

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Rachel Goldfarb, conducted by Margaret Garrett on May 20, 1997 in Silver Spring, Maryland. Tape 1, side 1. Mrs. Goldfarb, thank you very much for agreeing to do this interview.

You did a videotape interview for the Holocaust museum on August 27, 1991 about your experiences during the Holocaust. And today we'd like to talk with you a little more about experiences after that. But first, can we review a little bit what you spoke about briefly in the video interview-- your experiences from your liberation up to the end of the war? When liberation occurred for you, you were where?

We were in some forests that were in the area of Białystok I can't tell you exactly where. My geography of the land there is not very much remembered. I just know that there were forests. We were liberated by the Russians. Actually, we weren't aware that we were liberated until somebody said that there are no more Germans there.

We were in a village, and when we realized that we could move freely, we did not have to be afraid of the Germans anymore-- proceeded to the town where we had lived prior to the war, and to see if anybody else from the family would show up. That was the only way to make contact and find out if somebody else survived.

The we is you and your mother?

My mother and I, correct. Well actually, it was more than my mother and I. Whatever Jews had survived, all of them tried to go back to their places of domicile to see if any of the other members of the family have returned.

Now, you went back to your hometown, Dokshyts?

Correct.

And then what happened?

We were immediately warned-- my mother was warned, I should say-- I was just a follower at that time. My mother was warned that if she spends the night there, she might never see the morning again. So we continued to--

Because--

The population were still with the German sentiment that all Jews should be exterminated or gotten rid of.

This is the Polish population.

That's the Polish or actually the Belarus population there. We proceeded to a larger township about 30 kilometers from Dokshyts to a place called Głębokie. And by the time we got there, a few Jews had already gathered. Of course, they, too, had the same warning.

And we all lived in one house. I don't remember how many families, but I know that another mother and daughter shared the room with my mother and I and kind of set up housekeeping there. That was the gathering place. People from the surrounding area from smaller townships kind of joined in that larger township. And, of course, with numbers, everybody felt a greater degree of safety. We set up housekeeping there, and my mother enrolled me in school. So I started to attend the Russian school there right away.

No one knew exactly what was happening. We knew that the war was still raging. Different reports were coming from the front-- reports that the Russians were doing very well, because that's what they were trying to impart. And yet the city we were in was very close to a railway station. So reports were coming back also about a lot of wounded coming back, and stories from the wounded that all wasn't going as the media, or should I say the Russian media, was letting everybody know.

Now, you were 15 years old. This was in '45.

I was 14 years old.

And your mother put you in school right away.

Yes.

You had not been to school for several years.

Several years. I was fortunate enough that my parents have started my schooling rather early. By the age of three, I already read my own story books. And even though in Europe, children were not started to school until the age of seven, I was started at five, and I was advanced at that point.

That was informal school, or your governess taught you.

Formal school. Formal school. And I did have a governess in the times in between. So I was advanced in math, and reading, and writing. During the ghetto, my mother continued to have private tutoring. So I continued to get some education. Actually, the only period that I did not have any instruction at all was during the period of hiding, which was about two years.

As soon as we came to the city, Głębokie, and there was a school established, my mother enrolled me again. And throughout our travels through Europe, I was exposed in one way or another to some form of informal education-- geography, history. The older survivors took charge of the younger survivors trying to instruct them. So I've gained little bits of knowledge here and there and wherever.

My geography I've covered going from place to place, and the rivers, and the cities, and the countries. Math was something that the older adults had taught the children. Every place where there was any kind of Jewish engathering where survivors have gathered, the interest was always to teach the children. And because there was nothing really to do, the adults were anxious to impart whatever knowledge they had to the younger kids.

By the time we got to Budapest, Haganah was very active there. It was a Jewish organization that had great impact on the liberation of Palestine and the creation of the state of Israel. And they organized the children right away, trying to prime them to be citizens-- productive and active citizens. So they set up special living quarters, actually, for the children. My mother and I for a while did not live in the same place.

Excuse me, but are we getting ahead of the story?

Ahead of the story-- we got on education, so we got ahead of the story.

Maybe we can pick up on education when we get up to Budapest.

From Głębokie, actually, we started out, and I remember it was New Year's of '45. I remember the date very well. My mother made arrangements to join a working train. The train stations needed repair, especially the water towers. And they accepted volunteers. It wasn't easy to get into the workforce for a woman with a child. She had to bribe some of the people there. Fortunately, we were able to retrieve some valuables that had been buried and hidden with some local population. And of course, just as the ones that were bad, there were some that were very good.

You mean the population?

The population.

Some were good.

Yes, because actually, I had recuperated with a family who has also hidden us for part of the time when we

were running away from the ghetto. They had a farm, and they took me in, and kind of fattened me up. And my mother had hidden some valuables with some of those people, and they have returned some of them to us. And also, mother had buried some silver and gold that she was able-- and jewelry-- that she was able to unearth.

And that is what we used in order to survive for the next year or so. When she was able to sign on with this train, we were traveling to the front lines. And her idea was to cross over to the Allied side. We got as far--

On the working train, did you live on the train?

We lived on the train. Each boxcar was divided into four sleeping quarters. And the center of it had sort of like a wood stove that heated it. And we could cook the meals on it.

And where did you get the food to cook?

Whatever we took along with us-- mostly potatoes and grain.

So you had to take your own food on the working train?

Yes. It was very little rations. The only thing I can tell you how bad the food situation was is that I recall in one of the railroad stations where a hospital train was on this next track to ours, and we still have quite a bit of supplies. And mother had peeled potatoes and was going to throw out the skins. And one of the doctors from the hospital train stopped her from throwing out the peels.

He took them from her-- he said that'll make a soup for his soldiers because they have absolutely no provisions. The food situation was terrible as far as the Russian army was concerned.

Now, what nationality was the train? Was this a Russian train?

Russian. We were still on the Russian front.

You said it was a working train. Was your mother working?

My mother was working on the train.

On the train, or on the tracks?

Whenever we pulled into a station, we actually were on the way-- she hasn't started really working yet-- we were just traveling toward the stations that needed repair. I really don't know what she would do before we'd get there. So while you and your mother were on the train, you were only traveling on the train to get to stations that needed repair.

Correct.

Where, theoretically, she would've helped to work.

She would have helped to work if she were assigned a task.

And was everyone on this train in this same category-- that is they were workers? They were going--

They were workers. We were with another family that were also Jewish-- my mother and I, and then there was a husband, a wife, and a son. They also had survived in hiding. And the others were workers. They were--

Men, mostly?

Men, some women. But they were not Jewish, and they were just enlisted into the workforce.

And they were Polish?

White Russians-- Russians. There were a lot of Russians. There were very few from the Belarus. I don't think they quite incorporated them into anything yet. Those were people that were devoted Russians, communists.

And how was it for you and your mother as women alone with all those men?

To tell me the truth, I can't really tell you, other than my experiences that we were just along for the ride sort of. I remember one time we had a general traveling in the boxcar-- he was hitching a ride. And we had to make vacate our bed. After all, he was a general. So we crowded in-- five people in one side-- actually, it was less than a quarter of the boxcar. So you and your mother crowded in with the other--

The other family. With the others. Space had to be made, and that was it. And if anybody of rank needed to travel, they would hook on to wherever. It was great disorder. If I think back, living in this country, and knowing how things have been orderly, my god, there was hardly any order at all. Trains moved whenever the lines were free and you could push on. Trains were coming back. Like I told you, the hospital train on the next track-- they were there for days, and so were we waiting to be able to move on.

So things were kind of chaotic--

Very chaotic.

You were pushed around a lot.

Very chaotic.

Was there any sexual harassment or abuse?

Talking to the wrong person about that. I was as naive as naive could be. If there was, I wasn't aware of it.

So you don't remember anybody doing anything to you or your mother?

No, no. We kind of kept to our own little niche. And I knew enough to stay out of the way.

So you traveled under these conditions up to where?

Up to Southern Prussia. That was the area that was just being liberated. And this train was heading there to clean up the railway stations. When we got to that station in Prussia-- some of my recollections, I can't remember everything-- some of the things that stand out is that we had a path that we followed to get water. Because, of course, there was no running water on the train.

And we traveled that path back and forth for several days. A soldier a mis-stepped one step off the path, and he was blown to bits. That left an impression on me. At that time, we were afraid to almost get off to take a few steps off the train. Then when things calmed down, it was a Prussian city, I can't even remember the name of it. But I remember that other workers from the train and some of the soldiers-- soldiers were everywhere-- were telling stories about going in to Prussian houses, finding that the occupants have committed suicide.

And when the bodies were tried to be removed, whoever was trying to remove the bodies was blown up with the bodies. They had mined themselves. Chandeliers were mined. You were afraid to touch most anything because of the booby traps. And needless to say that the roads, and the railroad stations, everything had a certain amount of danger to it because of the mines everywhere.

At that point, from some of the people that had come from Southern Poland, we learned that there was a gathering of Jews in a city called Lublin. And mother, again, was able to bribe to have our boxcar attached to a train that was heading there. And we got there I think rather quickly. I don't remember exactly how long it took. But we must have gotten there around the end of March, because I remember the snows were melting.

And it wasn't as cold anymore because we had a couple of sheep skins, and mother had a fur coat that we were able to sell in the marketplace in order to gain a little bit of cash. We needed food, and we needed shelter. Shelter was provided, actually, free by some of the organizations that have set up there through the Haganah and through HIAS, which was another Jewish organization that was helpful.

The only thing I remember is the Red Cross must have been active, because I have my mother's document-- Red Cross document-- that was issued to her that was the first identification that we've had. And if we have this, the Red Cross must have been active. I don't remember it, per se, but this would be my evidence, I should say. Some food was provided, and some shelter.

The shelter that was provided was mainly a cot. They crowded in as many cots as possible into one room, and everybody got a cot, and everybody got some sort of food. The Haganah had organized groups that they were trying to smuggle into Palestine. And the youngsters were the ones that were the first ones to be pushed forward. I remember being separated from my mother at that point. She said, you go. I'll come when my turn comes. But it didn't happen that way.

But you were separated from her for a time?

I was put in different living quarters than my mother-- slightly better ones. Also, again, the organized type of supervision of the children, and schooling.

How did you feel about being separated from her?

Well, it was just a few blocks away, and I saw her every day. But the idea for the separation was to keep the younger people-- and I was probably amongst the youngest in the group-- the others were 16, 17, 18, 20-- and the idea was not to let them become hooligans, to have some sort of organized supervision. I was fortunate I had my mother, but the majority of them had absolutely no one.

I would say the great majority had absolutely no one. So the idea was to keep them busy with something other than free time to run around and get into some sort of mischief.

And your mother wanted you to go for the opportunities.

My mother wanted me to go for the opportunities, because otherwise all I would do is lay on the cot. It wasn't freedom of movement or anything like that. Again, because she had a little bit of money, she was able to get in with a group that would travel on their own without the supervision of the organizations that were trying to help. And we, mainly on foot, proceeded forward.

Now, how did your mother decide that you would travel onward at that point?

Because there was no hope of anything. It didn't move anywhere. We were just sitting there.

So the Haganah was not--

Well, they were active, but it was very difficult.

So they weren't able to arrange anything?

They were not able to move the amount of people that were there. And needless to say, they were the ones selecting who and what they should move. And I guess neither my mother nor I were priority.

So your mother decided she would take matters into her own hands.

She would take matters into her own hands and try to arrange for us to go-- actually to be guided, because we did not know how to travel, and where it was safe to travel, and the direction in which to go. So a group of people who had some means had gotten together and hired a guide to proceed towards the Allied lines.

OK.

And I remember going toward Czechoslovakia first.

Now, just backing up a bit, this was on foot--

On foot.

And leaving from--

From Budapest. No, I'm sorry from Lublin.

From Lublin in Poland.

In Poland.

On foot with a group of others and guides.

And guides. And we proceeded as far as Budapest.

And where did you sleep along the way?

Barns, wherever the guide could find some shelter.

And how did you find food?

Well, that had to be purchased. That was the final step-- whoever had, everything was shared. If the guide was able to arrange some sort of transportation other than by foot-- mostly it was done by foot. I remember sometimes some wagons arranged with some farmer that was going someplace, whether by the goodness of his heart. It wasn't a big group. I can't remember how many, but I would judge probably no more than 10.

And were the guides Israelis?

No, they were not Israelis. I'm sorry, my memory is not that good. And I'll tell you, it wasn't as impressive to me at the time, other than the fact that they would get up again-- no sooner do we get settled in some place, and we keep on moving, until we got to Budapest. When we got to Budapest, there was some sort of better organization.

As time was passing, the organization had improved. And I think there was also a bigger availability of support funds from I suppose the United States-- I don't know where it came from, but I suppose the United States and maybe some of the South American countries. Because it sure didn't come from the Jews in Poland anymore. So there was some support. Haganah basically was the biggest active force to move the Jews toward Palestine.

The idea was to move them to Romania, which was the closest access point to Palestine. And I know of some people that got across that way. We got stuck in Budapest. And from there, it was more difficult at that point to already start moving, because the British had caught on to what was going on and blockaded the ports, intercepted some of the vessels that were heading that way.

Eventually, and I can't give you the exact details how, I just remember certain incidents. I remember having crossed into Austria, I think it was, and being faced with the British who sent us right back to the Russian side. At that point, the realization dawned on everyone that you cannot cross borders freely, and that some discretion had to be taken as to how the crossings were made and where.

I remember certain dates and certain times. I remember in Czechoslovakia hearing that Berlin was surrounded. I remember that when we crossed into Italy, that was the highlight of everything. Because we had to go through the Alps and some of the passes--

Still on foot.

All on foot. And of, course I remember how cold it was. And when we came through the pass, we were so frozen, and we saw the Israeli flag. And everybody started to pinch each other, because we thought we were hallucinating. It was so cold, everybody was trying to encourage the others to stay warm, rubbing each other's toes and hands. And seeing the tents and the blue and white flags was like a mirage.

And everybody was pinching each other-- do you see what I see? Do you see what I see? Yeah, I see an Israeli flag. Well, if you see it, then I must see it too. And sure enough, it was the Hebrew brigade-- that was part of the British army at that point. And they were occupying an area that was near Bologna, because I know that was the next stop that we had. And we had the most warm reception. Our clothes were tattered.

And we were given some issue of the Israeli uniform issue. And I know I had a pair of shorts. I don't remember the shirt, but I remember the jacket which I cherished for a long, long time-- and of course, no shoes. And the Italian population were so different from the Belarus and the Polish population, where it was the first time where we felt that we didn't have to run for our lives.

I remember stories from some of the youngsters and the travels were they had to jump out of bed in their night clothes and run for their lives-- who have lost brothers, or sisters, or relatives, or friends after the Holocaust at the hands of the Poles. It's difficult to even imagine that people would go with axes, with bats. They were not baseball bats, what I mean by bats is pieces of wood-- we think here about the bat being a piece of wood that you can clobber somebody with-- I guess I should say with two by fours-- the size of pieces of wood like that-- to just kill.

And when we got to Italy, it was a different atmosphere. The Italians were very warm. They were very accommodating, actually, because we lived in some of the Italian homes.

Were these Jews?

No.

Gentiles?

Gentiles. Actually, the first quarries in Bologna were army barracks. I remember now the Quonset huts. And at that point, the Israeli Haganah was very active in Italy to try to transport people to the seashore, to either the Adriatic or the Mediterranean and get them across to Palestine. Everybody waited for the opportunity to be put on a ship. There were no other desires, no other hopes.

A ship to Palestine.

To Palestine, yes. The first movement we had to the South, we were put on a truck, about between 30 and 40, to be transported. A ship was going to go out from one of the southern ports in Italy. And our truck broke down-- never made it. We were broken down for about a day or two by the time they got supplies and everything and did not move very far.

We were housed in some actually villas-- a lot of people in one place, so sharing rooms but having a corner of our own. Food was provided at that time. We didn't have any more money. That was it. Everything was spent. By the time we reached Italy, we didn't have a suit to our name-- didn't even have any clothes on our back, other than what was given to us by the Hebrew brigade.

But we were housed in Bologna for a little bit. And at that point, the organization was called on UNRRA-- no, that came later. I'm sorry. It was the highest, and it was also a Jewish organization-- trying to think what it was-- that provided food and started to bring in clothing. There were donations from Jews from the United States. From there, again, we had the opportunity, or shall we say, we thought we had the opportunity, to get on another ship.

And we were transported to the South of Italy-- to the heel of Italy. There were three Santas there-- Santa Maria, Santa Caesarea, and Santa di Leuca-- I'll never forget that. And we got there to find out that the British were blockading, couldn't get on any ships. That became our living quarters for 1945 to early 1947.

And where were you living?

In housing in Italy-- these villas that were converted to boarding houses. I don't know how I can explain it that would be similar to what you could imagine here, except for we didn't each have a room of our own. We had corner of our own.

And who owned the houses? Who was sponsoring this?

All of this was being sponsored by HIAS. I'm trying to think what the organization was, because it became UNRRA afterwards.

But it was an organization.

Organization that provided us with food. They had a general kitchen that served food.

And that was '45 to '47.

'45 to '47. It was about July of '45 until early in '47.

And this was all Jewish refugees?

All Jewish refugees. I remember that there was an army outpost near Santa Caesarea. And I also remember my first encounter with Negroes, Blacks-- at that point, they were called Negroes, and they were of tremendous stature. I remember that each one of them was about six feet tall. To me, it seemed like that.

That was the first time you'd ever seen a Negro?

Yes, the first time. And I know that they were very kindly, because I never had such, how shall I say, treats, especially the children. They would give candy and ice cream. Italy is known for its gelato, and they would treat us to that. The place got organized very quickly. I started school again. Books were available. I remember doing a lot of reading.

And what language were the books in?

The books were in Yiddish-- and some in Polish, even though don't ask me to speak Polish now. I hate the language. I have no love for the people. And I almost forgot it. Russian-- probably every language that people had spoken, they had some books there. They were kind of collected and made available, and we all shared.

You couldn't take up more than one book at a time. And also some textbooks were provided. And we had an organized school. Everybody, no matter what their age was, depending on the subject they wanted to learn, and whatever there was a teacher available for, that's what you learned. Probably learned more world history over there than anybody learns in a school here. I know I learned enough to pass my New York Regent exam without having to study for it.

So you learned a lot.

And the same thing with geography. It helped me here.

What else was going on besides academic work for you? What did you do for fun?

What did we do for fun? Sing, talk. There was no such thing as having fun. Come to think of it, there were a few things, but that was later on. Whoever had made contacts with relatives in the United States and got a



few cents shared it with everybody else. I'm still in touch with a friend, a man friend who was quite a bit older than I, and we still visit-- his family and our family keep closely in touch.

He had brothers here in the United States. His father had two families, so to speak. Some of his nieces were older than he was. And his brother was an attorney in New York. I used to send him money on a pretty regular basis. And he shared it with everybody. My introduction to the opera, to music came this way.

Now, what could you buy with the money? Did you go to opera performances?

Performances.

Performances.

Performances.

So there was an opera company.

Oh yeah. Not in Santa Caesarea-- this happened a little later. Santa Caesarea was a sleepy town. What did we do for entertainment? I learned to swim. It was right on the sea-- there was a nice cove. Actually, it was a resort place. One of the hotels that was built there, Mussolini would frequent, because they were so hot sulfur baths. And for entertainment, we used to collect-- it was sort of like a winter resort and a spa.

And they would have dances on the terraces, and people would dress up in formal wear. And we would kind of sneak a look, and listen to the music, and we learned to dance on the area below, because the music was there, and we copied what they were doing.

So there were boys and girls.

Boys and girls. Actually, there were more boys than girls, because I was given a lot of attention, because I was probably the youngest, and the boys took care of me. But there were no harassment, there was no molestation. Everybody had respect for everybody else. And everybody tried to help everybody else.

Let's stop here and turn over the tape.

Take 1, side 2. So you were talking about learning to dance by watching others and having a good time.

If you wouldn't jar my memory, it probably was one of the things that I wouldn't exactly put my finger on. But yeah, now that I remember, yeah-- I used to like to watch and see how the other half lived. And it was really big exposure to how the other side lived, because there were a few until us that were occupied by refugees. But the general population was from the villages.

They did a lot of fishing. There were olive groves. I remember climbing-- my favorite place to read was in a fig tree. There were figs and olives growing. And it afforded shade and privacy. The population also was very kind and helpful. I met some vacationers, or should I say, winter vacationers-- they had a villa there from Rome, and they had a hotel in Rome. And I became friendly with the children in the family.

And I was learning a little bit of Italian, so it was easy to communicate. And they were very kind-hearted. It ended up that I would visit them in Rome later on. They took me along.

Were they Jewish?

No, no, no. They were Italians. Actually, the only Jews that I knew there were the Jews that were all displaced persons. They were Jews from Poland. They were Jews from Hungary-- I'd say a good majority of them were from Hungary. There were some Jews from Greece. My fond memory of that is they taught me how to play the mandolin. Now that you asked me, what did we do for entertainment? It seems like we did nothing, and yet we did quite a bit. I was taught how to play certain games in cards. What else?

And how did your mother spend her time there?

Mother worked. She worked in the kitchen. She did a little bit here and a little bit there. A lot of it was volunteer work. There was no real pay. Later on, there was a little bit of pay when everything got more organized and there were more people coming in. But from the beginning, it was volunteers-- one helped the other. I learned to ride a bike. What else did I do? I guess they were one day things, but it was progress in some way.

And so what happened next?

What happened next is that the frontier sort of opened. People were able to communicate with relatives in different countries. And the relatives made arrangements for their kin to come and join them. We were not able to make contact with anybody. So, again, the main push was to try to get to Palestine, because that was the haven.

Did you know of any relatives?

Yes, but we did not have an address. We didn't know an address. My mother remembered that my uncle, my father's sister, and her husband, they lived in Washington, DC. She remember the DC. And from the beginning, there was really no communication. As time progressed, and some of the survivors had emigrated to the United States, and we kept corresponding with them, they wrote and gave us advice on how to contact relatives.

The ones that left early were the ones that remembered the addresses of relatives and had managed to send communication to them. There was also a problem with quotas. Refugees were not allowed as quickly into the United States. Since we were on the Polish quota, the Polish quota was pretty much full, because Jews had emigrated from Poland to the United States up until the very end of the war.

So the accumulation of credits-- I don't know what else to call them-- of openings were not that big. It was only what had accumulated when people were not allowed to emigrate during the couple of years of war. And once that was filled, you had to wait from month to month, from year to year for your turn on the quota. This is why some of the refugees did not reach the shores of the United States until 1948 and '49. It became a little easier later on, but in '46 and '47, it was extremely difficult to emigrate. We tried to go to Palestine.

What did you do to try?

What did you do to try? You got yourself on lists with the proper authorities. And of course, they had to have the ship, they had to have the means to bribe whoever had to be bribed to allow the ship to exit the port, first, in Italy, and, of course, then the hope of reaching the shores of Israel. People that I knew who had gotten caught in the blockades, they actually jumped ship, and tried to wade into Palestine, and got the bullet, because the British did not want the immigration.

I think they were under a lot of pressure from the Arabs, and they sided with them, and stopped the entry. We missed the exodus, the famous exodus, because my mother got sick and had to be taken to the hospital. And I think that was about the saddest day of my life.

When you missed the exodus.

Missed the exodus, only to find out we would have ended up in Cyprus. But that would have been better too, because we would have been closer. And then my mother had written to the Jewish language newspapers in the United States-- there were two papers here the talk-- which meant the day and the forwards-- and looking for-- you always thought of looking for the man relatives, not the women relatives-- for my uncle.

And it all depended on who saw what in the paper and who identified with what. And then somebody here in Washington happened to read the paper and asked him whether this was a name that he recognized. And sure enough, it was my aunt's maiden name-- my father's sister. Recognized the name, and then there was a

question as to tracking down. The name was there, we were in Italy and trying to communicate with the forwards who put in the end-- well, we didn't put it in. We had to give it to somebody to put it in for us in the United States.

Somebody was going to the United States took the name, and it took time. You don't come to the United States, and the first thing you think about is somebody has given you a task to do. They got the help to approach the paper to send it in. So it took some time. And we had a letter that he's identifying himself as the William Godkin that we are searching. And, yes, his wife had relatives in the township, and they recognized the names because my mother and my aunt-- actually, my mother was a little older than my aunt-- but my aunt lived with her and my father before coming to the United States.

And she knew exactly who it was. They corresponded until the war broke out. And we made contact. And of course, letters did not turn around as quickly as they do now. Everything went by ship, so it was probably a month between communication. But he immediately wrote that he will start the paperwork to bring us to the United States. And it was a question of quota.

But my mother was born, actually, the area was Russia when she was born. Then it became White Russia. Because when Poland got its independence, some of the territory was transferred to Poland that was Russia before. And I remember the trip to Naples where the American Council was. And that was the closest place. Actually, something else happened before then.

Those people that after the exodus had been intercepted, the UNRRA that was administering the camps, had divided the people that were interested in going to the United States into a camp in Bari. It was a military camp originally-- Quonset huts. Actually, it was the first time my mother and I had a cubicle of our own.

And people would transfer there. And then the people that were trying to go to Israel, they transferred further north to Milan. So it would be harder for them to traverse the waters. It was a longer distance. It was also inland. It wasn't close to sea. Bari was a port. You could easily steal away on a ship-- not that any ships would have allowed it. Not too many ships were going to Palestine anyway.

So we were transferred to Bari. And in Bari, my uncle was sending us some money at that point. And I was enrolled into an Italian school, not having a very good grasp of Italian, but with the idea of learning English. It was an Italian school that taught English. And I did gain quite a bit, because my vocabulary was awful. I spoke with an Italian accent. But I did learn a little bit about grammar, how to read, and how to perceive the vowels.

But from Bari, that was our last point where we managed to get on the Russian quota, which expedited our departure for the United States.

So that was a long, tedious process.

It was us. We spent 2 and 1/2 years in Italy. We left November 1, because we came to the United States right before Thanksgiving-- the week before Thanksgiving.

What was the crossing like?

What was crossing like? It was a troop ship with bunks. My mother had a very difficult crossing. I don't think I would bring her food. She couldn't even get out of her bunk to go to the dining room.

Was it mostly displaced people?

No, not too many displaced people. There were a lot of Italians that were traveling here. But that was the only mode of transportation.

How did you feel about coming to the United States instead of Palestine?

How did I feel? Well, mixed feelings. One of the good feelings was coming to relatives. All the friends went

the other way-- or the majority of them. Some did come to the United States, but it was a vast country. From just having an idea about geography and where the different places were, there was probably very little hope of seeing anybody again.

After having sights set on Palestine for so long, and having a feeling of devotion that was actually instilled in me as a child-- because my father was a Zionist way back, and probably that's why I learned the language. And I knew Hebrew, because I spoke it from the beginning. It was like anybody here learns English, I learned Hebrew.

In the previous interview, you said that your father had founded a school.

Yes.

A modern Hebrew school. Actually, my father had supplied funds, but this rabbi had organized the school. It was a modern Hebrew school, with the Hebrew as spoken now in Israel. And it provided both a secular and Hebrew education. And I was enrolled in that school at the age of five, because they needed enrollees, and I was advanced enough to be able to just fit in.

The rabbi and his family ended up in the United States. And a son of his lives in this area. And jumping here from one thing to the other-- we went to a function here in the United States and my mother says to me, this is Noah Delinken. I says, mom, we have a dream. This is the United States. She says, it is. You go up and you ask him whether he is he. I said, do I have to? Sure enough.

That's amazing.

It is amazing. And the first person that I met when we crossed the Alps was the brother of my governess, because he asked me, where did I come from? Where was I born? And I said, you never heard of it. It's a little town, you've never heard of it. And he says, I come from a little town that nobody ever heard of either. And sure enough, we both came from the same place. And when he heard my name, he knew exactly who it was. And when I called my mother over, and they started to talk about the family, and his sister was my governess.

You never expected.

No. And he gave me one of the books that I've read thoroughly, and that's the Bible-- the complete Bible. It was a military issue. That's about 3 inches thick and it's probably 3 by 3 by 5. And the pages are so thin, I had to put a piece of paper underneath so I wouldn't see the words below. But that was one of the books too that I studied, just to keep occupied.

So back to the crossing when you were coming to the United States instead of Palestine-- when you had thought of going to Palestine, did that seem partly like coming home again?

Yes, it was. Yes, it was. It was the next best thing to home. As I told you, my father was interested in Palestine, also interested in the modern Hebrew language, and wanted his children to know it. We learned the language from birth, both my brother and I. My brother did not survive. And I had a very close identification coming to the United States with sort of almost like second-best, other than coming to a family.

So what was it like for you when you arrived?

When I arrived, very warm reception . We got off the ship. And by the way, we almost got lost at sea. Three days out of New York, there was a big storm. And the ship was listing, and it was listing so badly that we watched a fishing boat go down-- couldn't give it any help, because we walked on the sides, the ship listed so badly. But we made it.

Pulled into New York port, and what was it like? Sitting outside the port of New York, we arrived, it was dusk. It was late evening. To stand on the deck and to watch the strings of light-- whoever thought they were cars-- cars were something that was a novelty to many in Europe yet. Strings and strings of light, and all the

neon lights blasting, flashing-- unbelievable sight. Unbelievable sight.

I still think the skyline of New York-- whenever I'm there, it's still a sight to behold. And the excitement--

Was it different from what you had imagined?

Much different. Italy is a progressive country, but nowhere near what I saw here. Sure, we had running water in Italy, but it was one faucet. To walk into an apartment and turn on the spigot--

So everything seemed quite strange.

Remember something else-- that Poland is a very backward country. They didn't even have any bathrooms, indoor plumbing in most of the houses.

Your family, which was affluent--

We had a bathtub. But the bathtub had to be filled. The well was in the yard. It had to be pumped into the kitchen. You used the pump to pump it up from there to here. We had electricity, and we were way ahead of the others. There was many houses that didn't have electricity. We had a radio, but that was probably one of the few in the city. I can't begin to explain to you how backwards Poland is.

So just physically, the United States was a shock.

It wasn't as big a shock as if I would have come directly from Poland. We went through Czechoslovakia, which was very much modernized. We came into Italy that was also quite modernized. But it was still a long way from what I've encountered here.

So did your relatives meet you in New York?

Yes. My uncle and his cousin met us in New York. And we spent the night with my uncle's cousin. By the time we disembarked, went to customs, and then the next morning, we took a train to Washington. And needless to say, New York was very busy, scary. None of the places-- Rome was a big city, and there was a tram going around. You make the circle, and you could come to the same place. New York wasn't anything like that.

We disembarked, and the first thing that I saw was the Brooklyn Bridge. And my god, the expanse of it-- how long it was. And I was pointed out right away that there is the Williamsburg Bridge. That's just as long. It was incomprehensible. And of course, the subway-- we got on the subway underground train. The trains that I remembered were the steam trains. The train here was an electric train.

So how did that all seem to you? Scary or exciting?

It was exciting. I don't think I was scared of anything, to tell you the truth. I think part of my experience had sort of taken away any fear. I was a daredevil anyway.

You were a daredevil anyway-- you mean--

Not being afraid of things. For instance, there was electricity in the villa that we lived in, but everybody had sort of like-- in Italy, they had their hot plates. So everybody had a hot plate. And needless to say, the electricity was always out. I would go up to the pole and connect it back again. I didn't really understand what I was doing, other than the fact I was told to wear gloves and not to touch anything metal with my feet.

Were you a daredevil because of your experience during the Holocaust? Or did you have those tendencies, do you think, as a child before?

How would I know from before? But from the Holocaust, you say that not being afraid-- at one point during

the Holocaust, during the hiding, and the running, and so forth-- I got lost from my mother. I was in the forest, I had no idea which direction to go. I had no idea where the Germans were. I was by myself, and the forests were full of wolves, and bears, and all kinds of animals.

And what were your prospects? And I thought to myself, I came out to a clearing, and I heard the Germans yell, halt. And I thought, oh, this is my chance. I'll just step out and they'll shoot me. And the bullets were hitting the ground. I don't know if you've ever seen a bullet hit the ground-- just makes it a little puff in the dirt all around me. And nothing happened.

And all of a sudden, I heard my mother call my name. And so I turned around, I ran to my mother. I mean, life didn't mean anything. There was a strong sense of survival, but life didn't mean anything. You didn't expect to survive. You wanted to. You had the desire to. The aim was to survive, but you had to expect that something is going to happen in some way. If you die, you die.

My life wasn't that interesting. Life didn't hold that much for you. It's just I think the ingrained desire, the human push to live. This is why sometimes-- my husband has a big family. I don't-- relatives who are in their 90s and so forth. And you watch and somebody says, they are more dead than alive. Yeah, but the will to live is there, and it's so strong, and one is not even aware of it. You know it as a will to live, but it's there.

And you remember what that felt like.

Yeah. And I don't know, maybe I'm a fatalist. I said, well, if my day comes, it comes. Go by car-- some people are afraid to go at night. I'm not afraid to go at night. It's just this attitude that when your time is up, it's going to be up.

So back to arriving in the States, and you got on the train with your relatives to Washington.

My uncle had a grocery store at 3rd and P. He and my aunt were working unbelievable hours. He would be up at 5:00 in the morning, and I don't think he ever closed the store before 10:00 at night. And by time he'd get to bed, it'd probably be by midnight, and be up again at 5.

Now, your aunt was born in Poland.

Both my uncle and aunt.

Your uncle also.

My uncle came to the United States. I think he was about 16 when he left Poland. And my aunt was 14 at the time. And I'll always remember this romantic story that he promised her that he'll send for her. And he did-- as soon as he could earn enough to make some sort of arrangements for her to live here.

And she was only 14?

She was 14 when he left. She was about 16 or 17 when she came here.

And she came here to marry him?

My father paid the passage. And she couldn't come to the United States. Because if she wasn't a citizen she couldn't enter. But she came to Cuba. And he went to Cuba and married her. And talking about crossings, my aunt said when she came back, I said, I thought I was going to die on the ship. She says, you thought you were going to die on the ship-- you crossed the ocean. I crossed that ocean too. But I thought that after crossing the ocean, I was going to die crossing from Cuba to the United States.

But she crossed when she was only 16, she married a man that she hadn't seen for two years.

Yes.

This very young man.

Two or three years-- I don't know whether she was 16 or 17.

So back to your story, they had this store--

They had this grocery store, they had three daughters. Their oldest daughter was six months younger than I. And I was welcomed into the family very warmly. The next morning, it was before Thanksgiving, and the store was busy. And my cousin, who was 16, dressed in jeans and a shirt and went down to help in the store. And I was given a pair of jeans and a shirt and a pair of loafers that I squeezed my feet into.

And I went down to the store. And I could read, but a lot of the things I didn't know what they meant. And I couldn't understand everybody with the different dialects, because I had learned some English in Italy-- a few words here and there. And it started out, well, they started to point to me.

They wanted a can of peas, and I couldn't understand what they wanted. They pointed, and I read it as peas, and the label showed little peas, and that was a word that I've learned. My cousins, of course, did not have quite the patience. But nonetheless, they were good teachers, because I was afraid to cross them. And just as soon as Thanksgiving was over, my uncle took me-- there was a private Jewish religious school at Wisconsin and O-- I remember that, because that was ingrained in my memory.

I'd get lost otherwise. I wouldn't know how to ask where it is. And he took me down there-- it was an elementary school-- and enrolled me. And he says, you speak to those children in English. I said, uncle, I spoke to him in Yiddish-- I don't know. And he says, well, they are trying to learn Hebrew. So you teach them Hebrew, and they'll teach you English.

Well, they did accept me, for one thing-- not necessarily, how shall I say, willingly, but at that time, he was already a little better off, and he made contributions that school. It was a religious school that lived on contributions. So I was accepted. And by the end of January-- the new semester started in February-- I had conquered the language well enough to be able to at least communicate. I had no problem with the writing.

Were the classes conducted in English or Hebrew?

They were both in Hebrew and English, but mostly in English-- mostly in English. I sat in the classes. I wasn't really required to do very much other than the fact that I had the drive within myself. So whatever classes there were, the main idea was to English. But I learned enough of it to be able to exist. I knew enough to communicate.

My vocabulary was very poor. My sentence structure was awful. And my grammar, forget. And I was fortunate to a certain degree-- I guess I had the desire to learn, and I had people that recognized that. I was enrolled into a junior high school, because this elementary school said that I knew enough-- I had no credentials-- that I knew enough to be able to handle the work.

Now, in the elementary school, the children in your class must have been much younger than you.

Of course. I was 16. I was almost 17. I was actually 17 by the time I started--

How did that feel to be with little kids?

It didn't matter. I was there to learn. I knew the purpose I was there for. And I knew that if I pushed myself, I could go along.

So that was the important thing.

Yes. And my uncle took me to a friend of his who was a rabbi. And both of them sat down and asked me, what did I want. I had a choice. I could go to Americanization school, where they taught English to foreigners. Or they could get me into this school where I would have to learn on my own-- just be exposed

to it.

And having been exposed to the different languages-- I mean, in Hungary, I picked up a few words of Hungarian. In Italy, I picked up some Italian. And I realized that a language is not that difficult to conquer if you put your mind to it. I guess I had a pretty good IQ. Because from the German, I recognized some of the words. And the week that I spent in the grocery store before they took me down to the school, I had already picked up some words.

My cousins didn't speak anything else but English. They understood Yiddish, but they discouraged me from speaking it. Say it in English. And if I didn't, if I said it in Yiddish, they made me repeat it. And my uncle made me repeat. I mean, his English was horrible, but he made me repeat it in English. And I don't know, I just fell in with the tide.

But when I started junior high school, I had a lot of help from two teachers. One of them was my homeroom teacher, who later on I had acquainted much better because she was a member of Hadassah, and we were both in the same organization, a leftover from my early days. And I was in the class with my little cousin-- in the same grade. She didn't have the classes with me. I think my homeroom teacher saw to it that we weren't, because she was afraid that there would be intimidation.

But at least I wasn't afraid to go from the store to the school. I went with somebody-- just to traverse the streets here in the United States, even though today's traffic is a lot more than it was then-- but it was still busy streets. And--

Let's stop here and change the tape.