

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Irene Silver  
March 1, 2010  
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## PREFACE

The following interview 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.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

**IRENE SILVER**  
**March 1, 2010**

**Beginning File One**

Question: This is a **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with **Irene Silver**, conducted by **Gail Schwartz**, on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010, in **Olney, Maryland**.

Answer: It's **Silver Springs**. It should be **Olney**, but they decided on **Silver Spring** as being the address.

Q: Okay.

**End of File One**

**Interview with Irene Silver**  
**March 1, 2010**

**Beginning File Two**

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** volunteer collection interview with **Irene Silver**. And you were talking about your experience raising your children and – and their religious –

A: Affiliations?

Q: Yeah, mm-hm.

A: Well, that was about it, as far as that, you know, that – they're – they're all bringing up their children in the Jewish tradition. Since I was never that deeply steeped in religion, certainly I – I don't feel that they should be doing anything different. And – but I'm happy about the – the way that they are being brought up in.

Q: Okay. Okay. Are you more comfortable with people who lived through the war, than let's say Americans here, who never had to experience what you experienced? Are you angry that others – that you had to experience things that others didn't have to, by living in a different country?

A: No. I am basically – I'm basically very tolerant. I don't judge other people, and the fact that I had to live through the war, and others didn't, I'm happy that some people didn't have to experience it. Of course, I'm angry that – that the people who were there, and – and suffered, that – that, of course, is a very deep anger, but you

**Interview with Irene Silver**  
**March 1, 2010**

can't be angry forever, you can't think about it forever, or your life will become miserable. And am I more comfortable? Not necessarily. I have very close friends who have never gone through an – through it. But I do feel more comfortable, and be f – and – and are close to those friends of mine who – who understand, as much as they can, what happened. I don't think I would be very comfortable with people who say, well, you know, what happened, happened, and let's just forget about it. I would not want to hear that. There's one other thing that sometimes comes up, and it really, I think is unfair and bothers me; is when people say, well, why didn't the Jews rise up? Why did they just go there like sheep? Well, times were very different. Civilians did not have any arms. They couldn't defend themselves against an army. How could a civilian without any arms, stand up to an army, with – with guns and ammunition, and – and tanks, and everything else. And in the end, there were those who were still surviving in the ghetto, who did fight, and they fought to the end. But that was at the very, very end, and they felt they would try to do anything they could. But the general population, they had no way to defend themselves. In the beginning, nobody knew about the concentration camps, at least I don't know if they – that's what I hear, that they didn't know. I certainly was too young to know anything like that. But I don't know if my family knew about the camps. I think that eventually it became clear that people who went never came

**Interview with Irene Silver**  
**March 1, 2010**

back, and they – that there were these camps. But I just don't want to hear people saying, why did they not fight back? I'd like to see how they would feel if they were in that situation. Now of course, anybody can get a gun, and anybody, just about, can defend themselves. But I don't know what would happen if that ever happened again, I hope it never does, but y-you should never judge people if you have not been in that situation.

Q: Are you a different person because of what you experienced?

A: Yes. When I was still with my parents, even in the ghetto, I was not only – I was an only child. I was – trying to think of the right word, I was doted upon. My mother would feed me – first the nan – my nanny and then my mother would feed me til I was probably about seven or eight years old, because I didn't like to eat. And so there was always somebody taking care of me, I was really well taken care of. And because I was with my family, and with – with my parents, I didn't feel that I had to behave in any certain way. I don't know how I did behave, but I'm sure I could do whatever I really wanted, if it was safe. But when I left the ghetto, and I was with strangers, I learned to be not only obedient, but not to annoy other people. And so I think that I became more tolerant of others. I think that I was spoiled when I was very young, but I didn't gr – but after that I didn't grow up very spoiled, I – I always had to – when a child grows up like my children, for instance, if you are not

**Interview with Irene Silver**  
**March 1, 2010**

happy about something, you let your parents know. Well, when they're not your parents, you're not going to let them know. And even – even with my aunt and uncle, who were certainly my closest family, but still, they were not my parents. And so, I was very careful most of my life, as to how I behaved. Now, other than that, I – I don't know if I would have grown up to be a social worker. Probably not, if the war hadn't happened. I don't know what – what would have happened, what kind of person I would have been, if the – the war hadn't happened. I would hope that my war experiences have helped to make me into a person who cares about others.

Q: What about an inner strength, to cope with crises?

A: Well, I haven't really made up my mind about that, because I've had a number of crises in my life since the war. Health crisis, basically. And sometimes I think that those – that when you have a lot of trauma in your life, that makes you stronger, but sometimes I think, might work the other way. And I haven't really come to any conclusion on that, for myself. I think I am – I think with age you become stronger. I – I – I think most people will say that they're stronger than they were when they were younger. I know I – I – I was much – not that I'm a noisy person, but I was more of a quiet, do what others want you to do person. I will stand

**Interview with Irene Silver**  
**March 1, 2010**

up for myself more now. But that may be age. I don't know if it just makes – if it's my experience.

Q: Do you receive reparations?

A: I got some, yes. I – I didn't – I did not want to. When I was in my 20s, my uncle said to me once – asked me if I wanted to apply for it, and m – I said, I don't want any money from **Germany**, they cannot repay me. And I didn't for the longest, longest time, apply for anything. And then eventually, I did, and it – I did because I – it changed my view upon it. I thought then, will never repay me, but if my life can be made a little better, maybe it'll help my children, then why not? Why should it stay there, I'd rather have it here. And so the – ma – my son actually has done all – anything that's been done, it's my older son has started that. He pushed me into everything that I have done on this – in this area, and that – that's about it, what happened lately.

Q: Do you dream about the war years?

A: No. At least, I don't usually remember what I dream about, so it – I don't know. Maybe I do, but I – I honestly don't know.

Q: Were you active in the civil rights movement, because what happened to the Jews, being deprived of their civil rights?

A: No. I mean, I certainly sympathize with them.



**Interview with Irene Silver**  
**March 1, 2010**

Q: Yeah.

A: But I wasn't active in it. I was very busy raising my family. I really – I felt terrible about all of – all of it, and – and wished everybody all – you know, to get all their rights, and everything. I always felt that way, but I would not say that I – I was an – active in it, no.

Q: What were your thoughts about the **Eichmann** trial? Did that bring up any memories for you?

A: It didn't bring up memories, but I was certainly glad that they had gotten ahold of him, and – and whatever punishment was due, let – let that happen then. And I'm certainly upset about some of the people who have gotten away in – in **Argentina** or wherever they went. I think that that's a shame. I kind of feel that I was more immersed in – in – with my family, and my work, rather than – I – I did not think about it unless it came up on the news, or something like that.

Q: Do you feel that lessons have been learned, the world has learned any lessons from this?

A: No. I don't. I – I think that – I thought so at first, for many years I did think so. But now, looking around, I think people – there are those who will try to get rid of anybody who doesn't think their way, or who they don't like, or don't want to deal with, and – an-and – and as far as **Israel** is concerned, I think it's – I can't do

**Interview with Irene Silver**  
**March 1, 2010**

anything about it, so I try not to be – la – I’m really, really concerned and I just feel that after everything is said and done, I don’t know if they’ll ever be peace. And that – that’s a very sore point with me, cause I feel that people who – who really built the country from nothing, why shouldn’t they finally have some peace? But – and – and I suppose they do to a certain extent, but they’re always under this siege, and I worry about **Iran**, and their nuclear bomb, and – but I think that **Israel** has to just – something, and maybe they will. I – I don’t think they’re just going to go quietly anywhere. So, I – I feel that – I worry about it. I worry about everything that’s happening in the world. It’s – it’s – it’s just not a – not a peaceful time, and I worry about the future for my children, grandchildren, and really it’s – I do.

Q: Are you a member of any survivor groups?

A: I was. I – for a number of years, I was part of the hidden children group in **Rockland** county. It was a small group, and maybe there were 25 of us. And we used to meet on the weekly – on a monthly basis, and I found a lot of common ground with – with – with them. They – they all – we were all more or less in the same kind of – in the same page. And I’m – so, sometimes I – I write to one or two of them, but that was a close group, and I really – that was from the **Marriott** hotel we started that, after that. However, when I came to the united – when I came to **Washington** area, there is a group, but it’s a very, very large group. It’s **Baltimore**

**Interview with Irene Silver**  
**March 1, 2010**

and **Washington** hidden children. They had been a group for about 20 years, even before any of that. And I went to a couple of meetings, I really tried. But I'm not terribly outgoing. Maybe that's part of the problem. And I didn't feel – they said they welcomed me, but they were such a cl – such a close group, they knew all about each other's background. They had a history, and the – it's very hard to get into something that – and I – after a while I stopped going. So I don't belong to –

Q: Have you – have you been to the Holocaust Museum building?

A: Yes.

Q: What are your thoughts when you walk in there?

A: Well, it was very – first time I – first of all, I went to the opening with **Elie Wiesel**, and all that. And I will never, ever forget that, because that was extremely emotional for me. And I – I cry easily anyway, but it was a – all my children came, and we were all there. It was the rainiest day possible, and I thought ... that's probably the wrong thing to start talking about. I thought it must be the – the heavens coming down, crying.

Q: Right, right.

A: But anyway, I – I did go to that, and then I did go to the museum one time. And I think it's extremely well put together. It's – it's a place that other people can come

**Interview with Irene Silver**  
**March 1, 2010**

and see what – what was done. It was very realistic, and I was very emotional about it.

Q: Mm-hm. Okay [**indecipherable**] okay.

A: Did you want to put it on?

Q: Yeah. So, we were talking about you – you going into the building itself, and the exhibits. Did you go upstairs to any of the exhibits when you went into the building?

A: Ye-Yes.

Q: Now, I-I'm not talking about the time of dedication now, obviously.

A: No, I know. Oh, I – I did go through the –

Q: And that section on the **Warsaw** ghetto?

A: I don't know. I'm – I – I went through the whole thing, I'm – I – I think so.

Q: Yeah, okay, so it didn't have particular –

A: But it was very – it was many years ago.

Q: Yeah, okay, so you didn't have particular memories of going through the section of the **Warsaw** ghetto.

A: Oh, I tell you the truth, tried to kind of go through. I d – I didn't – I couldn't handle just –

Q: Yeah.

**Interview with Irene Silver**  
**March 1, 2010**

A: – you know, taking every little – everything in. I – I just couldn't. So I paced myself rather quickly.

Q: Mm-hm, yeah, yeah.

A: I went back 10 years later, to the rededication, or you know when they had that – the 10 year anniversary? And I felt – now that was a summer day, the sun was shining, and I was with my husband and my son. And I said, this is so much better. We have gone through 10 years. And not that there has been healing, but I think we're kind of past some of the things. And I just felt that it was almost like rebirth. That's how I felt. It was just – the whole atmosphere was so much different than the dedication, which was just, I thought it was so very traumatic for me. I didn't know why really. I – I – I – I just felt very traumatized. Not traumatized, but emotional about it. And then when we came back, it was different, 10 years later. I'm glad that it's there. I'm – I'm just good –

Q: Why are you glad?

A: Because I think that, not so much for us who have survived, but – but for those who ha – who didn't. They're not forgotten. That's why I think it's important. The room with the shoes was just too much.

**Interview with Irene Silver**  
**March 1, 2010**

Q: Is there anything else you would like to say before we end the interview? Any thoughts that you have, any message to your grandchildren possibly, that you would want to say to them?

A: Be strong, follow your star. Don't forget what happened, but don't be burdened by it. You have to go on with your life, and make the Jewish people proud, which I know you will. And I love you. That's it.

Q: That's a beautiful note to end on.

A: I'm sorry about all – I just – my – my children know me, and so when something emotional comes up, oh, here comes Mom. So, I'm sorry about that, but I should have brought a whole box of –

Q: Well, thank you –

A: I thought this was going to be a real dry interview.

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

A: You're very welcome. I hope that it becomes part of something bigger than just one person.

Q: Yes, it will be. This concludes the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** volunteer collection interview with **Irene Silver**.

**End of File Two**

**Conclusion of Interview**