

This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Maryla Korn, conducted by Gail Schwartz on September 9, 1998, in Washington DC. 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 Maryla Korn's post-Holocaust experiences. In preparation for this interview, I read the summary of the interview you conducted with Marin Oschega for the Jewish Community Council of Greater Washington on March 27, 1985. I will not ask you to repeat everything you said in that interview. Instead, I will use this interview as an opportunity to follow up on that interview and focus on your post-Holocaust experiences. This is tape number 1, side A. What is your full name?

Maryla Korn, I was born Orgel, O-R-G-E-L. And Maryla is a nickname. My name, my official name from birth was Maria.

And what is your date of birth?

June 10, 1938, in Krakow, Poland.

As I said, you have been interviewed before. But just to put this interview in a framework, let's summarize where you were during the war. You were an only child from a large extended family. Your father ran a family business of lumber and flour mills in Kolbuszowa. Your father and grandfather, in 1939, went to Tarnopol. Your grandfather died in 1942 in Tarnopol. And your father survived in Siberia.

In late 1940 or early 1941, you and your mother first went to Wieliczka and then to Bochnia. At one point, you were hidden with a peasant family but returned to your mother, because you cried so much. In the end of 1941 or early 1942, you went into the ghetto in Bochnia, where later on, the men were separated from the women. And at one time, you had to hide under a pile of mattresses.

Your mother worked outside the ghetto in a factory that produced string shopping bags. You were too young for school. But you did take messages outside of the ghetto and brought back food. In June of 1943, you left the ghetto with your mother. It was liquidated soon after. Your grandfather was shot in the cemetery in Bochnia and your grandmother was taken to Auschwitz. Your uncle in the summer '42, had been taken to Belzec and did not survive.

You traveled by truck to the border. And then after that, at night, by foot, and hid during the day. Your guides were paid partisans. And there were about 18 to 20 people in your group. You got to Kosice. But you were caught by Czech collaborators and then were let go. You proceeded, with the help of the Joint Distribution Committee to Hungary, and was caught again and sent to prison in Budapest. But the Joint got you out.

In July of 1943 you went to Ouzoud in Hungary, stayed there until April 1944. While there, you lived as a Christian. You went to mass. Your mother was able to bring food to Polish Jews living in the farmhouse. And you had an accident where your leg had gangrene.

In April of '44, the Hungarian Jews were being rounded up, and then the Polish foreign Jews were being rounded up. You went to Budapest. Your mother had stolen passes to get there. Then you went on to Bucharest with the help of the Joint. You had heard about D-day. You were liberated in the spring of 1945 by the Russians.

You had almost boarded a ship for Palestine, which was torpedoed later. You went back to Hungary, lived in Budapest for a year, where you started first grade. When your mother went back to Poland to check on the family, you stayed in a children's home. She found, in Poland, that your father had been traumatized by his war experiences. You visited your father in 1947.

Your mother had set up a business with your uncle in Vienna. In 1951, you went to Israel, returned to Belgium. In 1952, your father came to live with you. In 1959 to 1961, you lived in Israel, went back to Belgium. And then in May of 1961, you came to the United States and got married in June of that year.

Two corrections. One is I don't know the exact date, but in July, we escaped, as I said, on June-- I know it was June 10, because it was my fifth birthday. It was sometimes in either August or September that all these prison stays plus everything was true. So that we went to Kosice, we went to this little village in Hungary, to Ouzoud a little bit later. It wasn't July '43. It might have been late August. It might have been September. But it definitely was not July. That's too early after all of this.

The other one which I would like to correct that in the winter of '46, after we had-- after we had left Budapest, we went to Prague, where we stayed a couple of months. And then proceeded to Belgium to Brussels. In the winter of '46, again, whether it was December, whether it was January '47, that I really cannot-- but it was, I think, it was December of '46.

And the reason we went to Belgium, it might have been, as I always said, might have been Timbuktu, because we had no family left was because my mother's only surviving member of the family, which was my maternal grandmother's sister had lived in Antwerp before the war. She had survived in Brussels. And so we came to join her. That was the only reason.

Now, the only person, again, who survived the war was my mother's older brother, who had gone from Poland. He had also gone to Hungary. And from Hungary, he went back to Poland. And from Poland, in 1951, he left for Vienna. And this is where the connection comes in.

Thank you. Before we go on to the post-Holocaust experiences, I just wanted to clarify some more points. In the summary of that very early tape, it was said that your paternal grandfather had a non-Jewish assistant who took over the business and brought you money in the ghetto.

My maternal--

This is your paternal.

No, my maternal grandfather, who later was killed in the cemetery in Bochnia had a store in Krakow. They were from they were from Lublin. And OK, let me say, my grandfather's family was from Lublin. My grandmother's family was a rabbinical family that was around the city of Krakow. That's how, in 1914, my mother, and her older brother, and my grandparents came back to Krakow. So this is where we have the Lublin connection from my grandfather and the Krakow connection from my grandmother.

My grandfather had a store for all those years that was in Krakow that was oriental rugs and linoleum. He had always had an assistant in that store. And it was, in some cases, it was a shabbos goy. But in this case, it was an assistant in the store. This was a young guy by the name of Yuzik. Now, Yuzik was a very young man.

What was his last name?

That's a good question. I'm very bad at names. I can maybe get it out. Maybe later, OK, anyway, Yuzik was his assistant. By the time war came, he was a young man and already married into, really, a totally primitive peasant family, who, during the war, could have helped. But they were too frightened. And they were too primitive to even know what on Earth they were doing.

He was-- he took over the store in Krakow when the Germans did not allow Jews to own stores anymore. And he was the exception to the rule, because what he did during the war was to bring us suitcases full of money into the ghetto. That's how we had money to eat, to survive, and to, later on, to escape. And he is the one who kept the store until after the war.

And after the war, interestingly enough, when my older uncle Lishek went back from Hungary to Poland, he rejoined Yuzik in that business. And they had a business together, the same business that my grandfather had before the war. At one point, by the way, that business was on the main square of Krakow, which was quite unusual, because he was an Orthodox Jew. And Jews were not exactly welcome on that main squared, per se. But anyway, my uncle was in business

was that Yuzik until my uncle left for Vienna and gave him the whole business. And the man died a couple of years ago in Poland.

In the ghetto, are there any-- were there any sounds, or smells, or sights of the ghetto that you still remember?

Yes, and this is what, when I went into Daniel's Den--

This is the exhibit at the Holocaust Museum.

Museum, I could connect to it even more, maybe, than some adults. I mean, the adults have different memories of it. What struck me is-- as much as it's, I think it's wonderfully well done for the public and to be palatable. OK, I mean, but what was missing-- I remember coming out and somebody say to me, so? And my reaction was so where is the overcrowding, the smell, the dirt, and everything that went with it.

So, yes there were these-- maybe you don't realize it when you're a child. But there was always somebody around. I mean there was no such thing as having a peaceful time. But then I was a three or four-year-old child. You go with it. I don't remember. I must tell you, I asked my mother a while back, because everybody asks the same two questions.

One was were you ever hungry? And I turned to my mother and I said, I don't remember ever being hungry. So she smiled. And she says, no wonder, we paid almost was gold. Now, I don't know if really it was gold. But she said, when there was an apple available, we paid was gold that you would have the apple. The money was there, because of this Yuzik.

And at the same time-- and also there was money for another reason. My paternal grandmother, at the beginning of the war, when the men escaped, and she was left with-- in Kolbuszowa, she was left with two daughters and two boys. Out of this group, only, by the way, one survived. It's my uncle who is the head of the enzyme research in Mount Sinai in New York. All the rest were killed.

She brought to my mother half of what my paternal grandfather had left her. So there was this money also. But the money really that made us eat and everything else is definitely the one that Yuzik was bringing into the ghetto. So this is why I don't remember ever any hunger. I remember overcrowding. I remember these rooms with these stacked up beds all over the place. There must have been-- I don't know how many people were in one bedroom.

But I mean, stacked like in the army, not one on top of the other, but maybe four or five in height. They were building, obviously, in height to leave space for the floor. That I remember. The interesting thing is in 1985, I went back to Poland with my father, who had never been to Bochnia. And after visiting the family where we had lived with them outside of the ghetto for a while, I said to Marysia, who was 13 years older than I am, I said to her, take me to the ghetto. And then I will try to find my own way.

And interestingly enough, I retraced the way to where the Judenrat was. And from there, I retraced the house where we lived. And there it stood. And it stood the same way that it was in my memory. Only thing different, it's a two story house with an entrance on the side. And there it was.

So these are the only memories. But there are no memories-- there are memories of being hidden. There are memories of my grandmother, much more than my grandfather. My grandfather, for some reason, I don't know whether it's a question because he was separated from us and whether a child-- but I remember things before entering the ghetto. So I can't figure that one out. But I remember my grandmother, the way she was built.

I remember-- those things I remember. Overcrowding, and one little kitchen that I think must have been a closet, whatever it was. That's all the memories out of that.

Any particular smells?

No, absolutely not. I mean, smells in the sense that people were there. But I don't know why my reaction, when I saw

Daniel's Den, was where is the smell, the dirt, et cetera. Because obviously there must have been subconsciously some, but no.

What were the sanitary facilities like?

Probably terrible. I mean, even until today, there are no sanitary conditions. So when somebody says, was it clean, how could it be clean? I mean, that's why there were-- well, mice where that was maybe. But that's why there were lice. There were other things. I mean, but I don't remember dirt.

I just remember that I left Bochnia with this wonderful little cold. And believe it or not, my mother definitely not was flat foot shoes, when she was flat-- heeled shoes when she was going crossing the mountains. What crossed their minds, I don't know. Never remember, anything, remember in Hungary, not having shoes. But again, that type, no absolutely no memories of incredible hardship.

What was the address of your-- the building in Bochnia?

That I don't know.

What street?

I don't remember. I know where it is. But I don't know the street number.

What was the incident where you hid under mattresses?

They were coming. There was a program already-- I mean, program, there was an [? atzia ?] in the ghetto. And they were looking, obviously, for children. They were coming either for children, or women, or whatever. OK, if they didn't take everybody together. They were coming then for children. And my mother and grandmother piled me on top of the first mattress was all the other mattresses on top. And that's it. That's the episode. And when the [? atzia ?] was over, they took me out.

Do you remember this?

That one I remember. I also remember a very strange conversation which is not a question that it haunts me. But I, very often, I think about it, especially now that my mother is-- maybe God should have been good to her and she should have gone. She had a massive stroke. She's paralyzed. She cannot speak. And I said, to myself, when somebody said, well, at that age, it's natural that parents go. And I keep saying to myself, this is not just a mother. This is a mother plus the whole--

My grandmother, this conversation, whether, and it's not any-- this is in the back-- my mother confirmed it a long time back. And then she dropped the conversation, didn't want to talk about it. My grandmother turned to her, and this was her daughter. My mother was then 31, at the most, 32. She was born in 1912. So now, we're talking about 1942, '43. OK, either she's 31 or she's 32.

This was her child. And she said to her, if they take Marylka, maybe you should think about yourself. And she said, no, if they take her, I will go with her. And this, I always remember this, because it's normal. It's so normal. She said no, she would go. She never had, thank God, to do it.

And I really think, I mean, these are the years-- it's the same age as my children are. Would I react the same way? I guess so. I mean, my grandmother adored me. OK, I always remember things about it. But at the same time, she thought, if somebody had to survive, then let it be at least one. So that memory comes. And this, again, it must have been sometime '42, early '43, whatever. So that those are the memories.

How did your mother comfort you living under these kind of very difficult conditions? Did she have a certain way about her to comfort that small child like you?

No, I don't remember her as being-- I think I remember my grandmother being the strength, the caregiver, the person who was there. At the same time, I'm thinking. Again, my mother, born in 1912. So she was 27 years old when we war started.

Here is this upper middle class, very comfortable, very well-off young woman. She married very, very well. OK, my grandparents were middle class. But that, that other one, although they were in a village, and they didn't know how to live. I always think they lived like 17th, 18th century, the fact is they were very wealthy.

There she was. Suddenly, she's left alone with a baby. And the war starts, and then all the things that happen. So at 27, a baby. OK, a young mother, but a baby. 32, then she goes all through this. I really wonder where the strength came in. She's an extraordinarily strong woman.

Now, whether the strength came from that or whether this was the character, well, who was there to know? She is she is until today very difficult, but an extraordinarily self-reliant-- when everybody, for example, in Hungary, when we were there already, people were going back to Czechoslovakia. See, Czechoslovakia, by then, and Poland were already clear. I mean, the Hungarian Jews were being taken there. But nobody was looking anymore almost-- if I can say, of course, they're always looking for Polish Jews.

But the fact is that there were now-- Czechoslovakia was emptied of Jews. Some people were going back. And she says, I'm not going backward. I'm going forward. And until today, she says she put herself and me through unnecessary hardship in some way, because she could have stayed in Hungary at that point and be fine without putting-- but she was going forward. She was going for--

She wanted to go to Palestine. She just wanted to get out and to survive. You look at some of the movies like Europa Europa, some crazy things happened why somebody survived. I don't believe that anybody survived because they were so darn smart. They survived because either they were lucky, or whether they were in the right place, or whatever happened. And in her case, she had an incredible perseverance. Let it go. Don't worry, machine will pick up.

Did you have a favorite toy in the ghetto?

No, oh, yes, I had a favorite toy. But I don't know what it's called a toy. And this episode is in-- I said it on the show I was interviewing. Sure, I'm not sure whether it was there. My grandfather managed, in the very early times of our being in the ghetto, to bring me-- I don't know what to call, a tricycle, or whatever. It was a little-- well, it's called a [POLISH] in Polish, which was a board with two wheels. And then you pushed on it. Anyway, whatever it's called.

And I had it in the ghetto, which there were no toys. There was absolutely nothing. And I guess there were maybe toys that people had brought in. But nobody talked about toys. And one of the Jewish policemen, who I understand now, I just heard a couple of months ago that he finally died, should have. He was very much collaborating with the Germans. He was scaring everybody off.

And he's the one who, by the way, when my grandfather was being taken to the cemetery to be shot, even gave him, hit him in his face and tore off his arm, here, from his suit, thinking that he had some money in there. Because he kept saying that [INAUDIBLE] had to have some money with him. There was a book written, by the way, after the war about him. And it said for eternal disgrace. In Polish, it says [POLISH], for eternal-- I mean, for a eternal disgrace, for eternal [POLISH].

And he came to take away this bicycle, whatever you call it, that I had. And so my grandfather said to him, please, leave it. The children have nothing here. The child has nothing. Leave it. So he says, what's the difference? He won't survive anyway. So that was--

What was his name?

Rothkopf, Marion Rothkopf. I remember when I wrote this, I told her the name. And then I said, wrong, wrong, wrong.

This was another policeman. But that one was OK. It's Rothkopf. And Rothkopf came, believe it or not, came to Belgium. And survived. And lived that very well and has just died of cancer in Belgium.

How did you take messages out again, you were such a small child--

Can I just go back? He changed his name from Rothkopf to Rogovski. And he lived in Belgium. So that's his family under the name of Rogovski. Sorry, OK.

You were very small. How is it that you took messages out of the ghetto and brought back food?

Because I was small, I could get under the fence, or I could go somewhere where adults couldn't. That was basically the whole idea. I mean, it wasn't because I walked through the gates of the ghetto. It was because underneath, they had dug, probably, something. And this is how-- this is how we also escaped, at night, from the ghetto, to the outside, to be taken by truck to the Carpathian Mountains, because we had to go under. I mean, nobody opened the gates of the ghetto for us.

What kind of fence was this? What was it made out of? Was it barbed wire?

I don't remember what it was. But I think that there was barbed wire on top. But somehow, I think it was-- either, I think it was wood. It was the wood. I don't remember the fence. I remember that there was a fence there. I don't remember what it was.

And what kind of messages did you take out?

Whatever they had. What did I-- I didn't read. I didn't write, whatever it was.

How did you know where to go?

That how do I know after all these years to remember where the house was? I don't know, maybe somebody waited on the other side immediately and picked it up, whatever it was. I have no idea.

And then you brought food back.

Yeah, whenever we could. That's the story my mother, with this apple. Whenever there was something I brought or somebody else brought, but whenever I could, if I had an apple or something, I guess I brought it was me. These stories my mother told me later on.

Do you have a memory of doing this or is this just--

No, absolutely no memory of this. That I have no memory. I have memory of many things. But I don't have a memory of that. Have a memory of running away with this Marysia, who was 13 years older, when one day, the Germans were coming. And she took me by the hand. And we were running, because she my mother said, get her out. That I remember.

What is your very first memory?

Very difficult to say what are my first memories. I don't know what are my first memories. At this point, maybe they were there. Maybe 20 years ago, there were some. Absolutely no memory.

Your uncle was part of the resistance in the ghetto. Do you know what he did?

I don't know. This was a young group. This was 1942. They were all working in the Judenrat downstairs, because everybody wanted some pull, tried to put their kids into a position so that they wouldn't be taken. They had still these illusions. And I know that they were counterfeiting some stuff, whatever they were doing. And then he was taken, he

was taken in 1942.

Just to back up a little bit, do you remember being hidden with that peasant family?

No, I remember the story being forever told that if I had been quiet, I would have been in that place. And I would probably have survived there. It turns out that the story I was told about this little girl that was with me, which I told 15, 20 years ago was totally false.

The story was she was put there by her parents. I was put there by my mother, or by, at least, by these people with whom we lived in-- I'm sorry, in Bochnia, Marysia and her parents. OK, they took me to this farmhouse. And that baby was there already. Her parents were in Bochnia. So were her grandparents. She was good, year old baby, sat under the table. Didn't do anything.

I was three years old. And I screamed my head off, I wanted my mommy. So I was taken away. We were always told that she had survived there. And then, after the war, vanished, somehow vanished. Well, the story's a little bit stranger than fiction.

She was kept there for a short time. My mother and grandparents and her parents and grandparents were hidden together in this attic of this farmhouse in Bochnia. She was then returned to her parents and given, again, to somebody else. Her parents died. Her grandparents died. She survived the war being adopted by this Polish family. And she lived in Bochnia until '61 not knowing at all about this episode with this other little girl.

When she started writing a book, she came to the United States, when she started writing the book in Bochnia, she went to these people where we live, Marysia and her parents, who told her about this other child that had been there with her. And she, about two years ago, contacted me and tried to get my side of it. Then she called my mother, who tried to explain to her what had happened. And that's when, I think, we got the story straight.

So we were together like 24 hours. But she stayed there a little bit longer. And she was converted to Christianity. And then, she went to Israel. And the parents were wonderful people who gave her education, everything else. Then she went to Israel, then she came to America, she married a very religious Jew. She has two children. He just, the husband, died. And she lives now in New York. But she did convert. So at least that side of the story I had right there.

What is her last name, her family name? Wineberg, Lucia Wineberg, Weisberg, I'm sorry, Weisberg, Lucia. And she lives in New York. And that's why we're getting the story straight, because she's writing a book. I'm not.

When you left the ghetto, you were approximately five years--

This was couple of days before my birthday. I was five while walking the mountains, crossing the border.

What did your mother tell you why you were leaving?

Nothing, absolutely nothing.

Did you take anything special with you?

No, my mother didn't even take clothing, because she thought that since she was taking was her, sewn into her underwear, she was taking was her gold and some diamonds, that she would, by the time she crosses into Hungary, she would be able to buy the whole world. So nothing.

Were there any other young children along with you?

There were no young children. But I was the only one. Not only that, but I had the whooping cough. [COUGHS] Excuse me. And everybody was scared of taking me. And then came this crazy story, whether it's true or not, maybe a doctor can confirm it, somebody say, don't worry, once you will get into the mountains, the whooping cough will stop. It turned

out that they did stop, but whether was the mountains, or whether it was sheer luck, I don't know.

How did you keep up with the group? You said you had to walk by night.

I was much better than they were. This was the whole story-- my mother always said that when she was at the bottom of a hill, and I was on the top, and I saw that she couldn't come, I would run down, pick her up and drag her up. So children, obviously, have more resistance than adults.

Were you frightened?

I don't remember that. Look , I was brought up in fright. My whole childhood was in fright. So what was fright? I mean, I'm sure that it wasn't the way my-- I mean, that's for sure, it's not the way my granddaughter is being brought up. But what was fright? It was all relative. It was abnormal to start with.

This was not a normal way of living, or bringing up children, or for anything. So what's normal? I don't know. But no, I don't remember any fright.

Do you remember sleeping with the cows?

Yeah.

What's that like?

I guess, again, you take a child camping, and what's the reaction? So they-- so they go camp-- you see, these things were coming so regularly, so progressively, it was just a way of life. It didn't make any difference. My mother tells of a story, we were being hidden in a bush on our way to Romania. We're being hidden at night in a bush on the railroad station in order to wait for the train.

So somebody had to come to pick us, put us into that bush, and then had to take us out to get us on the train. Well, my mother got frightened. And I was the one who was calming her, saying everything will be all right. You cannot take it by normal standards. There are no normal standards in this. Was not a normal upbringing. This was not a normal way of life. And this was not normal reaction. That's about it. That's the best that I can say about this one.

Did you snuggle up to the cows? Or were they just often--

I can't remember anything. They were just there. They were there. And you knew that you had to sleep there.

When you were caught by the Czech collaborators, did you, as a child, know the danger of that?

No, I remember being in a cell with my mother. I remember being, then, into the main hall there where there was making some selection, which then turned out to be a very poignant and interesting one. But again, I didn't remember.

There was a group that had left before us in which there was half of a family and with us was the other half of the family. And the other group was then selected that day, and was sent back to Poland, and was shot. So with us was one half. I know the husband was with us. And I think the son was with us.

And on the other end was the-- but he was much older than I was, the son. And on the other-- in the other group was the mother with the daughter. And they were all taken back. And they were shot, which was a normal type of a thing. Again, I don't know whether my mother was this calming person, or whether it was the way of life that was. Mystery, I would suspect it's a combination.

When you got to Ouzoud in Hungary and you lived as a Christian, what did that mean to you? How much-- did you feel very Jewish before that? Did you know you were Jewish?



I knew I was Jewish all the way through. There was no-- the funny thing was that my mother was playing this Catholic, wearing a cross, sending me to church on Sunday, and playing this Catholic having no knowledge of what Catholicism, and then not wanting to eat pork because that wasn't what she was used to. So you have these conflicts. I mean, this was-- this was odd. The whole thing, really, sometimes sounds crazy.

My mother also went and connected with the Hungarian Jews. There was an orthodox butcher there. And the Polish Jews, including my mother, were telling them what was happening. And of course, they didn't believe it. It was odd. Yes, of course I always knew that I was Jewish. I never said it to anybody. But there was never any question.

This is a continuation of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Maryla Korn. This is tape number 1, side B. And you were talking about living-- knowing that you were Jewish but living and your mother living as Christians and what your reaction to that was.

I remember I was going, my mother sending me on Sunday to the church, wonderful.

What was that like for you?

I remember going. It didn't affect me one way or another. The only way, maybe, subconsciously it affected me, because I remember, always, even after the war, as very Jewish as I am, I mean, by any standards. I could go into a church and not feel that I was violating anybody's space or they were violating mine. It really, it doesn't-- I worked then, later on, in Georgetown in the campus ministry.

And to me, going to a mass or going to a church was not something that was either foreign or that was forbidden. Maybe it opens up some horizons. Who knows?

Did you join in the prayers when you were a child?

I don't remember joining in prayers. I know I remember knowing them a little bit, but not joining in prayers, no.

What was the story or just a little bit of background about the accident with your leg?

Well, barefoot, no shoes in the village. And we had to go and pick up the water. At that point, my mother, and her girlfriend, and husband, at the time, and the son, Bernard, who is now in Canada, who is two or three years older than I am. We all lived together. And the two children were sent to pick up water at the well.

And he pushed me or whatever when I was barefoot. And I stepped on a piece of glass. And it cut me. And from that, came, basically, what could have been a serious gangrene.

And the only thing that saved it is that they managed to take me to a doctor after a while. And he opened it up, still have the scar on the bottom of my foot. And he drained it. And that was it. So that's the story of that one. Until today, whenever we see each other, I always say to him, you push me on a bottle.

Do you remember that time as being a very difficult time?

No, I don't remember it as being difficult, because we were in this village. My mother was working in the fields. Whatever food we had was-- and it wasn't the pressure of being in a ghetto. So compared to the ghetto, this was-- it was another normal phase of living.

Did you know about a man named Hitler at that time?

Can't remember if I knew it. I knew, certainly, that they were the Germans. I don't know whether I knew what Hitler, per se.

What did German-- what did the word "Germans" represent to you?

Represented the horror of being scared and of being the ones who are doing something that was terribly wrong. But it's very difficult. This is about children. OK, either they lived a normal life, because they were hidden somewhere, as abnormal as it was. But it was a way of life.

Remember, I was 18 months old when it all started. So does a 5-year-old child now know who is, let's say, I don't know, not that I want to compare it to, that is Bush, or Reagan, or even Clinton? I doubt it. Maybe somebody, the name-- but it doesn't affect you. The name, I'm sure it was discussed royally around, but no, it didn't.

Did you know you were having problems because you were Jewish.

Yes, that was no question there.

Were you angry that you were Jewish because you had all these problems?

No, it never affected me until today. The other question which I was always asked, do I feel guilty that I survived? Excuse me, how does a 5-year-old feel guilty that they survived? I suspect that the older generation can feel guilty if they could not, like my mother, could not influence her parents to run away with us. Then you can start feeling-- what does a child, 5-year-old child, feel guilty about?

And then, in April '44, you went to Budapest. And what was that like? What was life like there?

Budapest, life was about as normal as the abnormality could be. We lived in a small room with my mother. We went every day to the Jewish Community, which was established by the Joint, where there was lunch, which was a dinner given out. We were all there. There was a small school for the children. There was none of the hiding. There was none of the-- if there was trauma before, there was none of that. That was a very, very peaceful time.

You had said that the Joint was of infinite help to you. How did they get to you? Or how did your mother get to them? What was the means of connection?

How they got to us, because I suspect that the escape route from Poland to Czechoslovakia to Hungary was established in collaboration with the Joint. As much as the people had to pay for it, it was established by the Joint. So they knew exactly who was coming through. Once we came out of the prison in Kosice, they immediately took care of us.

So they reached out to you. It wasn't a question of your mother reaching out to them.

Yes, that's right. They knew. And without them, we wouldn't have survived. There's just no question. This was a question of food. This was a question-- at any time, they were the support group that was there, from food to any-- remember, no money, no nothing. Anything was done was done by the Joint.

Definitely the escape from Hungary to Romania was all Joint. The support in Romania was all Joint. They were a blessing. I mean, there's no question of what they did.

You were six years old, I guess, in Bucharest. Did you feel very much older than that, do you think?

I suspect our childhood was taken away from all of us. Of course, any experience like this is going to produce a very different type of a child. So absolutely, there is no question-- older to what? What do you compare it to? I can compare it a little bit to my granddaughter, at this point. But what do you compare it when you have nothing to-- but we were grown up beyond our natural age, of course.

Did you know, then, that everybody didn't live like you did? Or did you think the whole world lived like you did?

I don't think that you compare it. I don't think that you think about it. I mean, does anybody think, even if you take, now, a child somewhere, does that child think that he or she lives differently than somebody else?

Describe what it was like, or if you remember, trying to get on this boat that, unfortunately, was later torpedoed.

We were sent from Bucharest to Constanta by train. Then, we ended up in these warehouses where everybody slept on the floor. Then, I remember going to this boat and my mother being the last one to be pushed off. The man saying to her, it won't make it. Don't get hysterical.

So we were taken back by train to Bucharest with my mother later saying that she thought that was the end of her and of us, because she didn't have the support. Then this boat was sunk. And a while later, a second attempt was made. So we went back to Constanta. But we never made it on a boat. And all of those who made that route ended up, of course, in Cyprus. But we never made it after that.

Do you know the name of the first boat?

It starts with an M. And you can find it, because it's a very well-- I think it's called the [? Mercour. ?] OK, I think that that's what it is. Somehow, it's in the back of my mind. It's the [? Mercour, ?] and it is, you can find it. This is either late '44 or very beginning '45. But it's a historic. It's the [? Mercour, ?] that's what it is.

Did your mother talk a lot about your father at that time? You had been separated from him since you were an infant.

No, she didn't she didn't, absolutely not. I don't remember ever anything coming into. This was not a conversation.

Did you ask about a father?

I don't think I did. Everybody had abnormal circumstances. Either there was a husband, or there was a wife, or there was a child, or there was somebody. Who ever saw full families except those friends of ours who ended up in Canada? I mean, everything was disjointed. Never remember talking about him.

At the time of liberation, what did that mean to a seven-year-old, almost seven-year-old. It's an incredible memory. We were in the basement of this wonderful house where we lived, bombs falling all over the place. Just one neighborhood, I remember, destroyed. And then, a sunshine, a day of sunshine, where everybody came out, and candies, or whatever the darn thing was that was flying out from those planes.

And the scream out of everybody don't touch it and don't eat it, because they didn't know whether it was poison, wasn't poison, or whatever. That's the memory of this incredible bombing before, never heard the bombs before. So this was the first time, shaking of the whole thing. Little houses, I mean, don't get any idea, these were not fortresses. These were not even buildings. These were small homes where there were, maybe, two apartments, or whatever, three apartments.

And then this bombing. And then this wonderful day. And then the coming in of the Russians. And I don't remember anybody being frightened. But my mother says that they were shaking, because to them, the memory of the Russians, before the war, that type of a memory, scared of the Russians as can be. And my mother decided, my uncle, by that time, the one who had survived, Lishek, came from Hungary to us to Romania, before going back to Poland.

And he said, are you to stay here? What are you going to do? And she said, I'm going back to Budapest. I'm escape-- I'm going back away from the Russians. So she took me by train. And we went back in an uproar, in a tumult. I mean, just got on the train and went, and went from Bucharest back to Budapest.

The Russians were there. But there was a much larger Jewish community, friends from Poland that had escaped, and they were all there. So there was a support group. And that's why we stayed a little bit longer, and then went to Czechoslovakia.

Let's go back a little bit, when it was the bombing before the liberation, what did you do during that time? Lived totally a normal life. I remember going by streetcar or walking to the Jewish house where there was the school, and there was this food, and there were these friends that were getting together. Living totally, definitely, not a frightened life, if that's

what you mean.

I mean at the time of the bombing. Did you go into a bomb shelter?

No, this was a basement of this little house. There were no bomb shelters. This was the basement. Every house had a basement. So they packed up into the basement. If something had fallen, we would all have been blown to pieces. Small houses, I mean, not exactly-- no, not shelters.

What did your mother say to you during the time of the bombing?

I don't remember anything except being frightened, because that was noisy. That I remember.

Did you know that you might get killed? Or was it just the noise?

Well, you certainly got scared. I was always afraid of thunder. I think that that thunder was connected to this bombing. I mean, when after the war, when there was thunder, I would go under the table. And I would wait there for the thunder pass. Probably, that's the connection. But no, nothing else beside that.

During these years, did you have an attachment, again, to something special, a toy, or doll, or something?

No, to my mother. Wouldn't let go of her, physically and emotionally, wouldn't let go. Was a security blanket.

So liberation meant candy falling from the sky. What else did it mean to you?

Nothing else, absolutely nothing, nothing else at that point. Interestingly enough, the scare-- if there was scare, if one can go into psychological analysis, if there was scare, that scare was a normal part of living. This was not a consciousness. This was a child. This was not a conscious way.

And maybe my mother's, and the presence there, maybe, that was, again, more than just a security blanket. I have-- I mean, I am sure that they can start writing all kinds of books, as long as they don't start going into it more than it was. I think there was basically nothing there, except a character build up, a different, probably, a different development type of thing.

My daughter, who is a very bright lawyer, says to me now, mom, I was thinking, you have a way of surviving instinct in you is so strong. And that has to go back to this childhood where you build up these walls. And these walls are these protective walls. Now, they are not walls for emotion. But they are definitely walls of survival. So that build a character. But there is not anything else in there that I can imagine, except if somebody really wants to write books about child psychology.

When your mother went back to Poland to check on the family, and you were put in this children's home for a temporary time, was that very traumatic?

Very traumatic.

To be separated from your mother for the first time.

My mother did not understand it. This is something that is absolutely fascinating to me. There was a Jewish home in Budapest established for children like myself and for children who were orphans, who were then starting to come out from all sides. OK, my mother decided that that wasn't good enough for her daughter. She had to put me into this fancy Hungarian home, which was called [FRENCH], in good, old French. And it was on the hills of Budapest. And it was this fancy, fancy thing.

Except that this fancy thing was too fancy for a child who had had no discipline, who had had-- what discipline? I mean, who was disciplining me? I mean, I was rolling with the punches, as they say. OK, whatever had to be done was done. I

mean, this is where the maturity of this child came in. Also, extremely attached to mother.

Plus, those children in the Jewish home had the same background, a little bit, that I had, not these kids where she put me. So she thought she was doing me this big favor. And I was absolutely miserable, everything else, for all that duration that I was there. When she came to pick me up, I must have given her a horrendous time, because-- and I must tell you, until today, now, unfortunately, she cannot speak.

But whenever I was going back, whenever I was talking to her, I always said to her, how could you? How didn't you think that you don't put a child into these type of circumstances? Because this was not a normal child. No, it was not a normal childhood.

And her reaction was I did what I thought was the best. I wanted to put you into this wonderful home. So I messed it up. But that, oh, yes, that has a very strong impact on me. There's no question.

How long was she gone for?

It wasn't a question of how long she was gone. She lived in Budapest in this one room. And she was going back and forth to Poland. This wasn't a one time episode. And I remember this almost like close to a school year. And then she-- look, she went back to Poland to see if anybody survived. She knew that my grandparents had not survived.

How did she know that?

She knew it immediately, she told me, after she had reached Krakow-- after she had reached-- when we left Bochnia, she says by the time she only she reached Budapest, she already knew that Bochnia ghetto had been liquidated. So she knew about that. Circumstances, she learned after the war.

But she went back to see whether everybody survived. Then she went back to Yuzik. And she got money from him. He was the only miracle on Earth. Everybody said to her, forget it. They kill the Jews when they go back there. And she says, Yuzik will be fine. And Yuzik gave her a lot of money for that time.

Yuzik also gave her some-- there is a memento that I just brought back. I was cleaning up my parents' home, because I don't know how much longer my father will be in the apartment. I brought things that meant something. My mother has a level of Chinese porcelain table that I have here that was given to her when she was a little girl, four, five years old by my grandfather who loved to collect antiques.

And it was-- either it was part of a set of children toys, or whatever, it's a wonderful piece. And this Yuzik gave her after the war, because he had it at home. And it had survived. So she brought that back. But she went coming back and forth.

She knew she wasn't coming-- I asked her once, why didn't we go back to Poland? And she said, because going back to Poland meant going to a country covered with blood. And so she had absolutely no intention, no matter what my father was going to do, she wasn't going to go back there. He had the choice of either staying there or joining us. But she wasn't going back to be, definitely not because he was there. This was-- she was a very strong woman, very strong woman. Messed up life, but a very strong woman.

How did your unhappiness manifest itself in this children's home? How did you act it out?

I was impossible. The other thing which I remember, which is absolutely crazy, there were no bathrooms. There were these night pots under some beds. And somebody must have decided that they were going to put me into trouble. So every night, they would turn over this pot.

Well, who got punished? The one under whose bed it was. That one never climbed out of bed. So I was miserable. I was just-- I remember being miserable there, not having anybody that could understand the need of this child. This was a traumatized 6, 7-year-old child.

Now, you're asking me whether I was-- whether I was changed by the war, by the experiences, of course we were. In a very different way, probably, as long as I was with my mother, that was one type of thing. But then you pull this child away, and there must be some incredible trauma going in there. So wasn't exactly the easiest one. But I remember the day that I was told she was coming to pick me up. I jumped to my cubby, and took everything out, and prepared it to go.

Did she come and visit you, though, through the year?

No, she didn't come to visit me. I understand that she came to see me. But she wasn't-- she did not come to talk to me. Except, I think once, and I very often ask her why, even, this. And she said, because everybody was saying it's easier for the children. Question mark.

So did she write to you? Or did you--

No, I knew-- look, I don't know. You see, this whole episode is, again, a very blurred one. It's an interesting part, which, I think-- look, she was going through some trauma. There's no question. She must have been going through some kind of a hell of a time at that point on her own. Young woman, OK, suddenly, and there's this whole destruction.

What were your thoughts about your father, then?

Nothing, absolutely no thoughts. Don't even try, because there isn't any. There was no thought.

Did you have any picture of him?

No, he had an only picture of us which were taken in 1939 that he carried through to Russia and then brought back. Nope, didn't have any idea, and didn't ask, and didn't matter.

Don't forget, there were all the losses. There were all of these people that meant so much, my grandmother, my grandfather, my-- we lived, with us lived my grandfather's sister and his daughter-- and her daughter. OK, they died together with my grandmother. Those were the losses. The loss was not somebody that didn't exist in my memory, just not there.

Did you go to school while you were in this orphanage?

Yes, my one normal school year in Hungary. Absolutely, and did very well in Hungarian.

How were you-- was language difficult?

Incredible, I spoke always Polish at home with my mother and my grandparents. I learned Hungarian like-- my mother said, overnight, when we were the first time. Went to Romania, overnight, forgot Hungarian and learned Romanian. Supposedly went out to play and said something to my mother in Hungarian. Came back, and she said something to me, and it was blank. It had gone.

So there was Romanian. Came back to Hungary, forgot Romanian, although I understand it, because I speak fluent French, and learned Hungarian. And did wonderfully well in school. Always spoke German, somehow, by osmosis, always spoke that.

When did your mother speak to her family? Did she speak Yiddish?

Nope, always Polish. We always spoke Polish.

Now, in 1951, you went to Israel.

In 1951-- in 1946, we went from Budapest, from Hungary, to Czechoslovakia, not knowing which way we were going. It turned out that my mother's aunt, from my grandmother's sister had survived in Belgium with her husband. Her only

son had been killed. And she lived, at that point, in Brussels. How they got connected, I have no idea.

That's where we went in the winter of '46 and stayed in Belgium. And my mother did very well, businesswise, any other way. And then, in 1947, I went to visit my father for the first time.

Tell me about that.

Stranger in my life. I knew he was my father. There was also my aunt, his sister, and her husband, and then there was already a baby. They all, by the way, live, now, in New York. My uncle died. But my aunt and my cousin are in New York. And there was also my younger uncle, who had survived also in New York. All physicians and all in this country. But they came much later here.

And so I went there. I visited with him. He was an intruder into my life. I mean, if my-- I think it would have been much easier on all of us, if this had been a stepfather, he would have taken a different attitude to this child, because it wasn't his. So he would have been either more careful or more whatever. This one was a very loving person whom I didn't want in my life, because he thought he could act as my father. And I didn't need a father.

I had a mother who had been everything. So who needed this person coming into the life of this 9-year-old? I mean, there you have all the personality conflicts that come in. My mother was everything for me. And suddenly-- and my father is, until today, an extraordinarily difficult man, who thinks he lives in the 17th century and everybody owes him-- he's the father figure. Well, it isn't exactly so.

He wasn't there. He was no father figure. And he tried to be the father figure. So try that one for a very confusing time in everybody's life, I think. Anyway, he went in '51 to Israel. And we joined him.

Oh, you went to join him in Israel.

We went to join him, thinking we would stay in Israel. And my mother took one look. This was, historically, the Tzema, the worst time in Israel. We went in July, wonderful time to go. I mean, the heat, and the sand, and the dirt, and the no food.

What did Israel mean to you at that age, you were 13?

It didn't mean anything to me, because my parents were, not my mother, nor my father were any big Zionist. To them, Israel was always the sands. The [Haludsniks] went there. It wasn't their way of life. It wasn't their mentality. It was wonderful to have it.

She had wanted to go there in '44. But this was no '44. She was doing very well. We were living very nicely in Belgium, going skiing, going summer vacationing. My mother took me skiing in the winter of '47, OK. I mean, we were a normal type of a life, whatever normal meant at the time, was being established.

And she came to Israel and she said, I survived one war. I'm not staying here. And so she took me back to Belgium. And my father, at that time, was working already in Israel. And she said to him, I'm not staying. So we went back to Belgium.

Did he stay in Israel?

He stayed in Israel until he could make it to Belgium now that he realized that my mother wasn't going to do anything about being there.

How long did you stay there in Israel?

A couple, I think, two months. And then we came back to Belgium. And he joined us. And I was going to school. I was having totally normal life. When I came to Belgium, I was already in second grade. But because of, again, a new

language, French, compared to, a year earlier, Hungarian, I was somehow between first and second grade.

I lost-- I didn't lose that much. But I lost. I graduated from high school, I was 19, rather than 17, 18. I went through the normal schooling. We lived in Brussels. My mother was doing economically very well, quite a business woman, quite a businesswoman. And so we lived a normal life.

He could not stay in Belgium, because he was not a business man. He was not a diamondtler. He had difficulty getting permission to stay. Belgium had a very difficult thing, he could have joined a wife and daughter. But he did not get his papers to stay in Belgium.

Ended up, anyway, in 1953, as soon as he came in, ended up in Germany in Frankfurt, where my uncle from Vienna had established a business, thinking that instead of being in Vienna, he would move to Germany, because he had a heart condition. And he wanted to go to Baden Leisure Center. Couldn't do it. It wasn't doing him any good. So he went back to Vienna.

And my father took over that business that was part my uncle part my mother. And so he stayed in Germany. And this is where they are until today, because after I got married, in '61, my mother had, as I called it, no more excuses. And she joined him in Germany.

You said your mother took you skiing in 1947. How does one go from one kind of life, difficult wartime, to then going skiing in such a short time?

I guess being young, I guess, being in a normal type of a-- you see, forgetting something, it still was not normal. It was still-- everybody around us were Holocaust survivors. Everybody started to redo their life. A lot of second marriages from young people who had lost their first families. A lot of new babies born in '46, '45, '46. A life that takes over, I guess it's a survival, animal survival that was in there.

How did the Jews that came to America, how come that they started leading lives as if-- not as if nothing had happened, but went on living much more normal lives, by the way, than we lived in Europe. I am totally convinced that the ones who came to America in the '46 ended up leading much more normal lives. Some of them went bonkers.

I don't have a single friend in Belgium whose parents survive. OK, get that one, because that one is interesting. That one of the parents, or both parents, or whoever, very few had both parents that had survived. OK, except if they went in Russia. That there was no nervous breakdown somewhere. There wasn't one. OK, some more seriously, some less seriously. They were all affected.

And I think that the ones that came to America, from what I see, were much less affected. They had to incorporate into this normal society. Europe was not normal. And it's normal until today.

You went back to Israel from 1959 to 1961? How did that come about?

Because by that time, I was 21 years old, very strong feeling toward Israel.

How did that come about?

Lot Jewish organizations in Belgium, first to open the akiva, then to the general Zionist.

Even though your parents were not Zionists.

But they were-- my mother was deep-- my mother is deeply, deeply, deeply Jewish. It was one thing going to Israel and living in a kibbutz. And it was another to have the feeling, totally two different entities in here we're talking about. I mean, I went to a kibbutz when I was in '59. And I looked at this, and I said, get me out of here.

Although I was in a Jewish organization when that was the mentality, I knew this was not my cup of tea. This isn't-- I



mean, maybe this collectivism. I don't know what it is. I mean, I wasn't even trying to think.

I went there with very strong feeling. We have wonderful friends and family that were there. People that-- my mother had a friend from childhood, she was my aunt Ruth. She had passed through Romania with her family while we were there. And they met in this Jewish kitchen when they were serving dinner.

This was my family. My family was not blood related. I wasn't brought up with them. They were the people who had been with me and who had been part of my surrounding in a way. So I went there. And I had the best time of my life. This was the happiest time of my life.

I always regretted that I didn't-- that I didn't stay in Israel. Because first of all, I went to Tel Aviv, where everybody surrounding me were what is called the wealthy Tel Aviv society. Some who were there from before the war and had done very, very well. And others had done very well already after the war. This was the golden youth.

For the first time, remember something, I'm 21 years old. The boys did not survive the war in Europe. It's the girls that survived. If there was a group, it was mostly girls. The boys were either, they were going into the diamond business and had no education, or there were people much older than I was. And there, you have these disproportionate marriages of people 10, 15 years older, because there was not-- I call it the pool of young men.

OK, there was much more a pool of young women that were coming into age. I had, basically, nobody to date that I felt that's what I wanted to have around me. Some of my friends started going to school. But they were my age. These were babies. There were no-- there was no way that I was going to find somebody that, subconsciously, that I wanted to marry, that I wanted to go out.

Israel was another ball game. There was this incredible world that opened up with these wonderful young men that were studying already in America, that were coming back for vacation to their home from MIT and everywhere else. It was another world. That's why a lot of Belgian Jews, or Polish, got married in England. Because there, there was this group of young men where you could marry. But then, there was British Jews, which is not exactly, again, what the Polish Jews were-- our mentality was used.

Do you know what I'm saying? This is where-- so Israel was this wonderful, wonderful-- I had the time of my life. I went to ulpan, started learning Hebrew. And then my mother decided that she was getting me back home. So she got me back in the summer. It was very hot. And I was very happy to go back home, except I thought it was for two months.

And once I got to Belgium, my mother said, forget it. You're not going back. So I went and I worked in-- I spoke English at the time, already. I had been to England for one summer and learned all the languages, also, in school for all these things. So I was fluent in English. I had no problem. And I went, I worked for Shell company as a secretary. Made money, put it away, bought a ticket, and went back to Israel.