

U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum  
Interview with Christine Cohen  
January 5, 1997  
Margaret Garrett, Interviewer

Tape 1 of 3; Side A

Name at birth: Rita Grabina. Date of birth: April 27, 1940. Place of birth: Warsaw, Poland.

Christine Cohen, at birth Rita Grabina, was born in the Warsaw ghetto. Her extended family had entered the Warsaw ghetto: grandparents, parents, aunt, uncle, their spouses and children, four cousins. All lived in one little apartment. Previously they had lived in different parts of Warsaw. Christine was born in a Jewish hospital in the ghetto and lived in the ghetto until she was two years old, 1942. Her mother escaped from the ghetto with her, leaving the family behind. The ghetto had been sealed at the time of her birth.

Christine's father had signed over his business assets to his partner and close friend before he went into the ghetto because Jews were not allowed to own anything. Her father was taken every day out of the ghetto along with other men for hard labor. He was able to make contact with people in the outside world and get forged papers for Christine and her mother stating they were Christian. The papers were supposed to be paid for with her father's money that the friend had. Christine's mother did not want to leave the ghetto because the whole family was there, even though they were taking people away. She did not want to believe what was happening. They felt as long as they were together they would somehow survive. Christine's grandfather was a jeweler and they were able to store some diamonds, precious jewelry. With a diamond you could buy a loaf of bread or get to a hospital. That is why she was born in the hospital. So they were able to get by with whatever he had in the way of jewelry to bribe everybody. Her father knew what was happening. Her mother was only 22 years old. Christine's father knew her mother was capable of doing something so he wanted her mother to take Christine to save her. Her mother didn't want to escape. Her father said if she did not try it he would give Christine to the Germans. A lot of people did give their small children to the Germans. Very few children were saved and sent to Germany or wherever. The majority were killed as soon as they

were given to the Germans for a sum of money. Her parents both knew this. Everybody knew this in 1942. Christine's mother has told her that the Germans would take the baby, take the money, and then grab the baby by the legs and hit the head against the wall in front of the parents.

A doctor in the ghetto gave Christine a tranquilizer because she was only two years old. She could not be discovered during the escape. Her mother dressed like a peasant woman with a big shawl around her and put Christine inside the scarf so she wouldn't be seen, mainly because not everybody in Poland is blue eyed and blond but that is how they were judging people. Her mother was a blue eyed blond. Christine was dark. For a child she looked Jewish. Her mother had a maid before the war who was called on to testify in court by a summons. Christine's mother had the summons. Right outside of the ghetto walls there was a court house. The Germans didn't know how to read Polish plus the date on the summons was 1938. Had they paid attention to it they would have discovered there was something wrong with the summons. She took the summons and walked straight to one of the guards at the gate and took him off guard because they were used to people running away from them, not walking toward them. She told them that she was from some village and got lost, and came into the ghetto and didn't know where she was and how did she get out. He was so surprised that he pointed to the gate. She said she was afraid she would get lost again and would he please walk her out and he did. He walked her outside of the wall.

Then she realized she still had the star of David on her arm under her shawl so she went to the first bathroom and flushed it down. Then she was not out of danger because if you didn't have papers you were assumed to be Jewish and shot. She had to get to the man who had all of the assets and was supposed to have a lot of money ready for her so she could meet the forger, pay the forger, and get the papers. First she went to his place. Danger was everywhere. First, Christine might wake up and cry. Secondly she had no papers. People were stopped constantly. She made it to his place. He lived like in a twelve story building, on top, and she went there and he opened the door. She said she was there for the money and he knew it was all set up with Christine's father and he said, what money. She said, their money. He said he did not know her. He had been a close friend before the war. Her mother said, how can you say that after all the dinners you had at my house. He said, what are you going to do about it. He had a fortune from Christine's father. Her mother went to the window and said,

if you don't give me the money I will jump with Christine. They always called her Christine, even before they got the papers, because they loved that name. He gave her the money because if she had jumped from his window he would have been shot because that would have been harboring a Jew. They would never believe him. When Christine was older her mother told her the story. Christine asked her mother, if he had said no would you have jumped. Her mother said, yes because she would not have gone back to the ghetto and she was as good as dead. Christine's mother had never had to lift a finger to do a thing. She was from a loving family. Everybody always took care of her. Suddenly she fights for her life and her daughter's every day.

Then she met with the forger, paid him, got the papers. Then they went to a small village, Goroshkuf (phon. ) Christine's mother picked a place where there farmers, by the forest. She thought if she needed to hide she could hide there. The partisans were there, although they were not helpful to Jews. There was a woman and some children and a couple, the farmers. Her mother had to pay them to live there. Her story was that her husband was in the Polish army and was taken prisoner of war and that was why she left Warsaw. The real reason she left Warsaw was that Christine's father and grandfather were well known and her mother could have been recognized by someone non-Jewish who would have reported her. Everybody believed her cover story.

She had to work to support them. she had never worked before. She sold cigarettes and liquor on trains, which was illegal. You could get shot for that. She worked in the fields. All kinds of odd jobs. She had to leave in the morning and come back in the evening and she paid those people to take care of Christine. Christine does not remember that part but thinks it is somewhere in her subconscious. She knows she was abused by all of them, physically, by the children and the woman, not the husband. Hitting. She has pictures of German soldiers on a horse with her. She was very talkative. She was more intelligent than the children in the village. All of the soldiers loved her. They used to bring her presents. The kids were jealous so they used to hit her. Their mother was jealous so she used to hit her. When the father was home no one hit her because he was a good man. She remembers it vaguely. She remembers being afraid of them. She was the youngest. The other kids were probably eight and ten years old. Christine was two when she got there and stayed until she was four. The other bad thing was--they did not know for sure that she was Jewish but

they were fishing. People in the village, even the woman they lived with used to ask Christine's mother how much money did she take to hide the Jewish bastard. They were convinced that her mother was Polish but that Christine was Jewish. Her mother had to act very brave. They threatened Christine's mother with taking Christine to the gestapo while she was working. Her mother couldn't do anything about it and never knew when she came home whether Christine would be there or whether they were bluffing. This affected Christine's whole life. It was a horrible way to live. When Christine was young, Christine's mother could not go to sleep until Christine was in bed at night. She was 22 years old when she got married. Before she got married her mother did not trust her. Christine's mother had to tell her she was Jewish when she was nine.

They were in the village. There was a German soldier who had a grand-daughter Christine's age. Christine's mother was very beautiful. The German soldier liked Christine and used to bring her whatever he could. he missed his grand-daughter. He was just a simple soldier, not SS. He always seemed to warn Christine's mother. If the Germans had a suspicion about something, mostly they were looking for partisans, they would come in the middle of the night, take the rifle, hit the door of the house, ask for vodka, have them drink with them, and search the house. One night they came in the middle of the night. They poured big glasses of vodka, and told Christine's mother to drink. She couldn't. She was choking. The woman they were staying with said that she drank like a Jew. Her mother then swallowed the vodka. The husband was so nice that he kept pouring water in it for her so it looked like she was drinking a lot of vodka. The Germans said if they didn't drink with them they were shot. Then they searched the house.

Then the older German soldier knew when the other soldiers were coming and would tell Christine's mother to take Christine and visit a nearby village. Christine's mother would ask why and the soldier said because her husband was a prisoner of war and she didn't want to be there when they were searching. So she would do that. Then he was transferred to the Russian front. There was a woman in the village who worked with the underground. The underground was not sympathetic to the Jews. As a rule they did not help. They didn't care. They were fighting the Germans but they didn't care about the Jews. They were probably just as likely to report the Jews to somebody. The woman in the village was a titled woman, nobility, had a castle in the village, was helping the Resistance.

This German man knew the woman in the village and trusted her. The German soldier knew Christine's mother was Jewish. He didn't want to tell her mother that he knew because he was afraid that she would run. He felt he could protect her. He told the woman to help her. She helped several times but didn't tell Christine's mother until after the war. Her mother never could find the German soldier. He saved their lives many times, and through the woman. Mrs. C. just found out about it recently.

When Christine's mother was on the train selling liquor and cigarettes they would stop the train and search for papers. If someone didn't have papers they were shot. They stopped the train one time, she learned several years ago, and got everybody off the train. There was an 18 year old girl with no papers. She was Jewish. The Germans said they would make an example of her and bury her alive. They made everybody dig her grave, including her. Even the Polish people were begging them to shoot her first, not bury her alive. They buried her alive.

One time the Germans caught her mother and she was supposed to cook for the big police dogs, the dogs that were supposed to smell a Jew. She was afraid. The dogs loved her.

Christine does not know why they ended up in another village toward the end of the war. They were living with a couple of very poor farmers who had daughters that were teen-agers. They looked grown up to Christine. They were a wonderful family. She called the parents grandma and grandpa. Christine did not have grandparents that she remembered. They were good to her. The girls were wonderful. Christine was like their little sister. That is where she starts remembering. She thinks before that she didn't want to. From that time on she remembers everything.

She remembers going with the girls to get bread. The girls were given money to get bread. They were very poor. On the way was a carnival. Christine wanted a doll so badly. The girls took the bread money and bought her a doll. Today she has a collection of stuffed animals. She is a grown person but she has a collection of stuffed animals. She wonders why it appeals to her so much. The parents were not upset with the girls for buying the doll with the bread money because they loved her.

Her mother was a stranger to her. She knew she hugged her at night. Her mother was never with her; she was always working. The other people

were her family. She would wait for the girls to come home from school. Christine's mother all of a sudden lost her vision. There was no physical reason for it. So the poor farmer went to work and supported them. Then all of a sudden she started seeing again. Whoever could work, worked. They were like family.

When the war ended her mother wanted to go to Warsaw to see if there was anybody left so she left Christine with them. She didn't find anybody. Then she found somebody, relatives of her sister's husband in a small town, close to the German border in the south. She thought that was better than no family. Christine and her mother ended up there. Her mother found a job. She came back for Christine who did not want to go with her. Christine was then five. Her mother left her there for a couple of months, came to visit, got an apartment. She had a maid to take care of Christine and came and took her. Her mother had to work. family. They kept in touch with the farmers.

Christine's mother had a maid, Irene, who was Polish, of German descent. Irene's sister was married and lived in Germany. Irene's brother-in-law was in the German army. They had a son, Willie, the same age as Christine. Willie's parents got killed or taken prisoner after the war. Irene was left with her nephew so she lived in with the child. She told the child if anyone asks don't tell them that he is German for fear of repercussions from the Poles after the war. He understood. Christine had understood, when she was three years old after her extended family disappeared, to tell anyone who asked any question to say she didn't know. From the age of two her standard answer was that she didn't know. Willie lived with them and was the companion of Christine. They were inseparable.

One day Christine's mother was at work and Irene was talking with another maid in the building. Christine and Willie were sitting at a table playing a board game and Christine asked Willie if he were German and he said he was not. Christine asked Willie if he understood such and such, a made up word that sounded German. He said that is not German. Christine said if you know that is not German then you speak German. The Germans killed her father and she was going to kill Willie. Christine got a kitchen knife and chased him around the table. He screamed that she was going to kill him. Christine's mother walked in. She let Irene go. Christine remembers that. She remembers she was bossy with him.

After the war because she felt she had been mistreated Christine went the other way. She was selfish and wanted all of the attention. Her mother used to undress her when she was 7 years old. Willie always knew he had to defer to her. They were friends as long as he did what she told him. Christine was very small so he could not have been smaller. Christine got a lot of attention from her mother. The more she got the more she wanted. Her mother could not say no to her up to the day she died. Christine had a brother born after the war. Her mother tried to make up for not having had all she should have had. Christine was a selfish bratty teen-ager too.

Christine and her mother were living in an apartment. She was 5 years old. She started school at age 6. The city was Walbozych. She vaguely remembers. She didn't know she was Jewish. Throughout the war she disliked Jews as much as the children in the village did. The kids used to

say a Jew is a pig with a tail. Christine grew up believing Jews were sub-human. During the war they lived not far from one of the camps. The woman in the first village they were in used to say to her mother, see that smoke. That is Jews burning. They deserve to be burning because they didn't go to church on Sunday. That was the mentality. With the communists it was against the law to say anything against Jews.

Her mother had a hard time telling her she was Jewish. Her mother married the only father Christine knew in 1946. She was six. He was from Cracow. His whole family died in a concentration camp except for him and one sister. They ended up in Russia. They put him to work in a coal mine. He was an electrical engineer. They lived in Israel for a time and he was in charge of the Negev irrigation. He was brilliant, spoke seven languages, kind, gentle, sweet, wonderful. Her mother married him to have a father for her. Christine loved him and was glad her mother got married because then she had two people to spoil her. There was nothing he wouldn't do for her. Then her brother came. Before deciding to marry Christine's mother left her with her dad, Leon, for a week to see how he could handle her. Christine probably felt the world had to make up to her for what she lost. She knew he would never let anything happen to her. She could not have asked for a better father. He wanted to legally adopt her but her mother did not want to change her name.

During the war she had to go to church every Sunday. After the war she wasn't going to church anymore. She knew it was something not to talk about. She missed going to church. . It was something she had grown up with. She started going herself without telling her mother when she was old enough, about eight years old. It had been about 3 years and she still missed it. It gave her a sense of security, a sense of belonging somewhere. It was a constant, familiar. When she was ten one day the kids said she didn't belong there because she was Jewish. She didn't believe them. How could she be sub-human. Her mother had to tell her as much as she felt she could understand, that she was Jewish. Christine did not want to be Jewish, less than human. Her mother tried to explain. For the next few years she hid that she was Jewish. She probably did not admit it to anyone until she was 17 and they moved to Israel. Her parents were not observant, no one in Poland after the war. Her mother did not come from a very religious family, neither did her father. After the war there was not a synagogue left in Warsaw, where they eventually moved back. Her parents were not observant. Until she found out she was Jewish



she had a Christmas tree every year and presents. Her parents wanted to do anything to make her happy, trying to make up to her.

Until she got married and had her own children she didn't understand. She resented her mother for making her come home early enough so she could go to sleep without worrying about her. She thought her mother did not respect her privacy. Sometimes she would listen in on a phone conversation or open a letter. Now she understands why. To her mother there was a threat hanging over her even in peacetime and she had to protect her at all costs, even if it made her mad. If she got sick her mother thought she was dying. Her mother was over-protective with her brother but not the same as with Christine. They never left her alone. It was not a matter of trust. Her mother was uneasy until she saw her home safe. She died 1 1/2 years ago.

After Christine got married her mother lived in New York. A few years ago Christine was cutting something in the kitchen. Her mother took the knife and said she would do it because Christine would hurt herself. In a way it was good that she wasn't near them. She had to be away to be independent. Her natural father died on the way to Treblinka. They know what happened to everyone in her natural father's family--2 aunts and a couple of cousins born after the war survived the war. She went to San Antonio to see relatives and met her husband. She hadn't planned on living there. She did not try to get away consciously but there were many times she wanted to get away. She resented being so protected. While she was growing up her mother talked about experiences during the war only if Christine asked. She thinks she started asking her after she got married. Until she got married she didn't want to hear it. When she got away from the situation she wanted to know.

Her mother never said, look what I did for you. Christine knew that she did it for her. If Christine had not been there, her mother would not have gone. She would have stayed with the rest of the family. Before the war people were already cut off. Her mother, her mother's brother and his wife, and the sisters, everybody wanted to leave Poland. Her grandfather didn't want to. The people who had something to lose didn't want to leave. Her grandfather said we will survive, we have diamonds. He was convinced that if you had enough money you would survive. In 1939 her mother was pregnant with her. Her father insisted on leaving. They paid some Russians to get them into Russia. They crossed the border. The

Russians took whatever they paid them, and turned them over to the Gestapo. The Gestapo beat them and sent them back to Warsaw. So when they tried, it was too late.

As a teenager extended family was not as important to her as it was as she got older and as it is now. Until her mother died she did not know what her grandparents looked like. Her mother could not take pictures out of the ghetto because that would identify her. From the family in Israel she got a few pictures. When her mother died her brother brought some boxes with papers and she found the pictures. So there is some link to the past. She wants to know more now. Her mother was the last link to the past. She wants to know what the people were really like.

## Tape 2, Side A

Children at school had known Christine was Jewish. They called her Christ-killer. She had a circle of friends who knew she was Jewish but it was never discussed. There was not one Jewish child in her school except her. When she got older she never had a problem dating; she was very popular. She does not remember how the teachers treated her. She was a very good student, straight A's. She never had a problem. She is sure that the fact that she was Jewish entered their minds. The majority of children and teen-agers were anti-Semitic like their parents and they would say things that hurt. She was unhappy and let it go. She knew there was no way to change anything; that was how Poland was.

At that time she did not want to be Jewish; it meant being somehow less than someone else. She was trying to be the same but wasn't, less, not a person. As a teen-ager <sup>she</sup> wanted to be Catholic, not Jewish, until she left Poland.

Christine and her family left Poland in 1957 and went to Israel and <sup>she</sup> could be Jewish. Since 1945 they had tried to leave Poland. Her father, being an electrical engineer, was involved in government projects. They would let Christine and her mother and brother go but not her father. In 1957 they still did not want to let him go but they said the only place they would let him go was Israel. They lived in Israel 5 years. In Israel she was the same as everybody else. She got over trying to hide that she was less than a person. After they moved out of Israel she had no problem being Jewish except feeling deprived of childhood, family, etc. Her mother was so intense, so over-protective.

Her mother did not take care of herself and had congestive heart failure. In the 50's Her mother suddenly lost her hearing. It was connected to the war--some nerves were paralyzed. She wore a hearing aid and could not hear very well. That affected Christine's life.

Everything that has happened to Christine is a direct result of the war. She tried not to be over-protective of her children. She is beginning to be almost like her mother. So she stops herself. Everything is intense. She is never truly relaxed. She loves dogs. She thinks she identifies with the dogs. A homeless dog--the whole day she can't stop thinking about it. Helpless creatures that someone abuses, uses as property. That is what

she brought from the war. If things go well, something is going to happen. She knows how to have fun. She has friends. She loves traveling, dancing. She can't just be herself without every time stepping outside of herself and looking at herself like what are you doing having fun. When first married, if her husband was five minutes late, she thought he was lying in a ditch. She was over-protective when her children were little. She didn't have to work and didn't want to when they were small. Now she works part-time. She pushed her son to be with other children and not be by himself. She tried not to be like her mother. Her mother was also over-protective of her grand-children and anxious about them.

Christine's husband is Jewish. Her husband balances her over-protectiveness. He points it out to her.

When things happen all over the world , with the media everybody knows about it. The world knows that everybody knew the Jews were being killed in Europe and no one lifted a hand. As terrible and cold as it sounds, of course she wouldn't want anything to happen to people anywhere, but she is almost becoming one of those people. They didn't help her, why should she be concerned about someone else. This is not the feeling she should have and she feels guilty about it. She is not without sympathy, but not enough to do something about it. She feels they were betrayed. She feels bitter. When she wakes up she looks at pictures of her family and thinks they took them away from her. She knows there were millions of people in that situation but she feels she is the only one. Her grief is more than anybody else's grief. Her closest friend for years after she got married was a German girl. She was married to an American GI. She and Christine met in 1964. Both were learning to speak English. That she was German didn't bother Christine. Christine saw pictures of her friend's father in an SS uniform. Her friend said her father was the meanest most twisted person in the world. She was a little girl when he died. She was happy when he died. Her friend's mother was just a housewife who went along with the husband. Her friend's mother is very wealthy now. Christine wonders if her friend's father got his wealth from the Jews. When Christine's mother died Christine's brother wrote something about the Holocaust for the unveiling. Her friend said until then she never really felt it so they talked about it for the first time.

Christine and her husband went to Israel with their children and then to Germany for a week to visit her friend's mother. Everywhere people were

very nice and friendly. Christine wondered all the time if each person had killed her father. She wanted the week to be over. She told her husband that she never wanted to go to Germany again. She cannot tell her friend that.

Christine went to Poland on a trip for 20 people for 8 or 10 days . They went to Warsaw. There was one other Jewish person in the group; she was born in Houston. Everyone else was descended from Polish people. They went to Warsaw, Cracow. This was right after the changes occurred. They went to Auschwitz. She knew it would be tough but she needed to do it. It was very difficult for her. She was drained. It was a dingy, rainy day. She walked through everything. She tried to be one of the people in her group, not herself. People started joking. One non-Jewish man spoke up. They knew about her because she had told them. He told them they shouldn't joke. They stopped. They all had Polish ties. After she left, she saw graffiti, hang all the Jews. That is what she saw in today's Poland. One of the people said a lot of Poles died. It was wrong but they stood for something. Jews died because they were Jewish. She wants to go back to Poland because she loves the country but to Germany she can't go. She sees someone in their seventies and she thinks maybe they killed her father or grandfather and she can't handle it.

When she lived in Israel she did not want to leave. She was very happy there. Her parents always wanted to come to the US. The only way to do it was to go to France and wait for a visa so they moved to Paris. Christine also did not want to leave Paris. When she went back to Israel it was like coming home again. She treated it more as fun and more as showing her children their heritage. She didn't have any feelings about wanting to live there but she likes the country. She likes going there.

Back to hiding that she was Jewish, she almost feels like Israel liberated her. She didn't have to be someone else. It took many years for her to feel comfortable and confident. When she was eighteen to twenty she always felt comfortable with men as far as being very attractive and very popular. But she never felt really comfortable. She always felt comfortable about her looks but she never felt confident about anything else. A group of people could be talking about something as silly as a movie and she always felt she didn't measure up. She thought, what if she said something wrong, what if it doesn't come out right. It took her many years. Now her husband says she is very opinionated. Now she is not

afraid to speak in public. She enjoys talking and she feels good about herself but she still has that anxiety in her. She tells herself to relax, physically. She does bio-feedback because she has migraine headaches. That is one of the treatments along with medication. She takes a lot of medication. She does biofeedback and relaxes herself and she still has that anxiety. She can't get rid of it. It took her many years to be confident enough. Now she doesn't wait for someone. Living in Israel helped her with that Jewish is OK. Then after she came here she really didn't feel that much difference. In France they believe in live and let live, everybody is equal. So once she left Poland she was just as good or better than a lot of people. She doesn't have those feelings anymore but she doesn't have feelings of peace, like everything is wonderful, enjoy the moment. She doesn't know how to do that. She doesn't feel that she is not good enough anymore but a feeling that something will happen, taking away what she loves because a lot of it was already taken away from her.

## Tape 2 of 2, Side B

After Christine was married she asked her mother about her earlier experiences. Hearing about it Christine almost started reliving it for her mother. Christine was not so much thinking about herself as what her mother had gone through. The grandparents and the aunts and uncles that were lost Christine didn't know. Her mother had grown up with them. Christine just kept feeling sorry for her mother. Now that her mother is gone, Christine thinks about herself.

Earlier Christine felt almost obligated to do anything her mother wanted, not that her mother did anything to make her feel that way. If her mother told her to be home at ten when everyone else had to be home at one, she was home at ten, because of what her mother went through. As Christine and her mother got older the roles were reversed. Christine tried very hard, although her mother was capable of taking care of herself. Christine's father died in 1977 and her mother was left in New York with no family. Her hearing was bad and that affected her life greatly. Christine felt bad about this.

When Christine's father died Christine tried to get her mother to move to San Antonio and put deposits on countless apartments. Her mother always backed out at the last minute. After what she went through her mother could not depend on anybody. She didn't drive. In New York City she had friends, she could get on a bus or a subway and go where ever she wanted to. She could take care of herself. Had she moved she would have had to depend on Christine for everything and she couldn't. To her it was frightening. Christine always felt bad that she was there all by herself and there was nothing she could do. That is why she felt protective toward her. As Christine grew more confident in herself she felt she could be protecting her mother where before she, Christine, needed it.

Her mother's English was not fluent. She could understand books but because of her hearing her English was not fluent because she didn't hear the words clearly. Her hearing impairment showed up in the early 50's but it really started during the war. After what her mother went through Christine is sure she had that feeling of persecution ; when you can't hear and people around you are talking, thinking they are plotting against you. All of these things Christine attributed to the war. And then to see her dying and going through the war all over again was horrible. That was

when Christine's feelings really got intense. Her mother relived the war. She thought Hitler was there and in every corner the Germans. She was in a nice Jewish nursing home. Christine was there almost every day. When she was leaving her mother was afraid of the Germans. It broke Christine's heart to leave her but she couldn't do anything else. Since her mother died, Christine's feelings are more intense. She feels more robbed of everything, even her mother.

Christine is in Bethesda visiting family for a Bar Mitzvah. It is wonderful for her. She has gotten closer to them since her mother died. They are the last link to her mother. There is no one left. On her father's side, her natural father, she has family in San Antonio, not large, most of them died. She has cousins. Her aunts died since then. She is close to the cousins but not as close as to the family in Bethesda because her natural father is almost like a mythical figure to her. She never knew him. Her mother is real to her. Her father, that her mother married after the war, had a sister in London. She died a few months ago. Christine was very close to her. The other father, it is like reading a story. She loves her family in San Antonio but she doesn't have the same feeling. This family, they are her mother's family. She is even closer to them than she was before.

She tried not to but she must have made her children feel like family was all important because they seem to be missing, without saying too much, not having extended family. Especially her son is very family oriented. He really feels the loss. Her daughter doesn't talk about it but Christine is sure she does too. It must have been the way Christine was that they picked up on. They know. They have read what her brother wrote. Her son right now is at the Holocaust Museum. It is not hard for Christine to talk about it with other people. It happened so many years ago so for most people it is hard to imagine that it really happened. Christine feels that if she talks about it, at least some of it they will believe. She thinks the world doesn't want to believe it. It is too hard to believe. As time goes on there are less people to say it. So if Christine says her mother saw a girl being buried alive, maybe they won't believe the whole thing but they will believe that they pulled a Jewish girl off the train and killed her. It is not that she is looking for sympathy but she thinks people should know.

Her brother, even though he was born in '48, it affected him greatly because her parents were what life made them. Her brother is a writer,



very sensitive, very intuitive. He feels it for them, he feels it for Christine, that she went through it. He is a very kind person. He never had a grandfather or grandmother either and he feels that loss. He is eight years younger than Christine. He lived with their parents as a teen ager in New York. She imagines he learned about it during those years. Then he went away to school and didn't live at home any more. It affected him almost as much as it affected Christine, even though she lived through it and he didn't. He wrote poems and had short stories published. He wrote a book about the family before the war and the war experiences and up until the time that her mother died.

With each day she lives it more and more. She has a good life, a wonderful husband, two children, a lot of friends, she lives in a city she likes, she does what she wants, and she would like to enjoy what she has and be happy but she can never be completely happy because she can't let go of this whatever it is inside; either the threat that something will happen or the pain that something already happened. There is no way for her to change it. It is always with her.

She has nightmares. She didn't until her mother died. Now she has a recurring nightmare. She is somewhere, it is not that frightening like she is in a forest lost with bears, she is in a city somewhere. She is driving or walking or whatever, she lost her directions and she doesn't know how to get whether it is to a home or the hotel where she is and she can't find her way back. She is always lost, not monsters or anything, any city, and she is walking to the hotel and she can't find her way back and she forgot the name of the hotel. Or she is driving back and can't find her way back and she usually wakes up. Before her mother died she didn't have it. She died, this March it will be two years.

Christine's husband says she needs some grief counseling. She probably does but she keeps trying to get herself better on her own but she may have to give in. The feeling is the same--how am I going to find my way home. She always wakes up. The same situation, three or four times a week. Sometimes she is afraid to go to sleep. What if she gets lost and there are people with guns or something. So far it hasn't been threatening, she is just lost. Her mother is the one who saved her from all the danger. Now her mother is gone. who is going to save her now.

Also over the years, she doesn't know when it started, she doesn't like

loud noises, she hates dark rooms. When she hears a fire engine or an ambulance siren she cringes. She doesn't know if it has to do with when they made you go in the cellar when they had the raids. She can see the ambulance but the noise frightens her incredibly. That always, as long as she can remember. The siren makes her panic. She likes light. But she is afraid of sirens. Her mother told her they went to hide in cellars during raids so she thinks that has to do with it. Anything loud.

She doesn't like arguments. She will do anything to avoid arguments. She will give in not to hear arguments. She thinks when she was little she was abused physically. She has a tremendous fear--if someone laid a hand on her she would be petrified. She was able to spank her children on the bottom but not very hard. Her parents never hit her. Her parents spoiled her and she tried not to do that with her children. She tried to be consistent with her children but it was very hard. Christine was never disciplined. She could do no wrong according to both of her parents. She remembers that she was dating somebody of whom they didn't approve. She was taking piano lessons. Her mother told her she couldn't date him because of going to piano lessons. She snuck out to see him. Her mother was paying the piano teacher for half a year and she never went for a lesson. The teacher was taking the money. Her mother caught her. She promised she would never see him again. A week later they went to the coast where they always went in the summer for three months. He talked his father into bringing him there. There he was. Her mother gave in. Christine does not remember why her mother didn't want her to see him. She never went through with a promise of denying Christine something. Her father didn't either. Christine thinks it is a good thing she never took advantage of it. She thinks she grew up a little mixed up. The first part of the war she was mistreated. Then she did whatever she wanted. There were no boundaries. That did not fill her with confidence. And then the noise, the bombs, the hiding and running, the family disappearing at the age of two. If you see your grandparents every day and then they disappear. Her father had always been there. She guesses she never resolved any of it. She feels like she never will.

Now she has more than most people. She chooses to be a travel agent because she enjoys it. Her children are good children. She has everything. She can leave town any time she wants to. She loves to travel. She can't fully enjoy it. She thinks it is part of her migraines. Her mother had terrible migraines after the war. Christine started having terrible

migraines when she went to Texas. She was 22 when she got married and right before she got married she had her first migraine. When her children were little she would wake up and wasn't able to function. Since she went to the headache clinic they try to prevent it as much as possible. Before she couldn't plan for the next day because she didn't know what was going to happen. She thinks it has to do with being so tense all the time. Her neck is never relaxed. She is always tense. She drives. She doesn't like driving. She is always afraid something will happen. She is not afraid to fly. When the children were younger and she left them at home she worried about that. Now she has two dogs and she worries about them. If she goes by herself without her husband she worries about him too. She worries about everybody that is left. Not about herself. She is ready for an adventure. Nothing scares her. She worries about the people and dogs she left behind. She keeps harping on it but everything is so mixed up. It is like a cross to carry. Everything is a result of what happened and she has to live with it.

She has been reluctant to go for counseling because what are they going to do. Are they going to give her her family back. Are they going to give her her childhood back. They are not. She realizes that is not very bright. You learn to cope with it. She is not coping very well. On the outside she is. Everybody thinks she is a lot of fun. Inside she is not that way. She thinks she is the way she is because of her mother's situation when she was pregnant with her. It is a strain for Christine to hide how she feels. Inside she is another person who is really miserable because she can't relax for one minute. She is afraid that if people knew that deep down she is never relaxed they would not want to be around her. So she shows another person to them. She has a couple of close friends that, if she is upset about something specific, she can talk about it with them. They want to help her and want her to be happy so she seems happy around them.

When she doesn't want to be around herself she comes up with a trip. She loves going with her husband but she actually loves going by herself because in the last few years she has become more independent. She feels adventurous, that she can do things by herself. She gets away from worrying about anything when she is by herself. Her husband is a CPA so between January and April 15th he doesn't go anywhere so she either goes by herself or she has a very good friend who will go with her. Her husband doesn't mind at all. This is a very good friend. If Christine feels like sulking she can sulk. She can be herself with her friend. The friend is

not Jewish. They spend all the holidays together. They go over there for Christmas and she comes for the Jewish holidays. In spite of herself the friend usually cheers her up. She is so positive. She has an eight year old child. She is 40. She had a very hard life, married before. To her, people are wonderful. She thinks everybody has some redeeming quality. When Christine gets upset her husband tells her to go over to Alicia. She sees good in everything. Christine is drawn to people like that. She knows the world is not wonderful but she makes it that way.

## Tape 3 of 3, Side A

When watching war movies, documentaries and things like "Schindler's List" it always upsets her. She tries to see everything on the war and she knows she will be upset but she has to do it. As she watches she relates everything to herself. When she sees someone in a concentration camp she thinks that could be her family and she makes it personal. After she watches she feels very badly and tries not to think about it but she can't forget about it. She is drawn to it even though she knows she shouldn't watch. It is not just movies, also written material. She feels the more she knows, she thinks maybe it will have a healing effect, but it doesn't.

As for contact with other survivors, she is in contact with her cousin in San Antonio. Her cousin is difficult to talk to about it because she lives in the past. Christine at least makes an attempt to live in the present. Her cousin lives in the past. Christine tries to avoid the subject because her cousin falls to pieces. Once a year she sees some other survivors when they light the candles in April for the six million Jews and have the service. They usually have the service in one of the synagogues and Christine lights a candle. In San Antonio there are maybe 25 people left and most are of her mother's generation so she wouldn't know them well anyway.

Her family is traditional. Her husband grew up in an Orthodox home. He got away from it when he went to college. When Christine came, because her family wasn't observant, they ended up in a Reform temple and Christine felt she fitted in. Her husband never felt that he did. Her children went the middle of the road, Conservative. They were very comfortable there. Her son had a Bar Mitzvah. Her daughter did not want to have a Bat Mitzvah but she went to Hebrew School and all that.

Now that the children are grown they are back at the Orthodox, which doesn't mean a thing to Christine because she is observant only because she knows it is important to her family, that is her husband and her children, especially her son. The symbols don't mean anything to Christine because she didn't grow up with it but she wanted her children to have the Jewish education. It is very important to her son. Christine does it because of the children; her husband does it because it is expected of him. She wanted her children to have the education so they will have something that she doesn't. Her husband expects her to truly believe. When they are

in the synagogue she is supposed to feel something but she doesn't. The only redeeming quality is they have a wonderful rabbi. Even though he is Orthodox he is very flexible and can really talk about anything. Even the Reform Jews belong to the synagogue because of the rabbi. That part is ok.

Sometimes she thinks she wishes she wasn't born Jewish. If she weren't't Jewish she wouldn't have had to go through all this. It spills onto the religion. She will go to a wake in a church and those symbols still mean more to her. She doesn't feel uncomfortable in a church. When they belonged to the Reform synagogue her husband didn't want to because there was an organ there. He said that was like a church. She said that was what made her feel comfortable. Religion is like a casualty of all that. She almost resents the whole religion. Why couldn't she be one of the others.

Conclusion