

**Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004**

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: This is the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Thea Sacca Rips**, conducted by **Gail Schwartz** on January 20th, 2004, in **Washington, D.C.** This is tape number one, side **A**. What is your full name?

Answer: **Thea Marguerita Valeria Sacca Rips**.

Q: And when were you born and where were you born?

A: I was born in **Trieste** on February 24, 1922.

Q: Tell me a little bit about your family, how long they had been there.

A: Here in the **United States**, you mean?

Q: No, how long they had been in **Trieste**.

A: Well, in **Trieste** from '22 to '27, because my father was working -- he was an engineer, electrical engineer, and he was working with the shipyards in **Monfalcone**. And when it were -- he was transfers to **Fiume**, which now is **Rijeka**. We moved to **Fiume** when I was about five years old. And we lived in **Fiume** until 1945, until the end of the war. And Father worked there, he was a chief -- he was the director of the electrical department of the shipyard. **Can-Cantieri Navale del Quarnaro**, where they were building all kind of ships, from submarines, even to the yacht for **Mussolini** they built, which was never delivered. And he was in charge of -- not only of the projects for the electrical equipment on the ships, but also of the -- care of the cranes and all the electrical equipment of the shipyard itself. And practically I was born with fascism, grew under

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

fascism, without realizing -- it wa -- it w -- it was normal for -- for s -- my life. And we went to school. Then they came when -- when we went to school. Of course, we were all supposed to be **piccolo Italiani**, small, little Italians, because otherwise the schools -- apparently we were not able to go to school, as far as I know. I never realized that, of course. And I went through the whole system until I finished the -- what we call senior high school. Actually it is the **Liceo Scientifico, Scientific Lyceum**, which is practically comparable to the -- to here -- even though it was only four year. Four year of junior high and four years of senior high. The junior high I went to the technical institute. The senior high I went to the **Liceo Scientifico**. But as far as education, they told me it's comparable, when you finish **Liceo Scientifico -- Scientifico**, excuse me, like two years of college in this country, because we had very thorough, you know, the education in **Europe**. And that's it. My father continued to work. H-He was never a -- a -- a carda -- a card holding fascist. He became -- he had to become or -- or -- a member of the fascist party in 1942, because otherwise he would have lost his job and h-he had responsibilities **[indecipherable]**. He had trouble because he didn't want to wear the uniform, and he never had a uniform and he never wore the black tie -- the -- the black shirt. But you know, they were, with the exceptions of few fanat -- a few -- several fanatics, the population was a strange population in **Fiume** because they were open-minded on one side and fascist on the other side because after the first World War, **Fiume** was next to **Italy** only in 1924, after the famous **DiNunzio coup**. Apparently th-the Italians didn't

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

want them, but they felt and they are still feel f -- extremely Italian, even though the population was mixed and the ch -- the city was occupied by everybody, from the **Espaniards** to the st -- **Napoleon**, th-the **Venetians**. It started as an Roman colony and -- but they were always, who knows why, very deeply, they felt deeply Italian. And so that's why they accepted **DiNunzio**. So **DiNunzio** and **Mussolini**, even though they didn't like each other very, very much, I must say -- for awhile they did, but then -- you see, they connected their fact that they were -- that they could join the Italian, they were admitted to be Italians betwe -- to **DiNunzio** and to **Mussolini**. So they felt in that fak -- ka -- in that sense they felt that they were fascists. Fascists because th -- fascism permitted them to be Italians, you know? The city was [**indecipherable**] after. And that's it. I tell you also another thing, that this city which was extremely wealthy, small city, we ended up with 45,000 people, but we were much smaller when I was little, had many plans, many industries. It had the torpedo plant, it had th-the shipyards, it had the oil refinery. It had heavy machinery plant, it had mills, and it -- ab-absolutely everything, and the population, the workers were very well off. They had nice houses, we were going skiing together at the engineers -- th-th-th-the director, with the son of th-the -- th-th-th-th-the -- of -- of everybody. We were really a str -- strong community. We were playing tennis together with the children of the workers and so on. So much so that we had a limited number of poor, who were known all by name, you see. And there was a very important Jewish community, **Ashkenazi**, coming from the east, from the **Balkans**, from

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

Germany. I don't think there was a single Sephardic Jew, as far as I can remember. And we had in **Villa Firenze** where we lived, among the other places, just across of it, a beautiful, beautiful, three domed synagogue with the cupolas covered with copper tiles. It was really beautiful. And living across the street from them, you see -- we were always saying, oh, d -- you know, they were th-the -- the real Orthodox Jews, the one with the curls and the -- and the fur k -- and the hats with the fur around it, you see. And we were s -- and -- and they were telling us, you know -- we were children, we were -- we were actually not so much children al-already, they were saying, oh well we cou -- we cannot go in there, we cannot go in there, because you know, we -- they don't allow us to go there and who knows what's going on there? But I never heard about -- people talking about blood sacrifices or things like this because they were -- we were so **interwined** that even then there were not many, but there were several mixed marriages at the time. And in my case, for instance, I found -- I found out that some of my schoolmates in -- in school were Jewish because they were allowed, on the Sabbath -- because at the time we were going to school also on s -- on Saturday -- on the Sabbath they were not going to school, but they were justified. They were allowed not to come, because until the racial laws were applied, unfortunately, there was no problem. And -- and -- and -- and we were going -- Jewish kids and non-Jewish kids and Protestant kids, we were all together, we couldn't care less about religion, o-or wherever they were coming from. And that was it. So, what did I say? And I remember, of all these other people, there was a -- a v -- a very

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

interesting man, a -- a Jew, Mr. **Tannenbaum**, ma -- mister -- well fa -- probably Mr. **Tannenbaum**, for us he's -- it looked like -- like a -- like a priest or something, because **[indecipherable]** we know, with the black caftan and the hat with the fur around. He was the sweetest man in the world. My father knew him well. He didn't come to our house often, but he was going around the house of people he knew, he was friendly. He was collecting money for charities. But charities not for the Jewish population, for everybody who was born in town. He was well known for that. Then, of course, he disappeared. Life was very comfortable in **Fiume**, very comfortable. Every year we were going to a **[speaks Italian here]**. And th-then I met a-another group of -- I had this group of Jewish friends tha -- the **Lagers, Bondy** and **Kathy Lager**, his bra -- his cousin, and we were all having fun going to the ocean together **[indecipherable]** this or that. And I remember they were already on guard in the sense that while we kind of ignored the musics from **America**, jazz, the **[indecipherable]** they already heard, may-maybe because they had relatives here or something, I don't know for sure. But anyhow, they were bringing this music and we learned jazz through these Jewish friends of ours, you know. They were really fantastic. I remember that **Bondy Lager** was very much in love with me. An-And I met **Bondy** when I first came here in '55, and he was married to an Austrian girl -- Jewish girl, and he had a child. And we met in -- in **New York** where he had a plant or -- or -- or a store -- o-of t-toys for -- and it -- it was very emotional, you know. After so many years, you know I call, who's there? He says, **B-Bondy's** there. Also because when

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

Bondy escaped from **Fiume** in -- just as -- with the last boat which left **Naple**, it must have been 1940, his parents remained in **Fiume**. They were merchants and they had a deposit with they had all kind of food, the potatoes, all kind of thing. Th-The parents remained in **Fiume**, but **Bondy** and his sister came to the **States**. And they left from **Naples**. And when they left **Fiume** by train to go to **Naples**, my sister and myself went to the train to say goodbye. And the funny thing is that since at that time I was young and I had many boys at the same time growing around me, my sister was saying, you know, yi -- there is like a -- like a-a -- a **torta**, a -- a cake. All the flies go to hel -- you know? So that when **Bondy** was writing to me, he was saying lot of love to the **torta**, you know **[indecipherable]**. Well, that was the story of **Bondy**. His -- his cousin went to **Milan**, h-he's -- hid in **Milan**, the -- **Lazi**, because they were of Hungarian descent, that **Lazi** -- **Ladizlow**, and -- and he was all right. Then what happened with this? The **anschluss**, yes, there's -- now we come to the real s -- thing, which is important.

Q: Let -- let me just ask you some questions before we get to that.

A: Yes.

Q: You say you had it -- you have a sister ti -- and what is her name?

A: My sister name is **Laura** and she is five years younger than I am. And f -- wh-while we were in **Fiume**, more or less we shared our life, but being five years younger, you know, she had -- at that moment she had her group and I had my group. We were always together because we were hikers and skiers and we were going every f -- every weekend -

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

- weekend -- every Sunday of every festivity. We -- Father introduced us to the love of nature and -- a-an-and -- and mountains and thing. We were going skiing or hiking. And she was very funny, they loved her very much, so much so that when I f-finished the -- ha -- the **Lyceum**, the senior high and there was the party, she was invited too, because she was so funny, and sh -- and so agile that she was making herself a ball, and they were throwing her like one. It was -- she -- she's still a funny character, I must say.

Unfortunately she cannot be a ball any more, but she is still go to the -- to the gym.

Q: What are your parent's names?

A: My father is **Giorgio** and my mother was **Emma Pacore**. Because my father parents were -- are -- well, my gr-grandmother from my father's side was born in **Courtsela**, and my grandfather was born in **Montenegro**, in **Corta**, but they lived always in **Trieste**. My grandfather was a purser or [**indecipherable**] there is a special name, it's [**speaks Italian**] which is the assistant purser, but one who is in charge of buying all the material f-f-food, everything for the ships, for the liners of the Austrian **Lloyd**, which later on became **Lloyd Adriatico**. No, first I think it was **Lloyd Triestino**, and then **Lloyd Adriatico**. And he traveled a lot to the Orient, so much so that the house of my grandparents had a lot of Oriental stuff, which like stupid we broke, and not only if we had not broken, we had to leave there when we escaped as refugees, so it was all lost. And my -- and his mother -- I -- we -- I have the documents, but I don't remember -- I don't know where she was born, but she was Italian speaking and German speaking, and

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

she had three sons. My grandfather was the youngest one, and when her husband died -- and I don't know what her husband did, which I think he was making bottles, wine bottles. He had the plant where he was making wine bottles. And she was a -- she didn't finish school. When my grandfather -- great grandfather died, on my father's side, she c - - finished her school, she became a teacher, and I still have the documents where she writes to the Austrian, to **Vienna**, to have the permission to teach in a school for girls, you know? But everything written in **Italia**. When **Mussolini**, as soon as he took over, forbade the people of our area -- we're in -- th-the interland of **Fiume** was Slav, Croatian and [**indecipherable**] **Trieste** Slav, Slovenian, he forbade them to use their language, he made them change their names, and he was stupid, while **Franz Josef** was smart enough to let each -- each nationality to use their own language and si -- that's why we lost that, kind of, because if he had been more intelligent, I will speak Croatian, which I love, and - - and they wouldn't ha -- we -- we wouldn't have made enemies. Instead, they were enemies. Of course, they forced to -- to -- to use a language -- the old people wer -- never could speak Italian, so --

Q: Mm-hm. And -- and **Fiume** is a -- a city on the -- on the **Adriatic**, a port city on the **Adriatic** --

A: Oh [**indecipherable**] yes, it's right, you know, with the eastern peninsula on one side, you know, there is like a triangle. There is **Trieste**. Then, at the tip of the triangle is **Paola**, or **Pula** as they call it now, and then it's **Fiume** on the other side that -- of -- and

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

we -- now it's called **Rijeka**, which means **Fiume** too, beca -- also in **Russia**, **Rijeka** is -- **Rijeka** is **Fiume**. And then immediately there is the Dalmatian coast and along the Dalmatian coast, among the islands is the island where my grandmother was born. And my grandmother was speaking German, of course, Croatian and Italian. So did my cra -- grandfather. So that's it.

Q: You have one sister, do you have any other sisters or brothers?

A: No, no, no, only one sister.

Q: Now you say you were born in 1922.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: When a man named **Hitler** came into power in 1933, did you hear of him then?

A: Well, you know, we kids, we couldn't care less about politics, you know. I think this is typical. Maybe now may -- maybe now kids follow more, but I know more about ancient history than the history that I lived through. Now I remember, now I start to -- to give importance to the facts, you know, but I went through the war in -- Spanish war, when -- when we had the **Franco**, that was a very good chance to go and take a day vacation because we were going demonstrating against this, or -- or when the [indecipherable] to go demonstrate on the British consulate. You know, it was -- in the meantime we didn't know -- we're not going to school. We didn't even know what we are doing, it was just having fun, you know. And as our famous journalist **Indro Montanelli**, who is now -- now dead [indecipherable] said, you know, who cared about fascism or

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

anything until things happened? We were young. We didn't think, we -- we didn't -- we didn't s -- we didn't suffer. We didn't follow th-the -- all the stories so much [indecipherable] this and that. Father, yes, probably, but in my home we never spoke about politics, never. Father was a rather -- rather closed character, and I think that we [indecipherable] never discussed politics. They just didn't agree, they did what they had to do, their job. They didn't participate to the famous [indecipherable] reunions, every ti -- ev-every -- every Saturday. They didn't -- they were just -- I mean, an-and they were not disturbed, they -- they could live their life.

Q: How religious was your family?

A: Catholic. I was bor -- baptized -- born and baptized in **Trieste** in the famous **San Giusto [indecipherable]** church, you know, Roman -- beautiful Romanic church, yeah.

Q: So, up to the time of the **anschluss** --

A: Yes.

Q: -- you had Jewish friends, you were comfortable with them --

A: Oh, very.

Q: -- you played with them?

A: Oh well, of course. Th-They've -- then, actually only after a -- a f -- I must say, after the **anschluss** and then in '38 the ration laws came about, we realized that there were Jews and non-Jews. And we were -- I -- I --

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

Q: These are racial laws in **Fiume**?

A: In da -- always in **Fiume**, yes, because we didn't move from **Fiume** until the end of the war. A-And --

Q: What -- what were some of the restrictions?

A: Beg your pardon?

Q: What were some of the restrictions of the racial laws?

A: Well, they were supposed not to have maids. The ki -- the girls couldn't come to school, but the professor, for quite a long time, kept an eye closed and the kids were coming to school just the same.

Q: Right.

A: Then, when they realized it, they started to be the -- th-the worst part started when the Germans took over, because until 1943, when the ger -- when, after the armistice, the Germans occupied the area, and it was the only area of **Italy** which was incorporated into **Germany**. At that time we became part of **Germany**. And that when the real trouble started.

Q: A -- but up to that time, did you still have close contact with your Jewish friends?

A: Yes, because after the **anschluss**, we had these -- well, in the same building was living an engineer fa -- naval engineer working [**indecipherable**] a friend of Father, working in the same shipyard [**indecipherable**] **Fierst, Bruno Fierst**. Then there was the fa -- the **Weiss** family, Jewish. The daughter married a Catholic boy, a -- the brother of a friend of

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

mine. She was studying piano, she was playing beautifully. On the ground -- on the first floor was living -- were living the **Moscovitz**. The **Moscovitz** had a beautiful -- kind of hardware store, but they were selling toys and everything. And every Christmas **[indecipherable]** it was a two story thing, you know, and it was on the way -- in the -- on one of the main squares of **Fiume**, and they had on that -- on the second floor, an enormous window and there was appearing a **Santa Claus**, and showing -- and -- and the children, we were all on the street, you know, watching what was going on, and -- and he was showing the **[indecipherable]** and the children, to me, to me, to me, to me, you know, and these were the **Moscovitz**, you know? And they were very nice. She was a very lovely little girl -- little woman, but -- but he was even funnier because he was very, very short and very, very, very prim all the time, you know? But wonderful people, and they all had the **mezuzah**, the **mezuzah** on their door, so what? You know, they **[indecipherable]**

Q: Did they ever confide in you that they were concerned or -- or -- your Jewish friends ever confide in you that they were concerned or frightened?

A: Until '43, no, they were not very -- they -- they didn't like the idea. Many were smart enough, many -- I don't know how many -- but several left. But these friends, close friends of ours who were living in the same building, they didn't. Then the -- the **Weiss** left first. Then the **Moscovitz** left. They had a maid, the **Moscovitz, Paula -- Paola**, Catholic. And when they left, they left the apartment, they were in the way it was. But

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

even -- yes, there it was with the **mezuzah** on the door. They only gave us to save, to put aside for them, an enormous portrait, natural size, of Mr. **Moscovitz**, which we hid behind a -- a -- an armoire we had, you know? [**indecipherable**] okay. And when the Germans came th-there, that apartment, th-the maid was there -- oh sorry -- that the maid was there, and they occupied the apartment of the **Moscovitz**. They saw the **mezuzah**, they could even -- they couldn't care less. They were there, **Paola** remained to take care of them. They were too old, and one was **Rudy Bukovitz**, a commander. The other one I don't remember, he was not -- a-and they were stationed at the shipyard where my father was working, you know, because they -- with the ships. And the -- and the shipyard was supposed then to repair damaged ships which were coming i-in port, Germans, si -- Italian.

Q: We're talking now April 1941, is that what you're thinking of?

A: Ah, no, this is -- this was in '43. With [**indecipherable**]. I mix up the dates because they are difference -- different people, different stories, you see. This was in '43 when they came. And I know that, for instance, the [**indecipherable**] the tanks -- we were leaving in a very w-wide avenue, you know, and they were coming with the tanks and they stopped under our building. And since they were living in what we call **mezzanino**, which is not really the first floor. Here is called first floor, but you have a few steps up and there's the doors, you know? And the **Moscovitz'** were li-living -- I mean, on the **mezzanino**, and the soldiers knocked at their door, asked for water, they gave them do --

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

water. Then they gave them breakfast and tha-that was it. The soldiers didn't even di -- bother them at all, and -- and then they went away. Then finally **Bukitz**, they took this apartment and the **Moscovitz'** went to **Venice** and then they were -- they went -- they were -- they took refuge in the island of **Saint George, San Giorgio** is one of these islands around **Venice**. And there was a kind of a sanitarium or a fi -- a psychiatric thing, and -- and they hid there during all the period of the war. Well, if I have to continue about the **Moscovitz'**, then he died, and then I saw Mrs. **Moscovitz** when she went to **Milan**, a- after the war sh-she was there. An-And -- and I think that there she was f -- living in **Milan**, and across her apartment, there was an apartment where there was a couple, I don't remember the name because I met them only that time, a young couple whose husband of the man and wife -- the wife of the man and the husband of the young woman died in concentration camp. They met in concentration camp, they got married and they had a little daughter. And I was there just for Passover. I didn't know what was Passover. And so I invite -- I was sleeping at Mrs. **Moscovitz**, so we went for -- for the passo -- the ne -- we were the five of us, it was my first Passover, you know? And they did explain to me, and this little girl, she said di -- when she had to tell the story of Passover, she said and then the **carabinieri** came. The ca -- the **carabinieri** with the [**indecipherable**] you know. Think it was really cute. And -- and that was it. So -- but then I didn't see Mrs. **Moscovitz** any more again. I heard that she died. These are the **Moscovitz'**. The **Weiss**, I don't know at -- what happened to them. Then I -- we had very close friends, this was a --

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

oh, a -- let's so -- go to the -- the important ones, the -- the **Schitzel**. After the **anschluss**, this family arrives from **Vienna. Arnold, Nellie and Anton Schitzel**.

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 **Thea Sacca Rips**. This is tape number one, side **B**, and you began -- you had begun to tell the story of this family.

A: So they arrived, and they found an apartment. It was a beautiful apartment building near the station an -- and the tennis courts. And there were only two apartments per building -- per -- per floor. We were on the fifth floor.

Q: And when was this?

A: 19 -- after -- immediately after the **anschluss**, what was -- what year was --

Q: So it was spring, 1938?

A: 1938, yes. They arrived -- we were flabbergasted, because they were, all of them, about two fee -- two -- two meter of tall -- one meter -- two meter tall. He was a very elegant gentleman, you know, very well dressed. She was a beautiful woman.

Q: Wh-Where had they come from?

A: From **Vienna**, as far as I remember, and then they had son, **Anton**, called **Tondo** in **[indecipherable]** he's always been **Tondo**. And I think that he was from very wealthy family in **Vienna**. I think that they were **[indecipherable]** special wines were --

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

expensive, gourmet food. As far as I think -- v-vaguely this -- I -- we never investigated what they were doing or something, and -- you know. And we started to talk, wi -- you know, th-the balcony, which was giving on the tennis courts, it was the balcony of our kitchen, and by the balcony of their kitchen was just looking as -- an -- by us, to our balcony. So we -- I was already -- well, in '38, I was already 16 year old

[indecipherable] something, and my sister was 12. **Tondo** was the age of -- o-of my sister, and we started to talk **[indecipherable]** soon from the balcony and then we became friends, we were **[indecipherable]** with the parents, and then that was it. And they were at four -- ended '43. We became very close. When, in '43, the Germans took over our area, after the armistice, immediately after September eight, we, at that time were h-having our -- spending our vacation at the seashore in **Lowranna**, or **Lovranna** now, in **Notelle**. And we've, unfortunately saw them arriving, the soldiers, how would you say? Making pee pee, you know, on the street, you know. Walking whi -- whi-while they were walking, going like this. Then we her -- we heard shots. They shot a couple of partisans who were already ready there, and they didn't let anybody to go near them.

There was one in the orchard and we can -- nobody can go -- can go there to take care of this person, and so on. And so, since we didn't feel safe in the hotel, there was -- there were some Croatian friends who had a villa, which once belonged to one of the archdukes, because that area was very famous during the Austro-Hungarian empire. They were keeping their -- their mistresses and they were spending their vacation there, and

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

this kind of thing. And we went to stay with them, eating only sardines and potatoes, okay, that was it. And the **Schitzel** were also vacationing in the same place, and they got extremely scared, of course. And they -- they found a -- a f -- a fisherman, who took them by boat to **Yugoslavia**, to the -- to the **Dalmatia** actually, to the other coast. They were hoping to be able to reach, probably -- I don't know, southern **Italy**. And I remember that they gave us a bag with the jewelry and -- and the -- and the key to the apartment. The only thing she took with -- no -- they took the jewelry with them, giving a -- and -- and they went there. Then they came back from **Yugoslavia** and they came to the apartment because they felt safe, an-and they were safe, nobody bothered them. But th-the -- we know -- nobody knew for how long they would have been safe, so they wanted to go away. And they got in touch with the police commissioner, who probably is on the -- how do you say, the roll of the just or whatever it is in **Jerusalem**, **Panicucci** was the -- the commissioner. One was [**indecipherable**] the name, they made a sort of film about him. The --

Q: **Schindler**, you mean?

A: No, no, no, no, the -- the commissioner, the -- th-they made a -- the documentary, that -- that it was even shown on th -- a couple of weeks ago in the Jewish thing. The last one was about the one who was also killed afterwards, who gave her passports to the Jews, and so on, but **Panicucci** was --

Q: **Wallenberg -- Raoul Wallenberg?**

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

A: No, no, no, no, no, no. In Italian.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: And [indecipherable]

Q: **Per-Perlaska?**

A: **Perlaska, Perlaska.** They -- **Panicucci** was the **Perlaska** of our area. And so apparently he gave them -- yeah, and he gave them papers with another name, **Sardi**, and th-the Franciscans father of the church of sa -- of **San Geron -- Geronim -- Geronimo's** church gave them birth certificates, Catholic [indecipherable]. But they fact is that i-in -- in the -- between '38 to '43, **Tondo** became a big boy. They were -- in **Fiume**, everybody knew them because they were so visible, you know, tall, handsome, they see all [indecipherable] of them going, you know? So, they were -- th-they went to f -- they went to flo -- to the -- they wanted to go to **Venice**, but how do we go to **Venice**? Everybody knows us, somebody meet you on the train, and if we have different documents, the Germans were going up and down the train. Okay, we -- **Thea** can take the -- the -- the documents for you, but -- but you le -- so they left with the f-forged documents on the train, and on the same train, like an idiot, I was on the same train as they were o-on with their real documents. So -- but we pretended not to know each other. I was sitting in one -- I -- I was sitting on one side, in one compartment, they were sitting on the other. And then, you know, we were in different are -- **Tondo** and I went on the corridor, we started to talk like two people who just meet, you know, it wa -- it was really

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

something. They were no trouble. In the meantime we had told to my sist -- my aunt -- my mother's sister, who was living in **Trieste**, that they were coming, to please -- she s -- since she had the large apartment, not many beds, but a large apartment, an enormous living room, dining room, larger than this one, to arrange for them to spend the night there, because the next day they were going to -- to **Venice**. So when they arrived, we went to the house of my aunt, she had arranged some mats on the floor an-and we slept there. And the next day they went to **Venice**. Their new names were **Sardi**. They were no more **Schitzel**, they were **Sardi**, and they went to live for awhile in hotel. But, of course, **Venice** and **Fiume** are pretty close and they were afraid that some people from **Fiume** would recognize them there, or [**indecipherable**]. And I remember that even I went once to visit with them -- o-or es -- yes, before leaving they gave us their jewelry, and there was another family too, in **Abbazia**, where they left a trunk, where she left her fur coats. I don't know what was there because we never saw the trunk and we never saw that family. And I don't know if -- how the stuff she gave them left. We -- they left in the apartment only some wine, some food that he had put aside, Mr. **Schitzel**. But they gave us the jewelry, and she took only a beautiful diamond ring she had, she took with her. And they went to -- as I say, they went to **Venice**. I went to visit with them and by mistake I knocked at the door and I said, Mr. **Schitzel**. The poor man was scared -- was scared to death, but I did -- you know, it win -- I-I -- without thinking. He was so scared. Anyhow, from there they moved to **Milan** where this engineer, **Fierst**, who was th --

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

working my -- with my father had found refuge in a -- in an apartment building in **Milan**, where many Jews were living we -- under ma -- different names, and they moved in there. The **portieri** knew about them, everybody knew who they were, but nothing happened. But the fact is that -- came that time that **Tondo** had the age to be called into the army. And th -- Mr. **Schitzel, Arnold**, got so scared that he -- I don't know through whom, thi-this we heard later wa -- from -- from the sh -- from the **Fierst** who told them, don't do that, don't do that, they might not call him. Hide the boy, don't do it. Instead, no, no, no, no, we go to **Switzerland**, we go to **Switzerland**, we go to **Switzerland**. And the guys who were supposed to take them across the border apparently betrayed them, and -- and that was it. For a long time we didn't hear anything. The war was over. **Tito** occupied our area. And one day a nice gentleman knocks at our door. And he says, I am so and so and so. I am the head of the Jewish community here in **Fiume**. I know that you helped the -- the **Schitzels** and that the **Schitzels** gave you some jewelry, so on. Oh, says, thank goodness. So we gave to him -- he -- of course he -- he demonstrated **[indecipherable]** and we gave the jewels to him a-and then we didn't hear from him any more, but I'm -- it -- I'm sure -- how -- how else could he know if -- if they had not told him? We trusted him immediately and we gave him back the jewels. She had -- she had hidden her diamond in her rectum when she was traveling and of course they found it, you know, because there -- they were examining a-absolutely everything. And so -- and

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

this man told us that **Tondo** and her -- and the father died in **Auschwitz** and, which is even more terrible, **Nellie**, the mother, was sick and she was killed by the dogs.

Q: Oh, no. Hm.

A: They were chasing after her and they -- and she died like this. In the meantime, they had left with us the address of her brother, who was living in **New York, Otto Weiss**. And I started to correspond -- as soon as I heard this, I wrote to him also, telling him about the jewels and telling him about the few things that they left with us, a -- a -- a silver box, because Mr. **Schitzel**, during the first World Wars, was a officer in the Austrian army. And the box he left with us was a box that he received from his companions, I don't know in what occasion, with all the signatures of his companions. And we have a photograph of the group of Austrian officers, and he is there, you see? It was -- it -- and so I wrote to Uncle **Otto** in English, with my poor English, but I managed. No, I -- I a -- at the time I was speaking some German, I don't know whether it was German or English, I mixed up things. I still have the correspondence, it's home. And so he said well, that to give certain things to -- to -- to I don't know who it was, and to keep the rest for us, it was a -- the -- th-the -- took the [**indecipherable**]. And -- and that was it. And that was the end o-o-of the **Schitzel**. And to us it was just like losing family, and -- and to hear that they went like that was really terrible. I kept corresponding with Uncle **Otto**, who was sending us care packages, because under **Tito** it was much worse than during the war. That was the worst part of -- for us, because **Fiume** was bombed only by

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

-- by the -- but when the British were bombing, where they were coming only with the s -
- small planes, with the **Sp-Spitfires**, you know, and they were -- since all the -- th-the --
the big industries were along the coast, they were not touching the city. They were going
ba -- th -- shooting at whatever the equipment they had there. But th-then the -- the
Americans came and then they bombed also the city, so much so that where we were --
no, we had shelters since there is the mountain behind th -- we are on the ocean and -- th-
the sea and the mountain and the shelters were under the mountain. And when the
Germans were there, in the -- in the -- a-and they occupied the shipyard, part of the he --
lighter works were hidden under the rocks under the mountains and so that -- and also,
near our home there was a shelter under th-the hills, so that we were safe in there. And
during that time, they were recruiting the Germ -- the Germans -- this is -- this has
nothing to -- the **Schitzel** were already away, but at that time, yes, we were still -- there
were still Jews, men -- several Jews in **Fiume**. Among them were the two **Farcas** brother,
Rudy and -- **Rudy** and **Paolo**. **Rudy** was the youngest one, a little bit light-headed,
simple, very, very pleasant boy. And **Paolo**, who was helping my sister with her Latin,
you know. And the ta -- the time came that -- when th-the -- the Germans started to
recruit the young people to work -- the famous [**indecipherable**] organization, you know,
to build a -- fortresses to -- to -- to build for them things all along the border because we
were right on the border with the Yugoslavs, you know? And we were saying, **Paolo** and
Rudy, Paolo, go away, go away, go away. Why do you stay here, why do you stay here?

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

And they said no, but there is no, we are working there, they are kind to us, they are nice. We are not only Jews there, they were recruiting everybody, you know. And he said, no, no, he said, we stay. Then one day they took away their parents, and they said co -- and they took them to **Trieste**, to the only concentration camp that th-the Germans made in **Trieste**, the famous rice factory, you know, the risia -- **Risiera** where they -- well, they di -- I don't know wha-what they did to them, they burned them or the wa -- I had -- I had no idea what -- what was going on. The **Risiera** now is the national monument in tr -- in **Trieste**, you know. A me-me -- a memorial. And we were telling them, go away, go away. No, no, no. When, after the parents were sent we'd say, but now you better go. No, no, no, no, no, no. In the meantime also, my sister and myself were recruited and my sister became a welder. Be si -- since Father was working at the shipyard, he immediately put them to work there. I was studying to be a doctor, so I was in the infirmary, and I was there helping the doctor, giving injections for -- for all kind of people, you know? And my sister was a welder for the ships, you know? And -- and the funny thing is that they were repairing the -- one of the -- I think it was a cruiser, I don't rem -- I don't know the name, the American names of the ships, but anyhow, which had been damaged, and the work was not -- never proceeding because the workers were working and undoing. Doing and undoing so that the Germans couldn't get it, you know? But finally they had to do it, and they -- because the Germans started to -- so, it was completed, and they went **[indecipherable]** to test, they were only -- but they were only the workers, Italian, that

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

they f -- workers. My father was on board, everybody. They went to sea, they tested, they came back, everything was perfect. The first time that the Germans went at sea with the **[indecipherable]** with the cruiser or whatever name it is, all at once we were standing on -- in -- looking at the -- at that ship, because working there both of us, we were there at the shipyard with Father. All at once from -- it was a sky like this one with broken clouds and sun, out of the clouds, **Spitsfires** started to comes. They knew that there were only Germans on board, so there must have been, you know, something. And **vroom, vroom, vroom, vroom**, they came back to the shipyard, you know, with wounded people and so and so. That was it. Then they bombed of course the -- the -- the -- the shipyard, the Americans who were in there. We were able to go underground, in -- under the -- th-the rocks. Then, when the bombardment was over, they brought some soldiers which were -- had been there **[indecipherable]** the German soldiers, I remember I had to give **morphium** to whoever there was very heavily wounded, the -- he broke a -- he lost a leg, but I remember he was there. We were -- we were two -- there were the -- the -- the -- the real nurse, then -- it was a man, the doctor and myself, and we had really to work, you know, **[indecipherable] morphium Schwester, morphium Schwester**, because he was in terrible pain. His hand was completely open, like this, you know. I gave him **morphium** and then they took him to the hospital. I heard that day he lost a leg, this soldier. And so the **Farcas** brothers were still there and one morning, it was a Sunday, we wake up and we could see the synagogue from our building, because it was very opened,

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

and we see f-fire. We said, God gracious, that's the synagogue. So my sister and I got dressed. Father and Mother didn't even dream to say no, don't go. It was naturally for us, we all -- we went to there and the fra -- th-the -- the synagogue was as fa -- afire. And there he -- who was, **Paolo** and **Rudy Farcas**, who said, go away, go away. He says to **[indecipherable]** if the Germans see that you are with us, he said, you are in danger, go away. We said my -- no, don't -- when -- we didn't go away. We were there crying, crying, crying. You should have seen that synagogue, it was so beautiful. And -- but we se -- an-and they didn't let the firemen to go and take care of the fire. It was a terrible day. It was in '43 when they burned th-the synagogue, those **[indecipherable]** th-th-the -- the **[indecipherable]**. And that was it. And of course, after awhile **Rudy** and **Farcas** **[indecipherable]** **Rudy** an-and -- and -- and -- and **Paolo** didn't appear any more. They were taken and we don't know how -- what, we don't know. We can imagine how they end up. So that **[indecipherable]**. I think that's as far as our experience with **[indecipherable]**. That's all that I can remember.

Q: When you were on the train carrying those false papers for -- I mean, carrying the true papers --

A: Yes, yes.

Q: -- were da -- were you questioned at all? Were there any -- wa-was there any incident where you had to make up a story?

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

A: No. No. There were -- I was a -- I were just a passenger, period. I -- **[indecipherable]** and I was afra -- I was not afraid, I was not worried. My parents sent me like nothing, you know, it's -- we didn't think of the danger, actually. I don't know why, because we were really -- it -- it was n -- to -- to us it was normal to -- to -- to do that, you know. That was it. A-And also for my aunt to give them refuge there for -- that night and -- and also the people in -- in -- i-i-in **Milan**, if **Arnold** wouldn't have been so afraid for -- for -- for his son, probably nothing would have happened, because **Fierst** came back, went to work in **Genoa** after the war, and, you know.

Q: The fi -- the first names of the **Schtikless** parents was **Arnold** --

A: **Arnold**, and she was **Nellie Weiss, Nellie Weiss**. But they -- they were adorable people, so nice, so nice. And when I came here, I tried to get in touch with **Otto Weiss** and I was not able to find it. Maybe either he had died, or the company was no more there, or something. But I have the correspondence with Uncle **Otto** and he actually -- his is the one who told -- who wrote to me that he had -- tha-that **Nellie** was killed that horrible way, you know.

Q: When the synagogue was burning, what about the rest of the people in the town, or other people, were they horrified?

A: The -- the people were really hor-horrified -- horrified, but you know, probably there were some fanatics who were really happy, you know, like always, but no, the people were really -- I tell you, until -- it was until '43 that -- that they were living peacefully.

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

Then we did -- then the Germans came, then there was the -- of course, the ones who were just accusing people for -- for re-revenge, which happened also when **Tito** took over, they had just to say, well, that was a fascist, even if he had not been ever, he said, and they killed several people of ours, and -- with nothing to do. It wa -- under **Tito** it was terrible. But under **Tito** I was a -- I left in December to stay with fr -- just to pass -- spend Christmas with a friend in **Valdosta** for -- to go skiing and then they arrested th -- they -- th-they -- they -- wa -- we call them **Titini**. The partisans arrested my father as an enemy of the people, you know, because then it stopped to be something like a war, it was a -- the Slavs against the Italians. And they arrested everybody who was somebody. The owner of all the bus lines which were going from **Fiume** to **Trieste** in the area, the director of the for -- torpedo plant. Everybody who was somebody. For awhile they were in -- in jail all together, and for awhile they had their -- they were very worried, especially for my father because my father, being an engineer, a technician, they were lacking personnel but it -- in that -- in -- in that field. We were afraid the -- because some were sent inside **Yugoslavia** to -- to work there for them. And instead there were some workers who accused Father of mistreatment. Father was a -- a rabbit like I am. Very good on his job, but not -- not a courageous person in the sense that -- courageous, yes he was, but not -- not to beat people or do these things of this kind, but you always find one who was for one reason or another. And then he was for one month in isolation, and -- and that broke my father. My father had never been the same, and if -- it ended --

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

fortunately it ended peacefully in, you know, his own bed without ever being sick, but he was a depressed person for an o -- when he came I -- i-in the meantime, I wanted to go back to **Fiume** because before going, they came to have us opting to be Yugoslav or Italian. Of course, we all opted to be Italian, to go back to **Italy**, [**indecipherable**]. And -- and I fr -- heard that my father was in prison by some university companions who were also from **Fiume**, who came to meet me at the station and they said, oh you know, your father is in jail in **Fiume**. That was the way I heard it. So I wanted to run to -- to **Fiume**. And I got, with great difficulty, in touch with my family and they told me, please don't come because otherwise they catch you too, because you were [**indecipherable**] when you -- okay. So I started to work. I -- I -- at the time I was studying and then I had to start to work, that's why I -- I am not a doctor, because I couldn't work and so on. Th-The iron fist, the British troops who had been stationed in -- in **Naples**, opened a garrison in **Padwa** and they hire me -- my English was just school English, poor, but it was better than nothing. At the time nobody was speaking English, so whatever I spoke was pretty -- it was better than nothing, you know? And I si --

End of Tape One, Side B

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Thea Rips**. This is tape number two, side **A**, and let's just talk a little bit about the end of the war before we continue on with your story. What was that like for you?

A: Well, the -- as I said, I was working as a nurse in the shipyards, and my sister was a welder, but for -- at the time she stopped working as a welder because she had typhoid fever, something like this. She was in the hospital. And when the end was coming, it was the beginning of May, the Yugoslav were bombing with ca -- with ca-cannons, grenades, **Fiume**. And in order to be safer, they had -- they -- the engineers had the -- the shifts to spend the nights in the shipyard, to keep an eye on whatever was going on, you know? And I as a nurse, was staying with Father and we were sleeping underground in the shelter, under the rocks. It was a very safe shelter, I must say because when they bombed, nothing happened to us. They destroyed a lot of things, but the bomb didn't bother us. And, in parentheses, my fat -- my father was made th-the head of -- chief of the **oompah**, which I don't remember right now what it means, but it was a -- a -- a group which was taking care of -- in case of a fire -- so-some -- some kind of a fireman, in case of bombings and things of this kind. And he and his workers -- how -- how can I say? The Germans had put dynamite under all the cranes of the shipyard, because before leaving they wanted to destroy the shipyards. Father and his men of the **oompah**, I don't know

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

when, I don't know now because he didn't -- they didn't talk about these things, took off
th -- everything, so that nothing blew up, you know, never s -- never tol -- never
recognized because it was an a -- again, a natural thing to do. So th -- he saved the
shipyard. Never recognized, never got a penny for it, but who wanted it anyhow? So
anyhow, when they started to bomb th-th-the -- the bombs started to come from the
Yugoslav side and the Yugoslavs were advancing, the partisans and so on, the Germans
started to flee. And it was a heavy bombardment. So we fa -- they said -- Father called the
di-director, he said -- th-the -- of the -- of the shipyard, what do I do? He said, here I have
a few men, and do I -- he said, do what you want. Washed their hands. You -- you -- you
decide, you do what you want, he said, because I cannot leave here, nobody want -- you
can leave because anyhow that is -- so -- so we -- we left and we went walking and it was
quite the walk, you just -- like going from here, more than down, going to -- from here to
Bethesda, something like this. And we -- we heard the grenades, **fssh, pssh**, falling
around us. And I kept the white cas -- boar -- rope, you know, was a [**indecipherable**] on
the street, you know. But do you think that the Germans bothered t-to bother us? They
were running. They were passing by us, going, running, scup -- escaping, escaping. And -
- and then we went -- we went home. And when we reached home, since it was in a
dangerous positions, we went to stay with a family, some friends of ours for a --for a few
days. Then we went back home and -- and it was May -- must have been the third or
fourth, because **Tito's birthday**, I think, is on the -- I have to look in my book, but was in

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

on the fifth or the sixth of May, when they started to shoot like crazy, **pom, pom, pom, pom, pom** to -- to celebrate, you know? And ye -- we could see, since we are in this wide avenue, you know, living, it was just like going through a dead city, you know, all the shutters were down. We were looking through the shutters and they were coming with these carts, with the car -- with the -- how do you say, the animals, the **[indecipherable]** the warri -- **[phone ringing]** -- sorry. **[tape break]**. So th-th-this was all the shutters down and they came wi -- on the carts, pulled by the oxen, and that -- a thing which was unbelievable, and they di -- and you could see these people sitting la -- you know, th-the poor -- I understand they -- they were poor people who lived in the woods, these partisans, but they were really mean. And they were s-standing on the streets and dancing the **kolo**. And th-the ones from **Montenegro**, th -- with the sh -- sheepco -- sheepskin coats over there ki-killing lice, you know. It was terrible. And that was the time when we were afraid to talk, when we couldn't even talk to friends because we didn't know what we're going to do, we -- what they were going to say or something. These people di -- went in -- they enter some apartment, they didn't understand what they're -- they didn't know how to use th-the -- the -- the -- the -- the -- the -- the facilities. They were looking at the chandeliers, you know, all this light coming from. It was really a **[indecipherable]** affair. And that was it. So then they came, they wanted us to **[indecipherable]** as I said, and -- and then I, as I said, I went to -- first to **F-Florence** just for a visit. I came back to it -- to -- to **Fiume**, then I went to **Valdosta** and when I went to **Padwa** they told me not

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

to go back to **Fiume**. I started to work with the British troops, [**indecipherable**] head-headquarters **Padwa** garrison. I worked for there for awhile, taking care of the wives of the English soldiers, Italian wi -- and they picked up some very good kids, but they picked up a lot of trash too, you know? And -- and after -- and I was there until '48.

When my father came out th -- my -- finally my father was freed because the judge of this tribunal of the people w-was -- had been friendly with the Jews too, and he knew about our friendships or something, I don't know how. And I f -- with the excuse that Father had arthritis, one thing and the other, they said no, no, no, he has to go -- he has to go to **Abbano**, which is a spa, and Father came out, but th-that man on the street didn't want to talk. My f -- my father didn't want to talk. He was turning always his head, he -- no, no, no, th-they are following me, they -- they're -- that was -- Father was ruined, that was it. And fr -- then in '48 he didn't want to stay in -- in -- he finally found a job down south in -- near **Foja**, in **Napolia**, that he worked for awhile, and I worked too. I went to teach at the Boys Town in **Bari**. And in Boys Town in our **Bari** came an American gentleman, Mr. **Broya** to visit this place. And at the s -- at the same time, I was working with the [**indecipherable**] of **Bari** for the rice company of **Milan**, and they told me that if I could be t-to help them, because Ambassador **Dunne** was coming to **Bari**, a-and so I went. And this way I started to get in touch with the Americans, because I went to -- I went to the theater, there were a ceremony, I was there with Ambassador **Dunne**, I had the pictures around. And -- and there there were a certain Mr. **Mamoly** who was working with the

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

Marshall Plan in Rome. So when the fair was over he said, why don't you come over and look for a job? And they -- I got the job with the **Marshall Plan**. They had organized, as kind of a traveling -- it was like a circus, it wa -- it looked, you know, it was with a tent and something. But there was all booths with propaganda for the **Marshall Plan** and what the **Marshall Plan** was doing. But they were coming from **France**, the group **[indecipherable]** group. And they were all French, two Americans, an Italian and myself. And we went from **Bari** to **Catan** -- to **Sicily, Catania, Palermo, Messina, Bari**. And this way I got acquainted with the Americans and fine -- I got the permanent job with the **Marshall Plan**. I worked there from '51 to '54. In '54 they needed interpreters here in this country because with the counterpar -- counterpart funds, which p-program they were exchange -- they were sending Italian technicians, politicians, trade union people to learn here in **America** how things were going. They send somebody from the State Department to -- to -- to -- to test several people, and among **[indecipherable]** and -- and a friend who just died not long ago, and myself were chosen to -- an-and so I came here as an interpreter. I was an interpreter for three years, from '55 to '57. And then --

Q: Were -- you say -- wa -- s -- what month did you come and where did you live?

A: I came here in January '55. I left in December '57, then I ca --

Q: Wh-Where were you living? In -- in **New York**?

A: **[indecipherable]** in the -- at that time since I went to work in **Rome** with the embassy, you know, with the **Marshall Plan**, my family followed me, because from that

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

moment on, my family was going where I was going. My family follow me to **Rome**.

And then I went back to **Rome**, then in **Rome**, they opened here the office of the nash -- the -- it was called National Committee for Nuclear Energy of **Italy**, which was a kind of a -- a -- a American [**indecipherable**]

Q: So -- so --

A: -- energy commission, you know, the same ca -- [**indecipherable**] Atomic Energy Commission, only the Italian, they open an office here. They knew that -- they knew me here, th-the person here [**indecipherable**] sent there because she knows and so on, so forth. So I went and then I worked there. On the way to -- to **America** from **Naples**, my husband boarded the ship in **Nice**, and so we met.

Q: Now -- now again --

A: In fi -- this was in '48 -- in '58.

Q: In other words, you worked in the **United States** and then went back to **Italy** --

A: No, no, no, I didn't work -- I work in the **United States** as an interpreter, then I went back to **Italy**. And then they call me here for this other job. And on --

Q: And on your trip back to the **United States** --

A: -- [**indecipherable**] back to the **United States**, I boarded that ship on the bord -- on -- on the ou -- the **Augustus** in **Naples**. My husband boarded the **Augustus** in **Nice**, and it - I never travel first class because I didn't have the means, but at that time the -- since they knew me very well, also because I was the fine -- the niece of -- the old **Sacca** was

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

my grandfather, who had worked for the **[indecipherable]** and he had to be in -- the president of the Orphans of the Sea and every time a ship was coming in **Trieste** he was going to visit them and everybody, oh, you are the niece of the old **Sacca**. So I was treated like a princess, you know? But a -- he -- we -- he came on board there, in **Nice** and -- and that was it.

Q: And his name?

A: **Serge -- Serge Rips**.

Q: And what was his experience? Where was he from and where did he grow up and what was his experience during the war?

A: He -- he -- he -- he -- when you **[indecipherable]** that thing there. Oh, welcome to my notes, okay. Well, he -- he was born in **Minsk**, and studied in ber -- born in **Minsk**.

Q: Wh-When was he born?

A: In February '28 or seven. From -- oh, I don't know -- from his father, fr -- be -- be -- from a Belgian father, **Jacob**, and his mother was Georgian, from **Russia, Ge-Georgia, Raisa**. And he arrived in the **United States** in -- between '40 and '41, and he became an American citizen in '44.

Q: And what was -- do you know anything -- wa-was he Catholic or Jewish?

A: He was Jewish. Th-The whole family was Jewish. He had a brother who had -- w-where -- was living in **Australia**, because after they were in bel -- wi --they went to

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

Belgium, his brother went to **Australia**, bu -- and then he di -- the brother died there.

And he ha -- and his daughter, the daughter of his brother is living here in -- in **Potomac**.

Q: Well, what do you know about your husband's experience leaving **Europe** for the first time? Had the war started?

A: Well, he was -- he was a kind of a **wunderkind**, you know. He studied -- li-listen to that, he studied at -- in **Belgium** at the royal [**indecipherable**], the first qua -- the first gi -
- the elementary -- a part of the high school he attended in **Russia**. His first language was the ris -- Russian. Then they moved to **Belgium** where his father was working in the diamond business. So in **Belgium** he attended th-the royal [**indecipherable**]. Then he attended a course, high course of political and economic sciences with the po -- under the supervision of **Louis Strauss**. If you remember, he was the president of the Supreme Economic Council, **Strauss**. Then he studied international law, international relation diplomacy with Ambassador **Minsitero Addaci**, bric -- who was the president of the International Court of Justice in **The Hague**. Then international, economic and trade, under **Leon Binz**, who was chairman of a shipping company and later on it became the Defense Minister of **Belgium**. And then he was a journalist in **Belgium**. He was the assoc -- associate with "**The Daily Neptune**" --

Q: Uh-huh.

A: -- and -- which it was one of the lousiest papers European continent, which was specialized in economics, shippings and these kinds of things -- and to the **Midi**, another

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

newspaper that he was editor and editor-in-chief. And also with **Liquor de la Burrs**, which had to do with stock market and economics, finance and this kind of thing. And also with **La [indecipherable] Belsh**, which was a -- where he wrote a weekly column, an editorial column which was called, Today and Tomorrow. But th-this is what he did between '26 and '40, you want to know that too?

Q: No, that's okay [indecipherable] the-then --

A: Okay, [indecipherable] in **Italy** -- he arrive in -- he arrive in the **United States of America** in '40 - '41, okay, this is all his work, this has nothing to do with it. When he was a journalist, since we're talking about journ -- th-the pa -- newspapers, this is the right point, when he was a journalist, he covered the civil war in **Spain**. And apparently he wrote something good tha-that he wrote for both sides. Of course, being a journalist he was covering the whole thing, and apparently st -- **Franco** did something good too, an- and he mentioned what he was -- done. So that later on he was decorated with the Order of **Isabel** the Catholic, by **Franco**. He -- and then he kept going, traveling, wi-wi-with -- all over it, all over **Europe**, all over the world and so. Then, when the bat -- when the Germans occupied **Belgium**, then he escaped with his f -- evo -- eve -- he had his sister living in **Berlin** at the time, but -- an-and she escaped to **Australia** to join her brother. He [indecipherable]

Q: But we -- we are s -- we're talking now about spring of 1940?

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

A: Yeah. It happened that when -- they left just while the Germans were entering **Belgium**. He -- he -- they had the car, and with this -- his parents, and -- and he -- **[indecipherable]** went through the **Basque** countries to **Bayonne** and they had to cross th-the border, and there is ther -- there was this bridge there in th-the border. He -- he was able to go there very easily because he was known, he had been decorated and so on. And he went to see **Carrero**, Admiral **Carrero Blanco**, who at the time was only a -- a naval officer or something, only of -- of -- I don't know how he was related in th -- th-the rel -- the relationship with **Franco** and -- an-and **Carrero Blanco**, I don't know what it was.

Q: Ha-Had -- had he already --

A: **[indecipherable]**

Q: -- had he already been decorated by **Franco** by this time?

A: Let's see. This I don't know. I have to look becau -- ah, wait, I have th-th-th-the -- I have the certificate. **[tape break]**

Q: So according to your document, he was awarded this ho-honor in November 4th, 1940?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: And he -- I don't know if -- if **Carrero Blanco**, I think was the one who c -- put in contact with **Franco**, you see, they want to talk to **Franco**. He said, no, but it's

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

impossible, and so on, so forth. No, no, no, he said, it's important, I want to talk to him, and **Franco** received him.

Q: **Franco** received your husband?

A: [**indecipherable**] **Franco** received my husband. And my husband talked to **Franco**, and he said listen, we are escaping from **Belgium**. There is plenty of people at the border who cannot come over because they have -- don't have documents, they -- they -- they -- there are so many, they don't know -- but there were not only Jews, there were communists, there were all people who wanted to escape from -- from -- from the Germans, you know?

Q: And get into **Spain**.

A: And late -- get into **Spain**. And he said, why don't you make a good gesture and open the border, let these people come in? Because otherwise th-they -- they are lost, you know, they're -- and apparently this is -- I tell you what -- what he told me. So apparently **Franco** said, wh-why should I do it? He said, why? And my husband said, because this is, I think, the right thing to do. And so **Franco** called somebody in, sign a paper and they open the border and these people were able to come over. And he told me that they were not put in concentration camps or nothing.

Q: Did your husband say about how many people he was talking about?

A: No. No, he didn't, he didn't. He said there were many, said they were running, they had nothing, they said th-they even printed a stamp that th-th-the police at the border

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

stamped a -- cards, you know, identity cards. Whatever paper they had, just to let them in and then they would let them go. They didn't ask what they were, what they -- what they were doing, where they were coming, they would let them in like this. That's what my husband says.

Q: And he was with his family?

A: He was with his family and then he was for a short while in **Spain** and then they moved to **Portugal** and from **Portugal** they came to the **United States**.

Q: Okay. And now let's -- and then he worked in the **United States**?

A: Yes.

Q: And then later on you met him?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: But I met -- I met him mu-much later, much later.

Q: And di -- ha -- did all his family survive the war?

A: Well, he -- some of his relatives, I don't know if some uncles, aunts, so on, to whom he always said leave, leave, leave, they -- of course they didn't want to leave, never heard of them. But his brother was already in **Australia** and his sister too. So his brother died a natural death in **Australia** and his sister, after she -- she was married in **Australia** with a -- I think a German Jew. And -- but married in **Germany** and went to **Australia**. And she had a son, sh -- her husband died, and then her 16 year old son died, so she came to the

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

United States. Serge helped her to come here, and she died in '78, I think. She was living in **New York**, and never remarried.

Q: So he came to the **United States** with his parents?

A: With his pare --

Q: And what kind of work did he do?

A: This I have -- this I have to read, because is too much.

Q: Well, just generally what did he do? Did he work for the government?

A: Yeah, but I ri -- we write this down. He was not even a citizen when he had to -- they -
- it was request -- he was requi -- requested to join th-the Office of War Information. And
then he was the editor for the French branch, and he was preparing the material to
broadcast to the country -- French speaking countries. I remember he told me that with
him there was -- I remember there was a movie actor, **Houseman** and **Charles Boyer**,
they were all cooperating, so much so that he was living at the time in **New York**, while
it -- his parents were living in **Queens** and he was living in **New York**, sleeping during
the day and working during the night to broadcast, you see? And they pre -- and he
prepared -- and I'm sorry, but I did not find it -- he prepared a text of President
Roosevelt's message in English to **France** the day of the invasion of -- of -- of **North**
Africa. I didn't find it. Then he joined th-the Board of Economic Warfare, and -- which
later on became for -- then -- was -- member enemy branch economic potential division.
Then he was acting chief for vario -- various western European countries. Then the Board

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

of Economic Warfare became the Office of Economic Warfare, and po -- and they din -- became f -- the **[indecipherable]** economic administration. Then it worked for them for the Balkan division. **[indecipherable]** he became **[indecipherable]** afterwards, he became chief of the first eastern division. Then, when this was over -- ah, it -- it prepares some program for the rehabilitation and recovery of **Japan, Thailand, Southeast Asia** and **Korea**, and here was his major job, and also **China**. And he resigned when the foreign economic administration became ca -- part of the commerce department. Then he was -- then they ask him that -- for one year to be the ec -- economic advisor for **Greece**, and there it per -- to organize the assistant programs -- you know, **Greece** was in -- in a pretty bad shape, you know, have to imagine now ger -- Germans, the Italians and so on. And he worked with the ambassador **[indecipherable]** **Geropolous**. **[tape break]** He- Here it's not written, but he had -- he ha -- he has the power of autonomy by the good king of **Thailand**, you know? S -- where were we?

Q: Well, you were talking that -- wha-what -- what h-his different economic jobs were, and then you said one -- one of the important jobs after was --

A: Well, he had several important jobs with various countries, with **Greece**, then with **Yugoslavia** with na -- all wi -- all kind a we -- then he was assistant to the president of **Haiti**. But finally, in '47, he was in -- in charge of the economic affairs and war reparations, which in **Japan** and **Thailand**, nobody had been succe -- had succeeded in rearrange this thing because during the war **Japan** **[indecipherable]** occupy **Indochina**

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

and **Thailand** and so on, they took away the gold and lot of money from the country, and -- and at the time **Macarthur** was in **Japan**, very much pro-Japanese, you know, and he was opposed to the fact that they was requested to return this material, this gold, this valuable s -- to the ca -- to -- to the **Thailand**. And my ma -- **Serge**, my husband, he was able to -- apparently he's a good -- was a good diplomat -- to rearr -- to rearrange the thing so that the gold was returned and whatever else was due to the **Thais** was returned to them, and that way was decorated with the -- well, let's see, he got all these decorations. He was knight --

Q: Not -- ju -- just one moment.

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 **Thea Rips**. This is tape number two, side **B**, and you were starting to talk about his decorations.

A: Well, the decorations he received was -- is Officer of the National Order of the Legion of Honor of **France**. Commander of the Most Exalted Order of the White Elephant of **Thailand**, and Knight Commander of the Most Exalted Order of the White Elephant **Thailand** -- this is a knightgood -- knightgo -- knighthood, with the motivation -- in gratitude for fruitful and unstinted assistance. Because thanks to him, **Japan** returned the -- the gold and whatever, owed them for war reparations. The Legion of Honor was given

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

to him because returning th -- whatever was taken by **Japan** from **Indochina**, they took also s -- whatever was French or -- in **Indochina**, and so they had to return it to **France**, and **France** decorated him with the order, the **Officié** of the -- the Legion of Honor. Then he received from **Japan**, even though **Japan** was defeated in a way, by him, the wa -- the wa -- the Order the k -- Knight Commander of the Order of the Sacred Treasure of **Japan**, which is knighthood, which was given by Minister **Shiga Mitsu**, who said this is the first time **Japan** decorates with deep thanks, enemy on battlefield, without alienating us, you know? Then he had other orders. Order of the Jade of **China**, and the Order of the Golden Ear, also of **China**, which he received when he was still a journalist in **Belgium** because he started the campaign to erase the unequal treaties which were made between the European countries and **China** whereby -- m-many countries of **Europe** had their concessions in **China** and the Chinese got no -- got nothing for them, and he started, with his new-newspapers in gi -- in **Belgium** to write why, what do we need them? Why do you we do this? What a -- so **Belgium** took off -- closed their da -- their thing. And little by little the other countries were -- le-le-left **China** in peace and th -- and they got the -- the [indecipherable] back, you see? That's why he got these two orders from the Chinese. Then he got the Order of the Crown fr-fr-from **Romania -- Romania**, but here I don't know why. He got the Order of the Crown of **Italy** because he was the only Belgian journalist who was invited to attend the wedding of Prince **Humberto**, th-the son of the king of **Italy** [indecipherable] third to the pr -- the Belgian Princess **Maya José**. And he

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

was there to report on the wed -- and so they gave him the order, you see? Why did he get the order as the -- o-of **Izhat** -- Knight of the Order of **Izhat** of **Afghanistan**? I don't know. I have no idea. He told me probably, this I know he told me, but I forgot.

Q: So when did you get married?

A: We were -- officially in 19 f -- Fe-February, Friday February 13, 19 sic -- '76.

Q: Ninetee -- and -- and what kind --

A: But we were -- but we -- we went together since -- well, 18 years of engagement and 18 years of marriage. We didn't get married until practically I left my job, because I had the -- this job with atomic energy commission of **Italy** and he said well yo-you know, better not, and better not, then finally when I -- then -- then we decided that was about time. You know, we f -- we talked it over quite a bit.

Q: And -- and you lived in **New York**, and then when did you come to **Washington**?

A: I never live in **New York**, I always lived in **Washington**, always. I -- b-because I came here, I was staying with a -- first in a fr -- **[indecipherable]** when I was an interpreter, then I moved in with a girl who was working with Italian ta -- technical delegation. Then, when I left and went back to **Italy**, when I came back here I got a -- an apartment at the **Alban** Towers a -- on **Columbia** Road. Then they built the **Colonnade**. In the meantime my husband was living in different places, and it -- he was not mine -- my husband, of course, at the time. And then we moved both into the **Colonnade** when it was built. I had an apartment on the seventh floor, he had apartment on the 12th floor.

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

Then from there we -- we moved to **Bethesda** fo -- just for a year, because he was scared, he didn't want to buy the apartment. And when it became a condominium, then we rented here at the Towers for a year or something. Then from here when this one became a condominium, we moved to a 41 **[indecipherable]** and then finally decided it was about time to buy an apartment and we moved here in '81 and I been here since.

Q: Just to finish off, do you -- are you an American citizen?

A: Yes, yes, I am an American citizen.

Q: Wh-When did you become a citizen?

A: '98.

Q: Mm-hm, 1998. Do you -- wh-what are your thoughts now, looking back? You had such an interesting childhood and you did -- do you -- do you have any final thoughts about what happened during the war and your relationship with the Jewish families that you helped, from this vantage point of 50 years later?

A: Well, from -- n-now that I'm old and wise, I hope wise, yes, I -- I see wher -- o-on a diff -- I -- I -- I -- I didn't realize, first of all, that my life was interesting. It was living, you know? Only now, going back and remembering these things, yes, I -- I think that it was -- life was while living and probably if I would live again I would do it again the same things as **[indecipherable]**. And as far as the Jewish situation is concerned, well, my feelings had always been the same. T-To me that we are all human beings and with -- as I told you, I found out that the people were Jewish by chance, and not because we --

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

and only after the war they started what are you. Are you this, are you that? Never dream -- never -- never, never dreamt, we're just good friends, period. You know, no prejudice. Ma -- there was never any prejudice in my family -- I remember even my grandfather -- now I remember that they had probably some Jewish friends, from the names that they -- vaguely I remember, but one more -- one thing really I'm very happy of, that in **Trieste** we have the most beautiful synagogue, beautiful, and I don't know how it was not touched. It is -- well, probably they stole something away, they -- they -- they -- they -- they -- they used it, the Germans, for something, but it -- it was not torn, it's a beautiful synagogue. I don't know how it happen. And -- and in -- in **Trieste**, for instance, where I was born, in my mentality is more **Triestini** than **Italiana**. I am very much middle European not -- I don't -- I feel Italian very deeply one way, but more middle European. And I'm proud of it because if -- you have to read that book by **John Morris**, you know, **Trieste [indecipherable]** and you will see. And we had, for instance, our great -- two -- two of the greatest **Triestini** writers, **Humberto Saba**, he is half Jewish, mother Jewish and -- and father not. And **Italo Levo**, who was **[indecipherable]** is also -- makes -- and we had a -- a fantastic Jewish community over there in **Italy**. But we didn't think of it. They were -- we are **Triestini**.

Q: Was the synagogue in **Fiume** ever restored?

A: No, th -- I don't know what they built there, they told me. We -- I went back to **Fiume** 25 years after the end of the war. We didn't have the heart to go. This is really another

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

experience really worthwhile to tell -- recounting, to show what **Yugoslavia** was under **Tito**. And we went with my nephew who at the time was about 10 year old. And we went to all the places where we had lived. Ha -- he -- and we went to sleep -- via **Mario Asso** number two, where my sister -- my family, the **Moscovitz**, the **Weiss** and the **Schitzel** were living. [crying]. We found so much. How uncivilized they are -- or they were over there. We had that -- you know, we were -- a few steps underneath, there was the apartment over there -- of the porter -- of the doorman, they say. And after the stairs there -- there were the boxes for their mail. Mailboxes with the names, you know? The names were there. To us it was a terrible thing. Not our, that was not, but the **Schitzel** were there. And the **Moscovitz** were there, but the **Moscovitz** at least died peacefully, but when we saw the **Schitzel** there, it was something so terrible, so terrible. I'm sorry.

Q: Oh no, no. Oh.

A: That was a terrible experience.

Q: Is there any message you want to give to people who might listen to this tape?

A: Well, you know, it's -- it's a message which should -- which has been repeated and repeated and repeated thousand times. It should never any more, never, nevermore. Unfortunately we can see it happening over and over again. But with how much we reach, with how much we pray, [indecipherable] what we do -- well, maybe we are too few doing, thinking like this, I don't know.

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

Q: Have you remained an observant Catholic since child -- have you remained an observant Catholic since childhood?

A: Yes, well, you know, at the beginning it was a li -- **Serge** was little [indecipherable] in certain way, he would have liked me to convert. And I was -- I would listen. I -- I love you the way you are. You love me the way you are, why -- I -- I wer -- it were -- I grew up this way. And I even went to a rabbi for a summer to be -- for education to -- to -- to learn, but I -- I didn't feel it. And not because I have ha -- because I -- I know that we are fundamentally we are Jews, nothing doing, you know. No, we are Jews. Nothing doing in tha -- we're -- we -- well, we just accept one thing that you didn't accept, period, but we are the same, absolutely. So I was not able to do it, I -- I could not. Not that my parents objected, not at all. My father said, do what you want, you -- you do f -- what you feel like doing. But I didn't feel like doing it. Then, for -- but I was always going -- my husband was not very observant. We were more observant when we were more with the - - with the **Korns**, you know, and we were going to their house, then we were going to the synagogue. There was a time of -- o-of **Rabinovitz**, we loved his sermons, we became very good friends, so it -- it was a -- and I went to all the festivities, I enjoyed them very much, I followed and so on. And sometimes **Serge** came to -- but I didn't go to church. I didn't go. Well, you know, the -- **Serge** di-didn't like it, so I didn't go. Then -- then for a couple of su -- we were -- w-we spent a couple of Christmases [indecipherable] Catholic, just let's go to meet -- went to meet [indecipherable] so we are going to meet

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

[**indecipherable**] an-and a -- and **Serge** was coming. Then, t-towards the end, th-the feel -- the last few years at Easter, **Serge** was saying, hey, we -- y-you -- this is Easter. We -- you have to go to chur -- we were -- he was going to church with me, you see? So that was a -- the kind of a di -- di -- mix up. And if you look at my -- it was -- we were laughing yesterday with some people, because I have a-an in -- an image of the Virgin and on top of the bed I have **David** with the head of **Goliath**. And even in **Rome**, I -- I have in the -- on -- on my night table, a -- a -- a -- a menorah. So, you know, it's -- but that's the way I feel.

Q: When did your husband pass away?

A: He passed away on September nine. September 9, 1994. It's impossible for me to think that it's almost 10 years. Nine years past.

Q: And now you are moving back to **Italy**, you said?

A: Yes, now I move. I -- I tell you, it's very painful, because all of my friends are like the **Korns**, and then others, they are all here, you know? I spent 38 years of my life here. I never spent more than -- than eight years in an apartment in -- in -- in **Europe**. Here I am 22 -- 22 years. And in **Europe** I have a lot of friends, but they are all over **Italy**, you know, is not -- here I have a concentration of friends in my life, and besides here I had the very good life, met very interesting people. I-It was -- my sister, she had a completely different life. I was the lucky one in the -- in the family. So --

Interview with Thea Rips
January 20, 2004

Q: Anything else you wanted to add?

A: Not really, I don't know, to add just -- just that I am very sorry to leave the **States**. I will miss the **States** very, very, very, very much, and I will miss my friends very much, but I hope they will come and see me.

Q: All right. And I hope you'll come back and visit. Thank you very much for doing the interview.

A: You're welcome.

Q: This concludes the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Thea S-Sacca Rips**.

End of Tape Two, Side B

Conclusion of Interview