United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Riane Gruss
April 22, 1994
RG-50.106*0113

PREFACE

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RIANE GRUSS
April 22, 1994

Question: The following is an interview of **Riane Gruss**. It is being conducted on April 22nd, 1994, by **Gail Schwartz**, on behalf of the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**. Please tell us your full name.

Answer: **Riane Gruss**. I was born – my maiden name was **Wohl**, **w-o-h-l**.

Q: And where were you born?

A: I was born in **Vienna**, **Austria**.

Q: And when were you born?

A: August 18, 1932.

Q: Who made up your household? Who were the members of your family?

A: It was my father, my mother and myself and my younger brother.

Q: And what was your father's name?

A: My father's name was **Athol**(ph) **Wohl**.

Q: Where was he from?

A: He was from **Kraków**, **Poland**.

Q: And your mother's name?

A: My mother's name was **Gisele Wohl**, and her maiden name was **Schtiglietz**(ph).

Q: And where was she from?

A: She was from **Kraków**, **Poland**.

Q: And your brother?

Interview with Riane Gruss
April 22, 1994

A: My brother was – is – his name is **Stefan Wohl**.

Q: And is he older or younger than you?

A: No, he's 18 months younger than I am.

Q: Did you have any extended family living nearby or with you: aunts, uncles, cousins?

A: No, we did not have – well, I should qualify that. When – when we were born, we were born in **Austria**, and my parents lived half in **Austria** and half in **Poland**. They both had family in **Poland**, but we had no family in **Austria**.

Q: So you, as a very young child, went back and forth between the two countries?

A: Mostly my parents went back and forth. We, my brother and I being very young and very sheltered, very rarely. We stayed in **Vienna**, and my parents would come and see us, or take us on vacation, or be with us the part of the time that they were in **Vienna**. In other words, we were raised by a governess or nurses. Spent a lot of time away from my parents, although they kept coming, but we were at – basically, until I was five years old, until 1938, that's how we lived.

Q: Do you remember anything about the neighborhood that you lived in in **Vienna**? I know you were very young, obviously, but do you have any recollection?

A: Yes, because I went there and looked at the street and the house in 1945 - '46, right after the war, and also from my parents' stories. We lived there in – in the

center of town. We lived in the – what's known as the third **bezirke**, which is a section of **Vienna** right near the **Belvedere** Palace, and we had a private three floor house, a walk-up kind of thing. I do remember glimpses of it from before the war, not too much.

Q: Was it a primarily Jewish neighborhood, or a mixed neighborhood, or –

A: It was not a Jewish neighborhood at all, it was probably one of the nicest sections of **Vienna**, not Jewish.

Q: Not Jewish at all?

A: No.

Q: So you really –

A: Not Jewish at all.

Q: – didn't have Jewish neighbors?

A: No, no.

Q: Okay. What kind of work did your father do?

A: My father was a banker, and he also was an industrialist, he – he had a bank in **Poland**, he had a branch of the bank in **Switzerland**, he had industry in **Austria**. He had a furniture factory and a brick factory in – in **Austria**, in **Vienna**. And because he had wide interests in **Austria** and my mother preferred **Austria** to **Poland**, that's

why we – he had a residence in **Austria**, and that's why my brother and I were born in **Austria**.

Q: Tell me about your schooling th – when you were young. When did you first begin school?

A: I did not begin school at all, because the war broke out September 1st, 1939, and I was just – I had just turned in August, seven, and in **Poland** school started at sev – you know, first grade at seven. So I had just been registered. By then we were in **Poland**, because we went from **Vienna** to **Poland** after the **anschluss**. And so I never went to school.

Q: How religious was your family?

A: Not at all. Not at all, except that they were – I can only – I don't remember too many holidays before the war, barely any at all. I remember one Passover in 1938, in **Poland** already, maybe '39, and – but I don't remember any Jewish observance. I do know that they felt Jewish. During the war I remember that I knew we were Jewish, and so on, but I don't remember any tradition at home until after the war.

Q: And going to synagogue you don't recall –

A: Never.

Q: – before the war?

Interview with Riane Gruss
April 22, 1994

A: Never. I know I never went. Nev – I'd never been to synagogue before the war, or during the war, for that matter. But I – the first time I was in a synagogue was after the war, in **Brazil**.

Q: So when you were very young, you pla – you had non-Jewish playmates?

A: Not too many playmates, because at that time, somehow children were more isolated. There was more fear of contagion and illnesses and all kinds of things. And I had a younger brother and the idea was that that was companionship enough. And so I re – I only remember very few other children, not at all on a steady basis, and my brother and I just played together. We also – neither one of us went to any nursery school or anything. But I know from what I heard later, that was not unusual. Children – some children did grow up – I think the more affluent people brought up their children that way. I do know that some – some of my cousins, my husband's family, his – they seem to have had a lot of contact with their cousins, which I didn't because I was in **Vienna** until I was five, so I – until I was five I certainly don't remember any other children.

Q: So you – so things went along until 1937, and again you were –

A: '38.

Q: O-Okay. Again, you were quite young. What was your first recollection of a change in your life? What was the first difference that you recall?

Interview with Riane Gruss
April 22, 1994

A: I recall that we had went on a train trip somewhere, and then, with our governess, or nanny, or whatever, and we went to **Kraków** from **Vienna** without our parents, and met them in vien – in **Kraków** when we arrived. And I remember that we were told that we are going to live here from now on for – for good. And that we had – and they hired a new governess, who spoke Polish, which we didn't speak, my brother and I, and that we were told that it was important for us to learn Polish.

Q: What language had you spoken at home?

A: German.

Q: Only?

A: German, yes. So, I remember that we then started living in **Poland**. That's when I first also saw some of my relatives. I remember my grandfather coming to our house, and going to my maternal grandparents, meeting some of my cousins, and during the – tha – at that point, I remember that.

Q: When did you arrive in **Kraków**?

A: I don't know the exact months, but it must a – it was right after the **anschluss**. We were still in **Vienna** during the **anschluss**, and my parents were horrified because they were in **Poland** and this happened that – an-and the two children were in **Vienna**. And then they were able to smuggle us out, through **Switzerland**. They

sent somebody from **Switzerland** to pick us up, I know to this day who it was. And this young man pretended that he was married to our governess, and he had a Swiss passport. My brother and I had no papers, or whatever papers we had probably were not very good for us. And so they took us out, since we were so young, to **Switzerland**, pretending that we were their children.

Q: What was his name?

A: His name was **Oswild**(ph) **Landau**(ph). He was the son, a young son of my father's partner in **Switzerland**, and he's still alive, I know, because I hear from him and see him occasionally. He's in – quite old now.

Q: So the four of you, the two adults and the two children –

A: That's right, that's right. But they didn't go all the way with us to **Kraków**. They – my parents then picked us up in **Switzerland**.

Q: In **Switzerland**.

A: And then we went to **Kraków**, and they of course stayed. He lived in **Switzerland**.

Q: Do you remember being very frightened as a child doing this?

A: Not at all.

Q: Did you –

A: Not – no, because I think we told we were going to go somewhere and meet my parents, or – no, I don't remember it at all. The only thing I do remember from that trip was that – that I was surprised that we were going with them, and that my parents didn't come. I was a little surprised, but I can't say that I was surprised **[indecipherable]** I don't remember it well.

Q: Do you have any recollection of being frightened or – in **Austria** once the **anschluss** happened?

A: No, not at all, no.

Q: Again, you were very young.

A: Not at all, no.

Q: And were you aware of that –

A: No.

Q: You weren't, no, okay. So then you went through **Switzerland** to **Kraków**.

A: Yes.

Q: And where – a-a-and where did you settle? Did you settle in town, where did you live?

A: We – my father and mother had an apartment because there, as I said, they spent a lot of time in **Kraków** as well. They had a large apartment right above the bank. The bank was on the main floor of this building, and our apartment was on the

second floor. And it was a corner building, so the apartment went all the way around the corner.

Q: Do you know what street you were on?

A: Yes, it was called **Sarego**, and corner of **Gertrudy**. It was right near what's known the **Planty**, which is the moat that surrounds **Kraków**, which is now a park, or at – and was at that time, as well. It had been a moat during medieval times, and it then was turned into a park.

Q: And then what was your daily life then like?

A: There, I begin to remember that my mother was nervous.

Q: Did she ever tell you why?

A: Jittery. No, nobody ever told us why. This was the year before the war, life was quite normal in – in other respects for us, but I remember that she was nervous because she would take me out sometimes, and if I didn't – like I was terribly frightened of thunderstorms, and – and rains, and I was once out with my mother, she took me and – and a thunderstorm came and she was terribly upset with me because I cried and screamed. And I remember feeling that it – things were not as nice as they used to be, but I can't really put my finger on it in any way, no.

Q: And so, what was a daily routine for you?

A: I don't quite remember, I think just going to – to the park, and having this new governess who – the language was a bit of a problem, even though we learned very, very quickly. I remember my brother saying some things in Polish that were very funny, and everybody laughed at them. And they were direct translations from German, I'm sure I did that as well. And I remember, as I said, some of my grandparents coming and visiting, and us visiting them. I remember that the children who had grown up in **Poland**, my cousins, behaved very differently towards my grandparents from the way we were told to behave. Like they – they would kiss their hands, my mother didn't let us do that, so we were different. I remember being different. Actually, I remember that all my life, being different. And so the routine I think was just to – to go to the park and to eat and to sleep and to go out for walks, and nothing in particular. No school or anything like that.

Q: So you – did you have any contact with non-Jewish children?

A: No, no. Actually, I don't remember any contact with any children except my cousins occasionally. Even that was not encouraged, it was – my parents were not – my parents were not that family conscious, I would say. That – you know, it wasn't the famil – because they lived from far away and because they – my father was very established and very worldly. And before he married my mother he already lived all over the world and so on. Their lifestyle was different from my parents' relatives in

Kraków and therefore, I think they didn't always spend a lot of time together. My mother was close to her brother, who will appear later.

Q: Okay. And then when was the next change, from going to the –

A: I should add also that my mother was to her own par – actually, my mother was close to her own family, but I think she lost some contact while she was living away, and – but she was closer to her family than maybe my father was to his. Okay.

Q: Okay, and then when was the next change in your daily –

A: Oh, the next change I remember very, very distinctly was when the war broke out. And that was September 1st, 1939, and I do remember the terrible commotion and screaming and yelling and peop – and packing, and –

Q: Where were you that day?

A: I can't remember the exact day, but I was certainly at home, which I described before, and my parents were very nervous, and everybody was packing. We were all at home and – and we were – th – we – my father had a large car and my – I guess somebody else had a car, but I remember there was a lot of discussion about who was going to go in which car and how many things we can take and where we should go. And in the end we ended up in this car with my father's, I guess sister and my cousin who was much older, she was 14. And her father was the director of

the branch in **Kraków**, so he was the one who was most closely associated with my father in business. That was his brother-in-law, and they were with us in the car. And –

Q: What were their names?

A: Their names was – her name was li – my cousin's name was **Stefunia**(ph), which is **Stefanie**(ph), and the last name was **Raab, r-a-a-b**, and her father's name was **Leon Raab**. And – and my aunt, was my father's younger sister, her name was **Eugenia**, and we went in this car for a while, and the next spot where we were supposed to stop was – I don't remember the name of the small town, it may come back to me. But it was the hometown of this new powe – Polish Jewish governess that they hired when we came from – from **Vienna**. And –

Q: What was her name?

A: **Amalia**(ph) – we called her **Tetta**(ph), because we called all our governesses **Tetta**(ph), which was evolve – which was baby talk for **schweste** in German, and then they all became **Tettas**(ph). So her name was **Tetta**(ph), just like every other one, and her parents came from this little town, which must have been a little bit east of **Kraków**, because we were definitely going east.

Q: You were seven years old. What did you take with you?

A: I don't remember. Whatever they let me or didn't let me, I don't remember.

Interview with Riane Gruss
April 22, 1994

Q: Okay. Do you remember being frightened?

A: Yes.

Q: In the car?

A: Frightened, uncomfortable. Everybody was nervous, it was tight, it was a long trip. There was a lot of discussion, among my parents particularly, as to where to go, and my father, who was very much of an optimist, unfortunately did not size up the situation very well, and thought it would pass in some way, thought that we would be comfortable at the – at the home of this governess, because her parents were there, and because there would be food there and sh – and so on, and my mother, who was arguing that this was stupid, that as – that we shouldn't stop anywhere and we should just go straight to the border with **Romania**, that was what many people did, and better than we did. But my father felt that it was not necessary, it was a panic, it was – also, I should actually rectify this. We did not leave September first, we left September third, because my father insisted on staying three days in **Kraków** aft – when the war began, because people were coming to the bank to get money out, and he felt he couldn't leave and disappoint them. So, we waited two – two days or three days, which was also somewhat fatal. So, I remember a lot of argument about leaving late. Was a lot of tension. That I remember, there was a lot of tension.

Q: What – do you remember what it meant to you as a child that the Germans had invaded **Poland**? Did that mean anything to you?

A: No, it didn't mean anything except this panic that – that just sort of rained around me, I didn't know why.

Q: That was the atmosphere of it.

A: It was more the atmosphere, I didn't have any concept of what the Germans –

Q: What was happening.

A: – were, why everybody was scared, no, definitely not. Children were not as included in those days as they are now, in **Poland**. We were very sheltered, and I never, for instance, ate with my parents before the war. So, you know, we led very much a separate existence. So we always ate in our room. So I really don't know.

Q: Did you go to your governesses house?

A: Yes, we did. We did, and we must have been there – and my timing will be confused, because I don't know, we must have been there two or three days. And then of course, the war progressed, and I remember there was the first bombing was there, there were – you know, there were siren, there were planes, we went to some cellar. There was a commotion, it was crowded in her house. And I don't know how long we were there, probably a few days, and then we started moving east again.

And again in the same car, and all in all, we were, I think, 14 people, between that car and my uncles car, I think. That means on my father's side.

Q: So you – you said you had gone into the shelter during the bombing.

A: Yeah, there was a bombing, and I remember a lot of commotion and going into –

Q: Was that a terribly frightening experience for you?

A: Yes, because it was noisy. It was very, very, you know, that the siren was noisy, the bombs were noisy, the planes coming low, and it was – yes, that was –

Q: You saw – you actually saw planes?

A: You did see planes, yes, yes. And that was frighten – frightening. I must say, I was very frightened of bombing throughout the war. Some people were more – some children were more, some were less, I was always very frightened of bombing. To me it was worse than lightning; I was frightening of lightning and this was like, you know, amplified lightening. So, I was always afraid of that.

Q: And then you continued on?

A: Then we continued on in two cars, and –

Q: This is still the two families?

A: Yes, but now I may – getting confused. I remember our car, but then my mother's brother somehow was there too, and he was in another car with his family, and I guess my mother's sister and her two sons, and there was a lot of family at

that point, and we were in two cars, and we headed east. And then I remember the next stop was some sort of an abandoned house, where the people had fled. It was not a Jewish house, it was like an estate. And it was abandoned and we – it was big, and we were very happy to find shelter there, and we stayed there a couple of days. And by that time it was difficult to get gasoline, and so my uncle went out to try to get gasoline, they got gasoline. And then there was a commotion; my father was ready to stay as usual, and then my father – but then he was convinced that he – that we shouldn't stay, and in the meantime we had news – we already saw, I remember, Polish soldiers who were either deserting, or their units had been broken up, they were running. And we knew that the front was not doing very well, and the Germans were advancing, so then we went, again, east. And I don't know how many days this whole trip took, but it took a few days. When it –

Q: How about food, did you have enough food?

A: We – on the way, we bought – I guess we had some money, we bought food, and in this house that was abandoned, we found food. I remember that was one reason why we stayed there for a few days, that there was plenty of food there. And then we went on and the next memory I have was of a little town called **Zwatruf**(ph), which was already in eastern **Poland**. And there we – there we got into some apartment that belonged to some Jewish people. It might have been somebody my

father knew, I don't – I don't know who they were. But there I remember a big discussion between – a big more than discussion, a fight between my uncle and my father, because it was – by that time it was – I remember that it was the first Jewish holiday, it was Rosh Hashanah, and my father decided to stay over the holiday and then continue to the Romanian border, because that was sort of the ultimate goal, that everybody thought we – one should go to. And my uncle felt that we should go immediately, and this is nonsense to start sitting and waiting. And – but then my father wasn't well, he didn't feel well, and we stayed. And we stayed there, I think, over the holidays, and maybe a couple of days longer. I don't remember how long we were there, but it was a few days. And then, because he didn't feel well, we did not go to the Romanian border til much, much later.

Q: What happened in between?

A: In between I just remember that we were living in – in very uncomfortable conditions and everybody was discussing when and where we should go, that's all I remember. But it was like a layover, we were just there waiting to – to decide what next. That's all I remember.

Q: And then you – your – you continued –

A: And then eventually, yes, my father was feeling better. I later found out that it was a gallbladder attack. He had gallbladder problems, I didn't know what they

were at the time. So that delayed us. Again it was the Jewish holidays originally, that we were supposed to wait just for two days and then he didn't feel well, so it – I don't know how long we were there. But anyway, then we went to a place called **Kolomyia** which was on the border, not far from the border. And there I think we stayed with – I don't know, in somebody's house, wasn't too uncomfortable. And we had – by then the borders had been closed, they were already guarded. The confusion was somewhat over. The Russians had occupied eastern **Poland**, the Germans had occupied western **Poland**. This was already after the three weeks that **Poland** defended itself. And at that point I remember we were in **Kolomyia** and we were waiting there to go to **Romania**. And by that time there were some guides, and people who would help, for money, would help you cross and so on, but you had to wait, because they couldn't take too many people at the same time. And at that time, I even remember that they did put me in a school, because I – I remember sitting there and making whole rows of **A**s and **B**s on lined paper. And we were there for three months.

Q: This was your first school?

A: This was my first school. And I remember writing **A**s and **B**s and straight lines. I remember that.

Q: And what kind of school was it?

Interview with Riane Gruss
April 22, 1994

A: I don't remember so much the school itself as having to write these long lines of the same letter. It was a public school in this little town **Kolomyia**. And since we were there, and they just sent us to school. Not us, my brother didn't go, he was too young, I did. So I went to first grade.

Q: Were they non – non Jewish schools?

A: Non-Jewish children, yes. Po – it was a Polish school.

Q: Polish school.

A: Yeah.

Q: And by then your Polish was good enough?

A: By then I could speak, yes, because we were there already a year, and with this – this last **Tetta**(ph) hardly spoke any German, that was why they hired her, and so yes, yes; children learn very quickly.

Q: What were your classmates actions towards you? Was there any problem that you –

A: No, no, I don't remember any at all, no.

Q: And no incidents on the street, talking on the street?

A: No, no, no, no, no, we just lived there. No, I don't –

Q: Was it a Jewish village, or –

A: **Kolomyia** apparently, this I learned later, was a very Jewish town, full of Jews. So maybe our neighbors and everybody was Jewish. I really don't know. I don't know, I – I wasn't aware of it one way or the other.

Q: So you remember these three months as relatively calm?

A: Calm. Absolutely, relatively calm, yes. And then one ma – one day my mother told us that my brother and my father were going to cross the border beca – an-and go, and leave and then she and I would follow a few days later. You couldn't cross in large groups. It was done by **[indecipherable]** and my – my father was supposed to go with his brother-in-law, and he did, as a matter of fact, and my brother. Fo – why the men went ahead, wha-wha-what this decision was made on, I don't know, but the idea was that they would go ahead and then my mother and I would follow. I do know that my aunt and my cousin, who was with us originally in the car, had gone directly to the border when my father was delayed by his illness, and they were already in **Romania**. And that's why maybe her husband, who was my father's brother-in-law, was supposed to go first with him, and I guess they decided to take my brother, so that my mother wouldn't have to go with two children. I don't know what the reasoning was, but that's how it was.

Q: So this is what, December 1939?

A: This must be by now about December 1939.

Q: And so they – the first group of men left?

A: Maybe November. Because I don't remember snow yet. I think it might have been November still.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah, the first group left.

Q: And you were left with your mother.

A: Right.

Q: Was that upsetting to you, that your brother and your father left?

A: No, I don't particularly remember it as being upsetting, because there wasn't that much time to be upset or not upset, because very soon, maybe on the next day, we learned that they had been captured on the border. So, we never followed. So I – that was upsetting, because I remember my mother crying and that was very upsetting, yes. And also the – the – the idea that my five year old brother was now in jail with my father and – and she didn't know where and how and so on. We her – we learned from the guy that that's what had happened, or **[indecipherable]** I don't – I wasn't there when she learned about it, but – or at least I don't remember, but I remember her crying, and it was quite awful.

Q: A-And then?

A: And then what happened was that she tried to contact the Russian authorities to see if she could see my father, or at least her goal was to pick up my little brother from jail. So she tried, how she tried I don't know, she must have gone there and pleaded with them. I wasn't with her, she left me at home – at home, I don't know, with the landlady or something, I don't remember that part. **[break]** And then she was able to – they told her that – that they would release my brother, and she should come and pick him up.

Q: How far away was your father and your brother from your town?

A: Very close, because this town was on the border. So it's very possible that he was in jail right in that town, that they brought him from – the few kilometers from the border back there, I don't know, I never saw him. But my mother went and brought my brother bra – back. So then she had both of us, but my father was in jail and she had no contact with him. And then she decided to go – to go and join her own family, and they were in **Zwatruf**(ph), and by her own family I mean her parents and her older sister and my uncle, meaning her brother, and his wife and three children. And her sister's two children. Eventually we ended up being 14 people. And they had an apartment or some way of living in – in this town called **Zwatruf**(ph), and we joined them there.

Q: How did you get there?

A: And – don't remember. I imagine we either took a train – probably a train, but I do not remember. All I remember is that they were all very, very nice to us, and that we lived there with them, and it was crowded, but it was peaceful and nice, for a short time. And my uncle would go to **Lwów**, which was not too far away, a few hours away, I presume. And he would come occasionally, and he wa – got a job in **Lwów** and he was making money. In other words, he was earning, he was the only one who was earning and he had a job, and he had friends and connections, but he left his family, his parents and so on in this place, and we were with them.

Q: Did your brother tell you anything – and a gra – I – I do know he was five years old – did he tell you anything about his prison experience with your father?

A: No, no, I don't remember anything.

Q: So your brother did not remember that experience that –

A: He either didn't, or he may have talked about it like a five year old would, and I don't remember what he said, or I don't – I don't know.

Q: So there you were this big group.

A: There we were, this big group, and then – and we did not go to school any more on the – I, or an – my cousins. And then one night there was a big commotion, yelling and screaming and banging and that's when the Russians came with – with – what do they call it, the trucks, and they loaded us on trucks and took us to the

trains, and deported us. I do remember – I'll go back a little bit – during the time when we were there with our big family group, there was a lot of discussion whether to take Russian citizenship or not. The Russians offered passports to all the people who had fled from western **Poland** into eastern **Poland**, they could become Russian citizens. There was a lot of discussion because one didn't know whether to do that or not to, because if you did that, it seemed to us – at least that's what the grownups were saying, then we would never, ever have a chance of leaving what was occupied Russian territory, or **Russia** itself, because we were Russian citizens. So that was sort of giving up. On the other hand, the risk of remaining with the Polish passports, which we had, was that then we would be treated badly, possibly deported. There were talks about deportations to **Siberia**, and that was a different risk, but I know that we did not take the Russian passports because we thought that was like abdicating altogether. So we were deported, all 14 of us.

Q: What was it like?

A: That I remember. That I already – there I have vivid memories. It was – it was cargo cars or cattle cars, and we were 70 people in one of them, in each one of them. And – and the conditions were very, very bad. There was one in the center of this big cattle car, there was one pipe which was the toilet, and it wasn't even covered or – or – or separated. So I remember that some people gave some blankets

or spreads or sheets, I don't remember, and those were somehow hung up there and my mother was rather witty, kept saying she could tell exactly from the feet as to who was in there, and that was a big – with the children, for us it was a sort of a game about guessing who was in there. But I remember that very distinctly. And the train would stop quite often and then the Russians would come in and they didn't mistreat us or anything, they didn't even come in. They would open the door and from the platform they would hand us the food. They brought big pots with – and mostly it was soup, I remember, some sort of soup. It was not great, but they did bring it twice a day over there. And also, we used to stop a great deal and it took us – we went all the way to – very far, we were deported all the way to – yeah, **Kutskaya Oblast**, which was near **Yakutsk** which is almost as far as you can go without going to **Manchuria**, I guess. And it took us six weeks to get there. So we tra – but six weeks with a great number of stops, because they did stop all the time, they stopped at different stations, I imagine when they needed the tracks they would put us on a side track, but I know we stopped a lot.

Q: Okay, let's talk a little bit more about that journey. Were there men, women and children together in a car?

A: Yes, yes. All the families were together. And one additional thing that I remember from that trip was that my brother got scarlet fever during that trip. And

he was very sick, then my cousin got it. And they tried to isolate them in one corner of this car, and my mother was going – absolutely falling apart, because – I mean, she was brave, but she was carrying on quite a bit because he was so sick. And there was even a doctor in another car who came, and my mother used to tell much later that he said it would take a miracle for my brother to survive, because he was supposed to be on a salt free diet, or whatever one does with scarlet fever. And he was quite sick. He was very sick. And so we were families together, yes; men, women and children.

Q: And what – was there any place to sit down, were there seat –

A: On the floor, there were – and suitcases.

Q: And suitcases.

A: On the suitcases, yes. And then things were spread on the floor to – to make sleeping – to make sleeping possible.

Q: So were you able to stretch out?

A: Yes, we were able to sort of, like sardines, one next to the other, we – we had – I remember sleeping, yes.

Q: And how much light was in the car?

A: There was some light from the windows, which were high up. There must have been light because I remember that my mother, to keep us busy, this is one of the

great things she did, the girls, she taught me how to darn socks on that trip. And when we ran out of socks with holes, I remember she made holes in socks and then I darned them over and over again. And I became very proficient at it, so I – there must have been light, to do that.

Q: Did you have any special doll or toy with you? Was there something –

A: No, I don't remember that – anything like that.

Q: You don't remember bringing anything that was special.

A: The only amusing incident I remember from that trip, I mean, there were many, that as strange as it seems in all these horrible situations there was always something humorous. And I remember that when we stopped in all the different – in all the different, I presume small towns or wherever we stopped, there was inevitably an enormous statue of **Stalin** and **Lenin** on the platform, and they were usually life-size. And one day we stopped at dusk, and usually when we stopped, somebody, very often my mother, would climb up on two or three suitcases to reach the little window, that's how I remember they were high up, and try to get – ask the passersby to give us some food or anything. Water, food, whatever we were wa – sh – literally begging. And one day she was sa – she turned around and said to everybody, well today we are sure to get what I asked for. Says, do you know who I just spoke to? I spoke to **Stalin** in person. It was – she was talking to this

[indecipherable] and suddenly she realized that it was one of the statues. So anyway, often these peasants did hand something over, and she learned a few words of Russian, **laybeonki**(ph) being children, and you know, I remember her always saying about the children. I always felt that like, that we were the – the cause of all evil, because th – we were used for – for that kind of begging. Like we were the only reason why she – she did it.

Q: What was the atmosphere inside the car? Were people helping each other, were they supportive of each other?

A: I remember arguments about space. I do remember arguments about, you know, th – particularly when my brother got sick and they – my – my mother and – and then later, a few days later, my cousin got sick, and there were arguments even about – between my mother an-an-and the mother of this cousin, and – who was her sister-in-law, about – because I guess everybody was so anxious. And I remember when they wanted to isolate the sick children, they had to – needed space from another family, so they displaced them a little, and tried to tell them the space here was just as good, whatever was left when they moved the other children. There were arguments about space, definitely. That I remember. On – in other ways, I think there was also support. It wasn't a constant argument, but there was tension about space, physical space.

Interview with Riane Gruss
April 22, 1994

Q: You said that the train made a lot of stops. Were you able to get out of the car and move around?

A: No, no, no.

Q: You were inside the car for –

A: We were inside –

Q: – six weeks.

A: – six weeks, yes. We were not able to get out on the platforms, we were not allowed.

Q: And –

A: The doors never opened unless they brought us food. So that's why my mother always –

Q: How often wou – did they bring the food?

A: I think she – I don't remember it, but I think two or three times a day. They did give us food twice a day for sure.

Q: What kind of food did they give you?

A: Soup mostly. Soup mostly, black bread and hot water. **Kipyatok** they called it.

Q: And did you just wear the same clothes the whole time?

A: I think so. I think so. I don't remember changing or washing. There was some washing, but I don't remember how. I don't remember.

Interview with Riane Gruss
April 22, 1994

Q: Did you play with the other children, word games or –

A: Yes, a lot. And my mother told us stories and we darned the socks and we did word games and finger games, and yes, a lot, and – and –

Q: What was the weather like during your journey?

A: It was – I don't remember it as being cold or anything, because we were deported, I think in June. I do remember that I turned eight in – when – after, right after we arrived in **Siberia**. So we must have arrived around August. And there it was very, very hot, because they have a short, hot summer.

Q: During the journey, was there any talk of people trying to escape?

A: No, I don't remember any –

Q: That you were aware of.

A: No, I wa – I – no, I don't think at that point – there was a lot of talk people trying to escape, and I do remember that later on when we were already settled in **Siberia**, but not from the train, I don't remember that, no.

Q: Was there any difference in the actions between the men – of the men, or of the women – any di – any difference in behavior of the men or the women on – in the car?

A: Not that I am aware of, no, no, I don't remember. I remember differences in people close to me. I remember my mother se – actions and attitudes were very

different from my aunt's actions and attitude. Some people despaired. There was a lot of despair and crying and so on. My mother did not succumb to that, and I remember thinking that she was different, because she really did not do that. She – she was much more resourceful, and much more – well, she used her charm, her intelligence, she was very clever, and so on, to – to achieve something, to gain things for herself and for us, but mainly for us, so – mainly for my brother was sick. But – and the others sort of just despaired. Also, there was a lot of talk like we'll never get out of here, and this is the end, and my mother arguing that this is not so, that it's not the end because we really don't know what – that the – you know, she didn't give in to that.

Q: And your memories of your feelings then, during that trip?

A: I don't have any memories of my feelings, except maybe some fear of the uncertain, but nothing other than that, no. No, I don't even remember being – I remember being very crowded, but I don't remember being very uncomfortable. I don't remember, you know, any physical pain or anything like that, no.

Q: Do you remember being hungry?

A: No.

Q: Do you rememb –

A: I think that the food came fairly regularly, and my mother probably gave us enough, because I remember that people did say that they were hungry. But I think she again made sure that – that I had enough. I was not hungry.

Q: And you weren't cold, because the weather –

A: No.

Q: – you said, was more mild –

A: We were not cold, no, no –

Q: – at that point.

A: – no, and we were crowded, so it wasn't cold, no.

Q: Now your father wa-was not with you, he was still in prison?

A: Yes, and we had absolutely, after my mother picked up my brother, she had no more contact, no – nor did we have any knowledge whether he – what happened to him. And that was something I do remember, because she talked about that a lot, that we didn't know whether he was dead or alive, or that he was in jail, where he was, nothing. Absolutely nothing. And she talked a lot about that.

Q: Did you and your brother miss him very much?

A: I don't know whether we missed him. I guess, yes, I think that th-the uncertainty, th-the insecurity that he was gone, and her despair over that. That was the only time she showed despair was when she talked about not knowing what happened to him.

So that, I think affected us more than the – just that he wasn't there. Again, I must emphasize that we didn't see that much of our parents when we were very young, cause he was not, you know, a father like today. He was a father was in the office, who came in maybe a few minutes before we went to sleep. So I really didn't – he was not directly involved in our care, daily lives, so I don't, you know, it wasn't

[inaudible]

Q: Did – you said the journey took six weeks.

A: Yes.

Q: Did it seem like more than six weeks?

A: Yes, it seemed endless. Yes, it seemed like a very long time, endless, yeah, that it seemed. And also, you must remember that we had absolutely no idea as to where we are being taken. So we didn't know whether it would take one week, six weeks, four weeks, and also where our final destination was we had no idea, so it was just going and going and going. Nobody knew where we were going.

Q: But the guards treated you all right –

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: – well, no problem with that.

A: No, no, no, no problem. They brought the food and left.

Q: And then finally you arrived.

A: Finally we arrived, and it was very hot there, I remember that, and there was a lot of like wheat, or very tall grass where we arrived. It was like fields and forests. We were actually in the middle of the **Taiga**, which are these enormous forests in **Russia**, and – in **Siberia**. And there were barracks, we did not have to build our own. There was like a settlement there waiting for us.

Q: Wha – you arrive, th-the car stopped, and you got out.

A: That's right.

Q: Do you remember that moment?

A: I do remember that – that it was wonderful to get out.

Q: I was going to say, what were your feelings –

A: Yes, it was wonderful, and I remember being very impressed with this tall grass, which was very tall, it was almost as tall as I was. And then we walked through this grass, and then there were these houses, which I remember seeing, they were like huts, and there were like 10 or 12 or 15 maybe of them, I don't know how many. And there was a central one where we all had to go and line up, and they assigned these houses. And I remember that my mother was very anxious for this whole family, we were 14 people, our family, to get our own house. And most of these houses housed between 16 or 20 people. And her big accomplishment was that we did get one of these houses just for us.

Interview with Riane Gruss
April 22, 1994

Q: How was your health at that point?

A: Mine was fine.

Q: How was your brother?

A: My brother was better by then, but very, very weak, and very emaciated. And – but he was better, he was no longer critical, and his fever, I think, had gone by then. And my health was fine.

Q: Were there many other children from other families –

A: Yes, there were –

Q: – in this group of people?

A: Yes, there were many children. There were many children, and after we all got settled, and this I remember also very distinctly, after they allocated these different huts to different – to – to all these people, and everybody was more or less settled, they – you had to register again for work. The adults had to register for work, and the children had to register for school. And there were many children, but they were – it seemed that they didn't have enough children who belonged into second grade, which was where I should have gone. And I knew by then how to read and write a little, because I had learned – three months I was in the – in that school, and maybe I learned on my – by myself, or whatever, but – but I didn't know Russian, of course. Now this school was going to be in Russian, and I remember that I – they

had a first grade and a third grade, or enough children to – for those age groups, and they were in the – somehow in the same room, there was the – why they had them in the same room, I guess they didn't have enough teachers, or they didn't have enough children, and I remember that they were – and I was in first grade. And with a – that was one of the things that they did very quickly. I remember we barely got there and we – and they made us go to school, and they made the adults work. And we all got like an **I.D.** card. The children got them and the working adults. And unless you had that, you could not buy food. By then you were buying food, they had like a dispensary. But you had to show your **I.D.** work card or school card to get your rations. You couldn't just come with rubles and buy it.

Q: Where did you get the – where did the adults get the money from?

A: From working. They were compensated, yes.

Q: They got paid. Oh, they got paid for working.

A: They got paid, yes.

Q: What were the sleeping arrangements like?

A: That I remember very well, too, because they were – it was called a **pritcha**(ph). It was a – like a bunk made out of wood, and it was right above the floor, and it was long. It was on the floor, and it was made out of boards. And so we, all 14 of us, slept on this one long thing, and it was very tight. And so, when I remember that

when one person turned, everybody turned. And to this day I can't stand sleeping with anybody, because it just – I can't sleep when somebody keeps turning, because I turn too. So that was terrible. The sleeping arrangements were very, very tight. Very tight.

Q: But you had food.

A: We had some food. We had some food and – but not adequate food, there were shortages of – there were no – no vegetables. People started getting scurvy, people started getting all kinds of – because they were deficient in – in so many foods. But we didn't have – and we were not starving, but we didn't have adequate food. But very soon after we arrived there, we started getting food parcels, because – I have to backtrack. My uncle was not deported. He was the only one of my mother's family, because he was working in **Lwów**, as I had said before, and he was not home that night. So he was not deported. And he, when he heard that his whole family was deported, his three children, his parents, his sisters, and his wife, he wanted to run after the train. He thought he would go and run after the train. And his friends in **Lwów** told him this was stupid – a stupid thing to do because you would get on some train – if you go there, to the station, they'll deport you, but by no means will you be on the same train. You may never find them. If you stay in **Lwów**, you may be able to help them, but this way it – it – it would be ludicrous. So he stayed. And

he had a very good job with the Russians, and so he made money and he sent parcels to us. How he knew where we were, I don't know, but he did – we got the parcels. We were **[phone ringing- break**] So we got the parcels – as a matter of fact, I don't – it – it still is a puzzle to me how he knew where he was, or whether he just sent them by name to **Siberia** and by mira-miracle we got them, but we did get them. And I remember that he sent sugar and fat and tea and coffee and things like that. I remember particularly the sugar and the fat.

Q: What kind of fat?

A: And that's an interesting story too. The fat was some kind of lard or chicken fat. And the problem with that was that my grandmother was still very religious. And my uncle, who was not religious any more, and who was a very clever and shrewd kind of person, and a very good son and – and father, and very family-minded, he wanted the worst way, because he knew what the conditions there were, that we should all eat this, particularly his mother. And so he himself certified it. And so what it was, it was he – after the war he told me that it was just at first he c-couldn't get any kosher fat, and then he just certified it himself. So it was different kinds of lards, whatever he could get. Goose fat, chicken fat, maybe lard. I don't know, whatever. And it came, and –

Q: Did – did this camp that you were in have a specific name?

A: No, it did not have a specific name, it was a – I wouldn't even call it a camp, it was a – it was a work settlement, it was a – it was a settlement. They had deportees in **Siberia** fra – during the – the – the purges that they did during Tsar's time. There were deportees there in the nearest town, who had been deported 11 years before, as I remember the number exactly because it always se – stuck in my mind. And these people had been there for – political deportees, who had no way of ever getting out, at least they thought, and they kept telling us that we would also remain – these were work settlements – that we would also remain there forever, because whenever we said well, you know, maybe someday we'll get out, or after the war, or something, they used to tell us there's no hope. So there were – there were different – this area had been populated by different deportees over the years, just like when I was **Yakutsk** in nine – four years, five years ago. They had a lot of deportees from the Tsar's time, who now are several generations later, and they just stayed there. It could have happened to us, thank God it didn't.

Q: What did you learn at school?

A: Oh, I learned how to read and write in Russian. And also they had a very – I remember that they had a very strong program of indoctrination of – **Stalin** was our hero, he was our father, he – around Christmastime they asked us to pray to God for candy, and we did, and nothing happened of course. And then they asked us to ask

Stalin, whose portrait was right in front of course, and we got candy. It was the only time we got candy, it was that kind of atmosphere. And it was always glory, the glory of **Russia** and the glory of **Stalin**, the glory of communism. That was all the reading material and all of that – that was what we learned in school, but mainly to read and write.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

A: I don't remember the school as being unpleasant. I do remember – I – I remember being – it was difficult, because we had to walk one kilometer. Took us about 10 or 15 minutes, and when it got cold – because once the snow falls there, it never melts, it – and they – we – they dug like a little trail, and on either side there were banks of the snow, which was tall as I was. And we all got what's called **valenkis**, the children got, they were boots made out of a heavy felt. And they allocated those for children to go to school in, and I remember walking that distance.

Q: But the subjects that you were learning in school?

A: I learned how to read and write, and I don't think it was divided by subjects, I think it was just mainly the glory of **Russia** and reading and writing, that's all I remember of that.

Q: What did you do for pleasure, the children? Anything?

Interview with Riane Gruss
April 22, 1994

A: I imagine we played in the snow and it was not terrib – I don't remember anything for pleasure. Stories, being home, games, running around. Nothing in particular. I mean, nothing organized, or –

Q: Besides the boots they gave you –

A: There were also jackets.

Q: – did you have enough clothes?

A: Yes.

Q: Oh, they gave you clothes.

A: They allocated – for children, they gave us those lined or interlined jackets and **– Fufaikas**, they were called, and working people also got those.

Q: What kind of work did your mother do?

A: They – in the forest, in the **Taiga**, women – men cut branches and trees – it was cleaning the **Taiga**. It was cleaning the forest. Men cut the branches and the dead branches, and women gathered them and carried them to – to central sort of spots where they were burned. So it was to clean out the undergrowth. It was heavy work, it was hard work, because you had to carry the branches, and then – it was hard, physical work. My mother, strangely enough, was very, very pampered and spoiled, said she, physically she felt very well the –

End of Tape One

Interview with Riane Gruss
January 5, 1996

Beginning Tape Two

Q: This is tape two, side one, and we were talking about your arrival in **Siberia** in August 1940, when you were eight years old. You were with your mother and brother. And you've already described some of the conditions there, but I was wondering, what was your first impression when you arrived?

A: We got off the train and sort of a – in the middle of nowhere, and then I remember seeing the huts, and then there was a bit of a scramble among the people, who is going to get which hut. And as we were a group of 14 people, same family, we did – we managed to get one hut just for our family, and that I remember as being something that everybody thought was a very positive thing.

Q: Can you describe a typical day there?

A: In the beginning there was utter confusion. We had to like register, we had to get our food cards. And they told us that we would go to school, children would go to school and they're go – and the adults would go to work. And then there was que – they talked a lot about what type of work and everybody was sort of – it was also a new experience for all of us to have to work. I mean, my mother never worked a day in her life, and ma – and most other women certainly didn't, and the type of work that they had was heavy, physical work. But the early work was actually cutting the – what was it, the grass. It was tall grass that they cut and they gave us these sickles, that's wha – th-the – like knives. And all – that's what the

first work was. The children did not do it, we did not do it, the adults did it. And they gathered it and tied it, and it was still very hot when we got there in August, it was very, very hot. It's a short summer. Soon after that, the typical day was going to school. And they did not have enough children to have a second grade, which I should have gone to, cause I already knew how to read and write in Polish, and I was eight years old. So – but they only had enough children for a first grade and for a third grade, so I was in the first grade, and we started learning Russian. And school was important. They did m-make it absolutely clear that we had to go to school in order to get our food, and school was important, and they were rather nice to us in school. The teacher was nice, and they kept telling us about, you know, **Stalin** and how he was going to take care of us, and how we are going to get presents from him, and actually when Christmas came around, they told us that we should pray for candy, and of course we didn't get any and then we should ask **Stalin** and the candy appeared. She distributed it and so on. Actually, this particular incident was very well portrayed in the film – what was it called? **"Europa Europa**.**"** Exactly he had the identical thing happen to him that I remember very vividly, the same conversation in school. Anyway, so our typical days, wet – it very soon got very cold. There's very – there's practically no transition. We started having the first snow by end of September, beginning of October, and that snow never, ever melts. So when we were walking to school, we

were walking like in a – in a ditch, and on both sides there were these walls of snow that were as tall as I was. It was cut out, so that if walked in, an-and that snow never, ever melted, so – until the next spring, obviously. And the grown-ups went off and did whatever they were doing, I didn't see them. And the thing was to get some of the wood for us to make fire in the hut. My grandmother sort of cooked something. I don't remember ever being really hungry. We did have some food, and so I don't remember ever being really hungry. I do remember going to the store and getting – with those ration cards and getting our allocations. And they were mostly some sort of staples, I think. Certainly no vegetables, no – no food, no nothing, so that was bad, because we were very deprived of – of vitamins and – and that kind of nutrition. There was a little town not far away, where from time to time people were summoned for various reasons, and there was always a great deal of trepidation and fear attached to that, because you didn't know – it was usually somebody that they either wanted to recruit for some other work, or it was some oth – or they suspected somebody of being what they called the **bourgoi**(ph) you know, before the war, and they wanted to look into it. Two young people from the settlement tried to run away to – to the Manchurian border, we were not far from **Manchuria**. It's pretty far out there. So, a-and they either were caught, or they were – there was some mystery. I mean, I was only eight years old, but I remember the excitement that thi – were they caught, weren't they

caught, did they freeze to death, didn't they freeze to death. But when they were missing, th-th-th-th-the **NKVD**, which then became the **[indecipherable]** who came around and asked questions, you know, the Russian secret service, or whatever they were. The police. So there was some contact to – to that little city, which was not far away. It was called **Auga**(ph). And so, the typical day was just, go to work or go to school and eat and sleep. Were a lot of bedbugs, that was a terrible pest, and other than that I can't really remember that much, except big discussions inside with my – I had one of my cousins was already 15 years old, and he had been quite a good student before the war, and he knew quite a bit of history, and his sort of view of the situation was that we'll never get out of there. This is where the Russians send their political enemies, have done so during Tsar's time and have done so, you know, during the purges, and are doing it now. And none of these people ever get out. And of course my view of history was limited, but I do remember arguments because my mother particularly said you can't take that kind of point of view, and it doesn't have necessary to be like that, and we will get out, it's different. There's a war and they will be defeated at some point, and things will change. Anyway, those discussions I do remember, and I remember him saying there's a Polish saying that these are dreams of a severed head. So, whenever my mother would hold out these optimistic speeches, he

would say, these are dreams of a severed head. So that's what I remember from there.

Q: What do you attribute – and again I know you were only eight years old – your mother's optimism to? Was she – had she always been that – that way?

A: She – it was not a stupid optimism, she was very clever, and sophisticated woman, who lived in various places in **Europe** and so on. I don't know whether it was just a sort of simplistic optimism, it was the kind of optimism that she had throughout the war later, in much worse circumstances, where she felt that we would survive. And it wasn't the rosy kind of optimism, it was just her kind of feeling that we would survive. And she was very good – I now understand it better than I did then, in – in making us believe it, that I always believed, I – later on also, that we would survive. And that she had this way of making us feel very important and very special, because of pre-war connections, because of her experience before the war, because of the way – because of who my father was. I see it all as – now as – not as significant as she thought it was, but it helped survive the war, so I can't even fault her. When I became a little older I started thinking that maybe she's exaggerating. But it worked.

Q: What did you talk about with friends, or di – first of all, did you make friends there?

A: No, I only ha – remember playing and talking and being with my two cousins, and they are – they're both girls. And sh – one of them was a year younger than I, and one is a year older. And they now live in **Israel** and I'm still friendly and close to them – no, schoolwork, schoolwork. Who could write – that's what we talked about, who could write the lines neater, who could read Russian better, do the arithmetic. I don't remember talking about any significant things. No, da-daily – daily occurrence.

Q: Did – did you go to school on the weekend?

A: I don't remember, probably Saturday, yes, Saturday we went to school, Sunday we didn't go. There was one free day, I don't remember what it was.

Q: And what did you do?

A: Stayed inside and played some word games, a lot of word games, because we didn't have toys. Lots of word games, string games. We had strings, and so I remember doing this cat's cradle. And jumping games like hopscotch, that kind of thing. But it was a t – it was tight quarters and there were no streets. So it was sort of all invented, and it was more in the center – there was a room in the center of that hut, and we sort of played there. It's hard to say exactly what we did.

Q: And the sleeping conditions were?

A: They – terrible. There was one long bunk and we all slept on this one long bunk, all 14 of us. And this is – to this day I have a thing about that, because it was

so tight that when one person turned, everybody had to turn, because you all had to be sort of lined up like sardines in the same direction. So it was – that was very, very un – bad. And to this day I can't sleep with anybody because it – it's – just the thought of having somebody next to me when I sleep, I can't stand.

Q: Did you have enough blankets?

A: We used – I think we covered ourselves also with our clothes, or coats or jackets and we also slept **clothesed**. We didn't sleep in pajamas, we did sleep **clothesed**.

Q: How did you keep yourself clean?

A: Again, I don't remember, there was th – yes, I do remember. They heated water and they put the – like a basin or a thing made out of wood, actually, and – like you see in very old –

Q: Like a bucket?

A: Oh yeah, exactly. And you washed first the bottom and the top or vice-a-versa, yes, in the kitchen, when it was warm. And it didn't happen certainly, every day. There was no bathroom.

Q: And sanitary facilities, toilet?

A: Outside, outside.

Q: Outside.

A: An outhouse.

Q: An outhouse.

A: An outhouse, or – or you just went anywhere, because it all froze anyway, right away, so there was no problem with that. But it was an outhouse. Very cold going out. No bathroom inside.

Q: Now you had said earlier that you had been, when you were very young, you were raised by a governess. And obviously the conditions had changed in so many ways. And so you were with your mother even more so under these derry – very difficult conditions –

A: Well, there's an interesting story actually. Both our governess and my cousin's governess was deported with us, because they happened to have been with us when they were – they still were with us when – when we got deported. And that was actually interesting, because as soon as we got to **Siberia**, they were working girls, so they thought that they deserved different conditions from us. They were not capitalists. And particularly my – my – our governess apparently was a very si – was a bit of a communist and a socially conscious person, and she – sh – they left. The two gir – the two young women left us, they lived someplace else. One of them I later found out had some sort of a relationship with some local one of the guards or something. And one of them apparently did get married there and stayed there and never left **Russia**. So these were two young girls, and so anyhow, they sort of evaporated after we got there, with some bad feelings, because both my

aunt and my mother thought they weren't very loyal, but they saw this as maybe some sort of an opportunity of not being, you know, employed by these people any more. So I don't think my – my mother could pay. It would have been – if they had stayed it would have been more out of loyalty, and apparently that did not happen.

Q: But my question was, how did this change your relationship with your mother now that it was you and she in close quarters.

A: Very much, very much so. But I think it's a little bit like – like – from what I remember, it was more like in a kibbutz, you know? The chil – everybody was together, so it was not only my mother who told us what to do, but my aunt and my grandmother, I mean ev-everybody was telling the children what to do. My – my mother was – my – the relationship was good, except that she always was very concerned about my brother, who was younger, and who was very – somewhat sickly. And my – my aunt, my two cousins' mother was very, very strict. So I felt sort of very privileged because my mother was not very strict. And – not strict at all, as a matter of fact, she was not a disciplinarian and she – we had it – we had a good relationship. It was only difficult to watch her because she was terribly concerned and nervous about what happened to – to my father, and there was a constant sort of tension. I almost sometimes had the feeling that you know, if th –

it's no use talking about it all the time, that whatever happens, happens, you know. It was oppressive to hear about that all the time. And but otherwise I –

Q: Do you know if – what action she took to try to get information?

A: Yes, she – she was in some way resourceful. What she did was each time there was an opportunity to talk to one of the Russian guards, which was at work, and this she told us in the evening about, or when she got her ration cards, or when she – whenever there was some contact, she would ask. Of course, these people were minor. Today I see how minor they were. These were minor guards and they had no idea what happened, you know, 3,000 kilometers back east, to my father. So it was sort of useless. I thought even at eight that she's being a terrible nuisance to them. But she did do that all the time. And as a matter of fact, she – she was once called, I don't know why, she was called either because of work, or because of some ration cards, or because of some permits to go to the city, I don't know, she was called to the encava – the office, and she went there, and as usual she com – told them that – about my father, and she tried to evoke some pity in them. And there was a large age difference between my parents and so she said he – you know that she – first of all she didn't want to say that he owned the bank, because that – you know. So she – but she said that he's older and that he is sickly and that she's terribly worried about him and so on. And then this official asked her, what did he do? So she said well, he was a bank clerk. So he said, so what are you so

upset about? You are young and you are beautiful and you'll – we have lots of bank clerks in **Russia** and you'll find a young one that he won't be sick. So don't be so upset. So she came home and told that story in very – it was very funny the way she told it. And so I know that she was constantly doing that. It didn't help terribly much, but she was doing it.

Q: Were there any particular sights or smells in that time that stayed with you?

A: Snow. Lots and lots of snow. No smells, no sights, we didn't go anywhere, it was just the snow in hut and the little narrow walkway to the school and from the school, and that's all I remember from that. And the schoolroom was pleasant and warm, that I remember, that it was pleasant and warm.

Q: And this routine went on for how long?

A: This routine went on until about April. It started in September, October, soon as we got –

Q: April 1941?

A: April 1941, right. And in April she was – my mother was summoned by them, and told that if she wanted to, she could leave, she could go back to **Poland** with the two children. And of course, she couldn't believe her ears, I mean, sh-she couldn't believe that they were saying that, and she thought it was some sort of a – of a plan to trick her to – to – she just couldn't believe it, no one had been set free. And so she said she just listened to them, and then she said, how will I go back, I

don't – you know, I don't have money to buy a ticket, I don't – you know, how do I go – so they said, why don't you ask your brother to send you money to get a – to buy the ticket for the transiber – she had to buy a ticket for the **Trans-Siberia** railroad, which went from **Vladivostok** all the way down – back to – to **Moscow**. But – and then we still were a day, or many hours by horse and buggy away from that last station. But anyway, so she said she was afraid that they were trying to trick her into saying that my uncle had the money to buy it. So she didn't – so she said, I don't know – he doesn't have that kind of money to buy the ticket. So he s – so this guard said to her, okay, so if he doesn't send you a ticket, then you won't go back. So at that point she thought maybe she was overplaying her cards here, so she said, okay, she'll write to him and he'll make a collection among his friends. And at that point the guard apparently got upset and said, in **Russia** we don't make collections. His honor was hurt. So she said, well, I'll write to him and see whatever he wants to do. And she got out of that one, and actually when she did write that they said that – that we could leave, but she needed the money for the passage and so on, he thought also that it was some sort of a trick. And he asked her for her password. He asked her the name of a cousin that they had actually here in **America**, who had left **Poland** in the early 20s, or whatever, her first name. And when she gave that – when she wrote it back, he did send the money. And at that point, she went with the money and she was told that we could leave,

and we left in May. We – we went to the train, just my brother and – and she – and my mother and I, and we went to – to – they provided us with transportation from where we were, to the end station. And I remember that trip very clearly because we had to wait overnight in – at this train station, which also was not very pleasant, it was very cold.

Q: What were – two questions, what were your thoughts about leaving? What was your reaction when your mother told you that you would be leaving?

A: I was very, very excited, and I didn't know – I had the same feeling she had, that we were afraid, because everybody, her parents and my aunt and the rest of the family said, who knows where they're taking you? Who knows why they're singling you out? Who knows what they'll do to you? And my mother's answer was, that if they wanted – and which was very clever, if they wanted to do something to her, or what – then they didn't have to – to put on this whole act, they could do it right here, they could just take her away and do it. So they didn't have to have this whole production. Therefore, she did trust that this is legitimate, that they want to send us back for some reason that she couldn't figure out. And of course, neither could I. And I remember just that we were ta – you know, people – people in general, other people; there were friends, and people she worked with, and everybody came to say goodbye to us, but there was a lot of, you know, should she go, shouldn't she go there for – for – for weeks, I remember these

discussions, should she go, shouldn't she go. And she decided she wanted to go and you know, and – did I –

Q: Did she say anything about leaving her parents and other relatives?

A: No, she was rather independent and she – I would say no. I think she – she trusted – she loved her brother, so she knew she was going to him. She knew she was going back to **Europe**. She knew, you know, that it was going to be less cold and less miserable, and she wouldn't be loo – so in other words, she knew – she felt that it was going to be better, whatever it is, it's going to be better. And certainly better for us children, particularly for my brother.

Q: Even though she left her parents?

A: Oh yeah. My mother was not – how shall I say? She was not that attached to her family. She had married, lived abroad and it's not that she didn't like them, but she felt that – that this was something that she –

Q: Opportunity she –

A: Yes, absolutely, and she was not the clinging type, no, absolutely not.

Q: Did you say anything special when you said goodbye to your relatives –

A: No.

Q: – do you remember saying anything?

A: No, I don't remember saying anything, no. Just goodbye and should – how should I say? I was glad to be rid of my aunt, I really was. What else? My

grandmother was very quiet, my grandfather – no, I don't remember saying anything, no, mm-mm, no.

Q: What did you all take with you when you left?

A: Whatever we were wearing. We didn't have anything to take with us. By then we had nothing, you know, precious or anything. No, I don't remember – all – all I remember is that she always watched very carefully her – the identity, the papers. The papers were very important, you know, th-the – the – the permits, the various permits that she needed. She did have to go back several times to get all of the permits and the train tickets, and the – all of that I remember, there was constantly talk about, you know, where to keep it and how to keep it to make sure she has it and all that, yeah.

Q: So now you're at the train station.

A: So now we're at the train station and the train arrived. We got on it and we had a compartment, and in the compartment there were two – there were bunk beds, and there was a – this I also don't remember, my brother and I had a bunk downstairs and there was another man in the compartment, who actually was with us the whole time. Whether he slept in that compartment or slept across in another compartment, I don't somehow remember, but I do remember that he used to take me and my brother to the restaurant car and gave us – and bought us hot chocolate. And that to us was such a treat, you see, this is the kind of thing I do remember,

that he sought – and my mother suspected, later on when she used to talk about it, that he was actually planted to sort of take care of us and, you know, planted by them to – to – to be nice to us and also maybe to watch us. Not that we had any place to go, we had no place she could have gone. But he was there for some strange reason, he was there in a way that – that – that we couldn't make out why he was there, and he was there – maybe he was just – maybe it – it wasn't so, maybe he just traveled, and he happened to be a friendly guy, and – so there's na – I don't know. But he sort of stayed around and the whole time – it's a long trip, it's 11 days. So – and then we got to **Moscow**.

Q: Did you ever get off the train?

A: In **Moscow**.

Q: Not – but not in –

A: Sometimes on the platform we would just get off, because the – the –

Q: Stretch.

A: – yes, th-th – because – the train was enormously comfortable. The beds were made with linens, I mean, this was super luxury for us, super luxury. We got very good food, decent food on the train and always hot water, what they called **kipyatok**. And then he would get us the hot chocolate. It was not bad, it was, by our standards this was top luxury. And when we got to **Moscow** we had to interrupt the trip and I don't know if we had to wait for another train, but I know

where – we had a few hours and he took us sightseeing. So he was, you know, he took us – he – he had a horse and buggy. And in **Kiev**, because we passed through **Kiev** also, and in **Kiev** – he was gone already, but we went – you know, he left in **Moscow**, he didn't continue with us. In **Kiev** my mother hired a horse and buggy, and we went around and she – she was very excited about being in **Kiev**, and she knew a lot about **Kiev**, and she was trying to show us the city, city is quite nice, by the way. And – well, my only memory from there is that as we were riding, they – my brother noticed a broken egg on the street, and he started yelling, an egg, an egg. And this egg sticks in my mind to this day. To him the whole city wasn't important, but that somebody could have dropped an actual egg and wasted it, was like, you know – so I remember that ride in **Kiev**. What I remember most vividly is arriving in – in **Lwów**, because when we arrived in **Lwów** my uncle was waiting on the platform, and that I remember as being an enormously emotional reunion, but really, I mean she was very, very excited and very happy, and I was too, I mean, you know, here we were, we had arrived and everything was all right, and so on. And I also remember that he helped us with the little bit of luggage we had. And he had a man with him, somebody who helped him, who I later found out was like his, kind of manservant, who did lots of things for him also, in connection with packing, antiques, and delivering things and so on. So he wasn't like a house servant, he was more like a helper. So he helped with the luggage. And we got i-

into a taxi, we actually got into a car, and while we were going to – to, I imagine where he lived, because we were supposed to go to his, I guess to hi – he was taking us to his house. While we were going there, my mother asked whether he had heard something about my father, was the usual thing. And he said, as a matter of fact he had. And he said – and so mother started saying, is he all right, is he all right? And he said yes, actually, he's all right, he's well. And the whole ride was not very long, must have been – I've been back there since, it's a short distance, must have been five or 10 minute ride. During those 10 minutes he prepared her that my father was actually there. And when we got to the building, there was my father standing and she fainted. My mother fainted, they had to carry her out, she screamed. And that I remember very vividly, I remember that was very moving and very, you know, I mean so unexpected. And I hadn't seen my father in over a year and a half or whatever it was, and it – and that was very exciting. And then we went upstairs and they talked and talked and talked and talked. And that was it.

[break]

Q: We were talking about your arrival in **Lwów** and your – you and your mother and your brother seeing your father for the first time.

A: Right. And – and the reason he didn't come to the railroad station was because – my uncle and he had decided that it was very important to prepare her slowly, but since the distance from the railroad station to his house was very short, so even

the slow preparation was not really slow enough, and the impact was enormous and she fainted and carried on, and so on. And then we went upstairs and I re – I just remember that they talked and talked and talked and talked. And that was – that was it. And then we found out that my father had – well, he had his own set of, you know, what he went through, but the reason we were set free was because they – a relative here in **New York** had bought in **Switzerland**, or gotten in **Switzerland**, Bolivian passports which were actually – they were almost genuine, they were not completely false. They were issued by the consulate – the Bolivian consulate in **Zurich**, which – they were not issued by the government of **Bolivia**. They had booklets and they had stamps and the consuls very often did it for their own gain. And so – but they were more legitimate than the ones who were later prod – you know, manufactured right – right then in **Poland** and wherever. So, anyhow, he had gotten the – these Bolivian passports, and my father, while he was in jail, and he ha – was moved during the 18 months he was in jail, he was moved to 11 different jails. They move people constantly. And the interrogations started from – from the beginning in each particular jail. My father never knew whether it was because they didn't have records, or whether it was a purposeful thing to exhaust people. Interrogations were always at night he told us, and the first few jails he was treated terribly, and he really suffered hunger. And later – and he, on the other hand, did something different which worked out well. He convinced

them that he was actually more important than he was. He tried – he did not play the **[indecipherable]** because he thought that it wouldn't work anyway. He was a very imposing, good-looking, tall man, and he spoke five languages fluently, was educated in **Germany**. And so he was a personality. And he was afraid that if he tried to tell them that – who he wasn't, they would find out who he was, and then that would be worse. So he sort of even – he told them who he was, and he told them that he had very good connections abroad. He did do some dealings with **Lehman** Brothers here in **America**, he had some dealings with **Bernard Baruch**, he did do that. Probably not as much as he told them, but – and they felt maybe that it was worth saving him and sending him abroad. And so when he – they told my father that if he wanted to contact his – his relatives and ask them to help him by sending in foreign papers, they would release him, and that's what happened. But we didn't know anything about that in **Siberia**, so when these passports arrived, they notif – they called my father one – by then he was in **La Lubyanka**. At the end, the last three or four months he was at **La Lubyanka**. By the way, it's a very luxurious prison. He had a beautiful room he told us, with Persian rugs, and they treated him like a king. Wonderful food, he went out for a walk every day. Those were the people – you never knew in **Russia** what was going to happen – those were the people that they subsequently probably released. Anyhow, to make a long story short, he said that they notified him one day that the passports had

arrived, and he would be able to leave whenever he felt like it. And at that point, he said he wasn't going to leave until he found out what happened to us. Took them three months to locate us. And three months later, I forgot to say, the first time they called my mother, they asked her to give them a picture of herself and the two children, and they didn't say why. And that picture took them a long time to send it from **Siberia** to **Moscow**, and it actually came to the **Lubyanka** and the – the inspector showed it to my father and said, is this your wife? We found her, we know now where she is. And that's when they told us to go back, or sent us back. So there was some rhyme and reason to it, and that's when – and – and they released him, or he left on hi – of his own free will. He was – when – when they told him that we got on the train. So that's how we were reunited, and we had now these Bolivian passports. And we were supposed to leave on the 24th of June, 1941, and we were supposed to go all the way east again, via **Japan** to leave **Russia**, and to go to, presumably **Bolivia** at some point. But the 22nd of June, **Germany** invaded **Russia**, and so we never made it. We had everything, we – we had the train tickets, we were packed, we had everything. So that was a very bad break for us because we – the da – the Russians evacuated very efficiently. I mean, they – they left, and they didn't take anyone with them. We tried to ask them to take us with them, but there was no way, they weren't going to take any civilians at all, and they didn't. And so we – we stayed in – in **Lwów**. And I remember we

were in the cellar at night, because they were shooting and bombing. Not bombing so much, but shooting. There was a war. And during the night, I remember there was this marching at night, this very, very strong marching, and my mother said, the Russians are gone, these are the Germans, and I remember say – sort of – I always thought that she knew too much before anyone else did, she – and sometimes she was wrong, but very – most of the time she was right. And I said, how do you know? And she said, because they march differently. And sure was she right, they marched differently. And in the morning, there they were. And so that was the hard – that was hard, because we were lucky in the way that we had the Bolivian passports, so we did not – we were not in the ghetto. The ghetto in **Lwów** was established very, very quickly, because they already had experience from **Kraków** and **Warsaw** and all that, so they – in **Lwów** it went very, very quickly. And we couldn't go out, because they were rounding up children in the street, they were rounding up people, they were rounding – you know, and they had these **ràtzias** as they called them, they rounded up people, so my parents didn't – th-th-they were afraid to let us out in the street because – or themselves, for that matter, because they knew that these Bolivian passports – you know, they – they were safe – th-there was talk that the – we would be exchanged for prisoners. As you know, these talks went on and on and some people were sent, and actually – I don't know if anyone was actually exchanged, but some people

were deported and told that they would be held, and would be exchanged. These foreigners. Some people really had real foreign passports because the husband was – had left **Poland** before and sent the passport, was living already in – in one of the South American countries, and so on, and the wife was supposed to follow. And so there were some real legitimate ones. Ours were not a hundred percent legitimate, but that didn't make that much difference.

Q: What was it like for you to see a German soldier?

A: Scary. Very, very scary, because they looked superhuman, they looked like gods, and I – I often had the – the feeling that maybe if we would look like they did, or be dressed like they did, and have these shiny boots that they had, then maybe we – they wouldn't hate us so much. In other words, I remember strongly feeling that they were superior. I believed they were superior at that time, they did – they – they – they look mighty and – and superhuman. So I – I was just afraid of them, but not – but at the same time I thought they were great, you know, they were the – they were – they were awesome, that's what they were. I remember reading one of **Elie Wiesel's** early books, and – where he talks about the same – that he had sometimes the same sort of feeling, that if he looked – you know, if he could look like them, they wouldn't hate us so much. So apparently children did have that kind of fantasy. So I do remember that. I remember being very afraid. I remember – you asked me about relationships and so on, I remember my parents

at that point fighting all the time. A lot of tension, a lot of fighting, because the fights were always about what to do and what not to do. And my mother – my father was a very law abiding sort of straight kind of person, and he thought if he lay low with his Bolivian passports, things would blow over. If he followed whatever directions, or whatever ordinances they passed, and so on, then he would be all right, because you don't – you don't do anything to somebody who's a law abiding citizen. My mother had totally different ideas. My mother felt that we would never survive if we just stayed there, and we have to do something, and there was this constant fighting about who was going to be guilty of us being killed and who wasn't, and who – you know, this was **[indecipherable]** this was, and it was really constant. So I remember th-that part of it. After a few – after – we were a year with the Germans in – in **Lwów**, but after the first two or three months, my parents too – sent my brother and me to the country, because by coincidence, the chauffeur that they employed before the war, his wife's family came from that part of – of **Poland**, and they had – they were farmers, they had a farm, they were peasants. And so he was able to find that out, he – or I guess my father did, and they paid them, and then my brother and I stayed there for about two or three months –

Q: Was it hard –

A: – or four months.

Q: – hard for you to leave –

A: No –

Q: – your mother?

A: – no, I was so happy to leave, because it was safe, you know, it was quiet. And it was – it felt safe, and –

Q: But even leaving your mother, wasn't it hard at that young age?

A: No, no I don't think it was hard, because I don't remember it as being hard, I remember thinking that – that this was going to be quiet and safe, and that – and they also told us that it would be – we were a burden. They – they made it very clear to us that we were a burden, because we – ye – they could hide with grown-ups, they – subsequently they were hidden by a German officer in his office. And wi – they couldn't do that sort of thing with us children around, so we knew that we had – that we were a kind of burden, and we had to be taken care of somewhere else. So, I know it wasn't bad, and these people were nice to us.

Q: The two or three months you were in **Lwów**, before you went to the country, what did you do?

A: Nothing. We stayed home, we never went out, we just – nothing. And there my mother was very good at creating paper games, pencil and paper games, and that – nothing. We couldn't go out, you did nothing. You – you went crazy. Particularly my brother went crazy, because he was a little boy and he was lively. I see now,

for instance, my grandchildren, if they have no program on a – you know, then what – th-the – programs for this and programs for that and so on. Nothing, there was nothing. You didn't do anything. You just – you just stayed around and listened to what the grown-ups were talking about, and it wasn't very cheerful, either. No, that was hard. You didn't go to school, you did nothing, you did absolutely nothing. One memory, vivid memory I actually have from – actually this happened before the Germans came, because they – we were there for two or three months before, and I had very, very bad teeth. I suppose because of the result of this year in **Russia** and I needed fillings, and those were my permanent teeth, and they were – had enormous cavities in them, and I – oh, knitting. My mother taught me how to knit and how to darn, and I did a lot of that because that was something to do all day long. So I had this knitting needle, and I could put it right through my front teeth, they were s – and I was supposed to go to the dentist, they had no – and you know, there were dentists **[indecipherable]** anyhow, they had no Novocain. So, to do that, they had to strap me to the table and – to the chair, which was, to this day when I go to a dentist, I have a terrible time. But anyway – and my parents were having one of their fights about what to do. And I remember staying – staying in my – I had like a little alcove where my bed was, and it was early in the morning, and I was supposed to go to the dentist that day, and I remember say-saying to myself whether I should volunteer and say if they stopped fighting, then

I would go without crying and objecting, and I never made it. I was so afraid of this dentist and the strap and the pain, that I didn't make it. I let them fight on, because I couldn't bring myself to do that, to make that supreme sacrifice. Anyway, aft – so then we went out and we were in the country. There I remember digging potatoes, which was great fun, by the way. And then they made fires, and they roasted the potatoes. I remember Christmas there, where we baked a – there we had something to do. That was, you see, the difference. I didn't – we didn't go out, because they didn't want us to see the other farmers, and we didn't go to church, and we didn't – because they all went to church on Sunday, but we didn't, we were actually hidden. So we only stayed on – in the field near to their house. And I remember the animals, I remember milking cows, I remember drinking milk straight from the cow. I remember feeding them, I remember the digging of potatoes. So that was actually not – it was a peaceful kind of interlude, so to speak. And –

Q: Did you have any contact with your parents?

A: Very little. He would go into the –

Q: How?

A: – yeah h – my parents would write little notes, you know, letters, and I would also write letters, I knew how to write. And he would go into the city and take the

letters, and then they would write. Yes, we did have contact, but not spoken, written yeah.

Q: Who made up –

A: And then –

Q: – the farmer's family?

A: It was he and his wife and a daughter. There were just three of them. The daughter was actually a very pretty girl, and I remember she had – she would sit in front of the mirror and make – she must have been about 18 or 19 or whatever, and make the hairdo like they did at that time, three sort of –

Q: Rolls, curls? Okay.

A: – round rolls this way, and then you pinned it with a pin. And then – and I – I remember thinking when I grow up, that's exactly the hairdo I'm going to have, I was so jealous of her. And –

Q: Did they know exactly who you were –

A: Yes.

Q: – that you were two Jewish children?

A: Yes, yes. They got paid for it. Yes. Oh, they were paid, absolutely. But they were kind, I mean, you know, they were kind. They were – they were human, they were – they treated us like – like they would any other relative children –

Q: Did they try any kind of converting on –

A: No, no, no. But we had – we sort of fit in, you know, when they were decorating the tree, we were decorating the tree. When they were baking cookies, we were baking cookies. But I know that we never went to church there, because they didn't want us to be all over the place, and people asking too many questions, but when somebody did come, like one of the neighbors or something, they said there were city – you know, children of some – somebody who worked in the city, a relative, and didn't want the children there; things were hard in the city. Don't forget that things were harder in cities always than in the country, there was a shortage of food by then, and all. But we were – we didn't have too much contact. But they were nice to us, they didn't mistreat us in any way at all. And then one day he came back from the city, and he told us that he has – that we are going to go to – that my parents are going to go to **Hungary**. And that they would take us – he took us by horse and buggy, or by car, I don't even remember, but I took us to an estate that was owned, or lived in by a German. And this German was supposed to help us get to the border. Some – a German helped us, that's how – my – and I'll tell you how that connection came. He had a relationship with a Polish woman who was a friend of somebody that my uncle knew. So she hel – she helped several Polish and Jewish people through her relationship with him. And again, it was paid as well, but that was the connection. So what they did with us, they brought my brother and me there, we spend one night there. And –

Q: The farmer brought you?

A: Yes, and they –

Q: What was the farmer's name, do you remember?

A: **Boushlevich**(ph) yes, I remember his last name because everybody called him **Boushlevich**(ph). I don't remember his first name. **Boushlevich**(ph). And then he – he brought us there, he left us there, and we were there a few days before my parents arrived. And I know it was August, because it was over my birthday. And he showed up, this German, I'll never forget that, and he asked me what I like best to eat. And I had a thing about tomatoes, I loved tomatoes. And on my birthday – he asked me when is my birthday, it so happened was in a few days, he brought me four tomatoes. I'll never forget that. This was this German. And then –

Q: His name?

A: No, don't remember, I was only there a few – I don't even know her name, but I understand that she was killed right after the war because she was considered a collaborator. These people didn't live very long, so – but anyway, she – and so my par – and my parents were hidden in his office behind a wardrobe at the end, it was really – they couldn't leave his office, they were like behind a big wardrobe, a partition or something. I wasn't there, so I don't know, but my – but that's what they told me. And you see, and that's why it was important to get us out of the way, because you couldn't hide us together like that. And then – then my par –

you see, my parents at some point realized that they would never survive, or that they would be deported with the Bolivian passport, that the Bolivian passports would not save them from deportations. And you see, there, there was a big difference of opinion between my parents, because my father believed that we would be exchanged, and my mother said no way, this is all – you know, they'll never exchange anybody for anybody. And they'll just take us like everybody else, and kill us. So the – in the end they made the decision that we would go illegally across the border to **Hungary**. And – which was a very risky business, but apparently they came to the conclusion that it would be less risky than staying with these Bolivian passports in **Lwów**. My uncle had gone before. He went before because he was – he didn't have any foreign passport, and he was what they dec – what they designated as a necessary Jew, because he helped – just like he helped the Russians to identify what they were robbing, he then did the same for the Germans, because they were – they were robbing things, and they had these warehouses where they stored them, and they had to decide what to take to **Germany**, what to send to **Germany**, what not to send to **Germany**, what to steal, what not to steal for themselves, and so on, so they needed experts to tell them what's good and what isn't, you know, like in every other area, you know, what is a good painting, what is a good carpet, what is good china, what is good silver, what is – and so on. So my uncle got, since he had that kind of job with the

Russians, he stayed on and they took over this warehouse, and so he stayed with them. And he became – my uncle was a very charismatic person and became very friendly with the guy who ran this warehouse. And so first he had like a certificate as a **notwendig Jude**, you know one of these Jews who were necessary for the German Reich. And then he was arrested twice and badly beaten and both times this German was able to get him out on the – saying that he was a necessary person. But my uncle realized that this is not going to work a third time, besides he suffered terribly, was terribly beaten. And so he decided to – to take – to run – to escape to **Hungary**, and then we followed. And I remember that crossing of the border, because that was a terrible experience, because you see, they kept saying, my parents kept saying – I guess they – they knew about it and they didn't try to hide it. Many of these guys, they were paid and then they took people directly to the nearest police outpost. And there was no way you could pretend, I remember being totally, totally defenseless against that, because you were in a forest, and you had to cross – you didn't cross on a road, you crossed like on trails. And you had to cross a river, there's a river on the border of **Germany** – of **Poland** and **Hungary**. So – and they were the guides, they – they were local people who knew how to – how to get there. And – but if they turned left or right or straight, and – and took you somewhere else, there was no way you could have prevented it, or – or even know. And that's what happened to many people. So I knew about that,

and I – I don't know how I knew about it, because probably my parents talked about it and – and I remember being terribly afraid that they would deliver us. So – but we didn't – they were – they didn't, and – or he didn't, was one guy. And what I remember about that is that when we were crossing the river, there was a strong sort of current, and there were like big rocks and it was slippery, and my father fell, or slipped and lost his glasses. And that was a major problem, and he got terribly upset because he couldn't see without his glasses, he was very **nearsight**. And so I went next to him, or I sort of went back and I started looking for the glasses and I found them, they were caught behind the – and he talked about this as long as he lived, about these – that I found his glasses and that saved whatever it saved. But the effect of all of this was that we arrived in **Hungary** near **Munkács**, and we – **Munkács** was the nearest metropolis. And we arrived in the morning early, and we were – my father was wet, and he was in a suit, and he was wet from the river. And it wasn't so much that it was uncomfortable, it was in August, so it wasn't cold, but as – as they said late – it was dangerous, you know? Why would these people be dressed like that and wet and no place to go, in the park. We went to a park, because that was the – the most logical place to be. And what my father – what my parents with great bitterness recalled for years and years was that – see, **Hungary** had not been occupied yet, and the Hungarian Jews in **Munkács** – **Munkács** was a very Jewish place, they were living there a normal

life, and my parents told – you know, approached a couple of people, my father did, and told them of – you know, that we had just escaped from **Poland** and would they help us. And nobody wanted to help us. Nobody. And it wasn't even – that's what my parent were so bitter about, because it was – later on, you understood if somebody didn't help you, or the Poles, for that matter, if they didn't help you during the occupation, because they would be severely punished. But at that point in **Hungary** there was no real danger yet of being severely punished, and yet they wanted no part. And we later – I read about it later a little, I think they thought if they had nothing to do wi-with us, then the evil, and all this problem that's coming from the east, somehow wouldn't come to them. You know, but my parents were very bitter about it, I don't know enough about it. But finally somebody did take us in, and I remember that it was on the outskirts, and it was a – was not a Jewish family, some – some woman in the square told us to follow her, and she took us, and she had a barn. And she told us we could stay in that barn. So we dried out in the barn, and she brought us some food. And in the meantime, my father had some sort of a meeting point with – because my uncle went ahead, and my uncle was supposed to arrange for Christian papers with a fake name for us. You see, we couldn't show up as the same people with the same passports in – in **Poland –** in **Hungary**. You see, we had to then reinvent, and I – ourselves and the new identity. So th-the idea was that in **Hungary** we would be

as Polish Christians, which – of whom there were many because there were some deserters from before the war, from the beginning of the war. And there was a colony of Polish people there. So these papers came to **Munkács**, and my father got them someplace, and they came with a man with a car, who my uncle arranged would take us to **Budapest** already with those papers. And those papers, that I ha – remember one of the most frightening moments of my war was that my mother told us that from now on my name, or – for me, and my brother too, my name was, since I was always called **Ria**(ph), that my name was **Maria**, and the last name was **Wolinsky**(ph). Our name before the war was **Wohl**. So the simplest thing, they dropped the **H** and made it into a very nice Polish name, which was **Wolinsky**(ph), so my name was **Maria Wolinsky**(ph), or **Wolinska**(ph) for that matter. And my brother was **Stefan** always, so there was no problem, was **Stefan Wolinsky**(ph) and my father was **Athol**(ph) and my mother was **Gisele**. But, when we were – you see, the – **Munkács** in that area was still the border, it was the border strip what they called, and then there was a post, a police post that you had to pass. And there they stopped all the cars and looked and – and you had to identify yourself, or whatever, identification. And at that point, when they stopped us, my mind went blank. I suddenly could not remember whether our name now was **Wolinsky**(ph) or **Wolsky**(ph), which are very similar. And I was – and how I didn't die of a heart attack, although children don't usually, but I was trembling

and I was petrified. And this guard spoke to the driver, of course and the driver – they spoke Hungarian, we couldn't understand a word. And they – he told them that we were some relatives or something. I mean, it never came to us – to our having – it was all bribe – the – to identify ourselves, but I thought that it might, and I was sure that they would ask me my name, this was very important at that point, and I was very scared. And as soon as we started moving again, I said to my mother, I forgot what our name is. And she – and I was – you know, I – I saw myself also as being the – the one who caused everyone to be whatever – so, killed or – or whatever. So my mother said then, don't worry, she said, if you – if they had asked you for your name, we would have been lost anyway, no matter what they would have s – what they would have – what you would have said. So – but it was just, to show you how these things were. So then we came to **Budapest** and in **Budapest** we stayed in a **pensionne**. And we could not stay in the city, it was sort of in the outskirts of the city, but life was good. You had plenty of food, we had comfortable rooms. Apparently life was enormously cheap in **Hungary** at that time. And my father went to the city quite often, I remember, came back and then once he was – you see, the – the – the Hungarians were allies of the Germans. Gonna stop it.

End of Tape Two

Interview with Riane Gruss
January 5, 1996

Beginning Tape Three

Q: This is tape three, side one, and you are now in **Hungary**.

A: Right, and we have just arrived, and we were actually sort of waiting. We stayed in this **pensionne**. My father would go into **Budapest**, it was a train ride, a short train ride. He would meet my uncle, he would meet other people. The main business of the day was some trading. You had to get some money. At that point my mother sold some jewelry, particularly one diamond pin about which she talked a lot because she said the things in – in **Hungary** were so inexpensive that we lived on that pin for one year. **[indecipherable]**

Q: This is a pin she had kept with her –

A: Yes –

Q: – all the time –

A: – yes, she had it –

Q: – even to **Siberia**?

A: – she had jewelry – yes, yes, she kept a few things and she had it with her. And she sold that. And they were also trading in stones. There was a big trade going on in diamonds, in foreign currencies; dollars, English pounds, and people were trading, the Jews and the non-Jews, th-th-the Gentile refugees. There was a business going on and people were trading and that's how people made some money, and that's what people lived on. Because at that point, none of us were

really in hiding. We did – my father did get held up or arrested at one point, because they were checking the legitimacy of his being there. So he had false papers, we had to have a permit to be – a residency permit, which we sort of got, but I know that he was in **Budapest**, he wasn't supposed to be there. Anyhow, he got caught, and then they came and got us, th-the – the – this is all now Hungarian police. And, because he told them where that they – they asked where we are, you know, and they knew he had family, or that he told them he had family, I don't know, I wasn't there. But they did come and they arrested us. And we were put into a – they had like a detention camp, it was not a real prison, but it was like a detention camp in the center of **Budapest**. And the danger there was that they would send us back to **Poland**.

Q: What were you – what were your thoughts when you got arrested?

A: Scared. We were scared because we were afraid that they would send us back to **Poland**. I knew better than anybody else, or certainly better than they that our papers were fake, our permits were fake, and if they caught on to that, they did send – you see, they were allies of the – of the Germans. They were not occupied, but they were allies, and if they found that somebody was really Jewish, and was pretending to be Polish, and had no legitimate papers to be there, they did send some people back. And that was the danger. It wasn't so much that the prison itself was so terrible. It was not very comfortable. They separated women from

men. All I remember is that there was a courtyard in the center of it, that's actually one of the nicer stories, with a huge tree. And the – the – my – my father, when we lived in this **pensionne**, we were not far from a forest, and my brother found, one day when we went for a walk, he found a baby squirrel that must have fallen out from the nest or whatever, and we took it home. And this baby squirrel, we had had him now maybe for a couple of months when – when we got arrested. And he was tame, he was – he would sit in people's pockets. He was quite destructive actually, he would chew things up. But of course, my brother absolutely adored this squirrel, and to this day he loves squirrels, and I do too. And when my father – when they arrested us, my – they did go back with my father a day or two later, and – to pick up some things, you know, the necessities, and so they – they went back with my father and he was supposed to pick up some things for us. And at that point the squirrel apparently recognized him and came to him and jumped into his pocket as he always did. And there he was, and this policeman had never seen a squirrel like that. And so he s – you know, the squirrel came back to prison, and he was there. And when we got – when he got there, we didn't know what to do with him, cause you couldn't keep him in the pocket all the time. So we let him go in the courtyard, and he went up and down that tree. He became like – everybody loved him. And luckily, we were released a few days later and the squirrel went home with us. But one of the other sort of more humorous thing – they – they

examined our papers and decided it was okay. But one of the more humorous things from that was that when they interrogated you, you had these false papers, but you had to have – you know, they could ask you what was your mother's maiden name, what was your grandmother's maiden name, and so on. So people of course, and we weren't the only ones who were in that situation, didn't have all that information, nor did they – so they invented these names, and my mother used to tol – told a very funny story of this woman who was interro – who was asked, you know, interrogated, and when she was asked, she would look around and pick an object, and say, you know, **tay-tabloska**(ph), you know, and just add the Polish ending to it, you'd look around. So that's how things were, you know, and – and you either got away with it, or you didn't get away with it, depended. But anyway, so then we were there for another – must have been there about 10 days, and then they released it.

Q: Were you ever questioned?

A: No, no –

Q: Wa – you were never questioned.

A: – no, no. I memorized what my mother told us to memorize, we didn't invent some sort of maiden names for my grandmother and so on. And no, I was not mem – we also were taught very carefully by my mother, who knew those things, because she had been educated in Catholic schools, we were taught the basic

prayers, you know, th-the Holy Mary, the – and Father, who are in heaven, the – the **Pater Noster**, because as Christian children we obviously had to know these main things. So those things we knew backwards and forwards in – in Polish, quite, quite well. We were not questioned about that. So then they released us and we went back to this place, but they told us that we couldn't stay there, because it was too close to **Budapest**. And they had, at that time they had some rules about Polish refugees in general. This was not directed against Jews. They did not want large concentrations of foreign refugees in **Budapest**, say they wanted them outside of **Budapest** in smaller villages and ar – and so on, areas. So at that point – by the way, the squirrel, after he came back about a week later, he grew, he became – a-and he left, he ran away. Probably went back to the forest, once he was no longer a baby, he was gone. And my brother was very upset when he – but – but he came back from prison, then he left. And then we – so then we had to move, and we moved to an area that was – that they told us they – that we should be in, and it was not far from **Budapest**, about an hour by train in **Leányfalu**, and that was sort of a concentration of Polish refugees. We rented a villa. We could do that, we did – you know, within the circumference of where they wanted to – we could live the way we wanted to live. The only problem with that was that we were surrounded by Poles, and many of them not Jews. Some were Jews like us and some were not. More were not. And there the theater started. You really had to

know how to pretend not to be Jewish. And these Polish people, they knew. I mean, this was – this was all a – a theater. So there – first of all, we had a fairly normal life in the sense that we were not hiding, so my mother decided to see if she could find somebody to take care of my brother and of me, and teach us something. I mean, you – we had never been to school again. And they – we were driving them also crazy. So we – they took a – they found a lady who had been a teacher before the war, and she was the wife of a – of a – she was Polish, not Jewish, and she was the wife, a young wife of a Polish deserter. Most of these Poles were actually somehow families of deserters. You know, they deserted in 1939 from this army that was falling apart. And he was a tenor at the – at the opera in **Poznan** a Polish singer, and she was a teacher. And she was just as happy to work for us because she was paid, of course. And she would come in the morning and she would take care of us all day long. And I – that was a – very nice, because she would take us on picnics. She did find some Polish books. She made up a schedule, you know, we read, and then she had dictation, and then she had arithmetic, and then she had lunch and – and we were with her all day long, and she invented – she even – we even staged a little – I think one of the pictures that – that I showed you that you took was a staging of a Polish song in honor of my uncle's birthday and so on.

Q: Now, your uncle was with you at this time?

A: No, he did – yes, he was in **Hungary**, and he was in **Budapest**, but he did not go with us –

Q: He did not come with you –

A: No, he did not live with us –

Q: – to the village.

A: – in this bucolic – no, he – when he had some Polish friends, he stayed with them, he – he had to also sort of do some wheeling and dealing, because he had to earn some sort of living. My father has – was more fortunate, my father had more money, my father had my mother's jewelry, he had – he had some connections where he could get some money, he got some money from **Switzerland** that point as well. So he was different, but my – my uncle really lived by trading, you know, he would buy antiques, sell antiques, make a commission. Buy and sell, that's what – and – and – and that's what he did, and he was a young, single person, I mean, his family was in **Siberia**, he had no contact at that point, he had no idea whether they lived or died. Chances were they all lived, by the way. We did know that the people in – in **Siberia**, unless they died of disease, that they were not killed. That much one did know. So – so we went –

Q: **[indecipherable]** had no – no contact?

A: No contact, none whatsoever, except that rumor had it that they did not kill people –

Q: Yeah.

A: – unlike the Germans, who did kill people. Then we lived – so there we lived for a while very nicely, until the day that the Germans marched in. When the ger – and we went to church regularly, went to church every Sunday, because you know, that was the **[indecipherable]**

Q: Okay, what was your feeling, going to church –

A: That's a very interesting, I –

Q: – young Jewish girl going to church?

A: Not the feeling that – that Americans have, not the feeling that I find among Jews here, which I very often find very reprehensible. You went – I knew that it was not my religion. I was afraid that I would do things wrong. You had to participate, you had to know when to get up, you had to go – know how to go to communion, you had to say the prayers the right place, you had to – you had to pretend, and you – and – and it had to be real. Another thing that I often – that I know was very highly emphasized to us, and I still feel very strongly about this, is that we had to speak Polish correctly. We were not allowed – my mother would have killed us if we had used a Jewish word, I mean that was a giveaway. So you were sort of brainwashed to speak it, to speak it correctly and speak it without an intonation and so on. Because those were giveaways. So to this day, when – when I hear – hear people mixing, you know, Yiddish and English, I – I can't stand it.

First of all, I don't think it's nice, because every language should be – I have nothing against Yiddish, but by itself, it shouldn't be mixed, you don't mix languages. Now there it was a matter of life and death, so you had to speak Polish correctly, and that was s-something that was another reason why my mother was very anxious to hire somebody to – to – to be with us, though, because children pick up accents, and that we should speak properly. So, we went to church every Sunday. How did I feel? I had one problem with it, and that was a very strange one. That the incense, I hated the smell of it, and I must have just about gotten to the age just before puberty, and I used to get terrible headaches. And – which I suffered from for a while. But I had a feeling at that time that the incense ma – produced them. Any time they start – I always had a headache on Sunday, whether it was the tension and the incense, or what it was – my mother went with us to church, so did my father. My mother knew very well what to do, she was very – had been exposed to it and so on. My father did – you know, what he was told to do. But that was one of the things that did make us nervous. It's not that I was – that I hated it, but it made us nervous. It's like crossing the border, you know. If they discover you're not who you say you are, you're in danger, so it made me nervous, yes.

Q: Did you think about death a lot?

A: Yes, yes. We –

Q: Was it something you were fearful of?

A: Yes, yes, because I knew that each time, like when they arrested us, and they – they'll be another episode later, which was more dangerous, that each time there was the possibility that they would send us back. And if they send you back, then that was death.

Q: And you knew that as a child?

A: Oh, oh **[indecipherable]**

Q: How did you know that?

A: Because everybody talked about it, that the danger was not so much of sitting in this prison in **Budapest**, which was not – they didn't torture you, they didn't beat you, they didn't do terrible things to you. The danger was that they will se – if they discover that you're not who you say you are, they'll send you back. If you – they send you back, you'll go to the border guards, the border guards will hand you over to the Gestapo. And then we knew that that was – that was 95 – 99 percent sure that you will be killed.

Q: Did your mother or father try to soften this for you? Do you know what I mean, to put a layer – to prote – a protective layer?

A: No, no, because this was in the air, everybody talked about it; who had been caught, who had been sent back, why did they send them back, why the papers weren't good enough. This was – this was what people talked about, so this was

something they couldn't really protect us from. They said that our papers were better, maybe, or that if we spoke correctly Polish that we would minimize this, that somebody would denounce us locally. You know, all these things, that's why we would – did all these things, to prevent this from happening. But nobody tried to tell you that if it did happen, that you would survive, no, th-th-that was like a sure death. So that was the scary thing out there all the time. And that's the danger of living on false papers, you know. So we stayed there, and – and w – and we were there until the Germans invaded. When the Germans invaded, that's when things became very dangerous, because a – they came and they made a inspection, and they did it very, very quickly. Everybody had to register with them. They came, they set up a desk in a – in a ha – in a schoolhouse or in a house – I remember it was in a house. And people had to line up –

Q: This is at your village?

A: Yes. People had to line up. They made an announcement, tomorrow morning or whatever, they are going to have an inspection, everybody has to register. Was just a registration, really. But that was dangerous, because they, of course, were looking for Jews, that's what they were looking for. So that was very bad, and at that point, we were doubly afraid; **A**, that they would discover that our papers were not a hundred percent right, and **B**, that somebody would denounce us, because before that, if somebody had denounced us, there was really very little

gain. What, they went to the Hungarians, the Hungarians didn't know who was who, they were not that interested in the whole thing. But here now, we were afraid of that. So the minute that happened, we went through the registration because there was nothing we could do to avoid it, because it happened very quickly.

Q: Did you go down yourself?

A: Yes, I s – went with my mother, yes, I went with my mo – they separated men and women. But one – what was the wonderful thing about it is that my – my – you see, what was dangerous was for my father – it wasn't so much for women, because they did examine men, they – and that was the easiest way to tell who was who. This husband of this teacher whom we had, he – his physique was somewhat similar to my father, he was shorter, but other than that, he was sort of husky, was a big man also, but shorter. And anyhow, he went instead of my father. He went in the morning himself, he got on the end of the line after a couple of hundred people, he went instead of – with my father's papers. And my brother they didn't examine, my brother went, you know, with him as his child and they just, you know. So after that – I'm in touch with her to this day, I just wrote her a letter. They still –

Q: What are – what are their – their names?

A: **Rochinski**(ph), **Rochinski**(ph). Her name was **Helena Rochinska**(ph). His name is – I don't know his first name, but **Rochinski**(ph), you know, you didn't address people by their first name, but I knew her better than him. But I – we saw them now – I mean, now, in 1973 when we were in **Poland**, and **Mike** and I went to visit them. They live in **Poznan**, and to this day I am in touch with her, I write to her, my father's, you know, helped her after the war. I still send her money as well, and so on. So it is one of those wonderful stories. And they are – so then we disappeared. Right after this-this thing, we knew we-we – we couldn't stay, that we – we ran away from there.

Q: When you were standing on line with your mother –

A: Yeah.

Q: – do you have any recollection?

A: Just – just being scared, and being relieved after they, you know, they – they – you went there, they – they looked at your papers and they waived you on. There was no conversation. The minute – as my mother used to say, the minute a conversation starts, things are bad. I mean, you know, there was nothing to talk about if they didn't question your truthfulness, or whatever. So, no, there was no conversation, looked at our paper and waved us on and that was it. Then we went home. And that was another one of those situations where my parents had an enormous fight, because my father felt that now that they have, you know,

registered us and examined us, we could stay. Then my mother said, we can't stay here. Somebody sooner or later will either denounce us or something's – this is no place for us to stay now. And she usually won out, because she made such scenes, my mother could fight, and – and actually my parents got along. And so we left. We left. I mean, what we did was – I don't remember exactly how – we stayed with a fr – my brother and I stayed with a friend of my uncle's, a Christian woman, a Polish lady, in **Budapest**. And my parents stayed with somebody, but I have no idea with whom. And during the next few weeks, two or three or four weeks, whatever that time period was, they made arrangements to – to try to cross the border illegally, to **Romania**. In other words, we tried to do the same thing we did from **Poland** to **Hungary**, now from **Hungary** to **Romania**. **Romania**, things were much easier, as you know. Prior to that, I forgot to mention my – you know, there were transports going, prior to the Germans arriving, there was a way of going to **Palestine** th-that was – there was some sort of effort made, and my uncle tried to get on one of those transports, because he had been a Zionist before the war, which my father was not, and he knew Hebrew, and he rated whatever, you know, an affidavit, or whatever they needed at the time, to prove that they were worthy of going to **Palestine**. And he, I don't know how he did it, but he got this fake – I showed you that picture, I think – he got this fake permit for a wife and a child, and my mother was supposed to go as his wife, and **Stefan**, my brother was

supposed to go as their child. But that never materialized. That's why there is this funny photo, passport photo of my uncle, my mother and – and my brother. That never materialized. But then, after the Germans came, and we were hiding for a bit, we tried to go to **Romania**. And the way that happened was we went to **Szeged**, and there there was a line-up. There was a house owned by some people who rented the rooms. You paid them. And that was just renting rooms. But then there was an aristocrat or a landowner who was – whose property was right on the border, and th-the – the way was through his property. And he was a kind of **bon vivant** before the war, or during the beginning of the war, and he had a lot of parties. So he wasn't conspicuous by having 10, 12 people at his estate at any one time. So people – so the first place where you stayed was a – at – in **Szeged**, and then you went at night to his property, and then you stayed there for one day, and there was this pretense of a party. And then at night you crossed the border to **Romania**. And the party before us was caught. Somebody must have announced, and they were all killed, by the way. So he was – they were caught, and somebody – and they came to get us, because somebody – they were tortured, and they gave out the address of where people – they knew that this was like a chain. My uncle, luckily, was not home when they came to arrest us. We were there, he was out on – in town, because he was supposed to go with us that evening, but he went out on

town. He was a – that was one of these strokes of genius. And he – and we were arrested, and they took us to the local jail in **Szeged**.

Q: This was the four of you?

A: Just the four of us, right. They separated my mother and me, and my brother and – and my father were in the men's' jail. Now there I remember it distinctly, because we went in the same cell with two prostitutes. You – this was a local prison, you know, you had these – and it was a miserable little jail, and the conditions were terrible, and there I was sure that we wouldn't survive. I was terrified, because I knew that if they arrested us, and these people there gave our names, that the next thing would be that they – that the police, th-the Hungarian police would hand us over to the Gestapo, there was no – I didn't think there was any other way out of this. And there my mother used to say that I used to cry. I – I remember crying, I remember thinking that I was too young to die. And my mother said that I told her a couple of times that it's easier for her because she already had a life, and I didn't have anything. And she said that was sort of heartbreaking. But I remember being terribly scared in that prison, terribly. Cause there it was the closest we came to being sent back. And we were there for a few days, and we were told by the Hungarian guards, and by these women with whom my mother started being very friendly, that they are – that the Gestapo came to the prison once a week. There was a day when they handed people over. And so the

hope was that somehow, by some miracle, we would get out, I don't know if it was a Monday or a Tuesday, whatever, before that happened. But I s – I didn't see any way out, but it so happened that after – I'll tell you why it happened. I – that the day before there was – we were there six days – the day before they were supposed to come, they released us, and in the custody of a local lawyer, a Hungarian lawyer who was born and bred in **Szeged**. Now the way this was done is very interesting, it shows you how resourceful my uncle was. When my uncle came back and realized we had been taken – by the way, my mother left money and jewelry behind one of the pictures. They had a – they had a – a secret as to how, you know – anyhow **[indecipherable]** he got that, and he went back to **Budapest**, by foot, by hitchhike, I don't even know how, but he did go back, because his papers were not so **[indecipherable]** either. But he was loner man, he was very resourceful. And he went to the Polish committee, there was a Polish committee, which was in charge of Polish refugees in **Hungary**. It was like a – a committee. And he knew a number of people; my uncle was very friendly with a number of non-Jews from before the war. He knew people in – and all the time, he was in touch with them. And he told them what happened to us. And basically, they figured out that the only transgression that we did, for all practical purposes, was that my father was not supposed to be in **Szeged**, because we, as Polish refugees were – we had designated areas where we were supposed to live, and

Szeged was not one of them. So they invented this idea that he went to look for work. And that was a very nice idea, but then they looked for a connection and they found the most prominent lawyer in **Szeged**, paid him off. He paid off the – I mean, this – the – the girl was his regular, you know, where he – where he was well known, and where he had his cronies. So that's how we got out. So we were actually – and this lawyer, also a wonderful man, took us to his house, and you know, really treated us – he was a Hungarian – very well. I mean, he fed us, I remember we took a bath there, everything was –

Q: What were the conditions like in the jail?

A: Terrible, terrible –

Q: Did you go outside?

A: – it was a small cell – no, no. It was a cell where you sat –

Q: So again you were cooped up, again you were

A: Absolutely, and it was with these two – two women who my mother later told me were prostitutes, but these were local girls, and we were just sitting there with these local women, and – and my mother used to tell me stories, because my brother wasn't with us, we didn't see them, they were – you know, they – we saw them maybe once, they – there was a place where – where – there was a corridor where my mother went to see them, I didn't see them. But she used to tell me stories. I once made a speech for the **Heschel**(ph) school. I said that, you know,

children's stories usually start with once upon a time, our stories always started, after the war. And she used to invent – she was a very good story teller in general, and she used to invent these stories about what would happen after the war. But there I – it was almost more than a fairy tale, because there I didn't believe we would get out. That was the only time I really didn't think we would make it.

Q: Did you find that your bond to your mother was getting closer and closer –

A: Yes, yes –

Q: – the more you experienced with her?

A: – yes, yes, yes. I felt that she was the strongest – and I – my strongest bond was to my uncle, cause my uncle was like God. He was the one who arranged things. He arranged our escape from **Poland** –

Q: This is **Joseph Schtiglietz**(ph) –

A: Yes.

Q: – we're talking about.

A: From **Poland** to **Hungary**. He arranged a – first – and he was also very amusing, he was a – he arranged that – our release from prison. He would arrange things, you know, he would bring things for us, he would tell stories, he would – he had all the adventures. I mean, in between he had his own adventures. He used to tell stories how he outwitted different the – he – he – to me he was immortal, indestructible an-and he proved such, I mean, he was a wonderful man. So he, to

me, was God. I worshipped the ground he walked on. And my mother was the next best thing, because she was a little bit like him, but of course she was a woman, and she was tied to my father and my father was ailing also, he was, you know, he was not the – he – he was sick. As a matter of fact, in – I mean, not all the time, but in **Szeged**, right after they released us, he had a gall bladder attack. And he – this Hungarian lawyer arranged for him to go to the hospital and he was very, very sick. At that point, my uncle made some sort of arrangements with somebody to pick us up, my brother and me, and brought us to **Budapest**, by train, I remember. We went to **Budapest** and then he put us up with his friend, he had a lady friend while he was – while he was there he had lots of lady friends.

Q: This is your uncle, yeah.

A: And so we stayed with – with his friend at the time, was a lovely Polish woman, beautiful woman. And she – so she – we lived with her, and then my uncle came and – and you know, he was there in the evenings and all the time, but we basically lived with her. And my parents went to the hospital. Was a convent hospital, and my father was apparently very sick, which I didn't know any more, because we had left. And my mother said that they came ahe – and they actually came for – you know, to give him unction, and these were these priests, and my mother told him how he had to confess, he had to make a last confession. And of course, he didn't have to do it so well, because it was in Hungarian **[break]**

Interview with Riane Gruss
January 5, 1996

Q: You were talking about your father having the gall bladder attack.

A: Right. So he went to the hospital. I understand he was ex – very, very sick. My mother claimed that after he had the last confession and they did do his – the rites and all of that, he started improving. She actually believed –

Q: But he did make a confession?

A: Yes, yes, but he confessed – he was very sick and he was probably, you know, even not quite lucid. I mean, he spoke in Polish and they didn't – these were Hungarian priests, so whatever he mumbled, she sort of improvised half Polish, her Hungarian wasn't so great either, was not the pun – you know, our obligation to know Hungarian. So anyhow, she said the confession went very well, but she always told it as a very amusing story, how he after that started improving. And he – so he was in this hospital for a few weeks, and she was with him. She – you know, they very often let relatives stay in European hospitals, it's still common in **Brazil**, even. But anyway, after that – and we were hidden – not hidden, but living with this woman, hidden in a way, because we couldn't go out. And then later, my uncle placed us with the janitor of a villa which was owned by Jewish antique dealer, who had been a contact of my uncles before the war. It was now occupied by a Dutch – I don't know, official, or somebody who was doing a lot of business with the Germans. And my uncle met him because he knew both the janitor and the previous owner. The previous owner, by the way, survived in one of those

Jewish houses in – in **Budapest**, he was not deported, he did survive. And so my uncle placed us in this villa, it was in **Buda**, right on top of a mountain, near a cemetery, I remember, with this janitor and his wife. So we were there. My parents, when they returned from **Szeged** from the hospital, stayed with some friends or some people they knew in **Budapest**. This was already now getting close to the end, and confusion was rampant. This was already – the Russians were very close.

Q: What we haven't talked about is your relationship with your brother.

A: My brother was a nuisance, throughout the war. My brother was – I always thought – my – my father, you see, my fath – my mother was his second wife, and he was not young. My father was born in 1887, so when my brother was born, he was close to 50. So my father had very little – and he was a very autocratic kind of authoritarian person. He had very little understanding, knowledge or anything about children. Children were supposed to be quiet and obey. And my brother was lively, had nothing to do – I mean we – we had nothing to do, it's very – now I see how difficult it was, but as a result of it, he was a terrible nuisance. He – he – my father was constantly yelling at him, my uncle often used to beat him up, he was beaten very often. He was a terrible nuisance, because he – he couldn't just behave. And I, as a child, or – I was only a year and a half older, I was very mature, and I was very quiet. So I was no problem. My mother taught me how to

darn, my mother taught me how to knit. Later on I knew how to read, so I used to read – not appropriate things, because she – whatever Polish book she had, I could sit there and decipher it, whether I liked the story or not, because that was something to do. I did all kinds of word games and so on. My brother wasn't interested in any of that, and he didn't do any of that. So he really – I don't remember what he did except make a terrible nuisance of himself. So – and I always, whenever they f – they also fought about him, because my mother protected him, my father got angry at him, my mother protected him. So he was a problem, and I always thought that he was the problem, I didn't know, nor did I understand that the circumstances were the problem, and he was just a naturally – a normal child who was in terrible conditions.

Q: Did you talk about the dangers with your brother? Did – did you confide in each other about your fears, and –

A: No, I don't – maybe I did and maybe I didn't, I don't remember. No, I don't remember. I remember playing with him sometimes. I remember taking care of him sometimes when he became impossible. My father would say, you take care of him, and I tried to – to make him be quiet. I don't know – we both were afraid at – as a matter of fact, I told you that I did an oral history in **Brazil** in Portuguese, and I have those tapes, but because of my brother, because he did one over there and they were – they had a program on Jewish refugees a few years ago, and the –

the focus was, what do people take when they're running away, do they take their pictures, do they take jewelry, do they take medals? I mean, depending, different people took different things. But that was the focus, and with that they had a few oral histories. And it is amazing how different his perception was of what happened. How he was afraid – the basic facts are the same, but like he was afraid at different times, he remembers different moments as being the worst or the best, and – from me. And we were only a year and a half apart, so – but I do know that he was a problem. He was a problem because he – he had – he was a problem; made noise, got on people's nerves, because he was bored. So I – you know, I tolerated – I – I identified with the grownups and the people who knew that – that you had to behave. And – and – and he – and I saw him the same way, unfortunately, I've – today I'm sorry about it, as my father did, that he was a nuisance and he didn't know how to behave and he didn't know that he had to be quiet. So, I did not identify with him, nor with his problems. I didn't identify with his problems til many years later, when I had my own children and I realized that children – what children really need and so on. But during the war he was a pain in the neck, he really was. And, I think we'll stop here, because otherwise I'll be very late.

Q: Okay.

End of Tape Three

Interview with Riane Gruss
March 1, 1999

Beginning Tape Four, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** volunteer collection interview with **Riane Gruss**. Previously, tape number one was recorded on April 22nd, 1994 in **Chevy Chase**, **Maryland**. And tapes number two and three were recorded on January 5th, 1996, in **New York City**. Today's interview is conducted, as before, by **Gail Schwartz**, on March 1st, 1999, in **Chevy Chase**, **Maryland**. This is tape number four, side **A**. And just to clarify where we are, and your age, you are 12 years old, it is mid-1944, and you are living in **Buda** at the time.

A: That's correct, except that my impression is that it was fall 1944, and we – at that point we were in **Buda**; we meaning my brother and I, because my parents stayed on in **Szeged** longer because my father was sick. He was first in the hospital, then he stayed for as long as they could in the house of the lawyer who was able to get us out of jail. He was a lawyer who was quite prominent in **Szeged**, had a large apartment, because I remember it, because that's where went directly from prison, we went to his apartment, and we stayed there a day or two before my brother and I left for **Budapest**, and he – and my father went to – got sick and stayed on and ended up in the hospital. Now we are in **Buda** at the janitor of a friend of my uncle's – oh, not a friend really, but an acquaintance who was in the same business as my

uncle, he was a art dealer in **Budapest**, and he had a villa in **Buda** where he lived, and on the property he had a caretaker and his wife. It was a small house on the property, separate. And that's where my uncle placed us. And that's where we were living, and it wasn't bad there, it was fine. I mean, they fed us and they were quite nice to us, we were not supposed to be running around too much, although we could go into the garden, but we were not going out too much. And my uncle would come and visit us quite often. Eventually, my parents came back to **Budapest**, and we did not see them, at least I don't remember seeing them. And I think they stayed somewhere, with someone for a very short time, because then my father got sick again. And he went to the hospital, and from what I understand, he was operated – he had gall bladder problems, that – that was his u – these various stays in the hospital ha – were gall bladder attacks. And I think he was oper – not only I think, I know, he was operated by a surgeon as th – people called them then a professor something, pr – I don't remember his name. And the surgeon realized that they were – who they were, or what they were and he decided to help them, I presume. And he kept my father in the hospital beyond – beyond what was necessary. Today you can't do that, but then you did. And he was a prominent – he was prominent in this hospital, and my parents had a private room, and my mother stayed with him, which was very common in those days. And he – they were liberated in the hospital. So for

them this was a marvelous thing, because he just kept him on and on. And he wasn't terribly well, he was weak, he was after surgery, so there was some justification in that. But anyhow, that's where they were liberated. We, on the other side – on the other hand were in **Buda** in – with this janitor, and my uncle was the one who kept coming to us and visiting us. And – and yo – sort of looking after us. And while this was going on, of course the front was getting closer and closer, the Russians were coming closer and closer, and **Budapest** was encircled. So the siege of **Budapest** was about, I think, five or six weeks, it was quite long.

Q: Before we get to that, which is important, you were a 12 year old child at the time. You are separated from your parents. Do you remember this as being a very frightening time? Did you have nightmares, did you know what was going on? Were you really, truly aware of what was happening?

A: Twelve years in those days was not really a child. I was very aware of what was going on, I was very – was I frightened? I was afraid – not – I was afraid because also the gun – you heard – by then you were beginning to hear a lot of guns and shooting, and there were bombings, the Russians were flying over **Budapest** with their planes, and so on. Was I afraid? Yes, I was afraid all the time. My one vivid memory from that time is that that's when I first got my period. And I didn't know who to turn to. I didn't have any kind of protection, and it was horrible. And it – that

– that I remember very clearly. And then I told – I guess I told my uncle, and he said it was normal, and he spoke to this woman there and she gave me some rags, which I had to wash out, but they were very hard to keep between my legs, because they kept falling out. And that's my one vivid memory from that period. But was I afraid? Yes, I – but – but as I said, you were afraid most of the time. I was less afraid then that we would be caught or – or something horrible would happen, because things were very stable in a way, we – you know, there was this couple and they took care of us, and they were nice to us, and there was, I guess, enough food. It wasn't we – i-it was okay, it was – it was one of the sort of stable sort of moments. We were not running away, we were not – it wasn't – we were maybe a little lonely, but I don't remember that so distinctly. I remember being very excited every time my uncle came and – to see us. And –

Q: What was your relationship with your brother at that point, who was a year and a half younger?

A: Right. I don't remember him being particularly difficult at that point. It was probably very good at that point. We were just on our own, and he didn't – I don't remember him as – in any way at that point. All I remember is that I was always told that I was the older one, I was the more mature one, and I was sort of looking after him a little, but he – I don't remember him being any problem.

Interview with Riane Gruss
March 1, 1999

Q: Did you think about your parents a lot while you were separated from them?

A: Yes, but I was much more dependent on my uncle, I must say. I – I – I felt that – that he was the one who was instrumental in either us surviving or not surviving. He – my father, you have to know, was helpless, was sick, and – at the time, so while I – I thought about them, I don't remember – I knew they were in the hospital, my uncle told me that they were safe, that they – this professor was going to keep them there. And so no, the answer is, I wasn't agonizing over what's happening to them, no. I was more agonizing about my uncle coming and making sure that we all were right, because I knew that he – it was all dependent on him, it was his relationship with these people, it was him taking care of us, and he was much more resourceful at ma – than my parents were at the time, and he was alone, and he was vital and interesting, and he was a great person.

Q: What – what kind of relationship did you have with the couple who was taking care of you? Were they – was it a warm relationship?

A: No. No, it was not a warm relationship. I just remember them as being civil and nice to us, but it was not a warm, warm relationship, at least not – not that I am aware of, no.

Q: Were there any other children in the house?

A: No, they were a childless couple.

Q: And did you have any schooling during that time?

A: No. No, no schooling whatsoever, zero. Because at that point, this – much before that, when we were living in the settlement with all the Polish refugees at that point, M-Mrs. **Rochinska**(ph) was teaching us, but this was – by then we had lost contact with her, and she probably remained, she was really critch – Christian. And we started running a – from one place to another. No, no schooling whatsoever.

Q: Did you feel at that point Viennese, or Polish? What – what did you think you were as a 12 year old?

A: Nothing. No, we – it – I – I – no, I didn't feel like – I don't think I felt like anything in particular, certainly not Hungarian, certainly not Austrian. If anything, all through my life, I identify much more with **Poland** than with any of the other countries, because I know even now, when I pick up a newspaper and there's something about **Poland**, I'll read it, if it's something about **Austria**, I don't, and something about **Hungary**, also much less. So no, definitely Polish, if anything, yes, Polish.

Q: So what did you and your brother do during the day?

A: That's a very good question, because I have no recollection what we did. I really don't know, I think we probably did nothing. I don't know. I don – I don't know what we did. I don't know if we played, or talked, or – or – I – I don't have any

recol – I think maybe she gave us some little things to do, like little chores and – I don't even remember her name. But I don't remember doing it.

Q: Did you have any contact with other children at all during tho-those months?

A: None whatsoever, none. Absolutely none, because the idea was that we shouldn't be seen too much, we – you know, nobody was exactly very proud of having these two children suddenly there that she never had before. So we were definitely not – no, no contact with other children, I don't remember any contact with other children.

Q: Was it easy for you to sleep, or did you have frightening nightmares at that time?

A: No, I always slept fine, and I don't remember any frightening nightmares, no, no, none – none whatsoever. Actually, what I do remember is that we slept – they had a big bed, and we slept with them in that huge bed.

Q: The four of you?

A: Yeah, all four of us, yeah.

Q: What was that like?

A: Not pleasant. No, I didn't like that, no, no. Mm-mm.

Q: Did they do that for purposes of safety, or just because of room?

A: I think lack of room, lack of room. It was a tiny little house, and it was not – I think it was for lack of room, yeah, but there was absolutely no – no privacy.

Everybody was always touching everybody, I didn't like that. Yeah, I didn't like that.

Q: But wa-was there any uncomfortable advances by the man?

A: Yes. And I remember that, and that was very unpleasant and then I told my brother to sleep next to me, and then there was this mishmash about who was sleeping where, and of course she wasn't aware of it, and so she – you know, it – it stopped, it wasn't very long. It just happened once or twice, yeah.

Q: But did you say anything to the man?

A: No. No, I was much too afraid, no.

Q: Okay, and then the next –

A: Then, the most dramatic event I remember was that my uncle told me that he would come and stay with us. We realized that we were being – that we were encircled, and that eventually there will be a fight, and there'll be a siege. And my uncle said that when things get really bad, and the fighting becomes very, you know, dangerous, he would come and stay with us. He wasn't going to leave us there by ourselves. And that was my biggest concern, that – that the fighting would start, and – and we would be all alone. And that I was really afraid of. So, I don't remember how it was, but I do remember that I used to meet my uncle – there was also another danger, that if somebody – something suspicious happens, like somebody came to –

to ask questions, or to ask why we were there, or who were we, or any kind of police visit or inquiry, I was supposed to warn my uncle, because he was much more vulnerable be – not much more vulnerable, but really vulnerable. In other words, if they were suspicious of us, he didn't want to come there, because they would arrest him. They would certainly watch him. So –

Q: How – how would you warn him?

A: Well, that was – I knew exactly where he was st – coming, I knew the route he was taking, and there wa – there was that streetcar, and he had to get off on the last stop of the streetcar and it was near a cemetery, and I knew, you know, I knew the neighborhood a little, so I knew how – and each time, I would meet him there when he came. He would tell me when he is coming and I would wait for him there, sometimes for very long periods of time. And when they were already really close and were shooting and so on, the last time, before he s – before he actually remained with us, I went to meet him and he always talked about that. They were actually shooting and I was hiding behind – alongside the graves, because the route took me through the – through the cemetery. And I got to the end station where I was supposed to wait for him, but the – the trams weren't coming very regularly any more, so I waited there for a very long time, he had to walk part of the way. But he came, and he was always very impressed that I made it to meet him, that I was – that

I was courageous enough to do it. He said no one else, when they were shooting, would have done it, but I was always very reliable and dependable, and at that point I certainly was even more so, I imagine. That was what I was – wanted to do, and that's what I – was expected of me, so I did it. Anyway, he came, and then we together ran back, you know, hiding and falling to the ground. It was the real shooting by then. And then he stayed with us. And the –

Q: But what part of **Buda** were – were you staying in? Can you be a little more specific about area?

A: I cannot. As a matter of fact, we went back, my husband and I went to **Budapest** in about 1982 or so, and I tried to ra – locate the – the street, and I couldn't. I couldn't. I know it was a – a par – a residential part of **Buda**, quite – because **Buda**, th-the – the lower part of **Buda** is part of the city, so that's very much like a city, like **Pest**, only that it's the nicer part, it's the older part of the city. But where we were was a residential part and was a si – and it was on top of a hill. I remember that, and then there was this – and it was the last stop of the trolley car. I couldn't remember where it – I mean, I – we went there and we walked around and there was a hill. But what looked to me at that time as a big hill was probably a minute hill. And so we tried to find it, no, we couldn't. So I don't know what part of **Budapest**.

Interview with Riane Gruss
March 1, 1999

Q: Was it hard for your brother when you would go to meet your uncle, and you would leave him alone in the house? Do you think that was hard for him?

A: Never asked him, there was no choice. He just stayed there, and that was it. My uncle said that I have to go by myself. I – was always safer for girls than for boys.

Q: Why is that?

A: Because of the circumcision. If you were caught, for a girl it was much easier than for a boy. So he had to stay home and that – and also you – you know, I didn't want to bother with him; he was younger, he was – anyhow, it was my job an-and I never thought much about what he felt when he stayed behind. Then we went – so anyway, then we came back, and by that time we no longer stayed in the – in the caretaker's house, because by that time the Germans were really on the run, and there was less danger of being arrested or something by the Germans. They were not so much on the run as they were occupied by other things. They were fighting. And we moved into the main house, and my uncle was able to get the old couple, who were actually the antique dealer and his wife, they were in a – what they called it – they were hidden someplace in **Buda** – in – in **Pest**, I think. I don't know exactly, but my uncle was able to get them out to wherever they were, and helped them come to our – come to their – what was their home, what was their house, and they prepared the cellar. And we were all in the cellar of the villa, because that was safer.

It was a real cellar, so it was more like a shelter. And that's where we were. So it was the old couple, my uncle and the two of us, and the caretaker and his wife would come in there and stay for a while and then go back to their house. They were in and out, I remember. There was a Dutch man – by the way, that's how we were actually able to stay with the caretaker. There was a Dutch man, I think – well, this will make a lot of sense, I think it was **Menton**(ph). **Menton**(ph) is a very well-known name because there was a book written about him, and then my uncle, after the war, was in a very controversial situation with him. **Menton**(ph) lived, or his friend, lived in the villa, and that's how we were able to stay with the caretaker, and there was no suspic – I mean, nobody looked at who we were and what we were. And so – but by then, **Menton**(ph) had fled, because he was obviously friendly with the Germans, and he was afraid and I think if he went to **Holland** – he – he was gone and the villa was empty. So the rightful owners came back, they were very old. As a matter of fact, she died during the siege. And – and then – and we all stayed in the shelter of that – or in the – what was the shelter, but what was n-not really a shelter, it was just the cellar of the villa. And during the fight – by then it was winter, because we were liberated in January. So it was freezing cold –

Q: Did you continue to menstruate once you started, under all that stress?

A: I don't think I menstruated because I don't remember it after that, I remember that – but I think that's very common when you first begin, you have a period and then for several months you don't. I don't remember any periods after that.

Q: When you had your first one, did you know what it was? Had you had any –

A: Maybe – maybe that was not my first one, because I now remember – no, actually I made a mistake, it was not my first one. I did get it then, and what I told you about the rags, I remember, and it was terrible. But I don't think it was my first one, I think it was my second one, because I did know what it was, and I remember the first one I got, I think when we were in **Leányfalu**, where Mrs. **Rochinska**(ph) was teaching us and there was a relative period of quiet, and I was 11, and that's when I got my first period, and I remember I had no clue what it was, and I thought that I had gotten – what is it called? Not diphtheria, that is – a disease –

Q: Typhoid?

A: I think it's typhoid where you bleed from the rectum. So I thought I was deadly ill, and when I saw the blood on the paper and I told my mother and that's when she told me what it was. So this must have been my second period. And then again, I don't remember having a period til late – much later. No, I did not have any. So we stayed, all of us in that cellar, and I don't remember what we ate, but I remember there wasn't terribly much. Mostly I think potatoes, from what I remember, and I

don't remember how it was prepared, I don't – there was a little stove, little **primos**(ph) what was called a little, I guess a little with kerosene or something, a little stove, and I think we had mostly potatoes. And –

Q: Did you have anything special with you that gave you comfort? A special book, or some special object?

A: That's a good question. I had a watch that my uncle gave me, that **Brenda** has today, that my uncle gave me for my, I guess 11th or 12th birthday, I don't remember which one, but it was during the war. Must have been 11th. And I absolutely loved that watch. That watch was my prime possession, it was sign of maturity, it was everything, a symbol of everything. And I always wore it, of course, and that watch I liked a lot. And then when the Russians did occupy us – I'll go back to that, but one of the things that I remember vividly is that my uncle realized – I didn't know about it, but he knew that they were raping women, and they were actually no – not a very kind liberators, but – and it was rough, and he wanted to protect me, so he told me that – they also used to be crazy about watches, they took watches by the dozen and they would line them up on their arms, and – from the wrist up, and they – that was sort of like their status symbol as – as to how many they could get. It was really weird that – how they focused on the watches. So my uncle told me that, you know, if I wanted to protect my watch and not have them take it, and I'll – he knew I

loved that watch, then I would have to hide under the bed. And that's what I did. And that I remember distinctly, that every time we heard steps on top, I would run and hide under the bed with my watch on my wrist.

Q: Did you know what rape meant? Did he explain it to you?

A: No, he didn't tell me, he just told me that I had to protect my watch, if I wanted – so that's – he – I had no clue as to why he was so concerned, but I – but I believed him, you know, that that was the thing, they were robbing and that's what was the thing. The other thing I remember distinctly is that the – they – the Russians je – since it was a fighting situation, there was a fight going on, he – **[phone ringing]** – so they would – th-the Russians, because it wou – they were fighting, I guess, to make sure that they survive, they would – wou – throw grenades into cellars before they came in, because that way they would be sure that it wasn't some Germans, who would shoot at them when they started coming down. So the big danger was that they would do that. So every time we heard steps on top, I went under the bed with my watch and – bed, it was a kind of cot, and my uncle would run up the steps and scream in Russian, you know, the – we – there are just children here, and we are friends and so on. Don't – don't kill, don't shoot, don't – and he would make a – he would talk to them and – and they never did, obviously, otherwise we wouldn't have survived. And he would – and then, you know, they would go away, they would –

no, I don't remember them ever – they would come down and look around and see that ever – you know, that there are no – that no Germans are hiding, and they would just go away and that was the end. But this happened a couple of times, about I would say three or four times it happened. And then, as they occupied more and more of the city, and we also knew already that **Pest** had fallen, **Pest** – they – the Germans did not defend **Pest** like **Buda**. They gave that up and they went in – they – because **Buda** had a hill and a castle, they occupied that, and from there they were defending themselves. From the castle, so they – they were in **Buda** much longer. And –

Q: At that point, or up to that point, did your uncle tell you what was happening in the other countries in **Europe**? Were you aware of what was happening outside your immediate life?

A: I don't remember. I – all I remember being concerned about, and – and knowing was how the front was progressing. In other words, both the – the – you know, the invasion in – in **Normandy**, I knew that the Americans had invaded **Europe** on the other side, and the Russians were coming on this side and eventually they would liberate us. I knew the Germans were losing the war. I knew that, but what exactly was happening in other countries? No, I don't – I don't think I was too concerned

about that. I think we were really focused on ourselves, totally and completely. We couldn't really care what happened anywhere else, it was – and at least –

Q: Had you heard about, in 1943, the **Warsaw** ghetto uprising?

A: No, didn't know anything about the **Warsaw** ghetto, didn't know anything about – I knew that they were deporting people to camps. I don't think that I knew too much – I knew that it was bad. I knew that – that they were killing people, I knew that – but the exact – I think I knew that they have gas chambers. I knew that – that being deported was the end. That I knew. But I didn't know exactly about the uprising and so on. Don't forget that the uprising was probably not described in the press, and we didn't have foreign fr – foreign press, and I don't even remember seeing – I could read, and I could read Hungarian as well. So I remember he – reading headlines in the Hungarian newspaper, because she bought the newspaper, the woman where we were hiding. But I don't rec – they certainly wouldn't write about that, so – I just know that we were – knew the – how the – the Russian forces were advancing, and that was our prime concern, you know, how quickly will this be over. And so after we were occupied and were safe, basically for – safe in the sense that – that no Germans would come and get us, for a few days, and more and more of the area was liberated, we heard that most of **Buda** was liberated, and the conditions in the cellar deteriorated. I mean, she died. She was buried in – in – the

owner's wife, the old lady, and I remember we buried her in the garden in the middle of the night. And that was before we were liberated. And I also remember that the ground was terribly, terribly hard, because it was winter, it was all frozen.

Q: Was this your first contact with a dead body?

A: Yes. I never knew any other dead body, but she was very old, and I don't remember being very upset. I was only very upset about having to bury her and doing this whole thing, because that was scarier, to go up and – and – and be outside of the cellar and – and – and bury her and get – get her out of the cellar.

Q: So you helped to actually dig the hole?

A: Yeah, I did help. I did help dig the hole. And so at – and also, food was getting shorter, and it was cold. I mean, the conditions were very, very horrible. So my uncle decided, when he heard that more and more of **Buda** was liberated and **Pest** was already occupied by the Russians, and we knew also, because we heard that the bur – bridges had all been exploded, because the Germans, when they retreated to – to **Buda**, they – they explo –

End of Tape Four, Side A

Beginning Tape Four, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** volunteer collection interview with **Riane Gruss**. This is tape number four, side **B**.

Interview with Riane Gruss
March 1, 1999

A: So we – we knew some people who were living close to the **Danube**, and so my uncle decided to leave our cellar and to try to get over to these other people's house, and see what's happening to them, and also try to get closer to the **Danube** to cross the **Danube**, and – and meet my parents, and get us across to my parents. And that's what we did, and that's what I remember as the most vivid and horrible thing, because th-there was snow on the ground, and there were dead bodies all over, beca – and dead horses. And dead horses had these wide open eyes, and so we had to s – literally step over these dead bodies; dead Germans, dead Russians and dead horses. And we finally got to their house –

Q: Can you talk a little bit more – what that's like for a 12 year old to experience that?

A: I – it's hard for me t-to talk in greater detail except that I was – it was – it was frightening, it was like a nightmare. And we had to – it was physically also difficult, you had to get over these things and it was slippery and we didn't have the best shoes and it was cold. It was all those things, and I remember that as being one of the most horrible walks, so to speak, that I ever took. But anyway, we – and that –

Q: Did – did your uncle comfort you at all, or did you ask him questions?

A: No, there was nothing to ask. I mean, I knew it was the aftermath of a battle, and did he comfort us? No, because he was equally as upset as – you know, it was

equally ha – people in tho – at least my – my experience was that except for my mother occasionally, when they were – when we were in jail, and things were sort of static, this was not static, you had to move. It's like – it's like comforting a child who got up on top of a hill and doesn't know how to ski down. So you comforted, you – you – you – but you have to get down. So that's – that's more or less **[indecipherable]** I don't think it's a good analogy, but there wasn't time to talk. There was – you had to move, you had to – you had to walk, and it was at night, and it was dark, and it was hard. But he – I guess he pushed us. He – I don't know what he did, I don't remember, but all I remember is that that was a very difficult, miserable walk. And then we got to their house, and they had been liberated for a few days also, and they were still in the cellar, because most people s – remained there. There was no pl – mu – many of the houses on top were destroyed. Or it was freezing cold, it was warmer in the cellar. So they were down below, and there was hardly any room for us, but somehow we – of course, we had to stay there, so we stayed there. But the worst thing was that during the night, the Germans broke out from the castle, and it was – that was the last – they were encircled and that was the last time they broke out and that they made any stand, and that they re-occupied our house. And that was terrible. And they took out all the men in our cellar and they – at – these were people that my uncle knew and I don't remember who they were. All

I remember is that they went – they made all the men go upstairs and they killed three of them while we were there. Now, how my uncle escaped being killed, I don't remember. I don't think he went up with them. They said, all the inhabitants in this house have to come upstairs – all the men. And so they did, and they killed them. This was in the last minute, we were only occupied for another few hours. And then the Russians advanced, and the Germans – you know, it was like a last desperate attempt on their part, and it was horrible that we ha – we were there. And –

Q: Did you hear the shots?

A: Yes, oh yes, I heard the shots, and then I heard, you know, the despair of th-the wives, and you know. And my uncle, I don't remember how he – whether he hid, or whether he didn't go up. I remember only that three of them were killed, and he was very upset by that, because it was in the last minute, you know, it was such a horrible thing that you had to – that – that that's what happened at the end. And then we were re-occupied by the Russians, and we didn't stay after that, we just went as far as the **Danube**. We tried to cross over and my uncle – by then I remember he sort of used us, my brother and me, you know. Here we were these children, and the parents were on the other side and so on. So because there was a har – a priority for people crossing, there was a pontoon bridge by then. And they didn't want civilians crossing back and forth, I mean, this was still wartime. So he, you know, by saying

these are the paren – the parents are over there and these are the children and so on, they let us – he convinced them. And what we had to do was go from boat to boat, because this was a pontoon bridge, and they needed people to get the water out of these little boats, because these boats kept leaking, and they were filling up with water. So it took us hours and hours, because we were going from one boat to the next, slowly crossing that bridge and helping get the water out of the boats. And then the next dramatic thing was that we go to **Buda** and we went straight to the hospital, and they had on the gate, they had a list of people who had survived, and my parents were not on it. And then I remember we got a terrible shock and started screaming and yelling. And it turned out that the reason there – they had survived, the reason the list – they were not on that list was because the list was of people who were still there, who had survived were – and were in the hospital. And my parents, because they were there only mainly because of being hidden there, the minute the Russians occupied **Pest**, they left and went to some friends' house. We knew where to look for them, and we came there and –

Q: Let's go back to the experience on – on the little boats and the pontoon bridge. Where did you have the energy to do what you were required to do? You said emptying out the buckets of water and so forth. Where did you get the strength? You were 12 years old.

A: I guess I did as much as I could. I don't know how much strength I had. Maybe – maybe it wasn't, you know, as – as efficient as it was supposed to be, but that's what we were told to do, and there were these containers and we took the water. Maybe the containers were not that big, maybe they had small and bigger containers. I don't remember that, but I do remember doing it, yes. It was hard. It was hard. Everything that – those last few days were very, very hard. Was hard. And then the emotio – by then the – I also remember the emotional stress, because by then we knew we are going over, and we are going to now be reunited with my parents, and while I wasn't thinking about them maybe continuously all the time, this was a very exciting moment for us, and I remembered that. And I do remember when we didn't see their names on that list; it was horrifying, and we were crying and we were screaming and I – my uncle said, you know, let – you know, don't cry, and everything will – will be all right, and let me ask and see what happened, and so on, so forth. So then we went inside and we spoke to – it was run by nuns and we spoke to – to whoever was in the office there, and they told us where my parents went, that they had left the hospital.

Q: Did you have enough food up to that point?

A: No, we did not have. During the whole siege, I told you was th – we had great shortages, I mean, I don't even remember what we ate, but I remember that we – there was very little to eat.

Interview with Riane Gruss
March 1, 1999

Q: Were you wearing the same clothes all the time?

A: Yes, yes. And I don't remember ever taking a bath or – oh, I do remember that we were full of lice, and that we were – that – that kept us, by the way, quite busy, because we used to sit there and take our clothes off and kill the lice, one by one –

Q: How did you kill them?

A: – between the nails of the two thumbs. That was a great occupation, you did it for hours and hours. And the problem is that you could never kill the eggs, and the eggs then would develop, and there would be new lice. But the lice were horrible because they were biting, and it was itching and it was horrible, yeah. So we were full of lice, full of lice. So when we got to there, where they were, everybody was in bad shape, because there was no food, there were terrible shortages, people were sick, full of lice. And that's when we left, we left right after that, bec – we went to the south of **Hungary**, to a place called **Makó**, I think.

Q: Le-Le-Let's talk about seeing your parents.

A: Oh, that was very exciting, that was very exciting. We came there, my mother hugged us and kissed us and cried, and there was a lot of commotion. And it was quite a – quite a reunion. That was very, very exciting. Very exciting.

Q: What kind of condition were they both in?

A: Not as bad as we, because they had been liberated for at least two or – two weeks already, and not that there was any abundance, because as I said, the c – the – the conditions were very hard. But I don't think they was in as bad a condition as we were, because they – even the hospital, th-there was more hygiene and more food. I don't think they had plenty, but there wa – I mean, they took care of the sick people, they gave them a soup every day. No one was taking care of us. So I remember that they were – and sh – my mother talked about it later, that they were appalled at, you know, very upset by the way we both looked, and how – in what terrible shape we were in.

Q: How do you think you looked?

A: Probably awful. And I remember they – they – the first thing they did also, we had a lot of lice in our hair, and they cut off all my hair and they washed it with some sort of kerosene and it smelled and burned and so on. So I remember that. How did I look? Probably dirty, and ragged, and I don't – I don't have a clear picture of what we looked like, but probably awful. I don't remember that.

Q: Did your mother or father say anything special to you, do you remember any particular words?

A: No. No, I don't remember. All I remember is that they kept saying we have to get out of here as fast as possible, because they – there was sickness, there was – we – I-

Interview with Riane Gruss
March 1, 1999

I just remember primary concern about surviving this next danger, which was sickness, and – and you know, when there's no food, an-and hygiene conditions are so terrible, and there's a lot of illness around, it spreads. And so all I remember is them saying that we have to get out of there as quickly as possible, and that's what we did.

Q: Did you feel free? Did you feel a relief?

A: Ye-Yes, in that respect we did. I mean, we knew that the Germans were gone, that nobody was going to deport us. But don't forget that the Russians and the chaos that was right after liberation. It was not paradise. It was far from it. You didn't know whether the Russians wouldn't grab you. Russians also did things that – unexpected things. They either arrested you, or they decided you were a capitalist. I mean, we had experience with the Russians, we had been with them. So we knew what they were like. So it wasn't like it was paradise, plus the physical conditions, which were so bad. And the cold, it was the middle of winter, was January. So it wasn't like you know, now you're free, and you begin to live. As a matter of fact, to digress a little, I understand there's a new documentary called **"The Last Days,"** which I understand deals a lot with the aftermath, what happens right after. Because it wasn't that simple, it didn't just end and then everything was fine. There were decisions to be made, where to go, what to do. I also remember that when you – that

I felt that when you only survive – when your goal is to survive, you have more of a direction than after the war, when you – when it's no longer just to survive, but where to go, how to survive, what to do with your life. When you're only trying to save your life, your – your way of thinking is very, very different. So I almost remember a certain, like a lack of direction, like a certain, you know, let down almost. It's like – it's like after a party. You look forward to it like I don't know what, and then afterwards you sort of, where do you go from here? That's the kind of thing I remember. And also the discussions; where to go, what to do. So finally they decided to go to the south of **Hungary**. And for me, at that point also was a very big disappointment, because my uncle, whom I worshipped, decided that he was done with us. He – he knew his family had survived. They had gone from **Siberia** to **Palestine**. He had – he had a goal, he was going to **Palestine** to be reunited with his family. So he, at that point, decided to leave us. And he was going to go to **Romania**, and from **Romania** I think there were boats already going to **Palestine** somehow. And I wanted to go with him. I didn't – I really wanted to go with him. I would have gone with him to the end of the world. And that I remember as being very traumatic, and he talked to me and told me that I couldn't go with him because I wasn't his child, and he had his own children and all of that was very hard for me to take. And also, I felt that he had more direction, he knew what he was

going to do, while my father did not. And so of course, he left and I felt very abandoned, very abandoned. And not only I, but our whole, family, because he was the resourceful one. And while my father di – was a wonderful man, but it – for peace time. He was not very good during the war. I mean, for – for these very difficult conditions. Not difficult, where you really couldn't just go a straight line, my father was a straight, very straight person. So anyway, my father da – so we went south, and I don't remember how we traveled. I think – I don't remember, you know, all I remember is that in the south of **Hungary**, we stayed on a farm with some people, and – Hungarians. And it was wonderful, because it was – it was spring by then. And we stayed there through the spring, and it – I think through the spring. Maybe for – for a month or six weeks. And there were animals. I remember I learned how to cut the wool off – they had angora rabbits, and so they taught me how to do that. That's sort of nice, and then how to weave. I could weave yarn. They had a spindle, or whatever it's called, and I could weave angora into wool; I was very good. Anything with my hands, I was very good at. And actually I had my first romance there, there was a boy of 17 or 16, he was much ol – and he was on the neighboring farm, and I learned how to ride a bike at that point, because he taught me how to ride a bike. And there was a little river where we used to go and walk along and look at pebbles, and do things. So that was very nice there. During that

time my father went back to **Poland**, to **Kraków**, because he thought that he would be able to go back there and resume life there. He did not want to go to **Palestine**, he was never a Zionist, and he also knew that conditions in **Palestine** were very bad. And he was a banker, and I remember he even – I remember his words. He used to say that the German bankers, there were many German bankers, much more prominent, who had gone there in the 30s and were still walking around with a cane. You know, with a little walking stick, because they had nothing to do, and – and so he felt that he couldn't – wouldn't want to go there, he couldn't make a living there. He could also not even contribute anything to the country, because he didn't have a – that kind of a skill. So **Palestine** was out. He thought that he could go back to **Poland**. The reason he thought he could go back to **Poland** is because there was a government in exile in – in **London**, headed by **Mikolajczyk** was his name, and my father thought that it was going to be a democratic **Poland**, and he thought he could repossess whatever he had, and start life again. He was robbed on the train going there. He got to **Kraków** and he saw the Russians had occupied **Poland**, and **[indecipherable]** but of course, conditions were much better already. But he saw that there was no one to talk to, that that – no one was – you know, he would have to deal with the Russians. Anyhow, he came to the conclusion he couldn't do it. So he came back to – to **Makó** and he decided that we should go to **Vienna**, which was

actually, in the long run, a good decision, because he had a great deal of property in **Vienna**. **Vienna** had just been liberated, and **Vienna** was in four occupational zones. And he would establish the fact that he survived, claim whatever he had claims on, and he thought maybe there. So that I remember, we went back to **Budapest** and from **Budapest** we took a train. And by then there was a train going, but there were like millions of people on the station, everybody had bundles and it was cold and it – it was horrible. It was really quite difficult.

Q: Speaking of **Budapest**, if we can just back up a little bit, when you were there, had you ever heard of a man named **Raoul Wallenberg**? Were you in safe houses when you were there? What did you know about him?

A: We – I knew a lot about him, I had heard about him, because my uncle kept talking about him, and he tried to get into those houses. My – my uncle tried everything, and he was aware, but we didn't qualify, so we couldn't get into one of those ha – those houses, because we were – had Christian papers. We actually had papers, and they didn't – they were taking Hungarian Jews who had no other identit – so we did not – there was no way they were going to take us. And we were not even Hungarian. So, you know, if – if – if – even if – if **Wallenberg** himself would have agreed to take us, the other Hungarians would have been very upset by us,

because there were mi – lines and lines of people waiting for that, it was like a safe haven. Yes, we knew about him, yes.

Q: And now to go forward, did – did you re-recover your health qu – quite quickly, or your physical condition once you were with your parents?

A: Yes, very, very quickly, because the – as I said, the conditions in the country were good. We had food, we had a room, we had – you know, my parents had a – a – a si – a room. It was a farmhouse, and so yes, very quickly.

Q: Did you talk to your mother or your father about what you had gone through without them when you were th-the – when you were not with them, you were with your uncle. Did your mother ask you specifically –

A: No, no. No, we never talked about. I mean, maybe we talked about it, th – you know, the siege, and in the cellar, yes, we talked about that. But I don't think that we dwelled on what we went through. I mean, that wasn't what – what this was all about. It was getting – lo-looking forward, and I think we talked a lot. I remember, you know, my – about I had to start going to school some point. I was very concerned about that, you know. And – and where are we going next, and – and we talked more about that than what we went through actually, because that was not very relevant at the moment, it was over. I mean, you didn't want to, didn't get you anywhere. So I don't remember talking a lot about what we went through or not, no.

Interview with Riane Gruss
March 1, 1999

Q: Did your uncle arrange for the farm in **Makó**?

A: I don't think so. I think my father did. I think we went down there, looked ar – looked – I don't remember the details. I don't even remember how we got there, whether it was by train, or – must have been by train, because th-the – the – probably the – the trains were already running. Or by truck? I don't know. I don't know, but it must have been my – my father, because my uncle was gone by then. He was gone, he – he left right away. So, then we aw – took this horrible train ride to **Vienna**, and we arrived in **Vienna** and we went to where my parents ho-home was. My parents lived in a townhouse, on three floors, like the little townhouses in **New York**. And again, there was a caretaker in the basement, and she was a woman who, of course, remembered my parents, wasn't that long, and my father decided – he stayed for a while, went around to all kinds of lawyers and things, and again, conditions in **Vienna** were very, very bad. Now, I remember it being cold, and that's why I'm confused. It must have been like March, maybe. Because I remember it being cold. So I think it was something like March, 1945. It was just be – just bef –

Q: I thought you – but in the spring you were on the farm, weren't you?

A: Well, that's just it. We were liberated in January. We went down soon after, so I think we might have been like, you know, end of January, four weeks in February and in March we got to – to **Vienna**. Because it was still cold, and they decided, or I

decide – everybody decided I was going to go to school, and my brother was going to go to school. Pro – but the main reason for going to school was food, because there was the United Nations, **UNRRA** provided soup for children in school. So we had one hot meal. One day it was bean soup, and one day it was pea soup, I remember it alternated. Now, the i – I remember the school as being very interesting because I spoke German, but I didn't know very well how – I – I knew how to read and write. But –

Q: Read and write German?

A: Read and write period. Some language. I knew how to read and write in – in Polish, which is what I learned. But if you know how to read and write in one language, and it's Latin characters, you can figure it out. And I knew how to speak German. So I knew how to read and write in German, more or less.

Q: Did you know Hungarian?

A: I learned Hungarian, fiy – ha – but only by ear, just for – and both my brother and I spoke excellent Hungarian, and we spoke to each other Hungarian, because that was the goal of our being there, because the whole version of us being with these people in – in – in **Buda** was that we were some relatives, and that they didn't want us to be in the center of town, so this was a little outside, so it was less likely to be bombed, and that was always – or visiting relatives, so the per – so we did have

to speak Hungarian to each other, we didn't run around speaking Polish. So

[indecipherable]

Q: What did you speak to your parents in, Polish?

A: Yes, always in Polish. So we got – when we got to **Austria** – to – to **Vienna**, the house, the building where we lived, or the hou – townhouse, was in the – in the British zone, which was one of the better zones to be in. And the city was divided, as I said, and I remember only that my father took me to the lawyer, and gave me a power of attorney, which was terribly imp – I was very impressed with that, because he – he – they were going to go back to **Poland**, my parents, and they decided they were going to leave us, because they still thought they could maybe make it there. And also, they also half-heartedly by then decided that they would emigrate. And the only place where we could go would be – you're going to – **[break]**

Q: Ready?

A: My parents decided to go back to **Poland** because in order for us to emigrate, we did need to emigrate from **Poland**. We were Polish citizens and that's what the law was at the time. From **Vienna** we could not go anywhere. We also needed to see where we could go, where we could get visas, and start applying for them, and all of this had to be done from **Poland**, because we were Polish citizens. And, so my parents decided that they would establish the fact that they survived, and claim

property in **Vienna** that they had before the war. And in order to establish the fact that they had survived, they were going to leave my brother and me in **Vienna**, because there were papers to be signed, and you know, it was proof that we – that we were alive and had claims. Because of that, my father took me to the lawyer and gave me a power of attorney, and every once in a while the lawyer would come and get me to sign some papers. I also had my fathe –

Q: Even though you're minor?

A: Even though I was a minor, because I guess I – I – it was some sort of paper declaring that that's – that I was empowered to do it because my parents couldn't be there, or whatever. I was very impressed with that. I also had plenty of money, my father left me money, because he left. And there was nothing to buy with the money, because there were horrendous shortages, but horrendous in **Vienna**. You actually y- you know, tha – everything was on coupons and so on. We ate with this woman who took care of the house, and –

Q: Was it hard for – for you to have your parents go away again?

A: No. No. Well, yes and no. In some ways yes, on the other hand, I knew that there was no imminent danger any more, nobody was going to take us anywhere. We lived in the British zone, which was fairly civilized. Altogether, **Vienna** was civilized at that point. It was occupy – it was an occupied city, there was order.

Interview with Riane Gruss
March 1, 1999

There was a lot of military on the street, but there was order. No, I was not afraid, I was, in a way lonely. It was miserable, because my brother, I don't know whether he went to school or not, but very soon after that, he got very sick. He had a – an abscess on his neck, I remember like today, and he started running a fever, and it was full of pus. And I didn't know what to do with that. So what I did was, I took him – would be interesting to see what he remembers, I took him to the Polish committee, because they – the – I knew that **Poland** was repatriating, they wanted all Polish citizens to go back to **Poland**, that was after the war. There was a repatriation effort. And I found a – somebody who was willing to take him by – who was going by car to **Kraków**, it wasn't – you know, **Vienna** and **Kraków** is not that far apart. And he took him. And so, because I w – I was afraid to stay with him any longer, because he was so sick, I didn't know what to do with him. So I send him home sick, and my parents got him. And then I stayed on probably another month or five weeks. And –

Q: But was that hard to be by yourself?

A: It was hard to be by myself, and it was hard altogether. I was – it was not an easy time. But wa – one funny incident – not funny, but interesting incident I remember before my brother left, when he was still well. Since I had so much money, and there was nothing to buy with it really, the theater was active in – in **Vienna**. So I decided

that we should go to the theater. I had never been to a theater, but – so I – we got tickets, or I got tickets, and I went. And they were doing **"Medea."** Does he remember that? Yes. And I took – and we went to see **"Medea."** And I – to this day, you know, there I was, I had no clue what this was all about, except that there was this mother who had ki – was kill – at the end kills those two children. And we had just survived, and I knew that my mother did everything to save us. I couldn't understand for the world of me, ho – why would a mother kill two children? And I remember I cried a lot during that play. That was very – it was probably very well done; the theater in **Vienna** was very, very good. So that I remember vividly, that was before he left. Then he left, and I was by myself, and I didn't like the woman we stayed with, I didn't – it was not – it was not very pleasant, yes, it was lonely. By that time it was lonely. Also, the school was very difficult because they didn't have any textbooks. That was very interesting. They were not allowed to use any of the Nazi period textbooks because they all had some element of propaganda in them, even the math books, you know, had things like how – how many Jews if you –

End of Tape Four, Side B

Interview with Riane Gruss
March 1, 1999

Beginning Tape Five, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** volunteer collection interview with **Riane Gruss**. This is tape number five, side **A**, and you were talking about the German textbooks.

A: So, they were not allowed to use in the schools in **Vienna** after the war, any of the German textbooks, which meant that everything was dictated to us. And it was so cold in the ca – in the classrooms, that we had to have gloves on to – to – to write, and it was very difficult, I remember that was very difficult, and it was difficult for me to write dictation, because also my German wasn't that good. But I did somehow, but the main reason why we weren't – why I was, I don't remember if my bro – I think my brother also must have gone, was that we got food, that we got the soup, that was the main reason to be there, because I don't remember learning a whole lot there. And then afterwards, one day a man came to us, and told me – introduced himself and told me that my parents said that he should bring me back to **Kraków**. And he didn't have a piece of paper, anything written, and I was a little bit leery of going with him, because my parents said that I had to wait until I heard from them, you know, that I had – that was my – my assignment. And I – and – but he convinced me. And I must have been very lonely, because I was happy to go. And I went, and I – the – he – and I later found out that he was doing what most people

were doing then, smuggling. And my parents – he knew my parents and they asked him if he would bring me back, because by then my parents had the Brazilian visas. We knew we were going to **Brazil**. At least they knew, I didn't. And they needed me to come back to **Poland**. And they asked him, because they knew he was doing that, he was going back and forth, had he had a car. But he told them that he wouldn't have room for me, and s – that he wouldn't be able to do it. And that's why they never gave him a piece of paper to – to te – a letter for me, that I was supposed to come. So – but then he found that he had room. **[break – doorbell]** So he discovered that he would have room for me, and not only would he have room for me, but apparently it was to his advantage, because if he traveled with a girl, or a child or whatever, he was less suspicious than he would have been. And that's why he decided he was going to take me after all. So he came, he contacted me, and I went. And we stop – we drove to **Brno**, we stopped in bro – **Brno**, which is **Czechoslovakia** at that time. And he – we stayed in a hotel, he took a room for me, and treated me very well, I liked that he was a very nice man. And he told me to come downstairs and we were going to have dinner. And there was this restaurant, it was like a **pensionne**. And I had a goose, he ordered a goose, and I'll never forget that goose as long as I live, was the best dinner I ever had, was wonderful. And then we slept, and the next morning we went on to **Kraków**. My parents, I remember,

were very excited to see me, very happy, because they didn't expect that I was coming at all, so that was a very happy reunion.

Q: Did you bring everything that you owned with you?

A: I didn't own very much, yes, I **[indecipherable]**

Q: What did you own?

A: A bundle, I don't know. A few – I suppose sweaters, I don't know. I have no idea, I don't remember. It was not a big – I didn't spend lots of time packing, like I do now. No, I don't remember that. Little something. And they lived in a house in the office of a distant relative. We couldn't get back into our apartment, which was a government office, actually, it was a biological institute, I found out. And my mother had reopened and was running the gallery, the antique gallery that my uncle and my grandfather owned. And it was a fairly sort of normal existence, except that we, of course, we – again we didn't go to school, and we were used mainly to walk from our – where we lived to – to the store, sit in the store. One day a week the beggars came to – to – because then all the businesses sort of have this as a custom in **Poland**, still is, where, so that you don't have to deal with beggars e-every single day, you used to tell them to come on Fridays. So my job was to sit next to the door, the entrance to this gallery and tell the beggars to come back on Friday. I remember that like today. And I wasn't very well for some reason, I don't know why. Maybe I

was run down when I came, because I remember that mi – I went to a doctor and I had like a general check-up. And he told my mother that I was fine, and as soon as I just lived, you know, had more food and so on, I would be fine, and I was fine. Basically I was very healthy.

Q: What month – what month was this that you got back to **Poland**?

A: This was – we left in July, so this must – must have been like June. I wasn't there very long, May or June, end of May or June, it was warm already. And I just sat in the store, watched my mother talk to people and ran errands and that's about it. We were, at that time, reunited with my grandfather, who had survived in **Siberia**, and he came ba – and my aunt, my mother's older sister, and we all lived together at the same time, in the same place.

Q: What was your reaction in seeing them again?

A: I'm not a very warm person. I keep thinking even now, you know, and – it was fine, you know, and my grandfather was a nice man, he was quiet. What I do remember is that I, for the first time, I found about Jewish things, because my grandfather ate kosher, and so did my aunt. And I remember that when I get – got back from **Vienna**, my mother showed me, there was this one shelf of a few cups and things, and she told me not to touch those, because those were my grandfather's dishes and I wasn't supposed to touch them. But I still didn't have a clear picture as

to exactly why, but I remember that he was a very nice man, and my aunt was very nice, and again, my concerns were different. They were there, it was crowded. My parents slept – this was a – the office of a cousin of my father's, and he – this cousin had imports of watches, he was an importer of watches from **Switzerland**, and – before the war. And so I remember my parents had a war – it was like a wardrobe, a – or a gr – big cabinet, not a wardrobe, a big cabinet that was put down on the floor, and they slept on that. So you know, it was crowded in there, and then my grandfather was there and my brother, and we slept – I think we slept on chairs that were put together. It was not very comfortable, there was – so I don't – you know, it wasn't like you were happy to see your grandfather. In a way it was almost – he had – he occupied the only bed that was there, so it wasn't so wonderful. And then, a little while later, we were ready to leave, and we left. We left by train from **Kraków** to **Warsaw**. And from **Warsaw**, we took – how did we get to **Stockholm**? I think –

Q: What did **Warsaw** look like when you got there?

A: That was in bad shape, yeah, that was ruined. But I wasn't very impressed, because again, by then it was a little cleaned up already, and it – while it was very destroyed, I was not exactly at an age where I could appreciate it, that these wonderful buildings were destroyed. And it was nothing compared with what **Budapest** looked like. I mean, I knew what the city that's destroyed is a few hours

after, that's very different. So I wasn't – that didn't make any impression on me. As far as Jewish memorials, we never went to any of them. My parents – you know, as far as the ghetto, or the site of the ghetto and so on. No, I think this is an **[indecipherable]** that is now very – you know, people do it and I'm going to say something that's going to shock everybody, but I think that – I myself feel that there's – when we really needed help and support right after the war, and when I came to **Brazil** and – and, you know, I had a need to talk about what happened to us, in order to inform people I had close contact with, schoolmates and so on, nobody was interested. Nobody was interested. And now, I almost think it's too much, and I myself am almost overdosed on the Holocaust, particularly on the superficial de – characteristics of it. I still very much like to read books on the ho – that have something to do with the Holocaust. Not memor – not memoirs, you know, what happened to another person who had a similar story like mine, I think on that level it's not interesting. But novels or fiction or anything that deals with the Holocaust, I will read, and I find some of them very interesting. But this sort of obsession with it now is, I think way overboard, you know, way, way too much. And not all of it's sincere anyway. So anyhow, we did – I don't remember doing anything Jewish. After the war, my mother was very gratified, because my parents did ask us after the war whether we wanted to stay Jewish. And both my brother and I apparently said

yes. I don't remember it v – I do remember talking about it, but it wasn't a long discussion, it was more – don't forget, we had these Christian papers. We had an option to stay who we were during the war. You – you did have some – you had a possibility, and some people did. They just didn't want to have anything to do with it any more. They didn't want their children to have to go through this, what we went through, and so there were all kinds of different solutions, let's say, or – or – or roads to recovery that people opted for. Options. So I – they asked us, and we decided that we wanted to – at least we said that we wanted to stay Jewish, and the reason was not – I was too young, I mean I didn't know anything, I never studied anything, neither did my brother, that I-I just felt that – that we were born, that is like, do I want to be a blonde? No, because I was never a blonde, and there was no reason to now become a blonde. So now that it's over, yes, so we said yes. But it wasn't such a big deal as it is today in general again, you know being Jewish was not what I always tell my husband, a full-time occupation. It was just something you were, that's all. So, after the war, we had back our names and our – you know, legitimate birth certificates and the whole thing. And we went via – we went to **Sweden**. In **Sweden** – we went by train, I think – in **Sweden** we had to wait a long time, we were in **Stockholm** for about three months. We didn't get to **Brazil** til October, so we must have been there – not three months, maybe a little shorter,

because the trip took about four or five weeks on the – on a freighter. At that time the big issue was not only getting a visa, but getting transportation out of **Europe** because everybody was go – leaving.

Q: Before we talk about your going to **Brazil**, let's just talk a little bit more about your leaving to go to **Sweden**. What were your thoughts about having now to go to another country?

A: Actually, that was a very positive experience. And actually, I should backtrack a little bit. I think from **Kraków** to **Warsaw**, on the way to **Brazil**, I later remembered we did fly. And I remember it was an airplane that did – had seats all around, it didn't have seats in rows. And it was a short flight, it's not very far.

Q: Th-This is a flight to **Sweden** you're talking about?

A: No, it was the flight from **Kraków** to **Warsaw** on the way to **Sweden**, and then in – from **Warsaw** to **Stockholm**, I really don't know how we went. As I said, I think it was by train, but I couldn't swear. I don't remember how – how we got there, all I remember is that we did get there.

Q: So you don't remember the voyage over the water to **Sweden**?

A: No, we definitely did not go by ship. We went by ship from **Sweden**, from **Göteborg** to **Brazil**, yeah, that was by sh – by ship. Going to **Sweden** was a wonderful feeling, because going – **Sweden** we knew was a neutral country during

the war. It was kind of heaven, you know, going to a neutral country, a country that was never destroyed, never had any part in any war. It was wonderful, and we knew it was a good country and a prosperous country and that we would be comfortable and – and we were. And –

Q: Were you unhappy about leaving **Poland**?

A: No, I was not unhappy about leaving **Poland** because I really had no roots in **Poland**. I never went to school in **Poland**. I was actually, between **Vienna** and our leaving, was only about two months. So I was only there for about two months, and also ba – by – by the time I returned from **Vienna**, when this man took me home to my parents, I was told that the reason they brought me over is because they already had the visas and it was just a matter of getting everything else settled and we were leaving. So it wasn't like you know, I was settling down anywhere. So I was very ha – then there was a good feeling. Leaving for **Sweden** was a good feeling was – because it was the beginning of something new and something that we knew had to happen, is us settling somewhere. Now **Brazil** was the goal and **Sweden** was certainly a good and easy country to – to wait in. And that's what happened. We waited in **Sweden** in – in **Stockholm** we stayed in – in zak – some sort of a **pensionne**, boarding house, very comfortable. And the only thing we thought was terrible was the Swedish food, which is very, very different from any food we had –

we ever had before. There's a lot of, as you know, cold fish and herrings and so on. And in addition to that, they have – their desserts are not sweet, so we were shocked that things that looked like a cake, turned out to be salty. So th – it was always a bit of a surprise. The other thing that struck us, and we must have arrived in **Sweden** in August, because they have very little sunshine there, and the minute the sun would come out in front of the opera, we – we lived not far from the opera, there were steps, and there were these people sitting down and with their faces leaning up and looking at the sun, and you know, every few moments of sunshine was a big thing. So we found that peculiar.

Q: How did you adjust to a new language?

A: We didn't understand, of course, Swedish. A little bit it's like German, so there were some words that we could make out. And again, it was not a big – it was not a big problem. We st-stayed in this boarding house, our needs were taken care of. What was a big problem was that my father went – while we were waiting to go to – to get the ship to go to **Brazil**, he decided to go to **Switzerland** and look around, because he was beginning to think what he was going to do in **Sweden** – in **Brazil**, and the reason we were going to **Brazil** was that his former partner from **Switzerland**, from his branch in **Switzerland** was in **Brazil** since 1940, and was doing very, very well. And the idea came up, I don't know if my father initiated it,

or this – his name was **Landau**(ph), Mr. **Roman Landau**(ph) – or whether Mr. **Landau**(ph) initiated it, but I – my father had very good connections in **Switzerland** in the – in the watch industry, because he financed – first of all, he was there during World War I, and – and so he somehow knew many of the people. But in addition to that, he financed the – his cousins representation of **Omega** and **Tissot**, which were two very well-known makes of Swiss watches. And my – my father's cousin had the representation of these two brands for **Poland**. **Omega** particularly was very successful before the war, and my father was – had a partner **[indecipherable]** finance his cousin, or whatever. So anyhow, he had connections, and his idea was to go to **Brazil**, and with the capital from Mr. **Landau**(ph), with his help, which was more like he owed my father wha – he – they – my father would open a representation and import of Swiss watches. And that actually was his business, and he went to – to **Switzerland** in order to talk – to see – t-to develop some relationships with manufacturers. And so he went for about two or three weeks. And in **Sweden** there wasn't much going on, because we were just waiting for passage and – and he knew that we weren't getting it so soon, there were, as I said before, thousands of people waiting for passage out of the –

Q: Did you – did you socialize with any of the children who were waiting to leave?

Interview with Riane Gruss
March 1, 1999

A: No, I don't remember. No. We stayed in this boarding house, and I don't remember any children, no. All I remember is my mother – my mother wasn't well – by the way, she miscarried at that time. She became pregnant after the war, which to her was – she was terribly upset about, but she only told it to me la – many years later. But I did know that she was very, very sick and she was bleeding. And she later told us this very moving story that after my father left, she realized she was pregnant, and she certainly couldn't now arrive in **Brazil** with a new baby, and we were grown, and it was – she was terribly upset and tried to get an abortion. There was no abortion in – in **Sweden**, which I – it was a surprise to me, a progressive country like that, you couldn't get an abortion. I remember her going to the doctor and I went with her to the do – what did I do? I just sort of stayed with her and with my brother, I mean, that's all we did. And – but I had no clue as to why. And then she induced the miscarriage. So I remember there was a lot of blood and she told me that was a very heavy menstruation. I was the one that was cleaning it up. So that was not a happy thing, but I didn't know that it was that until many years later. And then she recovered and we waited, and my father came back, eventually, we went to **Göteborg**. And that I remember, that trip from **Stockholm** to **Göteborg**, I remember very well, because it was a beautiful train ride, just beautiful. And we went to – and in **Göteborg** we still waited for a while. And I think that – I don't

know where it was, either in **Stockholm** or in **Göteborg**, I think my brother got a bicycle, or there was some talk about bicycle. I vaguely remember something about that, but very little. And then in the – then the passa – the – the tickets came through, or th-the space became available, and we went to **Brazil**, and arrived in **Brazil** in oke – October, 1946, end of October we arrived actually the day of my father's birth. So I remember that date very well, because it – my mother always talked about how we arrived on his birthday.

Q: So you were now a little over 14 years old.

A: Right. I turned 14 in **Sweden**, because we – in August we were in **Sweden**, that's when I turned 14. Mm-hm, so when I arrived in **Brazil**, there I had fi – my fa –

Q: O-On the boat going over, were there other people who were leaving **Europe**?

A: Yes, a very small – it was a freighter, and there were 11 of us. There was some other family, whom I remember very vaguely, and some – but there were no children, or no youngsters, we were the only ones. And on that – on that boat, I learned how to play Bridge, because the captain and purser, they had, I don't know, two or three officers and they needed a fourth hand. And I was the one that they decided to teach, I was the most teachable, so I – I played Bridge; that's most of what I remember on that boat, that I played Bridge, and that some days it was very

rough, and everybody was seasick. And I felt also queasy, but I was the only one who didn't really, you know, throw up, so I was very proud of myself. But –

Q: Were you looking forward to going to **Brazil**? What did **Brazil** mean to you at that – at the age of 14?

A: I didn't know anything about it, nothing. I knew it was a hot climate. I knew that **Rio**, its capital, and that's where we were going, was supposed to be a beautiful city. And also I knew that we knew a number of people there; that I knew. And also my father, not only that – that his former partner was there, but also my father was married before, so my mother was his second wife, and he had two daughters by his first wife, and the older one, with her husband and son, were in **Brazil**; that was another reason why we went there. And my nephew, her son, was only two and a half years younger than I am, and a year younger than my brother. So I knew that – that there was some sort of family. My father never had a very good relationship with her before or after the war, but that's a different story. But anyhow, I knew they were there. And what did it mean? It meant a certain, imagine, permanence, but not a happy one. Not – not for me. I had – I had – I was open to it, but my mother was very unhappy, she didn't want to go to **Brazil**, so there was a lot of problems for – about that, because my mother really wanted to go to **Palestine**. And she made it very clear when my uncle left, she wanted to do it. My father didn't want to take the

chance, and of course, she couldn't do it. But she felt that **Brazil** was really a very, very, very, you know, contrary, different country, and she felt very strongly that she had nothing in common with that culture, and talked a lot about it. I remember that I, for myself, felt that she was exaggerating, that she was making it – being negative, and I didn't want to be negative at that point. My father also – my father was a very positive, but my father was the kind of man who, how shall I say? If he decided to do something, he would – he – he didn't have second thoughts, he would make an effort to make it work. And she was a much more kind of intuitive and emotional person. Anyhow, she felt that after surviving the war, there was really nothing for in **Brazil**. It was a strange country, a tropical country, she kept saying it was a tropical country, a strange country, and it really made no sense to go there, and she was very unhappy about it. And when they argued about it, th-the interesting thing was that she used to say that my brother, who was much more – you know, was younger and much more sort of very different, less settled than I was at that – you – she used to warn my father and say, you na – he's going to get used to this country, and you see, he'll end up marrying out of faith. And that did happen eventually. So –

Q: When you had quiet moments with your mother, let's say on the voyage, or other times, did you and she talk about the difficult times in **Siberia**, or the train ride to **Siberia**? Did she ever – did you ever talk that over with her, that –

Interview with Riane Gruss
March 1, 1999

A: She used to talk a lot about it, because to her, what we went through, the war, was very much alive, and to me also. And she used to talk a lot about it, more in relation to what was expecting us. Her attitude was, we went through so much, and is this what we went it through for? And so she would bring things up, and – over and over. I can't say that I was sitting there patiently talking about it, because my attitude was more like my father's. We're coming here, it's – it's – it's – I didn't want it to be that negative because I didn't – I didn't worry about my fa – my brother marrying out of faith, I mean I – you know, I had other problem, I had other – I thought she was exaggerating, I thought, you know, let's give this country first a – a chance, and then see maybe it will be a nice country. Who knows? Why say in advance that it won't be? And so yes, she talked a lot about what – what we – we had gone through, and so on, yes. But how much I did of that, I probably listened. And some of the stories – she, by the way, was a great, as I mentioned probably earlier, she was a great storyteller and she was amusing and – and so on. And she was interesting, so I probably, you know, if she had some reminiscences of something that I didn't remember so well, or that was amusing to her, and at the time I was too young to understand, yes, I – she did talk about it, and I did listen to that, yes.

Q: So now you've arrived in **Brazil**?

Interview with Riane Gruss
March 1, 1999

A: So now we arrived in **Brazil**, and I – from that I have very vivid memories. It was hot. It was end of October, which is the beginning of the brazi – of the Brazilian summer, and it was very hot. And at that time there was no air conditioning. The only place that was air conditioned were cinemas. So my mother used to say, we go to the ci – to the movies for the climate. And that's the – that's the only place that was air conditioned. They arranged for us to – of course my sister met us at the pier, and my father's former partner, so there were people meeting us at the – when we arrived. And we – they rented for us two rooms, and a bathroom, and a little kind of – I don't know if it was a kitchen or whatever, in a residential hotel. And all I remember from that, that it was beastly hot, and it was full of cockroaches. Because cockroaches in **Brazil** at that time were numerous. And so my mother used to say, when you want to go into the bathroom, you have to knock first, not to see if somebody's there, but to frighten them away. And that's exactly what I **[indecipherable]**. And that was horrible, that was just awful. It was a horrible place, th – and it wasn't – it was in the best part of town, it wasn't like it was the slums or anything. But that – those were the conditions in **Brazil**. It was not a super luxury hotel, it was a – some sort of middle class kind of residential hotel. I have a very vivid memory of the second evening we were there, we were invited to dinner, to my father's former partner's house. And they lived in a really, really wonderful,

luxurious, enormous kind of apartment that exists to this day only in **Brazil**, it doesn't – y-you – nobody in **America** lives as well as that. And they were very, very well-to-do, they – he made a lot of money during the war on things like quartz and all kinds of raw materials.

End of Tape Five, Side A

Beginning Tape Five, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** volunteer collection interview with **Riane Gruss**. This is tape number five, side **B**.

A: And so we were invited there for dinner, and we went. And of course, during the – first of all, the dinner was so unbelievably elaborate and beautiful, and butlers in white gloves serving and candle lights on the thing. I'd never seen anything – on the table, candle lights, silver, porcelain. I mean, it was really, even by my today standards, it – it would still be very impressive because people don't live that way in – in **America** with, you know, we had practically two servants per person at this dinner. So anyway, during that dinner, of course, the conversation was about what we went through, you know, what happened wi – to us during the war and so on. And at the end tu – my parents sort of told the story. I, of course, at age 14 was very, very quiet and I didn't say anything, my brother didn't say anything because we just sat there and – and were stunned by the whole thing. And when she finished telling

what happened to us, our hostess said – she said, oh my God, she said, this is nothi – what you went through is nothing compared what we suffered not knowing where you were and what was happening. And I said to my mother – this I remember – when we left that evening, I said to my mother, I'm never going to talk about what happened to us to anybody. They don't understand. They don't – it's no use, beca – and I really did do that, I did not talk to people what happened. And later on, when I went to school, and I should then tell you how and where and so on, I also found that as a result of what happened to us, or to me, I had very little rapport with youngsters my age, very, very little. Because I always felt that whatever interested them was so – today I would use the word superficial, it wasn't superficial, it was – they were real teenagers, and they were interested in clothes and lipstick. Again, in **Brazil** this was very – still is a primary concern of a teenage girl. And – and I became later on, a little interested in that, but it wasn't like – you know, I had so many other things that happened to me. But they wouldn't understand, so I didn't have – I didn't have a lot in common with them. That was a big problem for me.

Q: Was there any other girl your age that you could confide in?

A: Did I have a best friend? I had a couple of friends, but I wouldn't say that any of them, as I said, I mean th-they were all – had been there during the war, in **Brazil**. They were – the people I became friendly with eventually, were actually children of

people from **Europe**, not necessarily survivors, because I didn't know that many, but people who went to **Brazil** in 1940 or 1939, who got out, were able to leave **Europe** before the war, and came there and lived extremely well. I mean, wa – I can't tell you how well people in **Brazil** to this day live, com – you know, th-they're wealthy people, live extremely well. So, I have a couple of very close friends, pa – the daughter of one of my parent's good friend is a very good friend of mine to this day. I did, but on the whole, classmates and parties and all of that, was something that was very difficult for me. I mean, I wasn't interested, I – I felt I was like – like an adult at a children's party, that's how I felt.

Q: How did the teachers at school treat you?

A: I should really backtrack and tell you about my school experience, because I arrived in **Brazil** at the age of 14, and basically had no school, because I was in school about 10 months in **Siberia**, in first grade. I was in school after that again, after the war, in **Vienna** for about six weeks or two months. I was taught by this lady, this Polish lady in **Hungary**, and by my mother, so I la – that's how, at some point I learned how to read and write. Probably in first grade, but that was in Russian. And just before they deported us, I was in school for about two months or so, because I remember making lines and lines and lines of **A**s and **B**s, that's how they taught at that time. So that was in Polish. So basically I had never really been in

school properly. So here I was, and I was 14 years old, and I needed to go to school. So my parents found out, and I found out that the Brazilian system is exactly like the French system. Which means that you have to – they cannot put you any higher than sixth grade, because you don't earn credits, you have to work towards the baccal – baccalaureate, or wa – how you spell it, how you pronounce it, and they wouldn't take me above the sixth grade. They were willing to take me into the sixth grade, and then I would learn Portuguese, and so on. So anyway, I had to learn Portuguese. This, to me, was like part of the war. It was a terrible disappointment, because here I was, I was 14 years old. To go into the sixth grade was so humiliating. And I was also very tall, I was as tall as I am today, or if not taller, cause I've begun to shrink. But – so this was a terrible, terrible blow to me, and there was nothing you could do about it. So someone told me, and that was my lifesaver, that there's an American school. And the American school does let you earn credits, and it only counts from the ninth grade. I was the right age for the ninth grade, so if they would let me start in the ninth grade, then I had a chance to – to be with people my own age, and graduate on time. Problem was that I didn't know any English at all, just like I didn't know any Portuguese. So, I – of course, my parents were convinced that it was six of one, half a dozen of the other, I did have to learn a new language, and that wasn't the problem. And I must say that I went with – I had to go with somebody who

would interpret for me. So I went with my half-sister, she spoke excellent English, she – she was at the interpreters' school in – in **Switzerland** before the war, her English was excellent. And she went with me. And we spoke – we got an appointment, we went there and they told me that if I learned English between October, end of a – now it's November already, middle of November, and March, because the school year in **Brazil** begins in – on the first of March. The long vacation because of the summer season is in the – is in the winter. So, they would give me some sort of an exam, that would have a little bit of social studies, they gave me some – they gave me a textbook. General science, a little mathematics. So basically sort of a – some kind of foundation. And some English and if I could pass that exam at the end of the summer, over there, by March first, they would let me cu – go into ninth grade. Now, when I took th – I studied like crazy from that day on until March first. And then my mother used to say that was – we had an armchair – oh, eventually we moved, we got an apartment. We had armchair that she used to say she could have sent easily to take that exam, because an armchair was so saturated with my sitting in there and studying. I studied from morni – morning to night, I had a dictionary. I had no lessons, nobody helped me, really. My sister occasionally helped me a little, but I really did it by myself with a dictionary, and my father knew a little English and somehow – and the American school was

unbelievable, they were so supportive, they really were. And when I was taking that exam, they gave me a dictionary, they let me use a dictionary. And in – and the only funny experience I had with that was that my mathematics was quite good, I was always good in math. And – but one of the examples on that exam had to do with dimes, nickels and quarters. And of course, there I had no idea what that was, and I had to leave that question out, but it was the only one I left out, so I did very well. And I started ninth grade at th – and I was thrilled, and I worked very hard, and I did very well. And I graduated from – from the American school when I was 18, four years later. And that's what brought me to the **United States**, because the American school did not have rights in **Brazil**, so I could not have gone on to – to a university or anything. So that fa – and I did want to leave, but it was because of that I really had to leave, unless I – I could have gone to a secretarial school and become a secretary, and there was some talk of doing that, but I didn't want to do that.

Q: Did the teachers at the American school ask you about your background, or be sympathetic, or be good listeners?

A: I think they knew about our – my background, and I wasn't the only one, by the way, there were three other survivors' children in my class. So I was not the only one any more. And we all did very well, by the way, all of us, because – because we worked so hard. We were so serious, we – you know, scholastically, we did very

well. The teachers did not – teachers at that time, I don't know how it was in the **United States**, but teachers were not really interested terribly much in what you thought or didn't think, or what you did do – went through or didn't go through. They were supportive, they helped you if you needed help, they were nice. No, I don't remember having any kind of contact about that.

Q: You said there were three other children.

A: Yeah, they were not chil – you know, teen –

Q: Teenagers. Did you four get together and talk?

A: Yeah, yes, they were – they – we definitely were a lot together, because we had a lot in common. One of them was a boy, and he was two years older than I was, and he was in the same b – he was unlucky enough to be to – so he graduated two years later, cause that was the only way you could do it. So he was there and then one of them was a distant, very distant cousin of my mother's, and her daughter was there and she was also two years older than I was.

Q: Did you exchange stories?

A: Did we exchange stories? I knew her story, yes, and she knew my story; with him, no. No, I don't know what – I wasn't that terribly friendly with him. I don't know what he went through. I knew thought, that he did – I think he lost his family, because he was living with an uncle. So I do – but I didn't – we didn't go around

asking people, you know, what did you or did you not – everybody's story was, in some ways, similar. I mean, you knew that if he survived – he also was on Christian papers, I knew that. So, I don't know whether I knew it because my mother knew – my parents knew these families, or knew about them. So whether that's how I heard that they survived – I heard more how people survived from my parents than I did directly. By then, people like – like him and my – the other young – the other girl, were more interested in the day to day, you know, getting – doing what we had to do. There – there wasn't much time to sit around and talk about what happened. So –

Q: Did you keep any kind of a journal, or did you do any kind of writing of your memories of what you had been through during the war, at that time?

A: No, I never really wrote diaries, and no, the answer is no. I have, to this day, something very funny. It's a – it's an embroidery, and it's a rectangular, like a – a – it's like a doily, but it's embroidered in a – in a stitch, it's not crocheted. And I got that at some point, I think in **Hungary**, because very often my mother would buy – I loved to sew and I was very good at it, I was always very good at knitting and embroidering and all of that, and that kept me busy. So, I – so this thing, I finished after the war, and I brought it with me to **Brazil**. So in the middle – in the center of it, I wrote it was embroidered during the war years of 1940 to '45. I have it to this day. Did I keep journals? No, no, I never did that, no. The – a closest thing I kept to

a journal was when I came to brazi – to **America**, I – I was here alone, I wrote home to my mother – well, to my parents actually, but she was the one that answered more, although my father also wrote very often. I wrote daily, because I guess I was lonely, and also I wanted them to know what was happening, and I was so far away, and there was such a big sacrifice on their part to send me, that I sort of felt I should do that. And my mother kept all those letters. So those letters still exist, some of them are – most of them are still in **Brazil**, my brother has them. And –

Q: Was it your desire to go to the **United States**?

A: Yes, I wanted to leave, **A**, as I told you, I really didn't want to take a secretarial course and study – and – and work there in an office, I wasn't very much – very exciting. And I did want to leave, because I guess that my feeling, after a few years there – you see, going to the American school ha – was a – it was a mixed blessing in some ways, because my classmates, who were all American, were children of diplomats, business people, and they kept coming and going. They would stay a year or two or three or four, whatever. But it was not – they were not in the country, and they certainly all left, after they – we graduated, they all went back to the **States** to s – to school, an – even if their parents remained in **Brazil**. So you didn't really have friends. Once the school was over, you didn't – not only friends, you didn't know anyone. That was the second reason. The third reason was that because my mother

ended up being very unhappy in **Brazil**, there was a lot of – there was a lot of unhappiness in – in my parents' home. There was a lot of friction, there was a lot of unhappiness. And so I was anxious to get away, I really was. So, that's why I wanted to go away. There were all these different reasons, but that's what I wanted.

Q: What were your first impressions of the **United States**?

A: Oh, I loved it, I loved it. Absolutely loved it. First of all, there was another thing that I hated in **Rio** – although I shouldn't really say that, I – that I didn't like the country, because it's not fair. The country is really very, very nice, and the Brazilians are very nice people. And I later on met some, and my brother did not go to the American school right away. He later transferred. So he has Brazilian friends galore, and – and also because he married a Brazilian woman, he – so I know a lot of people – I knew some through him when – when – as an older sister when – because he brought these people home. And he – he – they're lovely people, and they're not – they're not anti-Semitic, they're not – they're just very nice, hospitable, warm people. So – but what I didn't like there was that basically my social life was within the ca – what we call the colony. In other words, there were two Jewish clubs, and they were social clubs. And so the young people like myself would go there and there would be a record player, and you danced, and you dated these people and so on. But it was very, very provincial. I always used to say, by the time I woke up, if I

went to a dance, or – and stayed out, you know, til midnight and then slept late the next morning, by the time I woke up, my mother knew who I danced with, what I did, where I went and the whole thing. So it was – it was very, very provincial. And my parents social life also reflected that, you know. Lot of emphasis of who or what and where and when and how. So, because of that, I also wanted to leave, and when I came here, I had – to **America**, I came to **New York**, I had this wonderful feeling that nobody cared what I did, nobody. And I was on my own and I was free, and I didn't have to – to worry about anybody. I did like it, even though I was alone, I did like it very, very much.

Q: You were ninet – 19 years old?

A: I was 18 and a half – 19, actually. I came here in February, and I graduated in – in – in **Brazil** you graduate in – oh, when did we graduate? End of the year was in October, and then was vacation. And I didn't leave right away, because I had to wait for the new term here, and also because the wa – Korean war had broken out, so my father suddenly got very worried. And actually, originally, I was supposed to go to **London**. He agreed for me to go to **London**, he wasn't too keen on – on **America**. **London**, I don't know, **London** he felt a little more comfortable. When the Korean war broke out, **London** was no longer an option, he was afraid of **Europe** and so on,

and he decided – and – and I wanted to go to – to **New York**, to **America**. My father was not keen on my leaving. It was my mother was, and he wa not.

Q: Did you experience any anti-Semitism in **Brazil** during high school years?

A: None, absolutely none. Because again, in **Brazil** – the Brazilians were not at all anti-Semitic and the American – my classmates and so on, no, no. No, they were very – it wasn't that they did not like me, it was that I did not have enough in common with them to really – you know, to – to – to have some kind of real warm friendship.

Q: Now you're in **New York City**.

A: Now I'm in **New York City**, and again, because of what we went through, and also because my father was – my father, at that point, was beginning to – to be established. He was making a living, and he had started and – but he wasn't terribly well-to-do, because he had lost really everything. But – and at that time the Brazilian government was allowing 200 daw – if you had a student, child, living abroad, they were giving 200 dollars a month at the official exchange. So I was getting 200 dollars a month. My father could afford that, that wasn't a big thing. But he was afraid that if things changed, or he suddenly couldn't afford it, or whatever, he wanted to make sure that I would learn, or be able to – to earn my living as soon as possible. So his condition finally was that if I did come to **New York**, he wanted me

to go to secretarial school before I went to college. And that's what I did, I took a wa – so I went first to secretarial school, and I finished one year of that, and then I went to **NYU**. So – I don't remember what your question was about –

Q: Well, it – I had previously asked you about anti-Semitism –

A: Yeah.

Q: – but then you went on to talk about – you answered that and then went on to talk about being in **New York**.

A: Yeah, well, I liked **New York [indecipherable]**

Q: What did you concentrate – what did you major in in college?

A: I took liberal arts, and I – I did two years of it, and by then I got married, so I didn't finish, because my husband is almost 12 years older than I am and he was already in business and established and we started a life where I also had to entertain and go out and I just couldn't do it all at the same time. And then we had chil – I had children very young.

Q: And how did you meet your husband?

A: Oh, that's actually a cute story. He – my father was a banker in **Kraków** before the war, and my f – late father-in-law was in the banking business in **Lwów** in eastern **Poland**. And so they had done some business together. They were not friends, but – because they were living in different cities and it was a little bit – they

were different. But they had done some business together, and my late father-in-law found out from some – some Polish people from **Kraków** that – who were neighbors of his actually, in the building where he lived, was a family from **Kraków** who knew my parents, and found out that I was here by myself, studying. So he called me on night and said, my name is **Oskar Gruss**, and he – he was – said, I knew your father, and I would like to – you to come for dinner. Now, I had gotten quite a number of invitations like that, because many people knew my parents – well, my father, before the war. And if – they heard that I was alone in **New York**, so they would invite me. And most of these ee – dinners were deadly boring, terrible. So – and most of the names of the people who invited me, prior to this call, I had heard about at home, you know, the – they – but this name I had never heard, so I decided that I wasn't going to go there for dinner, and rush – he wanted me to come Friday night. I said, I'm sorry, Friday night I can't. So he said, when can you? So I said, Monday in two weeks, because I figured out – it took a week – it took five days actually, to write – to write a letter home and get an answer, so that would be 10 days. So it gave me over two weeks to find out who this person was. So he said Monday in two weeks, okay. And he said, we eat early, and – so be there at 6:30. All right, so I said goodbye and I said I would be. And in the meantime I wrote home to my parents, and I said such an **Oskar Gruss** called me, invited me for dinner, shall I

go? Who is it? So I got back an answer sure enough, and my father wrote that there was such a person, he was in the banking business, he was in **Lwów**, and he remembers him, you know, vaguely, not terribly, but – and that if I have nothing better to do on that Monday evening, I can go, I should go. So I decided to go. So I went and I got there at 6:30 sharp and I – my mother-in-law – my future mother-in-law opened the door, and I saw this blank thing – he completely forgot to tell her. But she caught on quite quickly, he mu – they must have talked about me, because once I stood there – first I saw this blank stare, and then she – she sort of caught on who I was. I introduced myself, and she was very nice. And then I saw the maid setting another place, so obviously everybody had forgotten about me. And then I sat – and she was very nice to me, and we sat on the sofa and she actually asked me a lot about what we had gone through, and wha – where was I and what was I doing, and so on. So, about half an hour later, the key turns in the door, and in comes my father-in-law first, and my future husband behind him. And my father-in-law sort of went with his head, oh my God, he said, cause he remembered he for – that he forgot completely that I was coming. Anyhow, then we sat down to dinner, and dinner was a disaster, because my husband had a sister who's no longer alive, and she was studying – oh, she was in third year law school, I think. And they were in **Wall Street**, and the conversation, even though I knew English, seemed to me that I

didn't understand one word, didn't know what they were talking about. And so that was dinner, and then right after dinner, we got up and my future husband said, I'm very sorry, but I have an appointment, and he got up and he left. And I said to myself, I'm going to wait 20 minutes, because I was told someone doesn't get up from the table and leave. But this was horrible, so I said to myself, I'll wait 20 minutes and then I'm leaving. So, during those 20 minutes, we sat on the sofa and my father-in-law also sat with us, my mother-in-law talked some more. And she was very nice, I liked her. And she – and my husband came back before those 20 minutes were up. I later found out that he did have a business appointment on **Broadway**, not far from where they lived, at the **Schrafft's**, they used to meet there at that time, and he had no way of contacting this person, so he ran over, told him I can't be with you tonight, and came back, brought me home. So that was very nice. That was very, very nice. Then I wrote home to my parents that – described the dinner, more or less, in the way – and there was one other detail that I omitted. My parents-in-law had the large collection of Jewish paintings, you know, as they s – they just now actually was – part of it went to the museum, the Jewish museum in **New York**. But they were all **Oppenheimers**(ph) and **Kaufmans**, so they were these Jewish heads. And all these things were staring down at me. And my father-in-law and my future husband, this was a Monday night, were sitting in **kippot**. I had never seen that in

my life. So I was a little bit taken by that, you know, it was such a different kind of home, I'd never seen anything like that. So that was a little strange. So anyhow, I wrote to my parents home about this whole evening, and I got a letter back from my father saying, in the year 1930, with a question mark, I remember sending him a present for his Bar Mitzvah. Why isn't he married yet? So anyway, so that's how I met my husband. We started going out, he started taking me out. This was in February, so it was about a year after I came to **New York**. And I went and – we went out from February til – til June. June I was going home for my vacation, because my s-school year was over. And I – he took me – he told me – he brought me a little radio, I remember, he brought me a present, the – the – just before I was leaving, and he said to me, I'm very sorry, I won't be able to take you to the ship to see you off – I was traveling by ship – because he said, it's a holiday. And I said, a holiday? Well, it turned out it was **Shavuot**, which was a holiday I never even heard about. So at that point I found out that he's observant. He kept it from me, from – from February until June, he took me out – I didn't realize that he was ordering fish, because I didn't really care what he was ordering. But we went out a lot, and I didn't realize that he was religious. Never asked me out on a Friday, but you know, th-that was – I didn't think about it. So when I came home to **Rio**, he came for the Fourth of

July weekend, and he came to my – to our home, he met my parents, and so on and so forth. And we got engaged in September, after I came back.

End of Tape Five, Side B

Interview with Riane Gruss
March 1, 1999

Beginning Tape Six, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** volunteer collection interview with **Riane Gruss**. This is tape number six, side **A**. What is your husband's name?

A: His official name is **Emmanuel Gruss**, he's called **Mike Gruss**.

Q: And you said you got engaged, and then –

A: Yeah, we got engaged in September, when I returned from **Rio**, and we got married in December.

Q: And you've lived in **New York** ever since?

A: Yes, yes, I've lived in **New York** ever since. We got married 1952, December '52.

Q: And do you have children?

A: Yes, we have two daughters. Our older daughter was born in January '54, and our younger daughter was born also in January 1957.

Q: Okay, did you work at all when the children were growing up?

A: No, I never worked. I never worked. I tried to take dictation from my husband on our honeymoon, and I was so inexperienced and slow that he – that was my last attempt. No, I never worked, no.

Interview with Riane Gruss
March 1, 1999

Q: Let's talk now a little bit about some of your thoughts. Do you feel that you would be a different person today, if you hadn't gone through the historical experience that you have?

A: Probably yes, because when I graduated high school, I – really my dream was to study medicine. And whether it was a dream or whether I wasn't, you know, persevering enough – many people who went through what I went through did very well after the war. I felt that my education was like a building without a foundation. Was a great building, but it – there was – as I had great, really great shortages. I didn't know many things, even though I did finish this American high school, I had no – hardly any European history, hardly any – so anyhow, I felt it was without a foundation. A building without a foundation, or – probably, if I had had a normal education, I probably would have been a different person. I would have been a different person also having lived in **Europe** and I don't – I imagine so that – that I would have been very different, yes.

Q: In what way?

A: I would have probably achieved a little more than I did achieve on my own, a-after the war. As I said, I would have had a – probably a better foundation, a regular education. I probably would have been able to – to go on and – and you know, do either medicine, or – or something a little more concrete than what I did.

Interview with Riane Gruss
March 1, 1999

Q: In the sense of coping with life, do y – do you think that you got skills that ordinarily children don't get, because of what you experienced?

A: Children, or as an a – as an adult?

Q: As an adult.

A: Oh.

Q: The adult that you became because of your childhood.

A: I would think in some ways yes, that I – maybe that my perspective on life is somewhat different than it would have been if I didn't go through what I went through. I had an interesting exchange just last week, I don't know if it's relevant or not, with **Brenda** about overprotective parents. And I had met this young – youngish woman who has an only daughter, talking to another youngish woman who has an only daughter. And they seemed to be terribly concerned because the class that these children, third graders were in, were going on some sort of a s-swimming – I don't know, they – at – at some club or something, and one of the mothers was saying how she's going also, because she's concerned they won't have enough lifeguards and 30 little girls swimming, and who knows – and these were not even Jewish people, these were Catholic people. So I – I told **Brenda** about this, I said, I never was concerned about – I mean, if the school took them someplace, I never thought that there was any – so **Brenda** said, maybe i – and I said, this must be because

they're only children. And **Brenda** said no, maybe it's because you went through so much when you were a child, that – that what we were doing was so protected and so normal, never occurred to you that something could happen. And maybe that's true, as the – I thought about it. It was just something that happened 10 days ago, I started thinking about it, maybe she's right. So then I said to her, so I was not an overprotective mother? And she said no, you were not. And I really – maybe that's something that I got out of it. On the other hand, from having read a lot about survivors, I know that many of them are overp – very, very overprotective of their children. I guess the reason is that they feel that these children should accomp – you know, that they – I don't know, I don't know why, but –

Q: Did you share your st-stories about your childhood with your daughters?

A: Very little. Later on in life, when they became more interested, because when they became more grown-up, and started reading and studying at university and so on, they would ask me, and then I would tell them. I didn't want to burden anyone with all of that. I felt that it was irrelevant, it wasn't that – it was over. And no, I didn't tell them too much. Every once in a while, I would make a comment, I remember, to them, you know, when – when I was your age – you know, if there's something meg – you know, was like highly exaggerated I thought by then, I would say, you know, when I was your age, I didn't have such and such, or I didn't even

think about such and such. As a matter of fact, I did that the other day, I don't remember what it was about, with my grandson **Jonathan**, and then he started to ask me, well, where were you, what were you doing? So I told him. As they asked me, I would tell, but not – not share a whole lot of it. He – he said – he said to me, so where were you when you were my age, you know. So I told him, that's how it started, so I told him. So he said, so – so what happened? And – but then you – you – you – you stop, because it's hard for – you don't want to burden a child like that, and many of the things that happened un – until he studies history, until – and that's what I felt with my own children, until they have the historical background, they won't be able to – to grasp what happened. So I – no, I did not talk too much about it, no.

Q: You said that your hus – your father-in-law was from **Poland**. When did your husband come to this country?

A: Oh, he came – he was very lucky, he left **Poland** at the a – my husband did, at the age of 17, because in eastern **Poland** where he was, the an – the anti-Semitism was really quite a problem for – for all of them, especially for my husband. And he left – actually, it's interesting, he really ri – left for a vacation, summer vacation, to learn a little English. So his parents sent him to **England**. And a ye –

Q: What year – what year was that?

Interview with Riane Gruss
March 1, 1999

A: ’38, a year before the war. And he was supposed to go back to **Poland** to finish his last year of – of the gymnasium, of – to matriculate. And he fell in love with **England** and freedom, and – and he told his parents he’s not going back, under no circumstances. And they were very upset, because he hadn’t finished high school, and – and he said he’s not going back. And so he stayed in **England** and went to university in **England**. Actually, he was able to convince the university in **Manchester**, he wasn’t able to do it in **London**, that his, what they call the small matriculation, because there were two matriculations in **Poland**, one was at the age of 16 or 15, and then there was one an – the full one was at 18. And he had the little one, and he had the – some sort of a diploma that that was it. And so he started university in **Manchester**. And he decide – and he never went back, he – so he was lucky, because the war broke out a year later, and he was in **England**. So, he was in **England**, he finished the university in 1942. He came to **America** and he was drafted, he was in the army. As a matter of fact, he was in the – in the Battle of the Bulge. He was – he was in **Europe**, he was overseas. And – and then he came back after the war.

Q: And what kind of work does he do?

A: He is a stockbroker. He’s on the exchange.

Interview with Riane Gruss
March 1, 1999

Q: Were there ever times when you were angry that you were Jewish, because you had such a difficult child mi – childhood because you were Jewish?

A: I wasn't ever angry.

Q: Or have any negative feelings about being Jewish, because of what you had to go through?

A: Yeah, I understand. Yes, when things – especially when the Germans were there in **Poland** and in **Hungary**, I often – I wasn't angry, I wasn't – I often wished that I wasn't Jewish because things would be easier, would be better, and I wouldn't – yes, but I wasn't angry, I wouldn't say I was angry. It was more that I wished like when you go to bed and you fantasize about something, I wished often that I wasn't Jewish.

Q: Have your feelings changed about being Jewish as you've matured?

A: They have changed in the sense that I no longer wish I wasn't Jewish. I just wish that being Jewish, the way it is in **America** wouldn't be so – how shall I put it? Wouldn't be such an important part of my life. I find it – there's just too much of it, it's – it's – being rai – I – you know, I wasn't raised in a home that was that Jewish, it – you were Jewish, you observed, my parents ob-observed Passover – after the war I'm now speaking. And – and Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah and that was being Jewish and – and nobody said you weren't Jewish, but that was about it. And

it was wonderful, you had three big holidays a year, and so on. And here I find that it's just – I find it very confining, yes. But that has nothing to do with the war, I probably would have found it very confining if I had – you know, if I had gotten from the kind of background I was from, into this kind of milieu, I may have found it very confining anyway. I don't know.

Q: You lost your childhood, in many ways. Did you ever feel that you got it back?

A: No, no, you don't get it back, no. You lost it. And what I did feel very strongly when I had my own children was that I was very involved with them. I took care of them myself, even though I didn't have to, and I enjoyed every moment of it, because I saw – you know, I enjoyed when they went to school, and – and – and enjoyed the fact that they enjoyed learning and did well. And – and enjoyed participating in day trips, and everything that – I spent a lot of time doing that, and I really enjoyed it. Not always because of – for them, as I felt that I often relived a part of my life that I never had. So I think because of that – I loved, for instance – I wa – I'm very f – very few women my – that I know, my friends, loved sitting in the park. I loved sitting in the park with those children and just observing them play. And – and the development, nobody ever concentrated on that, on my development, my brother's development, you know, you – you were surviving, you weren't developing. So that, I think I had from that, yes.

Interview with Riane Gruss
March 1, 1999

Q: When your daughters turned the ages – the age that you were – let's say when you and your mother and brother had to – you know, were on – in the train and going to **Siberia**, and all those very difficult times, did that bring back memories for you? Was that an especially hard time, when they were the age that you were?

A: No, I th – I do though, think, or actually I did often, sort of, when they would turn seven, like when the war would break out, it's not that I rethought what happened to me so much as I sort of marked the time and said, this is when – when it started for me and – and look what they're like. And I was often amazed how – looking at them, how childish they were, you know, here they – and – and when I think what I was like at that age, that's when I realized what the war had done to me. At seven, you know, I – I – even my grandchildren, I look at them, I mean, they – they're children. And when I think what I had to do and what I had to go through and what I had to think when I was that age, yes, it's – so when these la – these mar – these ages came, that – that were very significant in my life in terms of what happened to me, I would sort of look at them and say, my God, what was I like? How different was I when they – when that happened – when – when I was that age, yes. But not that I sat there and sort of reminisced, no. I'm not that much of a reminiscing person. But that did strike me, you know, when – when – and also the opportunities. But then my husband says very often, rightly, that our generation, he also didn't have the

opportunities that young people have today. Even though he – okay, he went to the army, but – so – but – but – and he has a university education, but young pe – like **Brenda**, for instance, she could travel, she – she did, I mean, she did all these things. She went to school, she traveled, she worked, she did all kinds of things before she got married. We didn't have a chance to do any of that. The world has changed. Young people also weren't as independent. But it often did sort of strike me how different their life was, and I was determined, that I remember thinking, that I would make sure that – that this should not happen to them. Yes, I di – in what way? Maybe by living here, or whatever, that – that I was hoping this would never happen to them. That I remember thinking, yes, that – that this kind of thing should not happen to them.

Q: Do you think it could happen again?

A: Another war like that, and another – not quite like that, but horrible things could happen, sure. Of course, yes, yes, we have no – no way of making sure that it will not happen. Maybe not in the same form. Probably not in the same form.

Q: Have you experienced anti-Semitism in your adult life?

A: Once, in a very strange way in – actually in **Poland**. We went back about two or three times. My father had property in **Poland**, which I now have. And it was very strange, it was the first time we went back, my husband and I, we were together.

Interview with Riane Gruss
March 1, 1999

And it was in 19 six – no, 1973. And we went to – to **Kraków**, and we ac – actually, it was the only time in my life, including the wars, interestingly enough, that I experienced outspoken anti-Semitism. Because during the war I never experienced it. I mean, I knew they were murdering Jews, but the Germans were doing it, and I personally never did. I wasn't in school, so I never did. And – and the Polish people, I also have very strong opinions about people – Polish people helping Jews, because those Jews who survived like I did, at one point or another had to be helped by Christians. Otherwise there was no hope, there was no way you could have survived. But anyway, I wa – we were in **Kraków** and we went to visit **Auschwitz**. Was a Sunday morning. And we came back, and both my husband and I speak Polish, and we had – we took a taxi or a driver, or whatever. And we came back from **Auschwitz**, it must have been like two o'clock Sunday, and – we went early in the morning, and we were starved. So we wanted – but we didn't – you feel funny after going there, funny. You feel very strange. And we didn't want to go to some fancy place for lunch, so we decided to ask the driver to just take us someplace where there's some food, where workers go. You know, a normal kind of place. So – so he said, okay, he'll take us where he sometimes eats and many of the cab drivers and workers eat there. So he said a very unpretentious kind of – that's what we were looking for, something unpretentious. So he took us there, and it was crowded, and it

was unpretentious and it was very crowded, and they were seating people together with other people. So we sat down – they told us to sit at a table where there was a young couple. They were speaking Polish. My husband and I were speaking English, because – but of course, they were speaking Polish because they were Polish, and we understood every word. And we sat down and we – I don't know, we spoke about, I don't know what we spoke about, but we spoke English. And there was no menu, so we got a big plate of sauerkraut, mashed – and big, big portions, sauerkraut, mashed potatoes and some sort of meat. And I – I'm a very good eater, but it was a huge portion, particularly there were a lot of these potatoes. So I finished everything except about half the potatoes. And she, the young woman, turned to her whoever he was, escort or – or boyfriend or husband, I don't know what he was, and she said to him, look she – he s – she said – and it's true that at that time there were still shortages in **Poland** – one always has to understand where it all comes from – and she said, look she's – he – she said, she didn't finish her potatoes. That – and so he said, yeah, I see, and then she said – she was more virulent than he – she was virulent, he wasn't. And she said, they're probably not good enough for her. And then she turned to him and said, look, she has this big Jewish nose. It was the only time – and to this day I'm really mad at myself that I didn't say any – something. But I was so taken aback. Also, I was so innocently

accused, because I just couldn't finish those potatoes. But the point was, that this was the only time, in all my life – I told my husband – the only time that I experienced anti-Semitism, you know, in its rawest kind of form. So, nothing, I didn't finish the potatoes, and they left, and so on. I wasn't – they finished, I mean, th-they had – she made that one remark, and then she didn't focus on us at all. But it was interesting. So that was the only time I really experienced sort of – and that was after the war, way after the war.

Q: What were some of your emotions when you visited **Auschwitz**?

A: Well, it's a pretty terrible place to visit. First of all, I was grateful I didn't end up there. But, you know, I've seen photographs, I've read about it, I knew about the camps already, you know, right after the end of war. It just bore out what I knew was – had happened, and how it had – how it looked and so on. So it was a horrible day and it's very depressing, but na – I didn't discover anything I didn't know, so –

Q: When your parents found out after the war, what had happened to – and the extent of what had happened, was this something again they shared with you, or you talked about with them?

A: After the war – well, during the war, we already knew that some of our relatives are – were killed. We were lucky to survive, all four of us, but we knew that some of them were – my father's brothe – brother-in-law was killed, his niece was killed. I

knew all of that, so it wasn't it – we didn't – they didn't wait til after the war, it was – some of them were shot before they were deported, those pe – so we knew, yes, I knew, of course. Tha-Tha – it wasn't a big discovery after the war. There were maybe individual – again, my situation is very different from other people, because my parents, as I probably said at the beginning, were very, very wealthy before the war. And we are – were raised in **Vienna** by governesses and nurses. We had no contact with other children. And also my parents fo – the families were in **Poland**. So in 1938, when we went to **Poland**, we still had no contact with anybody. My mother was afraid of – of children's diseases. At that time there were all these concerns. So I hardly – I didn't know my cousins, I didn't – I met them in **Siberia**, those – th – but those were the ones that went from **Siberia** to **Palestine**, so I knew they were safe and I knew them a little during that one year in **Siberia**. But I didn't know my uncles, I didn't know my aunts. My parents didn't – it was not a terribly close, enormous family, it was not. So I – contrary to other people like my – like my husband, when we went back to **Lwów**, to wa – and also, he was older. So when I walked with him through **Lwów**, he would show me, he – this is where Aunt So and So lived, and this is where Aunt So and So lived, and this is where the school was, and this is where the synagogue was, and this was here, and this was there. I didn't have all of that. I didn't – I didn't know where my relatives lived.

Q: Did he lose many members of his extended family?

A: **Mike**? Yes, he did. Yeah, he lost a good number, yes, yes. His grandparent – I don't know, yes, a good – a good number, yes. And so did we actually, because my – my – couple of my cousins, my – two of my aunts on my father's side. My mother's side, an uncle who I never met. One of my cousins, yes, I – I lost some, he lost some, yes. But I didn't know them well.

Q: When you go into a room now, and you meet people who are amer – Native Americans, and – do you feel like you are a different person than they are? Do you feel like you're two different people, someone on the inside, and someone on the outside to the public, because of your experience?

A: No, I do feel not two different people, I do feel very different from when I walk into an American – into a room with Native Americans – it's not Native Americans, you mean Jews who were born – born here, Americans who were born here. Yes, very much so, yes. I do feel that. Don't forget, to this day I have an accent. So very often, to this day, I mean I still have a – an accent, I na – people can hear that I wasn't born here. So, to this day, people will ask me, you know, where are you from, and then they start, you know, asking you where you're from, or where were you born. The next thing you know, they know that you went through the war, because in **[indecipherable]** figure out your age and so on. So they – unless I want

to cut them short, which I do very often if I feel I don't want to talk about it, then I'll just say, you know, I was born in **Vienna**, but I left when I was five. And then I don't say where I left, I don't – I don't tell them that I went east instead of west. But yes, yes, I do feel different, yes, definitely.

Q: How would you describe yourself today? Are you American, are you Polish? What are you?

A: Definitely not Polish, but defi – I would say American. I – yes, I like this country the most of any country that I've lived in. I've been very happy here. I like the political system. I think definitely American. But as I said, I think yesterday, that I still feel – **[inaudible, background noise]** I still – you'll get that noise. **[break] –** that when I see the newspaper – I think I said that yesterday also, and there's some news from **Poland**, I will read it, as opposed to let's say, news from **Hungary**, where I was a little while, and occasionally I'll look at it. But news from **Poland** I will read, so I must have some sort of feeling about knowing the country, knowing a little about their problems, and being interested in it. Never read news about **Austria**, don't feel Austrian at all, even though I was born there. That I really don't. But of course, we are all a little mixed up because we – because of the fact th-that we didn't grow up here. You know, when you don't grow up someplace and you become naturalized much later in life, you probably feel differently. And also,

Interview with Riane Gruss
March 1, 1999

English is not my native language, I learned it much later. So, I think it has something to do with it. Today, for instance, and also interesting, during the Purim celebration at **JPDS**, where I was with **Jonathan** today, they were singing all these Purim songs, it left me cold, I must say. But when they sang – what did they sing? Not the stars – **"America, the Beautiful,"** I felt a twinge, I really did. So yes, I do like this country.

Q: How did you convey Jewish culture to your children, Jewish religion to your children?

A: I didn't, my husband did. I really fe – was a very m – I did what – what was expected of me. I didn't put any effort into that at all. My husband was the one who cared about it. And I didn't sabotage it, but I certainly didn't, you know, I didn't – I wanted my children to be Jewish, but I didn't put a great deal of effort into it. It wasn't may doing. If – if – if it worked out, it was his doing.

Q: Are you proud that you are Jewish?

A: Y-Yes, but again, I don't – I'm not proud of – of the way Americans feel Jewish. I – it – it – it actually upsets me. I don't like the fact that they're so – so sure of themselves, so cocky, so – there's just – I keep thinking of it as just too much. Too – too – politically when they also – all these – these pressure groups, and all this Jewish stuff. And even **Israel** the way it's becoming today. This aggressiveness, and

this – you know, we are – we are different, we are better, we are th – it's just too much for me. Am I proud to be Jewish? Yes, in a quiet way, I'm very proud to be Jewish, but when it's – when it becomes overwhelming, and overbearing and then I- I don't like it.

Q: What are your thoughts about **Germany**?

A: Oh, **Germany** –

End of Tape Six, Side A

Beginning Tape Six, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** volunteer collection interview with **Riane Gruss**. This is tape number six, side **B**, and I was asking you your thoughts and – about **Germany**.

A: We went to **Germany** about – when did we go? About eight or 10 years ago there was an exhibition of – I don't remember what it was, it was a history of the Jews, it was in germ – in **Berlin**, and one of my mother-in-law's paintings was at that exhibition, so we – we decided to go. So we went, and I found it –

Q: This is a painting your mother-in-law owned, or painted?

A: Oh, yes, owned, owned, owned. From her collection. I found – first, what you do is, what most people I think do is, you sort of look around and you figure out whether this person was alive during the war or not. That's what most people do and

I did that to some degree also. And I soon realized that most people were not alive, because they – they were younger, my age or younger. And even if they were my age, then they were children during the war, so then I started telling myself that you can't – you know, you can't hold – think about that all the time, you just cannot. And would I want to live there? No. Do I hate them? No. You know, it's – it's hard to say what I think about them. I don't know whether they are any worse than – I often wonder what would happen in this country if there would be gradually, as very gradually our – th-the Nazi racial laws were – they didn't – they weren't done from one day to the next. People don't realize that. It came on very gradually. If there would be such laws passed against the black population, would we react, would we s – you know, some of us maybe the vi – but most of us would not. We would just sit quietly and – and – and probably not go out and help people and so on. So therefore I – I also know that helping was very, very difficult during the war. It was risky, it was dangerous, it was more than – I mean, in **Poland** people who helped were executed. They – there was no trial, no anything if they were caught. So, under those circumstances, would I do that for somebody else? Probably not. So therefore I have no – I don't hold it against them, I don't hate them. That's my feeling. I wouldn't want to live there, but then I wouldn't want to live anywhere except here, so it's the same – same thing. But I have – I – no, I don't hate – I don't hate that – hate them,

no. Just like I don't hate the Poles for that one – I didn't enjoy that one anti-Semitic incident, but I don't hate them, no. I've had some very good experiences with Polish people as well. We were on a hiking trip, I'll never get – we went – my husband and I, we – one of the trips that we took, we went to **Kraków** about two – two or three years ago when I start – when they started giving back property, we – I went, and we saw lawyers and we did this and that and the other. And then there was a Polish holiday, so we suddenly found ourselves with three days or four days as – a weekend, and over the weekend, and so we decided to go to **Zakopane**. We had to remain, we had appointments afterwards. **Zakopane** is in the mountains, in the – in the **Tatra** mountains. And both my husband and I enjoy hiking, they have wonderful walks there, so we went. And we met – it was a sort of difficult, somewhat steep hike for us, and it was after a rain, and there was moss and it was a little slippery. So climbing up was not bad, but I was afraid that it's not a loop. I wasn't sure it's a loop, and I was afraid of coming down the same trail. So, there was a young woman with a better trail map than what we had, which was not very good. And she was going up and I – we asked her whether it was a loop and so on, and she said, yes, it was a loop, we didn't have to come down the same way. And then she said she was a very good hiker, and she said she's going ahead, but she has two or three friends coming behind and they are slow, and they'll probably catch up with us, and we

should just follow them, and okay, thank you very much. We went up, and then sure enough there was a bu – they came up behind us and then we confirmed the route, and then they went ahead, and they were still faster than we. And eventually we – we met up with them again at the top where there was a beautiful overlook. And going – so, we already had talked with them, so we asked them about going down, which way the – you know, th-th-the – the trail, which was the best way to go down, the easiest way, we were looking for. So they explained to us, and they explained to us that at some point there's going to be a **V** and we had to take an – but there was another little trail, and then you had to take the left, but it was difficult. They said it would be a little bit maybe difficult to find. So, we got there, to that point, and there they were again. And they were sitting and waiting for us, and on the ground there was, in little pebbles, they had made an arrow which one – but – and they showed us that this is the arrow and they made it for us. And then I said, so why are you here? And they said, because we were really concerned about you, so we decided to wait for you after all. I've hiked in **America**, I've hiked in – in **Switzerland**, we've hiked in **France**, nothing like that ever happened to us. Did they know we were Jewish? Probably yes, because the way we speak Polish, th-they – we both speak well, but we don't – y-you know, when you haven't been in a country for 45 years, even if you speak continuously, it's a little – the language is a little different. And a-also,

they knew we had – were tourists, from the way we dress, from the way we – th- there's no – I mean, nobody thought the – so that was very nice, very nice. Then we started talking some more, they invited us to their homes, but they – they were not from **Zakopane**, they were also there – they were someplace from the north of **Poland** where we wer – never went. But, you know, that was something and I thought it was very, very nice. Never happened anywhere else. So you can't tell. People are people, and they're different, and everybody's different.

Q: What language do you think in?

A: I think probably the language I speak in at the moment, but I do think probably in Polish quite often. But probably in the language – and people ask me what – what – you know, the classical question is what language do you dream in? I have no idea. But probably the language I speak at the moment, I tend to – to do that. But I do – when I am by myself, I think I sp – I think in Polish a lot.

Q: Tell me briefly about what happened to your uncle, **Joseph Schtiglietz**(ph) who went on to **Palestine**.

A: He went to **Palestine** and he opened a gallery, like he did be – like he had before the war. He did extremely well, and the gallery was just closed about two years ago, when he died. But he lived there, and he was definitely a Zionist, was a da – Zionist before the war. He was very happy to be in **Israel**, traveled very often to **Europe**

and bought and sold and – and so on. And died a well t – very well-to-do man. So he did very well. And his children – his daught – he has two daughters and a son. His wife died a few years before him, and they're – and the children all live in **Israel**, all three of them, and they're married and have children and so on, and I'm in touch with them.

Q: Was it very hard for you when he died, because you said you had such an intense connection to him when you were younger?

A: It was very hard, because he was also very sick for a long time before he died, and he was in a senior citizen situation in – in **Bat Yam**, and I visit – I went all the time when I was there, went all the time. But it was very – it was heartbreaking because he – it was hard to also figure out, you know, exactly what he had, because – it was probably a number of strokes, because in **Israel** I find they don't – it's not like in **America**, in **America** people are very blunt, and the doctors tell the patient an-and you know exactly what, more or less, what the story is. Over there my cousins would say, well, you know, old age and so on. And it bothered me a lot because I couldn't get to the bottom of it, but he – he had – he was sick for a year, very sick and – and – and then he died.

Q: I was just thinking, he had such a profound effect on you and a profound influence on you as a child, but his lo – his an – his death must have been a tremendous loss for you.

A: Yeah, it was, it was both for me and for my brother. We ta – often talked about it, about that, yeah. And when we went to **Israel**, one of my main reason – we have a home in **Israel**, and – and we did that when our children were – were ha – our older daughter was about 10 when we built the home. So we did that when they were young, and the reason was, actually, that we wanted them to speak Hebrew well, and not – you know, spoken Hebrew, and get to know the country, and my husband was always interested in hi – zi – he – he is a Zionist, always supported the state. He also has an office in **Israel**, he also was business-wise active. But the main reason why I supported the whole thing was because of my uncle. I mean, otherwise, I wouldn't have wanted to have a house there, and so on. But – so we saw a lot of him when we were there, all the time.

Q: Do you also speak Hebrew?

A: I speak some Hebrew, yes. I learned it when I was – you know, I go there quite – we still go twice a year, all the time. And I – I don't speak terribly well, because – my husband speaks fluently and very, very well. But I just went to an old **[indecipherable]** in **New York**, and I found out exactly, the same as with my other

education, I learn languages by hearing, very easily. But because I never had any kind of Jewish education **[indecipherable]**. So I didn't – the – the class at the **[indecipherable]** was composed mostly of women who knew how to read very well, and knew how to pray, but couldn't put a sentence together, and I could speak very well, but I couldn't read. So – and then they would sit there and start, you know doing the **diktuk**(ph) and – and so on, and I dropped out, because that's not what I was – I was interested in learning how to speak well, and – and so I learned it by be – first in the **[indecipherable]** basic things, then I had some private lessons and I go t – go to **Israel** all the time, so I understand well, and I speak well – well enough, but I don't read it, and tha – it's a superficial kind of thing, but I don –

Q: Speaking of **Israel**, what was your reaction at the time of the **Eichmann** trial? Do you remember anything special?

A: I remember the **Eichmann** trial, I was terribly happy that they caught him, and I thought it was a great trial, and was a great thing for **Israel** and I was all in favor of it. I can't say that I felt the same way when **Demjanjuk** was tried, and subsequent, you know, that kind of thing. Because again, you – it's like with a very, you know, successful event, it's hard to repeat it. And sometimes it's counterproductive.

Q: Did it stir memories, the **Eichmann** trial, for you?

Interview with Riane Gruss
March 1, 1999

A: A little bit, because **Eichmann** was in **Hungary**, I don't know if you realize. He was the one that – and there were – that's why the deportations from – from **Hungary** were so efficiently done, because he came there and he did it very quickly and efficiently. So I kept hearing the name **Eichmann**. So it didn't stir memory – well, you know, I th – I was afraid it didn't – that we would be deported, we weren't. So, after the war, when he was caught, I was just glad that he was caught, and I thought it was a very worthwhile trial, both for **Israel** and for the world. That – that one trial I thought was great, but I don't like when they try these people who are now in their 80s, and you know, like in **France** when they tried – who was it that they were trying, was so old, and it's – it doesn't – I don't think it makes sense to put – to – for that kind of thing to – to be tried so many years later. You don't have the witnesses, you don't have anything.

Q: Do you have any special attachments to the civil rights movement here in the **United States**, again, because of your experience?

A: I'm not a very political person, wa – the only thing – no, not the civil rights, no, I –

Q: A sensitivity, in a – wa – do you feel you have a greater sensitivity to it?

A: Yes, I would say sensitivity, yes. When I read about what does happen, or doesn't happen, especially now in **New York**, we have all these incidents with –

because of the police seems to overreact because of our present administration, I get – I read all of that and it upsets me. The other sensitivity that I have is that I became aware of an organization called the **Abraham** Fund in **New York**, which is an organization that tries to promote better understanding and – and coexistence basically, between Israeli Jews and Arabs, in – in **Israel** within the Green Line and I'm very active with that, because I think that, you know, having, like my husband said, having been a second class citizen in a country like **Poland**, one knows what it feels like to be an Arab in **Israel**, with the same problems of having an identity card, where you're – you know, the religion is stamped in and that sort of thing. So, because of that, I do have more of a sensitivity about that. But mainly in connection with **Israel**, not so much with **America**, because in **America**, it's a problem that I'm not familiar enough with, or knowledgeable enough where I think, you know, that I can actively make an enormous difference. So I just read about it.

Q: You had said earlier that you are – you don't read other Holocaust memoirs, but you read historical books, is that correct?

A: Historical books? Not so much historical as when there's something worthwhile, from a different point of view. For instance, I found that f – I don't remember what the name of it was, a book that somebody recommended to me just last year, about women. It was called, between courage and something else. Not a very good title, I

thought. A woman who is, I think a sociologi – a professor of sociology, whatever, and who wrote about women in **Germany**, ger – the Jewish women in **Germany**, between 1933 and ’39. It wasn’t even about the war. And I found – that kind of thing I find very interesting because it – it talked about how the structure of the family changed, as the men were losing their positions and were not allowed to wo – to execute, let’s say, doctors were not allowed to practice, you know, as the racial laws progressed in **Germany**. Before the war, women tended to sometimes earn a living, sometimes the men became so isolated and so discouraged and so demoralized that the women were the f – th-the force behind the family. Also, when they had the discriminatory laws against children in schools, it was the women who went to the schools, and – and – and were in touch with the children, and heard about all of that. Also, when the husband was arrested, which happened very often at that point, or had some running in with the police, it was the women who went in and tried to – to talk to the police and tried to help the husbands. It totally changed the structure of the family. The women became the – the stronger part of the family, very often in – in a way that would not have happened at all, had it not been a – in a – a – had this not happened. And I find that kind of thing interests me very much. It – It’s partly, you know, German anti-Semitism, Holocaust, but it’s not just a story of what somebody went through, but how it affected life and affected the families, and

affected every-everything; how it changed things; how it showed – I – I – I also noticed that in my own family, that my mother was the much more, somehow, resourceful person during the war than my father, who had a tremendous position before the war. But once all of this was taken away from him, he – it – and I, of course, as a child I never understood what was going on. That kind of thing interests me, that kind of thing I read. There was recently a book by a German man written, called **"The Reader,"** did you read that?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: I find – that I find also very interesting; motivation, why and so on. Little – in order to – I read about the Holocaust only things that I – books that I think will give me more insight. That – that's the only reason why I read them. Otherwise I really am not interested.

Q: Are there any sights or sounds today that make you think back, or odors, smells, or even getting on a train? Does any of this ever trigger thoughts of the war?

A: Not odor and not smell and not trains. What does trigger is music, I would say. And not some lofty music, but let's say if I hear someplace, in an old, whatever, **"Lili Marlene."** That triggers it. But – or the other day I saw, gee, a wonderful film, which I think is going to be released, called comede – **"Comedian**(ph) **Harmonicum**(ph)**."** Did you hear about it?

Interview with Riane Gruss
March 1, 1999

Q: Yeah.

A: And that kind of music then triggers, but not, no, not trains and not – trains are so different now, you know, what – what – I mean, if you take **Amtrak** from – it's –

Q: Well, I meant because you were what, six weeks on a train.

A: Yeah, I know, no – yeah, but wa – the train itself is so different that it doesn't trigger that, no, mm-mm, no, no.

Q: What about lots of snow?

A: Snow, that's a good question, I l – st – I love it. I think it's beautiful when it falls. In **New York** there was – when we had that – what was it, the storm – not storm, what did they call it? The blizzard, a few years ago, I at – and I went to the park, I sort of said to myself, here we have – what did we get, say 12 inches, 16 inches, I don't know. And I remember – and I said to myself, this is lovely, but, you know, it's really not terribly much; they make such a fuss over it. But what we had in **Siberia**, the snow falls and it di – never, ever melts. And I remember when we were going to this school there, there was like a little – it was like a corridor and on both sides the snow came up to practically my – to my shoulders, I – just my little head was out there. So – and it was like that for months and months. So, yes, I did think about that for a moment, but just as a joke, rather than – you know, it doesn't trigger anything horrible.

Interview with Riane Gruss
March 1, 1999

Q: Is there anything else that you wanted to say, or anything we haven't covered? Anything – any maybe messages to your grandchildren? Anything you'd like to say before we close?

A: Messages to my grandchildren. I hope it never happens to them. No. I hope they have good lives, and then you know, will – will just see this as an interesting thing that happened to one of their grandparents. No, nothing special.

Q: Well, thank you very much for doing the interview.

A: You're very welcome. You're very welcome, I hope it, you know, it's of interest to somebody at some time. My grandson today asked me about this, my eight year old, why are you doing this? Why are you telling **Gail** about this? So I said to her – I said to him, it's going to go to the museum, the Holocaust Museum. And he – and he said why? And I said, well, you know, maybe someday somebody is going to study about what happened in **Europe** at that time, and maybe they'll look for somebody who was not very old, or was still a child and was in **Hungary**. And they'll look up in the index and they'll look up **Hungary**, and there'll be one other story, it will be different from what Hungarian children went through, because I'm – wasn't Hungarian, I – and ho – he said oh. That was the end of that. So, I tried to explain to him wa – what this is good for. So I hope in that sense that, you know, it's good for that.

Q: It certainly is. Well, that's a wonderful note to end on. Thank you again.

A: Okay.

Q: This concludes the interview with **Riane Gruss**.

End of Tape Six, Side B

Conclusion of Interview