

Interview with Susan Berlin
March 7, 2003

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: This is **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Susan Berlin**, conducted by **Esther Finder** on March 7th, 2003, in **Bethesda, 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 tape number one, side **A**. I'd like to ask you, what was your name at birth?

Answer: **Suzanna, S-u-z-a-n-n-a**, capital **R-e-i-c-h-m-a-n**.

Q: Where were you born, and when?

A: I was born June 22nd, 1926 in a town at that time that was called **R-o-z-n-a-v-a**, **Czechoslovakia**.

Q: And how is that pronounced?

A: **Roznava** it's pronounced, that was [indecipherable]

Q: What were your parent's names?

A: Am I talking too loud? **Elona Reichman, R-e-i-c-h-m-a-n**, and **Julius Reichman**.

Q: What did your father do for a living?

A: He owned a store, a dry goods store. Materials by the yard.

Q: And what work did your mother do?

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A: She worked with him in the store. She was more or less the buyer of the material.

Q: Did she have any help in the house then, if she was working?

A: Yes. We had a full time maid. I had a nanny til I was six, that spoke -- or -- or learned -- to teach me how to speak French, German, Czech, Hungarian, by the time I was four I spoke all those languages. And then we had a -- a special lady who just did the laundry, and a -- a gardener, and many things like that.

Q: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

A: No, I'm an only child.

Q: What was your hometown like?

A: I had no other comparison with other hometowns, most of my relatives lived in towns about that size. This population was about 10,000 - 500 Jews.

Q: Was it a commercial area or an industrial area? Agricultural area?

A: Around it were coal mines. It was a coal mining area.

Q: What were the relationships like between the Jews and their Christian neighbors?

A: Well, I was 12 when I left and all my immediate friends were Jewish. However, I attended a Catholic convent school, as all Jewish kids did. We had -- because that was the best school. We were perfectly content, got along. My parents never -

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- the parents never thought that Catholicism will affect us in any way. And every period there was a 10 minute pause for prayer when everybody got on their knees and prayed, with the exception of the Jewish and the Lutheran children. We didn't have to do that, we just sat and did our own thing and our -- the rabbi and the other priests came once or twice a week for religious lessons, and that was given after school, in the school area.

Q: Was your family religiously observant?

A: They were Orthodox. There was only one shul in our city and that was Orthodox and they were like the European Orthodox was, I would say they observed almost everything.

Q: Did your father had a full beard and **payas**?

A: No.

Q: Did you keep a kosher home?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you have a favorite holiday?

A: Probably **Pesach** was my favorite.

Q: Why?

A: Was the time that most relatives were able to get together.

Q: Did your family have a long history in this town?

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A: In that town and surrounding towns, my parents, my husband's parents lived in that area, if not in that town, which was part of the Austro-Hungarian empire, before 1919, before the **Warsaw** pact, it was **Austria-Hungary**. That's why my mother [**indecipherable**] Hungarian, and so is my father -- my hus -- no, his is actually German, but th-tha -- that same cit -- that same area in 1938 -- in 1918, sorry, after the **Warsaw** pact it was -- became part of **Czechoslovakia**. And **Czechoslovakia** was very -- not anti-Semitic, it was very liberal those few years from 1918 to 1938. In '38 that area became **Hungary**. That very same area was divided by **Hitler**, even though **Hitler** had not invaded **Hungary** til '44. That -- they divided **Bohemia**, **Slovakia** and **Moravia** and -- and which part of it was given to **Russia**, this part was given to **Slovakia**. So we were living, you know, in hu -- the other part was given to **Hungary**, and we lived at that time, from '38 to '39 til we came in **Hungary** with the Czech border, you see. And that was one of the reasons I always came [**indecipherable**]

Q: Had your father ever served in the military?

A: No.

Q: When you were a child did you experience any anti-Semitism?

A: None. None whatsoever.

Q: When you were little, what kinds of things did you do for fun?

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A: Well, I have three daughters and eight grandchildren. I could say that [indecipherable] the same, I couldn't think of anything that was different. We played with toys, we played with each other, we played tag, we -- the toy thing was, I think worldwide except, you know, I didn't have the electronic stuff that they had. But everything else, I think was played the same way as here.

Q: When you were a little girl, what did you think you'd be when you grew up?

A: What did I what? Want to be? I really did not delve into the future at that time because things were beginning to be uncertain even though in **Europe** it was believed that children should be seen and not heard. There wasn't much information given to us in terms of the political situation. Not just me but people -- kids of my generation. But the uncertainty, the possibility of the uncertainty coming was in the air and it was -- it was like -- felt that this is not going to be forever the way it is and kids my age didn't plan for the future at all. And the other thing is that 90 percent of my contemporaries were single children because their parents were convinced that there'll be another war, and they didn't want to raise any more, you know. After the first World War, they thought that they did not want to raise any more children for awhile. And in the little town that I lived, I ca -
- I couldn't count on my two hands the number of families where they had more than one child. And ask that -- you know, not just my parents, but everybody was

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willing to admit that. They don't want to -- they saw another war coming without anything, at that point.

Q: When you look back on your childhood, do you have some favorite memory, or some favorite memories that you'd like to share?

A: It was a very happy childhood I had. I -- I -- I belonged to a -- the upper middle class. I -- I wouldn't call us that rich, although I don't even know what rich meant, because all my friends had a maid, a nanny and a gardener and all these people -- there was nothing that I ever ne-needed materially. I had two parents that were very devoted. My father took me for a walk every day to the park. My mother did something else with me every day. I had the grandparents and I had the -- lots of relatives in different cities. Now it's very small, but in different cities that were able to visit on weekends and on holidays and things like that. My parents had, I don't know, between seven and 10 siblings, both of them, and they all had families. So getting together with them probably was the most enjoyable time, because they were just very warm, and very affectionate and very -- I -- it -- it -- it's an amazing way to look back, that I didn't have anything bad happening to me, or you know, there's some people that they were called a dirty Jew. Didn't even happen to me, it did not. And I don't think my parents, you know, cloistered me.

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We had some Christian neighbors that were -- the kids were my age and we played with them [indecipherable].

Q: Can you remember when things started to change for your family?

A: My father was a very perceptive person who did not finish anything, not even elementary school. And the stories trickling out of the concentration camp -- not -- I me -- the ghettos, actually, because that wasn't then, were trickling down to central **Europe** and he beli -- ga -- he began to believe them and he discuss it with his siblings, and everybody laughed at him. He had a brother who was a doctor who said, I picked every brick in this house and they're not going to come and touch me, and I was very good to the mayor and I treated everybody free. And we had -- they ha -- we had one uncle, he had -- my father had a brother here, who was going to send a visa to anybody who wanted to come. The only one who wanted to come is my father. And that was like by mid-30's, and they send him a visa and my father said, if I go by -- without me and my mother, we'll never see each other again. Which everybody else thought was crazy, but it was a true fact. We never would have seen. He said, I don't care if we -- how long we wait, we wait until we get a visa for everybody. And then that took, again, time, and we might have to wait a long time. What made our passage possible, in 1939 August 3rd, which was the last American ship that left the harbor, was the fact that in 1938

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Hitler gave this part of **Slovakia** to **Hungary**. We were Slovak nationals in a Hungarian quota. If -- we had -- let's put it this way. Every country had a quota of how many are permitted, right? When we were in **Czechoslovakia** the quota was this long, very long. Then -- now all of a sudden we're Czech nationals and we are now part of **Hungary**. Now, in the Hungarian embassy the Czech quota was very small, because there weren't that many Czech Nationals now in one year moved there. So our luck was that that part -- **Hitler** gave that part to **Hungary** and there was a Hungarian officer in -- working in the American embassy who told my father the following; if you sell everything, buy yourself three ship tickets and - - and train tickets to **Vienna**, I'll take your visa and put it on top. And everybody again in the family thought my father was crazy, and he -- the only thing that happened to him, he was taken to a labor camp, for eight months we didn't hear about him. Then he came out of the labor camp, he got in touch with this employee and he sold whatever he could and brought three tickets from **LaHavre** to **New York**, and three train tickets from **Budapest** to **LaHavre**. And we left on August third and in September the war was [indecipherable].

Q: I'm going to have you go back and give me some more details on -- on some of what you just told me.

A: Okay.

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Q: How much did you know -- I realize you just told me that your parents didn't speak politics in front of you.

A: Nothing.

Q: But how much did you know about what was going on in **Germany**?

A: Nothing.

Q: Tell me more about your father going to this labor camp. On -- on what charges was he taken, or when was he taken --

A: It was -- people were lined up, the -- a police order comes on a bullhorn that everybody between 25 and 45, let's say, line up. And they line up and they don't tell them wh-what, where, they left without coming back. And just a couple of weeks later we got a postcard from him, where he was located, and he was working on the road, a labor camp. And there was no way of knowing where or how to bring him back or something. He came back on his own after about eight months.

Q: A-And this was a labor camp, not a concentration camp.

A: Right.

Q: But you mentioned that he had heard about concentration camps.

A: Not [**indecipherable**] ghettos, because the concentration camps did not get done til about 1941. But tr-trickling information was coming from the ghettos.

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Q: What was the state of your father's health when he came back from the labor camp?

A: He was pretty -- he was pretty good. He felt that they worked many hours, but they got enough food, and he was very healthy. My recollection was that his health was not affected.

Q: You talked about the political changes and how **Czechoslovakia, Hungary**, the changes. How did the relations between you and your Christian neighbors change, if they changed, once the political landscape changed?

A: Well, you s -- you -- it was a double change, you see, it was a political change and a religious change at the time. When the -- when the Hungarians invaded our area, the bullhorns went by saying, if anybody is caught speaking hungari -- Czech, they'll be killed or they'll be put in prison. Now, I'm 11 and a half years old, and a -- a -- I immediately forgot all Czech. I mean, it was a very frightening thing to constantly being told that. Czech this -- you know, you went to Czech school, you had Czech friends, you -- you had to forget that. The Hungarians are very nationalistic -- were very nationalistic at that point. And the -- the friendship that -- that I had with kids that were Christian cooled off, but they didn't die completely. Those that lived like in the same yo -- like our little apartment house, with the same backyard coming th -- we saw them, but even as a child I remember

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there was some cooling off. But, you know, the real thing in **Hungary** happened in '44 when **Eichmann** invite -- invaded **Hungary**. But there was a [indecipherable] party, which was a -- there wa -- in **Slovakia** there was a -- a big anti-Semitic party an-and also in **Hungary** there. All these parties made it ready and easy for him to march in because they were prepared years ahead. A form of the Nazi party in these countries.

Q: How did they know who in the population was Jewish and who wasn't? You said your father didn't have the full beard.

A: He had no beard. Well, if you go on the third floor of the museum you'll see how they knew. Every city had a city hall and when you were born your religion was put on your birth certificate. And it was very easy for the Germans to look at the birth certificate and see, because that was there. The only people who escaped that is people in large cities where they -- it was easy for them to move, you know, they just didn't stay with the -- but a little town like mine, everybody knew who was Jewish and those who didn't ratted on each other and -- but it was all recording in the -- in the city hall of who was Jewish and who was not. And in large cities the other thing they did is that they made the men undress cause every Jew was circumcised and there were no Christians that were circumcised for

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health reasons at that time. So if people were in doubt, or if they felt the soldiers that they were -- somebody was escaping, they would make them get undressed.

Q: When the political situation changed, how much of that did you understand?

A: How much what?

Q: How much did you understand of the political changes?

A: Very little.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit more about the kinds of arrangements that were made for you to leave **Europe**?

A: Wa -- from the **United States** came the visa and a letter stating that we will not be a burden for the state, that my uncle will take of us financially and food-wise and put us up and things like that. And i-in **Europe** what we did is that we said -- w-we sold everything, gave it to this one man in the embassy and some other things that we had, we just gave it up, to relatives. I remember a bathtub, which was a big deal, we had a -- an American bathroom and we gave sa -- the tub to some relatives and they gave it away. But I was miserable, because I blamed my parents for taking me away from my friends, you see. There's no way that they were willing to explain to me that this -- what was going on. Far as I knew I did not know why we were coming. And I could have understood because I mean, after all, I was almost 13.

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Q: S -- your family gave away most of their possessions, but what -- what could your family take with them and what could you take with you when you left?

A: My father was a very honest man, he was given all sorts of advice, to put money in the lining of his coat and everything. And my father said that if an officer will look at him, he will get red, and he couldn't get away with anything like -- he just doesn't want to start life in the **United States** with hidden money or hidden any kind of -- any kind -- anything hidden. We bought nothing that was of -- of value. We bought my mo -- from my mother's trousseau I have two or three tablecloth that have her initials that must be close to a hundred years old, which my grandchildren love. We bought some photographs, not much. There was a limit on how much you can -- you can, you know, wa -- in terms of weight. Don't forget, this was the last ship. I don't know whether they knew it was, but they knew it was nik -- close to the last ship coming to the **United States**. And, you know, I have no recollection of what I brought. It -- it must have been a doll, cause I was very fond of a doll that -- that came. But for a long time I felt that there was nothing I want to get attached to, because you don't know when it's going to go away. I did not become attached to anything material. Even now I feel that material things are replaceable.

Q: What did you most regret leaving behind?

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A: My relatives and my friends.

Q: Were you able to say goodbye to them?

A: Yes, we were able to say goodbye to them. Very sad, but we did.

Q: Tell me about actually leaving your hometown and this journey over to
LaHavre.

A: We took a train from this little town and we had to change someplace, I forgot. This -- the vet -- the worst part of it was that we went through **Vienna** where there was an hour and a half stopover, and that was the first time I saw the **SS** troops. And they came with guns and very, very -- their demeanor was wa -- was very scary, even [**indecipherable**] I think afterwards, but to a kid, when they asked for your passport and your luggage and what they went through, was very much like, you know, at that point I thought this must be a concentration camp what they do. Course I realized later that that was not so. But for me at that time, it was probably the scariest -- no, it was not the scariest. Can I go back to something that was scary? Okay. When this happened that this ar -- little area -- **Czechoslovakia** was like this, it was big here, then it was **Moravia**, and **Slovakia** got thinner and then it was **Putka Pascaoush** which went to **Russia**. **Slovakia** was, let's say, a thin piece like this, okay? And this was given to **Hungary**. And the emp -- the other half was given to **Poland**. This narrow country known as **Slovakia**. Half went to

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Poland and half went to **Hungary**. The Poles were very upset that these Jews were being thrown over the border for them to take care of. Most of them were Hassidic and very, very religious. So they packed up these Hassidic Jews and their wives and children, got them out of **Poland** and threw them across the border to slo -- back to **Slovakia** and to -- the **Slovakia** that was a -- **Hungary** at that point. This was a Friday night, and they separated the men, the children and the things, and they did these -- put these men on the square and with a large scissors they just started to cut off their beards and their **payas**. And there was shrieking all night. And by morning the trucks took them away, probably **[indecipherable]** I don't know where. But it was a terribly nightmare-ish thing for a kid to see, the reaction of these people that on Friday night the beards were **[indecipherable]**. And in the museum on the second floor, I found a picture of this cutting of the beard of a number of people and I went up to the **[indecipherable]** archives, and it was not our town, but it was some place like 15 miles away that it occurred, so it must have occurred in more than one area. And I consider myself very lucky because this is the only thing that I personally witnessed on our -- during -- during the entire time I was there.

Q: Did you fear for your own safety at that time?

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A: My parents were on both side of me, and I did not fear -- I didn't feel I belonged to that group that was being attacked. Somehow or other I felt, well nobody has a beard in my family and they're not tha -- and they're not do that to us. I didn't see anybody taken from my immediate family as we were on that train or on the boat or anything like that.

Q: How old were you when you came to the **United States**?

A: 13.

Q: And what were your expectations of **America**?

A: Nothing. I really did not know. To go back, there was a nun in the convent where we lived who spent 27 years in the **United States** and I took lessons with her. So when I came my parents thought I would speak English well, which I really didn't do that well, and I was put in high school, first grade. And I learned very quickly on the bus with kids that were going from my neighborhood to high school, and I picked up English pretty fast, it wasn't hard for me. I did very well in high school. I -- I was put in -- in th -- they used to have repor -- programs, handwritten and a principal came in about two months in a class, in a Spanish class and said to the teacher that Miss **Reichman** belongs to speech, this is an error here, **S-P**, she should have been in speech instead of Spanish. And the teacher said, you can't take her away, she's my best student. So I stayed in

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Spanish and I learned Spanish and I got in the honors program in that high school, **Julia Richmond** High School, which was associated with **Hunter** and **Brooklyn** College, and in re -- I -- I enjoyed high school very much because to me it was like a new world, and I -- I guess when you excel in school so unexpectedly and make friends -- there was only ra -- ba -- one bad experience in high school. There was more than one, it sort of comes back. I-I'm not doing this very sequentially, is that okay? Okay. My clothing was a problem, because that was a real sore thumb. I stood out at that point anyway, it was very different, the clothes, even though I had lovely clothes because my mother designed my clothes and she had all this fabulous material. When my parents came out they didn't speak English well at all, it was very difficult. And an uncle of mine died and left my father a thousand dollars, and my father decided to buy a business for a thousand dollars. So they bought a business, a rooming house for 19,000 dollars, a thousand down, and they rented rooms in this rooming house and we had an apartment on the ground floor. And in this -- and then there wasn't -- they didn't make enough money or anything, it was somehow or other, somebody in the family advised that my mother should go with -- they should go to work as a couple for a year and put some money away. My mother became a maid and my father became a butler someplace, and I stayed with this one uncle who sent us the affidavit. Now, my

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father was the type of person that he did not ever take a glass of water for himself. If he wanted a glass of water he went to the restaurant, ordered a cup of coffee and they gave him some water. He never did anything by himself. And he did this and he -- they took this job, they worked 18 hours a day, the two of them. They made 20 dollars or 25 dollars a month and when they had enough money with that thousand dollars, that's when they left and they bought this -- this rooming house. But while I was -- while they were working as a maid and a butler, the daughter of that family and I went to the same high school. And she got a gang together and she -- they teased my clothes tremendously. And I had like two or three very unpleasant things about this particular clique that was just -- I now notice, I teach, how much nicer children are to the Asian children and things like that. My generation it was the opposite, or anyhow in **New York** where I was. It may be because of where I lived, but they made absolutely my life miserable with my clothes and my accent, my a -- a -- at that point I was not yet excelling and I was very, very unhappy and I didn't want to complain to my parents cause I knew they were doing this, they had to work at what they were doing. And eventually, and I can't think of time-wise except that maybe it was in two years, they got -- they bought this business and -- and then I was able to somehow or other make my own

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friends and I got on the honor roll at school, at this country school and things like that and I got out of this circle of people who were teasing me.

Q: We're going to pause and change tapes. Just one moment.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Susan Berlin**. This is tape number one, side **B**. And you had just told me about some of the difficulties you were having with transitioning to the **United States**. You were talking about this clique. Was -- was that a form of anti-foreign sentiment, did you think, or was it just that you were not part of their clique? Did you -- did you have any anti-foreign experiences when you first came to this country?

A: Well, I know that teenagers tend to be mean anyway, and they can do the things that some of these girls were doing, but to me they were very specific. Number one they said -- you know, they were -- made fun of the fact that my parents worked for her as a maid and a butler and that made me an inferior person. And the second thing that they were cliquish about is my clothes and my accent. I had an accent when I came first. However, the beauty of all that was that I never did

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take speech and every English teacher, including my college English teacher didn't believe that I wasn't born here, so somehow I overcame that.

Q: There is one thing that I wanted to ask you that we kind of glossed over. When you first arrived in the **United States**, what were your first impressions of this country?

A: Terrified. I was born -- I was -- I lived all my life in this little town. I have -- I have not seen a street light until I went visiting some f -- some relatives in **Hungary [indecipherable]** we didn't even have street light. **New York** is terrifying, you know, the first time you just walk around in it. And I lived with an aunt and an uncle who had no children, which didn't have -- didn't add to the point that I wasn't handled properly in many times. You know, they just said here's a quarter, go to the movies when I couldn't -- when I had, you know, when I had problems. Everything was very difficult. For instance, the food tasted -- tasted soapy. I felt that the **Coke** tasted like they had mixed it with soap and I felt that -- and my parents didn't, this was only me. I felt that a lot of the food was so strange to my palate, and it all tasted of soap. And I'm sure th -- I know that this was psychological. And it appeared very, very difficult at that point because of all the other problems with being a teenager and then you know, starting to go with boys -- not go with boys, but let's say if I was invited to a sweet 16 party I didn't

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know how to act. I -- I always said the wrong things and I did the wrong things and it took me a very long time to arise from this backward little girl, only child who lived in a town who knew only the things that everybody else did of the same, you know, socially we all did the same thing. I mean, nobody went to a dance without the other and it was a much closer knit group that I was with, and I had to overcome that. And that was a very, very hard, for many years. But then, you know, towards the end of high school I was -- I got more into it. I got into **Brooklyn** College, which -- a free school which was a big deal for me and I did not want to go to **Hunter**. I could not stand the fact that **Julia Richmond** was four years all girls. And I just said I'll travel anyplace to go with -- just see boys. And then in **Brooklyn** College I excelled pretty well. And a German professor of mine said, would you like to apply for a scholarship to the University of **Pennsylvania**? I said I don't want to because my parents can't afford it. They can't afford **Columbia** either, but they know I want to get a Masters and they said they'll take the loan. And he said, just for fun, don't tell your parents. If it happens, it happens, just we're going to put you in for a full-time scholarship. You will -- anyhow, I got this scholarship, which **Brooklyn** College was just thrilled, cause I was the first girl -- you know, that used to be an all boys school -- the first girl and the first Jewish girl, they combined two [indecipherable] got a full time scholarship to

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Columbia for a year. Full Masters, food, this -- tuition and everything else. And at that point my father knew how big this was, but he still said to me, you know, I can get that money for **Columbia** and I would so much rather you went anyhow. Y-You couldn't talk me out of it. My yi -- my mother worked [indecipherable] look much better on my record if I go to **Columbia** -- I mean, to the University of **Pennsylvania**. So I went to the University of **Pennsylvania** and that was a blast. I really in -- it was a very difficult school. But first, in several classes when I raised my hand, especially English or philosophy and I opened my mouth, the professor would say, you're one of those that came from a city college [indecipherable]. And my education just came through in many ways the professors saw that my background was very, very good and you know, we all, those of us who came from city colleges were very pleased with what we had as a background. And the university [indecipherable] was very nice, it was a great school and I got my Masters there and I wanted to teach, and when I finished I couldn't find a job because the veterans were coming home and they got preference to all teaching job. That was in '47. So I have a friend who got a job in **Washington**, a psychologist working for the police department, and sh-she's my best friend actually, and she said to me, I'll find you a job. Anyhow, two days later she sent me a telegram, I got a interview for you in a place and she said, don't get scared of

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the name, it's called the Army Intelligence Map Service and they're looking for people with languages. So she set up this interview and I came down and they were very impressed with my degree, I have a Masters and they hired me on the basis of my Hungarian language, nothing else, none of my other thing, but they're very short on Hungarian. So I worked there in Map Service from '47. I met my husband there, my -- and we got married in 1950. And I worked until 1952 when I had my first child.

Q: I'm goin -- I'm going to take you back to high school for a little while first.

A: All right.

Q: Okay. You mentioned that you would do things in high school, you would -- you'd go to parties and you would do the wrong thing. What do you mean you would do the wrong thing?

A: Well, I didn't know when it was appropriate to kiss or not to kiss and they spin the bottle and things like that that were totally Greek to me. And then when I wouldn't kiss anybody then I was made fun of. You know, this etiquette that you grow up with as to how you act at a party is something that, you know, with time I picked up, but it took a long time, and nobody was nice enough or honest enough to show me how to, you know, how to do this slowly and properly, or fast and improperly. It was like Greek to me because I was very little when I left.

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Q: You had told me about this clique that really tormented you and then you said you -- you began to make some of your own friends. Who were some of your friends? When you found people that were of a mind that you --

A: The girls that were -- I found on the bus. You see, this girl that taunted me lived in the fancy section of **Park** Avenue, she was never on the bus and everything. But they we -- I lived on the **East Side** and they -- then I saw a lot of the same kids on the bus and they were kind enough to talk to me and I talked to them and then we met for coffee on Saturday or go to the movies. And they seemed to have been all in the neighborhood where I wa -- we had -- where I was living.

Q: Were they Jewish, or were they foreign?

A: They were Jewish. I didn't have one non-Jewish friend except in college. I don't know why.

Q: When did you finish high school?

A: I finished high school in 1933 -- nine -- 40 -- '42.

Q: I'm going to take you back just a few years. When you first came to this country, were you able to stay in touch with family and friends that you left behind?

A: No, very soon the mail just did not go through at all. We didn't receive. We had no idea who was alive or who was dead.

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Q: In those first years when you were in this country, the war had started in **Europe**, how much did you know about what was going on over there?

A: Very little. I think the first notices, you know, this Polish diplomat tried to bring information to **Roosevelt**, but he was never publicized. And there were rumors coming around but we all called it rumors because we didn't want to believe it. The first time that the whole family and my circle knew about it is in '45 when they started to show the films.

Q: During the war did your parents ever talk about the political situation in **Europe**?

A: Very little until I was -- until I was much older, 16 - 17.

Q: Do you remember any of those conversations with your parents during the war?

A: No. But I know that it was late because I have grandchildren and I have taken my 11 year old to the Holocaust and she completely understands what's going on, and then -- what went on and children have -- well, maybe now they have a deeper perception, but we did not know. We -- our parents sheltered us to an extent that -- I mean -- I now feel I would have understood if I had been told earlier.

Q: You took your grandchildren to the Holocaust Museum, I'll ask you about your children and grandchildren in -- in a little while. I also wanted to -- to ask you if your level of religious observance changed when you came to the **United States**?

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A: [indecipherable]. Yeah, I -- I didn't want to bring up myself. I was raised in an Orthodox home [indecipherable] I became more Reformed, I would say, when we came here and we be -- joined the Reform Temple and [indecipherable] like that. But my mother had a kosher house. When the pictures about **Germany** came back, the skeletons and everything, and I saw my relatives in all those photographs, I became an atheist, but a true atheist. I began to talk to God about the fact that how could you let something like this happen. And any amount that I listened to **Elie Wiesel** or anybody else that it wasn't God's fault, I felt that God could have intervened. And as time went on I felt this was a very difficult life, to be an atheist if you were not always an atheist. And I thought about that too and I felt very guilty about the fact that I survived with my parents. Why? Wh -- I sa -- I -- in order for me to stop being an atheist I had to find out why I survived. I had to have a mission to survive because so many great people died. And I found my mission, an-and it might be a true -- a fiction of my imagination but it worked for me, that when my first child was born and I looked at her and I said, I know why I survived, because I know that through her and my other children, Judaism will continue forever. And I took this very seriously and I have three wonderful Jewish daughters, who believe very strongly. Who know everything about the Holocaust there is to know, even more than I do sometimes I think. And who strongly I have,

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y-you know, educated them in the fact that I ha -- believe that I am only surviving because to me, they will carry on Judaism. And I don't mean banging your head Judaism, I mean just Judaism philosophy, in principle and in -- as far as they want to carry it, religious. They were all **Bar Mitzvahed** and **Bat Mitzvahed**, my children, my grandchildren. I decided to take each one of them to **Israel** after they were **Bar Mitzvahed**. When my oldest one became 13, **Rabin** was killed and we decided it wasn't safe to go to **Israel**. So we went to **France** instead, it was a wonderful trip and ever since any of them become **Bar Mitzvahed** or **Bat Mitzvahed**, they take a trip, but it has to be safe by me and her parents and **Israel** has not yet been safe. One of my major dreams is that I take all of them to **Israel** for a week, to [indecipherable] and I've been there three or four times with my husband. And I still have this dream of taking my very big family to **Israel**, but I don't think that that's in the cards, and realistically I don't feel that politically it's going to happen, that it's safe.

Q: You -- you've jumped many years ahead of me, I have to bring you back.

A: Okay. [indecipherable]

Q: That's okay.

A: [indecipherable]

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Q: Can you give me a little insight into what was going on in your family with your parents and -- and their feelings and their anxieties, their worries, how you were feeling during the 40's when the war was raging.

A: If they did, they never communicated to me, no. They -- that generation did not go into fi -- I don't think my parents were different. They were not very much into feelings of the children. Th-Th-They were raised that the children have to sort of go with the flow and -- and -- and -- and just accept the feelings as the parents said it, not have different of their own.

Q: What were their feelings?

A: They didn't even talk about that. We had very little meaningful conversations.

Q: And how were they supporting themselves in the 1940's, the first half of the 40's?

A: Well, at first th -- I told you that they became a butler and a maid and then they got this thousand dollars and they bought this apartment house. Now, I just want to say one thing which probably has nothing to do with this, except they bought -- the apartment house -- the rooming house was 19,000 dollars and they had a thousand dollars cash, they put it down. And then they lived there, my mother and father and I went to college, they stayed there until my father died and then my mother moved into an apartment and then she moved here to **Washington** the last 12

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years of her life. And she had a friend who sol -- who sent her a newspaper clipping that that 19,000 dollar house was sold for one million, to show how the real estate market had gone in 50 years in **New York**.

Q: Do you remember **Pearl Harbor**?

A: Yes.

Q: What was that experience like for you?

A: Well, I just came home from Hebrew school and we were having lunch when my father put the radio on and he came back and it was very scary. I felt that -- and again, my par -- my father and I talked very little about it, but he felt that the world was in -- is in a bad spot. That at the ti -- it was very dangerous to be attacked by the Japanese. But the stress was still on **Hitler**, that's the worst thing [indecipherable], but that's -- was his connection.

Q: What changes do you remember from among your friends and just the general American population after **Pearl Harbor**? What memories do you have of that time?

A: Well, there was rationings that I remember. We didn't have a car, so it wasn't - - there was a food rationing. There was, you know, stamp licking and sometime some things you did with -- with thread, or balls, or some kind of something. Something connected with the war effort on a voluntary basis. And very much --

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everybody was very much in favor of -- of the atomic bomb, of my generation.

And my children's generation feel it was a terrible thing. And you know, we talk about that a lot, even though it -- it -- it -- and I think that that's also common.

They weren't alive then and I think it was a very important way to save American lives. There wasn't any other way.

Q: Do you remember the media coverage of the war during the war, or in the immediate post-war period?

A: Of **Europe**? Well, it was very hard for me to ascertain, you know, what -- what really happened. It was a -- a -- I thought it was -- it showed very realistic things and what I saw after the war, I don't think that the media exaggerated. I think that the media showed the European war pretty much of how it was.

Q: When did you feel like you really were acclimated to American life and that you kind of fit in now?

A: When I became a citizen, I think that was the real time and the -- it was one of these group things that we were -- you go in and you -- you -- you are sworn in by a judge. When a judge called me over into his chamber and said, I see you received a free American education and you received a Masters degree and I'm going to have to ask you questions, I'm not going to pass you with the -- with the group. And I said okay, and American history was one of my favorite subjects

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anyway. I don't recall -- but he was very specific on dates, things that really were not that important to remember, I felt. But I happened to have taken it recently and I answered everything very -- I answered all his questions, and he said to me that he was very proud that I knew American history. And he said, what I did with me he does with all American -- with young people. He feels that if you get a college education you should be able to know something about American history. And a -- and I agree with him.

Q: When was that?

A: When was that? I believe I was 21.

Q: What attempts did your parents make to find family and friends after the war?

A: We used every possible -- I -- if you know -- I'm sure you know **HIAS** is probably the primary organization a-and we went -- and then we found one or two relatives that -- distant relatives, like second or third cousins, alive. We wrote to them to see whether they knew of anybody and we ended up with one first cousin of mine in **Israel**, one in **Czechoslovakia** and one in **Hungary**, and a few second cousins out of over a hundred, there were over a hundred relatives. And these searches went periodically, you know, several locations and several ways. And also some stories were -- they were in **Auschwitz** and through a fence they recognized the relative and then that relative never came out. Very little, very,

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very little. And you know, they -- they just -- in our Temple, every -- th-the name of how many relatives died in the Holocaust and mine and my husband's is the longest. Which is not a credit, but it just shows how many of my relatives died. And -- and that continued a very long idea of guilt. Even though I felt that through my children and grandchildren I will perpetuate this wonderful Judaism, that I wish -- there's no full explanation of why they died. It wasn't -- I don't believe it was for **Israel**, or for me. I don't believe that it was only man's choice. I believe that there's nobody that really knows. And I don't want to ponder that because if I do I can go nuts, frankly, you know. Th-The real pondering on that, if you want to have a specific answer, there's no answer to that.

Q: Did you follow the war crimes trials after the war?

A: To some extent. The **Nuremberg** Trials yes, to some extent. They were very lenient, I thought. My husband's a lawyer and he tried to follow it more. They -- they should have been dealt with much stronger.

Q: Did you follow the debate in the **U.N.** regarding the partition of **Palestine**?

A: That's an emotional issue. That's -- y-you know, it's -- I'm at the stage with, right now that when an Arab speaks, I turn the television off. Now, I admit this -- not -- my grandchildren tried to talk me out of this, but I -- it's the -- it -- we should learn more about Islam. I said, well, do you think that anybody suggested

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that we should learn more about **Hitler**? That **Hitler** would have been better to the Jews if we knew more about it? No, we knew everything of course, cause he wrote in **Mein Kampf**. I don't believe I want to learn about Islam, I don't want to understand about Islam, because I basically feel they all want to kill anybody who is not a Moslem. And -- and a religion like that, believing in a God to kill everybody else who doesn't believe your religion, I don't want to understand, because it -- it can't be a good god to do that. And I just turn my mind away from that because I feel that I either want to cry or I want to scream about that. See, you weren't -- you weren't there, having it -- it ha -- all has to do with your background. Having gone through the Holocaust you have an entirely different political view about **Israel**, about the future. I do not believe that in 10 generation of Arab, they will change their mind about not wanting to put all the Jews in the sea. I think they'll remain exactly the same way. They want this little land with all the oil, having oil and [indecipherable] all around. It's not logical, it's not reasonable, and it is emotionally very painful.

Q: What are your memories of the birth of the state of **Israel**?

A: Dancing in the street. That we all went downtown, we went to **Times Square** and every kind of celebration in private homes, and at the embassies all over. I have one cousin who came over on a ship like the **Exodus**, saved from a

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concentration camp and was able to get away like that, became a male nurse in **Israel** and -- because somebody told him that's the only way you're going to get food. Get into -- get -- start working in a hospital where they have food. And he studied, he became a male nurse and he met his wife there **[indecipherable]**.

Q: Tell me how you met your husband.

A: My husband was working in the same agency on a different job, ma -- my -- the title of my position was Army Intelligence Research Analyst. And I had this fabulous job of reading articles and stuff in Hungarian, letters, and then summarizing them and saying this might pertain to something, maybe a railroad station or something like that. But there were hundreds of magazines that had -- they had -- they were just junk, it had nothing to do with politics. And I -- my husband's title in that office was -- he was the lia -- liaison representative of the Army Map Service of the Pentagon. But he worked between the Pentagon and this -- the Army Map Service. And he was the **[indecipherable]** -- oh, I was at a dance on a Saturday night at the Jewish Community Center and he was there. I was there with a girlfriend, he was there with a boy friend. And I said to my girlfriend, that boy works with me. So she said, go over. I said, I don't **[indecipherable]**.

Anyhow, she went over and she says, my girlfriend says you work in the same office. Anyhow we started to talk, and then that's how we got started to go out

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together. And one of the reasons our marriage works is he was born in **Vienna**, he came in 1941 and I think that many of our backgrounds are very, very similar and we don't have some of the difficulties that people of different philosophies have, and we have less disagreements on major issues on some of -- you know, on some of these things.

Q: You -- you mentioned your children. Can you tell me their names and just a little bit about them?

A: Okay. My oldest daughter is **Debbie** and she is a special education teacher that she --

Q: An airplane is --

A: They're not supposed to do that. There's no airplanes around **Washington**.

[indecipherable]. It's here.

Q: Let's pause until this passes. **[tape break]** Okay, we're back, that plane has stopped buzzing us. You were telling me about your daughter **Debbie**.

A: Yes, her name is **Debbie**, she's a teacher and she specializes in special -- in -- in children who come from non-English speaking homes. She has two classes, one in the morning, a whole **[indecipherable]** one in the afternoon, first grade. And they have special program devised specifically for children who come from non-English speaking homes. And you want me to tell you about the other children, or

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the family of [**indecipherable**]? Okay, she's married to a guy who is an accountant and they have two children, one of them is **Rachel**, she's in second year college, and **Jossy** who is a senior in high school. And then my middle daughter's name is **Lisa** and she lives in **California**, in **Clearwood**, right outside - - it's right outside of **L.A.**. And she is a **CEO** of a national corporation for Parents Anonymous, which is an organization that deals with parents, hopefully before they strike children. In -- in other words, they feel they are going to and they have these meetings and help parents. And now, she took it over when it was dying and now she -- it's in every state, and that she gets grants from Congress and also from toy companies like **Mattel** to -- to work their program.

Q: I'm going to interrupt you so I can change the tape. One moment.

A: Okay.

End of Tape One, Side B

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Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: -- uation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Susan Berlin**. This is tape number two, side **A**. And you were telling me about your second daughter and her work in **California**.

A: Okay, she is the **CEO** of an organization called Parents Anonymous and they work with children, parents and different people, and -- in helping them before they become violent. And she has -- sh -- there's a chapter in every city -- in every state now, and she has -- her husband's a professor at **UCLA**, he teaches Latin American economics. And they have two children, one of them is 16 and one of them is six. And my youngest daughter is **Cindy**, and she's a lawyer and her husband is a psychiatric social worker. And she has two children, one of them 14 and one of them 11. And she works for a -- a **Wall** Street law firm, the seventh largest in the -- in the **United States**, the name of which I never, never remember. But she just retired from there cause tha -- she was working 60 hours, and she got a new job with a giant corporation as the labor -- labor policy director and the ethics committee chairman.

Q: What did you tell your children about your childhood experiences?

A: Well, you know, they -- they were very happy to listen to any kind of stories that I -- I tried to tell them the funny ones that were, you know, more humorous

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than otherwise, but sometimes they just want me to tell them about anything. How was school, how was -- how was this and how was that and how we celebrated certain holidays. They were very -- they're very much interested in my past and my husband's past. I -- I can't think of anything specific. I must say to you that they want to hear -- they want to know everything and if I told this, it's say it again, they really want to hear everything.

Q: While I was changing the tape you told me about some advice you gave your daughters. Would you please repeat that so that we record that?

A: When they were still in high school and we would discuss careers very often, I had this notion that a lot of people, my friends, were being fired and I asked -- I told them that the most important thing I think, after liking what you do, is not to depend someone else for a job, but to -- to be able to hang up your shingle, you know, I was thinking of law or medicine, something where you can be in business for yourself. And not to depend on a man to support you. And you know, after awhile she said, well we know, we know that already, Ma, you don't want us -- i- it's not -- not that I didn't want them to get married, I just didn't want them to depend solely, because people in my generation, they did that. They were very unsuccessful.

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Q: You were in this country during some very turbulent -- turbulent times, and you were raising children in some very stressful times. I'd like you if you could to reflect on some of the events that you witnessed in this country, and let's -- let's start with the Cold War, and perhaps even the Cuban missile crisis.

A: Wa -- what's the last one you asked me? The co --

Q: Cu-Cuban missile crisis.

A: Oh, the Cuban missile crisis. The Cuban missile crisis was very -- my -- my husband is a tremendous -- a historian by hobby, and wi -- and he -- he likes nothing else, and with the kids too, we talked all the time about politics. And the Cuban missile crisis was very dangerous. Everybody felt that we were on the brink of something very, very serious happening and we would present our view and our fear of the insecurities and we -- we would let them talk. And even though it was an unlikely situation, they each knew that they had an opinion, you know, to -- to give in terms of their political views, that of course Daddy was arch-conservative and they were arch-liberal, etcetera, etcetera, and I tell you, there was one -- my middle daughter was the most liberal one, she went on all the marches and the school about wearing slacks when you weren't supposed to and she got expelled and he was really upset with her. And she overheard a conversation that my husband and I had where he compared her to **Patty Hearst**, I don't know if you

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remember it. And she overheard that conversation and she came in and she was very upset. And I said to my husband, that was the wrong example, it was tha -- it took us months and months for her -- for us to try to -- you know, she went on every march, to **Lincoln** Memorial and everything, and -- a-and she was sick one day, I had to go on a march for her. But I felt that it was something very sincere in her and I did not feel it was bad. I don't think it was extreme and I was more tolerant of her, which made a good combination with my husband. He was not as tolerant, he just felt she was much too -- much, much too liberal about taking chan -- he was very upset when she got expelled for 24 hours about marching, about wearing pants, which is so stupid when you think about it. And she was the one that really st -- was way out to the left among the three of them, and the other two were more or less in the middle. But no matter what came up in politics, we discuss it at every dinner table, and after dinner and -- and we had a friend from **New York** who came and visited at one dinner and he said, I would give my right arm if my family would be willing to talk about politics so much. So my husband said, you know, it's -- they got so used to it because we talked about it like other people talk about coffee and tea, we talk about what happens in politics, there's so much part of our daily living an-and he's very much into that, that I think the kids became part -- interested in that. And even now they talk on the telephone with

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California [indecipherable] about anything that happens over there, my kids want to talk to him about it.

Q: How about the Civil Rights movement?

A: The Civil Rights movement was a -- something that, again, it was some -- my -- my kids marched, all of them, at all ages. What was -- the one that was 12 and she was marching in mothers against abor -- for abortion and -- and like that, and I said to her, do you know what it is that you're marching for? And you know, at 12 she explained to me very clearly, and I said to my husband, I -- I think it's wonderful that she is so knowledgeable and everything, but at 12 I would be happier if she was playing with **Barbie** basically. There's such a long period that she has to worry about this particular problem in our -- which will not go away, and a -- all that. But most of my -- my kids, my family were just -- partook in the marches. I was less of a marcher. I was a marcher in philosophy, but not in act. But they all marched.

Q: But how did you, as a Holocaust survivor, see this civil -- Civil Rights issue?

A: Well, I think it was very important for them to have the -- th-the -- our Civil Rights were terrible. The conditions of blacks in this country was shocking to me when I -- I -- I -- first of all, I never saw a black person until I came here, so that whole even visual concept was brand new to me. And there was no class like the

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black class in **Europe**, it was entirely different. But, you know, you're reading about **Jefferson** and **Sally** ha -- y-you just can't believe the hypocrisy of the -- o- of all classes of people.

Q: You made reference to one of your children marching. How -- how about the sex -- sexual revolution? You were raising daughters.

A: You know, I don't -- how -- how do you define that? I don't remember going through that very much.

Q: Okay.

A: It was, you know, they were very liberal from day one, and I-I -- as they were growing up, and I just thought that all the girls now were -- you know, certain things existed.

Q: On a more serious note, the **Eichmann** trial in **Jerusalem**.

A: Well, I have to tell you. The museum had a speaker who caught **Eichmann** and he was the most fabulous speaker, wa -- th-the guy that looked this short, and white hair, of course it looked very different, and the judge was here and they held a [indecipherable] they -- they tel -- told the story how they caught him, which was fabulous. **Eichmann** was especial painful to us because he was the chief architect of the Hungarian Jews, and I think it was fabulous that after all those years they were able to catch him and bring him back and bring him to trial. And

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he didn't deserve a trial like he got, he got a ver -- a very, very fair trial. And he should have been burning in hell for a long time for what he did. I don't think that the trials are equal to the crimes at all. That's again personal, I guess. You know, you -- you can't --

Q: How about the Korean War and the war in **Vietnam**?

A: Well, I must say that I did not feel with the young people, I felt very much -- well, the Vietnamese war was a terrible mistake, I felt, because the French lost. They were there for 25 years and they s -- couldn't do it and they said to us, don't go in. And I felt that that was a very logical advice. How can you go in in an area where you don't know the terrain, you don't know anything about -- I think it was a lost war before it started. And the Korean War, I must tell you I'm not familiar enough to give a **[indecipherable]**.

Q: How about the assassinations of the **Kennedys** and **Martin Luther King, Junior**?

A: Well, I don't see how anybody can but feel very s -- deep sadness about that. I think that **Kennedy** had the potential of bringing something very great to this country in terms of inspiring young people, and -- and the fact that so many assassinations happen shows this country is very gun -- although the -- **Kennedy** said no, you can't protect anybody. That's what he himself said. You can't protect

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a president a hundred percent. Nevertheless, no one has as many assassinations as we do. And the role that guns play here is tremendous and it's very fearful and it's scary.

Q: When your kids were growing up were you a stay at home mom, or did you continue to work?

A: I -- I stayed at home because I noticed very early that when they came home from school they were ready to talk about certain things and at eight o'clock they were not. So I decided to quit my job, although they were willing to take me back to the Army Map Service cause there are so few Hungarian speaking people, on a part time basis, which at that point was in the 50's, it wasn't that common. And I decided to stay home. And my -- my oldest daughter **Debbie** began to draw very nicely and she came home one day and she said, Mommy, the teacher said that the sun is here, th-th-the -- the house is here and the -- this -- the sun isn't always on the right hand side. I tried to tell the teacher sometimes it's in the middle, when I'm walking. Teacher didn't believe me. So I decided to study art at that point because I saw that my kid had something that that teacher never learned, a methodology. And I liked to draw when I was a kid, and ev -- everything else. And I took a la -- a few art courses and then I studied with **Jack [indecipherable]** who is a local **Washington** colorist. And I decided to go to st -- to teach art. Now,

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at that point, art was not taught in every school, and they didn't have any art teachers. The only way they could hire me was through resource teacher job and I -- and they started me with [indecipherable], and places where they didn't even have pencils. The school in [indecipherable]. And I started to teach art to children that actually never even had a pencil to draw with, and they were just thrilled with it. And I devised a method and I started to teach kindergarten through sixth grade. I -- I liked that age because th -- in that kindergarten you can do a lot with -- take them out and look at the trees and you show them the bark and feel the bark. And it was just my own ideas. And I began to teach un -- for -- until I retired, I guess, in 1968 and was in the school system, some -- in two or three schools, sometimes. But in addition to that, I worked at Camp **Louise**. I don't know if you know where that is. I was the head of their craft department, but then I wanted to introduce more fine art. And I hired more counselors who did painting and drawing and sketching and things like that for the whole summer. And I did that for 25 years, I enjoyed that very much and I felt that children away from parents and not near a classroom, were very receptive to -- to learning and self expression. And **Louise** has 400 acres of -- of land and you could go under a tree and just all day, spend all day just looking at the way the grass looks at different places. So I was very successful doing that, and I enjoyed it. And what I did is that I called every parent

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that I felt had a potential student, in the fall, to give them lessons. And I made that a very strong point. I told the child that I will do that. And since then, which was about 20 years ago, I meet kids in restaurants and different places where they've said, oh you remember me? There was one kid the other day that says, do you know I am one of the head designers at **Bloomindales** in their interior department and it was all because of what you taught me about symmetry and asymmetry. She even remembered what I was working with her. And I had -- I had a great time with kids during the summer, with art and with -- it all started with my child and art. Now, out of my three children, they all love art and we all go to museums a lot. But one of my grandchildren paints very well [**indecipherable**]. We had some of her stuff framed. And a -- and art has worked through th -- my whole family that way and -- and we're very happy tha -- doing it. And I just recently stopped because my arthritis does not permit me to paint [**indecipherable**]. But I'm in -- I'm -- my -- my next best job is the museum. I love to work with the museum.

Q: Can you tell me about your work with the **U.S.** Holocaust Memorial Museum?

A: Yes, I am in the education department and our primary thing is to take children, middle and high school age, those were the first ones, through the museum and they are supposed to have some background, one of the teachers goes to these schools and gives them a few lessons. But 99 percent of them don't even know

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what the word means. The first thing I ask them is do you know what the Holocaust is, and you can see on their faces, mm -- mm -- no. It's no use to go to that museum, and I told this at every meeting to everybody, if they don't know the meaning. If you don't know the word, you are wasting so much time because you are talking about something so abstract, and -- and you -- you know, you have to put these kids, some of them don't even know where **Europe** is, or -- or what is it that we're trying to do. We are not giving them enough basics. But I worked on that and I succeeded partially, and I am continuing on it that way. At first, as I take, and we have about 12 to a group on a good day. On a bad day we have 50 - 60, you define the Holocaust, you stand in the Hall of Witness and I try to teach them something about the architecture because I think it's a very important part. You know, if I only spend five minutes, there has to be something said about the architecture. Then we go upstairs and then I try to go over and I explain to them we don't have time for every picture. But as we walk along, if something appeals to you that I'm not stopping, just stop me and I can stop again. The main thing is that I try -- and I must confess to you that not everybody has this technique yet, to be able to get down on the level that the majority of the group is on. To pick that up on their eyes, because they're too embarrassed to ask questions because they feel that they'll appear dumb, okay? So you have to somehow, sometimes ask

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questions, but sometimes the questions are a waste of time because they don't know the answers, but somehow or other feel and see of what level you have to bring. And that's what -- that's what I do. That's what I try to do and I think that's what I do well. And I -- and -- and now, a couple of months ago they started to do the police. The police chief, **Ramsey** thought that all the police should go up, and the **CIA**. And I -- having a choice I like the children better. Well, I think that sometimes the police [**indecipherable**] almost like entertain me. Without the word entertain, but like teach me. I -- I -- I know everything, kind of. That's what I see on the face, you see, and it's not always there. The children then, have a book what they can write what their opinion is or what they want, or -- and I suggest to the teachers to have them do two things. Write an essay about it and also draw. Art is a fabulous thing to draw what -- about the things, about what they saw. And the most -- most meaningful thing that was called on -- in the book, was written by black girls who said that up to now I only thought that my people suffered, and I didn't want to hear about anybody else suffering. But going to this museum, it opened my eyes that there are other people who have suffered also, and I must learn about their suffering. And I think that if we get one percent of this through to one percent of the population, that we've succeeded.

Q: What are the ages of some of the children that you're referring to?

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A: Middle school is -- and high school. And then we have some college and then we have Hebrew school. The Hebrew school brings younger ones, cause they have some preparation.

Q: Like **Bar** and **Bat Mitzvah** age?

A: Well, the -- the -- the Hebrew school teacher gives them some preparation and all that. And they have col -- college kids too, we have, and -- and there's a new thing that I do that I just -- before I was sick I was ate -- not able to join, which is called wrap up, which is -- you ask me what I do, I don't know whether you wanted to know about this part. It is -- you are given -- the group is given 28 or 30 photographs, and they are divided in 30 groups where they double up, depending on how many there are, and they make a line and hold the photographs in sequential order. The photographs of the permanent exhibit. And they -- the whole group decides, well this happened before, this happened before and then they make a line or a circle and then they discuss, do you think this pa -- photograph belongs here or there? It's called wrap up. It is something that, if we have enough time to do it, it has a very good review concept. And it was done by **Tim Kaiser**, who is blind. I don't know if you know him, he's in the education department. We have a person in the education department, can't see. But it's a very good tool.

Q: Are you involved with any other Holocaust organizations or institutions?

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A: No.

Q: Have you ever been back to your hometown?

A: Yes, three times. There -- there are no Jews there. I wanted to see the -- where I was born and that apartment house is very similar, it looks similar than it -- than it did. Then, there's a place where my fath -- i-it was square and my father had a store there. But that was the Communist headquarters; at the time that I was there was under Communism with red flags all over. And the third time my main thing, I was looking for the convent where I learned English, and that was totally grazed and they had something else on. And then I went into the cemetery because I had some grandparents buried there, but th-the -- the stones were all gone [indecipherable] gone.

Q: What years were -- were your trips to your hometown? What years? When did you go?

A: I'm going to have to guess on that. Surely I was there -- let's see, Communism was about '75 -- about '81 and maybe '59 or '60. But under Communism we found some relatives who, through some other people said that they can't write because that would be looked upon very poorly, having American relatives. And we understood that, that -- we were just glad to see that they were alive, through somebody, but not to correspond.

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Q: So who in your family did survive the Holocaust?

A: I have one cousin in -- in **Israel**, who is my age, who -- who -- who has survived as [indecipherable] one of the ships like the **Exodus** and then became a male nurse. I have one cousin in -- in **Hungary** who survived **Auschwitz**. Do we have time? What time is it? Oh. She came on the train in **Auschwitz** -- to **Auschwitz**, and she was -- she had a baby in her arm. And she was told on the line that if you bi -- give the baby to your mother on the other line, they're not going to kill the mothers and children. And of course that went first. Train she was on stopped and there was some kind of trouble, she got out not in the front of the car, but in the back door of the car and it said **küche**, and she spoke German. She went into the kitchen, she put on a chef's hat and a chef's uniform and started to -- and a -- an officer came in and she said -- he said, are you a new cook? And he -- she said yes. And she survived **Auschwitz** being in -- the cook, for three years there, without any papers or anything like that. And she was -- she was -- had a hard time because she could steal food, like the milk cans, you see? She could mark cans spoiled and they took them away at night. Well, where do you send the milk cans? There are 10,000 people in **Auschwitz** and the word got around that she sends the milk cans here. And the people that saw her walking someplace would try beating her up. It was a very difficult position in this particular area of **Auschwitz**, to be

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working in the kitchen, and not be able -- be equal to 10,000 people in terms of what you can do extra. So even when she survived and went home, the people tried to stone her, oh it's a terrible thing. But she survived. She had a husband who was a Hungarian Jewish officer and they -- the Germans put those in the front of the Russian line so they should kill them. He was captured by the Russians, she hasn't heard for seven years, the rabbi said that you can get married. So she was marrying his brother and two days before the wedding, he came home. And this is what -- what the -- for seven years he was in a Russian camp and he had a prayer book that was one inches long, someplace hidden. And he was davening one night and a Russian soldier saw him and said, I'm Jewish too, I'll get you enough food. So he gave him enough soup to last that he survived the seven year. Then they were sent home, about 20 of them from this camp, and they hit a warehouse. They broke into a warehouse, it was a sugar warehouse, it had sacks of sugar. They cut the sugar open, they started to eat the sugar and 95 percent of them died because their stomachs were this small, and my cousin's husband fainted after about the fifth -- and his luck was that he fainted and didn't eat. So then he walked back to where he was, which took another couple of days and he came in. So that's the second and the third survivor. I have another survivor in **Czechoslovakia** who was

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in **Auschwitz**, and I don't know how she survived. And the rest, a few of them, are the second cousins.

Q: Have you ever experienced any anti-Semitism in the **United States**?

A: No, none.

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

A: You could become anything you want to. The **United States** was very good to my family in -- in every possible way. Financially, e-economically, educationally. I mean, there was nothing that was denied to me.

Q: What was your biggest disappointment in this country?

A: Maybe the slowness of the Civil Rights, the fact that -- that there aren't -- isn't more equality.

Q: Is there anything more you'd like people to understand about your experiences?

A: I am an optimist and that's not a universal feeling among survivors or people that are looking at the future today. I feel that my family survived and Judaism survived with them, and it's not going to disappear until there'll be two people, like in **Masada**. I think that -- that Judaism will survive under all circumstances and I certainly, in my family will make sure that it does, and make it as palatable and as agreeable to my family as I can.

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

A: No. I think that I -- I've said everything and I -- I repeat, I -- I don't have any suffering to report, that -- any hardships like most people that have gone through, you know, the concentration camps [**indecipherable**] pictures and the books, as much as I can read on it, is a horror to remember, you know. I'm a diabetic and every time I take a needle, do twice a day and it hurts, I think about all those people in **Auschwitz** having no insulin and what they must have suffered, and the pain disappears.

Q: Thank you for speaking with us today. And this concludes the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Susan Berlin**. Thank you.

A: You're very welcome.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Conclusion of Interview