This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Sarah Ludwig, conducted by Gail Schwartz on August 19, 2013 at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. This track the number 1. What is your full name?

Sarah Ludwig.

And what was the name that you were born with?

Sarah Racimora.

And where were you born?

Radom, Poland.

And when?

I was born May 18, 1940.

Let's talk a little bit about your family, your parents. Your father's name?

Leon Racimora.

And where-- was he originally from there?

Yes, he was.

What's the story of his family-- a little bit about that.

His parents had a restaurant in Radom. Radom was a very big city in Poland, one of the largest cities. There was a large Jewish population there. Very close-knitted. They were very friendly, and most of the people who lived in Radom used to come to my grandparent's restaurant. I don't know the name. I would like to find out what the name was. We're still researching it.

They were very well-- how can I put it-- friendly with all the families. Every family knew each other. Not only the parents, but also the children and the grandparents. So it was a very nice knit Jewish community.

Was your father born in Radom?

Yes, he was. 1912-- May 20, 1912. And I think that he went to school up to high school in Radom. I'm not sure. My mother, whose name is Stella Szetiski, That was her maiden name. And when she married my father, she became Stella Racimora. Her Hebrew name was Esther Malka.

And her family? What do you know about her family?

Her family-- her mother was Devora Szetiski. Her father was Sam Szetiski. And she had-- she was the oldest daughter. Then she had a sister named Tova or Tobka. Then she had a brother. He was Shmulek. And then she had a younger sister, Fela, that we just found out yesterday who she was on the picture.

Her brother was a Jewish policeman in Radom where the Germans kept touch with him to see what's going with the Jewish community. Shmulek was the one who took care of me.

OK, we'll get to that in a minute. So you had a large extended family--

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Yes.

--in Radom. And were your parents, do you know-- obviously you weren't born at the time, but do you know if they were very religious, observant?

Yes. They came from an orthodox background.

And what were they, Zionists?

Yes, well at that time they lived in Poland. I don't think that they were that aware about Israel, to be very honest with you. It was Palestine at that time.

I got that. You weren't born, so I just didn't know what you found out later. So you had this large extended family and had the restaurant. Now you are born, you said, in 1940.

Correct.

OK, and what are your first memories?

Very little, to be very honest with you. I was born in a very--

The Germans had already invaded Poland obviously.

Exactly.

So you were born after the invasion.

Exactly. The community in Radom did not believe that anything would happen to them. They just sat still, didn't do nothing about it. There was no warning they figured, you know, they lived a nice life. They were happy with each other. There were [INAUDIBLE] they went to and everything else. Nothing will happen to us, until the Germans invaded Radom.

This is in 1942?

Yes.

So did your parents tell you anything about your first two years of life?

No, no. I was too young.

No, no, you were too young. I'm just saying did your parents ever tell you later about those first two years?

My mother never spoke about it.

OK.

My father was the one that was instrumental in setting up a society-- a Radom society with all the survivors in New York presently, you know. And they used to get together on all the [INAUDIBLE]. And there were quite a few survivors that survived. And that's how they kept their memories about Radom.

They became Zionists. They started sending money to Israel. They bought an ambulance for Israel, Magen David.

All right, so now the Germans invade, and then what happened in Radom.

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The Germans invaded, and of course they--

The ghetto was set up.

The ghetto was set up.

So you were born in the ghetto?

No, I was born in Radom.

OK.

The Germans invaded. We were all evacuated from Radom, and we went to Pionki, which was a labor camp.

And how did you get there?

Well, I couldn't get there. They didn't allow the children there to the labor camp. No children were allowed in the labor camp.

So your parents left first? What--

They left Radom.

Your parents left together?

Together. And we came to this big lot, and we were separated. The women were in one row, and the men were in the other row. And what they did, they tattooed us.

Well, I think that's a little bit later. I think a little bit later. Let's move back in time. You were in the ghetto, and then--

We evacuated from the ghetto.

Yeah, but was your father taken away first? Did you mother-- was he taken away first?

Probably. Probably-- I don't recall. I was--

No, I know. I know. I'm just saying this is information that gotten later on. So he was taken away. And then your mother-- was she then taken away later?

No my mother was with me.

Stayed in--

Radom until we were evacuated from Radom.

OK.

So can you maybe just tell me more specifically what happened in Radom when you were in the ghetto and how your parents got out?

OK.

And your uncle, Shmulek.

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Shmulek was my mother's brother, and Shmulek was a Jewish policeman under the Nazis-- under this thing. I could not go into the labor camp. No children were allowed in the labor camp. So Shmulek said to my father, I'll take care of Sarah. And he took care of me for quite a while. I don't know how long, to be very honest with you. Then the time came, and he called my father up, and he says, Leon, my position was diminished, and I cannot take care of Sarah anymore.

Your father is now in Pionki, and you're in Radom. I see.

Yes.

And your mother is where?

Pionki also. Yeah.

Oh, so she left also.

Right.

So you were by yourself with your uncle in the Radom ghetto.

Right.

OK, and so then he contacted your father.

And he said, Leon, my job was diminished, and I cannot take care of Sarah anymore. You have to find a solution to take care of Sarah.

My father was a very industrious human being-- knew how to solve problems. He called one of his friends, and he says, listen guys. We gotta get Sarah into Pionki. So they managed to get a truck, and in the truck with potato sacks, they put me in a potato sack. And my father caught me on this truck and smuggled me into Pionki.

They threw you out in the potato sack.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

And put me in a potato sack, and someone threw the potato sack at my father.

Into your father's arms.

To catch it-- right, exactly. And they--

Now when you say your uncle called your father and so forth, what do you mean by that?

Well, he let him know that he couldn't take care of me anymore.

You don't know how he contacted him.

I have no idea. No, I have no idea how they contacted each other.

I know it's all layered, of course.

I don't know, but he contacted my father that he cannot take care of me anymore-- that it was his responsibility to get me into the labor camp. Because children were not allowed. It was only adults.

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So now you're there.

We're there-- took me out of a potato sack, and I was there. They obviously had some kind of a room where my father and mother stayed, and I lived there with my parents. And the only thing that my parents said to me-- they said, Sarah, when you hear the footsteps of boots, those are Germans. You have to make sure that you hide under the bed so they will not discover. Because you're really are not allowed to be here. And that's how I survives that whole era in Pionki.

Do you have any memories of being under the bed?

I remember-- that I remember.

What was it like?

What was it like? It was scary as a young child to say to you, you can't-- you can't play when you hear those footsteps. And my mother made sure that I understood what was going on. I wasn't a rebellious child. I listened. My mother said you gotta do that, Sarah, if you want to survive. And whenever I heard footsteps and the boots of the Germans, I hid under the bed.

And they obviously never found you.

No, no. That's why I'm here telling the story.

What kind of work did your parents do in Pionki?

My father worked for his parents in the restaurant. I told you they had a restaurant in Radom.

No, no, no. In Pionki.

In Pionki he went into the food business. He went out and he bought food, and he started a kitchen in Pionki to feed the people that were there in the labor camp.

And your mother did the same thing.

Yeah, they worked together.

And so you were there for-- so do you have any memories of what you did when you weren't under the bed?

I don't.

No memories. Of course you were very young.

No. I had no toys. I know that. It's not like I had maybe a doll or something, you know. I had nothing, no. It was survival of the fittest.

Did you ever go outside the room?

I don't remember.

You don't remember.

If you tell me describe the room, I couldn't describe it, to be very honest with you. Because my mother never spoke about it.

Later, yeah.

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Yeah, later.

But do you have any sense that it was a scary time for you?

Oh, absolutely. Absolutely.

You have that sense.

Oh, sure. Absolutely.

OK, so you're there when you're 2 and 3 and possibly 4. And is there anything else you want to say about Pionki? Your parents stayed for how long?

In Pionki we were how long?

I know you didn't leave until probably August '44. But did your father leave before that?

But from Pionki I went to Auschwitz, didn't I?

Yes. Yes, that's what I'm saying. So you were there from '42 to '44.

No, not that long. Yeah, OK, '42 to '44.

Do you remember leaving Pionki?

No.

You don't.

I don't remember.

And then the three of you were taken to Auschwitz-- your mother, your father, and you.

Not really no. I was taken to Auschwitz, but before we went to Auschwitz, they tattooed us. They put numbers on our arms.

You sure that wasn't in Auschwitz?

No, before we went into Auschwitz. The tattooing began before we went to Auschwitz.

Do you know where that was?

Auschwitz?

No, no, no. Where-- the tattooing took place.

Right here.

No, no, no. The city or the town.

The city? Probably Radom. They evacuated all of Radom.

You went from Radom to Pionki, from Pionki to Auschwitz.

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Right.

From what I understand. OK.

But before we entered Auschwitz, we were tattooed.

OK, we can talk about that a little later.

So now three of you are leaving together from Radom to going on your way to Auschwitz, and you said before you got to Auschwitz, they put on a tattoo on your arm. What was that like for a child. Do you remember that? Getting the tattoo?

I remember that. Standing in line-- there was a big line. I remember my mother-- they put a tattoo on my mother's hand first, and then my mother held me, and they touched me.

And you got a number.

Yes.

What was the number? Do you know what the number is?

Do you remember?

What the number is?

We have it somewhere, you know.

You don't know.

Yeah. Yeah.

So what was the trip like between Pionki and Auschwitz?

The trip was they got cattle cars-- trains that the Germans used to take cattle to different places. And all of us had to go into those cattle trains. That I remember distinctly.

You do remember.

That I remember.

With your mother and your father?

My mother and my father-- our whole family.

Was it more relatives?

Yeah, my grandparents. My grandparents, all of us. It was very crowded, smelly. There were no facilities for bathrooms. There was no air coming in or anything like that.

This is August 1944.

Right. And they took us to Auschwitz from there. Now when we got to Auschwitz, we were separated. The children went to the kinder house in Auschwitz. My mother-- we found out now that she was in Czechoslovakia. We did some

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research.

Yeah. Do remember the arrival in Auschwitz at all? Do you have any memories of that as a child? Yeah, very young child.

I couldn't tell you specifically. All I knew that we were on this train for quite a few days. It was smelly. I couldn't wait to get out of there. And the next thing I knew we were in Auschwitz. And then I was separated from my mother, my father. And I was taken to the kinder house.

Was your mother our father able to say goodbye to you?

I don't remember specifics. I really don't. I'm sure that we have and everything else, you know what I mean?

OK, so now you're in the children's house. What memories do you have of that?

None. None whatsoever, to be very honest with you. Who took care of me? We were discussing it. I had no idea who took care of the children in Auschwitz.

And what did you do?

What did we do? I couldn't tell you. I don't remember, to be very honest with-- Were there people who helped me? I don't know. But we found out later on when we went on the internet some more information that we know now what was happening to me.

Which was?

Which was the Russians came in.

Oh, this is towards the end. OK.

And but the Russians were instrumental enough to bring in help to care for the kids there. So they brought nannies, and some of the prisoners that were in prison in Auschwitz, they were helping to take care of the kids. They made sure that the children were taken care of.

And so you remember the Russians?

I don't remember the Russians, but I knew there was help. There were people who helped us. You know, there were women who helped us if we needed anything. You ask me, what did they feed you? I don't know. Did you sleep? I don't know. But they were adults there to supervise us, because the Russians were there.

And the other children were just as young as you?

They were all ages.

All ages.

They were all ages.

Do you have any memories of any of these children?

Not really.

No. What language did you speak?

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I spoke Polish, and I spoke Yiddish.

Yiddish, OK.

Yeah, those two languages.

OK. So now the Russians have come, so it's January, obviously '45. And you hadn't-- did you see your parents? Do you know if you saw your parents when you went--

Didn't see anyone, no.

In children's house-- while you were in children's house.

Until liberation.

What happened with-- until liberation. What happened with your parents? Did they tell you later after you were separated? When you went to Auschwitz and you were separated, you went into the children's house. What happened to your parents?

Well, I know that my father was in Dachau. And my mother, we found out that she was in Czechoslovakia-- through research now that we found out. That's where she was sent.

She was sent. So they did not stay, and you were the only want to stay.

In Auschwitz.

What about grandparents and aunts and uncles?

My father's parents perished.

In Auschwitz.

Yeah, in Auschwitz. And my mother's father survived. His wife did not survive. Devora did not survive. My mother had-- she was the oldest of four children, so she survived. Her sister, Tobka, survived. Shmulek, that saved me, he was the policeman. He did not survive.

He had gone to Asuchwitz?

I have no idea. I have no idea where he landed, but he did not survive. Then there was a younger sister that we found out about yesterday-- Fela. She was in the picture, and I used to say to Betsy, I have to find out. This was my mother's younger sister. Her name was Fela. We found out about it yesterday.

So now it's liberation time. You're being taken care of by Russian nannies. And then what happened?

Then what happened? The children were evacuated from Auschwitz.

Do you know about how many?

I have no idea. I couldn't give you a numbers.

No, I know. I know.

I was put in a kinder house in Krakow, and my mother was liberated from Czechoslovakia. At that time, the Jewish community put out lists. There was a list of all the men that survived. There was a list of all the women that survived,

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and a list of all the children that survived and where you could locate them. My mother was instrumental. She got on the train, and she was on the way to Krakow, not knowing there was a man from Radom there.

On the train?

On the train. And he said to her, Stella, your father is here. And she said, my father? She didn't know that he survived. She got off the train. They met by this train station, and they walked together to the orphanage. They saw my name on the list.

They knew-- she had known you were in this orphanage.

Right. From the list. It was divided in a very reasonable way where the survivors could find their relatives. And my grandfather and my mom came to Krakow. In the orphanage, they were prepared already for survivors to come and claim the children.

They lined you up. My mother walked in, and my grandfather walked in. I haven't seen my mother in a long time. I recognized her. And I said, mamushka. That's Polish for mother. And that's how they found me.

What was the name of the orphanage? Do you know where it was located?

I don't know. I don't know. It was in Krakow.

In Krakow.

In Krakow, you know. I don't know how many surviving children were there. I have no idea. We didn't research it yet. We're still researching it.

So after that very emotional reunion, what happened?

What happened-- we found out that my father was very sick when he was liberated from Dachau by the Americans. And the Red Cross took care of him. He was in the hospital, and they brought him back to good health.

There was a sergeant there, a Jewish sergeant. And he took a liking to my dad. And he said to him, you know, Leon? I'm going to be stationed in Germany. The name of the town was FÃ¼rstenfeldbruck. I don't know if I'm pronouncing it correctly.

And he says, I'm going to give you a house there. I want you to stay there until you relocate with your whole family. And he says, you'll do some jobs for me. You know, like what can you do? My father said whatever you want me to do, I'll do it.

But this young man was an American sergeant, and he says, don't worry. I'll take care of you. And you just stay in this house until you gather your whole family. And that's what my father did.

My father found out through the Red Cross that he survived, and he was in this town in Germany-- in Filston Fellbrook. And so she took me and my grandfather, and we went to meet my father.

You said she took me.

My mother. My mother, my grandfather, and I--

Yeah, went to--

We went to FÃ¼rstenfeldbruck to my father's house, and we were reunited there.

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Do you have memories of that time? I just know that we went there, you know, because afterwards my parents told me exactly what happened.

That's what I'm saying. You don't have memories of the--

I don't have memories of it, but I remember that we went back to Germany. My mother's sister, Topa, survived. And she found out that, too. So she came to FÃ¼rstenfeldbruck, too. How do I know this? Because I have all pictures with all there. And we stayed there for quite awhile.

Was it summer of '45? Do you have any idea?

Yeah, I think so. It must have been '45. Yeah. Yeah, it was '45.

So you stayed there.

We stayed there. Then, of course, my father was the youngest child in the rest of our family. Before the war, his oldest sister, Ruth, married an older man, and she left for the United States. So she wasn't even involved in the Holocaust.

Right.

She had a brother-- my father had a brother, Morris. And he decided-- he married in Poland. And he took his wife, and they went to Belgium. They settled in Belgium.

Then he had another sister, Rivka. Rivka married a young man, and they made aliyah. They went to Israel. And they settled in Israel.

My father was the only one left for the Holocaust. My Aunt Ruth, who lived in the United States, called Poland. And she said to her father, Dad, why don't you come to the United States? It's very nice here.

Well my grandfather had a beard. He was Orthodox Jew and everything else, you know. He was very pious. And Ruth invited grandpa to stay with her. So he came to the United States, and he stayed here. He didn't like the United States.

However, he changed his whole image. He shaved his beard. He came back to Poland just with a little mustache. I have a picture of it. And he came back to Poland. Had he been wise enough, he would have said "kindalach, we're going to the United States."

They were very comfortable. This was their home, Poland. And they figured no one is going to touch them. So he came back to Poland, and, of course, we were all involved in the Holocaust. You know, my father's father perished, and his mother, Chaya, perished. I don't know what happened to them exactly, but they did not survive. My grandfather-- my mother's father-- survived. His wife, Devora did not survive. Shmulek, of course, did not survive as I told you, and my mother's youngest sister did not survive.

So now you're all together in Germany.

In Germany.

Where did you stay.

And we were all well and everything else. His brother, Morris, contact him. He lives in Belgium. He was in the pocketbook business there. Then we crossed into Brussels. He had two children, and Morris said to him, Leon, why don't you come to Belgium? Stay with us. My father wanted to see his family. So we traveled to Belgium.

So were you ever in a DP camp in Germany?

No.

You never were.

No.

We traveled to Belgium, and my father settled down. We got a nice apartment, and he worked for his brother for two years. He was very prosperous, Morris-- the big factory, pocketbook factory. He had two sons, and I had a good time with my cousins. Albert and--

So you have memories of that time.

Yes, that I do. Yeah, that I do. And we stayed in Belgium for 2 years.

Now you still have the tattoo on your arm at that point.

Yes. I'll tell you later on what happened with that. Rivka calls Morris, and she says what do you mean keeping Leon in Belgium? I want to see him. So of course he speaks to my father. And my father was like the wandering Jew. He wanted to see his whole family. So Rivka says, Leon, you survived, you come to Israel. So we picked up again, and we went to Israel.

OK, this was when?

This must have been after Israel became a state.

After '48.

Yes. After '48. And we lived with Rivka for quite a while. She had a nice house.

Where in Israel?

In Tel Aviv. Tel Aviv. And the government at that time was building the shikun. Know what shikun is? OK-- for survivors of the Holocaust.

So we lived with Rivka for quite a while until the shikun was ready. The shikun was built in Giv'at Rambam, which is just the outskirts of Tel Aviv. Once it was ready, we moved to Giv'at Rambam.

And you had to learn Hebrew.

Yes.

Now I switch-- I spoke Polish, I spoke Yiddish, I spoke French.

From Belgium.

From Belgium. Fluent in French. So my father says, you know, there's a school in Jaffa. The outskirts of Tel Aviv. I want Sarah to go and not to forget French. It's a nice language, and it sounds good and everything else.

Well, Rivka was very angry that-- she goes, what do you mean? You're in Israel. She's got to speak Hebrew. So my father let it go. He didn't push it, and I got enrolled in school, and I went to school in Israel. We lived in Israel for five years, and I spoke Hebrew fluently.

So I spoke Yiddish. I still spoke Polish. I still remember that. French-- I'm starting to forget. And, of course, Hebrew.

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Well, things were changing in the United States at that time under Roosevelt.

That was in the '50s.

Yes.

First he did not allow the people from Poland to come in. There was a quota. It's not like now-- anyone can come in. And we had to wait.

One year, Rivka calls us to Belgium, and she says-- no, no, to Israel. I'm sorry, to Israel. And she says, things have changed in the United States. The Polish quota was lifted. I'm coming to tell you all about it, Leon.

So Ruth took a trip to Israel-- the first trip. And she sat down, and she told us that now you can come to the United States, as long as you have a sponsor. And she said to my father, I'm going to be your sponsor. So when you come to the United States, I'll take care of you, Leon. Don't worry. You'll move in with me.

My aunt lived in the Bronx on Walton Avenue-- beautiful building and one-bedroom apartment. She says you move in with me. You move in with me. So we moved in with--

So you left Israel. How did you feel about leaving Israel?

I liked Israel. That was my best memories of my life. I was sad to leave Israel. By then I was already bat mitzvah. I had my bat mitzvah in Israel, and by then I was I think 13.

13, yeah.

13 years old. And we left Israel.

When you were in Israel, did you mix with any other refugee children from the Holocaust?

No.

Did you talk to your young friends about what you went through?

No, no, no, no.

You did not.

No, I just concentrated with the Hebrew, having a lot of fun. I had a lot of friends in Israel and learned the language.

Did you speak about your Holocaust experiences at that time with your parents?

No. My mother never spoke about it.

Your mother didn't.

My mother never spoke.

What about your father?

My father was busy earning a living, and we just didn't have time to dwell on it, you know?

So you were moving on.

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With your life.

So now you leave Israel. You come to the United States and live with your aunt.

Right, we lived with my aunt for a year, and my mother's sister, Toni, had a wonderful position with a garment-- what do you call it-- factory. Her husband that she married was-- I had an uncle in the AFL. And he was prominent to get him a job there. And my aunt got a job in the garment district. Became very well known-- she traveled all through the country, the United States, to see what the factories were manufacturing. And she was in charge.

At that time, my mother was a terrific seamstress, and she said, Stella, do you want a job? And my mother said, yes. What am I going to do. I'm going to sit around here? So she got her a job there, and she became the sample maker there. They manufactured robes, and then they went into the dress business. So my mother always made the sample dress.

From the sample dress, my mother had to supervise the people in the factory in Manhattan to make sure that the product that they made was equivalent to the sample. And so she was in charge of that.

And where did you go to school?

In New York?

Mm-hmm.

I went to the public school.

The public school.

Public school, yeah.

And what was that like?

In the Bronx. Well--

Were there other refugee children in your class?

No, no.

You were the only one.

Yeah.

Did the kids ask about your experience?

This is what I want to tell you. I was in public school in the Bronx, one of 35 kids in a classroom. I'm a teacher, so that I can tell you from the education point of view, it was in a kind of educational situation for a child that just came out of the Holocaust.

I had a number on my hand. In those days in New York, they never taught the Holocaust. It was mandated, like in the state of New Jersey. And the kids looked at the number, and they said, Sarah, what's that number on your hand? And I said, well, let me tell you. I was in the Holocaust in Germany, and a German put this number on me. I wasn't Sarah Racimora. I was this number. That's how they referred to me.

You're talking crazy. There was no such thing as the Holocaust. New York never taught the Holocaust. This was in 1954. Those kids were never educated. Never heard the word. What's Holocaust. Well, I didn't like to talk about it, and I went to my parents, and I said, you know what? I have to have this number removed. Because I am just too inundated

with questions that I cannot answer.

So we went to Mountain View hospital. They got a surgeon, and unfortunately, the surgeon got sick. And they brought someone else. Did a lousy job with this. This should have been just that thin stripe. And that's why I have a scar here.

I had it removed. I felt better, because the kids stopped talking about it. I went to my education in New York, finished high school, and then I met my husband. How did I meet my husband? I went to Moodus, Connecticut. Did you hear of that place? It was a place where young people were able to meet young Jewish young men.

And I went with a friend of mine. I took courses at Hunter College, and then we went for a week to Moodus, Connecticut to meet some guys.

We got there, and we didn't meet anyone a whole week. And then I said-- Sunday we were supposed to leave. We had a cab take us there. So I said to my friend, Brenda-- I said, you know, I'm hungry. Let's go to the dining room, because I feel like a salami sandwich.

So we went down, and I stood in line. And there was a young man there. And he says, hi, how are you? What are you ordering? I said a salami sandwich. He says, me, too. He says, I'm here with my friends. He came with a 4 or 5 of his friends from New Jersey. They were ready to meet new people. He says why don't you come over to the table and sit with us? Get your sandwich. So Brenda and I got our sandwiches. We sat down with them, and we got to talking.

And he says, where are you from? You have an accent. I said, well, I'm from Israel. He says, you're from Israel? I said yes. You have an accent. I said, well, can you understand me? I can still speak English? And he made a derogatory comment about Israel, and I was very angry.

I'm a rebel. I picked up the bottle of wine, and I was ready to hit him with the bottle. My husband, Billy-- later on we got married. He grab my hand. He says, put that bottle down. He's not worth it.

Well, we sat and we spent the evening with his friends. We had a very nice evening, and then the next day we were leaving Moodus, Connecticut, Banner lodge. I don't think it exists anymore.

And Billy says, you know what? I'll take you home. Would you? I said, I live in the Bronx, right across the street from Yankee Stadium. Well, he says, I know that area. Don't worry. I'll get you home safe.

So Brenda took a cab home, because we paid for that, and he took me home. And that's the history. After that was a romance. We dated for a year or so, and he says, you know, I really want you to move to New Jersey. You can continue education.

So I switched colleges, and I went to New York State. Was a teaching college. Now, it's Kean University. And I finished my education and my degree certified in New Jersey, Kindergarten through eighth grade. And I got a position in Scotch Plains-Fanwood teaching third grade. I taught there for a year, a year and a half. And I became pregnant with my daughter Debbie. So I had to stop teaching.

And I said, Billy, can I hire someone? There was a very nice woman living next to us in the apartment house. And she said she was willing to take care of Debbie while I went to work. My husband says no one is going to take over my daughter. You stay home. So I had to give up teaching. And I stayed home and I raised my daughter.

Later on, we saved enough money. We lived in the village for quite a while. We lived there for 10 years, and we bought a house in Livingston, New Jersey-- a very affluent community, a Jewish community. And we're there now for 40 years.

My daughter lives in Manalapan. She has two children-- boys. They are now in college at the University of Indiana. They both decided to go to the same college. Cody is a senior. Tyler is a freshman. She just took out the car, she's not even home.

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And my son became a spinal surgeon in Baltimore-- has a very nice group of doctors. Does a lot of traveling throughout the world educating other doctors in orthopedic surgery. He went to China. He went to Japan. He does a lot of traveling. And he has two children-- Katie, a little princess. Katie is now 11. Ethan is 13.

And they both go to private schools, because the Baltimore school system is not that great. So they're both in two different schools. They're not in the same school. Katie goes to an all girls school where my daughter-in-law graduated from, and Ethan is in the school from-- very big school from kindergarten through high school. And that whole school-- money was donated by Jewish families. How do I know? Every building has a Jewish name. We went to visit the school to see where Ethan was.

Very, very, very nice life. Now they're traveling by bikes. They are in Switzerland and going through all the other countries. Going to be away for two weeks. So I'll see them.

Let's talk a little bit about your story. Do you think about your wartime experiences-- the Holocaust-- more now that so many years have passed, or is it less?

Absolutely. For a very long time, I was busy with my career, raising my kids, and I just put everything aside. I didn't want to think about it. My father put the video. After he made a video with Steven Spielberg, we showed it to my children.

We spoke about it, and whenever Dad came to visit me in New Jersey-- he lived in New York at that time. My mother had died. He remarried a Holocaust survivor, his second wife. And he used to visit, so everything else was fine. And we didn't discuss it that much.

Years later-- recently I picked up, and I said I have to do something about it. And this is why I get involved being a teacher, being involved in teaching about the Holocaust. I learned from my father's video-- which I know you have a copy of that here-- the whole story how he saved me. And this was the basic of my foundation for these PowerPoint sessions.

I contacted my good friend, Elizabeth Bess, who is a principal at a very prestigious reform temple. And we got together, and we wrote this program. And now what we're doing-- we are managing to go out and talk about the Holocaust in a very, very educational way, and also in a creative way-- let children learn about it, walking out of one of these sessions that they can go home and say to the parents, this is what we are doing.

A lot of people in the United States-- even though they belong to a synagogue, they are not that educated in the Holocaust. So this is what we are doing now. That's why we came out here, Elizabeth and I-- to seek more information.

We found that a lot of information yesterday, as I told you, about my family. And we are writing a whole curriculum for the Holocaust programs that we're going to be doing.

Do you think you were at an advantage being so young and not remembering, as opposed to if you had been older during the Holocaust?

I can't tell you. It would just be a guess. My whole survival is-- I use the word when I speak to my students, it was [SPEAKING YIDDISH]. A lot of them don't know the word. It's a Yiddish word. And I said, I guess I was chosen to survive to tell the story and to come here and teach you about the Holocaust, so you can share it with your parents.

Many of these children are not Jewish where we go. We go to many affluent day schools. Some of them are Jewish, some aren't. Some don't know anything about the Holocaust. But the main thing that Elizabeth and I see is that we are reaching that population. When they walk out of one of our sessions, they say, Sarah, we learned so much today that we didn't know before.

I had them write evaluation. We went-- I don't know if you're familiar with the Princeton Day School in Jersey. Very affluent school. My cousin's daughter teaches there, which is a big plus also. She set a class up for us to give our spiel.

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The kids were mesmerized. They walked out. They wrote evaluations.

What did they want to know? The most-- tell us more stories about your father. He knew exactly what happened. They loved the stories where he put me in a potato sack and he threw me. They're what happened to you? Did you survive? I said, well, I'm here telling the story. It was very personal, and we are getting very successful. We're working very hard.

That's wonderful. Do you feel that you are two people, one on the outside and one on inside?

You can say that. I would never describe it, but it's possible. Absolutely. I have a lot of feelings that are hidden within me. Yes, absolutely.

And to the outside world, you somebody different.

Right, a different face.

Different face, yeah. Yeah. What were your thoughts-- do you remember your thoughts during the Eichmann trial? You were a young adult. Do you have any-- what your feelings were when Eichmann went on trial?

Well, I knew Eichmann went on trial, what he did exactly. I had very, very good feelings that he was captured, to be very honest with you. And I hope that more of those people would be captured and taught a lesson-- that that should never happen again.

Do you think it could happen again?

Absolutely. Betsy and I would were just discussing it. Absolutely. With the way the world is now, anyone can come into the United States. We had to wait until our visas were cleared. We could have been here earlier in the United States. There was a quota. They have no quotas now. Anyone can come to the United States, unfortunately.

What was it like when you became a citizen?

It was marvelous. I was a senior in high school. My father made sure that he knew about the Constitution. I sat down and I prompted them. My father at that time started to read the New York Times. He went to Taft High School, took some lessons in English with my mother, and we went for citizen papers 5 years afterwards. Very proud.

That specific day-- do you remember?

Yeah. I was very proud. It was a big room somewhere downtown in Manhattan, I don't remember exactly. And it was a big group of people who became citizens. I was very proud.

When your children were your age when they were infants and young children and 2 years old and 4 years, all the ages that you were when you went through all that terrible time, did that bring up feelings for you for the wartime?

No, no. I separated myself psychologically. I was a mother of children born in the United States.

Yeah, but I meant, for instance, when they were 2 and when they were 4, you were going through such terrible times yourself. It did not bring up--

No, I never discussed it with them. No, I didn't mean discuss it. Did it bring up emotionally-- when I was 2, when I was 4, this is what happened to me.

No, no. I just set it aside.

How much did you tell them when they were growing up about your experience?

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Well, it didn't come to discussing the Holocaust until my father was interviewed by Steven Spielberg.

Oh, OK.

And my father came to the house. He still lived in New York and showed my father's interview.

So that's when it started.

That's when they really learned. I think by that time-- I think Debbie and Steven, they were maybe 4th or 5th graders, not before that. Nothing before that.

No.

They knew nothing about your life.

No.

Your wartime life.

No.

What do you feel--

Well, they knew that I was born in Poland during the war. They knew that, just that. They didn't ask me details. You know, then of course as they got older, they studied it, and they knew what was happening. Later on they asked me questions when they got older.

And are there any sights or sounds or smells that bring back memories of the war time?

Well, I told you. Traveling in those cattle cars--

I was just going to say for instance.

Yes, that. Absolutely.

No, no, no but are there any sounds today or smells today that trigger that experience.

Nothing, no, no. Oh, dogs. Yes, I am fearful of dogs. Thank you, Betsy. Yeah.

You're fearful of the dogs because?

At times the Germans sometimes walked around with a dog in Radom.

And so even today when you see any dog?

No, it's nothing major, you know what I'm saying to you? It's just that I don't like dogs.

You don't.

Yeah, yeah. Do you think you would have been a different person today if you hadn't had the childhood that you had?

Absolutely, I'm sure. I'm sure.

In what sense?

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In what sense? Oh, I would have been brought up completely differently, you know? I wouldn't have missed all those young years that I missed being fearful, remembering that I had to hide under the bed. I wouldn't experience that. It probably would have been a more positive kind of growing up, to be very honest with you. A happier growing up-- not being fearful of what would happen. Not being cautious. It would have been a completely different story. Absolutely.

How has this affected you spiritually, religiously?

Well religiously, once my father made the tape with Steven Spielberg, he came back to Judaism. He used to go to shul when he lived in Florida. Every Saturday morning, he'd gather a couple of his friends. They got in the car. They went to services.

Holidays he loved to observe. I used to make all the holidays, and he used to come to my house. And we celebrated all the holidays. That was the pinnacle of happiness. He remembers. He used to say remember when your grandmother made this stuff, you know? His memories came back.

| grandfather did the same time, too. I mean, Passover was beautiful, because my grandfather had a beautiful voice. And at the end of the Seder, we used to sit with the Haggadah and he used to sing the songs. My kids still remember that. They used to-- he said to me the other day I remember when great grandpa was singing all these songs from the Haggadah. He had a beautiful voice. And of course my kids were going to Hebrew school, so they joined with them.

So you kept up a religious life.

Yes, absolutely.

Do you feel totally assimilated in the United States?

Yes, absolutely.

You do.

Yes. In a very positive way. I mean, we've lived in Livingston now for over 40 years in a very Jewish community. I know a lot of people. I have taught at a lot of temples-- not only conservative, but reform temples also. So I'm very well aware of the Jewish religious life. We've been members at the temple. My kids were bar mitzvah'd and bat mitzvah'd at Beth Shalom. My grandchildren, we had them up at the bimah, naming them. You know, very involved.

What are your thoughts about Germany today?

That's very interesting that you ask that. I have very negative feelings against Germany. Absolutely. My grandson, Cody, which just on a trip this summer in some of the European countries. And what he said to me-- Grandma, I'm going to go to Poland. I want to see Auschwitz.

He went to Poland, and I hadn't had time to discuss with him, because he's so busy getting ready to go back to school. He saw the world. He saw what the world is like, nothing like in the United States-- different ways of living. He visited a lot of countries, had a terrific experience through a very nice program that the college ran for students. And he spent, I think, a month or so in Europe-- his private school. I haven't had a chance to talk to him.

Have you been back to Poland?

Yes, I went on the March of the Living.

You did.

And before I went there, I called my daughter up, and I said, Debbie, I can't go by myself. I need you to go with me. She

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said let me check with my boss. And I said, Debbie, is going to be only a week. The March of the Living went to Poland first and then to Israel.

And the man that led this group of students, I had his children at day school where I taught. And Joe called me up, and he said, Sarah, why don't you come with me to Israel? Not to Israel, I'm sorry-- to Poland. And I said, Debbie can afford only one week to be away from her job. Is it OK if we just come to Poland with you? He says absolutely. He had two survivors, myself and another man-- an older man. And it was a marvelous, marvelous trip. Good experience. And I said, Debbie, you have to come with me, because this is the l'dor v'dor. And we only went to Poland.

And to Auschwitz.

Well, we went to-- we did Poland, the whole thing.

Right. So when you were in Auschwitz, did it stimulate any memories?

No.

No.

When we went to Auschwitz, I just said-- he says, Mom, you sit down. Debbie was my photographer. She took all the pictures of our trip to Poland. And for my birthday, she gave me an album of all the pictures. We visited a school in Poland-- a Jewish school. Had a marvelous experience talking to the rabbi who was in charge of the school. Talked to the teachers. They were teaching Hebrew there. Beautiful.

Was there any familiarity when we were in Auschwitz? Did anything look familiar to you?

No.

No.

It was just the building, and I didn't go into the building, to be very honest. I couldn't do it.

You did not go in.

I couldn't do it. Debbie says, Mom, you sit here outside. I'm going to go in, and I'll take all the pictures. Don't worry about it. She did a marvelous job. I have a terrific album.

What about-- and you say Germany. Do you have very negative feelings?

Oh, absolutely.

Do you get reparations?

Yes I do.

You do.

Yes.

Did your parents get reparations?

Well, what happened. My father applied for himself, and my mother said she doesn't want any of that dirty money. She said Leon, do not fill out the papers for me. She was very, very strict. So my mother never got reparation.

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My father got reparation, and I gave reparations. It's something. He was working now with the Israeli government where they want to give reparations for people who are older. And Israel is trying to work out something with Germany. I haven't heard anything yet.

Are you more comfortable around survivors?

Well, I have nothing to do with-- I mean, with the survivors, it was only my father's friends when I used to come.

No, but in today's world, when you meet with survivors, are you more--

If I meet them fine. It's not that I'm more comfortable.

With them then.

Them, no. There's no distinction between survivors and Americans. I'm an American. I'm an educator. You know, I don't do well about the survival, to be very honest with you.

I couldn't wait to come to Washington to the Holocaust Museum. My father was the first one when the Holocaust Museum opened, with his friends. They got a bus of all the survivors from Radom and they came to Washington, DC. He made sure of that. He was a doer.

Before we close, are there any messages to your grandchildren you would like to leave-- a message or anything you'd like to say to them for the future?

Well, I told my grandchildren-- my granddaughter came back from camp, and I called her up, and I Katie, how was camp? How did you do? Grandma, it was terrific. I said, Katie, I want you to know I'm going with my friend to the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC. Grandma, that's terrific.

And I said, when I come back, we will make a date, and you and Ethan and daddy and mommy are going to go with me to the Holocaust Museum, because I want to show you some things and some pictures that are now in the newspapers that I didn't even know.

I said, I'm going with a friend of mine, Elizabeth Bess-- very good friend of mine. We're going to do a lot of research there. And when I come back, I'm going to show you all the things. Oh, Grandma, that's terrific. I can't wait to see it. She was very enthusiastic about it. So I will pass-- how can I say-- these feelings, but positive feelings about what I have learned over this.

What you have learned.

What did I learn?

Yes.

I learned that it could happen again. But don't look away and say that happened many years ago. You lived through it. You survived it. You were able to come to the Holocaust Museum and tell your story.

I am not that sure that it wouldn't happen again, to be very honest with you, the way the world is going now, unfortunately. I'm very pessimistic, to be very honest for you, to see there are no quotas to come into the United States. We had to wait all that time in order to come here after the Holocaust.

Roosevelt had a quota for the Polish quota. Now there's no quotas. Anyone can come in. The border's so open. All you hear on TV and anywhere that you go-- all the atrocities that are happening, unfortunately-- every day it's a new gimmick. Robbing people, killing people-- the world is terrible now, and I'm very sad about it.

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Let's hope this interview contributes to something positive with you telling your story.

Thank you very much. I really appreciate it.

Well, thank you for doing the interview.

My pleasure.

This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Sarah Ludwig.

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