disaster for me, because I remember German shepherds pulling out people from hiding and killing them. This I remember. And those dreams are recurring to me. And I don't like dogs. I don't watch shooting situations. I prefer a sweet story of-- and very much generally intelligent, well-bred.

Mm-hmm. Yeah.

What else can I say? What other questions would you ask me?

Well--

I made a life for myself, very much so. I became an enterprise. I had a business that--

Tell me about-- tell me about the business that you were in.

Well, I was in-- I am in the-- I was in the jewelry business, and I was very successful.

And--

I really made a goal of myself, I must say, on every level. On the social level, I had a tremendous amount of friends. I'm generally quite liked, you know? Very successful children.

There's much to be proud of.

Which I am, of course. I am loved by peers. I don't-- I try not to hurt anybody. I'm generous, generally.

Did you ever go back to Poland? I went back on a conference. And actually, I went back to see my place in Warsaw, in Praga. But I found anything. I came back devastated from the place.

I also have an uncle which is still alive, which I lost a little contact with him, that lives in Melbourne, Australia. And he was a brother, the youngest brother who survived from my-- from my father.

[GASP] Oh, I see. From your father's family. I see. Did you ever go back to Demblin?

No. No, no, no. And I have no desire to go.

OK.

I have a hurt. A big hurt. I can only remember the country place. And that picture that you're going to see is taken on a vacation that I went with my grandma. She's not in the picture. But my father is keeping me on his lap. And that's-- actually, my children had made from a little small picture. It's in my bedroom.

We'll take a-- we'll film it in a minute.

I would like you to see it, and I would like you to make a picture.

We will. We will. And tell me about your mother and your aunt. You say your aunt came with you to the United States?

Yeah, and she passed away here in America, and my mother came to the funeral. I used to come with my children, with my little son, I used to go to visit my mother and told him she was my mother. And yet he knew my aunt very well. She took care of him. And her husband, the uncle, took care of my children all the time.

What year did your mother pass?

In the '80s.

OK.

And my aunt too in the '80s.

OK. Is there anything else you would like to add to what we talked about today? Anything that we've missed that you'd want people to know about?

Well, I was telling you my memories as much or-- not remembering them. I wanted to tell you how much I adore my children and how close I am to them. And I'm very proud of myself that I brought in such a wonderful generation.

I am proud of myself that from coming out of ashes, I did achieve a lot. I am extremely happy with myself. I have a good social life. I am still working a little bit, part time. And--

That is an amazing achievement.

Yes.

Coming from--

And I'm very proud of myself. I travel all over the world for pleasure and for other reasons, you know? And I go back to Israel to see my family, my adopted family. They became a part of me. I'm very close to them. At certain years, I helped them a lot. And I love them. I have also a big family in Brazil, which I'm very close. I have cousins from Paris. And my cousin, I got to see him.

It sounds like a good life.

Yes. Yes. I must say. I just pray for my health. I'm trying to be as healthy as I can, trying to eat good food as possibly can.

[LAUGHS]

I could lose a few pounds.

[LAUGHS]

I could have a little more wisdom at certain times. But otherwise, I'm very happy with myself.

Well, thank you.

I think I came out of ashes and I made a human being of myself, for whatever it is.

Well, thank you. Thank you for sharing this with us today. Thank you for finally agreeing and wanting to have your story told and bringing one more piece of the puzzle.

It's for my love for my children. I do it for my wonderful children and grandchildren.

OK.

And I'm so proud that I brought in a wonderful generation. And I hope and pray that I could live long enough to see a lot of happiness, more happiness in their life.

That's wonderful. Thank you.

You're welcome.

And so with this, this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mrs. Renee Grosman on December 19, 2015. And we will take a photograph and film it after in a minute or so.

I would love to show you that picture of my father and myself.

OK. Cut.

Yeah.

OK. So Mrs. Grosman, tell me. What is this photograph of?

Well, this is a photograph that was actually sent before the war to my aunt in Israel. And it's myself and my father. And my children, from a small little print, they made me this gorgeous present. And when I look at my dad, quite a few memories are coming back. But really, this is a treasure that I have from my children and for myself. This is the biggest present they ever gave me. Not others of course, I mean. But this is one of them.

Is this the only photograph you have of your father?

The only photograph.

And his name again was--

Itzak Aurbach.

OK. And he looks like a young man in this photograph. You're a baby, a toddler. And he looks quite young, like he's between 30 or 40 years old.

I would think-- I think in this photograph, he's maybe not even 30.

OK. OK. Thank you. Thank you for sharing that.