

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Jaffa Munk
October 8, 1996
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PREFACE

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JAFFA MUNK
October 8, 1996

I: what was your name at birth?

S: My name at birth was Noemi Donath

I: and where were you born?

S: I was born in Onod, which is the county of Borshod(?). It is about nine kilometer or nine mile from Mishkoltz.

I: And what was your date of birth?

S: My date of birth was April 10th 1931

I: Would you talk about your childhood?

S: Yes, I grew up as the daughter of a rabbi, my father was a rabbi and twenty six little towns belonged to his congregation. I had a beautiful childhood growing up among three brothers and sisters. The name of my brother was Joseph, and my sister is Esther who is alive and is living in Montreal. My parents were very educated people and they looked into it that the children should be going to the best schools. I attended a Lutheran school because there was no more Jewish school at the time that I grew up. However, we had been learning Jewish studies in the afternoons. Also I had a private teacher who was teaching the German language. That was the language that more advanced people, more intellectual people had been learning and my father was originally from Bratislava Czechoslovakia and he wanted his children to be very cultured. And we were always going to the library, picking up books. My father would see what we are reading, he would discuss with us. I come from a very religious background but yet very open minded. We had lots of celebrations. The holidays, Purim, everybody would come to the house.

I: Everybody. Who? Relatives, friends...

S: Friends. Friends and people who lived in the town. The whole town had only fifty

Jewish families.

I: And how many. How large was the town?

S: The population of the town was less than 3000 people. And from that about 300 were Jewish people. Fifty families, but you know, large families. Mostly the Jewish people in the town, they were store keepers. A lot of the people, they had big farms. There were doctors, some lawyers, but mainly really shopkeepers.

I: And your father was the rabbi in the town?

S: My father was the rabbi of the town and they really loved him. He had a special school for big boys, which is what we called yeshiva. And I remember very clearly the beautiful times when they were baking the matzah near to the house, you know, singing and I used to love as a young kid to walk around and all these lovely boys used to pet me and I used to tell them leave me alone. So they named me “leave me alone” in Hungarian.

We had a beautiful house. Lots of fruit trees. About fifty fruit trees. My momma used to cook all the fruits. You know it wasn't like today you go to the store and buy the canned goods, she would be putting into jars, making her own jams and prewn-de-qua(?), all these things, it was all a lot of fun. At the end of our house was a river named Shayo. And we used to go to the bank of the river. It had a lot of grass, and cousins would come from the big city of Budapest and we would giggle there. And we would be dancing there, going swimming there. So we had a lovely upbringing.

I remember that my mother used to bring a sewing lady and she would be sewing for us beautiful outfits for the holidays. She was a very devoted mother to her children. I used to tell “mama you need also something new” but first was her three children. She had a lot of pride, and two daughters. My sister's name is Judit Esther and my brother's name was Joseph. And my brother was educated in the big city in Budapest. And we used to love when he came home and he told us beautiful stories about his experience in the big city. I can thank him for who I am today because he was always the one introducing me to a lot of things about science, and books. He would come home and he would encourage that “whatever you have you can lose one day but what you have in your mind, that nobody can take away”. So that was our life in the small town.

We had been very friendly with the gentile people.

I: You went to a Lutheran school

S: I went to a Lutheran school. And we were very friendly with the minister. We were very friendly with the doctor of the town. We were very friendly with our simple neighbors too, who would love to come. And my mother was called the midwife of the town because when anybody gave birth to a child my mother was rushing and helping. Warming water for them, giving them some kind of food.

I: So this was not just Jews, but also gentiles

S: Also gentiles, we were very friendly, we went to schools. A matter of fact I happened to be in my childhood very good in arithmetic. And there was the daughter of the so called “mayor” of the town, she had difficulty and I used to go to her house, or she would come to our house. There was no separation between us except religiously. They went to their church and we went to our temple. But there was such a friendship.

Or we would go to the farmer to fetch our milk, because in those days you didn’t have milk in the store. So we would go and we would sing with them while they were milking the milk. Or they would come over to us and taste the cookies. My mother was an excellent baker. And we didn’t feel that there was any kind of hostility between us and our gentile people in the town until about 1942/43 when they started to throw bad words towards us.

I: Now before 1942 were you aware that there was anything different going on?

S: No. Nothing that was going on except a certain kind of restriction such as that the Jewish people could not anymore have beef because they did not allow any more to kill cows according to the rituals of the Jewish faith. So that was the very—

I: So this was the Hungarian government that said you can no longer kill cows according to the Jewish faith.

S: That’s right. That was the very first thing that I recall. And then later on when we started to feel that there is something going on, us as children, we went on Shabbat Saturday afternoon we went for a walk and we were singing some kind of Jewish song, and the first time that lots of the town people started to scream “dirty Jew go to Palestine”. At that time Israel was called Palestine.

I: Were these people that you knew?

S: These were not people that we really knew. These were people, you can call them sometimes, hoodlums who were in the street. So we didn't pay too much attention to that. Yet I have to state it, that my father had brothers and sisters living in Bratislava Czechoslovakia and he used to receive some letters from them. I as a young child, who had to be hardly ten years old at that time, I remember hearing my father "oh poor brother of mine, he has to be in a bunker." Or "poor brother of mine, they don't know where he is."

But I think being the youngest of the family. Or maybe if I wouldn't be the youngest, maybe they wanted to shield us children and they were not much talking about what was going on in the world. I remember very vividly that my father used to listen to the secret radio. There were certain channels that brought news from out of Hungary. And they would come home and tell "oh thank goodness the Americans are advancing" or "the British are advancing, they are hoping they are going to succeed to win the war against Germany." That I remember. But being a young kid, they did not involve too much into the politics. But here and there I gathered that there must be something going on and must be very important that the German people should not be able to capture more and more countries.

I also remember, that is already in 1943, that a lot of people smuggled into Hungary Jewish people from Poland. Not in small towns, because in a small town they right away would notice if somebody is foreign. But we had relatives. My mother had two brothers and a sister in the city of Budapest and they wrote that "we have some guest from a different country and they are telling us terrifying stories". But what exactly they were telling, my momma and father would not tell us. So I assume, remembering these little episodes that my parents were to a certain degree aware of it. That there is something bad going on in Poland and Czechoslovakia.

Also in 1942/43 a lot of girls came over from Czechoslovakia who escaped from bunkers where they were hiding and could not hide anymore certain relatives who arrived to the big city. And that was the other sign that something was going on there. That they had to run away from home and abandon even their own family

I: Now you said that you would not be able to hide Jews in a small town where you lived. If a Jew had suddenly shown up and started to live in your house what would have happened?

S: Well they, the local police would come, and they would arrest them. Now when we are talking about hiding in a small town, now this is really a story for later on but this is related to this. In 1944 when the Germans marched into Hungary, my parents approached

the catholic priest “would he hide the children”. So that is also telling that my parents were aware that something bad was waiting for us. And at first the catholic priest was thinking of it, that he would hide us children, and then he said “how can I do that, they would right away know that these are the children of the rabbi.” That’s number one. Number two, he said “I have no wife, I have no children. How can I have children suddenly in my household.” But my father told him “after all, you can have some students”. But the end of the story is that he refused to hide us.

I: So back in 1942 if extra Jews had appeared would anybody had done anything about it then?

S: Yes. Yes, in '42 already.

I: But your family, as Jews were living as they had before?

S: We had been living as before.

I: But if knew Jews would arrive something would happen?

S: Something would happen, the police would arrive. They would have to identify themselves, who are they. A matter of fact, in 1942, we had a cantor who was singing in our temple, and since he had no Hungarian nationality.. In Hungary it takes much longer than in America. In America in five years you can become a citizen. He was not a citizen because it takes 25 years, I’m not sure what the laws are today, but in those days you had to live in Hungary 25 years in order to get citizenship. And this fellow was from Poland. And he had no Hungarian citizenship. He had to leave the country. And we were crying that he is leaving the country and where is he going. He went to Palestine. And today he is alive with all his family and with grandchildren and so on and my family is in ashes. So in a way it was luck if you were not a citizen and you had to leave, but that was the law. If you were not a Hungarian citizen you could not live in the country.

I: If you were not Jewish you also could not live in the country?

S: If you were not Jewish, also.

I: So it wasn’t just Jews who had to..

S: Well I don't really know what happened with the people if you were just a temporary citizen you were allowed to live except if you were a Jew. If you were Jewish and you did not have a citizenship, that was the first thing that came out in 1942, that you had to leave the country.

I: So that applied to Jews only.

S: To Jews, yes. Only. Yeah only to Jews.

I: So you were saying that you were aware that something bad was happening.

S: Yes I was sensing. I was sensing the tenseness. I was sensing that my father was always secretly talking with momma. And when they noticed that the children are coming they would change the subject. I was noticing that my parents were shielding us more than before. If it was going to the streets, or traveling. They were much more alert to what was going on than before. Until 1942/43, we were a fairly free happy life, traveling, go to the theatre, going to the circus. Anywhere we wanted to go. Then later on, I am aware of it, I mean I remember it, the parents did not want the children too much to be in the streets and not to go to public places. We were not questioning why. But that's you know, what I remember.

I: And what do you remember next?

S: The next thing that I remember, in 1943, September, my sister, my oldest sister. I was the youngest in the family. She went to study also in Budapest in a special school, and my brother was away also in a special school. And I remember that the parents were very worried "are they ok?". When before, they were also away, except till this time they were not so concerned if everything is going ok with them. And in 1944, when the Germans marched into Hungary, my parents wanted the children to come home. There was a restriction, the Jews could not travel anymore by train. We were very worried if ever my siblings would be able to come home. One morning my father was stepping out from the congregation, the temple, and here is my sister. "How did you get home from Budapest?" And she told us the story that my aunt had dressed her to look like a gentile because the gentile people were a little differently dressed. We were a little more fashionably dressed, the Jewish people. She should look more like a peasant. It's really not right to say gentile, should say she should look more like a peasant girl. And she shouldn't be too attractive, she was a very beautiful girl.

And my father was asking “how did you get home”? And she said “lets go home quickly”. And she went home and she told us the story that her relatives put her on the train and luckily it went smooth. When they saw her looking like a little peasant girl they didn’t approach her. When she arrived, well there was no train station in Onod. It was about seven kilometer from us a train station. And when she unboarded, when she came down from the train, she thought “it’s night, what do I do? A young girl? How do I get home? I can’t walk this in the night.” She remembered that there is a Jewish family near by. She knocked on the door. Low and behold there was the headquarter of the German SS army. She’s opening the door and saying “oh I’m so sorry, I don’t want to disturb you. I just wanted a little bit of water.” She quickly went out. Here she’s wandering and wandering and suddenly she remembered there is another Jewish family living in the town. She went there, and they told her “you sleep over”. The next morning they brought her home. So that’s how my sister arrived. And later my brother arrived home too, also in a very special way. He got some papers from a gentile friend and he arrived too.

At that time we already knew that we were occupied by the Germans in Hungary. Yet Horti, who was the head of the Hungarian government was refusing to let to do anything to the Jewish people. But it didn’t take too long. The Germans override him. They fought against that. The new decree that came out was that we had to have the yellow star on our clothing, that we are not allowed to be on the street, only at certain times of the day. The gentile people are not allowed to sell us any merchandise. We are not allowed to hire any non-Jewish people working for us. And slowly and surely later on came out that we have to make an inventory of whatever we have in our house and submit it to the mayor of the town.

I remember that my mother was taking out from the closet a beautiful tablecloth. In those days, years before a girl was married they were embroidering and having the monograms on the tablecloths and on the bedsheets and the pillowcases. Each one that she was folding and writing down, her tears were running from her eye. And my brother was helping her to make the inventory.

I: And you were watching?

S: And I was watching all this because I was a very curious little girl. I think that I did not grasp it in the depth that this is not going to be ours any more. I was just admiring to see the beautiful colors and the beautiful embroidery and the counting. And my brother was saying “mommy don’t worry, we come back I will buy you the most beautiful linens”. That is ringing in my ear to this day.

I: He said when we come back

S: When we come back. That time I understood that it means we have to leave our house and hopefully we would come back. I have to tell that my father has been chosen to be the head of the ghetto, which one was located not far from Mishkoltz. Called the place Diossjer. It was a town that they had factories for iron. They emptied the worker's houses. That was very poor, like one room and kitchen kind of apartments and they had to organize that place to become the Jewish ghetto. At the time when we were doing this inventory my father was away because he had to go and organize this ghetto in Diossjer.

I: Do you know how they chose your father to be the head of the ghetto?

S: I have no idea why he was chosen to be because not only people from Onod but from all the surrounding towns. Except that he was the chief rabbi for all these towns. So maybe that's the reason they had been choosing him to be the head of the ghetto. And we were expecting the father should come back from there after he is doing the job organizing the place. But he never came back from the ghetto. After a few days the inventory was made. My mother succeeded to take a few precious pictures from the family and us children and a few tablecloth and a few silverware, such as which one she was lighting the Shabbat candles some Kiddush cups, some silver cups, one of them I happen to have it here. To our neighbor, who was very devoted neighbor to us as well we were very devoted, good friends helpful for each other all the time. And she asked her "do me a favor Martha, put these things away. And we have to most probably leave the town. But when come back, you will give these back to me. And if I am not coming back, then please would you give these to my children."

So all these little things indicate that my mother and father, they were informed somehow that elderly people are killed or that elderly people they don't make it. They had prayer and hope that the children will remain and she wanted us to have some mementos. Something that is from our household.

I: At the time you did not realize what your parents did but looking back on what they said, you can see what they knew.

S: At that time I couldn't understand why mother was hiding jams in the attic. Why was she putting away certain things or giving away some money to another gentile family in a small town who came to see if we had everything. I mean they, we call them "chasidei omot ha'olam" we call them the righteous gentiles who were worried and they

understood and endangered themselves, such as that family from a little town Hidveg, coming in and bringing some potato knowing that we can't any more buy food.

I: and this was before you went to the ghetto

S: Before we went to the ghetto. Before we went to the ghetto. So that family, my parents used to have a collection of silver coins. You know today people are investing in stock or putting in bank. In those days if you had a little money you put them in silver coins. The value didn't go down. For the children, education later, or if a child has to get married. So my father had a collection of silver money and he gave it to this gentile family.

Shortly after we had been submitting the inventory, giving to our neighbor certain items to keep, it came an enouncement. In those days it was in the market place, they used to announce in a loud speaker: ALL THE JEWISH FAMILIES. THEY HAVE TO PACK UP. THEY ARE ALLOWED TO TAKE ONLY CERTAIN AMOUNT OF CLOTHING WITH THEM. THEY HAVE TO GO INTO THE GHETTO.

Now we had to pay with our own money, horseman, buggy, pack up and go. We had to leave the keys and all the inventory at the house of the mayor. We had to be at 9 in the morning, in 1944, end of May, I don't exactly remember completely the date, but I do remember it was in May, we had to go into the ghetto in Diossjer.

I: Now the mayor was the father of your good friend, is that right?

S: Yes

I: Now what happened to your friendship with her?

S: We were friendly until the last minute. However, at the time when the yellow star came out, that we had to wear it on our clothing, our relationship was off. And the last thing that I remember him saying, the mayor, was that "I am sorry, I am not in a position of helping you." In other words, he must have had some kind of emotions, and yet he was really, maybe in a position where he was watched by the German occupying army. That he could not do anything. Since he was the only one important person in the town. So I am not able to blame him. It hurt at the time. But you have to put yourself in the shoe of the other person. And I have to state here that the Hungarian police department, the Jundermaren, they were worse than the Germans. They were more brutal. They were more beating us up. They were more hostile. In every way.

So we hire the buggy. We packed up my mother took with her one chicken. You

have to understand that we lived in a town, and in the backyard my mother was growing chickens and ducks, and turkey, and somehow she was so sentimental with her little chickens that one chicken she wanted to take with her. So she took a basket, she took some straw, and she took one chicken with us to the ghetto. Some dishes, some little leftover potatoes, some flower, whatever we had left in the house. And we each of us packed up some suitcase with some clothing and here we went with the buggy arriving to the ghetto.

I: And did you take some favorite things that you wanted?

S: Only our personal jewelry. But we were not allowed to. We had to leave everything. Such as clothing, books. It had to be in the inventory. We had to write down how many books we had, or how many lamps we had. How many furniture with us. But we could not take with us..

I: You couldn't take a favorite book.

S: No, we couldn't take a favorite book. The only thing we took with us was really our personal jewelry and my father took with him, at the beginning he went, he took some books, to study. When we left the house we had to leave everything in the house, and the officers statement of the German was: you will come back, and that's why we are doing the inventory, so you can claim when you come back, what is missing from the house. It was known that behind all these decrees, and the organization of the German Jews to go into the ghetto in Hungary was Eichman. Eichman was in Budapest, and he was the one who was organizing the departure of the Jewish people from Hungary. And the inventory, and what you can take, and what you can't take, this was all from the Eichman office. And the Jewish organization was hoping to have some kind of dialogue with him, some kind of agreement with him that if people are going to give you a certain amount of money, would you leave the Jewish people to stay in the ghetto in Hungary. Or some of them even in their homes.

We arrived to the ghetto and we were shocked to see how many Jewish people had been occupying already. And the headquarters that was given to us was at one time a small room, with a tiny eency teency little kitchen, and yet I have to say that ours was a luxurious apartment compared to many other people who had to sleep together, two three families in one room.

I: And do you think this was maybe because your father was the head of the ghetto?

S: Maybe. And maybe they felt after all, maybe a rabbi is still somebody important. I really think that was the reason for it. My mother placed the little basket with the chicken in the kitchen. This way she felt that there was some part with her from her childhood. She was brought up, she was born in Onod, she was the the daughter, her father, my grandfather was the previous rabbi before my father became the rabbi there. So everything from that town, the river, the grass, the chicken, the fruit. Everything was a part of her life. So this piece, the chicken, reminder her. And the chicken is a very special story because usually chickens, they lay eggs every other day. Except today when they are in incubators and the food is different. But in the primitive way of feeding them and raising them, chickens used to lay egg every other day. While we were in the ghetto, that chicken laid an egg every single day. And I remember that my mother would say “this egg is for my youngest daughter because she is so skinny”. (Hahaa in those days). She should be eating, and I refused. So sometimes she made a scrambled egg and I divided it between all of us. Sometimes she collected at least two eggs and she baked a cake with the little left over flour that she brought with her. And then we celebrated shavuot, which one is the holiday of receiving the Torah from sinai, mountain Sinai. We celebrated. That was the last holiday that I was with my parents together. And before that there went a whole discussion: what should we prepare for the holiday? We were used to have nice meal. My mother started to cry and she said “should we kill the chicken and I make a nice meal? or should we keep the chicken?”.

So the decision was that they killed the chicken because you don’t know what will be really our fate. Apparently they sensed, again, it’s an indication which at that time I didn’t understand, but looking back. And mother made from that one chicken, you name it, everything. She made chicken soup, she made roast chicken, she made hamburger from the white part. And that was the last chicken soup that my mother made.

I: And what was your religious life like in the ghetto?

S: In the ghetto the religious life was that my father had a special room where the people went to pray, and—

I: This was for everyone in the ghetto?

S: For everyone in the ghetto. But it didn’t take too long, and the Hungarian police came to the ghetto and they came to pressure and question the people where did they hide things. And where did you put certain things. You didn’t have everything in the

inventory. We know that you had more silverware, we know that you had some silver money, we know that you had a store. Where is all the money that you had been collecting all these years? And many times they would very brutally beat up people, think that if they are really hiding some things, seeing that they are so tortured, they will give in and they will tell. And the headquarters of the police department was behind our window. And my mother used to hear the screaming of the people when they were beaten up. And she just fainted, she just couldn't take. She grew up with all these people, from her childhood on. Seeing them, that they are blue and that they are losing blood and they are beaten up so severely she just couldn't take it. Either she was sitting and praying. Or she was crying. And once I remember when she fainted. I do remember when that took place, when our doctor who was helping the whole town. Giving birth to children, he was everything. A general doctor who helped heal children and birth children and what not. He was beaten up very severely. To that extent that my father had to intervene and had to get permission to take him to a hospital. Unfortunately he died from the beating.

So that was the time my mother.. we used to live next door to the doctor. This was the height of what she could suffer, my mother. After being in the ghetto about three weeks the new decree came out that we have to leave the ghetto.

I: Going back to the room your father set up.. did that room remain set aside for people to pray the whole time that you were in the ghetto?

S: The whole time that we were in the ghetto.

I: And were there services held that people could come?

S: Yes, yes. Three times in the day and my father conducted the prayer.

I: Every day, three times a day.

S: Yes. As well my father was corresponding with the Jewish organization in the big city of Budapest who were in contact with Eichman, trying to ease the life of the people in the ghetto. Questioning them, what is our fate. What do we have to do? Do we have to listen to all this? Or should we rebel? Should we organize something to escape, or just follow orders. And that I recall, that the order came in from the Jewish organization in Budapest that "Eichman is promising that we will be taken to a working camp. And nothing is going to happen to any of us. And that we should be obeying all their laws and all their decrees because that's the only way that everything will be smooth and everything will be

good.”

I: So you remember your father talking about that

S: Yes, yes. That I already remember very well from the ghetto.

I: And the services your father conducted in your room.. did the police ever try to interfere with that?

S: No.

I: Do you think they knew about it?

S: They knew about it and that was not their concern. Because, as far I remember they said “let them do what they want to do, it won’t last too long anyway.” That was their approach. So they did not interfere with it.

From the ghetto, first of all they collected all able working men. At that time, it was my father taken from the ghetto and my brother and all the people that I could call from age 16 till about 45, 50. All able working men has been collected and taken away from the ghetto. It was very sad kind of farewell from each other, departing. We did not no where they are taking them and what will be our fate. All women and children and babies, we are remaining and the old people. But they said that they need some workers. So we hoped that it was true, that they were needed for work.

I: Did you say they took your father?

S: Yes

I: So he had been the head of the ghetto, so he was no longer

S: no longer head of ghetto, no longer organized things in the ghetto, no more praying in the ghetto. The men were taken. Two days later, they said that all the people who remained in the ghetto, they have to march seven kilometers, which is approximately three miles in our measurements here. Into a brick factory in the city of Mishkoltz, and that from there, hopefully in a short time we will go to Czechoslovakia where they need working people. And we will be transported to that place, the working camp in Czechoslovakia in a short time. So we are walking, and at that time, not only Hungarian

police men but also the SS soldiers were going with us, marching with us. And if you were going slow they were beating you up and they were hollering that you “go faster! we have no time!” and we arrive to the brick factory which consisted only from a roof. No walls. Nothing on the ground except some leftover bricks. And as we are arriving to that place we hear some men screaming to us. We thought that we hear the voice of my father. But we couldn’t recognize him. Low and behold he was there. They sheared his beard, they took off his hair completely. He did not have anymore his nice suite. He was in a pants and a shirt. Then we got united.

We were in that brick factory, not doing nothing, except crying and starving for a few days.

I: Did you have anything to eat?

S: Only some leftover bread that momma baked in the ghetto. Maybe a few potatoes. I remember that my mother went out on the ground and she collected some woods and she had still with her one pot. She cooked some kind of a potato soup but it was more water than potato or anything else. But at least it was warm. Really what we ate, mainly it was stale bread that we had still with us. One day the German soldiers came in and said that they need some few hundred girls to work in their headquarters. To clean and to shine shoes. So my mother thought that here my girls are going to die from starvation, let them go to work, maybe they will be fed, maybe they can bring home some food for the rest of the family. We were taking with army truck. My mother gave a whole speech, be careful, you’re going with soldiers. And they said they’d bring us back in an afternoon. We went with the soldiers two times. Two days. And our work was to clean dishes, to wash clothing, to iron for them, to shine their shoes. They threw us some bread and some cooked potato, which was luxurious for us. And we brought home, we hide it in our pocket a few potatoes, a little bit bread, and we brought it back to the factory. The third day we were waiting and waiting that they come to pick us up again because at least we were occupied, we were doing something. Plus to eat, we were given a little something to eat. They didn’t come, and instead of that, again, they announced that we have to march from the factory, which was very close to the railroad. We have to march to the railroad. We can take as many things we have still left over, and we are now going to travel to the real good place, we are going to travel to the factory in Czechoslovakia. To a camp, a working camping, not to a factory but to a working camp.

So little we understood, or really we really knew what it meant to go to the railroad. Again the Germans with their huge dogs this time, they were the ones who were taking care of us, watching over us. Whoever who was collapsing, the dog would just tore

it apart. We were walking, you know, rushing. Rushing to where? Rushing to the railroad. And we just couldn't believe in our eyes, what kind of train was waiting for us. It was the cattle train, without window. They pushed us in, 70 people into one cattle train. They gave us two bottles, in one was water, and the other one instead of bathroom. Old people, screaming and crying, squeezed like sardines. They closed the door.

Here we are in the cattle train. My mother and father was sitting next to each other, and it was night time. And I heard my mother crying, and my father said "I wish that at least the children should remain alive." So again, I am sure they sensed it, they knew it, they had kind of information. They were fearful, their instinct, whatever. But they knew that this was not going to a good place. You don't take people in a..

I: And what about you? Do you remember what you were thinking at the time?

S: At the time I was just thinking where could I have some air. Where could I have something to drink? How could I calm the younger children that were crying?

I: So you were thinking about the immediate present and not thinking about what was going to happen so much.

S: No. I was not thinking of.. For sure I was thinking of my mother, because I saw that she is really not feeling good anymore. I was very close to my mother. I used to pet her and calm her and say to her "God is with us and it will be good". And my mother would say "for sure you will yet have yet a beautiful life". And she would overcome her sadness just to reassure her children that everything will be ok.

When we got to the city of Koshitz, which is a border city between Hungary and Czechoslovakia

I: What was the name of it?

S: Koshitz. They opened the wagon, the train, the cattle train. And they said that one person can go down and fetch some water and empty the bathroom bucket. So nobody was daring to do that. They thought that this is some kind of a trick. That the Germans are trying to have some person to go down and they will kill that person. My brother volunteered. He went down, and he looked around and he saw that we are in a city. From the train station he could sense it or recognize it. He fetched the water. We asked "aren't we getting all off from the train?"

The German soldiers said "no no no, we are not yet in the place where your

working camp is, it's taking a little bit longer." Before they really closed the door they asked that, "if you still have on you any jewelry please give it now, you will get it back but because we are going over a border it's not good, it might get lost" all kind of stories. They took away the last jewelry that we still had. By the way I forgot to tell that before we went away from the ghetto they already took away all the Jewelry except each one of us was trying to hide a memento. A ring. Or my mother, her wedding band. Or my father had a very special gold watch that he had in his pocket. They came and they screamed and said "you better give it because otherwise we beat you to death". So everybody got scared and the last jewelry, the last possession that we had we gave it right away. They closed the door and the train was going like mad, was rushing. Where is the train rushing so much? The noise was tremendous, and the crying. People died. Old people in the train. After three days, three and a half days actually, traveling in a not normal kind of situation. The bucket was full with what people made. The smell, the starvation, the crying the screaming, on and on. People were completely washed out. Some old people who died, they smelled. Suddenly they open the train. We are in Auschwitz.

When we arrived to Auschwitz, first the German soldiers with their dog they came to the door. And they said that "you have to get off very fast from the train because you are going to start to work. Leave your belongings, that will be shipped to your camp, why should you carry it?" Then there were some striped clothed men who were screaming also that "go fast, you have to line up five in a row." And in between screaming to us they talked to us in Yiddish. A few words in the Jewish language, saying to us that "don't go the mothers with the babies. Give the babies to the grandmothers." And we thought they're crazy. Why are they saying this? Why should a mother give up her child and give it to an old grandmother who hardly can walk anymore. We all looked pale, hungry, tired, the un-none(?). The mental facilities were not working properly anymore, when you've starved for such a long time. When you suffer with the darkness. We didn't want to believe what they are saying to us. Or to do what they are telling. There were people though whose mind was maybe working better, who took the babies and gave it to the grandmother, which saved many people's lives. But we didn't want to depart from momma. They said "don't go families together". Then they would holler in German. But in between, each time they would give us some little advice. Something that later on we understood how much they wanted to try and help us and to save us. Then when they noticed that the German soldier with the big dog is coming they would holler "schnell schnell, los los". You have to go fast and line up the men separate from the women.

We lined up and we were standing momma in the middle, my sister and me and then two other girls from our home town. And the men in a separate line. I remember my father screaming my name. He was very worried because I was the youngest.

I: So you were then about 13?

S: Yes, and I was very very skinny girl. They used to send me to resort place to gain a little bit of weight. When I was a child I just happened to be very slim. And my father was screaming my name and I turned around and he said “whatever happens, wherever you go, you continue to believe in God.” And that’s the last words of my father. That’s ringing each time in my ear. Apparently he knew that terrible things are coming and he wanted to reassure. That we should continue that the faith should give us strength.

I: you were talking about the last words your father spoke to you at the entrance of Auschwitz

S: Yes. Then we were walking and there was a huge tall beautiful man in army uniforms. He had white gloves on his hands. Shiny boots and a silver stick in his hand. When our turn came to approach him he pointed my mother to the left. Me and my sister and the two other sisters, Solomon, from my home town, to the right. When I noticed that my mother was pointed to the left I grabbed her skirt and I wanted to pull her. My mother who spoke beautiful German, she said to him, “please mister, I am capable of working, I am a young woman, may I go to the other side?”

How she knew that left means not to go to good side, I can’t tell. Most probably she saw that more young people are put to the right. Or she just wanted to be with her children. But I remember her words, that she said “I am capable of working”. And he became so angry that with his beautiful shiny boots he beat into my mother and he throw her to the left. I still was holding her skirt and trying to pull, but he pushed her so hard. That was the last time I saw my mother.

As I know, my mother was gassed that very same day in Auschwitz.

We were taken to a big huge place where there were beauticians, quote unquote, waiting for us. They sheared our hair off completely. They said that we have to take off our clothing, we are traveling for a long time, we have to have some shower. We should pile up nicely our clothing. We were taken into a shower, when we came back, no more clothing was waiting. We were naked. We had to stand. German soldiers came to count us, naked, without hair. I remember screaming, “Esther! Esther!”. That’s the name, Yehudit Esther my sister. She said “I’m standing next to you.” I couldn’t recognize her without hair. Without clothing. And after they counted us, then they threw us each one, some kind of an old shoe and an old dress. Then when we were about dressed we had to

march, again five in a row, and there was a painting lady who had a red, can of red paint and she painted in the back of our dress. I remember that I felt that the paint goes into my body. Why are they painting our dress? Well, in case we might in some miracle try to escape from Auschwitz we can't because we will be noticed from far away that we are inmates from Auschwitz.

From the bathing house we were marched into Birkenau. Which was the camps for the women. That's a sub-camp of Auschwitz, Auschwitz Birkenau. We were given to go into a huge bunk. It was about the length of two, times three times my living room. Where we had been pushed in one thousand girls. No beds, no blankets. Nothing was in that room. They again called us to stand for "seil aper" which is roll call. I happened to want to make, and I asked the head of the camp where can I go, and she said "in the back. But do it fast." So until I find it, and until I made it and I came back and they were already coming the Germans there again to count us, she became very angry and she gave me. She beat me up in my face that I could not see for days. I got so swollen in my face, because she is blamed that there is missing one person from the counting.

Then I was standing in the row and they counted again and everything was ok. We were given food and the food consisted of black coffee and a little piece of bread, the size of half of my palm. We ate and we asked "where are we going to sleep". So the head of the bunk said to us, "what do you think, you are in Budapest? What do you mean beds? You go and lay down on the bare floor". And she threw for every two girls a blanket. And she said "that is it, that's for covering and whatever you want to do with it." We were so exhausted from the trip, from the separation, from the shearing our hair, from the starvation, that we all fell asleep with the blanket, two to one blanket.

The next day they took us to a different bunk and that bunk had some kind of preach beds. Like how you call, children have those kind of bed..

I: Bunk beds?

S: Bunk beds, that's right. So we were taken there and again counting, and this counting business went sometimes three four times in a day, sometimes we had to be standing outside early in the morning. And in Auschwitz even though it was June, when we arrived, the nights were very cold. Sometimes we were standing for four hours. Until the Germans, they arrived and counted us. The dogs surrounding us. Jumping. If they saw someone looked to them too pale or too skinny they would call out. At that time we did not understand where they are taking them. Each day we were less and less. This was a camp that it's called "firnektuslager", which means "elimination camp". Nobody was working, nobody was doing nothing. Every day, less and less people remained in the

camp.

Opposite of our bunk was a so called “hospital” and if somebody was sick and did go to that hospital, never returned back from there. My best friend from my childhood, her name “Aniko weiss”, who came down with scarlet fever after a few days we were in Auschwitz. We tried to hide her. We tried to hold her. We tried to massage her. We tried to give up our little bit of warm stew that we were given just to make sure that she should not go to the hospital. But nothing helped, one day she collapsed from the high fever and she went over to the hospital. But luckily there was one German nurse who had pity on her. She was a very beautiful 13 year old cheerful little girl, whose mother happened to be with us. And she told her “you are enough good, go back. Don’t stay here in the hospital.”

We used to see trucks coming and they would pile on the trucks sick people. We used to ask where are they taking them? The answer used to be that they are taking them to the hospital. But they never came back. So we understood that it couldn’t be the hospital. After we had been maybe, two three weeks in the concentration camp, lager B3 Birkenau, they announced that all those children who are under the age of 16. From age, whatever, they will remain alive, they should be lining up, they will be united with their parents, they will be given better food, they are going to have milk and cake and bread. Who didn’t want to be united with the parents? We did not know yet, that nobody from our parents is any more alive, or if even alive, we will not be united with them. We lined up, happily. We are going to a better place.

I: Now was Esther under sixteen also?

S: Yes, Esther is two years older than I am. So we lined up. The two other sisters, the Solomon sisters, who were members of my father’s congregation. They said, “oh you are going away, we will remain here” because they were older. One of them was already married and the other one was 22, 23 years old. And they said “oh we will miss you so much why are you going?” But we said “but we will be united with the family and we are going to be served better food” so we lined up.

Here we are lining up, five again in a row, they again counting us. Around us all the time SS soldiers with their huge big dogs that we god forbidden we can’t move now any more from the row. As we are standing, and they are counting, I hear a voice saying “go back, don’t go with this group.” And I was looking who is talking to me? I believe that the German lady soldier, she would be saying this to me? Why is she saying this to me? Now until this day I don’t know if she was the one who was talking, or it was an inner voice, instinct or the soul of my mother. The end of the story is that I grabbed my

sister and she was very annoyed “why, we should be going, we will have good”. And when I heard this voice three times saying to me “just get out from this”. I took her, and the German soldier, the lady, with her dog, did not interfere, she let us go out from the row and we walked back to our bunk. The whole group was taken, not to be united with the parents in this world but to the gas chamber.

Many times, until this day, I feel guilty. Why I have been the one who was told if it was by the German soldier or by the soul of my mother or by an angel, or whatever. Why the other girls had to go to their death. But that’s fait, and perhaps god had a special reason to save us from that time from the death. So a lot of miracle things happened in Auschwitz.

After a while we were taken over in the same camp to a different headquarters and one night, I would never forget that, we heard tremendous screaming. There were no windows. Only through the cracks of the wooden bunk we could be looking out. And we saw a lot of fires and a lot of smoke going. All the gypsies who had been also taken to Auschwitz have been gassed that night. And the gypsies were very different in that matter. The Jewish people, when they were taken to the gas chambers they were singing, “shema yisrael” they were saying their prayer. The gypsy people have no religion. They very primitive people. They were trying to fight. They were trying to take their nails and attack the soldiers. It was such a night that it’s still ringing in my ear the screaming of the gypsy people who were gassed that night. And the fire that we saw was their bodies that were burned to ashes. That was the very first time that we really saw with our own eyes, that there is a gas chamber and that there is fire. And from that day on we knew, that if you are taken from this camp you are taken to the gas chamber and you are being burned. So we were very much aware what is going on in Auschwitz.

In about end of August, beginning of September, because the dates are not so clear, you know. Except that through some miraculous way, we were aware when is our holiday coming. There was always one girl, if we were marching, they used to take us to the bath, to the collective bath, we would march near to the men’s camp. They would always used to scream names “maybe there is one relative, did you see this, did you see that?” They would also scream to us “did you know tomorrow is Shabbat?” Or “did you know that tomorrow is the new year?”

One day we were marching, and one of my uncle was screaming and asking if we saw his wife Olga. So we knew that he is still alive. The mens were mainly in Auschwitz and they had been a little bit working. But what their work was exactly it’s hard for me to know.

In about the beginning of September they called again that they need some workers for a factory. But the entire camp has to line up in a very empty field and they

are going to choose some people for work. I had no choice because this time not age not group, not one part of the camp but the entire camp had to be naked, stand, and the German soldiers, and the head of them, Dr. Mengele that we called the Angel of Death, he came. He started to count and after he was counting the entire camp, that was a few thousand girls. He started to point to the right again and to the left.

I: How did you know that it was Dr. Mengele?

S: We know it because when we arrived, the striped soldiers, the striped inmates, they told us that there is a doctor whose name is Dr Mengele. And then later on the head of the camp, who happened to be a Jewish girl, who was working for the Germans, she used to throw this “oh wait till you meet this Dr. Mengele”. So we knew that was Dr. Joseph Mengele. He came and he started to point people, but this time the left meant that you remain still in Auschwitz and the right is the group that is going to leave the camp and is going to be taken to some kind of a factory to work. They said soldiers are very busy on the front, they are fighting the war, and there are no more able people working in the factories.

So my sister has been chosen to go to work, and I to remain in the camp. Well I didn't want to get separated from my sister and somehow I felt that if I were to remain here I would not be able to endure anymore. Being together gave strength. Each one was strengthening the other. We were each of us giving faith and strength to continue. So what should I do? I started to crawl on my stomach towards the group that has been chosen. One of the SS soldiers noticed me and beat with his bayonet on my back which one there is still a mark of it. And he said in German “uver fruchte yuden so vi vosh tard”. “You devil jew, you will anyway die. Go where you want to go.” I crawled into the group and again they started to count and count. Somehow I was very lucky that even though they had counted again and again there has to be only three hundred in the group, how it happened it was three hundred with me together. Now if somebody left because her sister was.. I can't tell you. At that time they took us to a train and we left Auschwitz.

They planned to take us to a factory but the allies were by that time bombing. American and British soldiers were already heavily fighting. And I remember that the train was going back and forth and back and forth. They couldn't really go advance because each time when the bombing was they would ship the train backwards to Auschwitz. So we didn't know, is this a new method of killing us? Because in the train we again didn't have air, didn't have food. And we thought that we are going to die and no one will ever know what happened to us because we are in the train. However after three four days of being shifting back and forth we arrived to a camp called Bergen-

Belsen. And when we arrived to Bergen-Belsen that was exactly a day before our most holy day of the year, Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur is the atonement of the Jewish people, and we made a decision that we are going to fast.

I: You and Esther decided

S: That's right, and a few other friends who were with us in the camp. And the German people there in Bergen-Belsen, they didn't do really nothing with us. No working, not so much roll calls. But in Bergen-Belsen the other problem existed that a lot of people came down with typhoid fever. Dysentery. The food was a tiny bit even better than in Auschwitz. The day we requested that we want to fast, would they give us two portions. They said, what are you crazy? Where you think you are back in Hungary? However, we fasted. We were in Bergen-Belsen sleeping on the bare floor. Little bit of straw somehow we collected, and I remember that I came down with infection of my gums. My whole face was swollen from it. Yet I did not dare go to the infirmary because by that time we had enough knowledge that if you go to the infirmary that's the end of you.

I: Back to Yom Kippur, so you and Esther and some friends fasted, and did you observe in any other way the fast?

S: No we couldn't. Except there were a few prayers that we remembered. Some older girls who remembered some little part of the prayer. We would be singing together, or saying together. On Yom Kippur. And we remained in Bergen-Belsen for a couple weeks. And then at last we were taken to another camp called Rochlitz where there was really a factory, and it amazes me until this day that not only that they took us to work, but they were teaching us certain technical measurements. We were schooled. They were hoping, the Germans, that the war would take such a long time, or that they will be enslaving us for such a duration of time, or just this is the way of the Germans to educate all the time, it was amazing. Every evening we were taken to a school for two weeks and we were learning special kinds of measurements of little airplane appliances. The factory where we were working was doing all kind of little tools and gadgets for airplanes.

In that factory we worked three shifts. Each time eight hours. Sometimes in the night, sometimes in the day, sometimes in the evening. And the foreman, who happened to be a German fellow, was having such a pity on me, and I am until this day very thankful for him that he used to call me in into his office, and close the door, and give me a little bit of his fareena. He was always eating cooked fareena in the morning. So I always looked forward to the shift when I worked in the morning because that day I new

that I am going to have something in my stomach.

One day while I was in his office, eating the farina, the German soldiers who came once in a while to observe if we are working, if we are producing, if we are doing our job comes. And she sees me inside. He quickly grabbed the plate and threw it down. He started to scream at me “so tomorrow you know better how to measure the appliance that you have to do!!?” I understood that that was a cover up. He himself could be in trouble favoring or doing anything for me.

While we were in that camp, it came our holiday Hanukah. The holiday of lighting the menorah. We wanted so much to light because we were so broken by then. Spiritually, mentally, emotionally, physically. We thought that maybe that would cheer us up. That would give us some kind of a hope. Thinking how the war between the Greeks and the Jewish people took place many years ago. Maybe that light would bring in some kind of warmth. But where do we have, where do we have a menorah? Where do we have oil? What can we do?

There were girls who were working in the kitchen, that was cooking for us that little bit of food. And one of the girls said, “you know girls let’s not talk about it. I’m going to bring home some kind of potato. We will cut the potato and carve it and make from it a menorah. Low and behold, every evening she put one potato until she had four potatoes, cut it in half, scooped it out. I don’t know how we did it but we did it. And now is the problem where we have to get some kind of an oil to light the menorah. So the other girl who was working, she said “just don’t talk about it, I’m going to find something”. She found an old bottle, she filled it in a little bit of oil that was used for cooking. So now we have potato and oil but we don’t have the wicks. What are we going to do? So we tore from our one dress that we had. We had no underwear. We tore and we made wicks. And we put it in the oil. Dipped it. We had no matches. There was one soldier who every evening used to come and go by the little houses and the time we were put up four to a little house. This was a camp that was taken away, a working for a summer camp or some sort of thing. It had small tiny little houses and four girl to each tiny little house. And the soldier used to come to see if it was quiet if everybody is doing what they are supposed to do. I went out and I said to the soldier “you know what? I need desperately just one match if you would give me.”

He says “for what?” I said “well don’t ask too many questions, could you give me one match and he threw his match. We lit the Hanukah candle the next evening. And we were all crying. And the whole camp came to that one house and they said “how did you get this? how did you make it?” And we remembered one Hanukah song and we were singing the song and that gave us strength. We are human, we are celebrating a holiday. We are not completely oppressed.

And the soldiers who came to check this evening was a different one. Well he was himself, a few came started to knock on the door. "What are you doing? Where do you think you are? You are inmates. This is an N. O. No you can't have Hanukah candle". They didn't say Hanukah candle, they said you can't have fire in your house. Out. Out.

And we had to kneel on our knees for four hours as punishment that we dared. But we were all smiling to each other. Never mind this kneeling. What we did, we showed to the Germans that we are still human beings. And what they are aiming, to completely destroy us, our emotions, our spirit, they did not succeed.

Many times when I am asked "why didn't you revolt?" Our main revolt was showing that we are human. Physically we couldn't. We were surrounded with barbed wires with electric wires. We could never escape. But we always tried to remain human. To help each other. To try to celebrate here and there a certain holiday. This way revolted, we showed to them that as much you try to destroy us, you can't completely destroy our spirit.

I: so your religion really helped you to keep going?

S: A lot, a lot.

[break]

I: You were talking about how important religion was for helping you survive

S: well all the time that we had been in the camp, religion gave us a lot of strength. And the devotion to keep religion, and the devotion to each other, the helpfulness of one to another gave strength. And wherever we could observe any of the customs or holidays, I think that spiritually, mentally, emotionally, gave us uplift and strength. I remember there was in Bergen Belsen a girl who was with us remains in Jerusalem, who would collect in an old broken can some rain water in order that she could wash her hand to that little rationed tiny bit of bread and bless over it so she can thank god for sustaining her life and giving food. I remember celebrating in Auschwitz the day that we call tisha be'av and we are remembering the destruction of the holy temple in Jerusalem. We fasted. And being able to do all these things gave us a lot of emotional strength as well spiritual strength. I would say that most of the people who had faith, who had religion, who tried to say certain prayers that they remembered or here and there smuggled in people a prayer book. And we were at least once in a week saying some kind of a prayer, they were the ones who could take the suffering. And they were the ones who were able to

overcome a lot of the hardship. I would say that people who had no faith, and mainly people who came from very spoiled backgrounds, very well to do people who never knew any kind of hardship, they were the first one. At least from my experience, the ones who came from mischkoltz, who came from Onod, if i look and I see who remained from the holocaust. Definitely from my hometown all the girls who came from very well to do families, not one of them came back. Even though that I come from a middle class family and I had a maid. My mother always made sure that we have some kind of job such as making beds, washing the dishes, and we always used to ask her, why not morishka our made? Why do we have to do? And mother said you never know when you will need it.

And I am very thankful for her, having this foresight. If it was for Auschwitz or for my life later on, I think it was very beneficial and very special. I thank for my parents that they raised me to have faith in god and whenever anything very bad happened I knew always to whom to turn. It was my god.

Now I am going to go back to my camp where I had been working and where we celebrated Hanukah. In the middle of January, one day we were just roaming around in the camp. The group that was in the factory was in the factory. The girls who were working in the kitchen. And the group that was off, we were just roaming, trying to breath a little fresh air. Suddenly from far away we see a column of men marching. And they were very very tired, very weak, some of them in striped clothing. They were screaming, the "war is over." We thought they were crazy. How could the war be over if we are still in a camp and they are marching? But they probably had some kind of knowledge that the allies are advancing.

They passed by, we didn't know nothing what their fait was. We continued to work. However, about two three weeks later, we were told we have to empty this camp and we are to be taken to a new concentration camp. We were taken to a new concentration camp called graslitz.

Graslitz was a jailhouse. We were put up, it was emptied or it was an old jailhouse I do not know. But we were 1800 girls. We were put up in a jail house. They had bunk beds. We were given very meager food there. Only twice in a day. The German soldiers kept on saying "we don't have any more food either so we can't provide for you". Every morning they would march us a few kilometers away from the jailhouse under the supervision, the guard of the SS soldiers to a huge mountain. We had to chainline from the top of the mountain to the bottom of the mountain. On the top of the mountain was a huge pile of stones. We had to take those stones down. But how? One was throwing it to the other person. And if you dropped it, you were beaten up. And we thought at least we are instrumental, we are going to help to build something, that's why we are taking the stones down. But the next day came our surprise, we had to pile the stones and take up

from the bottom to the top of the mountain. And this went on for a couple of weeks. It was just to destroy us. Cause even if you are enslaved and you work and you see that something is growing from it something this built from it, you have a certain kind of meaning, satisfaction, you feel that you are instrumental. But just to work, to make fun of us, to belittle us, to make a mockery of us was very bad for our morale. And some of the girls said “i wish i collapse already, who wants to live anymore? there is no end to this. we are not going to make it, we have no family anymore.”

We have been in that camp and doing this work about middle of march, end of march. One day the SS group of soldiers comes in and they said stand up next to your bed, we have to have a serious talk. We thought that they are going to shoot us. Why don't they take us to work anymore. They said “well we have to tell you you have a choice. either you stay in this jailhouse, but we leaving the building, and we don't provide you with any food or guarding you. What will happen to you will happen to you. Or you line up five in a column and you march with us. We have to leave this place.”

We didn't understand why they had to leave the place. Why they are offering for us that we can stay. No one of us dared to remain. Because who is going to provide us food? They may lock the door, we won't ever be allowed to go out. The windows had iron bars. The door had iron bars. If they close us we will suffocate us. So everybody marched out, one thousand eight hundred girls and they were marching with us, which is called the death march. For six weeks. Marching every single day. Sometimes 40 kilometers, sometimes 35 kilometers. And we were sometimes sleeping outside on the bare ground, sometimes I remember this was sude deuitchland this was the cold still in March and in April fairly heavy. Sometimes on the top of the snow we went to sleep. We were licking the snow because we were not given any kind of drink. No food. We were collecting some of the grass.

Once in a while they would take us to a big barn where we were given some straw. The animals on one side and we on the other. And I don't have to describe to you what smells we had there. And we went to sleep. We collapsed, hungry, wet, sometimes from rain or snow. Without food. In the morning many times I wanted to get up when they called us to get up and I couldn't move. People laying on me. I would call “please would you get up, would you move, we have to line up”. They don't move, they are dead. Each day, less and less of us remained. My sister, who was two years older than I am. She just asked me “please leave me here, I don't want to go anymore.” Her leg was all swollen, she lost her shoe. She had swollen legs, she had pus in her leg. She couldn't move any more. I used to grab her. I the young one the skinny one. But very determined. My personality I am very active, until this day. I used to put her on my shoulder and a little bit carry her and I would say to her “I can't carry you more but you have to go because

we will go back, and we will tell the story and we will remain in life, and god is with us”, and again going and going and going. This went on every single day. If we were lucky, once in a while they would be able to ask the farmer if they have some leftover potato that they cook for the pigs. And we would be jumping on it. That would be a feast for us. Many times we were given flour and we would just lick the flour. Once I remember we were going, marching and by the roads in Germany, in sude deutchland there are ditch next to the road and we would find some rotten apple we would pick up and we would be just eating. Sometimes if the Germans, they noticed that you went off from the road even for one single minute to grasp an apple, they would shoot the person. If some person could walk any more, couldn’t march, they would be shooting the people.

One evening we arrived to a farm and before we were even given the opportunity to go to sleep in the barn, one of the German soldiers and the rest somehow, they were not there. One of the soldiers, a very handsome young fellow, he starts to talk to us. Before they wouldn’t talk to us we were like dogs in their eyes, even the dogs they were talking better than to us. But this time he comes over and he says “I have to tell you a big secret. I am actually Jew. My mother was a Jewish person, my father was a German. And I enlisted to the SS in order that I can help you.”

We were shocked, you know, “you helped us? you used to beat us up? you used to shoot the girls who were standing who could not move any more and now you are telling us.. what is the reason you are telling us that you want so much for us to find favor in our eyes.” But we could not think anymore clearly. He said “but I am going to get for you tonight also food. And I am good, right I am good to you?”

So we were not responding to it. We just waited if he really is going to give us food. At that moment the only thing that we wanted was to drink something to eat something and to be able to go to sleep a bit. So low and behold he brought us again some kind of cooked potato that was half rotten, was cooked always. Those days that’s what they fed usually the pigs. We ate and we went to sleep.

The next day we were marching and in the morning we left that barn and we went by a bridge. And we looked, how beautiful that water and how lovely it would be to go down and just wash our face. We are full with lice, our clothing is full with lice, we are dirty we haven’t been drinking, we haven’t been washing ourselves for weeks already. Could we go down? No, the German soldiers are surrounding us with their huge dogs and they are keeping us, telling us go fast, we have to march, we have to get to a place. We are marching, and then towards the evening we see that we are back in that very same place. And this went on a few days, that they surrounded us in that very small spot maybe two three little towns but each time we are back to the same spot. So we started to think it must be something going on that they can’t take us further away. But still we didn’t

believe that the end of the war is coming. That time I think we were already left maybe four hundred girls. The rest collapsed either died during the night in the barns or were shot by the Germans.

I: Esther was still with you?

S: Esther was all the time, and the two sisters. That what I think gave a lot of strength to each other. That we remained all the time from day one to the end of the war together. As we are walking, each one of us feels that any minute we are going to collapse. And what will happen to us if we collapse, we will be shot or we will expire anyway from no food no strength nothing. One of the Solomon sisters, the older one, Mindy, she said "I am going to sit down in the ditch. If they kill me they kill me. I have been married already, I tasted life already. But if they don't shoot, then you all come and join me later." So she sits down in the ditch, and no German soldier is coming back or shooting or counting or seeing who is here. And we don't see the German soldiers. They went ahead of the column. So we went back and we sat down with her. And we're sitting all four of us in the ditch next to the road. We hear some shooting and we got very scared. We thought, oh, this is a trick they just let us to sit but they will return back and they are going to kill us. So we look around, where can we go? Who will take us? There are no houses. Opposite of the road we see a little forest. We say lets go into the forest and hide there. We go over the road. We go into the forest. We are hiding in the forest.

This is late afternoon, May 7th 1945. We are sitting there and we are starved. What will happen to us if we are not going to have any food. That will be our end. But the first thing, we look around in the forest. Maybe we find something, grass an apple, garbage. Nothing we find. We shake out our blanket, which was full with lice and lets sit down. Because if we are going to walk around we are wasting what little strength we have. We sitting down and we hear some kind of little noise. So we see a little creek. We went, we drank from that water. We washed our face. We started to say a little prayer that we remembered by heart. We sat down and we started to cry. What will be our fait? What will happen to us? As we are sitting, and we are quiet holding each other hand, suddenly we hear a rooster and the mooing of a cow. So my sister said "listen girls, we must be close to a farmer. If we hear so vividly, so clearly a rooster we must be close to a house. I am going to go there."

Suddenly she's strong, suddenly she's willing, suddenly she's able, suddenly she wants to do. "I'm going to beg for food". So we said "are you crazy? they're German, they're also going to shoot you." She said "I am not going to tell. I am going to tell them that I am" we spoke very well German "I am going to tell that I am a refugee, my house

has been bombed, my parents died, I happen to be outside, I remain in life, I have nobody, I am an orphan, would you give me some food?"

So one of the Solomon sisters said "I won't let you go alone. I will go with you. But how will we find back the way to the forest?" So like in the story of Hansel and Gretel we tore from our dress, tied to a few bushes and we were in the beginning of the forest even, not going in deep, you know? And they were going according to the noise of the cow. And thank god that it was not far really, it was at the edge of the forest, a little farm. And they went and they begged and they got some mashed potato and in a little jar a little bit of milk. They came back, we had a feast. We sat down and we ate and then we made a decision that we can't sleep all in one time because just in case we hear that the German's coming back we have to go more deep maybe we have to hide whatever, two each time was sleeping, two each time was sitting and waiting. We rotated. It was early in the morning, about 4:30, 5:00 in the morning. It was still dark outside. Suddenly we hear a tremendous noise between the trees. We held each one the hand and set out our little prayer "just god please help us" And suddenly we thought this is our end, maybe a beast maybe a lion, who knows what is in the depth of the forest. And he smelled human being. And he's coming and if we were not killed by the Germans we will be killed by a beast. But low and behold, suddenly a huge tall soldier is standing in the front of us who screams to us in Jewish language and says "children don't be scared, I am your brother, you are liberated". It was May 8th in the morning. The Russians captured that part of Germany and they knew that there was a group of inmates who were marching and they were looking for girls where they are. And he was searching in the gutters and in the roads and in the forests and in the woods wherever to get. He says "get up don't stay here, you go into the town, it's very close by. And any house that you want, you go in and you say that the Russian occupying army said to put you up".

We had no strength to walk. We walked a little bit, the second house we saw we opened the gate and a priest comes out and greets us "hello who are you?" We told him we are inmates and that we are going to be here by you because that's what the Russian army told us. He said ok, and he points to the barn that we should be going there. We didn't want to go into the barn so we went into the yard and we sat down in the grass. The woman who was his cook, she brought out again mashed potato and this time warm milk and we eat and we very happy and we sitting in the fresh air.

I: What was the name of the village?

S: The village was Jatetz. We are sitting outside very happy. Later on we went to sleep in the barn. It was a clean barn, it had hay. It didn't smell, because apparently he didn't have

any more cow there. We slept. In the morning we getting up and we sit outside. We wanted just to be in fresh air. She brought us some bread with a little bit of butter on it, and again some kind of milk. If I recall, I think she made us some cooked farina. About 9, 10 oclock in the morning. The same Russian soldier who came in to the forest comes to check on us. "So girls how are you doing?" We said fine. "How was your sleep." Ok. "Where did you sleep?" So we show him the barn. He rushed into the house and he said to the priest "excuse me you have such a huge house, and you put these girls who went through a whole year of troubles, and you're putting them in a barn to sleep? how about you sleep in the barn and these girls inside?"

So he gave us a room. He slept also in there, another room. He really had a big house. From that day on he became a different person. He realized that this is what his mission is now to help the refugees to come to certain kind of health and strength. He gave us beds, she gave us beautiful kinds of pillow and cover and feather in those days the pillows were. I just couldn't sleep in the bed. So I had to go down on the floor and sleep cause I just was not used anymore after a whole year. It was too soft, I just couldn't find myself. For a few days until I got used to it, first the pillow and slowly I got back and I slept in the bed.

About three days later unfortunately my sister came down with a very high fever and the two other sisters. All three had to be put in leibeshitza, a nearby city. And they had to be put up in a hospital, they all came down with typhoid fever. And I started to gain weight and my hair started to grow and I started to look human. These priest was very kind, every day he wanted to learn with me. He was learning with me Hebrew. He said "how about you become my daughter, you become catholic. I will provide you with everything". I told him I really appreciate everything but I am the daughter of a rabbi and I promised my parents that whatever will happen I will remain faithful to my own faith. From that day on he never bothered me, he was very kind to me. Then there were Czechoslovakian soldiers in the town who had a special headquarter and you could go to their headquarter if you were a refugee, if you were an inmate from a camp and they would give you a little bit of clothing. They would direct you a little bit. I told them only one thing that I am requesting is if I could get a bicycle so I can go in to the other city where my sister and my friends are in the hospital so I can go and visit them. Low and behold they gave me, how they got for me a bicycle I really don't know. They gave me a bicycle, they gave me a scarf that until this day I think I never got such a scarf in my life. I started to put around my head, around my neck. The humanity started to come back. The woman in me. To look decent, to look human. The lady who was the cook of the priest, she would bake with me cookie that I should take to the hospital. I was at first shaking, how can I ride the bike? I haven't been riding the bike for over a year.

But god was good to me and I started first around in the yard, and then I went and I was on the road on the bike going every day to visit the sick. Until one day I felt this is quite dangerous on the road. There were still Russian army coming in and they were not the nicest. Except this one fellow who liberated us, the rest were not so nice. There's a lot what to talk about. I just felt very bad, also my sister was very very sick. Her mind wasn't anymore there. So I begged the head doctor if he could give me some job in the hospital so I can be near to my sister. I told him otherwise she will die.

I: you were talking about asking for a job in the hospital where your sister was

S: so the doctor looked at me and he said "what do you think, you look skeleton, you want to have a job?" I explained to the doctor the need that I have to be near to my sister. He told me that it's ok I can be in the hospital, I can be in a... he said to me "I understand the need for you to be near to your sister and I tell you, there is a little porch that is enclosed. I am going to provide there a little bed. You be there, you don't have to work here, unless if you want to cheer up the sick people here. I see that you have some special ability in you, and that you are a very cheerful type of a person". I said "yes indeed I should be cheerful, do you know what I went through and look, I am here and I am normal". So they made me a little room and that was very near to the bed of my sister. She was unconscious and yet I used to rub her feet. And I used to talk to her, and slowly and surely she came back to her self. The other two girls also got better. I used to go to the other sick people and sing for them songs that I remembered from my childhood. My sister got better.

When she was released from that hospital they told us we are not allowed to leave. Going back, we wanted to go back to Hungary, we wanted to see maybe somebody remained from the family. We hoped for my brother, who was the oldest, he was 17 years old. We thought that maybe he came back. Maybe our father because he went from Auschwitz to Mauthausen. We didn't know that he perished later on. Maybe someone is alive, but they said that we can't travel, she's much too weak for such a trip. How they organized it I really don't know, but we were given a room and a kitchen and every few days we had to go back to the hospital to check up with my sister. At that time I came down also with some kind of, I had staphylococcus infection, all over, all kind of things on my body. The Russian doctor came, and without any anesthesia without anything she came and cut, I have marks. Painful, but at least I got healed. About end of august, we got the permission to leave Germany and go to Hungary. The Czechoslovakian organization, the army, gave us some money to purchase tickets with the train and we went to Prague first. The capital of Czech. There the joint, the American Jewish organization had already

a headquarter. They had already a list of names of people who perished, not correct yet completely but they had plenty. Unfortunately that was the place where we find that neither one of our parents, and not our brother remained from the war. We were very torn, didn't want to stay there. Maybe some cousin, some uncle, somebody remained. Let's go back to Hungary. We took the train from Prague, we went back to Budapest. Low and behold we found that we had two uncles who remained, one of them was in the Swedish house of rockelenberg who gave them papers. Two of them were in the Jewish ghetto. In a miraculous way they remained with their whole family. But they didn't have place for us because after the war, everybody was living together. There was shortage of apartments. Or maybe shortage of good will too. I don't want to go into it, it's a painful kind of thing.

We were put into an orphanage home. Our education began right away. It's amazing how people survived and were right away active and organized schooling for children. We both went to school. Although my sister had to be in a sanatorium for a couple more months but once she was released from there, you see the typhoid fever was so strong that once it attacked her lungs and she had to recuperate fully from the sickness. We both had been in school. In 1946 at the beginning of the year, they were talking about that all the orphan children should go to Israel because the memories are much too heavy to be in Hungary. We can't return to our hometown, we have no parents. Maybe if we are in a new environment, maybe if we are in a new country we will be easier to forget, psychologically it would be easier to transition from the terrible experience that we went through. I didn't want so much to go yet because I wanted at least that one school year to end. I felt that it was deprived so much from my education. However they said that even though I didn't finish the year, since I was doing very good, they are going to give me credit for that year.

In 1946 about May, we went with an illegal boat to Israel. Which was occupied at that time by the British. Even though the Britains knew what we went through, they were not much fond to admit us to Israel. We were a lot of orphans and a lot of broken people and we went on the deck of the boat and the British boat came to greet us. They wanted to send us to Cyprus. We begged them that please we are so broken, we need to get out from here. We need to be in the country. After a whole long discussion they admitted us to Israel. We were put in a camp again for three weeks. But then some teachers from the Jewish agency came and released first the young children, and I arrived in 1946 in June to Jerusalem. I was put up in an orphanage home and I went to school.

Most of my education is really from Israel. I have my B.A. from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and I became a certified teacher over there. Then I continued there in higher university in Allentown.

I: How did you get to the states?

S: To the states I came as an exchange teacher. To New York, to Brooklyn Flatbush, to yeshiva of Flatbush. The principle visited, I was teaching already, I was newly married and I was teaching in Israel when he visited me in the class. And he asked me if I would want to come for a little bit and teach here. I had my only sister, Esther, was married and she lived in America. I thought to myself, for sure I want to go, this is my only family I have and for two years is not so terrible. The two years last for thirty eight years and I am very happy to be in this country.

So now I would like to tell, I have first been in the ghetto in resjur, then I was in the brick factory in mishkoltz, we were taken to Auschwitz, I was in the Birkenau lager, and the camp was named B3 which one was meant a camp of elimination. Every day they eliminated it was called the fernichtenslager, it was death camp. From there, luckily it was the end of September I was taken to Bergen Belsen. In December from Bergen Belsen to rochlitz where we worked in a munition factory. We made little appliances for airplanes, from rochlitz we were taken to graslitz. Graslitz we were in a jailhouse and our work consisted of piling stones from the top of the mountain down and up and down. Then for six weeks the death march and liberated in nearby to leibeshitze jatetz, leibeshitze that's sude deutchland, by the Russian army. Living by a catholic priest for a while. Then in the hospital, then in a little apartment in the city of jatetz and from there we returned to Hungary. I can thank to my parents that I was able to hold out in the depth of the darkness and the most difficult days due to their upbringing and due to the special supervision of god, who even at a time that there is darkness in the world he wanted people to remain, perhaps to tell the story of what took place. I am very happy, I have a nice family, god was very good to me, I have four lovely children and thirteen beautiful grandchildren who know what I went through and they are really trying in each day and in each moment to sweeten my life.

I: and you married a rabbi?

S: and I married a rabbi who happened to be my teacher in Israel. And we got married in Israel and had two children there and two in this country.

I: Your name when you were born was Naomi. Now you use a different name?

S: My name was.. well you see in those days Jewish people gave a Jewish name and they

had to give also a name that was accepted by the country that you lived. My Jewish name was Sheindi which means pretty and my Hungarian name was Naomi, spelled in Hungarian N-A-O-M-I. Naomi. When I arrived to Israel the people thought that I was not Jewish. I was blonde, very fair faced. They asked me what is your name. So I said to them Naomi because in my papers it said the official name. They said “oh this is not a Jewish girl”. And I said “what do you mean, I have a Jewish name, my name is Sheindl”. “Oh shendl! that means ‘pretty’, why should you have that name? That name in Hebrew is Yaffa. Yaffa means pretty. In Yiddish, sheindl means pretty.” So they said “ from now on your name is Yaffa”. From then on in all my papers is both of my names ‘Yaffa Naomi’. The only name I do not carry any more was given to me in the Jewish language “sheindl”, by my parents, which was translated into Hebrew. That’s why the difference of the name.

I: I also forgot to ask your father’s name

S: My father’s name was Phillip Donat.

I: And your mother’s name.

S: And my mother’s name was Olga Donat, who was born Schick. My grandfather, rabbi Schick was a very great rabbi who established a very special kind of a school. One of it’s kind in Hungary. Where they not only learned bible but they learned.. It was like a vocational school, they learned also some kind of trade. Either being a tailor or being a shoemaker or carpenter. My grandfather believed that a person should have some kind of a trade. Not depend on it that somewhere he is going to have an income. I am very proud of him, that’s how I think we should be in life, combining the two. It’s one thing not enough. You have to have both. My brother’s name was Joseph Donat, whose perished in the holocaust. My sister, Esther Yehudit, she’s alive and she lives in Montreal. That’s my name now, is munk. I am married to a rabbi Yona Munk.

I: Your story is very important, thank you so much for giving your testimony

S: thank you for your time

[new interview session]

I: Mrs. Munk when we had the interview several months ago we left off about the time

that you and your sister Esther went to Prague for a day and then to Budapest. Can we pick up there and then you tell what happened when you arrived in Budapest?

S: First I want to go back to a minute to Prague. The main reason that we went back to Prague (A) it was on the way but mainly because that was a center for information, who the people survived. There were charters already put up in the Jewish center and the temple there and we looked if our father and brother survived. Somehow we knew that mother perished at the very beginning there in Auschwitz. However we didn't find their names and we still had slight hope. We didn't want to spend any more time in Prague. We took the very first opportunity of train and we went to Budapest. As we arrived to Budapest by the train station was big trucks waiting for the survivors, which was organized by the joint. Joint is an organization from America, Jewish Organization helping refugees. I really don't know the details of the name, but it's a well known organization. It's in existence until this day. They help out in the diaspora in many many other countries people who are in need of help. They greeted us, they took us to a headquarters that they established in a school for the refugees that came back and had no family. As we were going through the streets of Budapest, suddenly I noticed that we were passing by the house where my aunt lived and I started to scream this is 'hunadeter', this is the street where my aunt lives. However they did not let anybody to get off because they were not sure that anybody survived in that address, if that aunt is really alive. So we continued and we went to that place that was established for the refugees and after a day somebody from that orphanage home visited the place, her name is Esther Eckshtein who today is still alive and lives in Israel in the city of Bnei Brak. She was the head of that orphanage home and she made every effort to collect as many Jewish girls who remained after the holocaust and try to bring them to the orphanage home that she established in Budapest immediately after the liberation. To try to reeducate again those people who lost over a year, some of us more of schooling. So the orphanage home was located in Budapest and she took us, not only me and my sister, but a lot of girls who arrived in the transport back to Budapest and we were put up in the orphanage home where we had regular schooling during the day. How she organized this, from where she got the money and the energy, herself a survivor, who was for many years first hiding in Budapest, then caught and sent to a concentration camp in Theresienstadt. Upon her return, that was her aim and dream that as many children that survived she wants to see them being educated again.

In that orphanage home we had very meager, but we had some food. We had very simple headquarters for sleeping and resting. We had excellent teachers. In Budapest many of the professors and teachers from the gymnasium remained alive thanks to

Wallenberg or some of them just in the ghetto who were hiding or with false papers. They also felt that this much what they could do to educate the generation who remained alive. So we were studying—

I: How did that feel to you to be in that situation?

S: In that situation, in a way I was missing the home atmosphere. Having my home. Also I have to tell you, two uncles and one aunt remained alive in Budapest. I had been visiting them once in a while. We had free time we could go visiting museums or books in the library. Each time that we had that kind of period I would jump over and go to visit my aunt. It was very traumatic to see that they lived in their own home, they had their own furniture, it was a family life. Here we had no family life whatsoever.

I: Did you wish that your aunt would invite you to live with her?

S: Not really. Because not being in the camps, she had not enough understand what we went through. In a way I cherished that I am together with people that had the very same fait that we had. We had more understanding of our moods, our crying, our not being able to cope sometimes with the regular daily situation. Because we were together. We had all together that very same background that very same kind of fait and we helped each other to overcome.

I: What were the moods and the crying and the difficulty coping like?

S: well it was very difficult, we had no mommy with whom we could discuss. In a simple way our menstruation our monthly period did not return yet back because of our starvation and the medication that we got in Germany. It would be lovely to talk over it the mommy and to hear from a mother, don't worry eventually it will happen. Or mommy would say lets go to a doctor. We had to deal with all little and big problems by our self. Even though we had teachers and the mother of the orphanage home. But it's not the same with talking to your own mother.

I: So you were able to talk to these people but it was not as helpful as talking to your own mother.

S: It was not as easy. Maybe helpful it was because they did seek out doctors to take us and have checkups but it wasn't the same like talking with your own mother. You are shy

more and there are certain things that you were just keeping to yourself and you wouldn't want to share because even they were trying and very warm, nevertheless it wasn't the same. So we were missing family very much so. In the light that Budapest family life more or less returned to normalcy, because the ones who remained, remained intact. To see was a contrast to the life that we maintained in an orphanage home. But really I have to praise that there were three teachers beside this Esther Eckshtein, whose name today is Esther Weinberg. There were two other teachers, who she really recruited them, very knowledgeable girls and they all are still alive. One of them in Brooklyn New York and the other is in Israel.

I: Do you have contact with them?

S: I do have contact with them. In fact this past summer I was in Israel and Esther, who was the head teacher and the head of this whole organization of the orphanage home and seeking, looking after us. She put together an evening in honor of my visiting Israel. It was very moving because some, very few who remained still from that school that orphanage, came to greet me. I am in very strong contact with Esther. However the other teacher, Rachel, was also there. The third one, Miriam Gross, she is less involved with the group. If it has to do with it that she moved away from the circle of the girls. The majority of the students from that orphanage home are living in Israel. But I visit often Israel so I am in touch with the teachers. Each time very interesting reminder of the era that we all went through together after the war.

I: Is it partly upsetting to you to visit again with them?

S: Really not. In fact as the years pass by I am more and more admiring their mission their undertaking and all the effort and attention they gave us. For instance I remember that Esther went to a sewing lady and ordered for all of us beautiful blouse and beautiful skirt in honor of one celebration. To give back to us a feeling of humanity. To feel good about our self and to look good! Which was very important we had no clothing. We came back from the concentration camp, a matter of fact my winter coat was a German soldiers army coat that I shortened and somebody helped me to change the buttons that I should feel a little bit better. Here was a woman, you have to understand that at the time the situation in Budapest was very difficult. I'm talking about time that it was still under regime of the Russian army. People were standing for bread in the street. Clothing was a rarity. So we didn't feel that outcast with out poor clothing, and yet she was driving and doing everything to get for us some dresses some blouses some skirt that we should be

looking more decent.

I: Aside from standing in line, were you aware of any abuses from the Russian soldiers? Personal abuses?

S: I personally not, but on the train traveling here and there I used to see them seeking out nice looking girls. Just stopping when the train stopped, stopping these girls of continuing their trip. Grabbing them and taking them down. Whatever they did with them, that could be understood.

I: Were you frightened to travel by yourself on the train?

S: Very much so and I rarely traveled if at all. The only trip that I took once was with my aunt to Onod. I don't know if I told you this that my mother before we left, she hid some of the family pictures and some silverware by a gentile lady. My aunt wanted very much that we should have some mementos from our parents. So we traveled together and my aunt was putting a babushka on me. I should not look decent, I should look very frightened, very skinny which I was anyway, and very pale. But she was protecting me. I don't think that ever I would travel by myself, at all in those days.

I: When you had time off by the orphanage did you walk by yourself to your aunts.

S: We walked, but never alone. Never alone. We would never walk alone. Never in the evening. It was mainly in the daytime. Luckily it wasn't too far from my aunt. If I visited my aunt I would always watch my watch that if it's starting in winter already to be dark, we would be heading to go back to the orphanage home.

I: So you were very cautious.

S: Very cautious, yes.

I: And when you went back to Onod with your aunt to see if you could find the mementos what happened?

S: When we went back to Onod to find the mementos we came in and she was a neighbor of us and she greeted us very friendly. When my aunt said 'menomka(?)' you know my sister who you loved and loved you, she left with you a few very important items, would

you be able to give it back? This is a child that survived.” My sister was in a sanatorium so she couldn’t travel with us, she wasn’t well yet. She said, “well I am very sorry. I know she gave us a lot of things. I was very happy to do that for her but the Russian army passed by here and they came into the houses and emptied everything and they took.”

Somehow, looking around it didn’t seem that the house was robbed by the Russian army or that anything was emptied from there. So my aunt told her “we’re very thirsty, would you go out and fetch some water?” Because there were no faucets inside in those days yet. We’re talking about 1945. She went out to pump some water from the well. While she was gone, my aunt went and opened up her drawer, low and behold there it was. When she came back she was white. She said “oh gee I really didn’t know that the things remained.”

I: So your aunt showed her that she found the things in the drawer.

S: Yes, yes. She found the things and she said “oh I am so happy that you did find it.” If it was really true that she didn’t know, that it wasn’t emptied, all the drawers, or it wasn’t all. At any rate we got back. That’s how I have some pictures of my family.

I: How did that feel?

S: It was very very moving. Very moving moment to see my parents again even if they were not alive. But I thought to myself, no cemetery, no anything to remind of my parents and here I am looking and seeing my beautiful father and mother and my brother. It was a great moment. Each time I am taking out the picture I feel like I am close to them.

I: How did it feel that the woman was depriving you of ..(?)

S: Well at that moment I felt a little angry at her. I felt if she couldn’t keep the silverware, but pictures? If she wanted to have the silverware because she needed money, that’s one thing. But at least the pictures. That somehow I couldn’t grasp it. Why would the Russian army take pictures? I do know that they took usually watches or jewelry that they were looking for. But the pictures I couldn’t understand. But I think that she felt that if she’s looking in the drawer for the pictures then other things will come up, I really can’t figure out exactly, I don’t want to accuse. I felt at that moment that the whole world changed, apparently. That people who have been very friendly and very helpful. Once they used to come and shovel our snow because the snow was so high that we couldn’t open our door.

We would go and help them in any kind of situation especially my mother who was the midwife of the town, so anywhere that the child was born she was there. It didn't matter if Jewish or not Jewish. Poor or rich. She would go and help. Warm water, bathe the baby. Cook a meal for the mother after the childbirth. Here we are coming back and they are so cold, so to say.

I: This was the woman that your mother had selected, someone she could trust.

S: Yeah. So it's hard to know. It puzzles me sometimes, but having the nature that I don't want to hate people or be angry at people. Perhaps she really wanted to keep those things. It's possible, you never know.

From there we went back to Budapest and I remained in the orphanage home almost a whole year. From September 1945 until May 46.

I: Now Esther was in a sanatorium all that time

S: Most of the time. After January 1946 she was let out from the sanatorium, she got the ok from the doctors that she recuperated and she joined us in that orphanage home. So I do have some pictures of celebration, that we are together already in the orphanage home.

I: Now where were the Solomon sisters that you were with?

S: The Solomon sisters, they went back to Onod. They did find their little home. They were somehow not afraid of living in the hometown. One of them who was married found her husband. He came back. So was a man protecting them. You know it was a very different kind of a situation. They lived together the husband and the wife and the sister. Eventually after a very short time being in Onod they moved to a bigger city called Mishkoltz, which is the nearest city to Onod. There were many Jewish people who either came back and found someone of the family or they established again a family life. Some people got married a couple months after the holocaust. They were at the age of marriage and they wanted to have some kind of a family life. A home life. So in Mishkoltz there was already a fairly dynamic Jewish life again. They established school, they had a temple, they had a visiting rabbi. I never participated in any of the activities there because I was in Budapest, but even until today there are a few families who are in Mishkoltz who happened to be from Onod and survivors. They still have a temple. I don't think they have any Jewish schools now anymore.

I: In a previous interview you talked some about your faith, but what was your religious life like now in Budapest?

S: In Budapest the orphanage home was an orthodox religious home. We had been conducting the same type of life that I was brought up at home. Praying, blessing over the bread, rest according to the code of the religion. It was more or less the very same one. It is really amazing because a lot of people who survived they like, so to say, turned away from God. As the head of yeshiva university, Dr. Lam, once I had a very interesting discussion with him, and he said to me “you know Yaffa, I am not surprised the ones who turned away after the holocaust. To me it is most surprising the ones who remained faithful such as you.” Many of them who really completely turned away eventually recovered from the traumatic experience and slowly came back to the realization that even though this terrible thing happened, still there is God. It could be that for some kind of a reason he turned away. Or he let things to happen in the world. But definitely there is a God. Unfortunately a lot of people just can’t cope with it. They have so much anger and so much disappointment in God that they can’t return back again. I feel very lucky and very fortunate that it did not effect me and I remained the same faithful person that my parents brought me up. I pity the ones that can’t recognize the hand of God because I think that it gives me a certain strength. In my whole life, if it has to do with coping with what I went through or the daily life today. To see the creation and not to believe that it was created by God. To see a beautiful day like today, the sun is shining, the renewal of nature. How all this is taking place, yes science has to do with it, but definitely above all is God. I pity the ones who can’t see and recognize his presence.

I: How do you explain to yourself all the terrible things that happened?

S: You’re asking me a very difficult question because I am all the time trying to answer to myself this tremendous puzzling question. Why it took place. Why I had to lose my parents. Why 6 million Jews and so many gentiles and so many gypsies who were innocent. Mainly the most hurting and painful for me is whenever I think of the 1.5 million children who were completely innocent. Even if we want to blame or put any kind of pressure on people, or to say it came to them because they did something, but what did children do, they are innocent. So that is most puzzling. The only way that I can, is that it’s above my human understanding. Because there is no explanation for it. The greatest nation, the most cultured, the most educated people were the Germans. The people of science, the people of so many good things, music, you name it, they really knew. That they could go down to such a level and to be so cruel and so systematically

and in so organized a way, to kill out so many people it's beyond my human understanding. I feel that is for me the best answer. There are things that we know, we have a great sage, his name was Rambam. One of our great scholars in Judaism who said that "you are allowed to search the ways of God, but when there is no answer that means that it's above a human ability to understand." I can cope with that answer. I don't buy any kind of answer that they were mad, that they killed the Jews because the Jews were rich or all kind of other explanation. They took away their jobs.. There is no justification whatsoever to kill so many million people in such a cruel way except this is one of the things that we don't understand.

I: So your very strong faith continued throughout

S: I think so, that that helped me all the time. Wherever I have been I always felt the presence of God. All the miracles that happened to me during the holocaust and after. I feel that he was watching over me. We all survivors have that kind of question, why me and not others? It's not always the easiest thing to live with that kind but you have to believe that there is a special reason. Why some of us and so few of us remained after the holocaust, perhaps to tell the story, to teach people to be careful. When you are angry you have to calm down. It's a lesson. If it's not taken as a lesson for humanity, to be careful and to know how to conduct yourself in daily life too, with your neighbors with your friends, with your family, then the holocaust was in vain. If we learn from it if we better our way our way of life and the whole of humanity is learning from it than at least it wasn't completely in vain. Otherwise, why so many people?

I: So that's part of what we're doing today.

S: Yeah.

I: So you were in the orphanage until about May '46?

S: Until about end of April. It was very interesting, teaching a little bit, even though I was fourteen years old, but what I learned I was teaching to younger children. In the orphanage home.

I: What subject were you teaching?

S: All kind of subjects, mainly math. From childhood on I was a very good student in

math. I remember in my hometown the mayor's daughter who had difficulty in math, I used to teach her privately. I must have been maybe 10 years old. It just so happened that was my best subject. So I was teaching to the younger group and then one evening they gathered us in our social hall and they said that there is an organized group that is going to Palestine, who would like to join? They told us that it's a difficult journey, it's not legal, the British people don't want Jewish people to come to Palestine but we are going to organize and you will be put into schools and orphanage home. It was something that appealed very much to us. You have to understand that wherever we turned it reminded us the hostility and the abandonment and the cruelty of people. How did they let all this to happen? Why didn't they try to hide us? Why didn't they try to go against the German regime? Why didn't they try to fight for us? So we were not happy to be in Europe. We wanted to get away from there. It reminded us too much. Wherever we turned. I remember going in the street and suddenly crying, why? because I remembered that the last time that I was in Budapest was when my father and mother took me to the big zoo. In a way we were happy because we had clothing, we had food, we had good friends, we had been in school. But everything reminded us of the tragedy that had happened to our nation. We arranged just to leave. So when this announcement came that we can go to Palestine, we were very happy.

They organized and prepared us that it won't be an easy journey. We will have to go through borders, through Hungary to Romania in the night, have to hide, they are going to try to get the boat from Costanzo, that's the port city of Romania. From there to go to Israel. We joined it.

I: Who was organizing this group?

S: It was a Zionist group organizing this group, based in Budapest.

I: They wanted to help children get to Palestine.

S: That's right. They knew that emotionally, it would be the best for the children. To be away from all the environment that reminds them constantly of what took place. To go to a new country where most of the year is spring, that alone, being more free.

I: The group was going to be all children.

S: The group was mainly children or young people. The elderly people, they were sick. Very few remained except in Budapest. No elderly people came back from the

concentration camp. They organized this trip. I remember bringing very few items with us. We didn't have too much anyway, but because we had to be in a truck. They put some benches in a truck, closed the truck with blankets. During the night we went through the border. I really don't know how they arranged this with the Romanian government that they closed their eyes that these refugees are going through the border. We were stranded then in Bucharest, which is the capital of Romania, for about six weeks. Also in a Jewish organized home. Again, just girls together, and our teachers were with us. We continue even on the truck, we were continuing learning. They were very much into that that the kids should not suffer any lack of education. That all what had been deprived from us during the year or some were longer in the camp, should be given back to them, to educate again, in a way to be also busy with knowledge instead of too much time thinking.

[break]

I: You were talking about stopping in Bucharest for six weeks, and how the lessons continued during the trip.

S: Yes we had been stranded in Bucharest because the dealing with the boat company took a long time till they organized and purchase the boat, till they find a person who was ready to maintain the boat and take the group to Palestine.

I: How many were in the group?

S: We were 1800. Half of it or the majority of it were girls, and the other group was boys. We joined together with another orphanage home which was boys home. They were outskirts of Bucharest in a little city, put up. After six weeks of living in Bucharest where we constantly continued to learn, and all the time looked for it that life should be as normal as is possible for us. We were told one day that at last we are going to the port city and we are going to board the ship. I can't tell you how joyful it was for us. We were looking forward of living. Not knowing where we would be going, and how good it will be or how bad it will be. Difficult, or what is waiting for us.

I: Did you have some imaginings of what Israel would be like?

S: Very little, except the uncle who lived in Jerusalem and during the war when we were still living in Onod, he would write to us and he would describe the mountains of

Jerusalem, the beauty of the country. So we had a little bit of desire. Also they were teaching us in the school songs about Israel. Or they would be telling us stories about the prophets who used to walk in the streets of Jerusalem. Or the temple that was in existence once upon a time and there is a remaining wall. So a little bit of a taste or a little bit of an understanding we had. However, I wouldn't say that we were very knowledgeable about what life is there. Nevertheless we had understanding that the Jewish people who were present at that time in Palestine, which is called today Israel, that they were seeking the Britains to leave the country and that there is conflict there. Because I don't think that at that point we wanted to go to anywhere where life would be a conflict again or war again, or hostility again. What we wanted was to be just in nature and to see positive things. To see peacefulness among people, and love. Mainly really what we were seeking for was that the people love each other. Because a lot of us lost that faith that people can still love. That people care for each other. Except the united-ness of our people here and there during or after the holocaust.

That boat was waiting for us at the port. One thousand eight hundred people in a big ship, which was not actually a ship for transporting human beings. It was a ship transporting goods or animals. But we were delighted that we are heading to Palestine. The singing, the lectures on the boat. Somehow just to go and renew life in a different place, it was connected with a lot of hope. We were hoping that we are going to establish a new type of life. We are on the boat and water is coming in to the ship, we are frightened we are going to sink. They tried to fix the boat while we are in the boat and then one day after traveling they said that all the young people should go on the deck of the boat. We are encountered by the British. They don't want to let us into Palestine.

I: Now how long had you been on the boat?

S: About one week. Lots of us are sick, sea sick.

I: Were you sea sick?

S: No. I am always the lucky one.

I: Was Esther sea sick?

S: Yes sure. Yes she's very sensitive until this day. We went on the deck of the boat and we saw a huge military boat greeting us. They were screaming to the head of our boat, to our organizers that we should turn back to Europe. So we started to cry. We didn't want

to go back to Europe anymore. Whatever is waiting for us, just not back to Europe. So we were begging. Each one of us had the opportunity to speak in the loudspeaker and beg to the Britons, we are refugees who lost everybody. We suffered so much. We have nobody. We want to come to this country, we want to start a new life, please let us in. So this went on for three four hours, the yelling, 'yes' 'no'. Are you having a lot of mens? Are they military people? Do you bring any kind of ammunition. They were frightened that the Jewish people would be strong and they are going to oust the Britons from Palestine. After four hours about, or maybe it was a little bit longer, they agreed that they let us into Palestine. The boat came to the port of Haifa. Just from the deck to see the beautiful mountains of Carmel, which is a huge mountain in Haifa, was very moving, very emotional. The nature. It was springtime it was end of May. It's beautiful in Israel, all the flowers are blooming already. As we came down from the boat our people, they were greeting us and they were throwing to us all kinds of bags of goodies. The singing and the hugging. Some people found some relatives, some friends. But the Britons did not allow us to go out to the city. We were put in a camp, which was not a concentration camp, it's named Atlit. It was surrounded with gates and fence. It was a fenced in camp with army barracks. It was a very emotional kind of arrival to Israel which represents in our eye the freedom. That's what we are dreaming that now we are going to be free from soldiers and from being observed all the time, and here we are again enclosed in a closed camp situation.

I: So what did that feel like?

S: It brought anger. It brought anger because we felt that the world still did not learn from the experience and from the tragedy. We felt that we are people who actually all of us needed to be pampered, needed to be loved, needed so to say, in a resort place and given all what we could be given and here we are in a situation where we are closed in, we have no contact with the outside world again.

I: So again you hoped, and again you had been disappointed.

S: In a way, yes. Still, it's not to compare. Because we knew that eventually they are going to fight for our freedom. They, the people who organized this trip. It's called the Youth Aliyah, the Youth 'going up to Israel'. Lovely movement who wanted to save the children from remaining in Europe with the memories. They felt that that's the right thing to do for them.

I: So you had confidence they would be able to do this for them?

S: Yes we had confidence. Still, we could move in the premises, we couldn't leave the camp. It's not to compare to the camps in Germany. We were given food. Some people had visitors. We slowly contacted our uncle in Jerusalem who sent his son in law and he sent goodies for us and he brought us my very first silk scarf. I got from my uncle who sent it through the camp to us. He wanted that we should feel human, we should feel as girls should feel that you beautify a little yourself so he sent a scarf for me and for my sister. I by nature cherish every little new thing. I don't have to have big things. Every little new thing I can be happy. In those days for sure that scarf meant so much. I was trying to put it around neck and my head and around my face. All kind of different things.

I: What color was it?

S: It was a blue with white and pink. I remember because I had one nice dress and it matched. The dress was blue. So we were in that situation but not too long because then from the Jewish agency, which has branches in America too, and it's subsidized I think the money from here as well from Palestine. They came in and they demanded from the British that young children should be let out. After three weeks being in that camp we were let out. They gave us some ticket for a bus that would take us to Jerusalem. Because they asked "where is your destination, where do you want to go?" My uncle who lived in Jerusalem, he corresponded with my uncle in Budapest. Prior to my trip in Palestine the two of them made a decision, since we had no parents, that we should be attending a certain kind of religious school in Jerusalem. That school happened to have a dormitory. In that dormitory were the refugees, the survivors, the orphans. It was a kind of orphanage dormitory, still you didn't feel like you were in a real orphanage home. It was more like a school dormitory.

I: How did you feel about that decision?

S: Well, in a way I felt that it was somebody that was making the decision I didn't have to break my head where to head and what to do. Later on, I wished that they wouldn't make that decision for me. Perhaps I would have chosen a different school. This was a little bit more religious than I. It was a little bit too pious, you know what I mean. It was a little bit too strict kind of a school. I wanted to go to a lesser. It's like you go to a regular public school, or you go to the church school. This was more like a church school. Very restricted, orders. Very restricted how, code of dressing and code of behavior.

I: What kinds of behavior and dress?

S: Very little freedom in the evening, you could not leave the premises. You had to be home a certain time. In school you had to go with long sleeves and long skirts.

I: Were there any boys in the school?

S: No, only girls.

I: You had to be very covered.

S: Very much so, yes. So I wouldn't have mind a little bit less strict kind of situation.

I: Was there more religious training? More services?

S: Yes, more than I was exposed at home. Though I am coming from a rabbinical family. But this was a little bit more to the right. But the learning was on a high level. So I can't complain. Because educationally I got what I wanted. I wanted very much to further my education. In the beginning we had difficulty with the language.

I: You and Esther.

S: Yes me and Esther.

I: And the language was Hebrew.

S: Yes

I: Were the other girls in the school survivors, or some of them not survivors?

S: The majority of the students were local. Who lived, who were born and raised in Israel. In that time it was called Palestine. The refugees were trained by private teachers in order that they can cope with the material that the rest of the group was learning. They subsidized our learning sessions by taking us out some time from the regular class then privately teaching us. However, in many things such as science or math or geography, we were ahead of the Israelis. Apparently the education in Europe was on a high level in

certain areas and the religious education was much behind. So we needed mainly in language and religious studies such as the bible or the prophets, we needed a lot of help at the beginning. Or Jewish history. But in many other subjects we were much ahead of the local people.

I: You had told me in an earlier interview that your father had arranged Hebrew lessons for you and your sister and brother. Did that include spoken Hebrew?

S: That included spoken Hebrew but that was so little. It was really.. We knew certain expressions, you know. But we were not able to converse in Hebrew.

I: So not only did you have trouble with the classes because of spoken Hebrew, but was it hard for you to make friends also because of the language?

S: It was in a way maybe, but it wasn't really because the girls were very outgoing. I remember being invited to several of my friends who were very outgoing to help us and to try to make us feel good and being in homes sometimes. Not only to be in the dormitory. We were invited to their homes.

I: Were they day students or boarder students?

S: They were day students. Only the refugees were the ones who lived in the dormitories. Only the orphans. It wasn't easy at the beginning. Certain subjects took us a long long time to be able to join in with the rest of the group. But they made us feel good that in other subjects we were ahead. Such as math or science. They always used to say "we teach you Hebrew, we teach you prophets, and you teach us other things".

I: Did you have much contact with your family at that point, with your uncle?

S: With my uncle we were most of the time on the Shabbat, on the holiday, visiting here or there for a meal. We never slept over by my uncle. For different reasons. The boarding school didn't like the idea that we are not back in the evenings. Also, they lived in a very poor condition. Housing was very difficult in those days in Israel. My uncle who had three children lived in a two bedroom apartment. It would mean that we would be living or sleeping in the living room, which we didn't want to cause such a commotion in the house. But we went usually for a meal here and there. It was very refreshing. My aunt was a highly intelligent woman. My uncle was a rabbi in Frankfurt amein. They always

tried to tell us things what a parent would guide us.

I: So your uncle before the war was a rabbi in Frankfurt am Main, was he a refugee before the Holocaust?

S: He went in 1939, he got certificates from the Britons, which meant he was invited, allowed citizen to enter Palestine. They had certain quotas. I remember that in this country also you have quotas, how many people can come from Hungary, how many refugees can come from other country. Now a lot of times we hear other stories. When I came to this country I also came on a quota. So my uncle went from Frankfurt am Main to Palestine in 1939 right after Kristallnacht. They were also not too long in the country. A few years. But they established a nice kind of a life. It was very refreshing to talk with my uncle. He would tell us beautiful stories about our parents. He reminded us those days we came to visit.

I: So you had known him before.

S: Yes. We had known him. Both of them very outstanding people, I remember that one day my uncle took me and my sister to a store in Jerusalem and he bought a pocketbook for us. There were more important things maybe, but he wanted so much to give us the feeling that we are girls. That we are human, that we have a pocketbook just like every other girl has.

I: So that was very important to you.

S: It was very. I have a picture standing by the store when we went out. Believe me my uncle wasn't well to do, to buy this kind of things. Yet for him it was very important to give as many things as we could in order to make us feel that yes we live a normal life, and we are human beings, and we are just like all the other girls after the war. We walked with that pocketbook so proud. I wish to see today teenagers would cherish something that we get as we cherished those pocketbooks. For years, I think only a couple years ago I gave it away. I kept that pocketbook even though I was not using it because I couldn't depart from it. Because it was so meaningful, so special. That was the very first, the scarf that he sent to the camp. Then this pocketbook were the very first things as a young teenager I had, and I wasn't different from others.

I: So where did you give such a special thing?

S: Where did I give it? I gave it to a girl who was visiting me from Poland. In fact, it's not for the tape but we have now also a girl here who came to study from Poland. I am in contact with a girl who the parents were survivors and they went back to Poland to live and this girl is a young girl, her parents are not young people you know, and she's here to study and she's so determined so it brings back to me so many memories. How determined how she wants to live a normal life.

I: Does it remind you of yourself?

S: A lot.

I: So this is important for the tape.

S: Oh. If I should put this story in.

I: Did you know her parents? How did you find each other?

S: She was visiting a librarian from the school where I am teaching. She goes to a school in Silver Spring, and the daughter of the librarian of my school goes also to that school and they invited her. So she said "Yaffa I think that for you it would be a very meaningful experience to meet with this girl". And low and behold it was a very meaningful experience and I want her to come for a meal to visit me also.

I: Had you wished that someone would do that for you when you first arrived in Israel?

S: Very much so.

I: So giving her the pocketbook was really very meaningful for you.

S: Very much so. Very much so. I always wanted that somebody would appreciate as much as I appreciated. It would be used by somebody that it would be meaningful for.

I: So you feel you found the right person for the pocketbook.

S: I think so. Back to Jerusalem.

I: Who paid for the school that you were going to?

S: It was paid by the Jewish agency. I remember one thing that I wanted to tell, when we were let out from the camp, we were just given money to take the bus to Jerusalem. There was no straight bus from the camp situated next to Haifa to go to Jerusalem. We had to stop over in Tel Aviv. As we are standing waiting for the connecting bus a lady approaches us, she heard me talking to Esther in Hungarian, she approaches us and she's saying "who are you?" We told her our story, we are children of the rabbi of Onod. "Where are you going?" "We are going to Jerusalem". This was before a holiday. She says "well I knew your family from Europe, I am here in this country a few years, do you need anything?" We said "no we don't need nothing". However she ran and she bought for us some cake and she bought for us some candy and chocolate and she pushed into our pocket a very small amount of money but that was the very first money that we had in our pocket. She hugged us and she said "god bless you, thank god I see some young people who survived the concentration camps". A million times I wanted to find out who this lady was? What was she doing at the bus stop? She wasn't traveling. Later on when I told, many times when I repeated this story because I was very moved by it, that somebody specially found for her task to go to stations of bus or ships or wherever, maybe maybe she will find some survivors and she would be able to give them a few things to cheer them up. Once I told this story to a cousin of mine and she said, "you know who this was? this lady was a sister in law of my sister who died after the war in Budapest." She didn't know that we are related, I mean it's not real relation there is contact whatever. Many times I learned from this, not many times, but I learned from this I also like to go places where I know there is a need to cheer up people, if its an old age home or an orphanage home because I always feel I remember. It was little, it was small, but it was very much on time. That little bit of package that she had given to us and the few pennies that she put in our pocket. So I hope that I will be able for many years to cheer up people and continue to do what I learned from that one experience.

Back to Jerusalem. I had difficulties learning in the beginning but slowly it got each time better thanks to lots of the girls who came and learned with us and invited to their houses, it was not only the learning session but being invited into normal homes and seeing that there are families. That not everything had been wiped away during the holocaust, gave us a lot of strength. A good meal here and there sometimes because it was a very poor time in Israel. The food in the orphanage home was again fairly meager. But we ate, we ate bread. Here and there some potato. It was very helpful to be again among people who were cheerful who were happy, seeing children, seeing babies. I remember that I was very moved when I saw that babies are so pretty and that mommies

are pushing carriages. I thought that the whole world had been wiped away and that only a few of us remained. But I saw that life was going on and families were together and they built homes. They were working and they were learning. It was a normal kind of a life. Unfortunately I had to go through again a war in Israel in 1947. The independence war of Israel. Then the British were ousted and the Arabs attacked us. I have been visiting a friend of mine in Jerusalem and as I was returning back on the road to the orphanage home, I see that somehow the street is empty. That was very unusual for a Saturday afternoon. People used to stroll in the street, that's the day of rest. I hear boom boom boom, and I don't see nobody. So I ran to a ditch in the road and I was just hiding myself there knowing this kind of things from the experience in the holocaust. Then I hear from one window somebody screaming "come in! come in!" So I went into the house and they took me down to the basement which was a semi-kind of a shelter. They told me that I can't continue to go. "You can't go back to your orphanage place, the dormitory because the Arabs attacked us". So I went through a difficult time in Israel very shortly after our arrival.

We arrived in '46, '47 already. Started with the British with the Arabs and then the Independence war. Jerusalem was sieged. There was no water. There was no way to get out from the city to come back. And yet, I don't know, with all that suffering I never gave up. And it wasn't so depressing, because you were together with many people. You saw families. It wasn't that we had to be surrounded. It wasn't that we had to be hearing the gas chamber or smelling the smoke of the gas. Here we were fighting for our own independence. It was a very different kind of a feeling. It wasn't easy. It was not pleasant. But not to compare.

I: You didn't feel helpless as you had?

S: No. Not helpless, not at all. We had faith in our soldiers. We had faith in Hashem, in God you know. But it was difficult. Food was very poor. The main problem in Jerusalem was water. They used to give out a bucket of water per family. That's how difficult it was. For the time being, school was closed.

I: You were still living in the orphanage.

S: Still in the orphanage.

I: But you weren't having classes.

S: We had no classes because we were attacked and they were afraid to have children in the street. In those days children were walking to school. Even on the bus it was not safe. But after a while they reopened back the school. I left Jerusalem during the siege with an armor car. They took down some children to Tel Aviv because they felt that it was very dangerous to be in Jerusalem. Esther, my sister, by that time was working in Tel Aviv. So I went there.

I: So she was not in school.

S: She wasn't in the school with me. She was only for one year and she learned to sew. She went to a vocational school. I went to regular gymnasium.

I: So Esther did not go to the same school in Jerusalem that you did.

S: No. Not to the same school.

I: But she was in Jerusalem.

S: She was in the same dormitory. They established for girls who were unable to do spiritual kind of things or scholastic kind of things. Who were more broken from the war. Esther was, even though she was much brighter, for her learning is very easy, I had to work on my studies all the time all my life. Still she just couldn't go back to the books. They found that it's the best thing for certain girls to be busy with their hands instead of being busy with their minds.

I: So you were separated from Esther again.

S: I was separated from Esther. The first time separated after. Because after the camp she was in a sanatorium but I was not really separated because we were both in Budapest. Here we were also not separated, we lived together in the dormitory. Then we were separated because once she learned her profession, sewing, she got a job and she went to Tel Aviv. Also you have to know that after a certain age they did not keep the girls in the dormitory.

[break]

I: You were talking about Esther in Tel Aviv and you were still in Jerusalem, and that

was the first time that you were separated. How did you take that, being separated from Esther, even though you knew that it was important for her to be doing what she was doing?

S: In a way it was very difficult because I had nobody except her. Being the older sister who all the time felt a certain kind of responsibility and being a substitute mother in a way, as much she could. But by that time, perhaps due to my friends that were very very careful and very giving and very supporting, it was a little bit easier to take that separation. We were in constant touch with each other. But then when Jerusalem was surrounded I could not leave and she could not come to visit. That was a little bit difficult, because the fear was there. There was hope but there was a fear too, who knows how long will be this separation and when will I be able to see her again. She was the one who initiated that I should be leaving Jerusalem. It wasn't easy because you could not as a civilian leave the city. Soldiers were going in secret ways and they organized that once in a while to unite sisters or unite families they would take each time a few people. So happened that she made this arrangement with a convoy of soldiers I went from Jerusalem. Which was kind of a dangerous trip to do, from Tel Aviv. She made arrangement in Tel Aviv for me that I could continue in the same kind of school setting that I had been attending in Jerusalem and also in an orphanage home. There were orphanage homes established by the Jewish agency in different cities all over in Israel. So I went back to school. I continued my learning. Esther was visiting me on a daily basis. She was learning a little bit of money so she bought a blouse for me or some extra little food. Eventually after being in that orphanage home for about a year, we rented a little room with a privilege of using a little bit a kitchen. We joined together again and lived on our own. This was about 1948.

I: So you were 16.

S: Yes. I continued to go to school and Esther continued to go to her work. We lived by a family who rented out one little room and we were able to use one little burner in our room. Make once in a while food or a little bit of soup. It was an interesting kind of situation because we felt that we are again independent. That one little room, even though it was a rented room. But we felt that we are no more orphans. That we are like living a normal life like other people are living. We were very friendly with the people who rented us the place out. They were very nice to us, very intelligent people who helped me a lot with my learning also. Then we made friends, neighbors. There was a piano teacher who was very much looking out that we should come to her house, that we should be in a

family environment once in a while. She lived with her mother, she had two young children, and I loved to go to visit there. She had a brother who was a teacher, a matter a fact I wanted to learn a little bit English because by that time I had a command of the Hebrew language. I wanted some other foreign language to learn because I always wanted to be a teacher and I knew that eventually need more languages to know.

I: Did you assume that you would live in Israel for the rest of your life?

S: At that time I assumed that I would be in Israel and I am going to establish a family life eventually. It is very interesting to note that he was teaching me and he was always looking my handwriting. This is the brother of the music teacher who were the neighbors of where we had been living. It's outskirts of Tel Aviv, outskirt between Tel Aviv and Ramat Gan.

I: So you were going there for English lessons.

S: For English lessons. Free of charge. Just me. Whenever I came he used to be amazed with my handwriting. I don't know, I was young and very foolish. I didn't notice that actually he is teaching because he is in love with me not because he really was interested to teach me.

I: Why did you think he wasn't charging you?

S: I thought that so many people wanted to help, all the refugees in many different ways. Some who could help financially, some who could help educating them. I thought this the other, yes. I was really not interested in that time yet to get married. Nevertheless if I—

I: Now you're about 17

S: At this point 16 17, going on 17. He wanted to take me to a theatre. It's not only that I wasn't interested because humanity came back to me and for sure I was the age of sixteen and a half, seventeen something is moving in you, and you do feel you are a girl and this is a man. But he was not attractive at all. I really didn't want to be too much in his company. I enjoyed learning, but that's about it. Later on he was expressing that he wants to really date me, and that he wants to go with me and I said that I'm too young yet.

I: How old was he?

S: He was much older, he was much older. He must have to been 28, 29, much older than I. Many many years later when I was already a mommy of two children and I visited in Israel I happened to be in the temple with his mother, who loved me very much so. Later I understood why they were so much inviting us to the house because they had a plan in their mind for the son to marry me. She said to me “now” later, years later “now you can tell me, you are married and my son is married, why didn’t you want to have Sully for your husband?” I said to her “don’t ask me such questions.” But I know what I was thinking at the age of 16 and I didn’t wanted to tell her that he was not attracting me, you can’t say that to a mother. But I started with him to learn, and with the sister I was learning a little bit music. I wanted very much to get back to all the things that my parents wanted to give us. Unfortunately it was interrupted by the Germans. But it was very difficult because we didn’t have the means financially that I could go study music or take private lessons in English. So here was the opportunity but that had to stop after I learned that there are other alternative motivations than just giving us the extra lessons.

I: So after you figured out what was going on you stopped the lessons?

S: I stopped the lessons. I stopped the lessons.

I: Was that hard for you to do?

S: It was because I wanted very much to further in any way, in every way, my education. But I was involved in the school and eventually I learned a little bit music from other sources. I finished the high school. Not too many years after it I met my husband and I got married with him.

I: How did you meet him?

S: My husband was living by the principal of my school. In Tel Aviv. I was in Tel Aviv at school.

I: What school?

S: In Tel Aviv, it’s called Beit Yakov. My husband was living in their house and one day, she said to my husband. He was a boarder there. People used to take rooms by families. He said “I have a lovely girl, and I think that this girl is just for you. She has a very

similar kind of a background.” Although my husband was in Israel from 1939 and I only came in 1946, but the background is very similar.

I: In what way was it similar.

S: Similar because he comes from Czechoslovakia from where my father was, in the very same city. He went to the same school that my father went before he went in many years, but it was the same kind of setting. More or less from the same type of religious background. Educationally the same type. Financially, everybody was so called ‘middle class’. But what did we call ‘middle class’, if you had a room and a bed that was called ‘middle class’ in those days. So he was in the army at that time and he had furlough, a few days of vacation from the army and he said “if you come to the school I will introduce to you the girl that I am mentioning”. My husband knew me from before. Seeing me in the street of Tel Aviv. He used to walk with his buddy from the army. He would say to him “you see that girl that blonde one, I will take her out”. He knew me from even before when we attended the wedding of my teacher Esther Eckshtein, who was my teacher after the war. She is related to my husband, she’s a second cousin. Which I didn’t know until the wedding. I went as a student of her to the wedding. He went as a relative. I was introduced to her at the wedding. But nothing more than this is one of my students.

So when he was on vacation from the army he went to the school and I was called out from the class that I have to go to the office, the principal wants to see me. My heart was beating, I thought “god, did I fail in the past, did I do something wrong? why am I called to the office?” She said to me somebody wants to meet you. Here on the porch of the office building is a soldier in uniform and he tells me “I have two days off from the army, I want to take you to a night out”.

I said “I have to ask my sister”. I was, you know, I had no parents, with whom am I talking anything over? I said by the way, you know, my sister is older and she has to get married before me. Low and behold, I don’t want to elaborate on this story but slowly from this, within a year it developed a friendship to an extent that we got engaged and married.

I: So how old were you when you met?

S: Nineteen. Eighteen in the school. I was at the age of nineteen when I got married.

I: And you were still in school.

S: I was still in school. I continued to..

I: This was the equivalent to a college.

S: This was already then, yes. It was a teacher seminary. Which we don't have a lot today.

I: We used to have a lot.

S: Yeah, but we don't have anymore. I know that near to Allentown. Kutstown. Has a teacher's seminary. But it's very very rare now. I think that it's something that I'd like to see that it's coming back again.

I: So you were still in school and he was still in the army when you married?

S: He was still in the army when I married my husband.

I: You were then nineteen.

S: Yeah. And it wasn't an easy life, but we were very happy. We lived in one room apartment which was our living room and dining room and later on when my baby came it was even the baby room. We were very happy. Very happy. I'm very thankful for everything. This was the first baby, my son, that was born in our family. The first child after the holocaust. Very very moving moment. I remember when from Yale they interview me for the holocaust testimony and this was the highlight of my life when this baby was born. Because that minute I felt that there is continuation and that the nation and the people are renewing and getting back their strength.

I: And what did you name him?

S: I named him after my husband's father who perished also in the holocaust, Gabrielle. We wanted, while I was pregnant we were discussing all the time. Each one of us lost both sets of parents and each one of us lost a brother. So as many children we will have we would like that in that way their name should not be forgotten. So we will name the children. I wanted to be a good wife and I said if it's a girl I will name it after my mother, if it's a boy it will be after your father. So it was a boy. This one that is getting now

married is named after my mother. But we have four children, and it's after the four parents.

I: So you have two boys and two girls.

S: Two boys and two girls. Now the life was not easy. I have to say to you, after the holocaust. We were in Israel even after we got married. We lived in one room. We shared a kitchen three families together. It was an apartment of three rooms and in each room one couple was living and the kitchen we divided and three women were sharing that kitchen. But there was a lot of happiness, there was a lot of positiveness. There was a lot of sharing and doing together things, and respectfulness, trying to cheer each other.

I: Were the other women older than you?

S: Yes. I was the youngest.

I: Before we started the interview we were talking about your learning to cook and how you didn't have a chance for your mother to teach you and that when you were married you didn't know very much about cooking. You lived with Esther. Did you learn some of that cooking when you lived with Esther?

S: Well, when I lived with Esther, Esther was mainly in charge of the cooking. I was mainly in charge of cleaning and ironing. I was not so much interested in cooking. I was more into books in those days.

I: How was it after you got married in those days?

S: After I got married it was difficult. I remember that once I tried to make a cake because my husband said that it would be nice on the day of Shabbat to have a cup of coffee with a piece of homemade cake. Bakeries were not in existence. It was too expensive if it was here and there a bakery. Who could afford? I attempted to make a caked. It was a yeast cake and it wouldn't rise. So what should I do? It's already afternoon and it's nothing moving, it's soon the holiday coming, the Shabbat, I am not able to bake anymore. So I took that dough and I put it in the garbage can, and one thing I forgot was that I should have been wrapping it or hiding it more, that was the task of my husband that he came home that he helped me to take down the garbage from the apartment and into the dumpster to put it. As he was throwing it he saw the dough, he

didn't say nothing. Shabbat morning I was serving coffee and I had a piece of chocolate. He says "ah it would be nice to have a piece of cake but what can we do it's in the dumpster." So I knew that he noticed the dough. But slowly, I don't know, very little. I am not a big cook today either. I am admiring how my daughter is cooking, she is a really gourmet cooking. I do simple things. The taste I think came back, remembering from the home. I remember how it tasted, a good potato soup. I remember the dill that mother was using, or the petrosil. Or seeing her doing things. Eventually, certain things come back to you. And from experience. As my husband says I experimented on him. He had to be the one to eat certain foods that was not so good. But thank god, he survived. Forty seven years we will be married in April. So apparently something went good.

I: So back to your schooling. You were in school when you were married.

S: I was in school after I got married. I was in school for a very long time, and at the very early age I was still in school and married. I went to teach in outskirt in Tel Aviv. At that time the head of the country of Israel was Ben Gurion, which is a known name. He asked all the students who went to teach a seminar, to volunteer and go out to teach because the influx of the immigration was so high and Israel was not ready and prepared with enough teachers. So it was counted to a certain degree as credit towards our learning. We went out to teach in remote places, outskirt, my job was in a slum area of Tel Aviv, my first job. I had forty two students in the class. Not being an experienced teacher was not really an easy task. I was teaching first grade. Reading. I remember, I counted that at least thirty different countries were the children from and many different languages. But I still cherish that year. Because it was not only teaching those children, but helping them to adjust to a new life again. Later on I was teaching, mainly that they came from Morocco. I remember, I wasn't yet married when I was already helping out in that special observation center to teach children and I used to take home to bathe children. I was not only teaching, but I was teaching the parents because they came from Morocco from caves that they lived in and they had very little knowledge to maintain hygiene life at home. I used to take home children for the weekend, that they should have a little bit better food, better home. A matter of fact I got sick from one of the children, they had a lot of problems with eye infections. Trachoma. And I developed from this one little gorgeous beautiful child a bathed her, I put her next to me in bed, I didn't have extra bed anyway, and she was sleeping with me. So my husband is always teasing me that when I said to him "yes I marry you", I was not seeing well because I had that sickness of my eye.

But it was pioneer years. Everyone was doing. Everyone was helping. So even if

we had a lot of difficulties, we felt that we are all together building back a normal kind of a life. A new home for all of us. That we are establishing back a nation that has been destroyed. Until this day when I see a pregnant woman I bless, because it means that one more life is coming to this world. It's strengthening again the humanity. There is one more instead of the ones that have been wiped. We have to replace the ones who we lost. So it was a very, it was like the spring. The springtime is the time when everything is starting to come to life. That's how those years will be always remembered by me. Difficult, in one way it was very little income, it was very hard to find a job to have normal living quarters or any luxurious condition. Who had a car, who had.. we walked to places, and we never minded because we were all determined to try to prove to us, to the world and to humanity that with all we went through we are back to humanity and we are building back a normal kind of a life.

So I think that gave us a lot of courage, a lot of strength, and a lot of hope, seeing that things are getting back to normal.

I: So this year when you were teaching in the outskirts, you had finished school.

S: I finished school two years after I was married. I was teaching more. I was teaching and going to school at the same time.

I: Your school was training elementary education?

S: Elementary education. Yes, I always wanted primary grades. Until this day, it's forty years that I am teaching and always, always, young children.

I: So you finished going to school, and you had finished when you had been married for two years.

S: I had been married, in fact I had been pregnant. And I had been teaching and going to school. I continued even after I had a baby. I went to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. I have my B.A. in the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

I: Did you transfer or finished one school

S: I finished one school and then I started the other school at the Hebrew University. Then we came to this country as exchange teachers.

I: And then your husband was out of the army.

S: My husband was out of the army very shortly after we were married. Very shortly I was pregnant with my first son after he was out of the army. He went back to his profession. He's a high school teacher. He was back to teaching.

I: What was his subject?

S: His subject was Talmud and bible and prophets and we were both a couple of teachers. Then we came as exchange teachers.

I: Why did you decide to do that?

S: Teaching?

I: No to come as exchange teachers.

S: Because Esther, my sister, got married about a year and a half after I married. She married a rabbi from America in Israel. He was visiting in Israel and he met her, and they got engaged and they got married and she had to wait for papers to join him here back. He was a rabbi near to Pittsburgh named a place Braddock. She came out, and we didn't see each other for a couple years. When this opportunity came that I could come to the state as an exchange teacher I was very happy to do that because I wanted to see my sister.

I: So you thought you'd be able to spend some time.

S: Yes. We came for two years teaching in a school named Yeshiva of Flatbush. One of the best Jewish day schools in this country, in Brooklyn.

I: How many children did you have when you came?

S: I had two sons when I came. I came with two sons, they are Israeli born, my boys. Citizens of America because after a while, you get your citizenship here. Esther moved at that time to New York, and I was in New York and we saw each other almost on a daily basis. She had children so we, the cousins, played together. After the two years we wanted to return, as exchange teachers. We were asked in Allentown Pennsylvania was a

school established a couple years prior to our coming to this country, and they asked us to help them out. They had problems with the principal with the teachers, and they said to us “knowing you as pioneer kind of people who like to build and want to do, could you do us this much a favor that you extend your stay. We make the arrangements for you, and stay.” Low and behold we stayed ten years in Allentown. Ten years until we established that school and it’s a flourishing school. We are still in contact with some people, it’s already over twenty five years that we left that place. We still have some people that are in touch with us.

I: When did you decide to stay permanently in the United States?

S: About 27 years ago, 30 years ago.

I: How did you make that decision.

S: Well I tell you, I love Israel, but I am very thankful to this country. It has been very good to us and I like the education that my children were acquiring here. I felt that after Europe this is a country that gives a lot of freedom. I wouldn’t go back to any of the countries in Europe. I am amazed whoever is able to live there. There are people who went back. But this country is really a home to me.

I: You talked about Israel as though you might have felt at home there.

S: Well Israel or America. These are the two places that I can see myself living. But that time the decision to remain was mainly that my kids had very good education and I felt that I can give them University education here much easier. If I made the right decision. Thank god I raised four very beautiful and very well educated children who contribute to the country as much the country has contributed to us.

I: So your children were feeling at home here and were getting plugged in to things.

S: Yes. And then I went also to the high university in Bethlehem, that’s near Allentown and I got my master degree in children literature there. It’s very hard to jump one place to the other place. We spent a lot of time in Israel, we have a little condominium in Jerusalem. As much we can we spend. When I got there I try as much I can to be with young children. This whole desire of being with children and teaching I think comes from the time that we were in the cattle car and we were going towards Auschwitz, and the

crying in the night of the children, which is still ringing in my ear. I was very young but yet there were younger children who never made it. I tried to sing to them, I remembered a lot of stories. Our house was a house where momma was into poetry and my father was always reading to us in the evening. Or walking with us near to the bank of the river. He would always tell us stories. So I used those stories and calmed the children. And they all took to me during the trip of the few days. At that time I somehow, it went through my mind that maybe one day that would be my profession. Even though my parents encouraged that I go into medicine. But maybe that would be better for me. So when I came back from the war, I started. I always have been tutoring younger children or helping the ones who needed in certain areas. It came to me very naturally.

I: So teaching has always been an important part of your life, and you go back to the time you were in the cattle car with the children. You've been teaching for most of your life I gather.

S: That's very right. I have been teaching for most of my life, and I hope to continue for many years. What I like, that I want to give to my students, not only knowledge, but strength, and hope and stamina, just to teach them. That they should always cherish the positive and not to dwell on the negative. I think that comes from my experience as a holocaust survivor. And to tell them the story on their own level.

I: Well I think you have lots more to tell us. I think we will conclude this interview with you and then pick up on another day with more of your story. Thank you very much, Mrs. Munk for giving your testimony today.

S: You are very welcome and I look forward to being with you again and tell as much I can for the future generation to know.

I: This concludes the Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Yaffa Munk.