

**Interview with Erika Eckstut  
January 16, 2002**

**Beginning Tape One, Side A**

Question: This is the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Erika Eckstut**, conducted by **Esther Finder** on January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2002 in **Potomac, Maryland**. This interview is part of the museum's project to interview Holocaust survivors and witnesses who are also volunteers with the museum. This is a follow up interview that will focus on **Erika Eckstut's** post Holocaust experiences. In preparation for this interview I listened to the interview you conducted with the Survivors of the **Shoah** Visual History Foundation on September 29<sup>th</sup>, 1996. I will not ask you to repeat everything you said in that interview. Instead, I will use this interview as an opportunity to follow up on that interview and focus on your post Holocaust experiences. This is tape number one, side **A**. What was your name at birth?

Answer: **Erika Neuman**.

Q: When were you born?

A: On June 12<sup>th</sup>, 1928.

Q: And where were you born?

A: In **Znojmo**. That was in **Czechoslovakia**.

Q: How old were you when the war began in 1939?

A: In 1939 I was 11. 11? '28 - '29, yeah, 11. 11.

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

Q: And how old were you when you realized that the war was over?

A: When the war was over, I was 16 years old. I was 17 in -- in June.

Q: What can you tell me about the day that you realized that the war was over?

A: This is -- this is really a question I always had a very hard time to answer, because there were so many -- so many things in me. You know, first of all, I thought about my parents. We didn't have our parents, we were alone, my sister and I and her husband. And then, you know, the relatives which we didn't know who survived and who not, who were in concentration camps. And it -- it was just a wonderful feeling, but we were also very sad because we didn't have our parents and other relatives, but it was still a wonderful feeling. And I -- I -- I can't really explain it, ho-how wonderful it was.

Q: When did you realize that the war was over?

A: When I realized? When -- when -- when they -- they announced it. They -- we -- we were with the army, we were not alone when they announced that the war was over, because my sister got married on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1945 with a Czech officer, a Jewish Czech officer, and we were with him. We were with the army. So when the army announced that the war is over, for me the war was over. And that was mar -- May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1945 when I heard that the war was over.

Q: So you were with the Czech army?

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

A: With the Czech army I was.

Q: How long had it been since you were under Nazi occupation, cause you just said you were with the Czech army.

A: Yes.

Q: When was the last time you were under Nazi control?

A: I was under -- I was in -- that was 1945 and we left -- '44, when we left **Russia**. In **Russia** we were not under the -- we left in, I think it was in '43, we left under the Nazis and we came to **Russia**. And we were in **Russia** and from **Russia** we left. It was o-on -- I know exactly, on December 24<sup>th</sup>, we left **Russia**. And we ended up in **Poland**, then in **Czechoslovakia**. And that was the last time I was under the -- in -- in '43 I was the last time under the -- you know, under the Nazi occupation.

Q: And you mentioned that you went from **Russia** to **Poland** to **Czechoslovakia**.

A: Yes, that's exactly right. We went with the Czech army and we actually went with the -- i-it was a convoy of tractors. And we went with the tractors to **Poland**, and from **Poland** we escaped because where we were left was not a good place to be, we found that out very soon. And we ran away and we a-again got hold of a Czech army -- not any more the no -- what we were before, with a tractor of -- not tractor, with a -- a -- with just a car we got -- we got to **Czechoslovakia**.

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

Q: You mentioned before that you were with your sister and her husband, who was a -- a Czech officer.

A: Yeah. That was after -- after the march when she got married to him.

Q: Where were you living?

A: When where I was living? When I left -- when I left **Czechoslovakia** -- I mean, when I left **Russia**?

Q: No, when -- when you realized the war was over, where were you living?

A: Oh I -- w-we -- we were with the army, you know, wherever the army gave us a place. He had a place, my brother-in-law and I was -- I was the addition when he got married, I got married too, to him. No, I -- I'm just kidding. No, he took me too.

Q: Did you and your sister do any work to support yourselves?

A: We -- we did some, you know, we did some in -- in **Czechoslovakia**, matter of fact. We did also some -- my sister did all along in **Russia**. I did in **Russia** some work too. I went to school but I also did work.

Q: What kind of work?

A: I worked in a hospital. I checked -- in ladies who were pregnant, came to check in, and I checked them in.

Q: When the war was over, did you make any efforts to find missing loved ones and friends?

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

A: We didn't have any opportunity to make any pra -- a-any kind of inquiry until the war was completely over. And then only -- really we couldn't go anywhere, but our husbands went. You know, I was, in the meantime I got married and our husbands went, we couldn't even go. Because it wasn't -- it -- it still was not -- you couldn't go as a ci-civil person you couldn't go to any different country. And we had to go to a different country. So our husbands went and they got our parents.

Q: Okay, let me ask you about your husband. How did you meet him and what were the circumstances?

A: My husband I met when my sister married her husband. He was the best man. He was a very, very nice gu-guy, and when I met him, my brother-in-law said, you can ask him if you want to ride the horse. He can get it for you. And he was 10 years older than me and he just put his hands on my cheek and he said, oh you are a nice little girl. I had braids and I really looked like a little girl in comparing to him. And anyway, that's how I met him, and then, in th -- when my sister got married and all, once he sent my brother-in-law and my sister away and he came to visit me. I was in the Czech army. Every officer had a **spoika**. A **spoika** means a helper, and I was left in the place with a **spoika**. And when my late husband came to visit me, he told the **spoika** that he cou -- has off. And he wanted to kiss me and I wouldn't allow him, I really hit him, you know? And then he didn't come any more and then he

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

wanted to marry me. And when we went -- it was after the war and when we went to get married, I couldn't because I was too young. So we didn't get married. But then he was transferred to a place and he became them -- their -- he -- he was -- I -- I don't really know how you say it in English. He was a biggest man the army had in that town. And that was the town where was a German -- lot of Germans lived, and they were transported away, to go back to **Germany**. And this is where -- where we came, and he was the big shot there. We have number one, that we was the first ones to get married in that little town and nobody gave us a hard time. I had -- of course, I had to get -- what do you call it, somebody to take care of me because I didn't have my -- my parents, and my sister couldn't -- couldn't have done it. You know, you have to have a -- I-like your father, you know, who would give you permission. And my late husband had an uncle and gave me permission and we got married there, in that little town. This was **Freiwaldau** in -- in -- in the czechoslo -- in **Czechoslovakia**. And that -- that happened only on August 28, 1945. The -- first we wanted to get married in June, when I turned 17, but we couldn't. So then when he got transferred and all, and then, you know, when he got there he had us come and we got married.

Q: What was his name?

A: His name was **Robert Kauder, R-o-b-e-r-t K-a-u-d-e-r**.

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

Q: So all in all, how long did you know him before you married him?

A: I knew him from March until I married him, until I -- I married him in August. You see, you have to understand. When they came back, there was no Jewish girls, you know, there were no Jews when they came back. He had an aunt there and that - - that's a whole story in itself you -- you know, she was at home and her husband was in -- in **Theresienstadt**. He was in the camp the whole time, and he came back. But when he went to see his aunt, he found out that his mother and his sister were taken to **Auschwitz** and that -- that they died. And he was extremely sad. And then he wanted to get married, when he found out that he doesn't have anybody. And there really -- there really was nobody, we were -- it was very easy, really, to get married tha-that time, you know, I mean, it -- you didn't have anybody, like we didn't have our parent, and I married him. I didn't know that my parents are alive. Even so, the war was over in May. We still had no idea until -- I was married already to him when we found out where they are. That was through the Red Cross, cause we had no idea where my -- we didn't have any idea if our -- my parents are alive. And we did not find them where we left them, we found them in **Bukarin**, which is a capital of **Romania** and we left them in the **Bukovina**, completely different place. But my uncle -- my father had three brothers in the **United States** and only one really cared to si -- send letters and checking if we are alive. And the

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

first one they found was me, and I got a letter and there was 25 dollars in it. And then my sister, I think got it, and then somehow we got to know that our parents are in **Romania**, and then when our husbands went to get. That must have been someplace either end of '45, or beginning of '46 because it was cold outside when they came. But I -- I don't know the exact date when they came, I really can't remember. But I know I was married and I got married on August, like I said, 28, 1945. So they weren't there. When they came, I was married, you know, so it could have been end of the '45 or beginning of '46, I really don't remember.

Q: At the age of 17, did you feel you were ready for marriage?

A: I had no idea what marriage is. I had absolutely no idea. I remember what I -- I didn't have anything, and my late husband, a-and -- it was hard, you know, to buy something, and he wanted to make a me a dowry. And all I wanted was a -- a nightgown from flannel, because I never, ever wore a -- a nightgown. So I thought that's what I need is a big, long nightgown. That's what I want. And he did ge -- get -- you -- you know, a dowry for me, because I didn't have anything, nothing. I didn't have nothing, just what I wore. And go -- he got me whatever, and my -- my brother-in-law got some lace and his sister, who came back from **Auschwitz**, she was actually an -- you know, she used to make clothes. And she didn't have a machine or anything. And she made me a gown for my wedding. It is a short gown.



**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

It was a short -- wasn't enough material. And I don't think I -- I -- I don't know, I don't feel I have -- I don't have a picture here, but it's very funny the way -- it looks nice. It's -- it was nice. It was really ve-very nice.

Q: You mentioned a few moments ago that your husband was the -- the big boss in -  
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A: The big boss, yeah, in -- in **Freiwaldau**, in **Grafenberg-Freiwaldau** it was called, where we were. **Freiwaldau** was the city and **Grafenberg** was a -- i-it was there an institution for people who have troubles with their brains. It was at **Grafenberg**. And we lived actually on the way up **Grafenberg**. We had a beautiful house, but we -- we -- i-it was a beautiful, beautiful house, and we lived there. And in 1997 I went with my granddaughter to see the place, I went back. And there lived -- there lived some people. And I said -- it was raining outside, and I have there a cousin and she took us. And when I rang the bell I said, I used to live here. He said, you couldn't have lived here. Here lived a young girl who is a chief of the army. I said, that was me. And he let us go in. Was nice. It was really nice. I had my granddaughter. Was very nice to go back.

Q: Do you remember your husband's military rank?

A: It -- here it was a -- a -- a captain or a -- a -- a major. I think he got the major after, I don't really remember. I don't remember. It was not **[indecipherable]** he

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

was not -- I think he got -- he was a major. He was a captain when I met him, and I think then he got -- he got a major. I'm not hundred percent, I think that's what happened.

Q: When you got married and lived in this house that you remember so fondly --

A: Yes?

Q: -- how were you treated by the -- by your neighbors?

A: You know, I did not associate, actually, with the neighbors, only with the military. And we -- but what we did have was a maid. And she was a Czech and she was nice. I had no problem, and her husband did in the garden. We had a beautiful garden with the pool and everything was very nice, very, very nice. I had no -- no problems really. A matter of fact I had a lot of fun because when the -- when one of the soldiers would come to us with something for my husband, and if I would go to the door, if I would open the door, they always wanted to make a date with me, because I still had the braids, I still didn't cut my braids, and they didn't think that -- that I am the wife of -- of the -- of the **velitel**. **Velitel**, I don't know how you say it. Yeah, the big shot, whatever. It was very nice. Very nice life there, very nice.

Q: And what exactly were his duties and responsibilities?

A: I really don't know exactly his duties, but they were -- they -- they had to get rid of the Germans, which y-you know, take me away from there. It was the

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

**Sudetenland** where we were, you know, traveled over the **Sudetenland**. He did that, and whatever else he had to do. I-I really never -- I never discussed it. I never discussed it. I -- what -- what we did first, before we did anything was we were trying to -- we went to **Freiwaldau** and we also were trying to think that I will go back to school, because I didn't finish school. But then they told me that I won't have any children. I didn't know if I could or I couldn't, I mean I had no idea. And when I heard no children, how could I be without no children, I always wanted 12. So I went from one doctor to another, and that was when I was already -- when I was in school already when I found out. And I started to go to medical school. I had no problems. I took a test and I started to go. But then there was one time, the first time where we had an autopsy. It was a newborn baby, and when they took the [indecipherable] they cut the head, I started to m-move around a little, and professor said, Miss **Kauder**, will you please stand up straight? And I couldn't, because I wa-wa-was already crying when I w -- w-when I just tried to stand up. And he said, are you a -- a -- what do you say, a -- a cry -- an hysterical woman, or - - or what -- wh-what's wrong with you? I said, I'm a mother. I was pregnant already. And then I did -- the first semester was over, and I didn't go then back. Also my husband got sick and I didn't go back to school. But I was --

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

Q: Why did you think you couldn't have children?

A: I didn't know. It was the first time I went to a doctor, I had some problems. You know, i-i-i -- I just had some problems and my husband wanted me to go, so I went. And we didn't want to have any children. We had no problems with having children or not having. We didn't -- because we said, first I'll finish school and then we'll have a family. But when they said I can't have any children, I don't have to worry about that, I th -- to me that was a very big worry. I -- and I went from town to town until I got a very old doctor and he said, you are so young. He says, the only time you can have it is now. And that was true because then I had -- after my daughter was born, I had a -- two miscarriages, then I had my son. It's almost six years different between my daughter and my son. And when I had my son it was really very -- they told me that the only way I can have him, if I am going to lie quietly until I feel him, and then, you know, I could get up. And the doctor who knew me, h-he says, you know, you can do that. I said, of course I can do that. And I did it. I didn't move until I felt him, and I had him.

Q: You also mention that your husband was having health problems.

A: My husband got the -- was wounded in 1944 at **Dukla**, that was in **Russia**. And when he was -- when he was -- it was so sad, his whole -- his whole wounding was a very sad thing. They had what they called **spoika**, which meant that a soldier had to

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

go and tell another soldier that something is not right, you have to be careful. And the soldier who was to go was **Max Weiss**. And he couldn't -- he couldn't, he -- he just collapsed. And the officer who was surrounded, wherever he was, was my late husband's best friend. So he started to go, but he didn't have to go, he was the adjutant to **Swoboda**. He didn't have to go nowhere, and they said, don't go. You know, the general told him, don't go. And he d -- he saw that yo-you know, **Max Weiss** couldn't go, he completely collapsed. So he run and when he ran, they say, crawl. H-He was very tall, he says, you crawl. They -- when they ho-hollered at him and he -- he started to crawl, fell in -- in the -- in the bunker where his friend was and all, and he did tell them what happened. But then they didn't have any x-ray and what they looked was that he was wounded in the kidney. But the kidney wasn't touched, it looked fine. So they just sewed him up. And that was in '44, and in '46 he started to have problem, and he had terrible problems til the day he died. He had eight operations. He had -- they didn't have at that time like now, you know, that they can give you -- I forgot what it's called. He had artificial kidney and it didn't help. And he finally, you know, died only -- it was in 1957. It was a terrible, terrible time. But he was good. He went in the hospital, he was in the hospital a month or whatever. Came home, the first thing he did is made -- made ar-arrangements and we went to the -- to a show, or whatever. Never, every complained. Never

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

complained that he had to be in the hospital, that it -- at one time he had to have, you know, to wear a thing, and nothing bothered him. But he couldn't make it. I always said to the doctor. You just do what you can do, he'll do what he can do. And they couldn't -- they -- they just couldn't. He was -- one time -- my son, unfortunately inherited what my husband had -- had. And he was a year old when he was taken to the hospital, and he had two stones. And he was breastfed. He was 13 months old and then, six months later, he was taken again and they had to enlarge him the passage from the kidney to the bladder. And the operation was taking about four and a half hour. It was a very, very big operation. And he still has to go for -- you know, and he was, in 1949 -- '89, I was very ill and he had to go to the hospital too, he had problems. My son.

Q: I'm a little confused about something. Did your husband die as a result of this -- of being wounded, or did he have another medical condition, or was it a combination?

A: No, he died of -- of his wounding. When they opened the -- the kidney, you know, that happened in 1947, when they opened it. In '46 he started to have problem, and when the couldn't find anything and they couldn't see anything, they opened him and the kidney was a piece of pus. And the other kidney was already attack, unfortunately. If they would have taken out the kidney in **Russia** when he

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

was wounded, nothing would have happened. He lived -- we -- I also live with one kidney. He could have lived the longest time for -- with one kidney. I wanted to give him my kidney. I didn't know that I -- eventually I myself had kidney problems and I lost a kidney, I didn't know it then. But then I wanted to give him the kidney -- in **France** they had just made -- had a ki -- a case with twins, they gave from one twin to the other, and they didn't make it. And they wouldn't do it because at that point, you know, I had already my daughter, I didn't have my son yet, but they would not do that, they would not take my kidney and give it to him. And they couldn't do it -- they didn't do it because the only case they had was at that time in -- in **France** and it didn't work. What they didn't have is the -- what do you call -- I -- I can't remember. I'll remember maybe in the course of th -- I will tell you what it's called. What -- his -- his case was called -- he had **cystenuria**. That -- that what this stones were, **cysten** stones. But that was caused. They could -- they also didn't have any relatives of his to check if, let's say there was something in the family, but they don't know about anything. So they only -- they -- their case is that he died from the wounding.

Q: I had asked you before if you had much contact with your neighbors and you said no, but did the people of the town know that you and your husband were Jewish?

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

A: You know, I -- I was thinking about it. I really don't know if they knew. There was no -- in that little town, there was no temple or anything, and you couldn't really do there anything. Whatever you did, you did in the house. I mean, the -- the maid could have known, but I -- I don't know. I really have no idea. I do -- I really don't know.

Q: Were there other Jews in the town?

A: No. There were no -- except my aunt. We -- we took my aunt and my uncle, because my uncle, like I said, he was in -- in the camp, he came back to on -- that was not -- they were living in **Ostrow**, not where we lived. So my husband took them to **Freiwaldau** and he kept them there. But they -- he wasn't Jewish, her -- her husband, she was the one who was Jewish. And in 40 -- in '28, or when they got married, he converted. He also was circumcised. So -- so --

Q: I'm going to pause and change the tape. Just one minute.

**End of Tape One, Side A**

**Beginning Tape One, Side B**

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Erika Eckstut**. This is tape number one, side **B**. And I wanted to ask you about the state of your health at the end of the war. Did you



**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

have anything that happened to you during the war, any illness or accidents or any kinds of problems that presented you with any health issues at the end of the war?

A: I -- I was beaten at the place where we were taken when we were supposed to go to the concentration camp. And my back was always in very bad shape. It still is.

Q: Did you get any medical care, either during the war or immediately after the war for your back?

A: No, I didn't get any -- any medical care and one of the reasons was that really and truly I-I -- very, very early after we got married, my husband got sick. And I was so worried about him that I just -- and I was young. And I just said ah, I'll make it, I'll make it and I never -- I never really did do anything about it.

**[indecipherable]**. No, as we get older, it gets worse, but I mean --

Q: You also mentioned that there were Germans in the town and part of your husband's responsibility was to get -- get them out of the town.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Did you personally witness any acts of retribution or retaliation against collaborators or any Germans that were there?

A: No, I didn't. I just heard from -- fro -- oh, you all right? **[indecipherable]**. My husband was -- was not telling me really, but his friends who were there, some wanted to -- to do something to them. And my husband wouldn't even touch them,

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

and would not allow that anything -- y-you know, he -- he's just wouldn't even touch them. He was so mad that he wouldn't touch them.

Q: You also mentioned before about attempts to find your parents, you didn't know where they were and they -- you left them in one place and they ended up in another place. Did you put your name on a list of survivors?

A: No, I didn't. I didn't put my name any place. That da -- that what -- was what my uncle did. H-He had here three brothers, but only one did it. He -- he put all our names down. My father's, my mother's, my sister's and my -- m-my and myself, and my name. Of course, his parents too, but they -- they were unfortunately, you know, they died.

Q: Are you telling me that he put down your names that he was looking for you?

A: Yeah, after the war, you know. He did that. I didn't have anything to do with it, I just got a letter with 25 dollars. That's all I got from my uncle.

Q: What was your reaction, you and your sister, when you heard that your parents were alive?

A: Oh, wa-wa-what should I tell you? We started to dance and we didn't know what to do. We were ready to go right away, but we couldn't, and our husbands went. You know, they -- they were both in the uniform, they was -- were still, you know and they went.

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

Q: Did you have any correspondence with your parents before your husbands went to -- to collect them?

A: I don't think so. I really don't remember it. I don't remember having any because right away they went. And you see, when they came back, the house where I told you we lived -- my sister was with me that time, and -- and we were waiting for our parents to come. And we lived on a hill up, and it's a -- we heard the car coming. And our -- our top was like a -- ju-just a plain top and we saw the car way down. So I started to run down and I ran three steps I took at once and my sister went slower. And I was there before my sister. And when the car didn't even stop when my father came out. And my father was wounded in the first World War, and he walked with a cane. And I heard my mother say **den stock, den stock**, the cane. And he didn't take it. He was in my arms, I was in his and we were just holding. And he never took the cane again. But unfortunately, he didn't live too long, you know. He died when he left **Czechoslovakia**.

Q: When was that?

A: That was in 1949 -- fo -- no, 40 -- '49 in -- yeah, '49 in March, I think it was. Yeah. '49 or '48, I don't know if it was '48 or '49, I don't remember. Either '48 or '49, because they were looking for it -- the reason my parents had to leave, my sister had left. But my parents had to leave because they were looking for a German baron

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

and he looked like my father, and my father, who knew the policeman who came to us, he says, you know me. He says, you know my -- my parents. You -- you know me, I'm not from no baron. He says, all I have to do is take my pants down. He said not with the Russians, you don't. He said, because some, you know, had it done too, you know to -- so my -- they gave my father a diplomatic passport and he left for **Vienna**. And five weeks later he died. And when he died he had the same thing which he -- which he had two times before. Once when he left our little town, first -- he had the first heart attack. Then he had one in **Prague** where I came. And the third one he had, he said my sunshine is not here. He says, don't call anybody and sure enough he -- he didn't -- he didn't have --

Q: And who was his sunshine?

A: I was. I was both times with him and that was it.

Q: Did your parents say anything to you or make any comment about the fact that their sons-in-law came to pick them up, they didn't even know that you were married?

A: Yeah, oh did they make th -- did they make comments, of course. And their first comment to me was that he has to announce the weddings. I mean, it's not a wedding. He says, you know cannot say -- how can you take anybody else if your parents are alive? You know, I had a **formant** -- what -- what do you c -- I -- I don't

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

know what you call it, **formant**, you know, somebody who talks for me. But you had to -- probably you had to say. I -- I didn't fill out any papers, my husband did. I don't know what he said there, that I don't have my parents. They had to be dead, you had to have -- and my father was a lawyer. He says, you know, I -- I'll have that done in no time. But he loved my husband, but -- and I said, but I don't want it. I really don't want it, and anyway he didn't do it. But then he w -- he -- he did one thing, which was so nice, when he, for me when I was 18, he aw -- w-went to court and he initiated the case that they should forgive me my age and give me -- because we had still ta -- we got food on ration, because there was not food. And I got children's ration. I had already a daughter, I was breastfeeding. So -- and I couldn't go with them anywhere for drink or anything. When they went I had to stay out **[indecipherable]** outside. So he -- he did that. I have that document.

Q: When did you realize the full extent of the genocide?

A: I -- I really realized that, I think very early, my sister and I. We never talked to our parents what we went through. We never told them, they never told us how come that from the **Bukovina** they ended up in -- in **Bucharest**. How did they get to **Bucharest**? Why did they g -- were they there. I have no idea. Neither does my sister, we never, ever talked about it. I think we all knew what happened. We all knew exactly what happened and we didn't want to talk about it. We just didn't. We

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

just tried hard to make life as possible like other people. It wasn't easy, you know, it's very, very hard. And e-even when you ask me when I was 17 if I knew what the marriage was, I had no idea what the marriage was, absolutely none. And we just wanted to be loved. And we tried to make life as best as we knew how. But I never talked to my parents about it, never, and neither did my sister. Neither did they ca -- talk to us about it at all. And I know it was only because we knew what happened. I mean, at that point of course we knew what happened.

Q: How did you know what had happened?

A: From -- from what I went through, I -- I knew that. I -- I mean I knew what -- what went on all along. I mean, I was there, it's not that I didn't -- if I would have been hidden or something they wouldn't have known, but I was exposed to it, and I -- so I knew it.

Q: Had you heard during the war about **Auschwitz** and some of the other --

A: **Auschwitz** I never heard. I -- I don't -- I don't think I her -- but I knew that there were camps and I knew it was bad. Why did I run to **Russia**?

Q: Were you aware of any deaths of Jews, survivors, after the war was over?

A: After the war was over, yes, I remember too, was -- I heard that some people who came back and they didn't find anybody, they committed suicide. And yeah, it w -- it was a terrible thing. It's -- yeah, I heard some people, you know they -- they

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

commit, you know, was -- it was a terrible thing. It was awful, I remember. Some of the -- yeah, my father came in '46, because in '46 was the first time we had Passover in our house, and the soldiers which work with my -- they -- they were officers, you know, were in the same thing with my husband. They all came to our house, because we were the only ones who had parents. And my father was, of course, in -- in charge of the Passover. We -- he really -- och, tha-that was -- we have two people who were with -- with us when my father conducted the Passover, and th-they are in **New York**. That was so nice, that was so nice, my father conducted -- that was in -- in '46. Oh, that was such a nice Passover. Was very, very nice, and we had -- i-it was -- I don't even remember how many people were there, but there were all, you know, his friends and all, they all came to us. He was the only one who could make a Passover.

Q: You mentioned they were your husband's friends, they were the officers --

A: Yes, [**indecipherable**] officers from the army.

Q: Were there many Jewish officers in the army?

A: Yeah, there was, because they -- they were about -- at least six or seven came. At least. I-I -- I really don't remember how many there were, but there were a -- there were a lot, and they were talking about it for years to come and today if you talk to

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

him, he w -- he will tell you, you know, he was at -- for Passover, you know, at **Neuman's** house.

Q: You were one of the few to have parents that come back. And you mention that you did not speak about the war --

A: No, no.

Q: -- with your parents. But did your parents offer you any guidance or any words of wisdom to help you rebuild life after the war?

A: I -- I think, you know in their -- th-th-they were extremely loving and giving people. And they gave you a lot without even you realizing. Th-They did help you, without you being aware of it, because I remember things, you know, where -- where they would -- li-like for example, I remember when my daughter, she wouldn't eat at all. And I would sit there and sit and everything would fly. I would bake all kinds of things and she wouldn't eat -- she would put it in one cheek and the other cheek. And when I hold her nose she spit it out. And I was sitting there and sitting and in one time, you know, when she spit it out, I just slapped her, you know, on the face. And my father went white. I mean, he went white. I have never seen him like that, and he walked away. And then later on he took me aside and he says, where did you ever see touching a child? I said, but she doesn't -- she doesn't swallow. And my father, you know, had a very long talk with me. And then the



**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

other long talk we had was when he realized that I did not speak German to my mother. And my mother, unfortunately didn't speak much Czech, she was not Czech and we never spoke Czech in the house, we always spoke German. And he sat me and my sister down and he had a talk with us. And he says, you can't be the way you are. Why don't you speak with your mother the way you always spoke? And I said, I have nothing what to say in -- with my father I could speak Czech, because he spoke Czech very well, too. And I said, m -- I -- I don't have anything to say in German, what -- why should I speak German? I don't want to speak German. He said, why don't you want to speak German? I said, because I don't like the language. He said, what did the language do to you? I said, I don't want to talk about it. He said, but I want to talk about it. I said, I don't. He said, do you realize that if you hate, then **Hitler** won the war? He says, you can't do that. The language didn't do anything to you. And he talked to us. My sister was always smarter than I, she was also older, and she got it before I got it. And one time I was very bad, because he wouldn't let loose. My sister wasn't like me, she also spoke to my mother. And I g -- I just got up and left. And my mother immediately came to me and says, would you please go back and apologize? I said no. She said, will you go back and apologize? And I did go back and apologize, and I did si -- it took me awhile, and I started to speak to my mother in German. And it -- th-that was the

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

only time that we spoke about the war, and my father made sure that I have no hate in my heart, and I still don't. I don't know what it is to really hate. I don't hate anybody. I never did and I can't hate. I don't like what happened. I am not, you know, the person who can forgive anything. I'm not such a big person, I don't like what happened. But I don't hate. And I tried to prove it to my father, too. He wasn't here any more, and I st -- always try to do the right thing. I have always tried -- the first time that I came across a German girl in the school, I -- I did everything I had to do for her. And then she invited me to go to her wedding, and I went. But I said, Daddy, I'm doing this for you, and anyway -- it wa -- they -- they were both very, very loving, my parents. They were su -- such nice, easy people to get along with. Very, very nice people, very loving, very loving. That was very nice. Where am I now? Where was I really when I told you?

Q: In addition to the advice that your parents gave you after the war, did your parents -- you mentioned something about going back to school.

A: Yeah, that --

Q: Tell me where, exactly, you went back to school.

A: I went back to school in **Prague**, because that was, you know, we left **Prague**, I think it was in December or whenever, whenever he was -- he -- he was already in **Freiwaldau**, we got married in **Freiwaldau**, but I was still -- you know, I was with

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

him, and we -- I had -- just I took the test, you know. And the end -- the -- it started in September, started to school. And I went to school in **Prague** and I went to school, you know, I continued. I was with my sister, she was in -- in **Prague**, I was with her. And I went through the first -- the first part, and then I didn't go. And the professor I took where -- I mean, I took [indecipherable] I had, he came once to **Prague** -- to **New York**. A neighbor of ours was waiting for a niece who came from **Prague**, she was my friend. And he never knew her, he knew her as a little girl. And she came with her husband and her son. And he wanted me to go with him if I would recogni -- of course I recognized him. So I went with him and as we were standing upstairs and the people go out -- come out, you know after they go through the -- the -- wh-whatever they have to go when they come from a --

Q: Customs?

A: Customs. So I said, here she is. And right behind her was a man with a -- wi -- li-like a moustache, and I look and I -- I know the guy. I mean, I know him. He is a professor I had years ago. So I was waiting, and when she came out her uncle went t-to her and my aunt was there and all. And I went over to the guy and I asked him in Czech if he is Czech. He says, of course I am, he says, how do you know? I says, I'm your pupil. He said, I can't believe it. And then, you know, he -- slowly he remembered me and he went to **Chicago**. And I said, could you come and stay with

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

us after you are finished? He went to a lecture. He said, I would love to, but I have no money. I said, doesn't matter, I says, I'll give you some money and you'll come and stay with us. And he came and he stayed with us. He was in my house and I was already married to my husband, but my husband didn't have a job yet, you know, that's a long story. Anyway --

Q: This is with a different husband --

A: It's a different --

Q: -- you're -- you're jumping a little bit ahead of you.

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: Did you want to stay in **Czechoslovakia** after the war?

A: I had no choice, because my husband was very ill. I could not have gone anywhere. Because also what I didn't tell you, in -- in December of '44 -- '45, a cousin of my late husband came to **Freiwaldau** where we were, and he wanted to take ma -- he had every documents for my husband to go to the **United States**. And at that time he wasn't ill yet. And my husband said he won't go, he won't leave me. He says, you don't have to leave her. We'll -- we -- you'll divorce her and I'm going to marry her, or my chauffeur is going to marry her, just you know, for formal. And we go to -- they were in, I think in **Belgium** they were stationed. And my husband said, I am not going to divorce her and nobody is going

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

to marry her but me. And he wouldn't go. And he didn't go. I would have liked to go out. My sister left, my parents left. I was the only one I-left there.

Q: You told me how your father left and went. What about your sister, when did she leave, an-and under what circumstances?

A: My sister -- my -- my brother-in-law actually deserted the army, he was in the army and he just left to **Israel** to help with the **Haganah**. And of course that's also another story. When he came to **Israel** they wouldn't take him. He was 15 years older than my sister, he was 38 or 39 when he came there and he didn't speak any Hebrew. And he had a very hard time learning a language. He was from **Czechoslovakia** from the mountains, and he spoke Hungarian and Czech. We never spoke Hungarian, we were not from that part. And he couldn't learn right away the Hebrew, so he had also problems in -- in **Israel**. What -- they left right when -- when the communist came, because the o -- the other reason they le -- he left also was that a lot of Jewish officers were killed right after the communists took over. Not only Jewish, but some were Jewish, you see, quite a few. Was right in there and o-other, you know -- then **Morovitz** was there who was killed, he was married to a Jewish lady who was pregnant when she -- when he got killed. It was terrible, because **Swoboda** did not go with -- with -- with the communists, he didn't do anything to help them, and the army didn't want to go. The army was already, I

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

mean they could have taken them on. They were still in -- in gear. But they was -- so everybody who could, left. Because the officers who left didn't have no permission, they didn't leave from the army, they just left. You know, not legally.

Q: I'm not sure I understood all that you just said. When the communists came --

A: Yes.

Q: -- some of the Czech officers were -- were killed.

A: All the [indecipherable] were killed. Some of the Czech officers were killed.

Q: Why?

A: Why? They said they are against th-the prolat -- proletariat. They are against the Russians, or whatever, to -- you know, whatever they had -- whatever reason they had, they -- they didn't -- they didn't like them and they killed them. It was, you know, they always -- they had a reason, you know, they said they were against -- I mean, it -- it was absolutely insane, what they did. Absolutely. I mean, these were all officers which were in **Russia** and fought with the Russians. And they were not communists, they said. Now, not all were, but I mean they -- it -- it was a terrible time for us. A terrible time. My -- my husband was at that time already sick. So they were, wh-what are we going to do with him, you know. They didn't expect him to stay alive as long as he did, you know, they didn't. So that was one of the reasons they didn't do anything for him.

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

Q: How did your life change, aside from your husband being sick, but when the communists came, how did that change your life, yours and your husbands?

A: It-It changed a lot. My husband had to leave the army, because he also was sick, you know, a lot. Then he had a very big problem getting a job. And finally he got a job. But you see, when he was -- when he got the job, he was not a communist, you know, because a lot of them were in the, you know, a lot of them were really, you know, communist wi -- and he was not. And there were others who were killed who also were not, you know, communists. They were not really -- really communists. And they took him there and he had -- they asked him how come he doesn't read the **Ruda Pravel**. And he said he was wounded, he can't hold the paper, it's too big to hold. And anyway, he didn't make to enter, so they always gave him a postponement. And then finally he got a job in **Kovo** -- th-that was in -- in a job which had to do with -- th-the -- the -- it has to -- had to do with other p-places, you know, you had to go to **Bulgaria** or whatever, you know, in -- in the -- in the area of the Russian things, he had to travel there, too. So he was -- he was working until he died in that job, **kovo**, it was called.

Q: What exactly was that?

A: **Kovo** -- **kovo** is not a -- a name of anything, you know, it's not that I can tell you it was **kava** or -- I mean, coffee or anything. It was a sort -- a sort of something, you

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

know. I-It wa -- it was the import and export of a -- or tha-that's what it was, it was the import and export of some foods. And you know, wherever there was, you know, the most of the food went to -- to **Russia**. And whatever you could, you have for the -- for the Czechs, you know, and you went also -- he went to **Bulgaria** -- to **Bulgaria** he went. And then he had to go to **Germany** for -- for being a -- what do you call it, a witness, you know, so -- so he went to **Germany**. And then he had to go -- th-they also asked him if he would go to **America**. He said no, why would he go to **America**? They said, you have a mother-in-law there. Course my mother, that's ano -- another story. My mother ended up in the **United States** after my sister already left **Israel**, she came there too. And he said he would never take his mother-in-law instead of his wife. He liked his wife. He was bad, he really was bad. But he was so wounded they didn't -- you know, he was every year at least two months in the hospital.

Q: You mentioned he was called to **Germany** to testify. Would you explain that?

A: Yeah. He wa -- he was called to **Germany** to testify to be a witness for -- i-it was for **Nuremberg**. For **Nuremberg** he was called.

Q: Do you know any of the particulars of that?



**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

A: No. I don't remember anything, I only know he went. I know he was there -- I had some pictures -- I don't have that, where he was we saw all the people sitting there, but I don't have them.

Q: Did he actually testify or was he just there in case they needed him to testify?

A: I don't remember. I really don't know. I really don't know if he testified or he was jus -- he was there in that whole thing when it was, but if he testified I don't know. I have no idea. I --

Q: I'm going to have to pause to change the tape.

**End of Tape One, Side B**

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

**Beginning Tape Two, Side A**

Q: -- of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Erika Eckstut**. This is tape number two, side **A**. And you have been talking to me about the **Nuremberg** trial and you said that your husband had been called to -- to be there at **Nuremberg** --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- an-and you did say that you don't know exactly -- was he already sick at that time?

A: Yeah, h-he was six from -- sick from '46 and he went, but I really don't remember. And I know he talked probably about it when he came home. I really don't remember much about it. I know he went, I know he had a picture from all -- I saw all these people there. I know he wasn't very happy about a lot of things, but I really don't remember what.

Q: Do you remember reading about the trial and -- and the verdicts and everything? Did you feel that justice was done there?

A: I don't remember, I really don't. Because you know, you have to understand, I really and truly had my hands full. I had my kids, my husband, and it was -- oh, you know, I -- I -- I'm sure at the time I did, but I don't remember now.

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

Q: You also talked about the political changes going on around you when the communists came. And I wanted to ask you about anti-Semitism in the period after the war and before the communists came ov -- over. Did you notice any anti-Semitism around you?

A: No, I really didn't. I lived in a building in **Prague**, and I really don't remember any anti-Semitism.

Q: And after the communists came, did you notice any anti-Semitism, either within the government or just around you?

A: No, I -- I really don't, but iv -- as long as my husband was alive, I didn't work. I was home, and I didn't have any anti-Semitism. We lived in a building where there lived a lot of Jews and non-Jews so you know, you should have. And I have -- my kids, you know, were friends with Jewish kids and with non-Jewish kids. No, I don't remember to have any anti-Semitism. At least I didn't come across any.

Q: Were you aware of the events surrounding the partition of **Palestine**? Were there any news reports, or did the Jewish community around you say anything about the partition in **Palestine**?

A: No, I don't remember anything.

Q: You said that while your husband was still alive, you did not work.

A: That's right.

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

Q: And you have two children?

A: Yes.

Q: Can you tell me the years that your two children were born?

A: My daughter was born on September 16, 1946. My son was born March 13, 1952. It's almost six years difference between them.

Q: And their names?

A: My daughter's name is **Elishka**. It was **Elise** -- I mean, it was **Elishka**, not **Elise**. Now it's **Elise**, now it's **Elise**. And my son is **Michael**. It was **Misha**, but here it's **Michael**.

Q: Tell me about your circumstances, your family, when your husband passed away and -- and what you did immediately after.

A: You see, I had there lots of friends. I really didn't have any relatives. This one relatives which we had in [indecipherable] my uncle came, my aunt never came. And one of the cousins, there were four children, one came. And I had a ver -- like a mother there. It was the daughter of that lady who was a friend of my late husband, they went to school together. And they took us in like we were family. And she did more than I ever did anything. I was very quiet. I didn't -- i-it was a military funeral. I was there, but I really didn't do anything. I didn't talk to anybody and I didn't just do anything. And they used to come to my house, you know, the doctors who were -

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

- some of them -- my late husband was a medical student before he went to the war. And one of the doctors was a friend of his, they went to same medical school. And he came over and they were trying to -- when I had coffee, **Babi** would make coffee, or si -- mother, you know. And he would say do -- don't you want to break the cup? He says, we'll have some noise. I didn't want to do nothing. I didn't talk to them, nothing. They came, they left. And then one day -- and I didn't take care of the kids, **Babi** took care of the kids. Never asked about the kids. And one day I -- every day around five o'clock I used to go for the walk, for a long walk, after my late husband died. And **Babi** always went with me. One day when I went to the door to go, she said, I'm not going with you. And if you go yourself, she says, I'm going put the children in a -- in a home for -- you know, without the -- for children without parents. I hesitated just a second, and I left. Wa -- when I walked, I said to myself, she's not my mother. She is a strange woman. She doesn't care for my children. She will put my children in a home [indecipherable] from home, because she doesn't care. And I went home, I didn't say anything to her and I went into my daughter's. My son was only five at the time. And she cried and I cried, and it really, you know, broke everything between me and my children. My son was really too -- too young for it. And then the doctor came and he talked to me. I didn't talk to **Babi** at all, I -- I just didn't pay attention to her. And he came and he told me that if it wasn't for

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

**Babi**, that time when I walked out by myself, they were all around me, they didn't know what I'll do, and they were ready to put me away in **Freiwaldau**, you know, where I told you we were? And **Babi** said no, let me do it one more time. And she had called and she said that I went to **Elise** and everything is all right between my daughter and me. But otherwise I -- I just wasn't, you know, anything. And when I heard that, I went to **Babi** and I apologized. You know, it was so bad wha -- what I did to her. And then I went to work, and -- and then came the time when I -- I immediately applied to go to the **United States** and I was told immediately that I will not go, that they will not let me go. That the children from a Czech officer will not be beggars on **Broadway**. I didn't understand what that meant, but it was something it meant. And then -- then wa -- one t -- when I got the refusal that I'm not going to go, I went back one time. I asked again. And the guy there said, I told you, you're not going to go. He says, what do you do -- lose, a man? He says, you don't look so bad, you can get a man. And I got so mad. I got so mad, and I said, if it wasn't for my husband, you wouldn't be sitting here, and how dare you talk to me like that? And I said, and I am going to the president. And I was with my little boy, he didn't go to school yet, and I went to the president. When I came there, there was the soldiers and they put the bayonet, they didn't talk to me. And I said to my son, I said, you stay right here. I said, if one hair is going to be crooked on this kid, I says,

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

I cut both your heads off. And I went between the guns and I went in. They didn't do nothing. I -- I made one step -- I went in and there was another guy. He says, can I help you? I said yes, I want to speak to the president. He says, do you have an appointment? I said, I thought the president is for the people, and I am a people and I wanted to talk to him. I have a grievance and I would like to tell him. He said okay and he took me in, and when I walked in, the president walked out. I said, he's leaving. I was all excited. I saw him and he's leaving. And the lady says, don't worry, he's here. He -- she says, you just come in and we'll talk. And I complained to her and all and she says, do you need more money? Because I had a pension and my children had a pension because we had military, you know. And I said no, I have money enough, I -- what could I have bought? There was nothing left to buy anyway. I said, I just wanted to see my mother, I says, I haven't see her. We went through the war and now I'm not going to see her any more if I don't go now. She says, I can't promise you to get -- go to the **United States**, but I can give you some more money. And I left and I never, ever a-asked again to go until it was three years later I got the letter that if I want to go I have to give up my pension and everything, and I can go. You know, it was so unfair to take the pension away from me, but I had to -- I had to sign away my pension, my -- everything I had, and I could -- I could go. And then when we -- before I went I had to go to court to sign for the

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

children. And when I was ready to sign, a woman got up and she says she has a grievance. She says, how can I sign away the things for the children? I got up and I had with me one of the officers who -- who was a lawyer and he said, shut up and sit down. I said, who is that woman? How dare she tell me I can't sign for the children? Where was she all this time? Did she go with **Mike** to the hospital -- you know, my son wa-was sick, you know. And anyway, that was -- wh-which I didn't know, but my kids had s -- whatever they took out, she was the guardian for my children. So anyway I signed and -- and we left. But it was -- it was a terrible thing, terrible.

Q: I have a few questions about what you just said.

A: Yeah?

Q: You said you went to work. What kind of work did you do after your husband died?

A: I was on the -- on the main street like -- what is here the main street? I don't know where the main street. Like on s -- **Fifth Avenue**, in **Prague**

**[indecipherable]**, it was a bookstore for books. And all I had to do is take an exam for -- for books for -- children books, medical books, whatever. And for poetry and all that. So I took it. My daughter was an ardent reader, so the children's books I have had all color. Then I had a friend, she was a lawyer, she gave me all that. And I made it except poetry I wasn't very good, I -- I couldn't remember who wrote "**The**



**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

**Raven**” from all the things. But I made it and I worked -- it was military, **Nasha Voisko**. And I was a buyer of the books for **Nasha Voisko**. And I worked until I left, until I left, I worked.

Q: You also mentioned that when you first requested permission to leave, they said the children of an officer would not be allowed to go.

A: Be allowed to be beggars on -- on **Broadway**, I never forget that.

Q: Were they saying that you could go without them, or were they stop --

A: Yeah, oh yeah, they said it clear. They said it clearly. If I want to go, she said, I can, but she can't let the children go. I said forget it. I'm not going anywhere without my children. And then I was scared for a long time, you know, until I got this letter and I went there -- my sister, you know, arranged that. My sister and my mother, when -- when **Khrushchev** was here, you know, at the **U.N.**? My sister and my mother wrote him a letter and st -- they asked I should let go -- I should be let go. And he wrote and that's how I let -- was let go. But I didn't know that, she didn't tell me that. She didn't tell me over the phone that. I called her.

Q: Which her did you call?

A: My sister. I called my sister. I mean, you don't call awa -- i-it was extremely expensive, but I was -- once I got the permission to go, I was so excited. And when I asked her what should I bring, she says, bring Mrs. **Pietnik**, who was my maid, and

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

when my late husband died I wanted to get rid of her, but I couldn't. She said she is not going to leave me. She is not going to leave me, and she stayed, and I had problems because of her. Because she would call to -- to -- I -- I -- she would call to the office and say, you know, can she speak to her [indecipherable] that's to my lady. And they said, who is that? I said, that's my aunt. She said she said she wants to speak. I said, she's nuts, I said. She used to be a maid, I said, but now she doesn't know what she's talking about. I had a good ti -- oh, it wa -- it was a horrible time under the communists. I -- I -- I even re -- you know, when I came to the **United States** it took me so long before I even opened my mouth to speak. My brother-in-law, he shook me, he says, don't worry, no communists came with you, you can talk here. I says, there is nothing what I can talk about. He says, you -- are you going talk to me or aren't you? I was so scared. I was so scared you can't even imagine, because you know, there was -- there -- there was also a widow, like I was, she was put away in -- in a jail and they took her kids. I don't know what she did, but oh, I was so scared, don't ask. Was terrible, terrible. But I wanted to go back to **Czechoslovakia** the first year. I -- I missed my **babinka**, you know, my mother was wonderful and I was happy to be with her, but I still missed **babinka**, you know, I -- I didn't have my m-my mother, you know --

Q: The other.

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

A: The other.

Q: What was her real name?

A: **Elise -- El -- Elsa Drajan. D-r-a-j-a-n and E-l-i-s-e.** Yeah, she was -- she was so nice and I wasn't very happy here because I had to learn English. I took jobs whatever I could get. I was -- I got -- once I met a ch -- Czech girl and she says, I can get you a great job, she says, you'll be a -- a waitress. I says, fine. She says, but not a regular waitress, they have **Bar Mitzvahs** and so. You are just going to serve liquor. She says, you don't have to speak English for that. I says, how do I know what to do? She says, don't you know what whiskey is? They say whiskey, you give them whiskey. So what do I know? Came a -- everybody was very happy. They gave whiskey, I gave whiskey. I never gave water. I didn't even know what water meant. And -- and the -- the owner came over and he said, you're going go, he says, tonight. He said, you make the people too happy. He w -- he realized that I wasn't pulling the wool over his -- oh, it was terrible. Then I worked for a doctor. Oh, my -- my jobs I had was unbelievable. When I wa -- when I came. And then my s -- my mother put me in a school without asking me, to go -- you know, I -- I had one semester of medical school, so she put me in a school I should learn about technology. And I went -- I didn't speak English. So, it was terrible. So I says, how am I going to do that? She says, you write as you hear it. You come home **Beatrice**

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

will put it into English. The way I wrote there were no words which I wrote in any dictionary. You couldn't make out the words. Oh, it was terrible. But by the time my sister finally got something out, I had to rewrite it. And then I typed it the nice up, I -- I liked it should be neat. And by the time I was done I knew it by heart. I knew it also how to write it because I had it. You know, it was all there. So I -- I actually beat the system. I had the best mark of all the girls. And you know, you had to take the test for the school and for -- for the state and for the medical -- for the -- for the medical, or whatever. For three places I had to take the test, you know, you took. And the school sent a note to please excuse my -- my -- my writing. And it came back I had no mistakes. And they called me, they said, how come you didn't make mistakes? I said, I don't know. I says, I guess I typed it -- I did it right. I knew it by heart and I didn't make, and I had the best mark. And I worked for **Gillette** for almost 19 years and before I was in **New York**, but here. No, that's too far, I go -- I come to that later.

Q: You told me how difficult it was to get out of **Czechoslovakia**.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you have any problems coming into the **United States**? Did you have to take any tests, any intelligence tests, any medical tests? Anything like that to come in?

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

A: No, I had the only problems with my -- with my back, because you see, when I was beaten, yeah a -- I was beaten on -- on the one side. And the scar I have, it is a scar -- so-some kind of a scar, it's like I -- I had there something. I -- I -- it was just from beat -- beating. And the doctor wanted to give me his wife's **x-ray**, I said absolutely not. And he gave it and he explained that that was done by beating. I was never -- I never had **TB** or anything. And when I came I had to go for the **x-ray**, you know, so they took an **x-ray** of me because that was that. But -- but when I came, I saw that was really **America**. Because I thought -- God bless **America**, when I came I didn't see my mother, I didn't see my sister, I didn't see my friend from -- that was a soldier who I also knew. I -- I didn't see anybody but men. All I saw were men, so many men, and I said God bless **America**, they knew the widow is coming. I was already three years a widow, I mean, you know. And they were -- and they wanted to talk to me, I didn't speak English. So they wanted to an-another language. That time I spoke Ru-Russian fluently and Romanian and German and Czech. They wanted German, but I didn't talk. I was too a -- too afraid to talk. And -- but I realized, they didn't come for me. But I was in every newspaper in the **United States** was my picture, reunion between mother and daughter. I -- I have the pictures, they are really nice. I can show you someday.

Q: The men, were they reporters? Is that what you're trying to tell me?

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

A: No, no, they were porter -- reporters.

Q: Reporters.

A: Reporters, yeah. They were from every newspaper. From the **Times** and from a Jewish newspaper. From all the newspapers, it was all over. I have -- I have the papers.

Q: And why did they come for you?

A: I was the first one to come out behind the Iron Curtain from -- from any -- any -- far. Nobody came out at my age. I was 30 and my daughter was what -- 13. And my son was almost eight.

Q: Was it because you came out or because you came out with your children?

A: With my children and me, I was young. There was me came, two people from **Slovakia**, you know, I mean now ch -- **Czechoslovakia** were the same, it's **Czechoslovakia** -- they were old. They was -- two old women came from **Slovakia**. They were really old, I mean, in that time. But nobody my age and not -- no children came. Was -- I was the first one.

Q: Before you came to this country, what were your expectations about **America**?

A: I really didn't know what to expect, you know, from **America**. I expected more than what I got, you know, actually, because -- I mean, not what I got, I didn't expect to get anything. But my -- actually no, I did -- I didn't even -- tha-that wasn't

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

really th-the -- the thing. When -- when I came, my sister just moved in in her first house. My sister was here when I came here. She is here, I don't remember how many years longer than me. I think five, six, whatever. You know, they both worked, and they finally got themselves a house. But I couldn't get the house, yi -- I couldn't get no-nothing, I didn't have any money. So I stayed with my sister for a year and it was really hard because the house was very nice. My sister, my brother-in-law, they would have lied down, you could have walked on them. But they -- it was only a three room house. So she had to put two of her kids together and put two in -- my kids there. Then I slept in the living room. And it wasn't very comfy, you know, what you call. But she didn't want me to leave. In a -- in a year I left, I got an apartment.

Q: Besides having all the men greet you --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- what other impressions did you get when you first arrived?

A: That was one -- one big thing. Then, of course, I saw my mother and my sister and my friend came, the one I knew. He brought me the biggest candy box I've ever seen. It was like half the -- I -- I've never seen anything like it. That was -- and then the ben -- the newspaper came. My mother got a -- a letter from a rabbi that he would marry me, with my children. I think that was fantastic. I didn't go to him, but

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

he wanted to marry me, but I didn't -- I didn't take him up on it. My brother-in-law said I can't because he'll never be a rabbi [indecipherable]

Q: When exactly did you arrive in the **United States**?

A: I arrived on -- 1960 on -- on April 11<sup>th</sup>. It was the first day of Passover. And my mother came to see me. My mother was remarried too, my mother was 49 when my father passed away. And I -- I -- I was so shocked. She came to see me, she took me to my sisters and my sister was there and everybody was there. And then my mother left because my mother left with her husband to a place, because she didn't make no -- no holidays, you know. So they left for their place. And I was so shocked that she left when I came. But she had it arranged beforehand.

Q: Did she marry an American or another survivor?

A: American. An American, he was the owner of **Hanes** stocking. I had a lot of stockings, yeah. He -- he actually sent -- sent for me, you know, when we -- when I came, he was the one who sent the money, because my sister didn't have any money and my mother didn't have any money, so was Mr. **Brand**.

Q: How were you able to support yourself when you -- you finally -- you mentioned you had some jobs, but when was the first job that you had that really worked for you?



**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

A: The first job I really had which worked for me was as a technician. But that was about -- about -- you see, I was supposed to go two years to school, I went one year and I made it, you know, I -- I really took everything double and -- and so and I -- I really went out for it. I had a job right away, I was -- I took a job as a baby nurse. I -- I had no problems taking that test, except when they said, a baby you -- when a baby cries, what do you do? I said, you know, you check it and it's -- and everything's all right, if it's not wet or it's not hel -- health-wise alright, then you just, you know, let it cry until it goes to sleep. They said that's not like that, you walk it around on your shoulder, it's a shoulder baby. I didn't know what a shoulder baby is. So that part what I -- I made it anyway, I answered all -- all their questions and I -- and I had the -- I got a job as a -- as a nurse. And I would go for a week and be home or whatever, and then I would get another job. And I did that until I -- until I became a technician.

Q: Did you live with the family that you cared for?

A: Oh yeah. That was the bad part, you know. Then -- then I had -- I -- I usually was only one week with whoever I was. Then I got a job with a Dr. **Greebo**. I am still in touch with them. And the boy I had is here, he's a lawyer, **Howard**. I -- I went there and I was there nine months. I was already in school, and when I finished school I had his job in his office.

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

Q: Two questions. One, where exactly did you go to school? In what city?

A: In **New York**. In -- in **New York** on **59<sup>th</sup>** Street, on [**indecipherable**] whatever school it was, I have it written down. I have a paper from.

Q: And who took care of your children while you were working?

A: My sister. That's what happened, I -- I couldn't have taken care of.

Q: And you mentioned she had children. Were they about the same age as your children?

A: Yes, it's -- my so -- my older nephew and my daughter are three months apart. And my younger son and her son area also -- are one year apart. And her s -- older son is **Milan** and her younger son is **Alan**. And my children, I gave you my -- the age, you know.

Q: Did your children have any trouble adjusting to the **United States**?

A: Very much. Very much. My daughter had a lot of trouble with my nephew. My - - then -- my nephew, I mean, he was really a little boy, too, I mean, even if he was 13. He was just after his **Bar Mitzvah**. He had **Bar Mitzvah** in -- he was born January second. So he had sometimes in January and we -- we came that same April.

Q: I'm sorry, I have to interrupt you cause we're running out of tape. Just one moment.

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

A: Okay.

**End of Tape Two, Side A**

**Beginning Tape Two, Side B**

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

And I'm sorry I ran out of tape at the end of the last --

A: Yes.

Q: You were telling me about your -- your children --

A: My children, yes.

Q: -- adjusting, and you mentioned a **Bar Mitzvah**.

A: The **Bar Mitzvah**, my nephew was just **Bar Mitzvah** in January and we came here in April. And he had to, of course, give up his room and be with his brother and my children had the other room. And then when they went to school they went to the same -- same grade. And my son also, you know, he went to the first grade. First or second, I don't remember what he went. I think he went to the second grade. He was a -- he was coming in the sec -- he went to the second grade. And you know, he -- my nephew, the oldest -- wh-when they went to school -- I have to ge -- start -- when they went to school I wanted to give my daughter money, you know, for lunch. And my brother-in-law said absolutely not, that's my -- my job. And he gave

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

each one 50 cents or whatever. And when they came to the bus my nephew would say to my daughter, you give me some money, that's my money. And she never said that to me tha-that -- I her -- heard that many, many years later, that she never had lunch, you know, because he wou -- he would take her money, you know, I mean he -- he -- it -- it was understandable. My son was -- also had problems because he -- he's a year older than the other kids and I said, don't you dare touch him, you know, don't -- don't do anything. And my daughter cr -- told me once, she says, you better tell him that he can touch him, because he is really and truly taking advantage of him and you told him don't touch, and he doesn't. So I took care of that situation too. And then my brother-in-law, he a -- what happened was with our crates what we took with us, one crate was broken or -- or wasn't there and tha-that was the toys from my son. And he had a train and whatever, and it was all gone. So my brother-in-law said all the toys should be for the little -- little kid. And his older brother said to him, don't you dare touch anything, that's all ours, not yours. So I didn't know about that either, of course. So then one day my daughter says, why don't you ask **Mike** what he's doing when he comes home from school. So I asked him, I said, what are you doing when you -- he says, I do my homework. I says, and afterward? He says, I do my homework. I said, don't you go outside and play? He said, I have nothing left to play with, I have no toys. So anyway, so I took my nephew aside one

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

time and I told him, I said, look, I know it's not easy for you and it's not easy for us. I says, your parents, I don't know if they're not aware of it or whatever happened. I said, but one thing I can tell you. Don't do that to my children. I said, don't do that, because you'll be sorry. I'll beat the living daylights out of you if you ever do it again. It took me years before I got him out of his -- oh, he was really scared of me. But I would have never done it, but -- but anyway, and my son also got better. It -- it wa -- it was hard for them to adjust, it really was. They had a completely different life, you know, and they had also a completely different life. It was just as bad for them as for my kids, you know, they -- they weren't used to that, a whole family moves in. So anyway, that's how -- and then we finally got our o-own apartment and that was -- that took care of -- th-that -- we were good -- we had -- we had a really nice apartment. It -- it was a bachelor's apartment, but it was nice. My s -- my daughter -- I had two jobs, I worked as a technician and my daughter was the one who took care of the shopping, you know, I mean, in the meantime she was already 14, and she was already a big girl. I never had a babysitter for my children when I had my own apartment, I never. But I had an apartment in the building where there was a porter, you couldn't get in there. That -- that's all I wanted really. And my -- then we got a -- an uncle of -- of mine gave me a dog, and oh we were so happy we had the dog, but I -- that -- these were apartments only for people with -- with jobs,

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

who are -- with [indecipherable] jobs. So I had a job, I had no problem, but I couldn't have the kids. So I took my daughter, she was almost as tall as I, you know, it was fun, it was no problem. But **Mikey** started to cry, he wanted to come home too. So I took him too, and I had the dog too. So -- so one day he came and he said, who is that, to my daughter. I said, that's my sister. He says, and who is the little boy? I said, my son. He said, and she's your daughter? I says yes. I says, now I have to tell you a secret. He says, you know it doesn't go here, he says, but one thing -- he was also European, he says, one thing I tell you. Your kids behave, they can stay, but something has to go, either the kids or the dog. So I let the dog go. But he was funny, we had -- he was funny.

Q: When you came to this country, did the Americans that you met ask you about your life under communism?

A: Yeah, well, they ask me about communism, but that's about all. They were never interested if I went through a Holocaust, and if I wanted to say something -- if I wanted -- you know, I didn't really want to, but if I wanted, they said they are really not interested.

Q: You came in this -- to this country around the time of the **Eichmann** trial.

A: Yes.

Q: Did you know enough English to follow what was happening?

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

A: No, I couldn't. I -- I -- I mean I -- I will -- I knew the English I learned in school, you know, but I didn't --

Q: You -- basically you learned English in school?

A: Of course, I -- when I finished school I went to a -- to a school, to a regular high school to learn English. And at that point they wouldn't take me. They said I know too much English and I never really learned.

Q: What about your children, how did they learn English?

A: They learned English, you know, time -- my daughter I took a -- a -- a girl, my son I didn't take anything, they learned English in no time.

Q: You mentioned awhile ago another husband. Can you tell me how you met your current husband and when?

A: I met my current husband in 19 six -- six -- 62. The way I met him is through a friend who was here, actually one of the friends what I mentioned that her husband was killed. She was pregnant. He was killed when the communists took over **Czechoslovakia**. She had a sister here, and her brother-in-law was a -- a doctor and he got me, actually, the per -- first job. And she came to visit, they lived on **Fifth** Avenue in an apartment, one floor was their apartment. She had her own room, her own bathroom, everything. And she came to visit me and she wanted to stay with me. I had one room, one. In that one room there was a tiny little kitchen, a tiny little

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

refrigera -- everything miniature and with a curtain. And then I had there two beds and a couch, and my son slept on the couch and **Elise** and I had a bed. And we had a table and chairs and that was it. There was no room really for much more to go. And then, anyway, when we bought the piano we had it -- you know, when you walked in there was a square and that's was a piano there. We were very crowded, actually in the -- in our apartment. And she wanted to go to **Atlantic** City. And I really didn't want to go. I was busy, I had two jobs. And she said you can take one weekend, all you do is work. I said, doesn't matter, I said, and I don't have where to leave the kids and I am not going. She says, your sister will be happy to take the children. I said I don't want to. And anyway, I said, you can't sleep here either. You have plenty of room where you are. So she said, can't I sleep once with you here? I says, yo-you know, I -- you -- you don't realize it, I'm already a widow for three years, I says, if I sleep with anybody, you are the last person I'd like to sleep with. I said, I don't want to sleep with you. She says, sleep with your daughter and then give me her bed. Anyway, I slept with my daughter, I gave her ma -- the bed, and then we did go. And I-I-I was so bad th-those days, really I was so bad. I didn't have money. I would take the money and give my daughter, you know, I mean she has to shop and do everything. So anyway, we went, th-that's how I met my husband. We went to the -- on the beach and I told her that I want to sleep, you know, that I'm



**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

really very tired. I didn't -- I never realized how tired I was until I really got there. And so I went to sleep, and then she woke me, she says, can you show me how you use your lighter. I used to smoke. And I showed her and she says, you're so stupid, I have here such a nice guy, she says, he's looking at you all the time, but you thi -- never look. I said -- I didn't look, or I didn't open my eyes, I just showed her how and I kept sleeping. And then I hear a voice, you know, in English telling me, can I please, you know, ask you a question? Could -- could -- I would like to take you and your friend out tonight. I says, you can take my friend out, not me, but you can take her out. Tell me where, I'll bring her. She didn't speak any English. She spoke a little Jewish and he speaks a little Jewish and so they got along. So he gave me his address, I said I'll bring her there and we brought her there, my friend where -- she had a friend in **Atlantic** City, that's why we went there, I knew I won't have to pay hotel or anything. And when we came there we couldn't find him, I mean, I didn't know how he looks and she couldn't find him. Then she saw there is five dollars minimum. She says, can I go in? I said, no you can't. It's five dollars minimum, that's not in my -- my thing to -- to spe-spend. So anyway, we went away and next day, Sunday when we came we saw -- I saw a guy and she said, that's him. And he looked good. Boy, did he look good. He had a head of curls, you know, bl-blond curls and he was slender, you know, I -- he was really very slender and looked very

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

good. I said, I wouldn't even spit on him, I says, not -- I said he'll [indecipherable] come. She says oh, don't be like that. And he came over to me and he says, you know, I really and truly like you. I liked you yesterday and I like you today. I -- and I said, before you go any further, I want to tell you something. I says, you just met a widow with two children, and that -- one of the women who have the least money in the **United States**, that's me. And I am not interested in anybody. Not in you and not in 10 like you. I said, I don't -- I'm not interested. So we went back, we sit down and then he says, will you come to my parents, my parents are here. And so I -- I was sleeping and she says, come on, let's go over. I can't speak to hi -- his parents are from **Russia** and his mother really spoke some Russian, you know, and **Kira** spoke Russian, too. So we went over there and we met them. And then Monday when I came home from work the phone rang and my daughter answered the phone, sh -- she says, it's for you. I says who? She says a man. I said, what kind of man is for me, I don't get no man calls. And I went to the phone, it was him. I said what are -- what do you want? I said, how did you get my number? He says **Kira** gave me your number. So -- and then he wo -- said, can I come on the weekends? I says, you can. I won't be home, but you can come. And he used to come and my son really fell in love with him, because he thought that ma -- it was somebody just for him, you know. He was never married before. And he would come and come, I never saw

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

him, once maybe I saw him, or twice. And then a -- then I think Christmas it came, and then, you know, he started if I would marry him. And I said, why would I marry you? I do -- I -- I really don't know you, you know, I -- I don't want to get married. And my daughter says to me, Mommy, you have to marry him. I says, why do I have to marry him, I don't even love him. She says, you don't have to love him, **Mike** loves him. I says, **Mike** loves him, let him marry him. And I got married. She says I have to marry him, so I marry him. He -- I love him now. I didn't love him then, but I love him now, he's a good man.

Q: And his name?

A: His name is **David**.

Q: And when did you get married?

A: I got married on January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1963. It was n -- 39 years that I am married.

Q: And what does he do for a living?

A: He used to work for the government, he was an engineer.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about your children's education? What kinds of education were they able to get?

A: I'd be very happy. I was waiting that you -- I was hoping you'll ask me. My daughter who is older, she is a teacher. She has not one, but two Master's. She has a Master's in -- in Spanish and a Master's in English. And my son skipped school and

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

he went to **Rensselaer** for five years, got his Master's in chemical engineering and he went to -- to **Harvard** and got -- and got the **MBA** in finances, in -- also for -- for banking and everything. And he's doing very well and so is my daughter.

Q: You said he skipped what -- did he skip grades?

A: He skipped -- he skipped grades, yes. When we moved -- when I married my husband then, you know, he got a job in **Saint Louis, Missouri**. And when we went to **Missouri** they put him back. He had skipped in **New York** and they put him back and then we went back to **New York** and he -- he had his skipping, you know. He is doing very nicely.

Q: Do you talk to your children about your -- when -- especially when they were growing up, did you talk to your children about your Holocaust experiences?

A: Oh yes, I did. My children actually asked us if we will talk to them. And one day my sister and I sat down and I wished we would have had a tape and we talked about it. We talked to each other. And I -- we -- we couldn't -- we couldn't really believe that we went through everything which we went through and we talked to our children. We didn't talk then -- we didn't do it again, but my children knew how much the whole thing meant to both of us. And when they started with the building of the museum, I was very sick. I got, in 1989 I had cancer of the -- of the kidney and I had lung cancer and I was [indecipherable] and by a sheer miracle I really

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

made it. I was on a -- I we -- I went on a -- y-you know, no hospital could help me because when you have kidney and lung cancer, you can't have no -- no -- no- nothing really is -- is there for them. And was in the **GW** and they told me that I -- they can't do anything any more for me, and that I had to leave.

Q: **G.W.** is **George Washington** University Hospital, is that what you're trying to tell me?

A: Yeah, yeah. And so tha -- so my -- lucky for me my friend was with me, I worked at the [indecipherable] at that time. No, no, I -- I had just stopped; we -- we were let go. But anyway, my girlfriend was there and she wanted I should go to **Mount Vernon**, because I had heard that in **Mount Vernon** is a -- is a place where they do the same thing like they do at -- at -- in -- here in **Washington** at what -- what do you call? The -- the guy who was my -- my -- in college it's -- it's a hospital, told my husband that he called di -- **W -- G** du -- he called the place in **New York**, you know, **Sloan Caterer**, he called the hospital in **Baltimore**, you know, **John Hopkins** and the -- and here also, in **Washington**, and nobody would take me. They couldn't take me, they were right, because I had no life left. I had less than 25 percent of breathing, and there was nobody to take, you know, I -- it really wasn't. My girlfriend, she knew -- I had told her about **Mount Vernon**. What happened was Dr. **Rosenberg** was in together with a Dr. **Ayliss**. And this Dr. **Ayliss**

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

had something with -- wi-with **Rosenberg**, whatever happened, it wasn't all right, and he got the grant in **Mount Vernon** and he had one floor there where he di -- did the same thing they did at **GW**, and she wanted to take me there, and she took me there. And I ha -- I was in a wheelchair, I couldn't walk or anything. And we went in, and he didn't want to take me, but he did examine me and he says he can't take me, you know, it's not even legal and he can't do it. So we left, my husband and I, and **Diane**, my friend, stayed there. So, it was in August and I was very, very hot, and I knew that I have a few hours to live. I wanted to call my children and everybody, my sister and you know, at least to see them. And I wanted to go home. And my husband said, I can't, you know, **Diane** is not here, she doesn't have a car, because she came with us. So he got out of the car to go and get her and that she came out with the doctor and with the wheelchair, not to take mine and they took me in. And it took them three weeks to wa -- I didn't weigh enough, you know, I had to weigh at least, I think 98 or a hundred pounds and I weighed like 95. And they brought me up two pounds I was, I think two -- I still didn't have. And they ga -- put me o-on the study. And I was on the study and I was the only one left. There was a lady left which came later on, she didn't have what I had, she had melanoma. And she survived, but for my tho -- who was with me, nobody survived. There were 75 people, I was the only one who made it.

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

Q: I'm not sure I understand tha -- did you participate in a research study?

A: In a research study, yes. I signed up for it, I -- for me it was no problem. I mean, nobody else wanted me anyway, I couldn't do anything but the research study, not a regular study. I had th -- that's terrible. Wh-What do you call this -- I can't even remember now, can you believe it? I have that paper. Two -- two medications they gave me, I can't remember now what it was, but I couldn't take the one, I had a lot of problems with it and he took me off that and left me only on one medication. And then one day I said I -- I can't take this any more. I became so weak from the one medication and I stopped it too. And then I -- I made it, until now, I have with the knees. But --

Q: So you -- you're the only one in this research study to survive?

A: Yes, yes, yeah. Except the other lady who had what do you call it, the melon -- melanoma. Melanoma, you know, it's a skin cancer.

Q: Yeah. **[tape break]**

A: **[laughter]** You didn't expect that. I never talk about it, yeah.

Q: I-I'd like to take you back to some of the changes that occurred in this country. Now, you came out of a communist state, so I'm very curious to see what thoughts you had at the time about some of the events that happened in this country. You

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

were here when the **United States** became involved in the war in **Vietnam**. Did that -- did that touch your life in any way? Did you have any impressions about that?

A: No, I -- I don't --

Q: What were your thoughts about the c -- the Cold War, the conflicts the **United States** had with the **Soviet Union**?

A: I actually was al-all for it because I thought wherever is against the communist is good. You know, I -- I like that.

Q: So you felt the **United States** was justified?

A: Oh, absolutely.

Q: What about the Civil Rights movement? You saw some changes, some social changes here.

A: You know, when the -- when that occurred, I was very, very busy, but I did follow it and I was happy with what a -- with what occurred. You know, that they got something, you know, and very good.

Q: You also saw changes in -- in women's rights. How did you feel -- you're smiling -- how did you feel about those changes?

A: Good, very good. It was good to get -- I mean, you know, I -- I am a European, you know, and -- but I liked it very much. I liked that they should get some rights, too.



**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

Q: You were here for the assassination of the **Kennedys** and some of the other political assassinations.

A: Oh, that was terrible. That was the worst time be -- for me in the **United States**. I worked in the hospital. God, that was bad. That was very, very bad. That was the worst thing, I was so upset about it, you can't imagine. I -- I really liked President **Kennedy** a lot. Was very upset about it.

Q: Were there any other things that you saw happening in this country over the years that you were here, especially those first years, in the 60's, was a very turbulent time. Sixt --

A: Yeah, I was -- was -- it was a turbulent time here, too, you know, and I really and truly could not take in everything the way I should have, because like I told you before, I had problems with my kids, I had problems with jobs, I had problems, and I really and truly could not give it as much time as I would have liked to. I just didn't have it. I worked like y-you can't imagine. In my second job there I worked, I was usually finished by 10 o'clock and 10:20 because I worked two jobs. That was in the even -- at night I worked. And when I came out, usually I had a bus, but sometimes, you know, I had to work til 10:30 or til 11:00 because you can't leave a b -- a hospital without somebody else being in the lab. And one day was s -- sn -- s - - raining, and I would always call, you know, that they should get me a cab. And the

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

girl calls me back, she says, I can't ge-get [indecipherable] she says, anything, you can't get anything. She says, but you know you can sleep here. I said, I can't, I have two kids alone home. So I says, call the fire department or the police. She says, we don't call no fire department and police for somebody to go home. I said, then I'll call, and I called the police and I told them. But I told them that I have the two kids home, but didn't bother them. It wasn't like today, I would have been probably in jail if they know I have two -- I mean, my daughter was 14 or 15 already at the time. But anyway, I told and the guy said, you stay right where you are, I'll be right there. And he took me home and before I got in the building he says, I'll go just before so nobody sees you with the police, and I'll watch you go in. Now I -- I -- I was -- I -- I was so busy, really.

Q: Did you experience any anti-Semitism in this country?

A: Yes, I did. I had an -- a -- I -- I think I -- you know, I ch -- I looked for a job and it was all the nuns, and they want -- they -- when I filled out the papers for the job, they had there religions, so I put in Hebrew, you know? And -- excuse me, they wouldn't take me. They wouldn't take me.

Q: And what kind of institution was it, was it a hospital?

A: A hospital. They wouldn't take me. And when I asked why, because my -- I had very good credentials, they said, I don't think you are cut out, we are very religious

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

here and we don't want no Hebrews here. So, I mean, I -- I had -- I had a few times, you know, not bad, but I had it.

Q: What is your reaction to the resurgence of interest in the Holocaust? In the last decade or so there's been a revival of interest in the Holocaust. Do you have a reaction to that?

A: I am very much interested in it and what I didn't tell you actually is my son knew also what the Holocaust meant for me, and he never told me, but you see, when -- when the Holocaust started in '88 - '89, that's when I started to -- to have my problems, you know, and I was sick til '63, til the museum was built.

Q: You're talking about the Holocaust Museum?

A: The Holocaust Museum. What I found out was that my son gave for bi -- the building fund. When I came back I found out that he had pledged 50,000 and he play -- paid it out. And he paid it out for the living. You know, I mean he had to put in, I guess, whatever. He said it was for me and **Beatrice**. I couldn't have done it, but he could. I couldn't have done it.

Q: Can you tell me about the work you do for the Holocaust Museum?

A: I -- I work once a week, every week I work at the donor's desk. It's for donor, whoever wants to become a member or a donor or whatever. And then I work with the -- with the speaker's bureau. I go and I speak. Not now, now I am incapacitated,

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

but otherwise I go and I speak a lot. And otherwise, whenever they need somebody, you know, at the museum, they always call me and I speak for -- for the people who start to work there, the new people, or -- so I speak to them. And wherever, whoever asked me, I go.

Q: You mentioned you're incapacitated, I -- since they can't see you on the tape --

A: Yes.

Q: -- would you tell me why you're incapacitated?

A: Yeah, I had just a new knee, and it's -- it's a little bit not very comfortable to walk around.

Q: I think I'm going to stop now --

A: Good.

Q: -- and change tape.

A: And we'll have now lunch.

**End of Tape Two, Side B**

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

**Beginning Tape Three, Side A**

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Erika Eckstut**. This is tape number three, side

A. And I had been asking you about your work at the Holocaust Museum and you told me that you do some public speaking. How do you -- how do you respond when you hear Holocaust deniers?

A: How do I respond to hol -- Holocaust deniers, there is really nothing to respond to, because there is nothing you can tell them. I-It's ridiculous even, in my opinion to even talk about deniers, what do you mean deniers? Who can deny it? I mean, don't you have enough proof? You know, I -- I mean, to me it's -- it's almost a -- yo-you know, I mean i-i -- I -- I don't di -- di -- I don't talk about it very well. When -- when I come across a denier, all he had to do is just go and take the papers from the Germans. You don't even have to go any further, and you got everything you need. I mean, it was so clear. How can anybody be a denier? I can't -- I -- I -- I have nothing left to say for that.

Q: In your opinion, do you think American Jews might ever be in danger from neo-Nazis or skinheads?

A: Oh yeah. I -- I believed that when I came here and I still do. I hope not, but I do believe that they can -- I do believe they can, yes.

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

Q: Have you gone back to your hometown since you came to **America**?

A: Yes, I have. I have been there twice or three times. I -- three times, I think. I went in '97 with my granddaughter when I took her when I jumped, I told you I -- I took her there. And then I went -- before that, I went in '93, when I was so sick and I couldn't walk yet, I was in a wheelchair, and my granddaughter took me because my husband was very much against it, my sister was against it, everybody was against it except my oldest granddaughter wasn't against it. If **Omi** wants to go, she says, then I'll take her. And she took me, and we went together. We were there one week, but we were there. I didn't go anywhere. I really couldn't very well manage to go, but I was back, and it -- it did me very good to go back. And then I went again because they had a -- I -- I didn't go after until '64 or '65, they had a -- all the officers, you know, who were in the army, whoever got something, you know, my late husband got four medals. So we were there and they gave us the medals. My brother-in-law got two medals, my -- in -- in retrospect, or wa -- and the -- there -- there were, from all over the world they were there, from **Australia**, from whoever. Whoever was in the army came, and we were all there. Then we went one more time -- no, was three times I went, was three times I was in **Czechoslovakia**. In '63, in '64 and in '67.

Q: '63?

A: I mean, no, na -- '93. I'm sorry.

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

Q: Have you ever been to **Israel**?

A: Twice. I would have gone again if I could. Tw-Twice -- three times now. Three times, I was there last year.

Q: And what was that experience like?

A: Oh, that was a excellent experience, I loved going to **Israel**. I love **Israel**. I -- i-i-if -- if it would have been differently, I would have gone to **Israel**.

Q: Have you ever regretted not going to **Israel**?

A: No, I haven't regretted, I mean it -- it -- it's no -- no use even s-spending time on regretting, you know. But I would have gone to **Israel**. I like to go there. If -- if I am all right this year, we ha -- I have there a cousin. And he was just now in a -- he was actually in the "**Time**" magazine. He -- he is not in the army, but you know, whoever is in the army is being called. He is 25, or 26 years old, and he went to somewhere and they -- they attacked him i-in na -- just now, it was about two weeks ago. And he -- there were two officers and I don't know how many, you know, soldiers were with them. And the one officer was killed. And he w-was wounded and still with the one hand he killed another Arab, or two Ar-Arabs, whatever, and he got out of it. But he had 15 little shrapnels, but they couldn't take them all out, you know, because it would have been dangerous th-the way they are. And he is supposed to get married in August. If I could have my two knees done, I would have

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

gone too, if I could. It all depends, because this knee is still swollen. But if I could have both done, I would go.

Q: How has your Holocaust experience influenced the choices that you've made over the years?

A: You mean wha -- how a -- had the Holocaust, as such --

Q: Your experiences at -- how -- how did -- how do you feel that your experiences made an impact on some of the decisions that you made, some of the choices that you made over the years?

A: I really couldn't tell you, I -- I don't know. I guess my whole life, you know, is involved with the Holocaust. My whole life is the Holocaust. You know, I mean it's -- it's in there, you can't get rid of it ever. You know, I am a product of the Holocaust. So maybe whatever I did had to do with whatever I went through, I don't know. I really couldn't answer you that question very well.

Q: Did your view of Judaism change after the war?

A: I don't think it really changed. You know, m-maybe a little bit, but not really much. I don't think it changed much, maybe a little bit.

Q: When you look back upon yourself as a parent, do you think the Holocaust had any influence on the way you raised your children?



**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

A: I was asking that myself, and I really can't give you an answer. I -- I hope I didn't -- I -- I tried not to do it to my children. I really did try very -- I -- I was thinking about it, because don't forget, I was very early, mother and father to my children. And even when my husband was alive, I was also always there for them. And I was very, very worried I shouldn't make the wrong decision because of. And I hope I didn't, but I really couldn't, with a good conscience say I -- I did or I didn't. I don't know.

Q: Do you think you would have done anything differently?

A: I don't really think so. I don't know. I don't know how my life would have been if I didn't go through it. I -- it would have been a completely different life if we didn't have to go through it.

Q: You mentioned also that you have grandchildren.

A: Yes.

Q: Do you talk to your grandchildren much about your experiences? Cause you said your granddaughter took you to **Europe**.

A: Yes, I was with my granddaughters. I -- they all know very much about it and I took them and so on. But the great-grandchildren, they -- they are little. I don't talk to them about it. Just with my grandchildren. But ne -- I-I have little ones, and I didn't talk to them.

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

Q: How old are your grandchildren and how old are your great-grandchildren?

A: Yeah. My oldest grandchild is 36, she's -- the next one is a year younger, she is 36 -- what -- no, 36 - 35, then is my granddaughter, 19 --

Q: But what are their names also?

A: Oh, the -- **Rene** is my daughter's daughter. She was born on -- on -- wh-when was **Rene** born? God almighty. I know it. I can't remember now exactly when was she born. I don't know --

Q: How old is she?

A: She is 36. So, when was she born?

Q: And the one that's 35, what's her name?

A: **Judy**. The-These are the two daughters from my daughter, and she divorced the husband what she had the two daughters. Then she remarried and had a boy. And the boy's name is **Daniel**, and he is 14. And then I have my o -- son's daughter, who is 19, and they have a -- a boy who is 16.

Q: And the names of the younger ones?

A: And the -- the daughter is **Martina** and the son is **Robert**. The daughter is 19 and her son is 16. And these are all my grandchildren. And then I have, from **Judy**, I have two great-grandchildren, **Matthew** and **Valerie**. And **Matthew** is nine and **Valerie** is seven. And then from **Rene** I have one, and he is four and a half.

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

Q: And his name?

A: And his name, I always forget is **Stevie. Stevie.**

Q: Are you involved with any survivor groups?

A: Yeah, sure I'm involved. I -- whenever I can be involved, I'm involved.

Q: Wh-Which group are you involved with?

A: I am with the -- with the -- with **Nessie** and **Flora** in their group. I -- I -- I have to join really the second generation to my children [**indecipherable**]. And --

Q: So **Nessie** and **Flora's** group, is that Jewish Holocaust survivors and friends of --

A: Yeah, yes, yes.

Q: -- greater **Washington**?

A: Yes.

Q: What has been your best surprise about life in **America**?

A: The freedom. Freedom I didn't have. There was no freedom under the communists at all. I -- I -- I wish I -- I wish I had written, I was always so afraid that if I write, and somebody sh-should come one day, if something could happen. And then when I was here, I had no more time. And then as time went by, you don't feel it so strongly, so you don't, but I should have written about it. It was so bad, you can't even imagine. It really was worse than anything you can ever imagine. After the Holocaust. It was a bad time, a very bad time.

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

Q: Can you give me some examples?

A: Examples, examples was that you didn't have any -- any freedom at all. You had to go and clean the streets. You had to go and do whatever they wanted you to -- to do. I mean, it was -- a-and you were never sure that the person you really knew, that he is a person you didn't -- you do know. He could have gone and say that you are a spy, or whatever i-it -- it was his -- his thing he would have said. It -- it was a terrible time. Really not a good time.

Q: What has been your biggest disappointment in **America**?

A: You know what was the biggest disappointment for me in **America**? Is divorces. Because my daughter and my son they both divorced. And that was my biggest disappointment, how many divorces are here. That's my biggest disappointment.

Q: How has September 11<sup>th</sup> of this past year impacted you personally?

A: I -- I was extremely upset about that. Now, this was something which really and truly was -- that was the biggest disappointment actually of **America**, that -- because you see, when **America** was attacked first, and nothing was done, I was very disappointed when the Marines were shot. 280 or how many did they shot that time? Who-Who -- who is the other things which happened? Nobody did anything. But you see, when I talked about it, you know, like my husband, he's not -- he's not a survivor. He couldn't understand that I can't understand that it doesn't add up for

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

the Americans, because in **America** nothing can happen. That is when you ask me if the Jews from -- can be attacked, sure they can. If you let it happen, it will. Because you are practically very sure of yourself, and you can never be sure, never. It doesn't work that way, unfortunately. And tha-that was a terrible thing, I can't even tal -- wha-what can I tell you? I was very, very -- I am still very disappointed. I am still very worried, you know, I don't know who is good and who is bad. It's -- it's really something which should have never happened. That should have never happened here, never. And now with this war, th-this guy, you know who was -- the American who was there, **och**, it's -- it is just too much. It's just too much.

Q: Is there anything about the American reaction to the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> that has either upset you or -- or given you hope about this country?

A: You know, you always like to look for hope, you know. You never look y-y-you know, with the bad, you always try to look for the good. And I think, you know, what it gave me is a lot of confidence the way the Americans behave, you know. And I hope that it really w -- is work -- worth it, you know, that -- that's all I can say, I -- I hope that it's really meant the way it's said. I mean, you see the flags outside, it's not just for show, but they really mean it, you know. I -- I have nothing else I can say about it, I --

Q: What's next in store for you? What would you yet like to accomplish?

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

A: I don't think -- I don't think I want to accomplish anything. I think whatever I could, I accomplished. I have really and truly beautiful children, they are very, very nice. I don't like the idea that they both got divorced, that wasn't in my book. I -- I -- it's -- it's something I can't understand very well, but they are otherwise beautiful children and they both remarried and now everything -- but that's something which, you know, bothers me a little. But just -- just -- i-it should be peace in **America**, it should never happen anything again, and I should be able to have both my knees working because they -- they don't work for the last four or five years, and I -- I -- I'll just be happy. I -- I don't think I want to accomplish anything any more.

Q: I have a few questions to -- to go back --

A: Okay.

Q: -- and clarify things that you said on your **Shoah** Foundation interview, that I would like to get some --

A: Okay.

Q: -- some details on. Have you had any difficulties getting reparations, either under communism or in the **United States**?

A: Under communism didn't exist anything, I couldn't have gotten anything. When I came here I got a letter from **Germany** that they were looking for my in-laws, for my -- for the **Kauders**. And I didn't have money to go or do anything, so I didn't do

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

anything. My mother had gotten, which -- without her doing anything, she had gotten a -- a -- a flat sum for whatever, I don't know. And she also got, which she said she got for me, was 3,000 dollars, and that was all. I never applied -- no, that's not true. I applied last year or whenever we got that letter from the -- from the lawyer. You know, from the lawyer here, **Mark**, or whatever. I never heard from him. And that was all. I never got anything but the 3,000 dollars my mother gave me when I came. If it was for me or was her money, I don't know, but she gave me the 3,000 dollars. That's all I had from reparations.

Q: You also mention in your interview, the -- the ship, the **Patria**.

A: Yeah.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about the ship and where this historical event intersected with your family.

A: That happened in **Czernowitz**, and I only know that the ship went to **America**. I know that all boys went, no girls, and they wanted my father, who was very, very active in it, he was a big Zionist and he was very active and they wanted to take one of his children, the older one. Sh-She should go because he -- he did a lot of work and he didn't really have any children. But he didn't want it because it wasn't fair. You know, there were no girls, they were all boys. That's all I know about. I don't

**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

know anything else. Of course later on I found out, God knows when, that it never made it. That it --

Q: Do you remember what year all this was taking place?

A: No. Must have been in '41 - '42 when we were in -- when we were in **Romania**.

Q: What would you like your family or your friends or whoever will listen to this tape to know about you that they may not already know about you and your experiences?

A: That's a very good question, what would I like them to know? Well, I would like to leave for everybody who ever reads anything or anything I ever said, or read, or wha-whatever I left behind, that you should never hate. You should always try to love instead of hate, no matter what. And that I was happy to be here, and I hope it takes awhile before I go. And that's all.

Q: Is there anything else that you'd like to add before we conclude? Is there anything that we haven't discussed that you'd like to bring up?

A: Yeah, I would like that the **United States** should stay safe, nothing should happen to them ever again, and it should just be a good world for all of -- of the people, all my children who've stayed behind. Everybody should be well, and everything should be fine.



**Interview with Erika Eckstut**  
**January 16, 2002**

Q: I want to thank you for doing the interview with me today. And you're sure there's nothing else you wanted to add?

A: I don't know, I can't --

Q: Okay.

A: -- I can't think of a-anything I would like to do -- to -- just for me it's very important that I always tell everybody that I don't like to hate, I don't even -- that's very, very important and nothing should happen to the **United States**. It should be a good world, and people should learn to love each other. And that's what I wish for everybody. And to my kids, and everybody should stay well and be good.

Q: I want to thank you, and this concludes the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Erika Eckstut**.

A: Okay.

**End of Tape Three, Side A**

**Conclusion of Interview**