

National Council of Jewish Women Sarasota-Manatee Section
Holocaust Oral History Project
Interview with Lilly Voip, Survivor
January 29, 1989
Englewood, Florida

Tuesday – January 24, 1989. This is Fern Niven interviewing Mrs. Lilly Voip in Englewood, Florida. Mrs. Voip is a survivor of World War II from Estonia who has had her own unique experiences which she's willing to share with us as part of the Holocaust Project for the National Council of Jewish Women. Mrs. Voip, good morning. We were very glad that you were willing to participate in this project and I'd like to start out by asking you to tell us some things about your early life.

Q: What was the size of your family...where did your family live?

A: Well, as you know we come from Rakueve, Estonia, which is a small country, and the family was very small. I was an only child.

Q: In what town in Estonia?

A: In Rakueve which is...

Q: Go ahead.

A: ...a fairly small town. We did not live exactly in town. We were out on the farm more or less. My father was retired. He had come from...he had traveled the world for thirty years before he came back to his country and my mother and him were married and I was born in 1925.

Q: What had he done for a living?

A: He was a seaman in England for thirty-two years.

Q: He did not marry until after he had retired?

A: Right.

Q: So he was considerably...

A: He was fifty- two and my mother was nineteen and my mother did not marry him for his good looks either as far as that goes you know because young women like money but that is besides the point, I think.

Q: Well, no, it helps to have a better future...

- A: A better future, yes I understand that, and all my learning and what I know now and I still live by a lot of things that my father taught me.
- Q: What religious affiliations did you have?
- A: It's Lutheran, most of the country is Lutheran.
- Q: Were they practicing Lutherans?
- A: No, no -- I don't practice it.
- Q: Did your mother ever work or is she...?
- A: Housework, housework -- of course everybody worked.
- Q: I don't mean at housework -- did she work outside the home?
- A: No no, not outside the home.
- Q: So you were brought up in a farm community?
- A: More or less, yes.
- Q: And did you go to school from there?
- A: Of course.
- Q: Can you tell me about the school -- what is a big school, a small school?
- A: It was a very small school. We only had six grades because we have six grades mandatory. You go from school anywhere from seven to eight years old, and then when you are about fourteen, you're done and then you have two years of what we call gymnasium and after two years at about sixteen, you're ready for the university because it's nothing like this one here. It takes you twelve years to learn to read and write and then even you don't make it there.
- Q: So did you go on to the gymnasium?
- A: No, in 1939 I was fourteen and that was the end of it because the Russians occupied the Baltic States by then and I did not go anywheres anymore.
- Q: The school that you went to -- was it a Public school?
- A: Yes of course, it was a Public school.

Q: What did you do then when you got out of school about age fourteen? Did you work?

A: No, I stayed home of course, I didn't have to work.

Q: You helped your mother?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you have any other activities, did you do sports activities?

A: No no no – the regular activities, summertimes it was going to even we did it in school, we used to go to excursions and sometimes like in the summertime even after groups would get together...you know young people would go here and there...something like that.

Q: What year was it that you graduated?

A: 1939.

Q: 1939? How aware were you or your parents of the rise of Hitler to power?

A: Very aware. My father was very aware of the whole world because to me when I grew up as a child the world was very small to me, but he had traveled every corner of it and he was very aware of the whole thing and yet there were people who were not aware of it and so this was very difficult.

Q: How did he bring this to your awareness?

A: Explaining it to me, teaching.

Q: Did he perceive Hitler as a threat?

A: Of course.

Q: Do you remember anything special that he said about it?

A: Nothing really special because our history goes back into the German domination in the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth century where the Germans were the big landowners and the Estonian people were slaves more or less...they worked for them and that was all there was to it...I mean that was all there was to it and I mean we learned that all in school...I mean that was taught to us...the history was there. There was not a likeable subject to the average...I mean if you understand what it was all about then there was no confusion that they were no good, you know.

Q: Was there a time that you remember that the Germans formally occupied Estonia?

A: Of course I remember that...that was in 1941 in July and from thereon they were there till 1944.

Q: From the time they occupied Estonia, was your life style affected?

A: Of course it was.

Q: Can you tell us about that?

A: I was sixteen at the time and we were both arrested... my father and me and we were taken to the County Jail. The reason we were arrested because we had talked to our neighbors and mentioned that Hitler was not what we needed. The Germans were not what we should be welcoming and my main thing was, I've always had a...I don't know how to put it...I've always been very opinionated. When I believe in something I say it and my biggest crime was because I told my neighbors I was not going to say Heil Hitler. That was all on the papers written down when they turned me in...and those were my neighbors...the neighbors, you know friends, the people around you know what you stand for...not the Germans, not the Russians...not the Chinese. This is what is never been brought up...it's the community around you when the Governments change. People are not aware of that...that there is always somebody there that is willing to save their life to turn in somebody else.

Q: We hear stories and we've seen movies about what happened when the Germans came to get someone...you know, pounding on the door in the middle of the night

A: Uh hugh!

Q: Is that what it was like for you?

A: That's right...we were taken away from our home. It wasn't in the middle of the night. There weren't the Germans...I'll be honest, I didn't see one German. This was all done by our own people and that was done in every other country. This is something that I've always tried to talk about but the people don't believe me. It wasn't all done by the Germans. They had...our own people did more damage than the Germans. Of course they were the higher - ups. It was their rule...it was their overseeing it all...but the people...and that happened in every country. That even happened in Jewish communities which is not being mentioned...I don't know why. I guess the people are shamed that their own people can do things like that, but they do...and I wish that would be brought out.

Q: Well part of the reason we're talking today is to give you the opportunity to bring it out.

A: Yes, that's right and I'm glad.

Q: When they came in the middle of the day, did they tell you why they were taking you away?

A: No, no, you were not told anything why you were taken away...you were just taken away. My father and I ...and by that time my father and mother had been divorced and separated. We had a housekeeper...my father and I were taken away.

Q: You lived with your father?

A: Yes and the housekeeper was left on the premises and so, we were taken away...we were taken to a community of like a jail or what would you call it.

Q: Were you taken in a truck, in a police van?

A: No we walked and were taken to the backwoods that nobody would see us, and there were others and we arrived at the place it was full of people all different ages...different women, younger ones, older ones, men, all different people that were there that were arrested and we went to different interrogations that...

Q: ...and did they tell you why you were arrested?

A: Of course and when the interrogations started, we were told we had done this and we had said this and we had said that. I don't know what they asked my father because we were separated by that time you know because we were all separated from...men from women and so on...and what they asked me was "Did I say that". And I said "Yes I did"...and there was of course other accusations that I had threatened to do this and that to the Germans if they come...I said "Yes I did".

Q: What had you threatened?

A: I had threatened to do whatever...I can't remember exactly what I had said right now, but if they would be settling, I'd burn them down. [laughter]

Q: Does that sound stupid?

A: No that sounds terrible and it was all done by our own people. We were interrogated by our own people...we were tortured by our own people...we were not done by the Germans. At that time, later on...we seen a few Germans when we were taken to other prisons and labor camps.

Q: Where was the interrogation done?

- A: It was done in the community jail.
- Q: And they locked you up in that jail?
- A: Of course they were locked up, yeah.
- Q: For how long a time?
- A: I think we were there about two to three weeks...I'm not exactly sure how many days it was.
- Q: Do you remember that they fed you adequately at that time?
- A: Not adequately but we didn't starve at that time we were fed. The people would bring family kind food and it was allowed to be brought in then.
- Q: Did you have a family to do that?
- A: Well I had the housekeeper would bring food in once in a while but then meanwhile the war just had sort of ended in Estonia. The German troops had been pushed back in July...I mean the Russian troops had been pushed back and the Germans came in and of course there was a lot of clean up work to be done and we were I remember one day...two days in a row, we were sent out to comb the fields. All the dead Russian soldiers had to be buried that were there. They had been laying on the ground for about four, five weeks in the hot summer.
- Q: Were you part of that cleanup?
- A: Of course I was part of it...everybody was part of it...everybody that was in that little community...jail or prison whatever you want to call it.
- Q: I gather that up till that point you had lead a fairly sheltered existence.
- A: No it wasn't a sheltered existence...I was very independent as a child. I was taught what life is all about...I did not come out of a cocoon and then open eyes and here I was. No, I had been taught many things. I don't believe in raising children and telling them fairy tales up till they're fifteen – twenty years old.
- Q: Had anything in your experience prepared you to have to.....?????
- A: No, no, nothing like that but that was something that you did and I am a very strong person. It never bothered me and I can look back after all these years where people still I know people had bad experiences still live in the past and they think it was so terrible. Yes it was terrible but at the same time, I think we learned an awful lot.

Q: What did you learn?

A: What did I learn? To appreciate life a lot more and still be truthful and honest and believe in something...have a mind of your own...don't follow everything that comes along. This is the biggest downfall of all this because people follow things. They don't know what it's all about but they think it sounds good...let's go...let's follow it, and this is what happens to nations...it happens to countries...it can happen here. It is not that it is impossible to happen, especially when people are desperate for jobs...for this and that...they follow anything that promises. That's how Hitler got to power. That's what happened in Russia in 1917 when the Revolution came. When the Government neglects people, they don't have jobs...they get desperate...somebody promises them something...they follow it. They don't have a mind of their own to sort it out. I said hey, is this going to be right or not. This is what we face every day.

Q: Well I agree with you...people do need to learn to think for themselves and be more competitive, but I would...

A: Very much so and they have to be taught also by the parents...but the parents are not capable of so I don't know who they should go to.

Q: Okay, but after this experience of burying the dead soldiers, then what happened to you?

A: Then we were sent to the big city...to the city of Rakueve and we were put into one of the old world Estonia. Estonia has a lot of old world history and we have prisons that are walls of six foot thick...you know one of these old...I guess you would call them dungeons and we spend about a month or something over there and nobody knew where we were going and by that time I guess we were more or less convicted which we never knew what was what.

Q: What was it like in that big stone walled prison?

A: Well there was...you slept on a floor on straw with a blanket that was given to you and you got food. I always said we got food not enough to live on and not enough to die on...so it was sort of...you hung in there. You thought you were alive and sometimes you wondered if you were and was it all worth it.

Q: Were you with other women whom you knew?

A: Yes of course...no I didn't know anybody. There was women...we had a whole room full of women and then in the mornings five o'clock when the door opened, that got to be a signal that somebody was taken out and that somebody was never seen again.

Q: And you never know who it would be?

- A: No...you never knew who it would be.
- Q: Were you pretty apprehensive?
- A: Of course, everybody was...nobody wants to die but, and then we were sent into a labor camp from there and then we were sent out to work because I was strong and healthy and mean. [laughter]
- Q: And mean...were you given work details while you were in the big jail?
- A: No...not in that one we weren't. We just stayed there...we were waiting. I don't know what we were waiting for...nobody knew if you were going to live or die. There was no such option there so we didn't know about it.
- Q: And you were there how long?
- A: I think we were there about a month or maybe more and then we were sent to a large, large camp which had hundreds of thousands probably...I don't know how many but it was a huge old military...stone and military encampment.
- Q: How did you get to this camp?
- A: Of course we walked everywhere we went.
- Q: Was it hundreds of miles?
- A: No that was very close...maybe it was ten miles or so and you had your guards and all over watching you that you didn't run off.
- Q: What time of the year was that?
- A: That was probably in October which the winter comes early...there was already winter.
- Q: Did you have adequate clothing?
- A: No, no, that was not the thing. Nobody worried about the clothing.
- Q: You were saying nobody worried about the clothing.
- A: Nobody worried about the clothing...that's right because we were put into this big military encampment which was all circled with barbed wire...the windows were all covered with barbed wire and all that and at that time we went into a huge huge room which there was about seventy of us women that were rounded up and that was just one room.

Q: Like a barracks?

A: Well no they were not barracks...they were old stone buildings that had been there for years for the Estonian military and the place was filled slowly from different areas where they brought them in and then we had Gypsies. There was a room full of Gypsies next to us.

Q: Gypsies from Estonia?

A: From Estonia yes...they were all also...they did the same thing to the Gypsies as they did to the Jewish people because it was a racial thing.

Q: Please tell me more about the Gypsies.

A: Well every country had Gypsies and every country lost the Gypsies for the simple reason like I said earlier...it's a racial thing...the Jewish and the Gypsies were killed because of their racial difference.

Q: Gypsies were significant in the fact they were like wanderers?

A: Yes, that was not something that if they wanted. He didn't benefit anything from these people and that was the reason to exterminate them...and so that was one reason they were all gathered up and they were killed. We had a room full of women and children. I have no idea where the men were and they were there and one day they were gone and of course they were all killed.

Q: At this point in time if you can remember, were you and the people with you aware of the extermination...

A: Oh sure!

Q: ...or did you just think you would be used as forced labor?

A: No, no, no, we were aware of that because they had been taken out of from when we went to the big prison to there, and there some that were left behind in that big prison. These, I know...we found out later...they were all exterminated. They were older people and I don't know what the reasons were but most of them were sent over there to the big camp we were able to work. There were some older women there and the same thing went on. In the early morning when the doors opened there was somebody taken out which we never seen and we were aware of it of course. From day to day you did not know if you were going to be the one next morning and most of the people were taken out into the woods. They used at that time...they had Russian prisoners of war and they were used to dig the grave and they were lined up at the grave and they didn't have to push them in so they fall in all on their own.

Q: And they were just covered up?

A: Oh sure.

Q: They did not have Crematoriums?

A: Oh no...they didn't have those things. These were strictly in Germany in your large camps where they exterminated them by the thousands...no they didn't have those. In Estonia and the small countries, they were mostly just shot.

Q: Do you remember the name of the camp that you were in?

A: Well it was in Rakueve. There was no special name for it really.

Q: That's good.

A: Yeah...

Q: Well Rakueve was also the name of a town.

A: Yeah...it was in outskirts of the town.

Q: All of this took place within a few miles of your home?

A: Yes...within a few miles...I'd say maybe eight, nine, ten miles or something like that out of town where the camp was at...where the military encampment was. Then after working there, we were taken out to work for different places. We used to go to clean houses that the Germans...the Military would be moving in. Winter was on it's way...we had very severe winters.

Q: And how did you keep warm during this time?

A: Well we had been given some clothing and the housekeeper was able to bring me some clothes.

Q: The people that provided for you and others were able to move freely in and out of the camps with food and clothing?

A: No...no...they were all checked but they would let in clothing and maybe some food...not much food, but clothing they would be able to bring in. That was about it. You'd never be able to see them or nothing like that. I don't know how much of the stuff we ever got...that nobody knows, but we were given clothing...probably the clothing was no value to anybody else.

Q: And where was your father during this time?

A: My father was in a different camp and he was up by our capitol which is called Tallinn or (words missing in original transcript) whichever you want to call it. He was there...he spent two years in year...so...

Q: Did he survive it?

A: Oh yes...he came home after two years and he laughed...nobody's big enough to kill me.

Q: Tough guy!

A: He was tough...he was seventy - one by then...no he wasn't seventy - one...he was about sixty - nine by then.

Q: Please tell me...describe some more of your life in the camp. Were you able to keep clean?

A: Well, yes and no...there was no special cleanliness. We had lice and we had bed bugs and we had all the ordinary bugs that you get when you have no sanitary of any kind and it's very much the same as here...any camp in Germany...I mean there was no cleanliness. You did have a chance to wash once in a while and I had real long hair which I have it again now and of course, first thing that was to be cut off because otherwise there was no way of keeping it clean.

Q: They cut it off?

A: No...no, we cut it ourselves because...it was just for the cleanliness purpose. You had no, nothing...I mean there's just no way you could keep your long hair in shape and not have lice in them because that was a common thing and when you have seventy women in one room and sleeping on those...how would you say...they were like boards across and you sleep on them with straw on it. I mean...hey...and you have nothing else there. You had maybe a rag or two if you did get a chance to wash your face or whatever, you had a rag to wipe it with.

Q: Did you have any blankets at all?

A: Oh yeah, we had a blankets...I guess they were blankets.

Q: Did people try to steal from one another?

A: No there was nothing to steal because we weren't allowed anything. We had nothing...we got the same amount of food whatever it was...it wasn't very much of anything. We got a little piece of bread a day and a cup of hot water in the morning and then lunch - time they called it soup...I don't know. My father told me later it looked like somebody washed his socks in it.

Q: Dishwater!

A: Dishwater, yea...and you survived...you lived...and some of them...there was also a suicide rate which there are people that can't handle this type of life and I'm positive that that happened everywhere.

Q: What methods did they use for suicide?

A: Hanging them mostly with whatever...you know...and that was kinda a shock to everybody because when somebody if you are sleeping and you find some of your roommates hanging somewheres in the corner. It's a shock and you have to learn to live with it. It's amazing how little it takes to survive... which we everyday...we all we doing is surviving...maybe we think we have all this and we have all that. It's nothing but survival anyhow and when you don't have nothing else left but your life, it's amazing how you will hang on to that and survive.

Q: By any means.

A: By any means...no, I wouldn't go that far to say that because when you say by any means to me that would mean that you would be doing something to somebody else to save your life. No...I don't believe in that but you do survive...I personally...I don't about other people that much, but I personally...this is going to sound funny. I built a wall around myself.

Q: During that time?

A: During that time...and it's still here and nobody...I convinced myself that nobody was going to penetrate that and I felt safe because I wouldn't let anybody...in any way, I wouldn't let their meanness, their cruelty, their hunger, all that stuff, get to me because I was convinced I was going to come out of this and I wasn't going to end up in a loonie pen somewheres after that...and I wasn't going to live in the past after that. This was part of my life...and if I survived, it was not gonna affect me after that anymore.

Q: Can you describe any of your techniques for doing this? How did you build this wall?

A: I had learned most of it from my father...to be strong, to be independent and to believe in what you believed in...don't change your beliefs if you...I think every person has a certain sense of right and wrong and you can do that to yourself. You can study...you can think...you can figure things out. How would I like...when people are cruel they have never had a talk with themselves. When they do cruel things to other people, they never stop to think...how would I like that if this were done to me...and this is always a very good example. You analyze these things and I say hey, I wouldn't want anybody to do these things to

me. What gives me the right and why should I do those to other people...and that's one very simple rule... and when you follow these rules, you have no problem, and you know that you're right. When you go back, like I was saying history...history tells you an awful lot and if you learn and you read and you wanna find out, it's amazing what a person can learn and all on your own. You don't have to go to school...you don't have to go to College. The schools really don't give you anything if you're not willing to learn. You can do it on your own.

Q: I agree with all you say but as I'm sitting here...in the desperate circumstances in the camps, it would have been harder...

A: Of course it is harder...it's understandable it's harder. Every people from all walks of life...the ones that are screaming at night...the ones that are crying continually, especially the women. They didn't know what they were there for because when somebody said when they were asked, "Where's your husband, where's your son"? We didn't know where people were because the war had been on since 1940 when the Russians came in and I mean, we had no idea...and when you get asked these questions, it is hard to be calm and all that but yet deep down, you have to be and I was one of the lucky ones because I had learned all that from my father. He was a very, very intelligent man and it helped. Like I said earlier, it still helps me.

Q: I can see that.

A: Yeah, because you can't let these things make you into something that you're not.

Q: And during all this time, your guards were Estonians?

A: They were all Estonians...very young men because they were all taken in to the German Army after when they came in and then they were the guards...and even the man that was the camp leader or whatever you would call him...he was Estonian. We did see now and then, the Germans...the big shots I guess you would call them. They would come and inspect once in a while. That was very seldom that we seen them but the dirty work was done by our own people.

Q: Essentially they were like an offshoot of the German Army?

A: Oh sure...they were German Army. They were all into the German...they were given uniforms and everything by the Germans.

Q: Was there any medical attention available to anyone?

A: No...no, there was no medical attention. I think one time I had my finger...something had happened to it and I...there was supposedly been a doctor there. I don't if he's a doctor or not. I seen the man and what he was capable of doing and I don't think he was a doctor. I went to him after about so long you

know, suffering with this thing...and they let me see him...and all he did was take a pair of scissors and cut it open. That was about it, but I don't think he was a doctor...no. The medical...why bother with the medical...sooner or later they gonna be exterminated anyhow.

Q: They just worked people to death essentially.

A: Yeah, well we were moved...a group of us was moved into the country. The last end of it before I was released, we were moved...

Q: About how long were you in this camp?

A: I think we were there...let's see I think it was from October to about April...the winter months...and then May, we were sent out into the country...the spring was coming...and then we were sent out into the fields to...we were housed in an old building and then we worked out in the fields. That was the last end of that and after that it was really. We did mostly street cleanings and house cleanings...and oh yes and we were also taken by groups of three, four, five, six, whatever women taken into the military kitchens to peel potatoes and I'm an excellent potato peeler.

Q: If you were in the kitchens, was that a means of getting a little extra food?

A: Yes we did have extra food what was given to us. We were not able to take what we wanted, but were given something to eat during the day...but we were not allowed to take anything back into the camp because we were searched every time we went back in. There was no way...people tried and sometimes it was embarrassing you know what they tried to bring back and how...you couldn't do it.

Q: And what was this other camp that you went to?

A: That was mainly just working out in the fields and I was there only about a month.

Q: Tell me about the circumstances of being released.

A: I really don't know...being a political prisoner I guess they decided to turn her loose. She wasn't going to bend one way or the other.

Q: Did they try to make you bend?

A: Of course...you have to admit that what...when a people are made to admit or forced to admit something that they did not do or they do not believe in, that is very hard on everybody...and people will break...but I always believed I stand

my ground if I know I'm right you cannot change my mind. I don't care what way.

Q: You would prefer...

A: You better believe it...you better believe it. It was one of the things I told our own people during the interrogation we had them. They were quite nasty...they would slap us and beat us and all this. We had one particular interrogator...he thought he was really...I would say he was probably in his thirties. He was also an Estonian and the first one we were arrested. He was the first interrogator and he would yell real loud at you...real obnoxious sort of person...and he would get you, he would hold you by your throat and he'd slap you on both sides of your face. I guess I got slapped more than the others probably.

Q: How often were you interrogated during this time?

A: Well, for three weeks...almost three weeks when(words missing in original transcript) we were interrogated all the way through. I mean just about every other day or every other day they would (words missing in original transcript) and mostly the same thing over and over...if you said this or you did this and yes you don't believe Germany is bringing us freedom more than the Russians did or something on that order...and of course, they didn't. No way that they would. If I had my choice, I think I would have taken the Russians against the Germans...and I'm still saying it...I'm saying it every day to people that say that there was no such thing as Holocaust...there was no such thing. I say they're crazy.

Q: Well those are the Revisionists.

A: Yeah, that's what I mean. They like to make it look good but it isn't...it's there and I hope it stays in the history because if this is not taught to people and brought out and explained what can happen, it can happen again.

Q: That's right.

A: People are not prepared. And another thing, the schools are not teaching. You take average school. How much history do they teach. They teach history in a word of history. But they never teach history with what has happened and what can happen again. When you read about the cruelties of thousands of years ago, hundreds of years ago, the cruelties of certain groups of people, certain nationalities, and these have always come back up again. Germany for one instance. I don't know if I can say that. And the Japanese is another group of people. And if you read the history, you should learn something from it. Why is it? Okay, sure we know Japan is dead, Germany is dead. China is there. That is not history. History goes much, much deeper. History is something that you learn from. And when people talk about the Romans -- how cruel they were, I

say, "Yes, they were cruel, of course. But that was 2,000 years ago and they only fed the Christians to the lions. The Nazis -- compared to the Nazis, the Romans were pussycats. Cause what they did, they skinned people alive. They burned them, they gassed them by the millions. They did all kinds of things and they enjoyed it. So you're telling me that the Romans were cruel. Uh, uh. But at the same time, when you are reading all these things, you should still learn something. But the main thing is always the situation of the country, of the people, what happens when people are desperate. That's how Hitler got to power. Germany was nothing in the 20's -- the late 20's.

Q: That's part of the problem.

A: That's what I'm saying. The same thing happened in Russia. The wealthy were living high up on the hog and the poor people had nothing. They were on the streets, they had no food, they had no jobs. They had nothing. Anybody that comes up and promises something better, of course they're going to go over there. Because they've got to survive. They've got to eat something. They've got to have a place to sleep. And our country looks very bad now. We have so many people out on the street. If nothing is changed, I hate to see it years from now. Because if you don't keep the people working, that's all most people want. They want a job, they want a roof over their head and they want something to eat. They want the children to go to school. And then them to have a job. But if those things are not there, it isn't very healthy.

Q: We have to have some hope, don't we?

A: Yes, yes. We have to have hope; we have to have something. And when you get somebody out there that is promising things that are impossible, you know darn well he's not going to be able to do this. And the people do believe him. See, this again is up to the individual to believe that man. Is he going to do it? How is he going to do it? Of course Hitler didn't do it alone. He was their instigator. But he had to have help. And the ones that believed in him, they're the ones that followed him. They would do anything for him. They didn't matter who they killed. Their own family, their own mother. It did not matter who. That went on all over Europe.

Q: How do you explain that he was cable to get these people to follow him and to do such dreadful things?

A: Well first of all, there is -- German people are not going to like me...

Q: Well this isn't a popularity contest.

A: I know (laugh). There is a race of people in Germany, we have them here now. They call themselves the (words missing in original transcript) Aryans now. So they called them then Neo -- Nazis. They've always been a race of people there.

They are power hungry and they're cruel. And those are the ones who followed him first, to start with. And another thing, I don't think in – I don't know if the Jewish people, I have not seen it mentioned in any...I've read a lot of books about the Holocaust and different things, and I've seen movies and stuff, and something else is not been quite pointed out. Another reason, of course, was racial, one. Number two, it was profitable to exterminate the Jewish people. 'Cause the Jewish people have always been able to survive. The business people, they're successful. That was another reason to be...to exterminate them, because they had what Germany didn't have. They had valuables, they had money. You know, as well as I do, they even cut their hair off of these women. They pulled their gold teeth out of their mouth. This was all used to build up Germany. Not so much Germany itself, the military power that Germany built up in a matter of a few years. And 'cause they had slogans all over Germany that read (words missing in original transcript) which means all the wheels were turning for the war. And that was the thing that put Germany to work, was building war materials. They didn't build anything for anybody else. And they got every bit of these valuables that people had. And how many Jewish people were able to go back to their homes that survived and found all their stuff after the war?

Q: Very few.

A: Very few.

Q: Most of them...

A: So this was another -- that was another reason to exterminate all these people.

Q: Let's go back to...you were saying you were finally released from camp. Just one day they said, "Go."

A: Yes, I was more or less told one morning that I can go, that I was free to go home. And, of course...

Q: By this time, how far away were you from home?

A: By that time I was maybe like 50 miles from home. Because I had been moved slowly, you know. And...where do you go?

Q: What was your reaction?

A: The reaction was great, of course. I mean, hey, I'm going to survive. I made it. Naturally, that was the greatest thing.

Q: At this time you were about 17?

A: By that time, I was 17. Yes. And I was in my teens in 1942. And when they told me that, at first I couldn't believe it. And then they said, "Yah, you can go." So, I left. I didn't even know where I was going, but I went. Whatever rags were left, I was hungry and I walked, I know I walked all day. Because there was no way of transportation of any kind. You had nothing that you could even –no way, no transportation of any kind.

Q: When you were so malnourished, had you lost a lot of weight?

A: Yah, of course. Everybody did. Hey, we were skin and bones.

Q: So walking 50 miles was going to be difficult?

A: Well, it took me a few days. It took me a few days. At first, I arrived the first night and I was around in the middle of the day, and I just walked. I had a vague idea which direction to go. And I walked and then I'd spend the night in the woods. I had some kind of Jacket or something. And that was one of those things that kept me warm. If my feet got cold, I put it on my feet, and then I'd put it on top again. And next morning I arrived at the town of Bruckverne and I didn't know anybody there. And then from there I walked home, which was another probably 15 or 20 miles on the outside and I arrived there. I don't remember the date exactly. That's terrible; I should look it up.
I arrived home on Easter Sunday. The housekeeper was still there, of course. My father was still in a camp. He spent two years in it. It was a weird experience and I always said if you're a bird, you can sit on a tree limb and then you can look to see. But when you're a human being, it takes a little more than that. And somehow I made it home the second day, in the afternoon.

Q: And this was a farm really?

A: Yes, it was a small farm. My father was more or less retired. He wasn't working the farm. He had the house and about 40 acres.

Q: Where would the housekeeper have gotten food?

A: Well, we had enough there that she worked it or went in with the neighbors, also. People were known there. They were farm people and they raised everything their own. Of course everything was rationed at the time. Also, you got so much of this and so much of that and certain items were completely gone, but they were all taken away by the military. First, the Russians, then the (words missing in original transcript) and the (words missing in original transcript) and then the Germans. But the farmers survived a lot better than people in the cities and communities that had to depend on storing things.

Q: When you were in the camp, you mentioned there were gypsies there. Were there also Jewish people there?

A: I know the Jewish people were separated from the beginning. They were mostly shipped to Germany. The Jewish people were always taken to Germany.

Q: Have you any idea what the size of the Jewish population was?

A: I really don't know. I have read some books. I have never got quite the amount of people what was there left, because during Russian occupation and before 19 -- late '39, '40, when the Russians occupied the Baltic States, which was an agreement between Russia and Germany, for Russia not having an outlet to the Baltic Sea. And then, at the same time Germany started a war with Poland. But later on, they got known to each other. A lot of Jewish people left the country already, before and during the Russian occupation. They were leaving the country, going to Scandinavian countries like Sweden, Norway, different...especially Sweden. And through different channels they got out. But the ones that had not left, of course they were all gathered up. And they were also mostly gathered up by our own people.. The German military came from Germany. When they got there, they didn't know if you were Jewish. The only difference they could tell, if you were tell if you were black or white.

Most of the time all these things were done by local people. And nobody brought this point out. I don't know why. I understand it. What are they hiding? I know our people here, my own people, a lot of them are hiding so much of it. Because they don't want to talk about it. But they were probably the people that did those things. I know --okay, I'll give you an example. During Estonian, which was a good democratic country for a very few years between the two wars, and the constable (they call him that over there) he was a friend of mine. I mean a friend of my father's. I don't mean a real friend, he knew him. He came over once in a while. They would visit and drink and so on. And when the Russians arrived, he disappeared. I mean the man was gone. Naturally, people were disappearing every day, same as they did during the Nazi occupation. So nobody thought nothing of it. He was the man, when the Germans came in over there, he came back and he was the leader of the whole bunch that was arresting all these other people.

Meanwhile, later it was found out when the Russians came in, he moved closer to the Russian border. He was working for Russians over there. So when the Germans came in, he felt it was safe to go back to his hometown and start working for the Germans. And this only one example.

Q: He was a real opportunist.

A: That's right. He was a real opportunist. Or, like I heard later, while I was in a camp, the people had somehow got hold of him and he was taken back and just shot. Somewheres in the woods they got rid of him. It was all found out what was going on. But there's always opportunists, there's always greed. Greed is number one in most of these cases and this is your everyday life. A democratic country here, you see greed. And that was another thing there. As long as I

figure I can save my life, what do I care about the next person. And that is wrong. And this is something that should be taught to people. Not to be greedy. And always keep in mind, hey, would I like to be treated like that? And it's so simple.

Q: We call it the "Golden Rule."

A: "Golden Rule" -- right. The Golden Rule -- I think that rule has been broken years ago. It doesn't seem to exist any more.

Q: Okay, so how long from the beginning to end, were you away from home?

A: (pauses for thought) I was gone for about eleven months.

Q: Eleven months. You got home and your housekeeper was there and, of course, you'd be glad to get back home and you also learned that your neighbors were not people whom you could trust.

A: Right. The first day when I was coming home, it was in the afternoon, and like I said, it was Easter Sunday. I didn't see anybody. I had to come through the village and stuff. I didn't see anybody. I guess whatever they were doing. And, of course the next day we (words missing in original transcript) as soon as -- oh, yeh, when I was on my way through the town of Rakueve, I had to stop at the big camp and pick up my piece of paper that I was free to go. And as soon as I got home, I had to go and check in with the local police. Which after that I was under the, what do they call it here, on parole like. Because I was still a danger to the Third Reich. So I had to check in every week with the local police. So the following day, when I went to them, to the original place that we were arrested and sent to, I had to go there and check in that I was back. And that's when I met my neighbors. They were very humble and they were this and that and they were very shocked to see me back. Of course, the old man says, "Oh, you're back. We're so glad to have you back." I said, "Don't pretend. I know everything." "Well, we didn't do anything." I said, "No, you didn't do anything. I'm back and I'm here to stay." And I have always been a strict believer. Don't take revenge. He'll get to it. It'll come around sooner or later. And it does. It usually does.

Q: Did it?

A: Yes it did. Very nicely.

Q: Do you want to say anything about that?

A: Yes, I can talk about it. It's no big deal. They had three children. One was my age. The son was my age -- no he was a year older than me. They had a daughter four years older. The youngest daughter had epilepsy. When I came back, the son was in the German army and the daughter wasn't home -- the oldest daughter. Nobody knew what happened to her. No one. She just disappeared completely.

And the youngest daughter, she was in an asylum. And it wasn't too long after when the son was brought home. He was nothing -- a total cripple.

Q: Emotionally or physically?

A: No, no, from the war. Because he was in the German army and he had been sent to the Russian front at that time. And when he came back, I think he lost a leg and part of an arm and all this. And I didn't pity any of 'em. Sounds a little cruel, but there's a little bit of cruelty in every one of us.

Q: Poetic justice?

A: Yes, and that's the way I feel about it and I've seen it happen many, many, many times, over and over. And it does happen, because I'm a strict believer in that. I might not go to church and all that stuff, but I believe in something -- there is justice, if it isn't by humans, it is by something, I don't know what it could be.

Q: What were the circumstances of your father's release from the camps?

A: I don't know. He came home two years later and that was that. He was (words missing in original transcript).

Q: What kind of physical condition was he in?

A: He was in a fairly good physical condition because he had been working in the kitchen. So that gave him an opportunity to survive. He was a very strong man.

Q: But he was getting older all the time.

A: Of course, he was older, but that didn't mean nothing. He wasn't as old -- according to his age, yes. But otherwise he was a very young man. He was an amazing human being. I wish there were more like that. Not because he's my father. No. He was an amazing human being.

Q: Do you remember what it was like when he came home? Did you expect him? Did he just walk in?

A: You didn't expect anybody to come back and there was no correspondence of any kind. I didn't even know where he was, if he was dead or alive. Nobody knew anything. Like that. I mean that was the same as you know, you talking about the Holocaust and stuff. Did anybody know where anybody was, like that. I mean that was not the case. He just walked in one day and that was it. And, of course, it was a nice reunion. And then everybody was happy and so on. We both survived and his first expression was that he said, "Hey, this world isn't big enough to get me." Me neither.

Q: Like father, like daughter.

A: That is still my expression. I tell my friends that people continually – when people are complaining about nothing. I say, “Hey, look around. Appreciate nature and things. Always look at it this way. It could be so much worse. It could be so much worse. What is wrong there? Nothing. You have food, you’ve got a house, you’re healthy. If you’re really sick or something, that’s sad.” But in general, my God, what does it take? It doesn’t take a heck of a lot for a human being to survive and be happy. It has to come from inside. You can’t buy it, you can’t borrow it, you can’t take it away from somebody. You think “I’m going to take it away from so and so and I’ll keep it and I’ll be happier.” You don’t do things that way.

Q: True.

A: (laughing) I’m glad you agree.

Q: What were the circumstances that led you to leave Estonia?

A: Well, by that time -- okay, someday I should write a book. I’ve got a lot of it taped already. I should do something about it and I’d love to. I’ve had a quite interesting life, from all the way from day one to when we arrived in this country. Leaving the country, there was quite a bit lighter. I came home in ’42. I left there in ’44, because...

Q: The war was still on?

A: The war was still on, of course. I think in ’43, the winter of ’43, the Germans were stopped, up by Leningrad. And the fighting went on for...and I left there September of ’44. I was one day ahead before the Russians came back in. ‘Cause I know when I had left this town, at that time my father was home, the housekeeper had passed away about a year later and then there was just me and my father. So, by then it was decided by their new government, which was German government, that there was -- no, I’m getting my story mixed up. In ’43 we took in a lady with two children that had come from Russia or something. Her husband was in the Russian military. See, when my husband’s brother was in the Russian army. He was taken into the German army when the Russians occupied the country. My husband was taken into the German army. So this was one of those things that we ripped everything up. We had taken in...

Q: Let me ask you something. When did you get married?

A: Oh, that was later. We got married in Germany, in a camp. That has nothing to do with that.

Q: When did you get married?

A: In 1948. Okay, no, no, that had nothing to do with that. And so when this lady somehow came back and she had no place to go and somehow, I don't know, she came to this particular village, so we took her in. Then it was decided by their government, whoever, there was too many people living in one place. Some of them should go out and work someplace else. 'Cause Germany was great for that. They would ship people from one side of the country to the other to work. You wanted to go or not, that was not the question. If you didn't go willingly, you were taken and placed somewhere to work. And so my father, by that, he was 70 years old by then. So he said he would go. And I said, "No, I will go." So by then I was 18 years old and I was supposed to go work on some farm. I said, "No, I won't work on a farm, until I know where I am going." I had one of my friends that I had met in a labor camp and by that time she was also released. She wasn't in the last place I was in; we were separated. But she had also survived. And she was working at a first aid station in Rakueve. And she had said something, if I ever wanted to work, I could come there. So I worked there. It was a German installation, but it was also -- 'cause we had also our young men were in the military by that time. So I worked there, in the kitchen and all these other things, or whatever it was. And then later, in '44, 'cause the war was getting too close, so we -- I left, went back home. And a day ahead before. Because my father -- some people were leaving and some were staying and so on. And my father had a talk with me one day and he says, "The Russians are coming back and I don't know how you're going to get along with them. And I'm too old." He said, "I don't really worry about it anymore." Which was true. A lot of the older people had a rough time after leaving and going. They had no place to go and so on. But he says, "If you want to leave -- go."

Q: What was the prevailing attitude or feeling about the Russians? Were they dreaded?

A: Well they were dreaded also for the simple -- of course, they were dreaded because at the same time before, when the Russians came in from '41, we lost 14,000 of our people that were sent to Russian labor camps. And again, they were mostly, I would say, school teachers and people like that.

Q: So they weren't viewed as rescuers, for sure?

A: No, no, they were no rescuers; neither one of them was a rescuer, as far as that goes. But, they didn't use as much cruelty, for one thing. Not in the country itself there. I don't know what happened in Russia, I never was there. That's something I cannot verify exactly what went on. But when they first came in, we lost about 20 acres of our land because we were told we had too much land, we weren't supposed to have it, it was given to somebody. It was just like you would take something away from somebody here and give it to the people who had been on welfare. They don't really care. And it was given to somebody; I don't know who. My father says, "Go ahead, take it. Big deal. We weren't using it

anyhow.” So and certain other things. There was limitations, you know, on this and that, but they weren’t there that long, the first time around. ‘Cause the Germans were there from ’41 to ’44. So that was a longer time. And so when we had our little talk there and he said, “If you want to go, go.” There was a few other people that had young people and I know there was some older people and families that...and the leaving was something that you really didn’t know where you were going.

Q: You didn’t have a...plan on going to the United States?

A: No, no. Oh, God, no; that came way later. A lot of our people went to Sweden; at least they tried to. Some made it, some didn’t. A lot of the boats were sunk crossing. And so that was one thing that was out. So there was a group of people that had decided to leave. There was a couple of families and there was a few single people. So, somehow we just...I think we walked most of the way. We got to Latvia and, of course, we were stopped here and there, where were we going and we just made up our mind we were going to Germany because Germany was losing the war by then. Instead of going to Sweden, be sunk in the middle of the Baltic Sea, it didn’t seem a very good idea. And so we were in Latvia for quite a while. A group of us, we got on some kind of a ship, I don’t remember what the heck it was. I know we were in the harbor there, trying to find out if we could get to Holland. And so we got on -- it must have been some kind of a ship that hauls stuff and they had straw and we slept on that. Once you put your head down, you could hear the bugs running around in there. And we were loaded with lice and all kind of stuff by the time we got to Holland. Then we went through this delousing station or whatever the heck it was.

Q: How long were you on the ship?

A: Oh, I wasn’t -- from Lithuania to Holland wasn’t that long. I think it was a matter of two, three days. We did get something to eat there. I don’t know how much it was. And we got to Holland and we were in a little town in Holland and we worked there.

Q: You stayed with the group?

A: With the group, yes. By that time, there was only three of us left. Then we stayed together. I think some of the people stayed in Holland. And then the war was getting closer to England were bombing, coming from the flight over there.

Q: Do you remember the name of the town in Holland?

A: Yes, it was a small town, it’s called Baarns. It’s a little way out of Amsterdam. It’s B-a-a-r-n-s -- Baarns. And we stayed with some private people for a little while. And then we left there and came into Germany. Crossed the border and

we came into a factory. A bomb factory and we got a job over there. So that's how we came to Germany. Hitler was still in power, of course.

Q: Weren't you afraid to go into Germany?

A: Well, the English were only a little ways away. See, I -- we came into Germany in December, just shortly before Christmas. And the first of April England was in there already. For me, the war was over the 1st of April. And a funny coincidence again was Easter Sunday, when the English marched into the little town of Ahaus, in Germany. So two Easters were very important to me. Yes, the town was called Ahaus – A-h-a-u-s. Ahaus. It is about 30 kilometers from the Dutch border.

Q: What was it like when the war ended?

A: Ahh, the war ended, like I said earlier, a bird has a better chance. There was nothing. Even there, we worked in a factory there, which was like I said, it was still Hitler's time. And they were making a kind of weaving and spinning outfit that they made sacks and stuff for the military. I don't know what they were, what they were used for.

Q: You said you had a sense that the war was coming to an end.

A: Oh, of course, it was coming to an end. There was none of us that didn't know what was going on. You know, there was newspapers. There was like even during the German occupation in occupied Estonia. There was always the Underground that kept you up. If you were in contact with them, they kept you up on things. And so...but otherwise I would have never gone to Germany.

Q: Can you describe what it was like, how people behaved, when they learned that the Germans had surrendered?

A: Well, I don't know how the people survived --reacted anywhere else, but I know how we did, because it was a relief and still they didn't see no hope on the horizon at the moment, because you didn't have nothing. You had no home, you had nothing, absolutely nothing. We went to, when we worked in the factory, we were put into this big barrack. Now there was women there from Latvia, Estonia and Russia. There were 10 of us there. Well, at that time the air raids were on continually. We worked in the factory and I lost -- we lost three of the women there. From the 10 that we worked with in Germany.

Q: Because of the bombing?

A: Because of the bombing, of course. The whole town was leveled after awhile. The last one was -- completely -- everything was leveled. One of the women was very badly wounded. She was in a hospital already. And then one of my little

girlfriends that I had met, she was from Russia. She was a year younger than me. By that time, that was in '44,, I was 19 and she was 18, so we had kind of got to be friends and we stuck it out. And so when the factory was blown out, everything was blown out, we did have a few clothes, I did have a suitcase and had some things in it -- had some pictures. And I found a couple of pictures and I found a picture of my father, which was a great --that's one of the saddest things. But -- and then we had nothing, 'cause whatever was in there was gone. There was a big hole left in it, the building there. And we scrounged up some clothes and we just headed out in the country. And we knew this old German guy, he worked in a factory. He had already lost a son in the war. And he was a very, very nice old man. And he had told us that, "Hey, if things get tough, he lived out in the country." To come over there. So, we did. This little Russian girl, Irene was there. And they put us up and we helped them whatever we could do for them. And we got food. And then the air raids were still going on. We used to -- every night, when it got dark, so we'd go to town. If the bakery had blown up or something, we'd get bread. If the train was at the station, we got flour or different things. It was all around . We were always out there, getting something, you know. Dodging the bombs and what have you. And then when the war ended, we were (words missing in original transcript) the English (words missing in original transcript). Like I said, it was Easter morning. We looked out there and they were marching by. My English wasn't so good at the time that I was able to communicate. My father spoke seven languages. And as a kid, you don't want to learn anything. And I didn't. Usually you learn the words that you're not supposed to. He used to tell me, Learn this and that. And I said "Who am I going to talk to in this foreign stuff around here." But what little I knew, it helped. They searched all of the houses of course, the English military and I talked to them. They said everything was okay. So then, we didn't want to stay there anymore because we were more or less living off these people. So then we decided let's go and see if we can find some work someplace else. So we worked on some more German farms over there. But we got five meals a day. We didn't mind helping 14 or 15 hours a day. So then later on we left over there (words missing in original transcript) and going to the, what do you call it, DP camps. Displaced Persons. I think it is more and more misplaced than anything else.

Q: Displaced persons means you expect to go back to where you came from.

A: Yeah, well they went back most of them when we got to the camps in '45, they -- I was in a camp in Hanau, 18 kilometers out of Frankfurt am Mein. And they have the French, the Belgians, the Italians -- all the different countries that Germany had occupied. They still had some of those people that hadn't gone back to their own country. See our countries were occupied by Russia then.

Q: And where did you go from there?

A: We stayed in camps.

Q: For how long?

A: Until 1951 – until we emigrated to the United States.

Q: That's a long time!

A: Of course, a long time. We survived.

Q: What was the quality of your life?

A: That's what I mean, you survive. That's it.

Q: What did you do on a daily basis?

A: On a daily basis, I think you really didn't do anything, because there was certain groups of people who worked here and there. They were sent on labor details and stuff. I did. I came there in '45 and in '46 I went to a small town by Nuremberg. We had found out the Americans were looking for people to work in different areas, you know, especially the DPs and so on. So I got a job working for an American family. He was a captain in the American military and he had just brought his wife and children over. I was able to communicate and so on.

Q: But you meanwhile moved in and out of the camp?

A: No, no. I lived there for about a year and then he was sent someplace else and then I came back to the camp. And in '48 -- the early part of '48, I got married in camp and so we stayed there.

Q: Your husband was also in the camp?

A: Yes, he was also from Estonia.

Q: But you had not known him before?

A: No, no. People were very much thrown all over the world by that time. I mean, all over Europe. They didn't know what was what or who was where.

Q: It sounds like life in the camps was like a miniature city, where people worked...

A: Well, that's what it was. There was hundreds of thousands of people after the war in those camps and the emigration opened up, I think, in '48. I'm not positive. It could have been earlier. The International Refugee organization was taking care of all that. It was again a time that you stood still. I mean, you had no future, you had no nothing.

Q: Did you have in your head that you had plans for yourself?

A: Oh, sure, you always had to have a plan. Because if we gave up dreaming and wishing and thinking -- hey, you might as well dig a hole then.

Q: What was your dream?

A: I'll be somewheres someday. And I'll do something. I mean, you don't plan -- nobody's plan will come through, exactly what you want or what you want to do. Again it comes down to survival. But I wasn't going to stay there. 'Cause a lot of people, especially the older people, I think they stayed in Germany and some of them are still there now, I guess, if they're still alive. They had no place to go and they were not able to work. You know what I mean, there was different types of people who left the country.

Q: But you said you were married in the camp in '48...so you went through a courtship...

A: Well, that was more or less a normal life, I guess. You had food, you had clothes, which was all, of course, wherever it came from and what it was all about. Then certain people worked, like I did for awhile. Then we went into a immigration camp...

Q: But wait, when people get married, as you did...by the way, tell us your husband's name?

A: My husband's name was Ernest.

Q: Ernest Voip.

A: Um, hum.

Q: And were you given quarters for married people?

A: More or less, yeah. More or less. We were two families in a room, which was like separated, more or less, with a partition or something. It was very crowded conditions. There was when we were there, when I first came to the camp, we were put into a room.

This again was one of those huge, huge German military places, two, three story buildings. Then the place was turned into a camp. Like I said, the Italians, the French, the Belgians -- whoever was there. Whoever'd been there during the Germans, they had been brought over there, working here and then. They had been in a camp. But they were taken, let go to their homes. And then we, people like us, we moved in. And there was some Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, the Poles. I mean many, many nationalities that did not go back where the Russian occupation was.

- Q: You said you were there until 1951?
- A: We were there until 1949. Then we went to Ludwigsburg, to the immigration camp and we were there almost two years. You had to file for immigration.
- Q: To the United States?
- A: Well, I filed to Canada before I got married. It opened up late in '47, I'm sure it did. 'Cause I know, when I got married -- we refilled for Canada.
- Q: And how long after you filed did it take before you learned that...
- A: Well, it took us about two years before we...we were there in '49.
- Q: And you came across in a ship?
- A: No, we were flown over here.
- Q: From what port?
- A: We came out of Munich. We took a train across to San Francisco.
- Q: Wow!
- A: And that wasn't easy.
- Q: Why San Francisco?
- A: Because that's where we were going. We had a...see, when we came over here, we had to have -- everybody that comes through immigration has to have, you either have a sponsor or you have a job. And we stated that we were like all the rest of the people that were coming in here. And so this is where our destination was. And we came to a chicken ranch.
- Q: Near San Francisco? Who was the person who sponsored you?
- A: Well, actually -- see, when we filed for the United States, after Canada failed because my husband had been hurt in the war, he had lost the sight of one eye and a few other things. And Canada was very strict at first. They loosened it a little bit later. But at that time, so we filed for the United States. We were supposed to come to Mississippi to work on a farm there. That was our first sponsor. No way, this girl's not going to Mississippi. We fought that for about a year.
- Q: Who sponsored you? These were not relatives?

A: Oh, God, no. They were just people who went into those places where they could get to come and work for them. They were sort of -- hey, these people are coming here. They're down, you know, they can work for us forever and ever. Well, not me. I'm not that kind of person. And we had quite a hassle about that for -- it took us maybe more than six months to fight that one. And they kept on asking why I didn't want to go to Mississippi. And I was very familiar with the United States in the second grade already. And I said "No" because I just don't like the climate and I'm not going to work. And, first of all, I didn't want an individual sponsor. I wanted a group sponsor. Like a church, or something. We got that finally. When we arrived in San Francisco, we had a choice and the first guy that came along, he had a chicken ranch. And it sounded good. So we went. 'Cause I wanted to pick it when I get here. Not being afraid of work, but another thing that was done to a lot of these people, I know the same chicken farm, he sponsored a family from Germany. He was from somewheres in Europe, I don't know. Originally his parents or something. He sponsored a family from Germany. We stayed there a little over a year.

Q: What was your other choice, by the way?

A: I think there was mostly farm labor, because my husband wasn't skilled worker or anything. So it was mostly farm labor. And they sponsored a family from Germany. And, my God, they got those people into debt and they have to stay forever, three or four years. They couldn't do anything else, because they had to pay and stay and work and pay back what they owe. They tried the same thing with us. You know, you give 'em a little old empty house and he says, "Come on, we'll go to town and I'll buy you all this and I'll buy you that." So, of course, you know, you have to pay it back. I said, "No, we don't need it."

Q: So where did you go when you left there?

A: We moved and rented our own house. Rented a house and my husband worked for a chicken ranch. This was in Petaluma, California. It was (words missing in original transcript) of the world at that time, in the early '50s.

Q: Did you have children at that point?

A: I had two children when I came over here. And that was one reason we flew over. Because my number two son was less than six months old. And we didn't know if we'd make it across either. When we left London Heathrow Airport, we were coming over on one of those little, I don't know, really, really bad planes. It wasn't pressured very well and everything. I think we (words missing in original transcript) ourselves while we were still on the airplane. And we did make it finally and one of the motors went out coming in over close to Newfoundland. We had to make an emergency landing and everybody was worried. And I kept saying, "We'll make it. No problem." My husband always used to say, "You and your gypsy predictions." I'd say, "Yeah, but we made it, didn't we?" 'Cause my

heritage goes back to the gypsies. Good thing the Germans didn't know I was a gypsy. I was five generations away from it. That's quite a ways away, yeah.

Q: So from Petaluma, California, you somehow made it to Florida.

A: Oh, I've lived in San Jose, I've lived in Arkansas, I lived in Washington State. I'm ready to move again. I'm on the move continually. The world isn't big enough to stop me.

Q: Okay. Well I really appreciate all the information you've shared with us and before we close this interview, is there anything I haven't asked you, that you would like to add or anything that you thought of which we talked about earlier that you'd like to add?

A: Well, there is, but there is really a lot to be talked about and said, in my way of thinking. There hasn't been enough said about -- I mean there's been enough said about it, but the saying has been on deaf ears most of the time. I think what you're doing now, if it is for schools, and I think that should be started as soon as the children are able to understand right from wrong and truth from lies and so on. And I think that should be taught from then on.

Q: So, as you've said before, so it will never happen again.

A: So it will never happen again and like, I said earlier, when people read history, they only read things and dates and stuff like that. History has a deeper meaning, It is not to read and I know which days and what happened. Why did it happen? It's the same thing, like a parent says, I've always had a way of -- I remember when I was raising my children, and I had neighbors and friends that had small children and the mother would say the child will do something. The child is maybe three, four, five years old. And the kid will do something. And the mother says, "Don't do it," And the child will say, "Well, how come? Why not?" The mother says, "Cause I said so." And I think that is so stupid. It's got a strong footing, it's stupid, but it's true. You explain to them. And the same thing goes for everybody. When you say something and if that saying is not an explanation, then will you please put an explanation with it. Verify it. Why? How come? What for? All these things. And I think that is very important.

Q: Teaching people to think.

A: Teaching people. This is what all this experience is about, is to learn from. I think I'm a heck of a lot better human being. I'm not saying that I was ever a rotten kid or a rotten human being to start with. But I think I'm a heck of a lot better human being and I have a better understanding of human nature and what can happen. And I can sort out the bad people and the good people at my first meeting. All you have to do is listen to that person and talk to them and you can

decide. And this is something that is not taught and this has to be taught. Thank God my father taught me all that.

Q: Your father did, indeed, give you a heritage of strength.

A: Of course he did. He was a knowledgeable man. He was a strong man and I consider myself a strong person, because people tell me, "How can you be so strong?" I say, "Hey, I'm healthy, I have a mind and I have two strong legs to stand on." So what do I need? I don't need alcohol, I don't need drugs. To top it off, I don't even need religion. Because I am capable of handling it on my own. I have no problems. My father also taught me to keep a "you" I know in your life. You have heard people continually complain about this and that, so and so did this to them, so and so did that to them. It isn't true. In this day and age, whatever happens to you, you let it happen. Nobody can do things. Somebody said, "Oh, so and so sold me something." No, you bought it. It's as simple as that. And these things -- that you have to have a mind of your own. And if you don't -- another saying my father had, the most dangerous people in the world are the ones that are like leaves in the wind. Whichever way the wind blows, they'll go. And those are the kind of people we have to watch out for.

Q: Okay, I think that's a good note on which to end. And I really want to thank you very much for participating in our Holocaust project. You've made a really fine contribution.

A: Thank you.