

This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Nesse Godin, conducted by Gail Schwartz on July 6, 1998, in Silver Spring, Maryland. This interview is part of the museum's project to interview Holocaust survivors and witnesses who are also volunteers with the museum. This is a follow-up interview that will focus on Nesse Godin's post-Holocaust experience.

In preparation for this interview, I read the transcript of the post-Holocaust audio interview you conducted for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum on December 14, 1995, and have read the summaries of the audio interview you conducted for the Jewish Community Council of Greater Washington on February 27, 1985, and for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum video interview on May 8, 1988. I will not ask you to repeat everything you said in this interview. Instead, I will use this interview as an opportunity to follow up on those interviews and to focus on your post-Holocaust experiences. This is tape number one, side A. What is your full name?

Nesse Godin.

And where were you born and when were you born?

My maiden name was Galperin. I was born in Siauliai, Lithuania, March 28, 1928.

As I said, you've been interviewed extensively. But just to put this interview into a framework, let's summarize where you were during the war. The Russians occupied Lithuania in June of 1940. The Germans invaded June 22, 1941 and Siauliai June 23.

Two ghettos were set up. And by the end of 1942, there was a single ghetto. Your father was taken away November 5, 1943. And in the spring of 1944, you, your mother, and older brother were taken to Stutthof, where you were separated.

You then went to [? Durbeck ?] and then later to Malken. Then you went on a death march to Praust. And you were liberated at Chinow March 10, 1945, by the Russians.

Can I do a few corrections on it?

Absolutely.

Yeah. My father was taken with the children selection to Auschwitz November 5, 1943. Also when we were taken on the death march, we stopped in the middle in Proust for a few days and continued the death march until we came to Chinow where we set up in a barn for a few weeks and that's where we were liberated.

Thank you. I just also want to clarify a few other points before we continued on to your post-Holocaust experiences. How would you describe yourself as a child before the war began? Were you very independent?

I was not independent at all. I was a spoiled, sickly little child that had always got a cold, always was pampered, never wanted to eat. I was definitely not independent.

Did you have a close relationship with your parents?

I tell you, my parents were always in the business. I had a closer relationship with my nanny than with my parents-- although I loved my parents very much. But because they were business people and in food business, I didn't see them that much.

Did you like being by yourself, or did you always want to be surrounded with other people?

I was always surrounded with my friends and my brothers.

Did you have any favorite childhood songs?

I participated in school plays. So I definitely had a childhood song.

Is there any particular one that you remember that you like?

Well, all kinds of Hebrew songs. Always loved the song about the Kinneret and--

Can you sing a few phrases?

No, I'm not a singer. I'm a talker, but I don't sing.

Did you have a favorite holiday?

My holidays were always favorite. But the most favorite were Hanukkah and Pesach. Hanukkah, because all got Hanukkah gelt. In Europe, you didn't buy presents. You were getting money. So I liked that. And on Passover, because my birthday was always close to Passover, we always celebrated it on Passover when my parents were home, when we had time.

As I said, we're just clarifying some points now. When the war had started, you said your family, in a previous interview, had gotten certificates to go into the ghetto. How did your family specifically get those certificates?

You see, my dear, this is the problem with interviewers and interviewing. Each town, each place had a different system. In Siauliai, every family had to get a certificate.

It was done very orderly. On every interview, I said it clearly. Special Commission came to your home and assigned you a place in the ghetto.

My dad signed certificate just for adult and healthy. In order for a kid to go into the ghetto or an elderly or a sick, you had to bribe somebody or somehow sneak them in into the ghetto.

Now you may wonder, why would anybody want to sneak elderly, sick into a ghetto that's like a jail? In my testimony each time, it tells you. The ones that did not get into the ghetto were killed in one night in a forest off Zager-- not Zaga, but Zager.

How do you spell that?

Z-A-G-E-R. In Lithuanian, "zhah-gah-ri." Z-A-G-A-R-I-A-I. And on the Z, a little head which pronounce it to "zh," "zh-ah-gah-ri."

OK. You had mentioned before that you were a sickly child. What exactly were your problems?

Well, I didn't have any problems. I just was spoiled and didn't want to school. So I had a cold, so I stayed home. I wasn't sickly, but I was always spoiled, always-- but the word kvetching in Yiddish-- always complaining, this hurts me. That hurts me. I didn't want to eat. I was spoiled. That's it.

Why didn't you like school?

I loved school, but I wanted to be pampered. I loved school. I was very good in school.

And to move a little farther forward, you said your father was also taken away at the time of the children selection because he was not at work that particular day.

Correct.

Did you lose any friends of your own in that children selection?

I tell you. When the children selection in 1943, I was 15-and-a-half-years old. All the children that were taken was from birth to the age of 14. So my particular age, friends, did not go in that selection.

They were killed before, before going into the ghetto, many of them in other selections. But in that particular selection, just elderly, sick, children, and some healthy and strong, including a few men from our Jewish council-- the Judenrat, as you would call it-- were taken with that group. So my personal friends, not.

Did you know any of the children who were taken away?

Many of the children-- my friends' sisters and brothers, my neighbors' children-- many children, sure. Especially when you grow up and you live in the same community and you go to the same school, you know kids that are few years younger than you. If you also visit your friend and you see their sisters and their brothers, definitely you know.

Did you talk this loss over with your mother?

I really mourned very much that loss. But we had a personal loss-- my father. So when you have your personal loss, the next door neighbor may have lost two children, but you worry about your own, number one.

Then you look around and you see adults were gone, not just with my mother-- our whole family, my brothers, my uncles, my friends. Definitely, I talked to them about it.

Did your mother say anything especially comforting to you when your father left?

Which my father didn't leave. He was taken. Excuse me.

You're correct.

I tell you. I had many comforting words for my brothers. I'll never forget my older brother said to me, I'll be like a father to you, because he was seven years older. My mom, she was so in mourning for my father. We, the children, really comforted her more than she did to us.

Were you very religious-- well, what I want to say is, what were your thoughts about a God at this time that does something so devastating?

Again, I have been friends with you. You know me well, and I know you well. And forgive me for correcting you for things. What is religious? Religious is how you observe it or how you live your life.

To me, religious, as a child, my mom taught me that the most higher power of religion is to observe Ten Commandments, take care of the poor, take care of the widow and take care of the orphan. Naturally, we observed kosher. We went on Shabbat to synagogue.

And because I went to a Hebrew day school, we were taught Psalms, part of our education. And I'll never forget there is a Psalm 118 that it says, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. The heavens are for the God and the heavenly bodies. And the Earth, God gave to us human beings.

And it's we, the people, that do it to each other. Don't blame it on God. God gave us power to make a decision, to be good and to be bad, to be kind and to be nasty. So we didn't blame God at all.

What language did you speak at home?

In the house, we spoke Yiddish. With the nanny, I spoke Lithuanian. In school, I spoke Hebrew. So as a child, I spoke three languages and later learned many more.

In the ghetto, were you aware-- of course, you were a teenager. Were you aware of any of the Zionist youth movements or the underground newspapers that were there?

I was very much aware because of having the two older brothers. One of my brothers, when the Nazis took over, was 18. The other one was 20. Now they have been involved in Zionist organizations before the war, and they were involved in this underground in the ghetto.

Now at the age of 14, I became so quickly an adult from a temperate little girl that you cannot imagine. There were times when my brothers were afraid to go give a message. I was the one that had to go to a friend's house and bring a message. I did a lot of responsible things at the age of 14. So in the ghetto, we the kids grew up in a hurry. We became adults overnight.

Were you physically mature at that time, or did you still look like a little girl?

I was not physically mature. I never got my period before the war. I didn't get it during the war. I didn't develop at all. And that was very bad because I looked younger than my age.

When you were in Stutthof, you said you were kind to the old ladies in the camp. You had said that in one of your interviews.

They were kind to me, not I was kind to them. My interview states that women were kind to me. I survived the Holocaust because of the Lord above and the kindness of Jewish women.

And you do go into detail in previous interviews in that. Were your guards at Stutthof women or men?

There were different guards. Outside were the Nazis. Inside there was Polish criminals called kapos. In the women's barracks, we had women guards that were also Polish or Ukrainian women because they spoke-- I could hear Polish or Ukrainian, so we had different guards.

But you couldn't understand-- could you understand?

Well, I learned the year that the Russians were here, and I learned Russian. So it was very easy to understand from Russian to Polish and Ukrainian.

When you were separated from your mother, were you able to say anything before that separation to her? Or did you realize what the separation meant?

No. We didn't know how to say anything to each other. But before we were separated with my brother, then we were brought in to Stutthof. And we were put in a big area where there was nothing but-- like sandy area.

And we sat there. And people said to bury their valuables so the Nazis wouldn't have it. The last thing my brother said was, in case we survive the Holocaust-- we didn't call it Holocaust then. We call it this hell-- we should try to reunite in Lithuania.

And after we were picked up from that area-- the next thing we knew, one went to the right. The other one went to the left. I went in the middle. My brother was sent one way, my mom another way. And they just extinct. There I was, all alone. So you didn't have a chance to say much. It isn't that the Nazis say, OK. Say your goodbyes. It didn't work that way.

At the time of liberation-- which was March 10, 1945, by the Russians-- you were 17. Did you--

I was just 17.

Did you feel 17?

No. I felt like 79. I was a bundle of bones, lived through four years of suffering and pain all alone, the body abused from torture and hunger, the mind abused. I was like a old little lady.

When you were liberated, did you feel liberated?

I believe that I gave this testimony of liberators. You see, even then, when the Russians came, they told us that they are fighting the war and they found us there. They didn't tell us that some army sent them to liberate us.

So we were free. Now, once we were free, where do you go? What do you do?

I remember the night of liberation. And I believe it's in my testimony somewhere. Peoples are dancing. Peoples are jumping. Peoples are kissing the Russians. Peoples are kissing their hands and their feet.

I was crying because until then, I try to survive day by day. It was survival. Where do I get a piece of bread? How do I live a extra today?

But once I was free, I felt very sorry for myself. What do I do? Where do I go, now that I'm free? So that was my liberation.

Did you have any inside feelings for retaliation at that time?

Honey, at that point, you didn't think of retaliation. If somebody tells you they wanted to retaliate, we were bones and skin. Who could we retaliate? The Nazis, first of all, they run away, the guards, and they left us there.

Second-- and also, I'm sure I described that incident in my testimony. But how could you retaliate? Here and there you find immense camps where some prisoners, two or three of them, jumped on the Nazi and killed him. But in women's camps, I don't think you find it.

It was interesting. You said two different things in your interviews. One, you were in such a weakened state that you felt death was welcome but none--

Not after liberation. Before liberation. You see, in my interview there was a time just before liberation where I prayed every day to the Lord to let me live through a day and sleep through a night.

But it came a time when I was praying to be on top of this mountain of bodies. I was tired of living and tired of existing. You see, my dear, we in that barn did not know that the war is ending. We did not know that there was Allied forces.

We didn't know what was going on. We thought this will never end. And that is when I wished I would be dead. So the testimony that you read is in two different places. Now if you listen to my tape, you heard it. If you look through my transcript, somebody failed to put it in.

And then you had mentioned something else, that you had looked through the window. I love the way you phrased it. You looked through the window to see what freedom looked like.

Yes. Well, that was after I was taken out from the barn. I was taken into a little house. I was carried by a Russian soldier, put on a straw sack. And they told me that in a few days, the makeshift hospital--

Now, I better explain now I have a little more wisdom about tapings. Makeshift, I mean, by the time they took-- it was a school gymnasium or something that they converted into a hospital. So we had to stay in those little houses until they were ready.

And once I was there, it was like before night time. It was getting dark. And I was laying on that straw sack and

thinking, I am free. Now, how does freedom look?

And I wanted to look how a free world-- I was very ill. I had typhoid, dysentery. I weighed 69 pounds. I had wounds on my hands on every finger. My toes were frozen.

I had a wound here that my bones stuck out. I was beaten up on the death march. My face was swollen. And this opened up and was leaking. But I wanted to see freedom.

But instead, I saw a monster in that window pane, a reflection. And I got scared, and I turned around to see who was there. And that's when I realized no one was there. That's how I looked.

I have not seen myself in a mirror. I did not know. I looked at the other women that looked bad, but I didn't see it on myself. So this was that experience that you saw.

Later on, when you were in the displaced persons camp at Feldafing--

Feldafing.

--Feldafing, did you want to go to Palestine at that time?

I tell you, very sincerely. When we came to Feldafing, I mean, I was reunited with my mom in Lodz. Then, because my brother was in Feldafing, in-between Lodz and Feldafing, I got married. You have it in my testimony. OK. So we came to Feldafing, Jack, who is my husband-- 52 years now-- my mom, and I. And my brother was there already.

Now my mom said-- she suffered so much. She had two brothers and four sisters, one of them who immigrated to the United States the year I was born. That's the only one that was alive.

And she thought that she wants to be with her sister. And she turned to me and she said-- to me and Jack-- and she said, and where I am going, you are going. And I did not make decisions. Let me tell you again. You know me now.

But while my mother was alive, until her death in 1967, she was the boss of my house. We respected her. She made decisions, and she made that decision that we suffered so much during the Holocaust and we need to go to a country where there is freedom.

When you did get together with your mother and then later on, as the months and years went by, did you and she tell each other what each of you went through after you were separated?

I tell you, we talked a lot about what we went through. With my mother, we tried to encourage Jack to talk about his family. But he did not. Jack is my husband.

We did not have much family here that we socialized with. We had a lot of family here, but they were Americans. So we reached out to other survivors. We became friends. We became like family.

Every time we got together, that's all we talked about, how we survived, how bad it was, where we were. And as my children started to grow up, my mom was very wise. She said, children have to know, in a children's way, what happened to our people. So we talked in our house all the time.

What I meant though was before you came to the United States and when you were reunited with your mother, did you tell her all the things that happened to you?

I really shared with my mother. We were very close, and we talked to each other as much as we could about-- you see, Gail, in those days there was no therapists. And it's very important when you go through a trauma like this to have a friend or someone to listen to you, to unload your problems. And we really always talked to each other, how it was, comparing where we were. And that was really, in the long run, very helpful. Because many people did not do that, and

they still carry a very heavy load.

When you were in the displaced persons camp, you said you took classes. Who sponsored these classes, which organizations?

Many organizations sponsored it. It was ORT did a lot of skills by the United Nations Relief Organizations, called UNRA at that time, and I don't know. Maybe other organizations, maybe the Joint. I really don't know.

But there were classes in the displaced person camp. You could go to learn. I went to bookkeeping classes. I took design classes. At one time, I took a class how to make brassieres and girdles.

Because I had my mom and then I had my children, two of my children were born. So I didn't have to worry. I could go to school. While you were in the displaced persons camp, did you ever have fears that war could start again?

Gail, I wasn't as much afraid of the war as I was afraid of the German Nazis. When I walked out of the displaced person camp into the village, into Feldafing, I always thought, what will happen if the Nazi is there that hit me over the head and he'll be afraid that I'll recognize him? So if he recognize me, he'll kill me, right? He'll do something to me.

It was not easy to live five years among your murderers. It was very difficult, although it looked like a little bit normalized life. But still, you had this in your back, what if he recognizes me? What if I recognize a Nazi? What am I going to do? Was very difficult, very difficult.

President Truman had sent an envoy over to look into the displaced persons camp conditions, a gentleman named Earl Harrison. And he then published a report. Were you and the other people are aware of this-- at the summer of '45?

I tell you, Gail, summer of '45, I was still in Lodz. I didn't get to Feldafing until October. So I was somewhere the summer-- I didn't get to Lodz until maybe May. And then by the time I found my mother, back and forth.

So I don't know. I've heard of that, from other people afterwards. But I did not know about that. I was there then.

You did say that your husband Jack is also a survivor. And you also said that he doesn't like to talk about his experience. But just generally, where was he born and where was he during the war?

Well, I tell you. Jack is from Vilna. He was born in Vilna in 1921, where he lived with his parents, a brother and a sister, and uncles and aunts and cousins and grandparents. And when the Germans took over, Vilna belonged at that point already to Lithuania.

Jack was visiting a friend on his bicycle and the friend-- so he was at that time 20 years old. They said, let's run. So they got on the bike, started to run. They were overcome by the German forces.

And about a week or 10 days later-- he doesn't remember exactly-- they got sent back to Vilna. When they came to Vilna, Jack's whole family was killed in Ponar. I'm going now to go on Ponar to pay respect for his family and my father's family. They came from Vilna [INAUDIBLE] Ponar-- my grandma, my uncles, my aunts, my cousins.

Now Jack was in the ghetto until 1944-- 1944. Now you hear a lot of partisans of Vilna. But Jack doesn't consider himself a partisan. He and a few guys succeeded to get a gun and escaped from a war detail into the forest. See, around Vilna, there were a lot of forests, lot of partisans-- Polish, Ukrainian, Russian, all kind. So you could blend in there, and that's how he was liberated in that forest around Vilna.

Just to move back in time a little bit, I had read in one of your interviews how some of the people in the ghetto would sit around a special table, almost like a mystical experience, and ask questions to this table. And I read that about another ghetto and that this was something that people turned to for hope, to give them hope. Can you give us any other--

I can. This was exactly after the children selection. After the children selection, the families-- every family lost

members, whether it was children, whether it was parents, whether it was brothers, whether it was sisters. And when you are in despair, you start to believe in everything.

So people started to make sacrifices. I remember seeing my parents and some neighbor sitting on the little table holding hands and saying, table, table, if the children are alive, knock two. And you know the table knock two. And I stood there and I looked. I was thinking to myself, how can a table knock?

But when you are desperate, when you're drowning, you hold to a straw. This was the straw to still make you believe that they're alive. Some people still believe in this extra-whatever sense.

When you were on the boat going to the United States, you were separated from your mother and your husband. Did that bring back memories for you? Was that especially painful? And if so, how did you handle it?

You see, Gail, the United States government meant very well. They meant if you have children, you should have comfort. So if you're mothers and the children had a cabin.

But in the meantime, for Holocaust survivors to be, you came on the boat. And all of a sudden, your husband is in this hold and your mother is in another hold. And you are there with your two kids, and you cannot help it, to shudder and say, what's now? Who is going to be thrown into the water?

Until we got settled and we could see them-- we even ate in different areas, even the mess hall, what you call it, was in a different area. So it wasn't easy. We don't talk about it. But when you start to think about it, it was not easy.

Gail, when I come somewhere-- and there's a few lines in Florida especially. There's a restaurant that they have separate lines to go into it-- if you're two people or three people or four people, a party of-- and they say, how many people? Two? Go in this line.

I shudder. I go, but I shudder. When I come to an event yesterday for somebody's 95th birthday party and they get a lot of people in the house. They were cooking hot dogs and hamburgers.

And I said, where are the hot dog? They say, you have to go outside with a plate and stand there until it's finished. I didn't go for my food. I didn't. And somebody realized that I couldn't do that, and they brought me the food.

You see, Gail, we survivors, we survived, but with so much pain the rest of our lives, with so many hang-ups. You see me. I always look good. I always try to look nice. But I'm always looking.

What's this? Is this person nice? Is he going to punch me? Is somebody doing something wrong? Is somebody instigating to have Nazis come again? If I get a telephone call and somebody hangs up on the other side, I say, oh, that must be a prank call, which I get many.

But I'm public with my testimony. So you find me on the internet. You find me here. You find me there. They find me.

This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Nesse Godin. And you were talking about your feelings when you were asked to stand on a line.

Yeah. Well, I just believe it's on the other side of the tape. For us survivors, to stand in line for food is a torture. To take a plate and go out-- it may be the nicest restaurant, the nicest party, the most beautiful affair.

And I crash those lines. [INAUDIBLE] always people some time look at me. But some of the people know me, and they'll always know that I cannot stay in line for food. Or I don't go, or I crash the line.

When the boat landed, what was it like for you to put your foot on American soil?

When I put my foot on American soil, I felt like I came to a place of freedom, of security, a place where I'm going to be

able to be no more stateless, no more displaced person, but equal to every human being that lives here, especially when we got off the boat and my aunt and my cousin and another friend of my mother's were standing there with open arms, waiting for us. And all of a sudden, we had family. And so we really felt welcome and secure.

What were your very first impressions of the United States?

My first impression was really not when I got off the boat-- because we were still sitting in a big room with a lot of commotion, a lot of paperwork, bureaucracy-- but when we were traveling in the car from New York to Washington. And I'll never forget it. At one point, my cousin asked me if I'm hungry, if I would like to eat something.

I thought he was going to take out some sandwiches and give it to me. But next thing I knew, he got out of the car. And he went out and he bought me some sandwiches, and I couldn't understand how could he do that. We were moving, and he was bringing me sandwiches.

We got on the ferry crossing the Delaware, so that-- I said, look, in America, you can travel and get out of the car. So that was one of my really first experiences. And my other experience that was very negative is when I signed up right away to go to Americanization school.

And I lived on Lamont Street in Washington, and I went on the streetcar. And I don't know if it's still a law or not, but all the Black people were sitting in the back. And I didn't know that.

And I always got on in front of the streetcar, and I sat down in the back to get off the back door, which was a custom in Germany when I lived-- if you went on the bus, you got on. You got off the back door.

And people looked at me, why I sat in the back. And I always thought, can they tell that I am not American? And when I found out that this country that I blessed when I walked in for freedom still did not have freedom for all the people. So that was the second impression that I had, which things got changed in all those years.

How was your English when you arrived? You said you had taken lessons in Feldafing.

Now I took English lessons in school while the Russians were occupied. I knew how to say pencil, pen, notebook, teacher, write, read, drink, eat, maybe a few more words. In Feldafing, I filled in a little bit more to that vocabulary. But my English was very, very poor, very poor, especially when you try to use the words that you know and translate from your own language, from Yiddish, it comes out very different.

Even on the boat at one point, some sailor used to help me with the kids to go down the steps to go to the dining room. And one day, there was such a big storm. And water was coming over the deck. And I wanted to ask him if we'll get drowned. And I said, can we get drunk, drinking from Yiddish. Drinking and drinking, in Yiddish it sounds the same.

And it was Christmastime, and he thought I want a date. And he said, yeah, yeah. We'll get drunk. And I started to cry, and that's when he realized what I meant.

So although many of us knew a few words of English, it was very difficult. Really not until I went to Americanization school, which I attended three times a week at night-- I went to work, because of my mom living with us, I could do so. And then Jack and I went at night to learn, to write, to read, and to American history or whatever we needed. And in five years, we became citizens.

Can you tell me what that was like to become a citizen?

To become a citizen was something very special to all survivors. To me personally, because as a child I was not yet a voting member of the Lithuanian society, then all of a sudden I was a prisoner in a ghetto. Then I was a prisoner in a concentration camp, then in a labor camp, then on a death march.

Then I became stateless. Then I became a displaced person. So from all those things, to come to the United States and

finally become a citizen of this country, was very emotional, very emotional. I really felt like at least now I belong. I belong to a country that believes in freedom, that believes in rights of people. So it was really very positive.

Did your husband and your mother become citizens at the same time?

My husband did but not my mother, because she was so kind to let us go in school. It took care then-- once we became citizens, she went to school, at the age of 55. And she became a citizen at the age of 60. And also, she knew many, many languages.

She spoke Polish and Russian and German and Lithuanian and Yiddish and Hebrew. She was very well educated. But somehow, English was hard for her because the letters, you pronounce differently. The ABC was different. We knew "ah", "bey", "say", "day", "eh." And all of a sudden, your I is a E and your E is a-- so it was difficult. But she made it. She became a citizen.

How did you celebrate that?

Oh, we celebrated, definitely, especially when my mom became a citizen. The kids were already a little bigger, and we really had something special.

Before we now go on to talking about the actual post-war experiences, are there any other clarifications or corrections that you wanted to make to your previous interviews?

Well, I tell you, as I look through many interviews, there is some corrections needed to be done. At this point, I don't see it in front of me. But there are names of cities that need to be corrected.

At one point where I mentioned that I needed a quarter to come to the Lithuanian quarter, in one of my testimonies it said I didn't have a quarter. When I said I was liberated in Chinow, somehow somebody wrote down [? Fenovitsa ?] in the Ukraine. I was never in the Ukraine.

So I really feel that I need again to look through the testimony. I really think-- and I have been saying it for many years, even to you, Gail, I think from 1993-- while we are still alive send to each survivor that gave testimony their transcript. Have them read it, just minor things.

Now I said the Jews were supposed to be taken to town by the name of Zager. We've talked about it before. I found it said, [? Zaga. ?] Now you look for [? Zaga, ?] there's no such place. What is she talking about? There is no such place.

Also, you have to understand like many times, we survivors say, well, this and this town was in Bessarabia, let's say. Now it may be Ukraine. It may be Hungary. So same thing in Lithuania. Some parts of Lithuania, they're occupied by the Germans pre-war. Some areas were Poland. Like Vilna was Poland.

After the war, now again, it's Lithuania. So it's very important for verifying with the survivors what time was it? How was it called before the war? Is there another name for it? Especially now with the Soviet Union no more, all the names in the towns are changed now again, no more these communist names.

Do you feel that you would have been a different adult if you hadn't gone through what you did go through?

I could say it easily to you. It's always nice to say, oh, I would have been a different person if I wouldn't have lived through the Holocaust. Yes, I would have been a different person.

Because when you live through a trauma, you are more sensitive to other people's needs. Naturally, I would have had more education. I missed out on a education. Maybe I would have been a scholar.

As you all know me well, with the little education that I have, I did quite a bit for my own community, for my Jewish community, for the school system. So maybe I would have been more educated. Maybe I would be less compassionate.

Who knows.

It's easy to make a statement. But this is something that no person can really say what would I have been? Would I? Should I? I don't know. Maybe I would have been the same Nese as I'm now.

You had said earlier that you grew up very quickly when times were very difficult. So you lost part of your teenage years, your early life. Did you feel you ever got part of that back?

Gail, I never got back my teenage years, from 13 to 17. I missed out on school dances, on dating, on having fun. I'm sure you are aware that just last year, one of the schools where I can come to speak to-- I don't even call it lecture. I call it sharing memories-- gave me an honorary high school degree. You know of that, or you don't.

Tell it on the tape.

OK. You see, I have been coming to Madison High School in Virginia for 15 years to speak for this particular teacher. And Lynn [? Dubin, ?] who is a wonderful person. And one day I said to her, how many years do you keep one in a high school? She said, you are not going to quit and not come again? I say, no, but I envy those kids that graduate.

And she arranged with the Board of Education, and I had a honorary high school graduation. Now for me just to walk in with those kids with my robe on and to the music, it was some little piece in that puzzle that was missing for so many years was right there. Now, imagine.

I married my husband. He's a wonderful man. But did I date him? Did we really fall in love and got married? Did we make plans for a wedding? My mom said it would be a good idea that I get married so we have a man with us. It worked out.

But many of us survivors married because of need, because of needing a friend, because of needing material things. So every one of us-- not just me. I just happened to be at that age where 13 to 17-- no junior high school, no high school, no-- where was I? When a child at that age has fun, gets into trouble a little bit sometime. I missed out on that. You cannot get it back.

You had also said that you really hadn't physically matured until liberation and you got your menstrual period. What was that like for you as a young woman?

I did not get my menstrual period until I got a little healthier. You see, people don't realize-- when someone is anorexic, they lose their period. So because we were so skinny and lost so much weight, we didn't get our periods during-- somebody said that they put something in the food. I don't know how correct that is. I don't like to make statements what I don't know myself.

But as life started to become normal, we all gained a little weight. Some of us developed. Some of us got a period. Some of us got taller. I think I grew after the Holocaust. Because as I look at pictures, I was much shorter than Jack. And I was 18. And now, I'm not that much shorter than him.

Where there many other young girls your age in your group?

I tell you. At the beginning, there were. But at the very end in my particular camp, I was the youngest in that crowd. There were girls that were a few years older from my hometown.

There was not one friend of mine that was with me at that point, although about five people from my class, from my age, survived the Holocaust. But we were in different places. I wasn't really with any of them.

Some of my friends, I was with. Some of them were taken-- in the labor camp, we had selections-- taken back to the concentration camp. Some of them died in Stutthof of a typhoid epidemic. There was a gigantic typhoid epidemic just before liberation Stutthof. I read that. I wasn't there.

So many of them came to Proust also from different camps. What happened? Proust was a place, when we started the death marches-- I found that out now. I didn't know it then. But now and when I came to Proust, some people had come there.

What they did, they picked the little bit healthier to continue on death marches. And the ones that were-- they left them to die there. So many of my friends died in Proust. Some went back to Stutthof. Some I don't know what happened to them.

Was there ever any opportunity for you to make any choices during this time, or were you always being acted on?

What do you mean by choices? What were the choices for youth in camps, in ghettos, in places? For adults? I'm not talking-- I was a kid. Don't forget. I was a kid.

But what were the choices? The choice was, let's say in the ghetto, if you ran away, you needed a place to run to. Around Siauliai, there were not places to run to. The Lithuanians, when they saw a Jew running, they right away said, here's the Jew. Kill him.

When you came to the concentration camp, to the right and the left and the right and the left, did you have a choice? No. The only choice that I get was when the woman told me to try to get out to labor because they would kill me in the concentration camp, because I was little. And that was the choice, that I listened to this woman. And I snuck into that group that was being taken for work and somehow succeeded to get out.

How did you know to make that decision?

I did not know. In my testimony, if you read it, in Stutthof, there were an old camp and a new camp. When we were put into the new camp, the kitchen was not ready. So they brought in meal cans the food from the old camp to the new camp. And we stood in roll call in the women's area, and we went up and we were given amount of food, a soup, soup.

Now if there was a little bit left in that meal can, this man that was in charge of the camp-- his name was Max-- he used to say, children can get extra food. Now all the children were afraid to go out. Children were not supposed to be there. And I was 16, but I looked like 13 because three years in the ghetto with malnutrition.

So he and the kapos used to run among the women and pull out the younger kids and tell them, you're a kid. Go get extra food. Now I got pulled out many times, and I did get extra food.

So one day, we were standing in roll call. And a woman that I never knew her name, she said to me, little girl. They'll kill you here. They have pulled you out too many times for extra food. Next time, they'll know exactly where you are.

And I was scared. And I looked at her. I said, why are you scaring me? And she said, I'm trying to save your life. Maybe if you could get out to work, you could survive. I said, why aren't you going to work? I was not that stupid.

She said she has a child on the other side in the old camp. And she said, as long as I see my child's face, I don't want to leave that camp. And she told me, she says, there in the corner of the line are women. But make sure you stand on your tiptoes and you pinch your cheeks to look nice and healthy.

And I listened to her. So I made that choice to listen. But otherwise, was no choices to make. It wasn't. Somebody said, my family had the foresight to leave Germany and come to America. People didn't have the foresight. They had the money. They had the document. They had something but no foresight. Foresight-- after the fact, you can say foresight. Right, Gail?

When your children were 13 and 14, was that especially painful for you that they became the age that you were when the difficulties began?

Gail, it was not painful. It was victory over the Nazis. It was victory. With every child that I had was victory over the Nazis. With every celebration, with every simcha is a victory over the Nazis.

Every day that I lived in the camps, women told me, don't give up. In spite of them, we live day by day. It was a spiritual resistance to them. Now it's victory. Everything is victory.

They wanted us dead. My children had that bar mitzvah. My children went on that date. My granddaughters now who are much older already, they enjoyed their life. And I really wanted my children, our children, Jack's and my children to have what I missed out on. Now many times I can go live through them what I missed out.

How did you convey your religious feelings and the Jewish culture to your children?

Gail, you see, my parents believed very much-- you OK-- in Jewish education. And I was brought up that way. When I came to the United States and we made very little money, I looked yesterday through a drawer, I found that I paid \$59 to the Hebrew Academy.

Now I don't know if maybe it was for a few months' tuition. But my children went to the Hebrew Academy from day one. I worked for it. You can see we have a nice home.

We don't have any luxurious things, but we have millions. We have three children that we brought up in the best of education, secular and religious education. All our three children graduated the Hebrew Academy. They all went to colleges.

They didn't take loans. We paid for them because we did not want them to have bills after they finished. So was very important for me to have this education for my children.

Now for my mother, who was the head of the household, for her the most important thing was to teach them in the ways of our Torah. When they were very tiny, she taught them the Shema. She taught them the Modeh Ani. She taught them the importance of Hashem, of kindness, of Mitzvot, of doing charity. And I'm very proud to say that all of her three children continue to do this Tzedakah, study the Torah, and be wonderful human beings.

Are you angry that you were forced to go through the Holocaust and others in this country did not?

Sure, I'm angry. What do you think, I'm not angry? I could tell you all kinds of stories. Definitely, we are angry. I'm angry. But I learned to take my anger and use it in a useful way.

Instead of being angry, sitting home, cursing the Germans or the Nazis or whoever and not doing anything about it and being angry and making myself miserable, I took my anger for positive way, to do what I was taught as a little girl by my mom-- tikkun olam-- mending this world.

You know me well. You know what I do. You know how involved I am with the Jewish community, with children, most important to teach a little more love.

Why don't you tell us a little bit about what you do?

Right now? OK. What do I do? As you know, many, many years ago I always felt that I owe it to the dead. I survived the Holocaust by the kindness of Jewish women that shared a bite of bread with me, that told me where to stand and how to go, that held my hand and didn't leave me behind, that wrapped my body in straw to keep warm.

But they always said, if you survive, little girl, don't let us be forgotten, [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]. Tell the world what was done to our Jewish people. Tell what happened in this Holocaust, in this hell.

And in those days, I said, why would I survive? We'll all die. But I did survive somehow, and I felt like I owe it. And the first opportunity I had was when I was liberated and the soldier carried me in his arms. I started to tell him what

happened there, in my broken Russian. And I always continue to tell.

Years ago, when I appeared the first time on television-- I think it was in 1970 something, maybe '78. A Holocaust movie was being shown. A woman called me on the phone. And she said, I don't know if you remember me.

We gave birth in 1954 to children in Columbia Hospital for Women. And she said, I'll never forget you because you told me what hatred can do. We correspond now and then. She lives in Virginia. So when I look back through the years, I always try to fulfill this promise.

But it came a time when I gave up a job to do what I'm doing-- not just me. Many of the survivors. I mean leadership of a Holocaust survivors organization for many years. We pushed ourselves into the school system.

Schools didn't ask in those days for Holocaust studies. We pushed ourselves in. We said, we'll come. We'll give testimony. We were embarrassed with our accent, with the way we spoke. If we wrote something out, we were embarrassed to hand it to them because it was misspelled. But we did it.

So I have been sharing memories with schools, organizations, churches, synagogues for many years. True, I have been recognized. I've been honored many times by different places. I'm very much involved in our own Jewish community, United Jewish Appeal, Jewish Community Council.

Every organization that helps people, I'm a member of, a board member of, every organization, like Anti-Defamation, B'nai B'rith that will help-- we hope that it will change people's opinions about hatred, indifference. And I hope that by the time I die, somebody will say, yes, Nesse survived. But she did fulfill the promise she made to those women, and she made that little mark in this world that a human being needs to make.

What are your feelings about Germany and the Germans? Have they changed since the end of the war?

Gail, it is very wrong to put the blames of the fathers on their children. Yes, I feel terrible that many of those Nazis are going around free, that they are getting pensions from the German government without any questions. But I don't put this blame on the young people that are trying to live a Democratic life, that are trying to teach their own children about what happened in the Holocaust. Yes, sure, I'm not happy when I read about skinheads in Germany. And I'm not happy when I read about skinheads in Washington D.C. or elsewhere in the world.

Do you still feel any connection to Lithuania?

I do. I tell you why I feel connection to Lithuania. After all, until the age of 13, I lived a normal life. When I walk in the mall here, people don't remember my name. But it's, aren't you the Holocaust lady?

I wasn't born in the Holocaust. I had a life before. And you see, many times-- you touched something about talking to my mother, about talking to each other. In those days when we were liberated, there was no such thing as counseling.

I feel that maybe if I go to Lithuania where I once had a normal life-- and I do have a normal life now-- maybe it will connect somehow. So I really feel that this is important for my own human being. Also, this is the last chance I think.

I'm 70 years old, Gail. I'm not that young. And I think that it is important for me to go back to those graves where I left many of my friends, many of my relatives. I hope to go to Auschwitz where my father was killed.

And if possible, I may go to Stutthof. I'm not too sure yet how accommodations could be or whatever. But I really feel this is important. In Lithuania, there are still some relatives of the people that saved my brother, my younger brother's life. And they are waiting anxiously-- although they never met me-- they are waiting anxiously like a member of the family to come and visit.

Are you going by yourself?

I'm going with Carolyn Keeber. Carolyn Keeber became my dear friend through the Holocaust Museum. I met her years ago when we had the gathering of Holocaust survivors in Washington in 1983. She was a volunteer, and I believe maybe I met you at that time too.

And we kind of kept a little bit in touch. But I got to know her better as a wonderful human being while she was as a volunteer, coordinating the speakers bureau. She was there for us emotionally, physically helping us, doing everything possible.

And because she heard so many times when she went with me people saying to me, did you ever go back-- and I always said the same thing. I didn't go back for two reasons. Number one, it was communism. And once the country became independent, Jack and I gave our money-- we worked hard. We raised our children. We gave a lot of charity. I have a lot of awards on my wall-- I'll have to show it to you later-- but not really money.

So she wrote some letters on my behalf. And one gentleman was kind enough to give us frequent flyer points. And that's how we're going to Lithuania.

So just you and she together?

Just the two of us. Her family come from Lithuania, from a place called Å ilalÄ—.

And how long will you be there?

We don't know quite yet. We have to finalize our plans. We have not deciphered yet how long we staying in Lithuania, how long in Poland. It depends.

If we can get to Stutthof, we like to be a little longer in Poland. Because Stutthof is called now Sztutowo, and it's in Poland.