

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

## **William Helmreich Oral History Collection**

**Interview with Irena DeTour  
February 19, 1988  
RG-50.165\*0016**

## PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Irena De'Tour, conducted by William Helmreich on February 19, 1988 as research for his book *Against all odds: Holocaust survivors and the successful lives they made in America*. The interview was given to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum on Oct. 30, 1992 and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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

## IRENA DETOUR

### February 19, 1988

WH: (WH narrates:...very conversational, she sells antiques, the house looks like a museum...chairs here...a wall...cupboards...closets...tables, chairs of all sizes, shapes and description types-it looks sort of like a loft transplanted from Soho to Deep River, CT., a very quiet town and this looks very, very typical New England. She sells her paintings and as she says, if she gets two buyers a week, that is a lot. She makes a point that the survivors are very, very meticulous-they're very, very concerned about cleanliness. They are very, as she puts it in her own words, antiseptic. Antiseptic is the word she used. That they care-that everything has to be cleaned because they had to live with dirt for so long and I can say that every pillow here is made up perfectly and every room is made up perfectly, the feeling you get is someone very, very busy. She has to work all day and night on her manuscripts and on her papers-she only sells antiques in order to live off...must be painless).

WH: Okay, Irene, you have one sister?

ID: I have one sister, five years younger.

WH: And do you have any brothers?

ID: No, that's it.

WH: And how many children do you have?

ID: Two. Nicole and Alexandria.

WH: Your-.

ID: Oh, you have it all prepared!

WH: Yes.

ID: I really am in awe of you.

WH: Why is that? That I have prepared the interview?

ID: Yes.

WH: Oh, I...

ID: ...so scientific.

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WH: One has to. What was your father's occupation?

ID: None.

WH: None?

ID: He was a self-fashioned..he was a con artist, that was his occupation. Do you know what a 'var shal a goniff' is?

WH: Yes, I know Yiddish.

ID: Well, that was what he was. And I'm going right into his footsteps. I'm the Polish mafia. I'm not kidding you. He knew how to repair watches, sometimes, but his idea of making money was to go to horse races and get dressed to kill in English cut jackets and win on horses. Sometimes he won and sometimes he lost. And if he lost, to recapture his finances, he never went to work, of course, because that's...what he did. He scared up a game of poker and he recaptured it playing cards.

WH: Amazing.

ID: The other way he made money is to visit his mother-in-law who was a pushover for him and was a wealthy dowager. And he would go to the house on Friday night and...while having dinner, he'd catch her for(?)...just for the company.

WH: How did your mother feel about that?

ID: How my mother felt-she was insane about him because he was so attractive and charming.

WH: I saw.

ID: It was impossible to resist him. There's nobody who could resist him. No way. He was like Nelson Rockefeller...with charm...bubbly and...

WH: It's amazing that with his talent, right, that he could not become a survivor...you said he was the first person killed.

ID: Well, you see, the thing was, I really should amend my answers about his profession. He did know how to repair watches...he was very lazy, he never even shaved. He had an attendant coming to shave him in the morning.

WH: Did he have any sort of Jewish identification?

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ID: Ah, he went when he was forced

WH: But not as an adult.

ID: He went as an adult, a little bit. I suppose he was Bar Mitzvah, but I really don't know. And he came from, not an orthodox, but semi-orthodox family...of merchants. He was not an intellectual, he could hardly read or write. He didn't finish high school, and now myself when I go to a fancy client's house to Park avenue dinner party, and I deliver myself of an oration or a monologue straight from Chekhov, the first question that I give people the chance to ask me, and they say, What did your father do? Was he a diplomat? Was he a professor? He must have been brilliant! And I say, He could hardly read or write.

WH: What was your mother like?

ID: My mother was brilliant...so, anyway, my mother was very good in the sciences, she was good in the art, she was good in the languages, she was quadrilingual...at least she was good in music...but she was a meek person, which I didn't respect. I loved my mother, but I didn't like her and I criticize her and I yell at her all the time.

WH: ...at the time the war broke out you were fifteen?

ID: Something like that.

WH: And you were already in gymnasium school?

ID: Well, you see...these professors...who were part of our school that was closed up by the Germans and we had tutorial lessons in different specialties...

WH: During the war, you were in the Ghetto during the first part of the war until '43 and then you went into hiding as you indicated there.

ID: Yes. My father arranged for the escape...excuse me for a minute to interject, to get back to your original question of about five points back, chronologically speaking, when you asked me about if my father was so smart and shrewd and could survive by his wits, why didn't he escape. Because he arranged for me first to get out because I was the strongest and I would lay the territory for everybody. He got me and the false papers and then he arranged for my mother and my sister...the day of his escape... arranged with a guard...that day the started burning the Warsaw ghetto. I was in a bus with that lady from Brazil I was telling you about who said you could only have one dinner a night. I was on the bus and I saw the flames from under the wall. I had to keep my face straight and I realized that my father would never escape alive...I didn't want to give myself away by crying when everybody (on the bus) kept saying, 'great, the Jews are burning

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alive, they deserve it.'...my first hiding place was in a jewelry shop...without any facilities...I was alone...we could not exist as a family...we all had authentic Christian papers purchased from a priest...with different names and geographical locations...my name was Barbara Sawicka...because of being locked in the shop every night with a dead bolt I developed claustrophobia...it was like being burned alive!...no shrink can take (this fear) away from me! I have spent thousands of dollars with psychiatrists...I have lost some very good clients (because of it).

WH: After the war, where did you go?

ID: I went first...liberated by the Russians (in Berlin)...when Allied forces came...the section near...the airport...I worked (there)...it's a munitions factory.

WH: You went back to Warsaw?

ID: ...I walked from Berlin to Warsaw. 715 miles...

WH: How long did it take you?

ID: Five to six weeks on the road.

WH: (walked 15 miles a day)...you got some rides, I take it?

ID: No.

WH: No one picked you up?

ID: No. (traveled with very little food.)

WH: How did you have the strength?

ID: I was swollen with hunger...that's why I do not know how to drive. This is another residue of war. All my money goes to my drivers.

WH: ...why does it affect your ability to drive?

ID: Anything to do with transportation, I freak out...I'm scared to drive...after the war...I met my mother and sister...I love these people who rent penthouses and...townhouses. We rented a corner of a room. We were really rich, you see...I guess G-d decided to reimburse me for that inconvenience and this is how I ended up in a mansion of 36 rooms in Essex. I had to overcompensate.

WH: How long were you in Warsaw before you came here?

ID: ...maybe a month or two...until we could get to...Austria...we went to...a very famous displaced persons camp...we were in Austria about a year...with my mother and sister...

WH: You arranged for transport on the S.S. Marine Perch...

ID: We were brought here under false pretenses. That's the most important part of the story...my father had a brother who was a goddamned bastard...a doctor...and you as a psychologist or socialist should know that every Jewish parent wants to have a son (and here she raises her voice in mimicry, as she said: ) who's a doctor!...and they promised us the sky in the letters...

WH: He was here during the war?

ID: He was here because he studied in Switzerland...and he and my aunt...became very American. So American you could just throw up...like John Birch Society American...this uncle spoke English with a heavy Jewish accent, had terrible manners...undesirable in my book...He couldn't measure up to my father (knows the bitterness)...he was a Colonel in the army, Professor at John Hopkins University, Professor at Louisville, KY and Director at VA hospital. He was very humanitarian in one way...his name was Dr. Joshua Ehrlich...my sister (married a doctor and lives in Chicago)...he, (my uncle) wrote us these glowing letters...(that he)...will adopt...(me and my sister)...(he said: ) we love you children!...we (will) educate them...my German was perfect, my Latin almost as good as an Episcopalian priest.

WH: This is in 1946?

ID: (yes). We came here because I wanted to be a Freudian analyst...I could have made, without any aggrandizing, I will tell you that I would have made the most brilliant analyst...he (my uncle) promised to send me to study medicine at Louisville, KY...but the affidavit was made out...by a granduncle...who had limited savings...who lived in Washington, PA...the affidavit promised us education (so we would not be a burden to society)...we were torn because my mother was a member of HaShomer Hatzair...she was a Zionist and I was brought up in a very Jewish, religious home...my grandparents...were famous Jewish philanthropists...the most famous in Warsaw (on my mother's side)...Rubelchick (?)...we all wanted to go to Israel...a kibbutz after a slave labor camp in Versailles. It just depends what you compare it with.

WH: ...(why didn't you go to Israel after you came to America?)

ID: ...very hard to go to Israel after having any of the luxuries here.

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WH: What about the possibility of going to Israel before you came to America?

ID: My uncle...he was dying to see the...two little cutie girls...under false promises lured us here...I'm full of hate and venom like a snake outside a zoo (for the uncle)...(he) was not even waiting for us at the pier...he sent my aunt...when we got off the Marine Perch...and we only had one suitcase between myself, my sister and mother and seven dollars. I thought that they were going to take us to Louisville, KY and put us to school...instead they gave us...to other relatives, my mother's cousins...in Brooklyn...we realized that...we're not going to school...my mother had to work in a factory...my aunt took me to Louisville, KY...I came here in 1947...and (she) wanted me to become a physical therapist and marry a Jewish doctor...last thing on my mind so I went back...(told to be a factory worker at a corset factory and receive training)...the crime was...that we were brought here under false pretenses...she (my mother) could have blackmailed my uncle and say that she gonna write a letter to Washington to say that they lied about our education...(so we could have received money to go to school). I was so angry I did not go to his funeral. I'm very vindictive.

WH: What could he gain from bringing you over (here to America?)

ID: He thought he'd have two children who would worship...him because he was a Jewish doctor...and I had no respect for him.

WH: Why didn't he bring you to Louisville?

ID: Because he claimed I wasn't intellectual enough to make it...the character of the Jewish people isn't always very good. It's avaricious and mean...(I think)...he wanted us to pay back for this hardships...the second generation of the survivors...the parents say they worked in the sweat shops and they say, 'we had it hard, so you shouldn't have it so easy' They didn't learn from the war. Many of them had no business surviving...useless individuals...being mourned only by your family that means you haven't made a big dent in society. You have to touch at least 2,000 lives in order to have any justification for being here.

WH: What was the trip like...on the Marine Perch?

ID: It was terrible. It was steerage.

WH: You were in a big dormitory like room?

ID: ...20 people in steerage...

WH: Were all the people Jewish on the boat?



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- ID: They had to be...(in order to be on this boat).
- WH: How long was the trip?
- ID: Eleven to thirteen days...it was a terrible experience.
- WH: What did one do during the day?
- ID: Throw up (get sick).
- WH: What was your first impression when you sailed into New York Harbor?
- ID: I didn't see my uncle's face...I was full of hate.
- WH: How about the buildings-the Island of Manhattan...the Statue of Liberty...mean anything to you?
- ID: Not at all. I couldn't give a good goddamn. I didn't like the design of the sculpture...my aesthetic sensibilities made me realize what a tourist trap.
- WH: ...any trouble going through customs (after your aunt met you)?
- ID: No, I had nothing to declare.
- WH: You went to Brooklyn then?
- ID: We went to Brooklyn with a cousin of my mother's. (Mother's family in Poland had a leather tannery...supplied...leather to the Polish cavalry...cousin in America in the same business...this cousin met us at the pier...we got an apartment in Long Island City...my cousin paid rent for us for a whole year. \$60.00 a month he paid for us...my sister went to...high school there, and I went to Hunter College at night and my mother worked in the garment district.
- WH: Did you get help from any organizations?
- ID: No, they helped to make me miserable. They had idiots working for them...no sensitivity...(HIAS) didn't understand that we were from a different strata of society than most of the other survivors.
- WH: (This shows the bitterness of status loss. Some survivors, she says, were, in essence, low lifes.)

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ID: ...I am a snob. I identify with Park Avenue and not Brooklyn because I was brought up to be a snob...because (that class) are philanthropists, kind people and gave a lot to the city of Warsaw...when my grandfather died we had 2,000 people to the funeral and 5 streets were closed...I say only upper class came to the funeral...my sister says, simple, middle class were there...she's an idiot, my sister, and suffers from amnesia...survivors are pathological liars. You have to remember this. Nobody will tell you this. If you meet them at the Warsaw Ghetto Resistance, Ladies Auxillary, and you ask them what street they lived on and they forget that means they were in a little town outside of Warsaw...they never remember it as it was.

WH: Why?

ID: Survivors are sadists...they paying back what they got from the Germans...in trivial ways. I'll show what I mean...(?). A Polish survivor comes back from the Riviera and he says, 'I just came back from the Riviera and I ate in this wonderful restaurant,' and I'll say, 'Can you tell me the name of it? Maybe I'll go there when I go.' 'Oy,' he says, 'I forgot the name of it!' What they doing? They needling you those goddamn bastards. They want to tell you and then frustrate you.

WH: (Interview beautifully illustrates the class differences).

ID: They (the survivors) give and take...I hate the survivors...there are very few that I have any use for.

WH: That's a personality trait that I've already seen...

ID: Then you know how perceptive I am...

WEH: To get people's hopes up and then to dash them.

ID: ...I do it all the time...my husband (used to complain that) I gave too much time to the survivors.

WH: When you first lived with...the family who paid your rent for the first year...

ID: I was sent to the Fulton Fish Market. Worked in the jewelry department...during the war. I worked as a maid...with my first salary check I went to a book shop. I bought a Webster's College Dictionary and I almost totally memorized it... I started (nights) Hunter College in 1949 and graduated in 1956...had menial jobs...lived in Jackson Heights...I hated it because of all the Polish refugees. (Hated her apartment also because it was small and ugly).

End of Side #1

Side #2

WH: You said they save the money for the children? (The survivors)

ID: But I don't! I spend it every day because my children are very wealthy and very professional. Much more than most of the survivors' children (?)...I spend \$300.00 a month to call survivors to be their support person. To talk to them. To make them feel good about life.

WH: ...why do you have a separate book for the survivors?

ID: ...when I go to different meetings and somebody gives me a name I have it here and I have different books for my clients...relatives and survivors and Polish people I put (?) together...if I go to the Warsaw ghetto meeting I like to have it with me. Maybe I want to call somebody for dinner...but you can never have dinner with them! 'I have to feed my husband at 5 o'clock!' And to which I say...when I was in voluntary exile...like when...(I)...was in Jackson Heights when my mother was sick...I said to myself, 'I know all these people'...who beg me to see them and I come to New York...?...Beekman Tower Hotel which is extremely expensive because my clients are all on the East Side...I do a lot of business at auctions, (?) restaurants. I can't include the survivors in this kind of scene...every night I call somebody from this little blue book and I invite them to dinner to a nice restaurant...I know they won't pay for (it) because they have to save the money for the CHILDREN but I don't so I can buy them dinner.

The answers were always like this: 'Oy, I wish I could.' 'What's stopping you, did you get paralyzed?' 'No...I have to feed my husband dinner.' '...can't you leave him dinner on a tray? My mother is dying like (?) a dog. I need you. I need your support.' After five refusals to the person who said 'no' I just said in perfect Polish, 'Don't call me when your...(father) husband drops dead of a heart attack. I won't be holding your hand.' You'll have a lot of free evenings...one of the survivors...who is brilliant but an idiot in terms of living...her husband died...and I called her up and I said, 'I'm so sorry your husband died' and she said, 'well, I'm sad but...it's very inconvenient I have to learn how to drive.' I said, 'I don't know how to drive' and...she said to me...'When your husband dies you will have to learn how to drive too'...I'll get a second husband who knows how to drive and will get me a limo and I will pick up him in a bar just the way I picked up the first husband...the survivors are very different. They think very differently. And they are very selfish and ungiving...and when you ask them to use the telephone, to me, another fifty dollars, a hundred dollars is like five cents for anybody else. Not because I'm a millionaire. It's because of my attitude. It costs me \$300,00 dollars a month to call the survivors. I'm the only one in CT (who calls survivors)...they

don't care (how much I spend)...so you know what? I made myself a note on the telephone. I said, for every f-cking call to every f-cking survivor who has no business surviving I get myself one hour of Mr. O'Brien...with a big limo...who's a retired...Irish policeman, good company, professional driver and body guard. It's a blood transfusion into my own body. These people are leeches and vultures. And wait when you see Mrs. Gejlensch. You're ready to throw up...a lot of venom, huh?

WH: (She spent time trying to make sure the interviewer was comfortable)...you majored in what at Hunter?

ID: Classics...I was one of the six classic majors...(?)

WH: Did you have time to belong to any organizations...in general...during those years?

ID: I was always a member of 8 (?) museums...Asia Society...and went to all art openings...(? Inaudible).

WH: Was your health good, then?

ID: My health was never good...I never feel good...but I now am suffering even more from the-this 30 year post traumatic syndrome. You know what that is.

WH: I do know what that is...

ID: I don't have to explain any of this...

ID: (inaudible...cripple?...paralysis?...of my sickness?)...this is...luck of the survivors. They have to light a candle...invited to the White House...(for) a big event...I was invited to the...Kennedy dinner. There were 8 people invited. I was one of the 8 people. With my husband. Never could go. Because I always thought I was going to get sick. I'd be trapped. I'd have no escape. I missed a lot of chances. I thought I'd be a museum director.

WH: What do you mean, you thought you'd be trapped?

ID: Trapped... it all comes back to that shop.

WH: What happens when you go to NYC?

ID: I deal with it somehow.....(?)....

WH: Do you think of yourself as being an optimistic person?

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ID: NO! Melancholy, (?)...the suffering from the blues (?).

WH: When you go back to the way you started your life here and what you did, what were the points at which you think you would have been happier if you had done something differently?

ID: (inaudible)...had I lived on the East Side my children would have gone to better colleges.

WH: ...where did they go to school?

ID: You're going to die. Hold to your chair! They went to (?)...University of CT because my husband was too f-cking busy writing the dictionary for Bennet Cerf so he couldn't take them for an interview. And all my lovers took the children to (? burlesque)...however they couldn't take them for college interviews...but my children did fantastically well...in spite of it. One became a psychologist...(she's not just a psychologist) she has a...clinic...like Dr. Ellis she has a following, she gives lectures...she has her own radio program...(inaudible)...they are very humanitarian, they are very caring, they are very loving...(Nicole) (daughter named after her deceased grandfather(?). Younger daughter (?). Oldest daughter (?))...

WH: Are you proud of them?

ID: No.

WH: Why not?

ID: I have no reason to be proud. The only thing about them, they don't steal, I suppose. I am most proud because I trained them to marry millionaires. They have skills...of people who have always had everything, we didn't have a lot of money when I married...(inaudible)...(the children)...had skills from sewing to typing. They both made extra money by typing other peoples' papers. They are cooks...bartenders...restaurant work...sailors...they are terrific hostesses, they speak well...well-groomed, well-mannered, they are not slobs...and I GROOMED them to marry millionaires and not necessarily Jews even though I am very Israel oriented and give all my money in support of (?orphanage? charity.) And Israel comes first.

WH: What comes first in your mind?

ID: ...Israel first, Poland second. (inaudible)...but I love Warsaw. I love Poland. I don't consider myself an American...I am a citizen but I didn't consider myself an American...I really don't like this country. I like Scotland. I should live in Scotland.

WH: But you do identify as a Jew?

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ID: Very much so.

WH: (inaudible, but 'only the survivors who crashed the 400'-she didn't—a status symbol?)...have you been to Israel?

ID: Once for three days, and I was miserable.

WH: Why?

ID: Because I hate Israel.

WH: Subculture-you mean you hate Israelis but you like Israel?

ID: ...exactly...I want to contribute...to Hadassah...after the war...I helped Hadassah. My mother was a Hadassah volunteer, (? I have a Hadassah and 17 Jewish charities and Hunter college in my will)...but at the same time I do not identify with Israelis. They are loud, they are brusque, they have terrible manners, they are surly,

WH: Do you think there is a difference between the survivors who went to Israel and those who came here?

ID: They're all slob. No...I have never met a survivor who (inaudible) knows how to do good. NOT ONE OF THEM! Including that schlemiel on Park Avenue (inaudible)...They're pitiful...the survivors are almost practicing incest they like the old dramas in classical times. They intermarried each other. They couldn't make it with anybody else. They had to intermarry each other because they knew (if one got nightmares in the middle of the night)...the other (one would) understand.

WH: Do you ever have nightmares?

ID: ...a lot.

WH: (inaudible) yet you weren't afraid to marry someone who didn't know about those things.

ID: I wasn't because I laid eyes on my husband and when I saw him I said, 'I'd rather die than not have this man in my life' period...

WH: He was American?

ID: Yes.

WH: The survivors (in your opinion)...as far as you can gather, that they usually don't have extra marital affairs.

ID: Yes, and they never have lovers, they always have the perfect wife.

WH: Why is that?

ID: Most of them are very provincial and boring and they would never appeal to anybody in the higher echelon group...(inaudible)...I have no feelings about sex, I have feelings about no screwing something for charity...(inaudible)...I give my money to Israel and I don't think I'm doing my best...I was hysterical crying, like a lunatic, I was so moved by her (Golda Meier)...I said I was the most selfish, horrible person because I should go home and give up this goddamn 36 room mansion, disassemble everything and go into my (?) time (?)...my skills I learnt from my mother, not from Hunter College. My greatest knowledge is from my family and...their way of life...I can teach people so many things.

WH: Do you think American learn those (have your) skills?

ID: Depends on where they come from. Only the rich have those skills.

WH: ...when you first came here...(and) you had to deal with other American Jews, how did they respond to you?

ID: Not well. I will tell you that the American Jew despise me...I remind them of Aunt Sadie from the Bronx because they don't realize that my accent is so different.

ID: (inaudible) Shiksa...I hate that word...(a person?) thought I was not a prestigious dealer because I had an accent and I was Jewish, The Jews don't like to buy from the Jews. They think that if they buy from the Christians it's better. So very often I don't tell the Jewish client that I'm Jewish (inaudible).

WH: Do you think the American Jews feels guilty about survivors?

ID: No. They look down on them...being a survivor is like being a leper. Because people feel sorry for you but they really don't want anything to do with you. There's a stigma attached. This you can put in your book. I only came out of the closet officially 5 or 6 years ago...

WH: What made you come out?

ID: I don't know. I don't remember...(writing her memoirs? Inaudible)...I find that survivors are mercenary...no worse than others but certainly no better and most of them try to capitalize on the war...they write about the war...they think they are publishing literature they publishing...semantics and chronicles at best...(I wrote about) a stream of

consciousness...one of my chapters was published in the journal by the women's auxillary. It's called 'The Woman Survivor' and then I started coming out of the closet a little more...and the people in the group...said I was being very selfish that I didn't want to write about the war, that it was my duty to write about the war to document to which my answer was, I did one documentary for \$100,00 (inaudible)...a simple documentary written by an idiot (inaudible)...I have fulfilled my duty to society (by doing this)...very few people know how glamour (Warsaw was) before the war...my contribution is (informing)...the highlights of Warsaw, the rich life, the culture life of the Jewish community...etc...one cannot understand fully the enormity of the crime...(of-not recording?-denying?-the information of such a culture...)

WH: Isn't there a terrible feeling of loss no matter if you stood on your head from now until the day you die you can never bring it back-you can never really fully explain it to people...

ID: (? I don't explain it. There's no need to...?) And anyway, it's not happen again, you can be sure of that...there'll be another Holocaust.

WH: You believe that?

ID: So many people deny it...it's not chic to be Jewish...it's not 'in' to be Jewish, it never was 'in' to be Jewish...this is why lawyers like William Junstler, (the?) never defend the Jew...(?)...the Holocaust survivor in cases. They only defend the Black because it's chic. It's chic to be Black.

WH: Wasn't it 'in' to be Jewish in the last...10, 15 years the Jews seemed to identify-

ID: Never. NEVER! (and her voice dropped as she intoned:) Don't kid yourself.

WH: You don't think so.

ID: ...you couldn't...walk into the door to the Essex Yacht Club.

WH: What about the taxi drivers in CT?

ID: ...they wouldn't take you...if you don't have Lacost shirt and look like Yacht club and have blond hair they'll tell you that they're booked up!!...(inaudible)...I'll tell you what. I hate to sit on the beach in America because I look at blond children...who-? The future killers of?...concentration camps and the future KKK When I see Christian children selling door to door, I say I'm not buying it (Girl Scout Cookies) because these are future concentration camp peoples...when I see these children, I think about the children who died in the Warsaw ghetto innocently, I resent it...I see all these Christian children playing in the sun and having a good time...that's how I look at it...my husband gets



upset and he doesn't want to hear that...but I'm more and more aware because I'm thinking of my...lovely...but I'm more and more aware because I'm thinking of my...lovely...beautiful cousins...really fantastic...my family...(I have pictures)... and all these people are killed!!...my aunt's son was killed before her eyes!

WH: Tell me something, why do you think that we're in this cycle where it'll always happen again and again. What do you think it is that makes Gentiles hate Jews so much?

ID: I'm really not so brilliant...able to express it so succinctly (?)...certainly I feel that it is just the nature of things...everything returns...every few years there has to be a pogrom on a large scale...don't want to go out of practice killing Jews...(inaudible).

WH: Do you think that the fact that there's a country, Israel now makes a difference?

ID: Not at all.

WH: Why not?

ID: People say that because of Israel, there's no respect for the Jews...Jews are still hated no matter what...they have no answer...unless they lie...or change their names...that's a bad scene.

WH: Are you happy you were born Jewish?

ID: I was happy I was born to a special family. I was always proud to be a member of that family. I never heard yelling. I never hear fight. I always heard nice things said about each other. I had a loving aunt...if I had a choice now, I'd rather not be Jewish. I changed my name...just in case. I'm terrified!...I paid a driver to take me to Town Hall to register to vote...(encountered) prejudice of blue collar workers in a small town...I don't look...typically Jewish and I don't speak like a Jewish person and I don't speak like the other survivors necessarily, do I?...(?0 what should be (?0...I went in to the Town hall and I started filling out registration to vote because it was a new town I moved in...everybody knew us because of my shop. We were written up in the New Haven Registrar...(?)...(inaudible)...I came in and everybody pretended not to know who I was, that was the first thing. I gave them my mink coat at the door, I went to my duffle coat not to show off...prejudice I already kind of staged the scene...(?) I expected trouble before I even walked in to register to vote. I took a passport...in case they asked for a driver's license and I'd have to tell them I don't drive...I even had something with my photograph. When I came in they immediately asked me if I had a driver's license and I said I didn't. I have my passport. One woman started writing my number from the passport and the other woman said, 'this is not enough...(inaudible)...this is not enough, you can't register, you can't vote in this town.' They didn't like my accent, you see, they didn't know I was Jewish...(and I told them)...that I lived in the biggest house in

Essex...and there they knew nothing of my passport they just came in a limousine to pick me up to get my vote because my driver was off! I rubbed it in. And they said, 'No, we have your naturalization papers, your citizenship papers, are you a citizen of this country?' I said, 'Yes, but I can't get them because they are in a vault in New York'...they said I had to get them...I said, 'Do you realize that in order to get a passport you have to show your naturalization papers?' They said, 'That's not enough in this town! You have to have both!'...(?) I took it and cut it in 4 pieces.

WH: What?

ID: The CARD that I just filled out that they did not accept for the voting. And they said, 'So you won't be able to vote.' And I said, 'I won't want to vote.' But I asked for the names of the two volunteers. Have them written out- I took the 4 pieces of paper and I put them in my Deep River file and when I finish with some of my projects, I'm going to have the best lawyer, a man whose name is Menachem Rosenfelt (?) who defends survivors and I'm going to make a cause celebre out of it. I told Gejdehsom (?) about it. He called me from Washington pleading for my vote because when I vote for somebody that means 2,000 votes for that person because everybody knows me here...I was a close friend to the wife of Chester Boles and ambassador...and I said, 'Sam, I'm not voting.' 'We'll pick you up in a limo.' I said, 'I have my own limo' I wrote to Hartford (?) and I got a letter of apology and pleading to vote because I KNOW how much my vote carries here. Part of the reason this little bastard was elected was because of me because I talked him up...everywhere.

WH: How did he win as a Jew on an area like this- it's not pro Jewish...?

ID: Because they're rich, the land alone is worth 3-4 million dollars, those creeps, and they don't even know how to use a spoon!!

WH: How did they get the land?

ID: They're chicken farmers...simple people.

WH: What do you think of these current elections now?

ID: ...I think it's a disaster! I certainly don't want hominy grits in the White House. That's what I don't want. I don't want to see a black in the White House...I don't want to see Dukakis because he's shift. He's like Greeks bearing gifts...I AM bigoted!...you know, those society people how they are different from the Jews? The Jews only want to talk about their plumbing, and their insides...and what hurts them. You go to Park Avenue...(?)...you say to somebody, 'How do you feel?' and they are dying of cirrhosis of the liver and...they smile, this beautiful Hollywood smile, they say, 'Couldn't be better.' Then you get invited to somebody's dinner party in Beacon Hill in Boston and

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your favorite uncle drops dead under the table during Thanksgiving dinner and the next person says, 'Would you please pass the salt'...that's how the rich are different.

WH: Did you pass on the ideas you were expressing a minute ago to your children?

ID: Absolutely!

WH: Did you tell your children about the Holocaust?

ID: Not really. Because they don't want to hear. My youngest daughter is terrified. I tried to convince them to...belong to some of these groups...and they don't want to.

WH: They don't want to belong to them?

ID: No.

WH: They don't talk about it?

ID: The older one, yes, the younger one, no. She's more American. (Alexandra)...the older one is more like- she's more sentimental about Jews. Although my younger daughter is going now with a Jewish boy, is the first time in her life...from Plainview, Long Island...his parents are two psychologists.

WH: What are they like?

ID: ...I never met them.

WH: He identifies Jewishly?

ID: No. I have no interest...she goes into the Jewish holidays because I used to make seders sometimes but we don't have big Jewish holidays because my husband was assimilated. His father was German and his mother was from Warsaw but she didn't want to admit it. They were both born in this country. They were second generation.

WH: So your children...weren't brought up knowing very much about Judaism.

ID: Well, they know about Temples...they know that I always did charity work. They always knew that my mother was very charitable...they knew who they were- they had no identity crises...even when they went to a school near Columbia Street. Hilda's and St. Hughes, run by Episcopalian nuns, simply because they had (?) and Latin program and I wanted for them, plus they couldn't get to (other schools, i.e. Spence) because they had a West Side address.

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WH: ...wouldn't take them because they had a West Side address?

ID: ...well, this f-ck up, excuse me, tells me that his little daughter is going to (? Braille?), I said to myself, 'With that loud mouth mother that little kid from Park Avenue now is accepted to (?Grayling?) and my children are not accepted. It just breaks my heart.'

WH: Dalton or any of those schools?

ID: Dalton, I never approved of, it was too progressive.

WH: Fiedlson (?0.

ID: I hated products of (?). My husband is a (inaudible)...because he's not aggressive...(?).

WH: When did you live on the West Side?

ID: I lived there from 1952 to 1965. (72<sup>nd</sup> Street building before Riverside Drive)...even the people who weren't religious they became G-d fearing during the war. Even my father, I think now, has become more religious...we had makeshift temples- we all went to temples.

WH: Your father?

ID: Yes, in the war. That's the American Jew. Suddenly they became very religious because they look for salvation.

WH: You don't believe in G-d, do you?

ID: I certainly DO!!

WH: You do?

ID: A am the most G-d fearing person- I think that every second, G-d is watching me and if I do something that is not nice or cheat somebody in business or do something that isn't ethical I get killed and go to hell. (?) I'm not kidding you.

WH: Did you believe in G-d before the war?

ID: ...always did...I have two G-ds. The Christian and the Jewish G-d that's how I'm doing so well. Because...the maids that my mother hired...(inaudible)...they took us to church- I went to church every day.

WH: But you don't believe in an exclusively Jewish G-d?

ID: I believe in higher power but I'm very Jewish oriented. I can start crying in a Temple in Kol Nidre. I get very sentimental. My grandfather went to shul every Friday night and I remember that he had a tallis and all those little square things...what are those things?

WH: Tfellin.

ID: Yeh, all that stuff.

WH: Did your parents keep anything in the house when you were growing up?

ID: Kosher food, I suppose we had and there was also ham and stuff for the maid but we had kosher food...

WH: Did you keep any of that up when you lived on the West Side?

ID: My mother did...?...

WH: On the West Side, when you lived there...did you see that as a survivor neighborhood?

ID: Never.

WH: Never thought of it...

ID: Absolutely not.

WH: You didn't see survivors...?

ID: I didn't think about the war right after the war. I think about the war now ALL the time. I told you it was 30 years ago...

WH: Sad.

ID: Yeh. But at that time...what concerned us was every day life- how am I going to survive the fight with my husband- how my children going to go to school- will I have enough money to buy the food in Gristede's.

WH: Speaking of survival...this is a question that...(inaudible) be very interested in, which is, you mentioned, you made some general statements about survivors- why do you think you personally survived the war? To what would you owe it to?

ID: ...G-d was watching over me. That's the only reason.

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WH: G-d was watching over you?

ID: That's the only reason and I think...I was rewarded for all the good things that my mother's family did for humanity and all the people they fed in the kitchen and all the money they give to charity and G-d decided to save part of the family...I can be very sophisticated in art and so on and literature but I basically have a kabbalistic- Polish peasant mind...I always simplify issues like that...I don't intellectualize them...(inaudible).

WH: Do you think that if there was a Holocaust now that you'd survive?

ID: Probably...although I don't know I have a quota of very good years so perhaps not. Maybe I used up my quota

WH: Do you think that survivors as a group are different...(have)...something that enabled the to survive? When you look at them as a population- .

ID: No...because some of the very weak people survived and some of the very robust people did not survive. My aunt used to steal my rations of bread from me in the camp...

WH: Did she survive?

ID: She survived.

WH: ...you go on vacation, don't you?...

ID: As seldom as possible. I hate vacation.

WH: Why?

ID: Because I like to be between my kitchen sink and my Olivetti typewriter.

WH: You like to be busy?

ID: I like to write or read. Anything else is a disturbance in my life...

WH: You don't have problems concentrating...(inaudible)...

ID: Never.

WH: The reason that I ask is because you said a few moments ago that...you think about the war all the time...

- ID: Well, whatever I say, you have to divide by 5 and subtract 30 (?) because I exaggerate. I think a lot but it doesn't interfere with my work. My work comes first.
- WH: If you took the friends that you have now, say your four best friends, people you regard as your closest friends, how many of them are Jewish?
- ID: None.
- WH: None.
- ID: ...wait a second- one is half Jewish...but he lies...(a) man called me today...he just had an audience with the Pope, he's Polish Christian but he's a humanitarian and a (dog lover?) and so on. I know him through business. My best friends are through business. There are people who (?) work here become wonderful friends. My clients are like my club...(?) very close...two gay women lesbians from Grosse Point. Multimillionaires and also very literary and brilliant who live in (?) in an estate on the water...the Jewish people don't like me. They didn't like my father either. They don't like me. They're jealous of me.
- WH: Of what?
- ID: Well I was friendly with George Plimpton, and the Frost family and I was with Town and Country and I worked for Nelson Rockefeller when he was in Newport and all of a sudden they dreamt about what they didn't do. So even though they have all the money- and I don't really have a fortune- if this French artist dies I have 2 million dollars. Alright. I have an apartment that's worth maybe \$300, 000 and I have savings of maybe \$200,00 so altogether, maybe a million dollars. That's not a lot of money today. But it's enough for me because my needs aren't great. And I don't have to go to the Riviera. You ask me about a vacation. I want to say something about a general observation of the survivors that you will not hear from anybody else. Ever. And I would like you to quote it in the book if possible. When you ask a survivor, 'How are you? How Me? How do you feel? Are you happy?' (the phone rings and she shouts: ) F-ck off!!!

End of Side #2

Conclusion of Interview

