United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Rita Rubinstein
August 25, 2009
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audiotaped interview with Rita Rubinstein, conducted on August 25, 2009 by Gail Schwartz on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Rockville, Maryland and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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RITA RUBINSTEIN
August 25, 2009

Question: This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Rita Lifschitz Rubinstein, conducted by Gail Schwartz on August 25th, 2009 in Rockville, Maryland. This is tape number one, side A. What is your full name?

Answer: Rita Rubinstein.

Q: And your maiden name?

A: Lifschitz, Rifka -- Frieda Rifka Lifschitz.

Q: And where and when were you born?

A: I was born December 12th, 1936, at home, with the assistance of a midwife. My father's sister was present and my father and his mother, my grandmother. And it was on a Shabbat; Shabbat Hanukah that I was born on. I was born into a very loving family. At the time my father was doing very well. He was -- had a textile business. We sh-shared a home with his sister and her family. She had two children, a little girl eight months younger than I, and a boy six years -- seven years older than I. We shared the business and the store as well.

Q: And where were you born?

A: I was born in Waszkow, or Waszkowitz, Romania.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about your parent and their background. What were their names?

A: My father's name was Abram David Lifschitz. He was one of -- of four children, the only son. And my grandmother became a widow after World War I, so she sent her two oldest girls to the golden land, the golden amadina. They were only 16 and 18 and the younger two children remained with her. And they have immigrated to the United States. My mother came from a pious family in a little village where my grandfather had an orchard, apple orchard and he had a

dry goods store as well.

Q: What was her name, your mother -- your grand --

A: And -- her name was Tavu Shangel Mirbaum. She was the eldest and was the first to get married and of course, produced their first grandchild. I had an aunt that was only seven years older than I. And unfortunately, they were all killed.

Q: How long had your parents' families lived in the towns that they were born in? How far back generations can you go? Do you know?

A: They lived there all their lives as far as I know.

Q: Yeah. And then --

A: And when my mother met my father and married, she moved to Waszkow.

Q: Right. Do you know how they met?

A: A-Actually yes. They were introduced. My grandpar -- my -- my grandmother -- my great-grandparents, my grandmother's parents lived in Waszkow and they knew, they said, a very nice young man. And so they were introduced, and at that time you didn't even hold hands in the street and I think they saw them holding hands and it was really not very ladylike. She got reprimanded for that. But he was -- they were really meant for each other. He was a wonderful person from what I heard and they had a very loving and wonderful marriage.

Q: What year did they get married?

A: They got married in 1934, and two years later I was born.

Q: Yeah. And let's again talk about -- and I know this is what you've heard, obviously, cause you weren't born --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- ri -- of course. Were they a very religious family?

A: My mother came from a very pious family. My grandfather had a -- a long beard, and of course everything was homemade. I heard my grandmother was an excellent balabusta. She made everything from scratch and she sewed beautifully. I -- she sewed outfits for me as well. And we lived -- my grandmother lived with us, my father's mother, who was also a very pious woman. She wore a sheitel which is a wig, and va -- she was with us during the war and of course, died in the war.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Were your -- what -- what language did you speak, did your parents speak at home?

A: Thanks to my grandmother, at the time the Jewish people spoke German, the more cultured families wanted expose their children to German at home. But since my grandmother [indecipherable] lived with us, she insisted and she said, I do not want my grandchild speaking deutschmueller she used to refer to it, making fun of the German language, but I want her to speak Yiddish. So my very first language, my mamalashen was Yiddish.

Q: Okay. And again, just tell me a little bit about your father's business, just a little more elaboration.

A: Mm-hm. He employed people in the textile -- they had textile machines. They had it -- it's attached to the house and they manufactured peasants' skirts and shawls and -- which they sold in their dry goods store to the villagers. Beautiful, colorful fabrics and he was doing well because his sister said, maybe you should come to the United States and he was finally getting on his feet and he said no, we're doing well here in Europe. And he was in business together with his brother-in-law, his sister's husband. And we shared a two -- was a two family home. And so

things were going well for us, I had dolls and doll carriages and I would play outside and was a happy time.

Q: Do you have any memories of -- of the town? Can you describe the town at all, or what your mother told you about the town later on?

A: Well, the Jews pretty much lived in the same area. Was a pretty modern town. My father went to shul every Shabbat. He had a beautiful voice, I guess I've inherited that from him, and he used to be the[indecipherable]. He also belonged to the Havra Kadisha, which is the burial society. Very giving, as my grandmother was, they were very pious. He had a sukkah and at that time only the men would eat in the sukkah and the children. And my mother told me that he would take me to shul every Shabbat. And I think -- I didn't know that, but I loved going to services, and I too like to conduct the services, I'm a shuli hatsidore, and to follow in his footsteps, years later I -- I became part of the Havra Kadisha also --

Q: Mm-hm. Now, what would be your very first memory? Do you know?

A: Of my town?

Q: Yeah, mm-hm. Or of your life, your first memory. The earliest memories [indecipherable]

A: My earliest memories were happy.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Had a -- had a happy, loving childhood. Would visit my grandparents and they adored me. My aunts, uncles. So for the most part it was loving, and -- but my grandmother who lived with us didn't allow me to take my toys -- oh, she said, she'll use it up. Why is she always in the street playing with the children? And -- course, it was very short-lived, but it was a happy childhood. I was with my cousin, who was just eight months younger and I recall it being happy

and content. We had a radio, we had running water.

Q: You lived in a house in the center of town?

A: We lived in a house, yes.

Q: Right in the center of town?

A: More or less, I believe, but I really don't recall exactly. I don't have an address.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Now, do you have memories of that town at all?

A: The street where I played, yes. Some memories, whether they're my own or because they were related to me. When I would come to my grandparents in the little village, they would give me a bath outside. And I would watch my grandmother make her own butter, and how she churned it. It's just fragmented memories here. I do remember a Sukkor here and there.

Q: Any -- any favorite songs as a young, young child, from that time?

A: That I really don't remember, just is -- I remember sadness after that, that was all.

Q: Yeah, okay. Well let's -- when did things start to change from this happy childhood?

A: Well, the -- as I recall, the Russians came in first and they drafted all young men. They drafted my father into the army and that was -- we did not know, but it was to be the last time that I saw him, when we said our goodbyes and he left on a train with other soldiers. My uncle got out of it because of -- I don't know how, but he stayed with us. So he was the head of that whole family, with my mother and I and luckily her sister, who was sent to live with us.

Q: Do you -- do you have any memories of your father?

A: Do I have memories?

Q: Of your father.

A: Of my father?

Q: Yeah.

A: He was a tall man, a handsome man, very loving, always smiling.

Q: And you remember -- that's what I'm saying, cause you were so young when he left, but you do remember him?

A: I don't know if it's exactly my memory or what I've been told, cause it's -- was a long time ago.

Q: Yes. Right. So he went off the Russian army and then?

A: Yes. Then the war broke out [indecipherable] in '41, and the Jews were told, we were told that we would be evacuated and we had to be ready within 48 hours and we could only take whatever we could carry with us, whatever was on our backs and in a little knapsack. Even though I was only four years old, I do recall when they first came marching into town, my cousin had gone up to the attic and he was looking outside. And soldiers saw him and I remember they came knocking on the door with bayonets and my mother said for us to hide under the beds. So the children, we hid under the beds, and they said, where is this spy? She said there were no spies, this was a child that was looking out the window, she saw you marching. No, we saw a spy. And they came with the bayonets, they came into my mother's bedroom, that I do recall and they opened the closet door and were looking. And we were afraid, we were whimpering under the bed and they made us come out from under the bed. We were lucky, they didn't sh -- and my cousin admitted that he was the one that was looking at them, and my mother begged them and said, don't harm these children, my husband went into the war, he's a soldier and please don't -- don't harm them. That's all I recall and so our lives --

Q: What -- what -- what did the soldiers look like to you, would -- when you were such a young

child? Do you have any memory of that?

A: Mean. I was -- it was horrible experience. I was really shivering, we were very frightened that we would be shot. You know, they accused us of being spies.

Q: Right. But you all -- I'm sorry --

A: It was a frightening experience.

Q: Do you have a memory of this time?

A: That I do have a memory of.

Q: Yeah.

A: Some things distinctly I have a memory of.

Q: Now, these are German soldiers?

A: There were -- I'm not exactly clear if they were German or Romanians who worked hand in hand with the German soldiers.

Q: Yeah, okay, mm-hm. So then they left your house?

A: Then they left my house. I then -- next thing we knew we had to pack up and my mother dressed me in layers of clothing.

Q: What did she tell you was happening, now here you are just a ch -- such a young child?

A: We have to leave. We have to leave everything behind. [indecipherable] child wanted -- I wanted to be with my mother.

Q: Right.

A: She -- she dressed me. I-I didn't want to wear so many things. I -- I must have worn about four or five layers and on top of it, coats. And then I -- as little as I was, I had to have a knapsack on my back, carrying other belongings, with no toys, nothing.

Q: You took nothing personal, no dolls, no anything?

A: No dolls, nothing.

Q: No books, no toys?

A: No, no. And the funny part was that they took -- well, my mother took my father's suits, thinking that -- that when he would return she wanted some clothes for him. And she took his tallit. So that tallit was with us. She also took the down pillows and -- and some quilts along. So they really carried large bundles and then we had the -- the Jewish star on, that we had to wear.

Q: By that time you were --

A: The yellow star.

Q: Yes. Do you re --

A: And then we -- we went -- were to be transported to a -- a camp.

Q: Do you remember wearing the yellow star?

A: Do I remember wearing it?

Q: Yeah.

A: I do remember wearing it.

Q: Do you remember any feelings about that? Did you know what it meant? Again, I un -- you were so young. Did it mean anything?

A: It meant that I was different. It was frightening. I saw a lot of people, we were packed like sardines and they didn't tell us where we were going, but they said our destination was Margulav, which afterwards turned out to be -- that was a death camp. However, my grandmother's half-brother was on that transport as well. He was very well-to-do. And he heard in the middle of the night that some soldiers -- we were at that point in a resting place, and a --

that --

Q: Now you were -- you were on a train?

A: Yeah, after the train they brought us to a -- it's a -- was a great big hall with -- with hundreds of people. I know I -- I had a terrible earache there, I remember that. And in the middle of the night my uncle disappeared and then he came back. And he said, we're gonna leave this transport. It's dangerous, but we're gonna leave because some of the Romanian soldiers were taking bribes and my grandmother had sewn some money in her bras and in her girdle. I had asked her why she was doing that and she said, well, I'm an old lady -- she considered herself old then, she probably was just in her -- her 40's -- if they shoot me, but we never know, it may save our lives. And sure enough, the soldiers who took the bribe, they took us over the Dniester, D-n-i-e-s-t-e-r river.

Q: Let's back up a little bit. From your home --

A: Sorry.

Q: Th-That's okay. Wi -- from your home to the train, how did you get there?

A: We walked.

Q: You walked. With -- with other villi -- with other Jewish --

A: Yes.

Q: -- people [indecipherable]

A: With other Jewish people.

Q: And you got to the train station.

A: You know, like Anna Cheska it reminded me. When I saw that, I said oh my God.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah, it really hit me.

Q: Yeah. And you got to the train station and you all got on the train. Was it a train with seats?

A: You know, that I really don't remember.

Q: Okay, okay, okay.

A: Remember standing, but I don't really remember.

Q: Okay. So now your -- your uncle said, we're gonna leave this transport.

A: Okay. Right, but they took us over to the river to a place called Chargolat, which was also in Transnistria. It was the Ukraine, but it was a labor camp, okay?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And many a soldier -- th-these were barges we were on, and they drowned -- many of the Jews were drowned, the soldiers just threw them in the -- in the river.

Q: Did you as a child see this, or you heard it --

A: I saw this. A soldier was holding me, and my mother's anguished look. He knew that she was on the verge of tears, she said please don't hurt my child. And he said -- there were -- really God answered me, I da -- I believe. He said, do not worry. I have a child this age at home, I am not going to harm her. I was blonde. I had brown eyes and I think he said I reminded him of his child. So there were kindnesses that I do remember and thank God that we did make it across. Then our good luck was also the people that took us in, they were prima -- it was a labor camp, but we'd have to find our own housing. And the person that took us in wa -- they were Jewish. They were also part of the labor camp, but he had one of his children, his oldest child, who was engaged [indecipherable] went to the riverbank to see which people looked suitable, they looked balabatish to take in. We were nine people. They had a primitive clay house, that is a one

bedroom with a hearth in the center. They were a family of four taking in ni -- they had to take in, they had no choice, so they picked -- they picked us, we were lucky. They picked nine of us. He was a butcher, the gentleman who -- who was the owner of the house, and he took us in. It was my mother and I, my grandmother and her sister, and then my father's sister and her husband, two children and my uncle's mother, Baba Chana. So they took all of us in.

Q: Now, is this 1942?

A: No, this was in 1941, September of '41.

Q: Oh, September of '41, okay.

A: Right.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And the reason I -- I asked, I said how come my mother wasn't -- I don't recall her being -- for some reason they had mercy, that if you had a small child, they didn't take you into the labor camp. Her sister worked in the tobacco fields and she also worked in an area where they dried apples and fruit and tomatoes. She wasn't allowed to -- she would have been shot if she would had taken any food out. Thus we experienced a lot of hunger. Whatever we could get, that's -- luckily my aunt, who was very handy with a needle and she -- she sewed beautifully and she knitted beautifully. And she found some people from home who were not Jewish, but they were also transported to this camp. The two women who gave her work to do on the side, and after she came home from labor, and in exchange, they would give her food here and there. So we would have a potato floating in the water. I would have a -- a piece of bread with some oil occasionally. But as a child I remember you -- we found other -- even though I saw death, I saw people dying in the street and starving, they didn't have a roof over their heads, and as primitive as the

conditions were -- there was no running water, there was no -- there were no toilet facilities. I remember going in a pail, having to go outside in the very bitter cold of the winter. My aunt and uncle stayed with us only for one year, but then they -- they left, they went to a different camp. It was ju -- we just couldn't make it together, it was too hard.

Q: But up to that point you were all living with that family of four.

A: All living with that family but my mother and I stayed --

Q: What was their name -- wa -- what was the name of the family, do you know?

A: Yes. I found out. Yoshka Nousins Brytank.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Okay. Brytburt, Brytburt. Yoshka Nousins Brytburt. That was his name.

Q: And what were they like to you? What di --

A: They were very nice actually. They -- they had nothing so they couldn't share with us. But you can imagine ah -- all I remember is so many of us in this one great big room. They had a bedroom, but we had to find sleeping quarters for nine of us. My uncle had typhoid fever and they were very, very nice, they let us -- let him be in the bedroom when he was so ill, they di -- they didn't want him to infect the rest of us, and he was lucky, he made it. But it was a very, very hard time and I remember my aunt would get very upset with my cousin who was older. She said, why don't you steal like other children, so we could have a piece of bread? And -- and he said, I can't do it, I can't. It's not in my nature, I will not do it. And that's when they decided to leave and see if they, you know, they -- they didn't want it to be a burden. Here we were women, all women, and it was hard for her to leave her mother behind, cause her mother is the one that stayed with us, my grandmother, but she also had her husband's mother and so they went to a

different camp where she worked on -- on hats, and -- a different labor camp.

Q: Did the host family have children? You said there were four or --

A: Yes, they had two, they were older.

Q: They were older?

A: They had two older children, yeah, one was about to be married.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm, the ho -- so what were they -- what did you do during the day?

A: Well --

Q: You were there for a few years in the --

A: Yes.

Q: -- in the town.

A: We were there until ’44, April of ’44.

Q: Okay, but staying in this same house?

A: In this same house. I watched my grandmother [indecipherable]. She died in that house, she had stomach cancer. And she had shrouds that were being made for her and I would ask her -- you know, a child is very inquisitive, what are these? Why is all this white? And she said, that’s for when they bury me. And she had a little sack of soil that her brother was able to get for her, it was the soil from Israel, as you know, traditionally that’s what we’re buried with. And she knew that her son would never come back, she had that feeling. And she never was to see her daughters again, the one from the United States and she didn’t know what would happen to us either, we were all in danger. And when she died, she -- oh, she asked me, she said, I want you to light the candles. But what they didn’t do, they didn’t take me to the cemetery. I remember they did the taharat, they prepared her body for burial right in that room where we lived. And that was

such a -- such a traumatic things for me. And of course when the finished I lit the candle, but then they took her away and they didn't let me come to the ceremony. Klainer kinder, little children you don't take to the cemetery. That is imbedded in my memory, I will never forget that, it was really, really difficult. It was my first experience with -- with loss, somebody close like that who died.

Q: But what -- when did she die?

A: I -- you know, I don't know exactly, but --

Q: Do you know what year?

A: I think it was about a year and a half in [indecipherable] I wou -- I would think it would be about f -- I would say '42 - 1942.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So she did have a -- a burial site. She was the only one of my grandparents who -- well, she and her -- her husband of course died in World War I. I don't recall them saying that he had a -- a burial ground, I don't know. But -- so that was it.

Q: All right, uh-huh.

A: As far as what did I do there, we played with little stones. My mother made a -- a rag doll for me out of straw. What kept us alive was cleanliness. My mother had to go about a mile and a half to a running -- running water where she would do our laundry, made sure that we were clean. And I fell into that river once. I went with my mother and -- and my cousin, and my cousin suddenly said, Tante Tavu, there's a kinder in wasser. Aunt Tavu, there's a little child in the water. And my mother takes a look and that little child is -- is her daughter, and she did not know how to swim, so luckily she was doing our sheets and she threw the sheet in and she told

me to grab onto it, and I did, but I did not speak for three days. They had me lying down, I -- that I remember cause to me it was like witchcraft. There was this woman that came and -- and broke an egg on my forehead and she started talking --

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: -- after that.

A: Well, I could not speak, so they brought in this woman who broke an egg on my forehead. She said all kinds of abra kadabra language that was not familiar to me. I still didn't speak, it was traumatic for me, and for the family.

Q: This was a Jewish woman, or a --

A: I really don't know, the -- yes, she was Jewish. They called in a specialist, so to speak, and luckily after three days I -- I came back and started speaking. But this was the second time that my mother almost lost me and it was very frightening for -- for her. But as a child I -- I found other children, we played with little rocks and there was even a little pre-kindergarten class organized by people and I remember going and learning my very first Hebrew, because you had to say what you were bringing. So I had [speaks Hebrew] which okay, bread and -- and some oil, occasionally. It was very brief, I recall fragments, you know. We learned a song here and there and I was with other children. And even though the times were horrible and I saw starvation and people begging in the streets and death, somehow as a child you find some happiness with other children, you just -- I mean, I saw a lot of sadness but I guess to protect yourself you just want to step back and live in your own little dream world.

Q: Who -- who is the teacher of the class, do you remember?

A: I really don't recall her name. I can find out.

Q: No. No. And were your warm, did you have enough food, do you remember --

A: No, food, we were always hungry, no. I remember being cold, being hungry. Yes, we did have clothing from home that, you know, luckily when we dressed in all those layers. And our own bedding that my mother carried with us, so that s -- that saved us. And there was a potbellied stove and they -- they did heat it, but the winters were bitter there, bitter cold.

Q: How did your mother explain to you as a young child what was happening? Do -- did she say any -- tell you anything special, maybe a story, or --

A: She herself was just so forlorn, not knowing where her husband was, not hearing a thing about him. Not knowing anything about her parents or the fate of her -- her sibling. She was loving and -- but I -- I really don't recall the stories she made up for me. They were bad people, she said. Do anything --

Q: Did you --

A: -- to good people.

Q: -- did you know there was a war going on, or --

A: Oh yes, yes.

Q: What did war mean to --

A: How could I not know?

Q: Well, what did war mean to a young child like you? What does it mean?

A: Separation. I -- I heard bombing. I heard what was going on. Noises always scared me, I s -- dogs always scared me, because I had seen dogs chasing people, and I have -- to this day when I see a German Shepherd, I hate it. My friend had to put her German Shepherd out in a kennel

whenever we'd come to visit, because I just would not even get up from the table. And this was a friendly dog, but he was ju -- i-it just -- I couldn't st -- deal with it. To this day. So there are some things that I -- I hate the -- the noise, it always startled me.

Q: So what was the typical day for you, do you remember? You would wake up in the morning --

A: It was an existence. We would wake up hungry, we'd see what there was to eat, we had something to drink. Nutrition was very poor, no milk, no -- you know, the hygiene too. I don't remember brushing teeth and things like that.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: That's why my teeth are so horrible, and as a result I -- I was sick after the war.

Q: Did the other children that you --

A: There weren't many that I saw, many children, but --

Q: Did you all t -- do you m -- do you remember if you talked about what was happening, about the war? Or you ju --

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

Q: -- you just played children's games?

A: We just played with, you know, my cousin and then they left and -- and then I found some other children and my mother was with me. It was --

Q: Were -- did you hear any speeches? Did you ever hear Hitler make a speech?

A: Yes, I heard speeches before we were deported, because we had a radio.

Q: Right.

A: And yes, it was like the wild man talking.

Q: Da -- and you knew ger -- did you know German, or just Yiddish?

A: No, I -- I just heard how it was said, it was -- sounded horrible.

Q: Yeah.

A: You know.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: You knew hatred and I guess my parents explained it. But they really didn't know what was going on either, nobody knew exactly what was going to happen.

Q: Did you see any swastikas?

A: Did I see swastikas, no.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

A: No.

Q: Okay. And in -- di -- were you -- were you able in Shagara to walk around by yourself? Again, you were very young, of course.

A: No.

Q: You had to stay close to the house.

A: I stayed close to the house, did not go anywhere.

Q: Yeah, uh-huh.

A: No [indecipherable]

Q: Did you ever talk to the non-Jewish children, or --

A: Didn't see any.

Q: Didn't see any, no.

A: No.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

A: Never went to the market, no.

Q: Not even to the market?

A: No, mm-mm.

Q: So for those years you were just in the house and --

A: I mean, I don't know if I want to blot that memory out, but it's not a pleasant memory.

Q: Yeah.

A: But I did have this memory of -- of playing with some stones and a little rag doll and going with my mother to the river to wash clothes.

Q: What was the stone game that you played?

A: You know I don't -- I don't -- I can't remember, we -- my mother said we found little things that made us happy and -- and we played for hours just with other children, and conversing.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm. Did you ask about your father?

A: And singing. Yes. She said well, after the war, maybe he'll come back and --

Q: Yeah.

A: You hope.

Q: Yeah. You said something about singing. Did you have any songs at that time that you remember?

A: Don't recall any but my mother said I learned a couple of Hebrew songs here and there and I w -- I wish I had written down what, but I have no recollection.

Q: Did -- did you start to learn how to write?

A: No, not yet.

Q: Yeah, not at that point.

A: No.

Q: So no reading, no writing.

A: No, my only schooling was right after we were liberated.

Q: Mm-hm. But up to that point it was no reading and no writing?

A: No.

Q: Yeah. So the days --

A: That I recall.

Q: -- yeah -- the days went on.

A: The days went on, seemed like forever, and then right before liberation, our --

Q: Which was -- wa -- your -- you were --

A: Which was -- we were liberated in April of ’44.

Q: So you started in September ’41, you said, in ch -- in ch --

A: We -- we got there September ’41 --

Q: ’41 and April ’44 --

A: -- and the Russians liberated us in ’44. But the night before liberation there was a lot of -- a lot going on in the camp and people were afraid because they were going to be bombings, you know, the front was pushing towards that area. And so the [indecipherable] from our -- our landlord, so to speak, they had a house with a basement and a sub-basement and they took us into a sub-basement where we were all hiding. They had a -- a little boy who suddenly disappeared and they were afraid for him because he ran out in the street. And that’s how we found out though that the Russians actually came, because he was out and when he came back he

reported that there was drinking in the street and he saw Russian soldiers. So in -- I guess the front broke through and at that point we knew that the war was over. And then our -- our journey back home, so to speak, began.

Q: Okay. We'll get to that, of course. You knew, you said, that the war was over. Now again, what did that mean to a child of your age?

A: It meant that I was going home. I thought I was going back to my house. I thought I would reunite with my father, I thought I would see my grandparents again, my aunts and uncles, which unfortunately was not to be.

Q: Right.

A: But there was euphoria, there was happiness that we lived through that horrible period so far, and we were going to pick up the pieces and go back, what we thought was home.

Q: But when you were in Shargarat, did you see people going off to work in the streets? It was a camp --

A: Yeah, my aunt left every day.

Q: Yeah.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: So you knew it was a place where people would go off --

A: Yeah, oh yeah.

Q: -- to work.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Yep.

Q: But did you see groups of people marching, going off to work?

A: I saw marching and I saw people begging in the street.

Q: Yeah. And what was your mother's state of mind when she knew the Russians had broken through?

A: Pardon?

Q: What was your mother's state of mind when she knew that the Russians had broken through?

A: Oh, was not too good. She was ra -- always sad, but she put up a good front for me, and I guess her mother-in-law, who was a lovely woman, and --

Q: So you were seven -- s-seven years old? In '44, you were --

A: In '40 -- in '44 --

Q: You were eight.

A: Yeah.

Q: You were eight.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Okay. And so then how s -- how much longer did you stay in Shagara after that?

A: Oh, we didn't. We left as soon as we were liberated. We left -- I -- don't ask me, we got on a train and we went back to Waszkow.

Q: Was it hard to say goodbye to the people you lived with?

A: No -- yes and no, you know, we thanked them, of course, that they took us in, we were very grateful. And they finally had their house to themselves, but it was very primitive compared to the home that we'd left. When we came back to Waszkow, the Russians -- the Iron Curtain set in, and the same real estate people that my aunt was working for when she came to visit -- not

visit, to stay with my parents because her father wanted her out when the Russians initially came. He -- he was in charge of a bank, so he invited my aunt to come and work for the bank. But when we went to our house, it was used as a silo, and they said no, you cannot -- they had product there, you cannot come in. My mother said look, my husband was fighting the war at that time, he's a soldier and I just want the pictures that I have in the attic. Can I go into the attic, cause I don't have any pictures. And they did let her go in the attic, I don't -- and where we were permitted to live was my great-grandparents house was converted for the returnees, those who came back home but they couldn't go into their home. So we were given a room in my great-grandparents house --

Q: What -- what --

A: -- which was not far from where we used to live, okay. And I started going to kindergarten --

Q: Okay, th -- what did your mother find in the attic of the --

A: She found pictures, but she didn't find the money that she had hidden [indecipherable]

Q: So she took the photographs --

A: She got -- took the photo album and took the pictures, right. They were precious, cause some people have lost -- my husband didn't have a picture left, nothing. He's just told how beautiful -- what a beautiful baby he was, but he never saw it.

Q: Was the furniture and everything in the house, was that --

A: Nothing, everything was gone.

Q: Oh, it wasn't the furniture that you ha -- your parents had had?

A: No, no, no, no, was converted into a silo, they had --

Q: Oh, that's right.

A: -- no, they had products there, no. No, no, nothing was -- was there.

Q: Did you also go inside the house?

A: Did I? No.

Q: No, okay.

A: Only my mother.

Q: Oh, yeah.

A: And there [indecipherable] my mother put herself in danger with my aunt -- oh, and my aunt came too, from the other labor camp, we were together again. And they would sell different products so that we could have food on the table. And of course my aunt had a job. And then my uncle again found out that if he falsified -- there was a -- a Pole that he knew, a friend. And he said to him, I'm going to register my family, cause I want to get out. You should also see if you can have false papers drawn up, because I would suggest that you leave this place, it's going to be hard to leave Russia, if you don't leave -- we were there for a brief period of time. We got there April '44, and we were out by -- by '40 -- '45.

Q: What part of --

A: Na -- we were there about a year, not even a year.

Q: What were your -- y-you talk about your aunt --

A: [indecipherable] excuse me?

Q: You -- you -- you talk about your aunt and uncle, what -- what were their names?

A: Oh, my uncle's name was [indecipherable] oh, Mendel. Mendel. Mendel Machlovich. He was married to my father's sister Esther.

Q: Okay.

A: Okay? And this -- a friend of -- of my Uncle Mendel, Mr. Schlitz, his wife was Polish, so he knew -- he told us that all ethnic Poles were going to leave the Iron Curtain and that's when he told him to have these papers falsified. And Mendel, my uncle, decided to lie and say they were Polish so they would get then into Poland. And he went with my mother and registered me, that's when he made me the two years younger. And my aunt was -- he said that my aunt was his sister. I don't know what he made my mother into, but --

Q: What was the purpose in making you two year younger?

A: Because he had a child that was eight months old and it -- I couldn't be older because he had another -- he had a son, so he thought that if I would be younger than his daughter, it would make more sense. So they got these false papers and my aunt was not allowed to leave. We were all on the train, ready to leave, and my aunt worked in the bank. My mother went to beg her empl -- her sister's employer's wife to please speak to her husband and let -- and let her s -- only sister go. Oh, and what I didn't bring up, my mother and aunt found out the fate of their parents. They wanted to go back to the little village where their parents lived, but as it turned out they found a neighbor of my grandparents who was living in Waszkow aft-after liberation, and they inquired. They said, what happened to our parents? Well, they proceeded to give them the blow by blow description. The Ukrainians worked hand in hand with -- you know, they were anti-Semites too, and they were glad to comply with the government, you know, to get rid of the Jews, and this way they had their belongings because my aunt saw him wear -- my mother did too, my grandfather's shirt. And when they went to the house they saw -- you know, they prepared a hope chest. My aunt would have been the next one to get married and my grandmother already started a hope chest for her and they saw that there and they saw some of the furnishings. And

they said that my grandfather escaped briefly, but they said there was HaSharah, they used to train religious boys in kibbutz life and there was a ri -- so he -- he went there for awhile because he said they won't touch the families, yes. Well, he came back, he came back the day after his wife, my grandmother, the three aunts and my uncle were butchered. I call it butchered because they were, with farm implements, they killed each and every one of them. And they left the remains and they showed him the remains. And then for some reason they had mercy and shot him instead of killing him with the farm implements. And this man, this neighbor described it to my mother. It was horrible, so we -- we know exactly the date when they were killed, the 10th of Tammuz, which was on a July -- I have it down here --

Q: Do you know what year?

A: It was in 19 -- just -- it was on ju -- on July fifth, but I don't know the -- the 10th of Tammuz, and he was a day later.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Yes. Which was -- which was horrible because my mother just tore the earrings out of her -- you know, when she heard all that, and you know, they became orphans in -- in a sense and -- and my father's best friend came home and we asked him what happened to my father, where was my father. And when he related he also gave us, you know, cause it's very important to the Jewish people to know the exact Yahrzeit and when. Of course they had no burial, none of them did, but at least he came back giving us when, the seventh day of Av, it's always two days before Tisha B'Av. For me it's a Tisha B'Av because from the time I was little I had to say Kaddish for him. Of course then it was only Orthodox, so the girls didn't say, so that's when I found out I -- I didn't have a father any more. And that was very difficult. He was always -- I always missed

having a father in my life.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And gra -- and loving grandparents.

Q: Yeah, yeah. So you -- you were --

A: [indecipherable]

Q: -- actually remember hearing that your father was gone?

A: Pardon?

Q: You d -- you do remember hearing the news that your father was gone?

A: Oh yeah, oh yes, they told me. And I went to the --

Q: How did you handle that as a child, after being --

A: Hard, it was hard. I, of course, cried and I -- I was envious of my cousin who had her father.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And she -- they were never set -- separated from him. But -- and I had the love of my mother and -- and her sister and then I went to school and I remember the Russian soldiers looking over my report card and -- and saying, oh you're such a good student [Russian] means outstanding, outstanding. But I was very scared, I used to walk to school through the woods. And I had to recite poetry from memory, remembering -- I learned Russian, Ukrainian, we learned -- and we were told to kiss Stalin's picture cause these were -- these schools were run by communists.

Q: But you were now living --

A: I was living in -- in Waszkowitz, when we returned after liberation.

Q: Right, but then you said you got new papers, you -- yo --

A: No, no, no, but this is before we got papers to leave --

Q: Oh, okay.

A: -- I went to -- we were there for a year, and I --

Q: Okay, so this is the year?

A: -- did complete -- yes, I'm sorry.

Q: Okay, yeah.

A: The year before we left of our own free will.

Q: Okay.

A: Yes.

Q: Yeah. So you were --

A: So --

Q: -- still using your name, you were still using your -- your correct name, yeah --

A: Oh yes --

Q: Yeah. Right.

A: -- yes, yes, yes, Lifschitz, right. And I wa --

Q: And you pi -- and you picked up Russian, you learned Russian.

A: Picked up Ukrainian, they taught in the lower grades and I -- and some Russian, right, because I recited poetry and I -- I was scared to death, they don't believe in Santa Claus, but they called him Ded Moroz there was, with a big tree and he was dressed like the Santa Claus, and I had to recite this poem in -- in Russian. And the anti-Semitism was there, even though i -- although we were told that he is the savior, Stalin, you kissed his picture whenever you saw him, you gave him [indecipherable] before I went to bed. Yes, but --

Q: Did you know who he was?

A: He was a dictator. He -- I knew he was a ruler of Russia and they came and -- and took -- and there were a lot of pogroms even then, they -- they killed a lot of people. The Ukrainians killed Russians soldiers. There was a lot of murder going on. We couldn't wait to get out. We got out of there just in time.

Q: So you felt the danger during that year?

A: Yeah, and a -- we would go out to leave ho -- at that point we were very happy to leave Waszkow.

Q: But what -- did your mother give you any freedom tha -- during that year that you were there?

A: Freedom, yeah, I walked to school, I went -- you know, I -- I don't recall everything that happened to me. We lived there and -- until we were able to leave, and when we left our journey took forever. It took us three months and we had to cross different borders with false papers and at that point the israle -- Israeli underground, Israeli people were planted in Poland and in -- in -- in Czech -- in the Czech Republic, Czechoslovakia and in Salzburg, cause I was in Lódz and I was in --

Q: Okay, let -- le-let's do your journey now. So you're le --

A: The journey was -- that I remember, cause I was older and I remember how horrible it was, we -- we --

Q: Okay, you were --

A: -- jumped on trains illegally, on coal cars and all kinds of places.

Q: Okay, now this is -- this is April '45 is when --

A: This was in -- in '45, right.

Q: A-April '45, you're -- you have a new name, you have false papers.

A: [indecipherable] I -- yes --

Q: And you and --

A: -- we had false papers.

Q: -- and who di -- who did you leave with besides your mother?

A: My aunt and uncle --

Q: Uncle

A: Uncle Mendel [indecipherable] my Aunt Bella.

Q: Okay.

A: Of course my grandmother was gone.

Q: Right.

A: And my uncle's mother, she immigrated with them to Israel. She -- she survived the war with him.

Q: Okay.

A: And my cousins Sepora, Faygela and --

Q: Now what did you take with you? Your --

A: What did we take with us? We didn't have very much.

Q: Okay, you're nine years old at this point.

A: Ah, I'm nine years old.

Q: What da -- what does a nine year old take with herself?

A: I didn't have much to begin with left in Waszkowitz. We came after the war, we had nothing.

Q: Okay.

A: Whatever I had, whatever clothing, I -- I can't even remember --

Q: So di -- you didn't have a favorite doll that you took with you, or --

A: I had no dolls, remember, everything was gone.

Q: Okay.

A: I had nothing.

Q: Even during that year after, you still didn't have any --

A: That year we didn't have --

Q: Okay.

A: -- no, I don't even remember having a toy, I just remember being old beyond my years --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- as far as -- you know, cause of what we lived through. Socially, I learned songs. I -- I liked school. But --

Q: Can you sing --

A: -- I remember traveling, the conditions were horrible. We -- we were --

Q: Okay, now you're -- now you're leaving, now you're --

A: Pardon?

Q: Now you're leaving Waszkowitz, you said?

A: Now we left our --

Q: And where did you first go to?

A: We went to Poland, we went to Lódz, we went to --

Q: How'd you get there, by --

A: -- Czechoslovakia [indecipherable]

Q: Well le-let's do it -- let's do it gradually. So --

A: I don't remember the gradual --

Q: Okay.

A: -- where -- where we were exactly at what time.

Q: No, I know, I know.

A: All I remember is that it took us three months to get to Germany, to Munich where we finally got to a DP camp.

Q: Right, right. Now, did you go by train all the time?

A: We went by different trains, we hopped different trains.

Q: How did you hop it -- a train? How do you hop a train?

A: Illegally. We -- we did it at night, we were on coal cars, we -- when we were stopped -- we posed at one point as Greeks and they send us children and -- and we ask for mayim, mayim, and we showed them we wanted some water. The soldiers searched us, you know, we had to undress, my mother, I remember. It -- it was a very frightening time for us, and we found some places -- again, the s -- one man appeared that came from the town that my -- my uncle knew and he told us where to go, where it was safe to stay. So --

Q: So what was your new name at this point?

A: No, our name --

Q: You said you got --

A: -- our name was the same, just the dates were changed, the birth date and -- and the way I --

Q: Oh, so you --

A: Yeah, yeah --

Q: -- still had the same name?

A: -- yeah, yeah.

Q: So you didn't have false --

A: And the -- the only thing that's not clear to me is we wound up, my mother and I and my aunt wound up in -- in one DP camp and my -- and my other Aunt Esther and her husband, and her two children and mother-in-law wound up in a different DP camp.

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Rita Lifschitz Rubinstein. This is tape number two, side A. And before we go on to talk about your experience in the DP camp, were there any instances where non-Jews helped you and your family out?

A: Yes. When my aunt worked in the labor camp, she recognized one woman who was not Jewish [indecipherable] and her sister Lydia. One of them had worked in a pharmacy, a Jewish pharmacist. She was his assistant and she happened to be in Shargarat at the time and she needed some things that had to be fixed. This was not done, of course, during her work in labor camp, but after she would leave they would give her some extra work and in exchange they would give her some food that she was --

Q: What -- what kind of work would she give your aunt?

A: She would do repairs and -- and a -- do some dresses for them.

Q: So this was dressmaking --

A: She would sa --

Q: -- this was the dress --

A: Yes, dressmaking work. Tailoring, so to speak. And in exchange they would give her bread, and -- but she was very happy to share with us, and so we didn't starve [indecipherable]

Q: Any other instances besides that?

A: Yes. After the -- the war when we came back to Waszkowitz, there was [indecipherable] whom she -- my aunts had worked in real estate for him, but when the Russians came he became a banker. He owned a bank and he invited her to work in the bank. So there she earned some

money and we were able to purchase food and that sustained us again. My mother did a lot of smuggling with her -- her sister-in-law. They -- a-and that brought food to the table, too. Ma -- they exchanged credits, in other words, they did not do it legally. But we were very poor, we had nothing left after the war, no money and so on.

Q: When you say food on the table, what kind of food?

A: The -- what kind of foods? They fix bread, milk and -- and some butter and no luxuries. Cheeses. I don't think they had a kosher butcher left, and we were very kosher then. It was mostly a -- dairy products. I don't really remember any -- eating any meats at all.

Q: Mm-hm. And -- and is -- was that --

A: Oh, and then there was another in-instance when we were trying to flee the Iron Curtain and we were at the train station when the son of the midwife who delivered both my mother and my aunt in their little town of Mili, or Mileev, he was married to a Polish woman and he was on the transport to go to -- to Poland. And he thought, so he knew he was able to go because of his wife being Polish.

Q: But he was Jewish?

A: No. And he knew that they were not really Poles, that we weren't Poles, but he did not give it away. He did not go to the authorities and he pretended that he didn't know us -- because in that instance he could have -- we probably wouldn't have been allowed to leave.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

A: Yeah.

Q: But you were and you did get away and now you --

A: So, it was the third time, right, that we were lucky.

Q: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And now you're in Germany?

A: So now we went to Lódz, we went to -- to Czechoslovakia, my aunt met her wonderful husband with other -- we were -- I know we met lots of refugees who were fleeing from different -- he was from Lithuania. We were together, the un -- the --

Q: How long did you stay at these places?

A: -- the Israeli underground, they -- I should say organizers from Israel helped us travel through -- through the different areas and -- and found places for us to stay.

Q: And would you ever stay more than one or two nights in the --

A: In some -- in some instances, yes.

Q: But you were constantly moving?

A: Constantly moving by the kindness of strangers and other either Jewish families, or non-Jewish families. They knew where it was safe for us and we were constantly moving, constantly. Finally, finally we reached Munich. Yes, it was near Munich and [indecipherable] and that was a Displaced Persons camp and we were in barracks which were used for -- not the soldiers really, it was a camp for soldiers, but it was run by HIAS and -- the Hebrew sheltering society.

Q: Before we get now to that --

A: Yes.

Q: When you were traveling, those months --

A: Yes.

Q: -- to get there, were there a lot of children in the group with you?

A: Not a lot of children. Oh, it was very sad because as you know, most children didn't survive the war. A lot of children were murdered. And -- but in DP camp, you did find children.

Q: Yeah, but before the DP camp, were there any children in the group at all that you were traveling with?

A: Other than my cousins, I don't recall.

Q: Okay.

A: Really don't recall --

Q: Okay.

A: -- seeing a lot of children.

Q: Mm-hm. Did y -- did you and your cousins do --

A: But I did see families when we wer -- got on trains.

Q: Yeah.

A: Groups of people all the time and --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- also doing what we were doing.

Q: And di -- did you know what was happening, what was a nine year old's perspective at that time?

A: We knew we were the -- we were de -- either destined to go to the United States or we wanted to go to Israel.

Q: You knew that at the time on your way to the DP camp?

A: That that was our goal, we knew that --

Q: Okay.

A: -- we no longer had a home as far as we were concerned. Our home was gone.

Q: Le-Let's -- let's talk about what Israel and also the United States meant to a nine year old

who had been through the war.

A: Okay.

Q: Did you know what Israel was?

A: First of all, to a nine year old, it was my first taste of a formal Jewish school, where I was taught Hebrew, history -- we were like sponges, we were -- had a void in our lives. We didn't have much of a childhood, we didn't have time for play, we didn't have time for study. And suddenly we were given mathematics and -- a-and the thirst for knowledge was unbelievab -- we had wonderful teachers.

Q: This is in the camp -- in -- in Feldafing --

A: This is in DP camp, in Feldafing.

Q: Okay.

A: We were given one room, the conditions were certainly not plush, but we were given a room. My mother met a man from Germany, he had lost his wife and he was in Auschwitz and in Dachau and he lost a wife and son there. His daughter was on a Kindertransport to England, he didn't know if she was alive. He was 15 years my mother's senior, but people told my mother, who knew at the time she was probably going to go to the United States, but I -- my Zionism was, I think, embedded in me when I started going to the school there and the love of Israel and I will never forget the day that Israel was declared independent. We children -- the school was -- consisted of just maybe a hundred children. I have pictures of that, of DP camp. And yet we were so happy that those were happy times, cause we were free. And we danced all night in a bonfire and I told my mother, I am not going to the United States, I am going to tear up the papers. I'm a half an orphan, I wanted to go on the Exodus. My aunt did not -- even though she had two sisters

in the United States, but my cousin was seven years older than I and he swam the channel already. He refused to go to the United States. But my mother said, my only sister, she had -- there was a quota system then. My aunt got married to a Lithuanian Jew and -- who lost his entire family and they were allowed to come -- immigrate to the United States right away, they left in 1946 -- ’47. ’46 - ’47. And we did not leave until ’49, we had to wait for our quota system. In the meantime we had our physical exams and many of the children in the school were found to have TB. I was in a camp -- they had diagnosed it three months before they even told my mother, and then they told her that I indeed had TB and I had to go to a sanitarium, they called it a sanitarium then. And it was not in the same town, it was in Augsburg. And here I was, nine and a half, 10 years old. My mother took me there initially and she left me with all the other children. I was only able to see her once a week, it was not close. And when she came back and was looking for me, she said where is my daughter? And they said well, she is in quarantine. She has a bad case of TB and she cannot be with other children. So I was in that sanitarium for nine months. The treatment that I needed they only gave to people who had TB of the bones, not -- I had it in my lungs. And so they had to collapse a lung and th-the anti-Semitic nurses, they were not -- there were some people that were nice. The doctor that I had was wonderful, the Danish doctor who spoke to my mother. He said, I had TB as a child, I have a family now, don’t worry, your daughter will be okay. But luckily we had family here, so my mother wrote to them in the United States saying that I needed streptomycin if they could possibly get it for me. In the meantime they had to perform surgery and the nurses would always tell me, you’re going to go through this test, it’s going to hurt. And they would give me tissues, you’re going to cry. And so I believe that my tolerance for pain was established there because I showed them how brave I

could be, and no matter how much it hurt, I -- I didn't give in. I -- I had to show them. I would write letters to my mother trying to calm her down because [indecipherable] said don't worry, things will be okay. I -- and I remember my mouth, I had developed a terrible tooth infection, they had to send me to -- I had an abscess and I had to go through surgery, they sent me to a different hospital where suddenly I had my period at 10 and a half. And that was so frightening, that it -- I -- that I remember very vividly.

Q: Did you know what it represented, it meant?

A: No, because my mother never talked to me about it, but of course the -- a friend, you found out through friends. And we didn't have tampons, and we didn't have -- it was rags, that was disgusting. But then finally you know, and the Americans brought over the pads and things. But I was frightened. There was a very nice counselor from HIAS who -- who would come to see me and she brought me a lot of handiwork to do. I still have an embroidery that I did.

Q: This is while you're still in solitary?

A: While in -- I was in the sanitarium for nine months and I was in the quarantine for -- for three months. They performed surgery, I still have the scars. While I was under the knife, my mother came with the streptomycin -- this is before, and I used to get streptomycin shots every four hours all during the day and night. That was -- that was for three months. And after surgery I would console my mother, she just wished she had saved my letters, that I saw a bird and don't worry, I'll be fine and I'm feeling okay. But thank God I lived through it and came back to camp. My cousins couldn't even say goodbye to me, they went to Israel. In the meantime they left for Israel because they were not allowed, but my aunt would come with my uncle and then of course we had a wonderful reunion first time we went to Israel before the Yom Kippur war, my

husband and I. And I -I just can't describe it, how we felt. We both kissed the soil of Israel and we were just so thrilled. But also I've been very happy in the United States. I'm glad that, you know, I did go with my mother, cause we did have a loving family here. I met my father's sisters for the first time, who always sent packages while I was in the sanitarium. At that time they believed in feeding you. I was, you know, skinny after the war, but my fat cells grew in that sanitarium. Then they believed in feeding you a lot. Butter and all kinds of rich things. And they would send me clothing from my cousins and my cousins would blame me for being chubby. We had to eat because our cousin in Europe was starving. But with -- you know, the opportunities were here. We came --

Q: But let us -- before we get to the United States --

A: Okay.

Q: -- let's talk a little more about -- about the camp --

A: [indecipherable]

Q: -- yeah, about the camp. So you were in the sanitarium for nine months and they you went back to the camp itself. I -- y-you were in the sanitarium --

A: Oh, from the sanitarium --

Q: And then you were ca --

A: -- for nine months, and f -- my mother visited me once a week only, which was hard.

Q: Yeah. And then you went back to her.

A: I went back to camp at -- yeah, and I went back to school.

Q: Mm-hm. And what did you and the other kids talk about?

A: What was very sad for us and -- and a-at the same time rewarding too. I've always loved to

sing and dance and we put on wonderful performances for the people. And that -- one performance I -- I was given solo a lot, with-without any formal training but I had a good voice and I loved to sing and we put on some really cute shows, even without the ballet outfits, I'll show you the makeshift outfits they made for us. We always had managed with costumes and things. But they were a handful of kids, there were only a hundred of us or so. And there were people that came, survivors who came to see the shows, and one woman sat next to my mother and she pointed to me. She said, who knows if -- if the parents of this child is alive. There were so many children -- I had friends there that -- whose parents didn't survive. I mean, that was my lucky thing --

Q: Right.

A: -- that I survived with my mother. And she said, well, thank God, I am the parent. She said, how lucky you are, and people who lost their children, it was so sad. And I learned Polish there because there were many kids who had been hidden in convents and they didn't speak a word, they didn't even know they were Jewish. And they didn't speak a word of Yiddish. So, in order for me to be able to converse, I learned the language. And people would start speaking Polish to my mother, said I don't understand. How come? Your daughter speaks Polish. Well, my daughter picked it up.

Q: W-When you put on the shows, in what language were the shows?

A: Oh, now that was all in Yiddish.

Q: That was all in --

A: Yiddish or Hebrew. We learned Hebrew and we learned Yiddish.

Q: And you had a formal schooling there?

A: Absolutely, formal schooling with -- with report cards and excellent teachers, excellent tea --

Q: Who were the teachers?

A: But we remember -- now they would say child molestation, sex -- sex offender, we had -- and it's strange, none of us -- we had a reunion here. I have two friends, dearest friends that I met in DP camp. They were -- one was from Poland and one was from Lithuania. We found each other. And she was just here. We had a reunion because we worked as volunteers for the army, three of us. And we never talked about it, I mean, we didn't think about it, cause then we were so ashamed. There was one teacher, he was an excellent teacher, but he would invite you to his home. He would say he was going to help us, you know, with the studies or whate -- very friendly, very nice man and I -- I was always lacking a fatherly figure. And -- but he always was touchy-feely, and you know, we were developing girls. And we never, you know, none of us shared it. We had a reunion, one of the survivors lived in Vancouver, and we talked about this teacher and all of us had this same experience, how we jumped out -- I jumped out of his window, I ran when he started, you know, anything. And they said they had the same experience. And we burst out laughing, I mean it -- it's funny to us now, but we were afraid to say anything to our parents or anybody, they would think we are crazy. And we felt so dirty, we felt oh my God, what is he doing, you know, touching us like that.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

A: So it -- these teachers, a lot of them were trained as teachers and they took us on trips. There were different castles and there were a lot of marbrahim that came from Israel and they talked about Israel and that's why we -- we had [indecipherable] we had a different assembly for -- for Hertzel and Schumfeldore and different celebrations.

Q: So you became fluent in Hebrew then?

A: We learned Hebrew well, and Yiddish, right [indecipherable] that's -- yeah.

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

A: Mm-hm. That's when -- I was so delighted when I came to New York and they offered Hebrew in the junior high school and the high school. That's what I took and I continued with it.

Q: Yeah. So you -- you h -- your daily schedule was to get up and go to school?

A: Yes.

Q: And then come back to your mother at the end of the day and --

A: Yeah, and we had woods nearby and I would go with my friends and we would pick strawberries and all kinds of berries and mushrooms. And sometimes we would steal apples from orchards from the Germans and we didn't -- we would get like cans of tuna fish we didn't -- and they gave us Spam. I -- Spam, what the heck is that? So what -- my stepfather took it and he -- in exchange the Germans -- he would speak German very well, they gave him a chicken that we had slaughtered and had chicken, cause you know, th-the food was not that great that they gave you.

Q: What kind of living arrangement, how -- did you have? Were you in a --

A: We were in a -- we were in a one room with not -- all together in the one room and we had a little kitchenette. It was a barrack. The living quarters were not great, and I had hand-me-down clothing, but I was happy, you know. We had a table and chair -- chairs. They gave us basics that we would need. We had tuna fish we didn't know what to do with. Then we find -- you know, so peanut butter, and --

Q: Did you -- what were your thou -- feelings about Germans at -- at that time? When you would

see German people --

A: We did not like them, I'll tell you that. It was a beautiful country, we went to see, but --

Q: So when you would see a German on the street or German in the camp --

A: Well, they were not in -- in uniform then --

Q: No, I know.

A: -- that was --

Q: No, I know, but did it -- did you have any emotional gut feeling towards them at all?

A: All I know that I -- I was robbed of my father, my grandparents because of them. I didn't have good feel -- but I mean, I didn't blame them all, I knew that some of them who are my age, they were not at fault, they didn't do any of it, but their parents, their grandparents.

Q: What about the American, when you would see an American?

A: That made us feel good. They always gave us chocolate and they were very friendly and they were very outgoing and -- but they made it difficult too for us to come to the United States. We couldn't wait until the quota system finally -- and we were really frightened because you had to pass the health exam and if anybody was sick, even though Ellis Island was abolished at that point, you still -- you didn't make it. And they saw calcification on my lung, so my mother worried about that. But thank God we had sponsors. She had great-uncles who came to the uni -- my -- my grandfather's stepbrothers, they were here. And so we did have some help as far as finding an apartment. In the beginning it was very difficult. We lived with my aunt, my mother's sist -- only surviving sister.

Q: Your -- you're talking about in -- in the --

A: When we came to the United States --

Q: Okay, and -- and -- and --

A: -- initially.

Q: -- okay. Wh-When you were still over there in Feldafing, wa -- what were your thoughts about the United States? I know you said you wanted to go to Israel.

A: I wanted to go to Israel because I finally -- finally we had a country that we could call our own.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: We said, how wonderful this would be, to be in our very own country. To have street cleaners, to have garbage men all Jewish. Of course they're not any more, but to be surrounded and not be frightened. To be able to hold our heads up high. And we were just so happy to hear about Israel and -- and the things they were doing. Of course we knew they were in danger. The Arabs didn't love us then and they had to fight for the freedom. But when it was declared as a state, it -- but then again we also heard that the United States was so tolerant of all religions. I never felt anti-Semitism at all.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And I moved into a neighborhood -- well, initially --

Q: Okay, well, we'll get to that.

A: Sorry.

Q: Yeah. When you were still in the camp, the DP camp and you were with the other kids your age, did you ever tell each other the stories of what you all had been through during the --

A: Yes.

Q: -- war years?

A: Yes.

Q: Would you exchange stories with them?

A: Yes, in fact one of the -- there was a grandmother and a little child, her name was Mirunya and this grandmother told us about how she rescued her granddaughter. Her -- her children didn't make it. It was an adorable child. And even though it -- we picked up -- these were the remnants of the war that picked up the pieces, and suddenly you saw a lot of weddings, a lot of babies that were born. You saw life again. We had theater, we had the opera. I mean, there was a thirst for all of that that we were -- was missing from our lives.

Q: You said you were in a -- performances.

A: Lots of performances, oh --

Q: Can you sing one that --

A: -- we just, it's --

Q: -- a little bit of one of the songs?

A: We -- we still did so -- we did a lot of Hebrew songs --

Q: Can you sing one of them a little bit?

A: -- in Hebrew, we'd -- we did Arab dances, and it was just -- it was really -- you know, when people say, oh DP camp -- and both my friend Ada and I said, this is a happy time. We bo -- we had boyfriends, we had -- we remember two boys, we tried to locate them, but we couldn't. We still remember names, I have pictures of them. There was such a bond, because everybody lost grandparents, everybody lost somebody. We --

Q: So there was a -- a --

A: -- we were very close knit.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And then I was --

Q: It was like a youth group type of feeling.

A: Yeah, we all scattered. Everybody just went to different places. That was sad, parting like that.

Q: Can you sing any songs, or -- one or two lines of any of those songs?

A: I can't say --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Oh my God, we're really going back to my youth. You know, basically the yid -- Zionist songs that you know that were the very old ones, the Chenna Chenna, and [sings] I love that. [sings] Sang songs from Israel all the time, all the time.

Q: What were the names of the two friends you said you got together --

A: Ada Rosenberg, whose father was the journalist. She was in Russia, hiding in Russia like my -- my late husband. And then Ruthka, who immigrated to British Columbia with her family and we found her -- we just -- unfortunately she has died, but we found her six years ago through the holocaust -- a little holocaust museum on the island that my friend was volunteering. And she talked to her friend and she says, Ruthka, I know where Ruth -- oh, she was so excited and she sent us a letter. And I ran to New York when I heard she was around because we were such -- she says, you were my best friend in DP camp, and --

Q: What -- what did the three of you do in DP camp together?

A: We were very good friends, we did a lot of fun things together.

Q: Like what?

A: We took walks together, we went on trips together, we -- we picked berries together, we were in classes together. We were in all the shows together. I have pictures of it.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And I have one good friend who was Orthodox and I lost touch with her, but we were inseparable. We both had the long braids and w-we really loved one another. I remember staying with her all day when my mother remarried.

Q: What was Rutka's last name? Rutka's last name?

A: Who -- Ruth? Ruth Kran.

Q: Kran.

A: Mm-hm.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

A: -- and she lived in the same barrack [indecipherable]

Q: Was she your age?

A: She was exactly my age, yes, and she too was an only child. Some of parents had babies in DP camp, but my mother felt that I was an only child and when she remarried she didn't want me to feel like the stepchild -- I was a stepchild, my stepfather was not very good to me, but she didn't want me -- want to bring other children into the world where I would feel the difference.

Q: Your stepfather's name was?

A: His name was Leo Neufeld and he sort of adopted me, but I can look back and see that he lost his son and wife and he was a bitter person and not very good to me, let's put it this way. Didn't allow me to go on trips, there -- he never came to visit me in the sanitarium. But it -- I did go on

trips. And we went to different ski resorts and we -- we did a lot with the Israeli [indecipherable]. We would have bonfires, we belonged to -- we -- in the summertime we had the [indecipherable], we had camps with tents. So they tried to give us as normal a life as possible, what we missed. And some people had motorcycles and -- and bicycles. My friend Ada, whose father was a journalist, I thought she lived in the rich part cause she had her own room and that -- she said, what are you talking about, we were in barracks also. But they had a little more, she had a bicycle and so did -- her brother was born there and then I had another friend, this Ruthka, I remember holding her brother as a baby.

Q: When you said --

A: We started being interested in boys, we had Leon and then there -- there were the two twins, they had crushes on both Ada Rosenberg and I, and we really -- we socialized and we -- we had fun together. We were so happy to be alive, happy to be in the school, and we had a -- a special bonding and we fought for one another. We -- we all were lacking grandparents, we all lacked a childhood, we didn't have the childhood, the normal childhood. I know we didn't have any love left for the Germans, let's put it this way, or the Poles for that matter. Most the Polish people, they experienced when they went back home, there were -- many Poles said, what are you doing back? We thought they killed all the Jews. And many lost their lives, so it was -- it was sad, but some were saved. There were ri -- Righteous Gentile. They were saved in nunneries and -- and some Poles took them in, but of course they didn't want to give them up either. They just thought they were Christian.

Q: When you had gone back to -- let's back up a little bit, when you had gone back to your home village, home town -- this is before you left to the --

A: Oh yes.

Q: Did you experience --

A: You mean [indecipherable]

Q: -- after --

A: -- liberated?

Q: Yeah, after Shagarat and you went back for that. Did you experience any anti-Semitism when you left Shagarat and came back?

A: Well, in -- it was the Iron Curtain --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- they had -- didn't display it openly --

Q: Y-Yeah.

A: -- but I was afraid, as a Jew, although the communist movement, you know they -- they said they loved all children and blah, blah, blah, all of that. What was interesting though was that I lacked religion. You know, come to think of it, you said I -- I came from a pious home, you know, before the war. I guess my mother lost some of her belief because of what happened. I mean, how could God do this to such a pious family like my -- my parents, who were just so charitable. And it was the same goyim that they were so good to. He would give them credit. He had a dry goods store, but when it was their holiday and one goy would invite my grandparents, even though they didn't eat anything at the weddings, to the weddings. And they're the same goyim that turned on them and they -- and they butchered the family? I -- how can human beings do this to other human beings? You just wonder what -- what triggers it.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: That's why it's important, you know, it -- it could happen, God forbid, could happen again.

Q: We're back in the DP camp.

A: Back in the DP camp.

Q: And you're ready, getting ready to leave. What was that like, when you knew you were going to be leaving?

A: It was a happy time. I knew I was going to see aunts and cousins that I had never met.

Q: And you came by boat.

A: And the arrival -- oh my God, I remember that journey. I think that cured me of any cruises, I never wanted to go on a cruise or on a boat. That -- of course we didn't go under plush circumstances at all. We were transported on -- on the army transport. I remember General Haan to this day and by coincidence, my husband was on the General Haan when he was drafted into the army and he was not sent to Korea, but instead he was sent to Germany, and he spoke German, so he had some very interesting conversation in bars with some Germans as a young Jewish American soldier. But in any case, that journey was horrible. We were --

Q: How did you get to the boat?

A: We got there by train.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And I know we went through all kinds of exams, and had the papers and we were allowed luggage and we were assigned to a huge room with bunk beds, and my mother said, if you have to be sick you better choose a -- a top bunk bed and we did. I was together with my mother and both she and I were sick the entire time. Did not set foot into a dining room. I think we had maybe two grapes -- grapefruit. If we had a grapefruit a day it was a lot and we -- but the day

that we landed and -- near the Statue of Liberty, I will never forget that. They -- that's where we finally -- when we arrived, we got on -- onto the deck and when we saw the statue it -- you really felt such welcome. And at -- it was such an overwhelming feeling, I said, why me? Why was I privileged, and how come not the others? And I was happy, very happy that I was finally coming to a country, land of opportunity that I'd heard so much about. Course I would have been happier gone to Israel, but I was happy, I made peace with it. After all, I wanted to be with my mother and other family members. And we got a big reception.

Q: Who me -- who met you --

A: My mother's sister, husband and baby and all the relatives on my -- from my father's side, my -- my father's -- my father's two sisters Aunt Bertha and Sarah and they had dinner for us --

Q: Well, when you came down onto the ground, onto the American ground, what was that like? Do you remember any special --

A: It's a good feeling, but it was strange too, cause they -- they thought we -- some of them who had emigrated years ago, you know, they thought we didn't see lights and this is a light. And the salad was kind of strange because we didn't -- we ate different, it was not like the iceberg lettuce, we were used to different salad. And they served us salads and they kept asking us if we saw -- and of course I didn't speak a word of English. I had -- when we moved in with my mother's sister, who had a one bedroom apartment, it was very difficult to get apartment --

Q: This is 1949?

A: This is the 19 -- September 1949. At -- she lived in the Midwood section of Brooklyn where I thought, oh the Jews are so rich, because they had their own home and a piano in the house and oh my God, I -- but I did not open up my mouth for three months because I didn't speak English.

And I'm very frustrated I remember because they gave me a -- an I.Q. test and I could hardly speak the language. So when I got to high school and the principal called me in, and he said, I've never seen anybody improve so much on the I.Q. test, I said look, you gave it to a greenhorn who didn't know a tailor from a dressmaker. I said, it's lucky I didn't test as an imbecile, I passed it. Yes, I didn't pass it with high marks, but I said, no wonder it's gone up so much, I said, now I know the language. And they frustrated me even further, they gave me French, they put me in a special class. I said oh my God, you know, that was really unreal. I look at it today they have the bilingual education, and I say what -- what's going on, you know? They bend over backwards, then it was sink or swim, when I --

Q: Were you still living with your relatives?

A: Lived with my aunt for three months until we got our own apartment and we moved to a neighborhood that was not quite as affluent. There was -- we lived in Midwood section with -- in Flatbush near Brooklyn College with my aunt, and then we moved to Bensonhurst, where it was a mixed neighborhood, Italian and Jewish. And more people -- some people spoke Yiddish as well, it -- it -- I felt more comfortable, I -- perhaps also because my English was quite -- you know, much better.

Q: Yeah, Mm-hm.

A: And thanks to the land of opportunity really because we were poor and my -- my stepfather didn't really have a trade here. [coughs] Excuse me. He had been a businessman in -- in Germany, and there was no business for him to take over so they taught him how to house paint. My mother's uncles were in the real estate, so he became a housepainter. And my mother wanted to work so that I wouldn't have to go to clinics and he didn't like that too much. So she quit and

so I remember working my way through school really. While I went -- was in high school I always had jobs from the time I was 15. I worked in bakeries, I worked in -- in different stores, I worked as a counselor. And I came to -- when I was -- graduated from high school and wanted to go on to college I definitely had the grade, and my stepfather didn't want me to go to college. He believed girls should marry rich [indecipherable] it was not easy, I -- we had lived in a one bedroom apartment, my room was the living room, the sleep sofa and my pinups were on the closet, but I did not leave home ye -- at that time you respected your parents and my mother went through a lot with me and I -- it was a di -- a difficult time, but I -- I told my mother I can't -- I just for [indecipherable] like, I didn't go to school right away, but I said I have to go to school, cause people even offered to give me money to send me away, but I said, I can't do that to my mother. Brooklyn College accepted -- you know, if you had A average, the girls had to have 90 - 95, the boys only 80 something. So -- it was free, other than just the books. I said, I'll go to scho -- I'll support myself. During the day I went -- I worked in a real estate office and at night I -- I went to school at night until I had to go student teach. You know, you have to do that for a year, so I transferred and I started going in during the day. And I met my wonderful husband while I was in school and we married in 1959, I married him and I met him in '56.

Q: Was he also a student?

A: He was a student --

Q: Also?

A: -- right, under the G.I. bill and --

Q: When you were in high school --

A: Yes.

Q: -- did you tell the other American students what you had been through, d -- or did they ask or did the teachers ask?

A: They never talked about the Holocaust then. There were no Holocaust studies at all, as if --

Q: Right.

A: -- it didn't happen.

Q: But did teachers ask you about your background and what you had been through? Did you confide in any of them?

A: Um, no. I do remember -- people really didn't want to hear too much about it. I didn't want to -- I myself didn't want to speak Yiddish then to my mother. I said, we're in America, we have to talk English. But as I got older, I -- I wanted to cling to the Yiddish. That was my, you know, Mamalashen. And no, strangely enough, they didn't talk of it, but the -- my relatives wanted to know what we went -- what we lived through, but nobody from school, we didn't have --

Q: So the other teenagers were not --

A: -- counseling. No. My friends, yes, they -- they would -- there was one, because her parents came from Europe, they were the ones that were interested. They would ask me questions. But a -- and then in college, of course, it was different. People wanted to know. It was interesting, they wanted to know what happened and -- you know.

Q: I mean, I was asking because I would imagine on the registration form in high school puts your di -- place of birth and date of birth --

A: Absolutely. What made me --

Q: -- and you would think the teachers would want to know a little bit about it.

A: What made me extremely nervous was in New York we had to pass some very strict exams

before we became a teacher, before you were licensed. And we had to go to a speech pedagogy exam. And having not been born in the United States, I was so -- and you know, people in Brooklyn have very distinct accents, that I made sure in college I took speech classes and I said, I'm going to pass this exam, because some of my friends who were native Americans, they were born in the States didn't pass it and I really was scared. I said, uh-oh, I'm going to go before this whole board, there are principals and teachers and they gave me things to read and things to pronounce, and I s -- I was so nervous. Oh, never -- and when I passed I was ecstatic. I just didn't -- I was so careful to enunciate and pronounce everything correctly. So I'm going to show them that -- as soon -- I said, they'll see where I was born and they're probably going to give me a hard time. So I was thrilled, I really was. And it -- I was very grateful, I -- I -- I'm still very patriotic, I think it's a wonderful place for somebody, you know, we didn't have anything and I -- you can make something of yourself.

Q: So you met your husband, you got married in '59 --

A: Met my husband, we were starving students, we were in love and we didn't have to have the house, we didn't have to have the car. With my -- my savings I bought our first car that we used for a honeymoon to Canada. He accepted a -- a teaching assistantship at the University of Maryland. He was a math major and physics minor and on 1800 dollars a year. I was supposed to support us through a -- through his schooling, but we got lonely. There weren't very many Jewish graduate students and we would go to New York quite often to see our parents. I became pregnant when my -- you know, before I was supposed to. I -- it was planned, it was not an unplanned pregnancy. But we managed because at that time the gifts that we had gotten for our wedding and we managed with little.

Q: And he was born in Germany?

A: Pardon?

Q: Where was he born?

A: Oh no, my husband was born in Poland.

Q: Poland.

A: And they were hiding. They lost their entire family except for my father-in-law's sister, he -- his whole family and my mother-in-law's family too, as a matter of fact. And they were hiding in Russia, they went through a hard time. He was the only one that I dated that was a greenhorn, so to speak, only went out with American, but --

Q: When did he get to the United States, your husband?

A: In '49. We didn't know each other.

Q: I see.

A: But they came at the same time. However, he was not as fortunate. He did not go to -- to the schools, he had to help his parents out. They didn't have relatives like we did. And so he worked the garment center, he would take classes at night. And then he was drafted into the army shortly after and he went to school on the G.I. bill and not every college was going to accept him, but he was brilliant in math. And Long Island University --

Q: And his first name?

A: Nathan. And he survived the war with his parents and brother. Brother who was born near Siberia in Russia. They had a very tough time.

Q: What town in Poland was he from?

A: He was from Pulawy a Wisla, near Warsaw. I have the [indecipherable] book.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Yeah, his father was a tailor and he was a very special person, very bright. He was a rocket motor scientist, worked for Johns Hopkins applied physics lab. And we had three daughters and a wonderful marriage, only to be short-lived unfortunately for 30 -- 35 beautiful years and then he went -- got cancer.

Q: Oh.

A: Yeah, lung cancer.

Q: Mm, mm.

A: But he fought it valiantly and we had our -- our first house in the family and then the cars and we thought -- well, we really had everything, I would re -- I would go back to the apartment and if he were only alive, I didn't care if -- we were very happy together. And produced three wonderful daughters and I'm lucky to have them around, but I'm -- my grandchildren, they're my life, as you know. Grandchildren are wonderful.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about your feelings about what you went through. I know you said before that you had lost your childhood in those early years and it was not a normal childhood and --

A: And I lost my father, my --

Q: Right.

A: I always felt a void in my life not having a father, but my mother's sister married a wonderful, wonderful man who was like my surrogate father --

Q: Surrogate father.

A: -- to me, however he also -- he died very young. He was -- left at -- at the time a 12 year old and a five year old, so --

Q: Are you -- are you angry that you had to go through what you went through while others your age were having an easy childhood in --

A: No --

Q: -- United States?

A: I was not angry with other people about it. It was something that a -- like people ask me how did you go through everything and still have a bright disposition? I said look, it's other human beings who did it, I don't believe that a -- God did it. He -- yes, I felt deprived of a childhood and I had sadness and sometimes it would surface when my kids said they were under pressure and I used to say, what do you know about pressure? I mean here they had -- and we wanted them -- please don't get me wrong, we wanted them to have everything we didn't have, but they lived in a beautiful home and they didn't strug -- we had provided for them and -- and they -- they had their own rooms, which I never had and -- but you know, it's normal. You can't just bring your life into their -- but at one point if they would complain they had so much pressure, I would -- then I would see that my background was with me, I -- what do you know from pressure? You've had loving parents and thank God you have your grandma, and --

Q: When they were the age you were when, let's say, you had to go to Shagarat or go through certain things --

A: Yeah, I look at my granddaughter now, I say oh my God, was I that age?

Q: Right, do -- right, what does that do when you see -- when you saw your children and now your grandchildren --

A: Oh, I think what --

Q: -- the same age you were at those times? Does it bring back memories for you, or --

A: No, well -- well, I -- I look at my granddaughter who is five and a half [indecipherable] you know and I say thank God. Thank God there is not, an-and I hope that they'll never be war, I don't want them to go through anything like that again. I don't want them to go through loss like that again. And -- and war is a horrible thing for children. I mean, it -- just terrible, I mean breaks my heart there is still a lot of suffering and a lot of poverty in the world now.

Q: Do you think you would have been a different person today if you hadn't gone through what you did go through?

A: Hard to say. I don't know. Would have been happier having had the love of my father and the guidance of a father. I wouldn't have felt that -- that void. That was hard, especially when I was a teenager or later when I had to introduce my dates to my stepfather, who didn't -- wasn't a talker and who -- who was really [indecipherable] in my life. That was hard. And hard not having Seders and you know, I -- I'm surprised I picked up as much, cause I guess it was inborn because my -- my father trained me to be -- have such feelings, but I'm very involved with shul and it gives me comfort. But yes, I ask questions. Why and why did my husband have to die young and -- and why, but I don't feel sorry for myself, it just -- I feel sorry for those who didn't make it. Why didn't my aunt, who was only seven years older than I, she never made anything, you know. So I thank God for what I have, I'm grateful. Yes, I'm angry at the people who did these horrible things. Th-The farmers, how -- how they could turn like that on my grandparents, who were such pious people and you say why? You know, you're supposed to be rewarded with sedakah and you know [indecipherable] Hasidim and --

Q: Are you more comfortable around people who've -- that -- who are survivors also?

A: I'm sorry?

Q: Are you more comfortable around others who -- other people who are survivors as opposed to people who were -- who didn't have to go through what --

A: There's a special bond, but it's interesting that you ask that. I'm very comfortable. However, when my husband and I joined the child survivor group and we went to a couple of meetings, both of us felt that some of the people were very bitter and they had a lot of psychological problems and they wore it on their sleeve, whereas my husband and I had gone through a lot, we just put it in the past. We were grateful for what we have here and try not to be bitter. I mean, what's the point? How you -- you survived, you're alive, you picked up the pieces. You have a beautiful family, you just speak up for the -- the ones that are less fortunate and you have to speak out when you see injustices done to -- you know, things that are done to other people, so that it doesn't happen again. Yes, my heart bleeds for Israel, I always worry. I know I'm an American, I'm a Jew, but somehow there i -- I have this special feeling for Israel that if God forbid anything would happen to Israel, you know, it -- what are we again? You know we're -- we're a people without a land. Yes, I -- I'm a citizen of the United States, I have all my full rights here, but somehow I feel like I belong there becau -- and -- and I think that's as a result of having survived the war, not having a place to go, that's all. [sings] Tell me where shall I go. I mean, that has so much meaning to me, cause every door was closed to us. And look at how many children, the innocent children, that's what really gets to me. But I'm thankful for what I have. You know, some people look at their glass half full and some people look at it half empty and I thank God for [indecipherable] yes, it could have been different, but you know, life went on, I have a beautiful family. Hitler didn't succeed. And people tell me, we thank God you're here, what do you mean you -- you say why me? It -- every shul needs a reader who

[indecipherable] this one lady who is very sweet. I said thank you very much, but -- so -- and -- and I hope it -- it will never happen again and -- and any of my grandchildren [indecipherable] I wouldn't want them to go through that. And I think because I lacked grandparents, I bend over backwards to be a good grandparent. I try very hard and bond with the kids, and help out, as you do with your -- your gra -- it's a pleasure. It's just a pleasure. And I don't understand how people could do that to kids.

End of Tape Two, Side B

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Rita Lifschitz Rubinstein. This is tape number three, side A. You got your teaching certificate and then you started teaching?

A: Got my teaching certificate and I was thrilled to get a job at Olney Elementary School where -- this was 1960. I thought I earned a lot of money, it was 7,000 a year and I was supposed to support my husband through graduate school. However in 1961 our very first child Nina was born and then in ’63 her sister Sherri and 60 si -- six, Rene. And of course we were not lacking for names, unfortunately, we had lots of names to give them. Wonderful girls, we loved being parents and very proud of them. One is a psycholog -- she’s industrial psychologist, one earned a degree in law, she’s an attorney and -- and the third one is a -- a nurse at Hopkins, and my husband was privileged to walk two of them down the aisle with me and he was -- he did see four grandchildren, but unfortunately the oldest, when he died in ’95 was only six and the youngest at the time was only two. So he -- he saw four grandchildren and four have been born since, and he would have been so proud of all of them. Just -- I regret the fact that he never was there for a Bar Mitzvah, but I -- I feel that he was there in spirit, because I can see some of the characteristics that he had in each and every one of my grandchildren. And we talk about him a lot and his -- his memory will be for a blessing and I know he’ll always be remembered. And one of his grandchildren has a love of soccer just like he did, and she’s a good soccer player. So my grandchildren range in age from 20 down to two. And --

Q: And their names are?

A: -- I thank God for them. I -- names are Sammy, which would have been my -- my uncle who

was killed in the Holocaust. Then I have a Max, Maxwell David Heller and he's named after my father, David. And -- and then we have Alexis. She has other grandparents who are survivors too, so she was named after that side. And then we have Mitchell, Mitchell Heller and he was named after my late husband's brother, Baruch -- Benny. And then came Tobi, Tavulah, who is my mother, named after my mother and she was born si -- six weeks after my husband died. It was too hard to give her hi-his name. And after Tobi came Jacklyn and she has my husband's name Natanya, which is a gift from God. And then my daughter Rene has the two younger ones, she has Chelsea and Blake, who are -- unfortunately don't have Hebrew names because she married a non-Jew. And -- but I love them all and that's my mishpokhe. I am proud of all of them.

Q: Can we talk a little bit more about your thoughts? Are there any sights -- sights or smells or reminders that you come across today that kind of make you go back in time to your experience?

A: In time from when I was a little girl?

Q: Yeah, when you were little, going through the war. Anything today that sparks a return in your mind?

A: I know Seders and Sukkoth, I always had tears in my eyes when I saw people celebrating Pesach because I -- I didn't have that, I'd -- I'd recall [indecipherable] I was very little and I recall the Sukkoth, but yeah, that's why I -- I really celebrate them fully and always invite people to Seder. Smells, I -- I've -- I know from what my mother told me about her mother having been such a wonderful balabusta, she made everything from scratch, so whether it's -- I was told the difference, she was an excellent cook and an excellent baker and -- and did everything, but I really don't --

Q: Nothing triggers --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- you back in time.

A: No.

Q: What was it like to become a citizen?

A: It was a great feeling. I'd have to do it on my own and of course when I went to court I had already been through school so I did -- it was a joke the questions that they would ask, I knew I would pass. It felt very good. Felt I belonged and it was great. Didn't feel anti -- any anti-Semitism, so --

Q: Did you experience any anti-Semitism in the United States?

A: Personally no, but my grandchildren here and there have, and they've heard it, and so that was very hurtful to me and they were very angry. And this -- a hockey field, ice hockey? Particular instance where -- yeah.

Q: You mean, other children --

A: They were called a name, and --

Q: By other children.

A: By other children. And I said, how could this be in the United States, my grandchild, you know. But I know it's there and I know it's hidden. You feel it. I did -- oh, I shouldn't say, I did experience it. My uncle had a house in the country and suddenly I saw a sign, no dogs or Jews allowed. And this was the country club, yes. So I knew that there were places that were forbidden and I knew that Jewish students had a tough time here, I mean I -- I learned history. When they went to medical school and other places, it was -- it was harder for them. But we

were always known as the people of the book, and we -- so we excelled, we knew we had to excel.

Q: Do you think of yourself a survivor? Do you call yourself that?

A: Definitely. Definitely. I'll always be a survivor. I felt like a greenhorn for a long time, I -- I didn't after -- you know.

Q: Is it a d -- a defining --

A: Does it define me?

Q: Yeah.

A: I think I am -- in a way I was glad that I married a survivor because we understood each other fully. You know, the sadness and there was a lot of un -- [coughs] Excuse me. There was a lot of unspoken, but we had so much more in common. And there's a special bond that we all -- survivors have. So I think yes. My children also know that they're the product of survivors. They think they were brought up differently because -- well, I don't think so because I co -- I consider myself American, I -- I went through schools here, public schools, but I definitely feel like I'm a survivor. I survived the war, I feel I can survive anything. I'm also a cancer survivor, so --

Q: You -- you started to talk about your teaching experience and then you had the children and then did you go to --

A: All right. At the time when I was teaching my career ended early because I became pregnant and they didn't want pregnant women in the school system. So I decided to rear them when they were very young, myself and stay home and do with a little bit less materially. And then when I was member of Hadassah and somebody was teaching at the Chaim Weizmann Yiddish Hebrew School and they needed a music teacher and Yiddish teacher and so I said oh, it sounds

wonderful and I went for an interview and got the job. So I taught Yiddish music, brought me back to my music and my days in DP camp, and Hebrew and [indecipherable]. And then after my teaching there about four or five years, the principal, Frieda Frank had retired and she asked me to take over for her. I became principal and I enjoyed that very much. And as a -- a Hebrew school teacher I also went to different training session and I was trained to become a Bar and Bat Mitzvah tutor. I learned the trope for Torah and Haftorah. And I had private students. I did it for a number of my friends, they were my guinea pigs in the beginning. Friends' children that is, who are now all grown and have children beyond the Bar Mitzvah years. So I enjoyed that very much. I've also taught adult -- adults -- I've had four adult B'nai Mitzvah that I -- I trained and that was rewarding. And right now they all -- all the training I do is for my grandchildren. I've had the pleasure of -- of teaching three of -- four of actually -- five of my grandchildren, prepared them for Bar and Bat Mitzvah and I'm looking forward to the others in the future, yeah.

Q: That's wonderful.

A: And I -- I think it's wonderful that I belong to an egalitarian shul where we were given complete rights and I can read Torah and Haftorah, I do that in memory of -- of my parents and I chant the Haftorah and privileged to ha -- ha -- I'm happy to have the privilege to give -- to be given the opportunity where I could read Torah, because I remember we were not always egalitarian and when my mother died and I went to shul every day to say Kaddish, they didn't recognize me as part of the minyan and I fought it -- and we fought it and under our new rabbi, Rabbi Jonah Layman, he gave us full rights and I was very happy. W-We actually got those -- we were counted in the minyan before Jonah joined us and I was happy because unfortunately when my husband died and he didn't leave any male heirs and my daughters went to say

Kaddish, they did not look for a 10th man, they were counted in the minyan. So I am very proud -- I don't know what my grandparents are thinking about it, but I -- I'm very happy that we have equal rights, cause they were all Orthodox.

Q: Do you have any survivor friends or have you talked to survivors, other survivors who say they've lost their faith because of what they went through?

A: Well, my own mother really was not as pious here as she had been. She -- sh-she -- she was not Orthodox any more, she traveled on Shabbat and a -- yes, she kept kosher, definitely and -- as I do. But she was angry with God, yes, so to speak and yes I have survivor friends and we do have a special bond, have older friends and younger friends and they're -- they're like family.

Q: What were your thoughts during the Eichmann trial?

A: Oh, I was watching that and I -- I was overwhelmed by what people went through and sometimes I f -- I felt guilty that I didn't go through as much as some people and what -- what is strange, the competition sometimes bothers me among survivors. When you tell them where you're from, or what you've gone through, they say oh, that's nothing. You were not in Auschwitz or Dachau, you don't have a number. But how are they to say what I've experienced and what losses -- I've had losses. I was robbed of a childhood. And in a way that's what kept me away from some of the groups, because I was never honored -- not in my shul, my shul I've been honored many times, but never honored to light a candle, and Transnistria existed, it was a labor camp. So in a sense I felt a little hurt. I didn't make waves, but -- and a -- I've heard other people experience the same thing. People, for instance who were in Russia. My friend Ada, she also experienced that, they say, what did you go through? And you were a kid, you can't remember much. But we did. We're robbed of our childhood and -- and we certainly went

through a holocaust, our own personal holocaust.

Q: How would you describe yourself? Are you an American, are you Jewish, are you Romanian?

A: No, definitely not Romanian. I have no desire to go back. Well, sometimes --

Q: That was going to be my next question, right.

A: Yeah, sometimes I've wanted see where [indecipherable] say oh, it wasn't so great. I would -- I'm proud to say I'm an American, yes, very proud and a -- I'm a Jew first. I will always feel very, very Jewish, because no matter what, the Jews who've tried to hide that they were Jewish, you couldn't hide it. Even those who had, they say [indecipherable] whatever, even if you had a little blood, the great-great grandparents, those Germans found you and they labeled you, you were a Jew. But no, I don't mean it in that sense, I am proud of who I am. I'm proud of my people, things that we've gone through and we persevere. And that's why we exist. And we -- we cling to our belief that the -- the Torah, if we only would all practice what the Torah preaches it would be a wonderful world. And the same thing for the Christians.

Q: What do you think your reasons are for doing this interview?

A: What are the reasons?

Q: For doing this interview.

A: To keep the memory alive and to say to deniers, you can't deny it, it happened. Let's hope it never happens again.

Q: Mm. Before we close, is there any message you wanted to give to your grandchildren? Anything special you wanted to say to them, or --

A: Yes. First of all, I mean, to my children and grandchildren, I love them very much, I'm very proud of them, but I want them to remember to always be proud … of their heritage, proud of

being Jewish and always fight for the underdog, do not stay -- stand back and say oh, they don't mean me. Even if it's somebody out of the religion, out of your faith, always speak up for the truth and for justice. And -- and do the right thing, as Grandpa said, always do the right thing. And know I'll be with you, watching over you no matter where I am and I'll always love you.

Q: Well that -- well that [tape interruption]. Have you been to the Holocaust ceremony at the rotunda of the capital, United States capital?

A: Yes, and I will never forget the very first time I was seated in the rotunda. It was an overwhelming experience, very emotional. I have taken, when we were allowed to, I have taken two of my grandchildren there and two of my daughters there. I -- I said -- it was such a -- an overwhelming emotional experience, I wanted them to experience it. Of course they experienced it differently than I did. But the first time I sat in the rotunda and suddenly I saw all the military walking in with the flags that liberated the camps, I -- I just started crying like a baby. It was a feeling of joy and a feeling of sadness and a feeling of saying well here I am, the greenhorn, sitting in the United States, a citizen, a -- in the rotunda and being with other survivors and seeing the flags and it brought back memories of the war and saying why me, why was I privileged? And especially this year it was very emotional because I sat very close to the stage and there was Elie Wiesel sitting next to our President Obama. And President Obama addressing us. I-I will never forget that, I was really choked up, it was quite an experience. And it -- it made me proud to be an American and seeing that they recognize the Holocaust. I mean, it's sad that we had it but at least it's there and -- and they recognize it by honoring the memory of the dead by having the Holocaust Museum, which is a-an educational tool and -- and I see so many people from different walks of life on line and that makes me feel good. Because hopefully through

education, something like this will not happen again. And so I have volunteered and I will start working at the Holocaust Museum myself. It's difficult, yes. Having been through the museum, it's -- it's ha -- very hard to take when you see very graphic pictures and when you walk into a room with pictures of smiling faces and families that were, that are no longer here because the entire town was gone, maybe a fe -- a handful of people survived, that's very hard, but it's an important lesson. And I think people should go and -- and be educated and I'm glad that they are offering it now as part of the curriculum in the schools. So I think it's my duty, it's time for me to -- to do some volunteering there as well.

Q: Are there any names of relatives you'd like to mention that we haven't talked about?

A: Yeah, my mother -- my grandparents, my mother's side, my -- my grandfather Zev Mirabaum, Worf Mirabaum and his wife, Zora Brina Mirabaum. Her brother Shmul, or Sammy, as they called him. A-Anita, Menusha and Esther, who would have been only seven years older than I, she was born in 1929. May their memory be for a blessing and my [indecipherable] my grandma -- my father -- my father's mother who -- who died in labor camp in Transnistria, were wonderful -- they were wonderful people.

Q: Before we close, you had been talking about a singing group that you have started, can we end on that note? Tell me a little bit about the singing group.

A: We're called Die Freyliche Knaidlach which -- the Happy Dumplings. And we sing mostly Yiddish songs and some Ladino and Hebrew songs. And we bring joy to people. We've sung in various -- he -- in Hebrew homes and nursing homes. We've sung at the Israeli embassy, at Catholic University, Montgomery College, University of Maryland. And music is wonderful medicine for some people. It i -- it evokes such emotion. People with Alzheimer's who have not

spoken for quite some time suddenly start crying and singing along with us. We derive a lot of pleasure and at the same time we feel we're doing a mitzvah and it's -- it's wonderful for us as well. It's a healing. Music really heals. We love bringing some joy, some freyliche to people and it was s -- it really saved me after my husband died. I immersed myself in it and I'm teaching Yiddish to my fellow knaidlach and they enjoy it immensely too and it brings joy to people. So I'm -- I'm happy to be part of the group.

Q: Do-Does your group have a motto or a slogan?

A: Yes, and just like knaidlach, we find ourselves offering hot soup, sometimes in cold soup or just like good knaidlach we always rise to the top. And that's it. I am also involved in other two musical groups, the [indecipherable] choir and the Gaithersburg chorus. And we do quite a few Yiddish songs there as well.

Q: Well that's a -- a wonderful motto to end up on. Thank you so much for doing this interview. This -- this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Rita Lifschitz Rubinstein.

End of Tape Three, Side A

Conclusion of Interview