This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, volunteer collection, with Genia MIranski, conducted by Gail Schwartz, on May 19, 2013, in Silver Spring, Maryland. It is in addition to her father's interview, Elia Miranski. And she is adding some more information as his daughter. This is tape number one.

So your father has already told us the story. So let's kind of fill in some of the spots that we didn't cover. Could you tell me the names of the children in the family? His siblings? And his parents' names?

Yeah, the name of the father was Isser-- is Isaac, Genia, his mother, and the brother was Israel Simchas. Elia, Zlota, Tola, and--

There was a sixth child.

Yeah, six children.

And when your father was young, growing up in Mir, which is where he was born in 1922, was he a member of any Zionist youth organizations?

Yeah, he was a member of Hashomer Hatzair. And he learned Hebrew. He went to cheder-- they learned prayers. Actually, he was recital [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH] when I was little. And he knew the holidays, Jewish holidays, and prayers, because he had a Jewish upbringing.

And now let's go move up to when the Germans came in 1939. What the changes were.

When Germans came, they gather all the Jewish people in the middle of the city, Mir. And they put everybody together, and they start shooting everybody. People who could escape, and they did shoot, they brought them to the castle. It was a castle in the middle of Mir, and they turned this castle to make a ghetto for people who they want them to work for them.

If somebody was too old, or not able to work, they was killing them right away. It wasn't no use.

So your father went into the castle.

They went into the castle.

With his family? With his siblings?

With his brother, Isser. And some of the younger friends.

And did they have to do any work while they were in that castle in the ghetto?

In the castle in the ghetto, they were sending to the work, to build bridges, and build roads for Germans to bring their supplies, so their cars could drive in and out.

And so your father went out to do this kind of work?

They was working hard. And whoever was not able to work, there was killing on the spot.

So he saw this?

He saw this. And actually, one of his friends, they sent some dogs-- they was like making jokes and sending dogs to take person apart, like maul him to death. And that was in front of his eyes.

Do you know about his parents? Were his parents in the castle, also?

His parents was killed.

They never went into the castle.

They didn't go to the castle, they was killed on the spot. And all the younger siblings, because it was younger.

And then your father jumped out of the window of the castle and escaped into the forest?

They jump from the window from the castle, because of one of the guys who German didn't know he was Jewish, and his name was Oswald, he was working with a German. And he was telling the people in a castle, in German, telling they going to kill everybody.

He was warning them.

He was warning them. They thought this guy was Polish priest, because when they gather all the Jewish people here, on the way to the Polish convent, and the nuns told Germans, he belonged here. So they didn't know he wasn't Jewish. So he was working with people in the castle, and warned them.

So the windows was very high-- they jumped from the windows, and they crawl down and run through the forest. As there was hiding in a forest inside the-- [NON-ENGLISH]?

Swamp.

Swamp-- they was hiding in a swamp, they were sitting in the swamp.

In the water?

In the water. And breathing through the straw, when they heard the dogs was barking. Because they knew the Germans was looking for people who escape.

So they were sitting for three days in the water, in the swamp, to cover the trails. And then they walk around the forest until they found the group of the partisans who was fighting Germans.

And let's talk a little bit about his experience in the partisans, and to get supplies, he would do what? To get food?

To get supplies, sometimes he was going to the city, and they was killing the Germans who was guarding the German supply. Germans was gathering food, and supplies, and clothes, and everything from the people who live in the city. And they have like a [NON-ENGLISH]--

A store.

Storage, yeah, warehouse. So it was one of the thing for them for partisans to go to get supplies, to kill the people who was guarding these warehouses, and bring supplies.

And your father had said something about friction between Jews and Jews-- different Jewish partisan groups.

Different groups, was like, doesn't like each other. And it was competition. And Russian partisans sometime too, they didn't like Jewish people too. And in one instance, they killed somebody who had little baby. And they wanted to have a stroller for a baby. And the leader of another partisan group, Jewish person, killed this father because he didn't want them to have the stroller.

[NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

So they were blowing up, as your father spoke about, on his interview, they were blowing up railroad tracks.

Yeah, they was going to-- and we have to remember, this was like 17, 18-year-olds. So it was a lot of drinking going on too.

Drinking alcohol.

Alcohol, they was doing moonshine in the forest.

The partisans.

Partisans, yes.

Really?

Because they was giving-- the children was very scared and they have this traumatic experience, seeing their parents and siblings killing in front of their eyes. So there were was like drinking and then going for all this.

Were there young-- young children in your father's group? Do you know? Did he ever talk about that?

I know his friend, Joseph Salabrinkof, he was 14.

Yeah, that was one of the youngest.

I assume it was another children too, because they had different groups. They had groups who were going to do all kind of--

Sabotage.

--sabotage, and there was groups was like family groups, who was cooking and helping with household chores.

Yeah. Anything else you wanted to say about the partisans, your father's experience with the partisans? Because then he went into the army, the Russian army, after that.

Then they went to the army.

And he got badly wounded.

And he got badly wounded. And they told him-- he was like six months in the hospital. And they told him he was not going to be able to work. And it can be infected. They didn't have enough supplies. And they told him he'd have to cut his arm off. And he said, no.

And he-- after that, exercise and to try to take care of, and get stronger, and he lived productive life.

Yeah. So then he leaves the army and comes back to Mir. And stays in Mir.

Yeah, he stayed in Mir for a little while. And then--

Well, he said for seven years, didn't he?

Seven years. And then he went to Minsk.

Minsk.

And in '58, was all the people who was from Poland descent, because Mir was Poland before Russia took this part and become Belarus.

Right.

So all the people who had Polish--

Papers.

--citizenship could emigrate to Israel. They let them go to Israel. This why a lot of people in '58 left and went to Israel and went to United States.

Yeah.

So he want to emigrate, but my mother wasn't ready. Because all her family, after war, got together. She lost a lot of members and her parents to the war.

And your mother's name?

Zila.

And do you know her maiden name?

Her maiden name was Soloveitchik.

Oh, Soloveitchik, related to the famous rabbis? The Soloveitchiks?

I have no idea.

OK.

And so she is- had her sisters--

Were still in Minsk.

--was in Minsk. And she didn't want to go by herself to Israel. So she didn't emigrate in '58.

So you were born in 1958.

Yes.

And your brother was born--

He was born in 40--

[NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

'46.

But your-- so his mother was different?

My brother-- he wasn't married, but he had a son after the war.

Your father did.

Yeah.

Yeah. And this is your brother.

He-- yeah--

Yeah.

Because he's my brother.

Yes.

And my mother actually brought him up. Because his mother, how much I remember from the stories, put him in the orphanage home.

Orphanage, yeah.

And they pick him up from orphanage.

Yeah, OK. And so then they stayed in Minsk. And then his brother, your uncle, Israel, went to Israel in 1958-- your uncle, your father's brother.

Yeah. He went to Israel in '58, yes.

Right.

And we couldn't have any--

Any contact.

--contact or relationship. I never saw my uncle in my life. Because--

Because you were all still in the Soviet Union.

We was in Soviet Union. And when we immigrate to Israel, he died, in '72. So he didn't have an opportunity to see him either.

And then can you talk a little bit about the underground bakery in Minsk that your--

Yeah, in Minsk, my father, because he had a Jewish upbringing, before '38, he had a good idea what you do in the holidays. And he wanted to be informed what going on with Israel. And he was following all the news, what going on with Israel in a the Six Day Wars and everything.

And I remember, as a child, he was hiding in the bathroom with a little radio. And putting pillows against the walls so neighbor not going to hear his listening to Kol Israel and BBC, Golos America, from Voice of America, what going on. And then for Passover, it was underground bakery. And Jewish people who want to have matzo they had to bring flour to this.

And they was baking at night, just at night, so nobody can see them. And he was bringing home, like in a suitcase, the matzo. And all of my Russian actually friends was telling me, can we try this Jewish cracker?

So we tried. My mother had no idea about the Jewish holidays because she grew up in Soviet Union. And she just knew Yiddish, but she didn't know about holidays. And my father was know how to pray. He was telling in Hebrew different

prayers for different holidays, and kiddush for Shabbat.

Right. And then your family decided to move. Well, tell me-- OK, anything else in Minsk before you moved to Israel?

It was a lot of anti-Semite--

Semitism.

--anti-Semitism going on in Minsk. And the people was calling us [NON-ENGLISH]. [NON-ENGLISH] it's derogatory. I remember as little child, from all my schooling, we had me and another Jewish person. And I remember I was fighting with one child. And he told him, so go to your country. And I knew-- we were already working in the paper, so I told him, I will.

And it was very good feeling. Because we went to Israel in a couple months after that. It took us a year and a half to make visa to go to Israel. My father had a lot of medals from the war. And they call him and they told him he's a trader. And they took all his medals away. Took all his-- like certificate of the war and they throw him away from work.

And I couldn't stay in my house when we was packing and everything. I went to live with my aunt because my parents was afraid the neighbors going to go-- we immigrated to Israel, so they're going to do something with me. So they send me away. So I wasn't-- like for three or four months before we left, I didn't go to school. Because it was like a really big secret. We couldn't tell nobody we're going to school.

So when we immigrate to Israel, finally we got the papers. It took a long time to get all the papers. And we went to Israel.

In 1972.

In '72, we live in Nazareth Illit. Actually, in Israel they built-- it's called [PLACE NAME] Shalom. It's a neighborhood of peace. And it was between Nazareth Illit and downtown, where all the Arabs was living in Nazareth.

Yeah.

You're 14 years old.

I'm 14, yeah. And I remember we went to the Arab market to buy food and clothes. And they built [PLACE NAME] shalom, neighborhood of peace. Just all the new immigrants come to this place to live. And if somebody was coming there to ask questions in Hebrew, like where is the bus stop or whatever, nobody could tell. Because nobody speak Hebrew in this part of the city.

And all the Arabic neighborhood downtown in Nazareth actually start speaking Yiddish and Russian because they want business with Jewish people. And in '73, one year after we came to Israel, it was Milhemet Yom HaKipurim.

The Yom Kippur War.

The Yom Kippur War. And I remember, we was going out. It was completely dark. And people have to be in their underground bunkers. And people couldn't stay in their apartments. And you have to turn off the lights.

And as children, was like running outside and screaming at the neighbors, like turn off the light, turn off the light. My father was working day and night. He wasn't with us. Because he was working on the ships, warships. And they had to prepare the ships, what was going for a war. So they was working extra time and staying, sleeping, at workplace.

And then it's finished. And yeah, they make us stop. Actually, the war-- when Israel start winning, they make us stop. So it's-- we don't do a complete destruction. But it's OK for other people to have destruction of Israel.

So then you stayed. And your story-- so your father continued to work in Israel.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah. And then your life after that, did you go to school?

Yeah, I went to school. And I went to live in Jerusalem, actually. I was a student in Jerusalem.

Were you?

In--

What were you studying?

I was studying early childhood education.

At a teachers seminary? At a teacher's college or something?

Yeah. [NON-ENGLISH]. I actually was-- for our first year, I was [NON-ENGLISH]. I went to-- it was special classes, for two days, [NON-ENGLISH], to learn more about the Tanakh Bible and Jewish studies.

Because to have-- to finish high school, you have to actually pass Bible studies exam. So I went to Jerusalem. And then I went to the seminar. And our parents was trying too. It was pretty hard to start new life.

Yes.

They was over 50. And they learn new language.

Yes.

They make new friends. And life in Israel was very, very nice. For teenagers, and people was very friendly. And for me, I was feeling like I'm at home. So it was very good feeling.

And then when did you come to the United States?

I came to United States in '85.

And with the intent to stay? Or did you--

Actually, not with intent to stay. I came to visit one of my mother's sisters immigrate to United States and I come to visit. And then I met my husband.

You met your husband in the United States--

Yes.

--or in Israel? in the United States.

Yes. And we got married and I stayed.

And you stayed, yeah. And you have the two children.

Yes.

Yes. Yeah. Can I ask you this-- and then your parents came after that.

Yeah, after this my parents came because--

In '95, 1995.

--it was very hard for them to get along by themselves when they was like 80s, since the 80s.

Right. And when you came to the United States, did you come to Washington right away? Or did you--

Yeah.

You did.

Maryland.

To Maryland, yeah. Tell me your thoughts about being the daughter of a Holocaust survivor. What is that like? How has that affected you, do you think?

It's affect my life, because every time-- through the years-- from the beginning, I didn't pay attention for all his stories. And every time when he was like sad or getting together with his friends, he start like thing by thing telling a little bit about.

And I didn't have any grandparents, uncles, cousins, extended family. No holidays with the family, like big family gathering. And even right now, I see in other families-- I see in other families getting together and visiting each other. I don't have nobody. And I didn't get any grandparents interactions.

And my father tried to be the best father he could be. Because I cannot even imagine how he put his life together after he went through. But he was very good husband. Very, very good, supportive to my mom.

And I really don't know what was going on in his mind. Because they didn't get any post-traumatic counseling and psychological evaluation or whatever. They have to start working. And getting food, or clothes, or something, they start with zero. And I have no idea how. But it's pretty hard. And they did the best they could.

What was your mother-- just generally, what was your mother's story during the war?

My mother--

Is your mother alive?

No, she died two years ago.

Oh, sorry. I'm sorry.

She was with her family when Germans came. They actually, like a lot of Jewish families too, they went deep into the--

Forrest?

South-- no, like--

She was in Minsk?

She was in Minsk.

And then the Germans came.

They went to Kazakhstan. And all kind of stans.

Yeah, right.

She, and her two sisters, and her mother, [INAUDIBLE] another little sister was in a school, like a kindergarten in the same day. And kindergarten immigrate somewhere. They took them right away. And she couldn't find until the last moment. She was looking for her younger sister. She couldn't find her.

Another sister, she was a little bit younger than her, they evacuated them together from work, or from school. She was at school at the same time. And they couldn't find them through the war. She was I think 16. And my mother's mother died in the evacuation because all her children was all over through there.

Her older brother was under Leningrad-- Leningrad blockade. And he was in the army. And they received a letter he was killed. His name was Haim. I know about him because he liked to play guitar and my mom liked to play guitar. They was playing guitar together.

And so she lost two of her sisters, her brother, and her mother died through the war. When the war was finished, they came-- I know with her older sister-- her husband, she was married, and her husband was in the war. And her little daughter was in the evacuation with them too. So when they came back to Minsk after the war they start looking for siblings who got lost.

They found the sister who got lost when she was 16, who evacuated with the school. But the little one, they couldn't find until last. And she was looking for her all the time. And she think maybe-- maybe she was killed. But maybe they changed her name or maybe somebody adopted her. Maybe she doesn't remember her name and what is her last name.

One of the Minsk family, who when we was doing all the paperwork to go to Israel, her name was Genia, the lady's name was Genia. And my mother was thinking she was her younger sister. She was asking her all the time about her roots and everything.

Because one of the sister's was named Genia. The little sister who lost, her name was Rya. But they thought maybe she didn't remember. She said her name is Genia. So this why she was like really excited, but she couldn't find her.

And you've lived in different countries. Do you think you would have been a very different person if you hadn't gone through what you went through living and your parents being survivors?

Yeah. For sure, I wouldn't be. Because I wouldn't learn from this experience. I'm thinking a lot about how Holocaust could happen, like very, very educated. And people who love opera, and ballet, and everything could be so primitive and so hateful toward another people.

And we have to be very careful about-- Jewish people try to survive in wars. And I have a lot of conversation with American Jewish people here about what-- how they see it. And they're very comfortable to live in this country. And sometimes they don't support Israel how they should support Israel.

Because without Israel, even people in the United States don't have house, don't have home, don't have homeland. And the United States very nice home homeland for all kinds of religions and everything. But history can repeat them self.

And we really, really have to support Israel and everything what they're doing to survive. To survive, because they support all the Jewish people from each country. And if start being really, really bad in any country, we always have home.

So Israel is your home?

Yes.

What are your thoughts about Germany?

Oh right now, I still don't accept they fully understand what exactly their ancestors did to my ancestors. I don't know exactly how the education in Germany, teaching them about the Holocaust and how they really behaved in the war. And they should be more supportive of Israel.

I know they move out. But I still cannot understand how they can change so much from everything what they did and now be completely different. I don't know how exactly. They still have neo-Nazis. They still have people who support different groups.

Are you more comfortable around immigrants than you are native born Americans?

No. I actually very comfortable. Because of different experience, I live in different places. And I have friends from all walks of life. I am very comfortable. I love Americans. I have a lot of immigrants from different countries. My, actually, almost like a sister, my best friends, they're from India. They're not even Jewish.

I have a lot of people who are my friends from different-- like Lebanon. I have very good neighbors-- I have very good neighbors from different countries. And I really, really love people in the United States because they're very friendly. They're very open people. And I like experience different cultures too.

Tell me about your husband. Is he from America?

My husband's Israeli. He's Israeli. He was born in Israel. His parents is from Romania. And when they moved-- they immigrated too. When they move to Israel, he was born right away.

Were they survivors too?

They're survivors too from Romania.

From where in Romania?

From Iasi, from Iasi, from Romania. And I was blessed with the best mother-in-law and father-in-law. Because when my parents was in Israel, and I was living here, they took my parents like they-- like closest relative. And they had good relationship.

So again, are you-- I know you said you're comfortable with all people from all different backgrounds, but are you even more comfortable with people whose parents and grandparents were survivors and immigrants?

Yes, because--

Do you feel a connection?

I feel a connection. I feel they understand more what exactly-- people from former Soviet Union, they went through the same upbringing and experiences what I experience. And people who immigrated to Israel went through immigration process, have similar experiences too, how to fit in new society.

So this is how I-- and I like new people. I like to meet new people, because I really like these new experiences and experience different people, different kinds of people.

Do you think your-- and your husband's name is--

Israel.

Israel.

Do you think your and your husband's experiences influenced your children?

Yeah.

You're second generation. They're third generation.

Yes. My children pretty much brainwashed about Holocaust experience. And I told him never forget from where you come from. I told him, you have to love your people and be good to Jewish people, because every another ethnic group support each other. My children love Israel. I teach him about Israel. They have to love Israel. And Israel have to-- for them, like I told him, you cannot do no wrong in my eyes. And it has to be in their eyes too. And they have to be remembered, like I grew up without grandparents, they have to be thankful they have grandparents. And so they have to be thankful of everything what they got, because people went through everything for them to have a future. So, yeah my children know exactly--

Have you taken them to Israel? Have they been to Israel?

Yes, my children have been in Israel.

And their names are--

Karen and Avi.

Right. And how old are they now?

My son's 22 and my daughter is 18.

18. Well, is there anything else you would like to add that we haven't covered or--

Yeah, I just want to wish all of Israel, Jewish people, so they're going to have peace. This is the most important peace. And so Israel going to grow and prosper, and all the Jewish people have to support. So we're not going to have another Holocaust.

We have to understand our enemies. They want to wipe-- wipe all Israel out of the face of the world. We cannot-- they don't want to talk to us. They don't want to compromise. This what they want to do. And this what we have to remember.

Do you feel Russian in any way?

Yes, I feel a little bit of Russian culture. Because I like Russian food. I like Russian music. I like to read Russian literature. And I like to watch a Russian concert on YouTubes. And yeah, I like Russian culture. But on the same note, I really like everything Jewish. So it's a combination.

Do you feel American?

I don't feel much American. I feel American because I speak English to my children. And I feel American because my close friend, it's America, it's a melting pot, and whoever know me, all my friends is melting pot. I have big group of people who is really like really supportive of each other.

Like my best friend's from India. Another best friend from Puerto Rico. And we're doing potlucks, everybody bring

food from different countries. And yeah, I feel I like America because I'm involved in American culture. I like music, American movies.

[INAUDIBLE]

How did you feel about the fall of communism in '89-- 1989?

I'm very happy about it. Because they was telling they're going to be more democratic and more open. But it doesn't look like it's really working out. And it's continue. Hopefully, they're not going to go backwards.

Well, again, any final, final thoughts-- final, final thoughts.

Yeah, I want to thank you for your patience. And for my father it was very nice. So somebody talking to him. He is 91-year-old.

Yes.

And it's very hard for him to remember. But it's very important, so people know exactly what happened.

Yes.

And people respect what our parents went through and acknowledge their suffering.

Well, that's a very meaningful note to end on. That's very meaningful. This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Genia Miranski.