

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Julie Keefer
August 9, 2012
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PREFACE

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JULIE KEEFER

August 9, 2012

Gail Schwartz: This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Julie Keefer, conducted by Gail Schwartz on August 9, 2012 in Bethesda, Maryland. This is track number one. What is your full name?

Julie Keefer: Julie Ann Keefer.

Q: And the name you had when you were born?

A: Jula J-U-L-I, J-U-L-A Weinstock, W-E-I-N-S-T-O-C-K.

Q: Where were you born?

A: I was born in Lvov, Poland.

Q: And when?

A: In 1941, April 19.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about your parents, your family. How far back can you trace the family in Lvov?

A: To my grandfather's parents and my grandfather was the oldest of six.

Q: And his name?

A: Isaac Eisen. And he, his name was Eisen because they, the parents got married, had their Jewish wedding and that did not come in Poland. And they had their official Polish wedding afterwards. And my grandfather was born before the Polish wedding. So he has his mother's

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name, Eisen. The others have the father's last name which is **Grusgott** and the order, birth order was my grandfather.

Q: Is this your paternal or your maternal grandfather?

A: Maternal.

Q: Maternal.

A: My grandfather. Then came his sister, Rosa. Then came three brothers, then and I don't remember their names. And then came the youngest sister, Helen. The parents sent the two girls to the United States to escape the pogroms. And that's my maternal side. My paternal side I know almost nothing. I only know that my father had an aunt here and an uncle here in the United States. That was Tante Helen Siegel and she's the one who sponsored me to come to the United States.

Q: Let's talk about your parents. Their names.

A: My mother's name was **Sala**. Eisen Weinstock. My father was Herman Weinstock. My mother was born in 1913. I don't know when. My father was born in 1912.

Q: What kind of work did your father do?

A: I think he was a plumber.

Q: And your mother, did she work or was she at home?

A: I think she was home but she had been a Jewish opera singer.

Q: So she had performed?

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A: I don't know.

Q: You were born in 1941. What were you told about what happened when the Germans first came?

A: I was told when the Nazis first came that my father's wife Clara was taken to a concentration camp.

Q: Your father's wife?

A: Clara. Yeah. Grandfather's wife. And I don't know about his brothers and their wives, but at least some were taken to concentration camps. I know my grandfather's –

Q: This is maternal grandfather.

A: Again yes. Were at some point they were killed. I don't know where. There were all kinds of **aktions** and my grandfather was taken to a labor camp and what I was told was that he had escaped and came to where my mother and my father and I were living. And my mother didn't recognize her father because suddenly he had lost a hundred pounds and his hair was white. And but I did and I was, according to my grandfather, this is. I just grabbed his leg and said **Jaji**, [ph] Jaji, which means grandpa, grandpa. Because he was, and that was by the way the first I spoke, were not mama or dada but **Jaju**, because he and I had a very special bond. He would take me on his shoulders and I just remember, we'd go play cards and he'd have a beer. And I'd drink the foam and he'd have the beer. And yeah.

Q: Did your family go into the ghetto in the fall, in September?

A: I do not know, I don't know. The dates of that I do not know.

Q: But they did eventually go into the ghetto?

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A: Unh hunh, unh hunh, yes.

Q: It was you and your parents and your grandfather.

A: No, no. My grandfather was hiding somewhere else. I don't know where. And we were in hiding in the ghetto. At that point.

Q: In hiding in the ghetto. And did you have any siblings?

A: Yes, my baby sister was born well, she's a year and a half younger than I. I can't remember exactly her birthday. But –

Q: Her name?

A: **Tola** Weinstock.

Q: She was born in ghetto.

A: Mm hm.

Q: What is your first memory?

A: My first memory is in the bunker.

Q: In the ghetto?

A: No. My grandfather had, then was in concentration camp. Captured and put into the **Janov** killing camp. It must have been around 1943. And yeah –

Q: So you're now two years old.

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A: Right. And while we're hiding in the ghetto, my mother, my father, my baby sister and I, he escapes from concentration camp and manages to get across a railroad track just as a Nazi munitions train was going. So the sentries had shot his finger, but as he was jumping down, they shot him in the hand and shot his finger. And he started running away as the train was coming by. And of course they did not dare fire at that train because there would be a massive explosion. Ok. Then while he was running this was in a woods, a very deep woods in Lvov. And he met a peasant named Mr. **Borecki**. And Mr. Borecki, a lot of this is in my grandfather's diary. Mr. Borecki gave him a jacket, rags to wrap around his feet, because my grandfather was a very big man and no shoes could fit him. So and he gave him, and he bandaged his hand and had him sleep in the barn and gave him three breads.

And my grandfather said look, I know helping Jews could --. He said well I'll just leave my barn door open. Then if I get asked, I could say I don't know who sleeps in my barn. So my grandfather did that and the next day he left. And when he was in the woods, oh and he was given a shovel. And in the woods, he was sitting there. And suddenly he heard two or three men speaking Yiddish. And they had escaped an aktion, very near this woods. And one of them had a gun. And they -- my grandfather had been trained for military service as an officer, I guess because he looked good on a horse. The Polish cavalry.

He did. And I think that's why they took him. But anyway, so he was -- they made him the leader. They dug this tunnel and that's the one that I called the bunker. Ok, it's a tunnel in this woods, yes. And --

Q: How far from the ghetto?

A: Quite a ways I think. Because this was in the woods and the ghetto -- now, I'll describe the bunker in just a moment. But when grandfather went back to Mr. Borecki, he asked him two things. One was did he know anything, his -- Mr. Borecki's son had been killed by the Nazis. Because he was in the resistance, in the Polish resistance. Now but before then he had told his father that the Nazis were going to bomb the ghetto very soon. So my grandfather knew that it was just a matter of time before my father and my mother and my baby sister and I lost our lives. Ok. Now I'm going to switch back and tell you about the bunker.

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The bunker to me of course it was, I remember cold, damp mud. And there was a ladder to go in and as I remember it, it seemed very tall. Probably it was no more than six feet. And as you walked around, you felt this cold, wet mud. And at one side, here was the entrance. Then there was this cold wet mud. And here at the corner, at the very end, was a fat, was a table, like the kind that electric wire comes on, those spool tables. And I just, I remember it feeling splintery. And I remember the smell of the candle wax because there was a fat candle sitting on that table. And then again some more wet mud. Then like an archway out of mud again and a separate room. On the, as you walked into that room, on the left were things that I later found out were guns. And rifles. What I, and how I, I only knew that I touched them and my grandfather smacked my hand and yelled and he never, ever raised his voice to me, much less his hand. And that's when I realized those were dangerous.

I don't remember the people in the tunnel. Now I'm going to switch back and tell you. Eventually there were 37 people in the tunnel. But when my grandfather found out that the Nazis were going to bomb the ghetto he asked for volunteers and he, everybody, all the men volunteered, and he took two and they dressed in Nazi uniforms. Well I have to tell you that how they lived at this time was that the men would go out and raid Nazi trucks. They would raise, they would kill the drivers and take –

Q: They were escaped from the ghetto.

A: They were not in the ghetto. They were in this woods, in the bunker. And they would go out on raids where they would raid Nazi munitions, trucks, outposts. Take whatever, food, clothing, everything. Now the -- at this time the **Banderovski** who were Ukrainian resistance were in this woods and they were very powerful and they were very numerous and the Nazis would keep trying to bomb and try to get rid of them and they didn't. So the Nazis thought that these Jews who were raiding them were Banderovski, these Ukrainian resistance fighters. But they were not. Now the Banderovski didn't like Jews much at all, except they would take Jews if the Jews were doctors. Otherwise, and the agreement was, ok stay out of our way. We'll stay out of your way kind of thing. We'll leave you alone. And that's what happened.

Well my grandfather found out that the Nazis from Mr. Borecki who had found out from his son, the Nazis were going to burn the ghetto so he got the two volunteers. They all dressed in Nazi

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uniforms, had commandeered a Nazi jeep and drove to the outskirts of the ghetto at night. The two men stayed. My grandfather in Nazi regalia, went into the ghetto, got my mother, my father, my baby sister and me out. Put us in this jeep and brought us to the home of Mr. Borecki. Because my grandfather had spoken to Mr. Borecki and asked him if he would save my mother and the two girls' lives and he said of course. And so we came in the middle of the night and we were at Mr. Borecki's house and my mother said I will not leave my husband or you, father. I will not. I've already lost my mother. I'm not going to lose you. So they had no choice but all of us now went to the bunker.

Q: This is 1943.

A: 1943.

Q: Do you know what month or what season?

A: I –

Q: That's all right.

A: It probably was still winter. Because there was snow and the bunker was still relatively safe because the Nazis could, dogs could not get the scent and stuff. So it was winter, probably.

Q: End of 43?

A: Yes, mm hm. Towards the end of 43, right, mm hm. Then apparently and this I hear from my grandfather, my baby sister. Oh there were 37 people in that tunnel. My mother and my father and us. My grandfather's son, my uncle, his wife. And I think their two boys. They had two boys. My sister and I were the youngest, by far. And I guess we cried and got lice and people were very afraid because we endangered the lives of everybody. And my grandfather felt that he just could not do that. That his family could not endanger everybody else because everyone wanted to live and they had the right to live.

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So he decided to take us. He had gotten a peasant sheepskin jacket. He dressed himself as a Polish peasant and took my baby sister and me out. I guess according to my grandfather, I had blond hair and dark eyes. My sister had light hair and gray eyes. And he took us both and he went to the local market, looking for someone named Dr. **Gruen**. Dr. Gruen was a Pole. I think he was Catholic, very famous pediatrician who ran an orphanage for Catholic children. And he looked for, but he couldn't find him. And he was so desperate and this he writes in his diary. He was so desperate about what to do with us when he couldn't find Dr. Gruen, that he almost was ready, he was ready to leave us in the market, thinking somebody would find us and keep us. And keep us alive during the war.

But just as he was thinking of that, he saw a woman who had been a former neighbor. A Polish Catholic woman whose husband had been killed by the Nazis in one of their mass reprisals. And my grandfather had helped her with her horse and carriage business. So she saw him and recognized him and he brought her to the side where they would not be heard. And of course she said she was so happy to know that he was alive and then he said he had these two children and he couldn't find Dr. Gruen. And at that point, he said could you take them. And my grandmother had had to sell her house because the people she had working for her were Jews. And they were all in the ghetto and so she couldn't make a living. So she started working as a cook for a retired engineer and his wife, the **Szwarczynskis**, somewhere in the country. It must have been near Lvov. And the story they told was that my grandfather was her husband that the two of us were her sister's children. Now at that time many people were back and forth, going towards the Ukraine and, and so the story she told was that her sisters had gone to Ukraine and left their babies with her. And then she asked Mrs. Szwarczynski could she, could grandma take both. And Mrs. Szwarczynski said yes, she could take me. But she couldn't take a six month old baby. So my grandfather went, again he asked for how to find Dr. Gruen and this orphanage. And apparently Mr. Szwarczynski knew Dr. Gruen and he told him where the orphanage was and so forth. So grandpa had – now remember all this time he's passing as a Polish peasant. Very big one. But the Polish peasant and because my grandfather was six, two and well over 200 pounds. He was -- just an aside. The first time I read **Les Miserables**, I kept thinking of my grandfather. Because remember **Jean Valjean** lifts a cart and that's how **Javert** knows that he is Jean Valjean. Well my grandfather could lift a car. So I **huss**? Anyway, sidebar finished. Now back to –

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Q: You were telling me about your sister.

A: My sister's name was changed from Tola to **Antonina Noviska**, which was the name of the woman who saved our lives. **Lucia** Noviska and that's when she was left there. And I stayed with the Szwarczynskis and my grandmother. I have a picture, the first picture I have of me was at around that time. I was probably around two and a half at this point maybe even three. And I had been following my grandmother who was going into the countryside to forage for whatever she could find in the way of food. And –

Q: Do you remember this time?

A: I, again I remember –

Q: Flashes?

A: Flashes, that's right. I remember that I wanted her to play with me. I remember that we picked dandelions together. And she made me a wreath out of dandelions. And I remember putting it on and then following her but then falling asleep, just falling asleep. And this I was told later. That grandma had gone home, thinking that I had probably gone home. And when she didn't find me there, she was standing outside waiting for me. And ready to go look for me with Mrs. Szwarczynski. And she saw a Nazi soldier, carrying what she thought was my dead body. And so she was about to scream when Mrs. Szwarczynski put her hand over her mouth and told her to stay calm. And the soldier came and at that point I can't, I don't know but I woke up. And so grandma was just unbelievably relieved. And the soldier had said that I was asleep and he found me there. And I reminded him of his children back home and so he was bringing me to the closest house because he was sure that's where I lived. So some kind of way later he had the picture developed and grandma got it and she took that picture, saved it and after the war. And by the way that picture is in the Holocaust Museum. As is a picture of my birth mother, father, uncle and two friends.

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Well anyway then we were still there with the Szwarczynskis. The Szwarczynskis had a dog. Great big huge German shepherd, really fierce watchdog. So fierce that he was not in the house. He was kept on a chain outdoors and fed with a long stick. And one day, again this I was told. One day the dog was outside and I went over to the dog and my grandmother was about to scream again. And Mrs. Szwarczynski kept her from yelling and I went over to the dog and petted the dog and he started licking me and we became great buddies. Now what I do remember is that when the Nazis came I was told to take the dog and go under the table with the dog. Now one possibility is that, that just as they said to make sure that the dog didn't remove the Nazi's leg because he had bitten a Nazi before. The other possibility, although it's fairly remote is that they suspected I was a Jewish child. But I think that's fairly remote because they were a bit anti-Semitic also. And my, there was a woman on the street near where the Szwarczynskis lived who had told the Nazis that Lucia Noviska was hiding a Jewish child. So the Nazis came and took her and she was imprisoned. And tortured. And my grandfather of course found out about that and he went to Mrs. Szwarczynski and said look, you have to do something. We have to get my wife out. And Mrs. Szwarczynski was a good friend of the wife of the commandant and so Mrs. Szwarczynski went to the commandant and said you know look, to the wife and said to her, look you know the Nazis have taken my cook and I don't know what we're going to do because we need her. And she certainly is not hiding any Jewish children. And the commandant's wife talked to her husband and the next thing is that the commandant came and she was released from prison and told not to talk about it to anyone. And she was released and came back.

Now what I remember I had – I was in kind of a crib. I remember a crib with a ladder to get to the crib. And I just remember a ladder that I would climb out of the crib and into. One day I heard some noise, lots and lots of noise and the dog came. And grabbed me, some kind of way. Either I was on the ladder, I don't know. But the dog grabbed my clothing or grabbed me, something, and took me to the door of the house. And I don't know, I don't know where this was vis a vis the bedroom. I don't remember any of this. I do remember the dog taking me. And I do remember that a bomb fell on where I had been sleeping. So cause there was lots of bombing going on at that time. And –

Q: This is what, spring of 44?

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A: This is I think not, yes, not, not, not spring yet. Probably – like February. In April of 1944, right around my birthday my grandfather talked to my grandmother and said look I have to go back and see how everybody is doing in the bunker, in the tunnel. And so I'm going to go back. So he went back to the tunnel.

Q: He went by himself.

A: And he saw one other man there who was alive and everybody else had been shot and bombed. And he buried everyone.

Q: Your grandfather?

A: And (pause, sigh) and then in 1944 in June, the Russians came to Lvov. And the one advantage we had with the Russians at that time was because grandpa was a survivor of a killing camp, the Russians gave him preferential treatment which meant that he could get an apartment in the bombed out buildings. He could get rags for clothes, that kind of thing. So that's what happened. And that was right around my birthday I think. And then we went to one DP camp which is displaced persons. But I like to think of it as delayed pilgrims. Yes so very delayed. So then –

Q: Do you remember the time of leaving where you were living --

A: I remember the first apartment because –

Q: Well that's, do you remember your leaving the house? Do you remember that at all?

A: Of the, but when the dog took me –

Q: No, after the Russians were coming you left.

A: No. I don't remember that, Mm, mm. Mm, mm.

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Q: So you're gone.

A: My grandfather in between had been trying to locate Dr. Gruen's orphanage.

Q: For your sister.

A: Mm hm. And nothing at that point and then we went to our first I guess our second DP camp. And what I remember was that grandma took one look and she said no we're not staying here. Turned out that a girl had died of TB in one of the beds and so grandma wasn't going to stay there no matter what. Then we went to another DP camp and –

Q: Do you know the names. And if you don't ok.

A: And there was a fire.

Q: Now you're three years old.

A: I'm probably older. At this point I'm older probably four or five. Probably four at least. So it's 45. Mm hm. I don't remember exactly when the war is over, but I'm at least, yeah I'm five.

Q: Do you have any memories of hearing that the war was over or did that mean anything to you. You were so young.

A: I was so young anything could be, because what I, I have vague memories but they're of stores and you know that it looks like almost a washboard and the stores were –

Q: You pull it down?

A: Yeah were all like that and I remember the streets being torn up and boulders here and there. Grandma says that I, she was with me. I have no idea where this was but probably where that

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apartment was where we were living. And that she was with me and she saw, we saw a truck go by with blood and bodies and blood oozing and that she fainted and she was holding me and I fell to the ground and broke my nose for the first time. So I don't remember that. I don't remember that at all. I remember her tell, she told me that. Well I do remember lots of broken buildings. I remember people kind of frantic. I remember, I remember a man and a woman and a little girl and they were going very fast and everybody was frowning and this little girl was trying to keep up. I remember watching that.

I don't know where that was but I remember that. Then we moved as I say, to this third DP camp. I have no idea where it was. I have no idea. That's the one where we were asleep at night and suddenly grandma smelled smoke and woke us all up and the barrack we were in was on fire. So we got out with our pajamas. And we had a suitcase that was filled with I guess some old fur coats and some gold and that –

Q: When you say we –

A: Grandpa and grandma. Yeah we were all together and you know it had meats and fur coats and they all burned out. And so we were left with our pajamas period. And then the next thing I know we were in our final DP camp which I do remember. And I was told how we got there. Ignacio -- oh let me think of his last name. It'll come to me in a moment. But anyway he had been a friend of grandpa's and he ran this particular DP camp in Linz Austria. And it was called Camp Taylor in **Wegscheid**. And I found out it was called Camp Taylor when I looked at my so called birth certificate.

Q: Do you know who the Taylor was?

A: Somebody American probably. No, no idea. And I remember being there. And I remember we lived in one room of like an army barracks. Every family got a room. And we got a galvanized tub and when we could find wood or something to make fires we could have hot drinks and a bath once a week. And the bath was with lye soap and kerosene. Because of the lice to try to prevent lice. And the bathrooms were like wooden privies all in a row together at one side. And in this camp there was a **schul** where we went every week for Friday night services

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and all day Saturday. And I remember I had, I was kind of a ring leader and I was always climbing trees and whatever, whatever.

Q: Were there a lot of other children there?

A: There were other children, yes, there were other children. Mm hm, mm hm. And –

Q: What language were you speaking? Polish?

A: It depended. Mainly Polish but grandpa was hospitalized in the Alps. He said it was for his heart, but the translator and I probably agree it was a psychiatric hospital. Probably that he was sent to and this was well after the war. In the Alps. And what I remember is grandma and I going to visit him in one of those chairs like a ski lift kind of thing. And grandma holding on to me for all she was worth. And me feeling hey grandma let go. But so yeah. I remember grandpa being there. And we ran black market sugar and when grandpa left I had to do it because grandma couldn't read or write in any language or really figure. So –

Q: How did you know how to read and write?

A: I went to a school, Hebrew school yes.

Q: In the DP camp?

A: Mm hm. Mm hm. Where I got smacked because I was left handed. That was a sign of the devil. So I kept getting my hand smacked. But according to grandpa I was so smart and you know more. But that of course is my grandpa. So anyway I do remember I had a little dog.

Grandma sided with me and we got a dog. Oh first.

Grandpa wanted to marry grandma. Cause she did love him very much. And she had saved our lives and he had asked her if he could give her money and she said no. My life is with you and with Julia and all. So in order to convert the rabbi said ok but she would have to shave her head and go into the **mikvah**. And I remember grandma saying, Isaac, I have so little hair, and I

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remember sometimes when grandpa made up his mind you didn't mess with grandpa. And he went to the rabbi and he said look, Lucia wants to become a Jew. She does us great, great proud by wanting to become a Jew. She doesn't want to shave her head. She will not shave her head. And the rabbi, ok, Isaac she won't shave her head, all right, all right. So grandpa became Jewish. I mean grandma. Became Jewish and became Leah I guess, although nobody ever called her Leah. Later she dubbed herself Lucy cause she watched I Love Lucy. But it was Lucia Noviska Eisen. So can we stop for a little bit.

Q: Yes.

A: We would hide the sugar. It would serve as pillows in this huge bed that grandpa, grandma and I all slept in.

Q: These are bags of sugar.

A: Yes, great big bags of sugar and whenever the police came to look around and so forth, I was, it was my duty to be in bed.

Q: Sleep on the sugar.

A: I'd sleep on the sugar, right. So that's -- I remember that. I remember my grandfather worked in a matzah making kind of oven there in lager. We called DP camp lager. And I remember we had Purim plays and this and that. And I remember where I'd take the little dog to schul. I'd try to stay out of the way of the men who would, if they could get close enough would smack you. So you had to kind of make sure you were running fast enough and avoid the smacks, with my little team of cohorts.

And then we'd go outside schul and make mud pies and things like that. And in the winter grandma would wrap me in rags and everything and there was a huge hill that was like a hole and not a hill, it was a hole. A huge hole that was dug there and we kids would go sledding there. And to me I'd walk around that, the parameters of this hole and that was where God was. And so I remember always asking for my baby sister. I wanted my baby sister. And God to me, at that

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point, was like a puppeteer and there were wars and things went wrong because people were like marionettes and the strings would get tangled, so that's what I remember.

I remember walking with my grandfather once and taking his hand and asking him grandpa, where are my parents? And he said oh they're they went on a trip, they're far away. I said Jaju they're never coming back, are they. And he looked at me and I saw these huge tears, fat teardrops coming from his eyes. And he was not a man who cried easily. And I knew that was not a question to ask any more and I knew they were dead.

And I remember once not far from the bunk we were in, there was a huge tree and there were twin brothers. They were either late teens or early 20s. They seemed aged, very aged to me at the time, but that's how old they probably were, 18 to 21. And they were standing by the tree and lightning struck and they died. They were killed and I remember seeing that. And, and that was pretty scary.

And we got a care package in lager and it was said that I was going to be leaving so everybody in lager decided that this new plastic raincoat should go to me. Now mind you I was all of seven and this was an adult raincoat but nonetheless Jula had to have it. So I was so proud, this blue plastic raincoat. And then what I heard later was that grandpa had tried to get us into Palestine, the three of us and then eventually he tried to get us into Israel because remember in 48 Israel was not accepting and Palestine didn't want any old, old people and orphan children. So we were living a pretty difficult existence so grandpa thought it would be best if he sent me to the States. And my Tante Siegel sponsored me and what I remember is passing a place with a huge metal fence, very high metal fence. And I remember children at one side of it, the other side clinging to that fence and looking at us.

And I said Jaju promise me you'll never put me there, promise. And he promised. And then I was there and because he had made -- he had decided to send me to America. And I had to go through a series of orphanages and they were Catholic orphanages or something cause I remember nuns and that was one of them. And --

Q: Why did you have to go through the series?

A: I don't know.

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Q: To prove that you were an orphan?

A: I don't know. I don't know. I have no idea. I know that grandpa -- let's see. Yeah. I remember it seemed like forever that I was in these --

Q: Orphanages.

A: Mm hm. And I remember being very, very sad and crying and apparently the nuns were very worried that I was going to die because I wasn't eating. I wasn't, I was just kind of fading away. So they called my grandfather or contacted him some kind of way. And he and grandma came and he brought me a china doll which was the first toy I'd ever had because the only toys I had known were origami soldiers made out of newspapers on horses, also made out of newspapers that grandpa and I would play.

And so I had this doll and not only was she a doll, she had eyes that opened and closed. Yep. And he also brought a bag of oranges. And that was incredibly much of a huge, huge big deal. And he found one of the older girls and he asked her if she would take care of me on the way to America and she said yes. Grandpa gave the oranges, some to her and some to the nun, nuns. And (pause) I remember feeling very sad. But this girl was very nice and she would do my hair and she would try to, she just was there. I don't remember her name or anything. I just remember she was nice. And I remember that was -- the ship we came on. We slept in hammocks. Ok and there were four of them. And I was the youngest so I was on the bottom one.

Q: What was your name then?

A: Julia.

Q: Still?

A: Mm hm. Julia Weinstock Eisen. And then I had a terrible toothache because I grew up on American Coca Cola which was the big thing and if it was American it had to be wonderful. So I, that's what I lived on. Well I had terribly rotten teeth. I had a horrible toothache. And I

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remember the nun giving me oil of cloves or putting oil of cloves on me so I smelled like oil of cloves. Then we were on the ship.

Q: What was the name of the ship?

A: The General **Bumbe**. I always thought that it was in December that I came to the States but when I read in the manifest it said November 14th. I don't know if that's when it sailed or that's when we landed. And I don't know where we landed.

Q: In 1948?

A: Unh hunh. I do remember, I thought it was Baltimore. That's what I remember, Baltimore. And what I do remember, and some of these I've written about was ladies coming with little American flags to give us American flags. Later I found out they were the DAR. And I remember one lady coming up to me and talking to me and giving me my flag and I had no idea what she was saying because the English I knew was taught to me by an American soldier. And I could count, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. That was the extent of my English.

So what I didn't understand the woman spoke louder. And she screamed in my ear and I remember thinking, why do all Americans yell. And I couldn't believe it. But then I remember the nuns getting us on a bus and I said to the nun. I was very thirsty. And she gave me an orange and that didn't slack my thirst at all. But then I remember sleeping and it seemed like forever and then arriving at a soot covered brick building in New York. And what I loved about that building was it had a marble staircase. And like **Tevya**, I loved running up and down those stairs because I loved the sound that marble made. And they also had sweetheart soap. Well that was the first time I had smelled soap that smelled, didn't smell like tar and it was -- I kept washing my hands. And that was glorious. And I remember coming down the stairs one day and I remember this woman at the bottom talking to the nun. And what I heard and it was in German was she can't be Isaac's granddaughter. Isaac is so handsome. And then look at that hair. I bet she has lice. And that was my introduction to my Aunt Helen.

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Gail Schwartz: This is the continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Julie Keefer. This is track number two and you were talking about coming to the United States and then coming, your aunt was downstairs discussing you.

Julie Keefer: But first I'm going to just back track a little bit. The nuns I remember, one of the nuns taking me to a park somewhere in New York. And in the park, I saw a little girl, probably around my age. I was seven. And I looked at her and I figured out how it was that Americans could make those strange sounds. Like three and through because they had special throats. And those throats came out and because I had never seen bubble gum before. And this girl was blowing a bubble.

Q: She was blowing her throat out.

A: Yes, to make those funny sounds, mm hm. So I remember that. And now I'm back with Aunt Siegel. No, Aunt Helen. Aunt Helen **Fichtenbaum** was my grandfather's youngest sibling. And she shared a house with her older sister Rosa who was widowed. And Rosa had a daughter Elaine **Yeta**, who was 16. And Aunt Helen had a daughter Perry, who was 12. And a husband, Dick. And they lived in half of a duplex in a very Orthodox section of Brooklyn. And the first day that I remember was Aunt Helen taking me to their bathroom and cutting my hair, because she was very sure that I had lice, so she cut my hair which made me cry because I was so proud of not having lice. It was a big thing. And then I was a student at the local elementary school where the only teacher in the school who spoke any language I did was the kindergarten teacher who spoke German.

Q: What language by that old age of seven did you know?

A: Oh I knew a little bit of Hebrew, Yiddish, Polish, German. And Ukrainian.

Q: You knew Russian?

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A: A little bit, very little. And so I went to the local school and the children called me retard because I was tall for my age and here I was in kindergarten at age seven. And seven and a half. And they also called me Nazi because the language I spoke was German. And Aunt Helen was a very troubled woman and it was very hard for her to take this child who had come from a war torn country and who was a granddaughter of this absent older brother that she idealized. And I was not a pretty child at all. And so she didn't know quite what to do with me. She was a little overwhelmed. Her daughter Perry was allergic to everything and Perry and I shared a room. And I just remember being truly, truly unhappy and waiting. I couldn't wait for the weekends when I would go see Tante Siegel. Tante Siegel was my father's aunt. And she is the one who sponsored my coming to America. She lived in the Bronx in, on the third floor of a walk up. In a one bedroom apartment. This one bedroom apartment, as you walked in the door you looked directly at some French doors covered by lace curtains that were the entrance to the bedroom. And otherwise you saw a sofa, a couple of chairs and a black telephone and a glass bottle near the telephone where everyone who wanted to make a call had to put in a nickel.

Then there were **tzedakah** boxes all over the place and they were blue with white Jewish stars on them. They were all for some cause or other in Israel. For yeshivas, for trees, for whatever. And Tante Siegel herself was about four foot ten with huge round blue eyes. High cheekbones, a Clara Bow mouth and a very, very pretty face. Blondish gray hair. Her brother, Uncle Charlie, also was short but a little taller than she. And I met him a little afterwards and he had a farm in the Adirondacks that he had apparently sold the farm. He had had five daughters. He and his wife Sophie had five daughters. Like Tevya. And no sons. So he sold the farm but kept the bungalow which was a house. And there was a man-made lake and I remember Uncle Charlie driving me in this beat up black car over these hairpin turns at what seemed like umpteen miles an hour. Well of course it wasn't. But I remember Uncle Charlie's huge hands. He had these hands with large knuckles and when I first saw Van Gogh's the Potato Eaters, I could always remember Uncle Charlie cause that's what he looked like, his hands looked like.

Well back to Aunt Helen -- Tante Siegel and her apartment. There was a window. On the door was -- the window was on the left and I remember I would sit at that window for hours and hours and hours and just look out and just look out. There, it was all concrete. There was some kind of a basketball court. You know concrete playground with a high fence, metal fence around it and I would watch people play. And I remember feeling very sad. But Tante Siegel was very, very

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warm. And her husband Uncle Jake, was a little taller than she. Huge, beak like nose, but Uncle Jake almost never spoke. He was like a shadow. So we never knew what he was thinking or whatever. He just was there. He might as well have been invisible. But I loved those times at Tante Siegel's.

Tante Siegel had two children. She had Marvin who was in the army, very good looking and I only saw his pictures. And she had Adele who was married to Sid Roman. And they were supposed to move to an apartment on the other side of the third floor but it wasn't ready. So they were staying with Tante Siegel. Had to pull out something. So to say there was no room in this apartment. So the Joint wouldn't let me live there. And, but I loved going there. And I heard from my cousin Sid, many years later he had given me a huge teddy bear which he had won at a fair and he was going to give it to their first child. But he said, you looked so sad and needy there that I thought maybe I better give it to you. So he gave it to me. And I, very imaginative child, named this teddy bear, **Louka**, which means doll in Polish. But oh I loved that teddy bear. And that was a happy time. And Tante Siegel would have a yummy brunch every Sunday with white fish and sable, and lox and bagels and cheeses and tomatoes and all kinds of yummy stuff, always **milchig**. And I would be doing dishes and I inevitably used the wrong dish towel. And we had to go find a place that had any dirt in Bronx New York. But that was a challenge. So that was Tante Siegel.

I remember once Aunt Rosa who always looked unbelievably chic. She had a black chignon. I'm sure she died her hair but she was very regal looking, in contrast to her sister Aunt Helen who always looked bedraggled and harried. In shapeless housedresses which were ugly. Never smiled. Anyway Aunt, Tante Rosa worked outside the home. And one day she took me out for lunch and to buy me a new skirt. And the skirt, I remember was gray but it was kind of full, had big pockets with blue trim on the pocket, the top part of the pocket. And I thought it was gorgeous. And I wore it back to Aunt Helen's and I remember her yelling in the kitchen where Aunt Helen was yelling and saying why did you take that brat? Why didn't you take Perry? She deserves it. That brat doesn't deserve anything. I don't know what Isaac and that woman were thinking of. And I decided that I wouldn't wear the skirt by Aunt Helen because all it did was get Tante Rosa in trouble. So I would only wear it at Tante Siegel's.

Well, one day I remembered, I was still a bit of a ring leader and Perry was very, very shy and I remember saying to Perry, let's go visit Yeta's room, Elaine, at that time she was called Elaine's

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room. So her room was in the very front of the house and it had one of those satiny bedspreads that I -- quilted satin, and all these cologne bottles on a blond mirrored dresser which I thought was so gorgeous. And they all smelled so good. So I remember that was just a whole new world. Yeta was a -- Elaine wasn't thrilled that these two younger went to her room but I think she forgave us eventually but I remember that was so pretty.

I just remember Aunt Helen saying that well if you're good I'll show you a picture of your grandpa when, in his soldier uniform which I had never seen him so I was -- I tried to be so good. And I was never quite good enough. So I never did see that picture. And I guess I must have been there for eight or nine months. And it was a very, very difficult time. Probably for everyone. But I remember it being very difficult for me.

And I remember the social worker from the Joint coming. The first time and I was warned that I was to tell her that I was being treated beautifully and that I was very happy. And the second time she came, I didn't care and I told her I hate it here. And that I was fed with -- like a dog. Food was left in front of the bedroom. That I was a pretty awful person and ugh. Um. The social worker said Julie, we're going to send you to the country. You're going to go where you'll see chickens and cows and other children. And I thought wow, that's pretty great. I didn't want to leave Tante Siegel cause I adored her. So that was pretty sad, leaving her. But I -- someone put me in a pretty new pink dress. And I remember it had belts that tied in the back, with some flowers on it. I was eight years old and I was put on an airplane. And told that someone in **Bellefaire** would meet me at the other end. In Cleveland. And so I was being sent to Bellefaire Jewish children's home for problem children. And it was in Shaker Heights, Ohio. (laughs) No chickens, no cows, children yes. (laughs)

But there were cottages which were brick buildings and we were assigned in cottages by gender. And by age. And I was put in the little kids' cottage when I first came which was run by Aviva and Chaim **Orlen** who were an Israeli couple and they were, they were very nice. I remember -- what I remember is at night getting this horrible medicine, codfish liver oil and other stuff. That was sweet. And then we'd get one of those **Mallomar** cookies with milk. Well that was so delicious. I also remember a little girl there named Tanya. Although she was older than I, she was almost a head shorter.

And I remember that my teddy bear had no eyes. The eyes had been removed. I don't know what ever happened to the china doll. I don't remember but I remember that my teddy bear who I

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loved had lost his eyes. And I suspected that it was Tanya. I remember this so clearly. I said Tanya if you tell me the truth, I won't hit you. So she told me the truth. Yeah, she did it. And I thought that, was that stupid of me or not. Why did I say I wouldn't hit her. I was mad. But at least she told the truth. (sigh)

Q: Did you have any contact with your grandfather at that point? No?

A: They didn't come to this country until 1951.

Q: Ok. So how long did you stay in this children's –

A: Til I was 14 and a half.

Q: You stayed there, in this children's home in Shaker Heights.

A: It was Bellefaire. It was run by Fritz Mayer who was a cohort of Bruno Bettelheim's whereas Bruno Bettelheim believed in psychoanalysis, Fritz Mayer believed in milieu therapy. So the Bellefaire was run on milieu therapy kind of thing where we had all kinds of activities. We had woodshop, we had art. We had Miss Sugar and story hour and lots of books in the library and I loved reading and apparently that was my escape.

And I was afraid of loud noises, uniforms and playing hide and seek.

Q: Did you talk about the war at all?

A: I had a series of social workers until one day I said I'm not going to talk to you anymore because you're just going to leave like all the others and Bellefaire decided to put me on a trial with University Hospital, Hannah House and they sent me to a child analyst, Marian Barnes. And I saw Ms. Barnes for many years. She was really special. And I remember sitting on this great horsehair sofa in the waiting room of Hannah house, picturing what Ms. Barnes would look like. And she would be beautiful with dark hair and -- well I went into the office where she was and she was middle aged, gray hair, kind of round. Old. And she said, Julie or Julia. I was called

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Julia at this point, I can't be your mother, but I can be like a favorite aunt. And in fact she was. When I was in talent shows, Ms. Barnes was always there. She gave me my tiny tears doll who wet and had – cried real tears. And my first bicycle. And when I was singing Frankie and Johnny at the talent show and looking straight up at the ceiling cause I was so nervous, she was sitting there in the audience clapping. Ms. Barnes was I think what kept me going for a long time. And did I talk about the war? Yes. I talked about my dreams. I talked about – yeah, I talked about a lot of things with Ms. Barnes.

Meanwhile we had various social – various cottage parents. We had cottage parents during the day, cottage parents at night and like permanent couple who lived with us. And I remember I was put in the big girls' cottage. I think I was ten. When my grandparents came I was close to 11. And I have some pictures there. And I remember I didn't remember my Polish. Just English. Grandpa's shoes squeaked when he walked. And I remember grandpa and grandma and I going to the Fairmont theater, walking. And I remember being a little bit distant from my grandfather, grandmother. And Ms. Barnes informed me that I had acted like a brat. (laughs) and I said yeah.

Q: But you had remembered them?

A: Yeah, yeah I remembered them. But part of what was going on -- Bupsha I told you had been tortured and sometimes she was not totally rational. And she said that I was so horrible that even my grandfather didn't want me around. That's why he sent me away. And I believed that. And um (pause) um, I was also upset with my grandfather and also feeling terribly guilty because my time with his sister was awful. So I felt ambivalent about that visit. Very. It was also at – you want me to stop.

Q: No, no I was just –

A: How much time?

Q: As much as you need. I was going to say how long did you stay in Bellefaire, til what age?

A: 14.

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Q: 14. And then?

A: I went to my first foster home and then stayed there for six months and went to my second foster home and that's where I was adopted.

Q: Oh you were adopted? Was it in Cleveland?

A: With phenomenal parents.

Q: Really, and their names?

A: Fred and Tea **Klejstadt**. And they were unbelievable people. And I was so, so lucky. Unbelievably lucky. I met them first, Fritz Mayer didn't believe in our being institutionalized so we had big sisters, big brothers to take us out. And I met the Klejstadts with three other girls. They took us out for a picnic and I remember thinking how beautiful Tea was and sweet and how special I felt around her. Fred I thought was nice but I, she was warmth itself. And I had a very dear friend in Bellefaire whose name was Joyce. And we were assigned permanent big sisters, big brothers. And I was assigned to **Nussensens** who were lovely warm large Jewish family with two sons. The younger son had some mental health issues and I adored them both. They were like little brothers and they were just special. And Flo and Manny Nussensen were warm as warm could be. And I was just included in everything which was neat cause I was kind of a shy, dream, dreamy child who, who read all the time. And I drew a lot and painted. At Bellefaire I had an art teacher who had no thumbs and he was a phenomenal man. And I learned a great deal from him. He's black and one of my favorite counselors was black. And I mention that because we were going to Parma tubing which is a special lake with all kinds of stuff in Cleveland. We were on a big bus with this counselor and Fritz Mayer and we got to Parma tubing and someone came up and said oh no, we don't allow Negroes here. And so I remember Fritz Mayer puffing himself out. Zis will not go on. Come, children, get in the bus. So if you don't' take one of us, you take none of us. So we all left.

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But this counselor was wonderful because one, we used to give plays for July fourth. And she had Paul Robeson, Ballad for the Americans. And so I went to her house to hear it. And I was usually the star or whatever so she wanted me to listen to it. And I remember that was special. And then we had a cottage parents who were Mormon and he was getting his degree, advanced degree in chemistry. So he used to make our shampoos. They were smelly, ugh. But I suppose they were good. And his wife was just a sweetie pie. They used to play folk music and a lot of Leadbelly. So I grew up on Leadbelly.

Q: You stayed at with the family the Klejstadts and then went to –

A: Never stayed with them. I just went on that picnic with them and I was back to Bellefaire and I was in elementary school and at Andrew Jackson **Rikoff** where the teachers stayed in their rooms and students went to different teachers for different subjects. And I had a math teacher. This was sixth grade. Oh, fourth grade was my first experience at Andrew Jackson Rikoff. Well first I went to a very elegant school, elementary school, third grade near Bellefaire. And the teacher thought I was retarded because I wrote things backwards. And she wanted us to have fresh handkerchiefs pinned on us. And at Bellefaire we had these sewing ladies who would redo clothes so they would fit us and stuff. So I went up and I asked for a hankie and they gave me a box of Kleenex. They said this is much more sanitary. So I came in with my box of Kleenex and teacher was sure I was definitely retarded so Bellefaire decided to test me. So I remember having a battery of tests. They decided no, I wasn't retarded. And but they also decided I was artistic. That Julie needed piano lessons. Well we had one piano and it was in the playroom and I was in the big girls' cottage now. Well Julie, Julie had to practice. Julia. No one was allowed in the playroom when Julia had to practice. Makes you instantly popular doesn't it? I decided I don't want piano lessons so my piano teacher and I started talking about African violets and she taught me to knit instead which was great. But I remained very interested in art. And anyway, I'm –

Q: Can we move on. Then you went to high school.

A: No, then I went to um,

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Q: TO get to your high school years and then on to college.

A: Then I went to my first foster home.

Q: Right and you stayed six months. And then you went to a second –

A: Well I had met my parents when I was on that outing when I was 11. And they decided then they wanted to adopt me. And I had a hard time with that. Didn't want to be adopted. Took me a long time to figure out who I was and didn't want to change it.

Um, so I saw Ms. Barnes again to decide whether I would be adopted or not. And she helped. And my grandfather was very against it. At this time they were in the States and I was to go see them every summer. I couldn't live with them because they lived in some pretty awful slums and the Joint didn't think that that was safe. Then when I went to my parents, it was my mother was an artist. And I guess, I loved art and it was like wow, and my father loved having a daughter. And it was amazing to me because he was very, very educated, well-educated man who did not take to fools lightly. He had a PhD. And yet I could you know if I were taking French, we'd speak French at the table so that Julie could practice. So he was very special. And they both were. And we became very, very close.

And my grandfather eventually met my parents. Although he didn't understand adoption. He thought it was a form of white slavery. So I had him come and meet them. And he fell in love with my mother. He thought she was like his daughter and my father was a good business man and that he was very thrilled about. So I was adopted. I skipped a year of high school because frankly I didn't want to take math. I was terrible in math and at that time, they gave you tests in English and history and if you did well, you were put in top track. And top track meant that you had to have physics and you had to have advanced, advanced math. So I wanted to skip a year and skip that. So I did.

And I graduated and my father, I said I'm not going to college. And my father said um, well it's not a question of going or not going. It's a question of which college. So I said well I want to go to Sarah Lawrence and my mother said well because I had met a girl who looked like a

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Rembrandt painting and with her red hair and everything and she went to Sarah Lawrence so I wanted to go there.

My mother said honey, you know you might want to go someplace that's coed where you'd be with both boys and girls. So I also wanted to go to the University of Chicago. So my father took me down and did not like Hyde Park at all, at all, at all and said mm, mm. You're too young to be in this. Meanwhile I had got early admittance to Antioch and I went to see Antioch. I just turned 16. But I couldn't handle that much freedom. So I said I can't handle that much freedom. My father said well I have this idea. There's a school that's close to us and I would like you to check it out for your cousin Suzanne because not only is it a good liberal arts school but it has a good conservatory for your cousin. So I'd like a young person's opinion. I said ok, I'll go with you. Went with him. Next thing I know, I've got an appointment with Dean Jackson, dean of admissions and Dean Jackson said you know introduces himself. And my father is sitting there and I said actually Dean Jackson you don't want to take me because I did ok on the English part but on the math part. He said yeah I see. Did you just write your name and then turn it in. I said – he said yeah, hm. He said well you know you didn't have your three years of high school math to get in so you'd have to have your third year of math to get out. But yeah they decided they would take me.

So my father – I said take me. We're looking at this for my cousin and Julie you know we just adopted you and you've been with us so little and Oberlin is only an hour away and we'd like to be close to you. And I said ok. And I went to classes and I felt so comfortable because I had gone to Miami, University of Miami, Miami University in Ohio and I hated it. People were nice enough but I was doing a crossword puzzle and suddenly I was an egghead. And unh, unh, I'd had enough of that. At high school. I just wanted a chance just to be me.

And at Oberlin I could be me. And I loved that and I just, so that's why I went to Oberlin and kept changing majors. And then junior year when you had to declare your major, I had most hours in French and art. And studio art was a very long major and so I decided I would go for French. And I had met Larry when he was a senior and I was a junior living at French house. And he went to the University of New Hampshire for graduate school in chemistry. And he asked me to marry him which is also a funny story.

I called my father to tell him that I was engaged. This is my senior year. I was, Daddy, I'm engaged. You're what? I'm engaged Daddy. Quiet, the silence. He didn't ask me. Daddy he

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doesn't want to marry you. That fell really like a bomb. And then Larry wasn't Jewish. And my parents were upset about this. Everybody was upset about it. And but Larry was an amazing, amazing, is an amazing man.

Q: So you got married and then where did you live, just kind of summarize.

A: And then we lived in Durham, New Hampshire while Larry finished his degree and I taught French and Spanish at the local high school. Then for two years. Then I had Steve and you could not teach if you were pregnant at that time. And then when Steve was close to a year, we left and went to Chicago, Larry's first job. We stayed in Chicago for three and a half years and then, well three years. Then moved to Omaha, Nebraska and that's where our daughter was born and she had a naming ceremony and Larry decided that he also wanted to convert at that. He had taken the course in Chicago from Rabbi Devine who had them read God, Jews and History by Max **Dimont**. And Larry thought, great this is my thing. So he decided to convert and when he was asked ok so you'll be Abraham. He said no, I don't want to be Abraham, I want to Moshe. So they said ok be Moshe, so that's why you see the various Moses's over there. And so that's, we lived in Nebraska where Larry worked at the University of -- at a research place for cancer research. That was a part of the University of Nebraska Medical School.

Then we came down here where -- oh and I got a few more degrees in Omaha. I had substitute taught in Chicago where if you could breathe and walk, they told you, you could teach. And then I realized that I needed much more training to deal with kids with problems which I enjoyed. And so when we got here I was going to go on in that field, and that's what I did.

Q: Talk a little bit about some of your thoughts. When you were raising your children, when your children were first born even, did that influence, did it bring back memories of what you went through. Your childhood was so very different than theirs. Did it influence how you raised your children, do you think because of what you had gone through? And the trauma and the challenges that you had?

A: (pause) I think in a way it certainly influenced our son. Because I had made a big, big thing of having him have a bar mitzvah. Grandpa wanted to live to see his great grandson bar

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mitzvahed. Great, great, I guess hunh. And so I put some pressure on Steve to have the bar mitzvah and he had a hard time with that one. And I had grandpa's diary translated. And I think it was a lot for him to deal with being the son of a survivor cause it kind of fell on him. And I think the family hero was grandpa who started a resistance and all of that. Steve eventually joined the rangers, the airborne rangers and I think that's partially why.

So I think yes, to some extent, but mm. I was worried about the kind of parent I would be because my grandma was at times very difficult and I didn't want to be like that. But I had lots and lots of help as I was growing up and I had lots of people who were very important to me. I was very blessed in that.

So (sigh) I think I got demonstrations of how to love very well.

Q: Are you angry that you had to go through the terrible times –

A: No.

Q: Other people were living.

A: Not at all, not at all. I think what I do deal with is big time is survivor guilt. And that you know is the baggage that you try to move around and move around and get rid of. You don't get rid of it but you can move it around. But no, no. not at all. If your question is did I derive, you said people having a so called easier life than I did. No. Because I feel that pain is also very personal. How do you compare people's pain? And I don't think it's fair to com – you know to say this person's pain is greater than this.

One thing I did have great difficulty with. When I went to, I told you I went to Israel last with Rabbis for human rights. It was an outstanding trip but it was terribly painful because I had gone to **Yad Vashem** first. I went early and Yad Vashem is now very different than it was when I first went there. It's a huge spread of acres which is interesting because as you walk through it, you have this feeling of freedom and then you come up against one of the railroad cars where you can walk into various – but this feeling of freedom.

And you know there's an awful lot of lip service paid to the Holocaust. Never again will we have this. Never again but I have great difficulty because never again but to us. Not necessarily to

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anyone else. And that just really, that hurt my heart. To see what we're all doing in Israel itself. And I'm not saying that you know it's all one sided or whatever, whatever. But oh. Anyway. So I had great difficulty with that.

Q: Are you more comfortable around other survivors?

A: No, no. I'm comfortable around survivors and non survivors.

Q: Are there any sights or sounds or smells in today's world that triggers memories for you?

A: When we were first living in Chicago, Larry and I, we lived near Michael Reese hospital and there were always sirens, sirens and sirens used to terrify me. And so Larry said to me one day, well but Julie think of it this way. These are all pregnant women going to have babies. Well it worked. (laughs) And I would smilingly think of all these pregnant ladies going to have babies. Yeah, it was wonderful, yep.

Q: Any other sights or sounds or smells that trigger memories for you?

A: Yeah. When we were in California we went to Hirsh Park to hear a concert, live concert. That's where the Nazis, neo-Nazis had their headquarters. And I saw them in their uniforms marching around and I was beside myself I was so livid. And I was with my brother in law and my husband and my three year old son. And I broke free from them and I went up to the Nazis and I said you are such worthless, worthless people. Well we have the right to believe what – I said yes, and you're doing it in a park that was contributed by Jews. I said hunh and I said I just, I think you are such the crap of the earth. And I said and that's my freedom of speech.

Q: Did you tell them where you came from?

A: No, no, no. but Larry was – and Jim were ready to save me and so forth. And so on. And –

Q: What are your thoughts about Germany?

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A: I, you know, the first time I went to Ger – no it was actually the second time I went to Germany, I had great difficulty. I had come from France and I was to meet Larry in Germany. We were going to go to Freiburg because he had a doctor herr **Drochi**, who had invented a special kind of rat for cancer research. And so I was to meet Larry there so we could have a vacation also. I had come from France. And I had a glorious time and I was sitting there in this car with these French young men who were going to Germany to work. Cause Germany paid much better wages. And just as we passed the border, the German police came on very, very officious and I got my dander up a bit and I had a big suitcase. And I didn't understand a word they were saying and I could care less. And the soldiers, the French soldiers said you know don't make a big issue of this. It's ok. We're here for you. We understand. They understood nothing but they were lovely.

And so they were gentling me along. And they got the suitcase down. They said there's nothing there. She's an American, whatever, whatever. But that was my first taste. And then I got to the railroad station. And I was supposed to meet Larry there. He wasn't there. And I, there am I with this huge suitcase, no Larry. A man comes up to me cause apparently that's where you pick up prostitutes at the train station. And I didn't know. So (phone ringing) I – then Larry came and I was furious with Larry. And he had gotten the wrong time that the train was to come in and I was so angry with him.

Then we had an interesting -- we stayed at the, I called it the rat house. We stayed there and for a night and then herr doctor Drochi invited us to his apartment. So Larry and I went there and I saw this man who was a caricature. A dueling scar. I think he was wearing a monocle even, I think so. And he kissed my hand and like that was his feat. And I looked at Larry and he said oh you know how nice to meet Larry. He spoke German and French, no English. Nice to meet Larry and his French wife. And I said **Je ne suis pas Francaise. Je suis Americaine et je suis juife** [ph]. Just like that cause I thought I am going to clear the air with this jerk. And we're sitting down and he's giving me the party line. We're talking the problems with America. They're all due to miscegenation. All in French. And I'm thinking I can't believe that this guy is still around. He's a Nazi so and so. And Larry said no, no, no, no. he wouldn't have this position, Julie. He can't be a Nazi, no way and when we came back and we were having lunch with Umberto **Safiati** who was the NIH who is a sweetheart. And Umberto said so how was

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lunch with the Nazi? And Larry said what? He said oh yeah, yeah Drochi was a Nazi. Didn't you know that Larry? And I said hm. But Larry is so naïve. He's so naïve. Yeah, so.

Q: Do you feel any nostalgia for Poland?

A: None.

Q: Even though you were born there?

A: I don't remember a pretty or nice Poland. What I want to see is to find out where things were and so forth and so on, but nostalgia no.

Q: Have you been back?

A: No, never.

Q: Do you want to go back?

A: Yes, Larry and I will be going back. He's going to go first cause he has to give a speech in Krakow. And then we'll trace a few things. And we're going to go, I think maybe to even Warsaw, to the Jewish information institute to find out what we can about my sister.

Q: Cause she was never found?

A: Never found no.

Q: Would you go back to Lvov?

A: Sure, I that's where I yeah which is now of course L'viv and it's the Ukraine. Yeah, I want to go back. I want to see where things are. I was talking to Theresa who works at the Holocaust Museum and Teresa had gone to L'viv, just two years ago and she had some wonderful pictures.

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She also showed me this huge hospital and she said yeah, that was a big Jewish hospital. Nowhere does it say that it was a Jewish hospital. So that's, yeah.

Q: Do you feel totally assimilated?

A: To the United States? I feel very grateful to the United States.

Q: Do you feel American?

A: Oh yes, oh yes, very much so. Yeah.

Q: Do you consider yourself a religious person?

A: Not at all.

Q: Because of what you went through, because of what, being Jewish.

A: No. No. I had a period in my life where I was conservative. I really liked young Judea and what it stood for. And then **B'Nai Brith** and B'Nai Brith girls and no I'm not religious at all.

Q: But do you feel Jewish?

A: Absolutely. Oh I feel like Judaism is my core. Mm hm and everything that I feel I stand for is the base is Judaism.

Q: Do your children feel very Jewish? Do they consider themselves --

A: My son not at all, not at all. He doesn't believe in any religion he says. My daughter who is also married to someone who was not Jewish, believes very strongly in raising her son Jewish. She's kind of eclectic in what she kind of believes but she wants her son to be raised Jewish. And my grandsons, the older two were bar mitzvahed. Yeah.

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Q: Do you think you are the person who you are today because of your childhood and your life? That you would have been very different if your life hadn't been what it was?

A: I think that I owe the world a great deal. And I think that (pause) that's kind of been my life's work in educational equity and even in you know making even the playing field all the way around. And I believe in that. And that probably comes from being a survivor. Why did I, useless me, survive when so many good and fabulous people didn't? But that isn't the question that can ever be answered. But so yes, I also feel that I was so, so unbelievably lucky. I had parents I absolutely adored and were such a huge influence on my life. And –

Q: These are the people who adopted you?

A: Yes, yeah, mm hm. Yeah. And I believe I was very, very lucky in my husband who is just such an incredibly good man. I mean I don't know many people who – Larry, **Gator** said I should ask you because I'd like to bring this kid home to live with us. What do you think? He said oh if you think it's ok, it's ok. So we had **Gamley** who is living with us.

Q: This is where, it was –

A: Here. I was an assistant principal at Blair and this was a kid, one of them was a kid I kicked out and then I kicked him out, I suspended him for fighting and he came right back and fought the same kid again. So I had him up for possible expulsion. And he had lots of problems.

Q: And he came here to live?

A: Mm hm.

Q: Any, before we close any message to your grandchildren that you'd like to leave for them?

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A: It's not what happens to you. It's how you react to what happens to you that matters. And that I know that they are all bright capable, and strong young men and I know that they will be great and how proud and pleased I am to have them.

Q: Well that's a lovely, certainly a lovely note to end on.

A: I don't know about that.

Q: This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Julie Keefer.

(end)