

1
00:00:00,000 --> 00:00:03,820

2
00:00:03,820 --> 00:00:06,550
This is tape three, side A.

3
00:00:06,550 --> 00:00:11,190
And when I came
home, I know that

4
00:00:11,190 --> 00:00:13,330
for months, a friend of mine--

5
00:00:13,330 --> 00:00:17,260

6
00:00:17,260 --> 00:00:22,660
the first thing he said to me
is, you will feel paranoid.

7
00:00:22,660 --> 00:00:24,770
I said, not I. He
said, you just wait.

8
00:00:24,770 --> 00:00:27,400
And he was absolutely right.

9
00:00:27,400 --> 00:00:33,580
For months, I felt, when
I heard a car, that--

10
00:00:33,580 --> 00:00:36,430
because they told you,
we are letting you out.

11
00:00:36,430 --> 00:00:39,640
But we keep our
tabs, because they

12
00:00:39,640 --> 00:00:44,500
wanted that you sign with them

that you will be their spy.

13
00:00:44,500 --> 00:00:46,870
And that's a very--

14
00:00:46,870 --> 00:00:48,700
and some people did it.

15
00:00:48,700 --> 00:00:51,280
I mean, I know somebody
who did it, actually,

16
00:00:51,280 --> 00:00:56,222
because he told us that he
signed it, that-- you know.

17
00:00:56,222 --> 00:00:59,620

18
00:00:59,620 --> 00:01:02,350
And that was a kind
of common knowledge--

19
00:01:02,350 --> 00:01:07,080
that if you do not
believe them, don't--

20
00:01:07,080 --> 00:01:10,220

21
00:01:10,220 --> 00:01:13,510
but I was scared
stiff for months

22
00:01:13,510 --> 00:01:18,030
when I heard a car
stop that that's

23
00:01:18,030 --> 00:01:20,870
them coming for me,
because I didn't sign that.

24

00:01:20,870 --> 00:01:21,370
And--

25
00:01:21,370 --> 00:01:24,130

26
00:01:24,130 --> 00:01:27,060
Were you able to
go back to school?

27
00:01:27,060 --> 00:01:28,520
No, I was already out of the--

28
00:01:28,520 --> 00:01:30,100
You had already finished.

29
00:01:30,100 --> 00:01:33,830
No, out of-- because they
threw me out of the university

30
00:01:33,830 --> 00:01:35,810
that I was a
bourgeois originator.

31
00:01:35,810 --> 00:01:36,310
Right.

32
00:01:36,310 --> 00:01:37,970
So you could not re-enter.

33
00:01:37,970 --> 00:01:38,520
Oh, know.

34
00:01:38,520 --> 00:01:40,870
That, you can't.

35
00:01:40,870 --> 00:01:41,500
No, no.

36
00:01:41,500 --> 00:01:43,335
That, they take seriously.

37

00:01:43,335 --> 00:01:45,470

So what did you do then?

38

00:01:45,470 --> 00:01:48,490

Oh, father found me a job
with another architect.

39

00:01:48,490 --> 00:01:54,010

I hated that, because
it was drawing.

40

00:01:54,010 --> 00:01:58,210

And at that time,
today, everything

41

00:01:58,210 --> 00:01:59,650

would be done on a computer.

42

00:01:59,650 --> 00:02:02,350

But at that time,
you had to draw.

43

00:02:02,350 --> 00:02:05,730

It was so boring.

44

00:02:05,730 --> 00:02:07,870

And we went to Israel
then, because that

45

00:02:07,870 --> 00:02:10,900

was the last country
they would allow.

46

00:02:10,900 --> 00:02:12,400

Now, what year are
we talking about?

47

00:02:12,400 --> 00:02:13,720

'49.

48

00:02:13,720 --> 00:02:15,783

So you stayed in

Prague until '49.

49
00:02:15,783 --> 00:02:16,450
And then where--

50
00:02:16,450 --> 00:02:18,940
Well, the communists
came in '48.

51
00:02:18,940 --> 00:02:21,770

52
00:02:21,770 --> 00:02:28,593
And so we went in '49.

53
00:02:28,593 --> 00:02:30,010
The whole family,
the four of you?

54
00:02:30,010 --> 00:02:38,490
Yes, because that
time, the Czech--

55
00:02:38,490 --> 00:02:41,100
I mean, the communists, whether
the Russian, all of them

56
00:02:41,100 --> 00:02:45,570
believed that Israel
will go into their camp.

57
00:02:45,570 --> 00:02:46,470
So they allowed.

58
00:02:46,470 --> 00:02:52,010
That was a-- because we had,
at that time, visas to Canada.

59
00:02:52,010 --> 00:02:53,820
And they wouldn't
allow us to leave

60

00:02:53,820 --> 00:02:58,650
for Canada, which I am
very thankful today,

61
00:02:58,650 --> 00:03:01,920
since I saw Canada.

62
00:03:01,920 --> 00:03:03,270
But--

63
00:03:03,270 --> 00:03:06,720
What was it like for you
to leave Czechoslovakia?

64
00:03:06,720 --> 00:03:09,530
Well, everybody was kind of--

65
00:03:09,530 --> 00:03:13,380
my generation,
leaving illegally--

66
00:03:13,380 --> 00:03:14,250
in jail.

67
00:03:14,250 --> 00:03:15,990
It was a big upheaval.

68
00:03:15,990 --> 00:03:17,370
It was.

69
00:03:17,370 --> 00:03:22,200
And I had no idea about what--

70
00:03:22,200 --> 00:03:26,700
the Czechs really were very good
to Israel, so it was not that.

71
00:03:26,700 --> 00:03:28,275
But we knew nothing, really.

72
00:03:28,275 --> 00:03:31,960

73
00:03:31,960 --> 00:03:33,180
And--

74
00:03:33,180 --> 00:03:35,100
Did you have any
affinity for Israel

75
00:03:35,100 --> 00:03:36,610
before you went over, any--

76
00:03:36,610 --> 00:03:37,110
No.

77
00:03:37,110 --> 00:03:38,068
--emotional connection?

78
00:03:38,068 --> 00:03:39,210
No, not really.

79
00:03:39,210 --> 00:03:45,090
I mean, for any brave country
which is fighting for its life,

80
00:03:45,090 --> 00:03:49,700
I don't think that I really--

81
00:03:49,700 --> 00:03:50,664
you know.

82
00:03:50,664 --> 00:03:55,290
You didn't feel any Jewish
connection to Israel.

83
00:03:55,290 --> 00:03:55,910
No.

84
00:03:55,910 --> 00:03:56,880
I don't know.

85
00:03:56,880 --> 00:04:00,990

I mean, that's too much to say, didn't, but kind of.

86
00:04:00,990 --> 00:04:06,840
If it were not for the communistic thing overall,

87
00:04:06,840 --> 00:04:09,210
I would feel that's very nice for them.

88
00:04:09,210 --> 00:04:13,720
If they need Israel, that's fine with me, but not for me.

89
00:04:13,720 --> 00:04:15,852
If only everything changed.

90
00:04:15,852 --> 00:04:16,435
What did you--

91
00:04:16,435 --> 00:04:21,180
That was a typical Herzl product.

92
00:04:21,180 --> 00:04:23,350
So where did you settle in Israel, and for how long?

93
00:04:23,350 --> 00:04:24,150
Well, we didn't.

94
00:04:24,150 --> 00:04:25,370
We came.

95
00:04:25,370 --> 00:04:27,060
We went again ahead.

96
00:04:27,060 --> 00:04:30,170
My parents went one transport back.

97

00:04:30,170 --> 00:04:35,190
And first of all, we
staged nearly a strike,

98
00:04:35,190 --> 00:04:39,540
because we were able to
buy tickets up to Bari.

99
00:04:39,540 --> 00:04:42,320
And then we had to
go on a Israeli ship.

100
00:04:42,320 --> 00:04:44,470
Though we went
first class to Bari.

101
00:04:44,470 --> 00:04:47,420
And then we get on
a terrible ship.

102
00:04:47,420 --> 00:04:51,090
So first thing is I'm
looking out of the window.

103
00:04:51,090 --> 00:04:53,280
And there are the
Israeli sailors.

104
00:04:53,280 --> 00:04:57,480
So I say-- they have the
Star of David, or whatever.

105
00:04:57,480 --> 00:05:00,120
So I say, what language?

106
00:05:00,120 --> 00:05:01,640
They said, German.

107
00:05:01,640 --> 00:05:06,720
So I said, OK,
[GERMAN] is Israel?

108
00:05:06,720 --> 00:05:08,980

What kind of a
country is Israel?

109
00:05:08,980 --> 00:05:10,380
It was a sailor.

110
00:05:10,380 --> 00:05:15,810
The first Israeli I meet
says in Yiddish, [YIDDISH]..

111
00:05:15,810 --> 00:05:20,730

112
00:05:20,730 --> 00:05:25,930
The country is nice,
but the people--

113
00:05:25,930 --> 00:05:30,830
so that was my introduction,
which is marvelous

114
00:05:30,830 --> 00:05:33,600
when you think about it.

115
00:05:33,600 --> 00:05:39,510
And then they put us on a ship,
which probably was not supposed

116
00:05:39,510 --> 00:05:43,070
to run for the last 40 years.

117
00:05:43,070 --> 00:05:46,240
And they were trying
to put us down.

118
00:05:46,240 --> 00:05:52,620
And the Hungarians
will go up on the deck.

119
00:05:52,620 --> 00:05:55,220
And we started also
Czech saying, well, why?

120

00:05:55,220 --> 00:05:57,920

We have here some
pregnant women.

121

00:05:57,920 --> 00:06:02,670

I mean, it was not
a nice thing to do.

122

00:06:02,670 --> 00:06:05,040

So it is, so the captain said.

123

00:06:05,040 --> 00:06:06,650

So we said, so we don't go.

124

00:06:06,650 --> 00:06:11,688

So then they came and said,
OK, the pregnant women can.

125

00:06:11,688 --> 00:06:12,230

I don't know.

126

00:06:12,230 --> 00:06:15,260

Probably the captain
was a Hungarian.

127

00:06:15,260 --> 00:06:22,456

And we went to one of
those transit camps

128

00:06:22,456 --> 00:06:30,910

near Haifa, where there were
10,000 people and two latrines.

129

00:06:30,910 --> 00:06:36,610

And I don't know why-- first
of all, they put us in a tent

130

00:06:36,610 --> 00:06:37,530

with 10 people.

131

00:06:37,530 --> 00:06:40,540

That was much [INAUDIBLE].

132
00:06:40,540 --> 00:06:41,170
How much?

133
00:06:41,170 --> 00:06:44,050
We knew we were
only Czechs there.

134
00:06:44,050 --> 00:06:48,670
Comes the evening, so we start
to put one bed over the other

135
00:06:48,670 --> 00:06:52,500
to reach the top to
close the opening.

136
00:06:52,500 --> 00:06:55,540
And comes an Israeli and
says, what are you doing?

137
00:06:55,540 --> 00:06:58,140
We said, we are
closing the opening.

138
00:06:58,140 --> 00:07:00,360
He said, you will choke.

139
00:07:00,360 --> 00:07:02,690
Its June.

140
00:07:02,690 --> 00:07:06,040
I said, what about if it rains?

141
00:07:06,040 --> 00:07:09,300
And he says, it won't rain.

142
00:07:09,300 --> 00:07:11,815
And he's a typical Israeli.

143
00:07:11,815 --> 00:07:13,932
He knows it will not rain.

144

00:07:13,932 --> 00:07:17,090

I mean, we knew
nothing, so we choked.

145

00:07:17,090 --> 00:07:20,710

Next day, we took the
chances, and we found out

146

00:07:20,710 --> 00:07:23,830

it will not rain.

147

00:07:23,830 --> 00:07:29,080

And then that was
Alena who found out--

148

00:07:29,080 --> 00:07:32,920

she said, there
must be a doctor.

149

00:07:32,920 --> 00:07:38,750

And where is a doctor
will be a decent lavatory.

150

00:07:38,750 --> 00:07:41,305

So we marched every day.

151

00:07:41,305 --> 00:07:44,980

And years afterwards, I
would meet somebody who said,

152

00:07:44,980 --> 00:07:49,210

I remember you from the
bed only because you

153

00:07:49,210 --> 00:07:53,050

were the one who, while we
were marching behind you,

154

00:07:53,050 --> 00:07:55,030

the girls know where to go.

155

00:07:55,030 --> 00:07:58,570

They look like they are clean.

156

00:07:58,570 --> 00:08:04,220

And then of course, from there,
we would try to look for jobs.

157

00:08:04,220 --> 00:08:06,320

That was a time when Israel--

158

00:08:06,320 --> 00:08:11,060

600,000 people took in
one million refugees.

159

00:08:11,060 --> 00:08:20,029

And we both got a job in
the airport, in the hotel.

160

00:08:20,029 --> 00:08:25,500

So she wouldn't forget me.

161

00:08:25,500 --> 00:08:28,065

So you looked for
a job, you said.

162

00:08:28,065 --> 00:08:28,690

But there was--

163

00:08:28,690 --> 00:08:30,780

We found then--

164

00:08:30,780 --> 00:08:35,290

Alena was the first
one who found a job.

165

00:08:35,290 --> 00:08:39,600

166

00:08:39,600 --> 00:08:42,539

They gave her a
pushcart, which went

167

00:08:42,539 --> 00:08:46,670

to every plane coming and
going, with Jews and whatever.

168
00:08:46,670 --> 00:08:50,160

169
00:08:50,160 --> 00:08:55,200
And so she said to the owner
that, but I have a sister.

170
00:08:55,200 --> 00:08:58,800
So they gave me a job.

171
00:08:58,800 --> 00:09:08,640
I was probably the unskilled
worker in a bookkeeping office.

172
00:09:08,640 --> 00:09:09,900
They didn't have a machine.

173
00:09:09,900 --> 00:09:14,430
I had to add the
sums the whole day.

174
00:09:14,430 --> 00:09:16,330
But it was a job.

175
00:09:16,330 --> 00:09:19,190

176
00:09:19,190 --> 00:09:22,320
And how long did you
stay there in Israel?

177
00:09:22,320 --> 00:09:30,610
I stayed there probably for
two years, whatever it was.

178
00:09:30,610 --> 00:09:36,760
And then I got myself
a ticket to London.

179

00:09:36,760 --> 00:09:41,370
A friend of ours, who was head
of Swiss Air-- he was a Czech,

180
00:09:41,370 --> 00:09:42,690
originally--

181
00:09:42,690 --> 00:09:44,310
gave me a free ticket.

182
00:09:44,310 --> 00:09:49,980
And I went to London that
I would do something.

183
00:09:49,980 --> 00:09:54,615
I went to school there a
little bit, and wanted to--

184
00:09:54,615 --> 00:09:59,490
was trying to get a scholarship
to one of the universities.

185
00:09:59,490 --> 00:10:03,330
So since that time, I became
a western person who I said,

186
00:10:03,330 --> 00:10:04,590
Little Doggie [BELL NOISE].

187
00:10:04,590 --> 00:10:05,090
Yes.

188
00:10:05,090 --> 00:10:05,590
Yes.

189
00:10:05,590 --> 00:10:07,810
Yes.

190
00:10:07,810 --> 00:10:08,740
And so you went--

191
00:10:08,740 --> 00:10:10,870

how long were you in London?

192
00:10:10,870 --> 00:10:12,340
I was over a year.

193
00:10:12,340 --> 00:10:13,920
Three years, I think.

194
00:10:13,920 --> 00:10:15,670
And then I went back to Israel.

195
00:10:15,670 --> 00:10:17,920
And then I got a
job with somebody

196
00:10:17,920 --> 00:10:26,250
that I came the first
time to this country.

197
00:10:26,250 --> 00:10:28,070
Then I married
the first husband.

198
00:10:28,070 --> 00:10:29,730
Then I married the
second husband.

199
00:10:29,730 --> 00:10:31,260
And then I'm here.

200
00:10:31,260 --> 00:10:33,590
So you've been living in the
United States on and off.

201
00:10:33,590 --> 00:10:39,900
On and off since 1956,
because with my first husband,

202
00:10:39,900 --> 00:10:41,030
we lived also in London.

203
00:10:41,030 --> 00:10:41,950

He was an American.

204

00:10:41,950 --> 00:10:46,440

He was a film
producer at one time.

205

00:10:46,440 --> 00:10:51,960

I lived everywhere
in the Western world.

206

00:10:51,960 --> 00:10:54,900

Can we talk before we end
just a little bit about some

207

00:10:54,900 --> 00:11:03,270

of your thoughts after what you
had gone through because you

208

00:11:03,270 --> 00:11:03,930

were Jewish?

209

00:11:03,930 --> 00:11:06,970

Has that influenced
your feelings about--

210

00:11:06,970 --> 00:11:07,470

About what?

211

00:11:07,470 --> 00:11:10,110

--being Jewish in any way?

212

00:11:10,110 --> 00:11:10,930

Has it changed?

213

00:11:10,930 --> 00:11:12,420

Did it make you more aware?

214

00:11:12,420 --> 00:11:13,440

Did it--

215

00:11:13,440 --> 00:11:16,980

Oh, I'm-- yes.

216
00:11:16,980 --> 00:11:19,060
I am very aware
that I am Jewish.

217
00:11:19,060 --> 00:11:21,420
And I think Israel
did it much more.

218
00:11:21,420 --> 00:11:32,640
I think I am the typical
product of [INAUDIBLE]..

219
00:11:32,640 --> 00:11:34,170
They will come when they need.

220
00:11:34,170 --> 00:11:36,795
But it's a great country.

221
00:11:36,795 --> 00:11:39,580

222
00:11:39,580 --> 00:11:46,200
And I think that Israel
did much more for me than--

223
00:11:46,200 --> 00:11:47,820
Even though you
went through what

224
00:11:47,820 --> 00:11:49,980
you went through
because you were Jewish.

225
00:11:49,980 --> 00:11:51,270
Yeah, but that's negative.

226
00:11:51,270 --> 00:11:56,020

227
00:11:56,020 --> 00:11:58,440
The Israeli experience

is positive.

228
00:11:58,440 --> 00:12:04,700

229
00:12:04,700 --> 00:12:10,100
Are there any sights
or smells today

230
00:12:10,100 --> 00:12:14,090
that remind you of some of your
experiences during the war?

231
00:12:14,090 --> 00:12:20,910

232
00:12:20,910 --> 00:12:23,060
Yeah, there are smells.

233
00:12:23,060 --> 00:12:25,650
Oh, I can't tell
you which and when.

234
00:12:25,650 --> 00:12:26,596
But there are.

235
00:12:26,596 --> 00:12:47,430

236
00:12:47,430 --> 00:12:49,410
Do you get reparations?

237
00:12:49,410 --> 00:12:55,490
Yes, I get-- because the
Czechs can get only for health.

238
00:12:55,490 --> 00:12:57,360
But Czechs don't get
like the Germans.

239
00:12:57,360 --> 00:13:01,150
The Germans get-- the former

Germans get big reparations.

240
00:13:01,150 --> 00:13:03,180
So we don't get.

241
00:13:03,180 --> 00:13:04,125
But we get something.

242
00:13:04,125 --> 00:13:07,500
I get every month something.

243
00:13:07,500 --> 00:13:09,845
How do you feel about
getting reparations?

244
00:13:09,845 --> 00:13:13,470
I feel they owe me much
more than they are paying.

245
00:13:13,470 --> 00:13:16,560
I don't have any kind
of this hang-ups,

246
00:13:16,560 --> 00:13:19,740
because it's not
what was negotiated.

247
00:13:19,740 --> 00:13:22,530
It was not blood money.

248
00:13:22,530 --> 00:13:25,180
It's not for life.

249
00:13:25,180 --> 00:13:26,710
It's not that they
will pay you--

250
00:13:26,710 --> 00:13:29,010
you lost so many, and
so many, we will pay you

251
00:13:29,010 --> 00:13:32,340

so much, and so on,
because the Germans

252
00:13:32,340 --> 00:13:38,400
got it so-called for loss
of their earning capacity,

253
00:13:38,400 --> 00:13:39,160
or whatever.

254
00:13:39,160 --> 00:13:46,440
And we get-- it's like what
you have here from insurances.

255
00:13:46,440 --> 00:13:48,150
So I don't feel that--

256
00:13:48,150 --> 00:13:54,400

257
00:13:54,400 --> 00:13:59,820
Did it make a difference,
going through what

258
00:13:59,820 --> 00:14:02,880
you did go through,
having your sister there?

259
00:14:02,880 --> 00:14:03,750
I'm sure.

260
00:14:03,750 --> 00:14:04,320
I'm sure.

261
00:14:04,320 --> 00:14:06,210
Was that a source
of strength for you?

262
00:14:06,210 --> 00:14:06,860
I'm sure.

263
00:14:06,860 --> 00:14:11,090

264
00:14:11,090 --> 00:14:13,520
In what way?

265
00:14:13,520 --> 00:14:14,360
I can't tell you.

266
00:14:14,360 --> 00:14:18,680
But I'm sure, because
one of the worst things

267
00:14:18,680 --> 00:14:20,300
is that you are a lonely person.

268
00:14:20,300 --> 00:14:20,810
I'm sorry.

269
00:14:20,810 --> 00:14:22,580
I think he wants to go out.

270
00:14:22,580 --> 00:14:24,320
Come, [DOG'S NAME].

271
00:14:24,320 --> 00:14:26,750
Besides being with
your sister, what

272
00:14:26,750 --> 00:14:32,180
do you think kept you going in
this terrible, terrible time?

273
00:14:32,180 --> 00:14:33,300
I really don't know.

274
00:14:33,300 --> 00:14:35,810
But I think it's a
natural human instinct

275
00:14:35,810 --> 00:14:38,378
that you want to survive.

276

00:14:38,378 --> 00:14:40,170

I think it's one of
the strongest instinct.

277

00:14:40,170 --> 00:14:45,140

278

00:14:45,140 --> 00:14:48,710

Do you and your sister talk
about your experiences?

279

00:14:48,710 --> 00:14:49,820

No, not really.

280

00:14:49,820 --> 00:14:53,800

281

00:14:53,800 --> 00:14:57,220

And did she follow your--

282

00:14:57,220 --> 00:14:59,920

in coming with you
to the United States?

283

00:14:59,920 --> 00:15:01,780

She was here before.

284

00:15:01,780 --> 00:15:04,190

Her husband had to come
here for something.

285

00:15:04,190 --> 00:15:09,100

So she went-- no, she
lives in Switzerland now.

286

00:15:09,100 --> 00:15:11,120

So she never settled
in the United States.

287

00:15:11,120 --> 00:15:11,620

No.

288
00:15:11,620 --> 00:15:12,120
No.

289
00:15:12,120 --> 00:15:14,290
No.

290
00:15:14,290 --> 00:15:14,960
I'm sorry.

291
00:15:14,960 --> 00:15:17,230
That's the back.

292
00:15:17,230 --> 00:15:22,630
Have you talked about your
experiences much to others?

293
00:15:22,630 --> 00:15:23,560
Not really.

294
00:15:23,560 --> 00:15:24,550
No.

295
00:15:24,550 --> 00:15:26,000
Here and there, but not really.

296
00:15:26,000 --> 00:15:27,610
No.

297
00:15:27,610 --> 00:15:29,140
Is there anything
you wanted to add

298
00:15:29,140 --> 00:15:31,140
that we haven't talked about?

299
00:15:31,140 --> 00:15:32,270
I don't think so.

300
00:15:32,270 --> 00:15:32,770
No.

301
00:15:32,770 --> 00:15:33,270
No.

302
00:15:33,270 --> 00:15:34,260
No.

303
00:15:34,260 --> 00:15:37,630
But you transcribe it, or
will they transcribe it?

304
00:15:37,630 --> 00:15:39,500
Well, we can talk
about that later.

305
00:15:39,500 --> 00:15:41,410
OK, well, I want
to thank you very

306
00:15:41,410 --> 00:15:42,930
much for doing the interview.

307
00:15:42,930 --> 00:15:45,390
We appreciate very
much what you did.

308
00:15:45,390 --> 00:15:45,890
Thanks.

309
00:15:45,890 --> 00:15:46,390
Yeah.

310
00:15:46,390 --> 00:15:48,940
No.

311
00:15:48,940 --> 00:15:51,810
This concludes the
interview of Irena Kirkland.

312
00:15:51,810 --> 00:15:56,740
It took place on June 26,
1996 in Washington, DC.

313

00:15:56,740 --> 00:15:58,990

And it was conducted

by Gail Schwartz

314

00:15:58,990 --> 00:16:02,940

on behalf of the United States

Holocaust Memorial Museum.

315

00:16:02,940 --> 00:16:06,000