

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

## **William Helmreich Oral History Collection**

**Interview with Elizabeth Gevirtz**

**April 23, 1989**

**RG-50.165\*0030**

## PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Elizabeth Gevirtz, conducted by William Helmreich on April 23, 1989 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.

## ELIZABETH GEVIRTZ

### April 23, 1989

(Elizabeth Gevirtz is telling the interviewer about an experience she had in a store).

...Bridgeport. And, uhh, there was a saleslady and looked VERY familiar to me and I right away pictured her in that S.S. cap and a black, not a coat, was, uhh, cape. And I said, 'yes, she's the one who used to come with us out to the field. We were building an air field and, uhh, she wasn't, sh –she wasn't bad to us, except she has to watch us to work to make sure that we not stopping, and, uhh, we had a kapo from, from Walawas? Who spoke German and, uhh, she wanted to be nice to this S.S. woman, but she wouldn't let her go near because she was afraid of a disease –the S.S. woman, I don't know why. But when I saw her in that store, and then a other, uhh, saleslady, a Jewish woman, they were talking about something, and she, the saleslady, the Jewish saleslady, was so happy that she said something to her that she liked, that she kissed her. And all of a sudden it, it came back to me and she was trying to go far from us being afraid so much, and here is this Jewish woman kissing her. I didn't know what to do. I was afraid to say anything to her or ask questions. And then the second time I met her in the beauty shop and for some reason I told myself I have to say something good. Ask something. But I was afraid to start. The only thing I asked her was that if she had any relatives in, uhh, Switzerland. And she asked me 'Why?' –'so because I had a good friend and she looks so much like you. Would you have a younger picture?' So when I, when I said, even asking for a younger picture, she looked up to me, she says, 'No, I don't have any!' with a tremendous German accent. She says, 'No,' she says, 'I don't have any,' she says, 'We came from Germany with my family and we couldn't bring out many things,' so I noticed right away that she was trying to change the subject. That, you know, she came from Germany and all things they had to move. And that was the end of it. I went home and told my husband."

Q: What year was this?

A: This was about, uhm, good six years ago. But but I see her in shopping centers.

Q: You live in Fairfield?

A: Fairfield, yes. But, uhh, I was so afraid to start anything. I mean, where can I go, what, what can I say? Then again they would take my name and, tell her. Maybe she's surrounded with, uhh, more S.S. people. You know what I mean? And, and to be afraid that they will follow me and kill me. So I just let it go-.

Q: Does she work (still?).

A: -but I feel very guilty. Ahh, no, she doesn't work any more. I, I ask her when I met her in the mall once that, I said, 'Freida? What are you doing here? You don't work any

**USHMM Archives RG-50.165\*0030**

**2**

more?’ she says, ‘No,’ she says, ‘I can’t find a job and I’ll wait.’ But then I can see, ‘no’? inaudible) she’s running away so much from me. That too, I am so sure she is the one.

Q: Do you think that she thinks that she may recognize you?

A: No. She couldn’t recognize me ‘cause we were there in that commando about 45 girls, so how can she remember me? But, then again, I had a friend in, in Hungary, Budapest, and she came to visit me, and I told her that ‘let’s go to the store and I want you to, to tell me if I’m right’ and it just happened that that time she wasn’t there. Can you imagine?

Q: What kind of a store is it-?

A: A department store.

Q: Just a regular department store?

A: Regular department.

Q: In a shopping mall in Bridgeport?

A: No, no- this, ya was in a shopping mall in Trumbull. It’s not far from Bridgeport. Yes, Trumbull.

Q: Trumbull Shopping Park...what is the name of the department store?

A: ...Kays...but now that store went out of business.

Q: So she’s not working.

A: She’s not working, yes. But I didn’t even know whom to go or what to say. The fear in me was terrible. Just terrible.

Q: Did you see instances where she was cruel to anyone?

A: She- that’s why I didn’t- really, that too. No. I didn’t see her being cruel or, or, or beating up anybody. It’s just, eh, eh, she had a very straight face and (as such? she kept looking us how we working, and- but that’s it. O mean, if I would have known someone that she was cruel to her, I would probably do something about it.

Q: You would have felt more guilty, you would have felt worse.

**USHMM Archives RG-50.165\*0030**

**3**

A: Exactly! Exactly! But this way too, knowing that she was there and I can do nothing about it.

Q: Did it ever happen...that, you know, there were Jewish kapos?

A: Yes, Jewish kapos, yes.

Q: Did you ever meet anyone like that in America?

A: Jewish kapos? Ahh, not really. Not really. After the war I do met one. In Hungary. And she was the one who, who was, who wanted to show the S.S. women how good-how loyal she was to them and she beat up a woman, a mother with three children, SO badly, her head looked like this. And when I met her on the railway station, she was surrounded with two men, and I says to her, 'Laura, what are you doing here?' She looked at me. She probably had that experience before me. She says, 'This is my husband and this is my brother-in-law.' For me to know that I can't do nothing to her. So I says to her, I says, 'And you are alive? You really don't deserve to be alive.' So one of the men, I don't know, the husband or the brother-in-law, ask me, 'Was she a good kapo?' I says, 'No. And I told them what happened.' And she started to CRY! She said she had to do that, that the German- the S.S. woman told her to do that. I says, 'No, that's not true.' But I was crying so much I couldn't talk. I couldn't-.

Q: What happened to her?

A: I felt like, like killing her! So in that station there was a train coming- a fast train and she ran and she was killed. Under the train.

Q: She was killed?

A: Killed.

Q: And she ran to the train?

A: To the train to be killed. She wanted to wanted to commit suicide. She couldn't take this any more. And then this, the husband says that this is not the first incident. All over they find her. That's why they are with her all the time. Because she was beaten up by, by Jewish girls. So, ahh, young woman, ahhh, that time my age eighteen-.

Q: What was their reaction when she ran (to) the train?

A: Ahhh, they didn't, ahhh, I don't know. For some reason, they thought that this was the best thing for her.

**USHMM Archives RG-50.165\*0030**

**4**

Q: Even then?

A: Yes. Yes.

Q: Was this her husband, you think before the war?

A: I don't know if she made it up or, or, she, she paid for these two men to be with her to guard her, I don't know. I never find out. In a way I felt sorry for her that she, you know, chose this death. But then, I guess, she deserved it.

Q: Where were you born?

A: Czechoslovakia...Varie...

Q: You had sisters, brothers?

A: I have a sister and a brother, yes. My sister lives in Maryland, she is sick since, emotionally very, very sick. Never came out of it out of it. She was beaten up by the S.S. soldier and my brother who also lives in Fairfield

Q: These were your only siblings?

A: Only siblings

Q: And they made it through?

A: Yeh, the three of us- not our parents.

Q: Where were you during the war?

A: We started out in Auschwitz.

Q: Did you get there in '44?

A: We get there in 1944, May 29<sup>th</sup>. And that time a kapo In Auschwitz in one of the barracks, said to us that we should mark the date when we came in because that date will be our jahrzeit date. And we looked at her, 'how can you be so cruel, telling us something like that!' She says, 'look at that chimney. You see that flame? You see the smoke? This is your parent's body going up in that chimney'.

Q: Did you believe her?

**USHMM Archives RG-50.165\*0030**

**5**

A: No. It's a good thing we didn't. Because I remember we were standing up there- five rows and kept on looking up at the chimney and, and the flame like a head came out, and then the arms. We were imagining or, or I don't know if that can happen, all of a sudden behind me a girl started to scream, 'I don't want to live! They are killing my mother and my father!' and from then on, she screamed and screamed, day and night. So finally the S.S. came to check us every other day, and they took her to the crematorium. There was no help for her there. Age of 18.

Q: ...at the camp, what was your job?

A: From Auschwitz we spent 10 weeks luckily, and then from there we went to Stuthoff(?), also a- (inaudible) heard about it probably. And from there we went to Probst?...and there was a place where we had to work with vegetables, the the best thing that ever happened to us, because we could eat the vegetables, at least. And then we ended up there until we had to, we had to evacuate because the Russians were coming closer...

Q: Where did they make you march, somewhere else?

A: Yes, into-in more, more deeply more into Poland. And the Russians came behind us all the time. We heard the bombing.

Q: ...so then the war ended, and you went where, then?

A: The war ended and then we went home, and we find the biggest city, (Bereckfas(?)) there already a few Jewish men were home from the working camp and they did everything for us.

Q: How old were you then?

A: 19. My sister, 21. And little by little, these girls, these people, came back. But no parents. Only our age. Boys and girls. And then, naturally, those who were home already like these men who were welcoming us, we were telling the truth. One of them asked us, we knew him by name, and he asked us, 'Would you know what happened to my wife and the four children?' So we told him what happened. He collapsed there, and a short while after, he died. Young man...we were among the first ones to go home. To be in that, in the city. Like, everybody came to see us because they thought, especially the goyim, that we were all killed. That's why they robbed our homes and, and took out everything from our houses.

Q: You had to leave from there, right?

A: We had to leave from that. First of all, we didn't trust them- second of all, we had nothing to do there. And then we heard that, uhh, if we go back to Germany, ahhh, we

better off. But we didn't go back to Germany. We went to Czechoslovakia...The Christian Czechs helped us tremendously! Tremendously!.

Q: ...they were a different type of people?

A: Completely. Completely. Although they were goyim, you know.

Q: You saw a difference between the Czechs and the Hungarian gentiles?

A: Oh tremendous! You can't compare the Hungarians- I don't even want to speak the language! Because there such a bad memories! These people they they just terrible what they did to us! I mean, they could do the same thing as Romania did in Buchavena, Romania, when they, when Hitler went in the first thing, ah, we want to have your Jews. And they said, 'We have no Jews. All Romanians here.' And they- survived Buchavena. Yes, they all survived. All the Jews.

Q: ...you were brought up in a religious home?

A: Yes- my father had a semicha. Yes, yes. Religious background. And, ah, what can I say. When, when we were in Auschwitz he was about two- we were A,B,C. We were in the 'C' larger. He was in the 'A' larger. And that, ahm. That tremendous long ah, electric fence were up so he couldn't, he couldn't do anything to send us, like if he had more food, he only did, wrote a little, uhm, note and put a stone, a piece of stone in it and said the guy in 'B' larger 'would you please throw this over the fence, whoever finds it, our names were there.' Sure enough, it happened. So he wrote, 'Whatever they give you to eat, kindelach, eat.' He was afraid that we were so kosher-.

Q: ...b'chorf(?) nefesh and you have to eat it.

A: Anything they give us, yes, yes.

Q: After the wars, you left there and you went to Czechoslovakia. Did you come to America from there?

A: No. From Czechoslovakia we we heard that we have to go back home, where we came from.

Q: 'We' means whom now?

A: My brother, my sister, my husband, that time he was just a, a boyfriend since childhood. It happened that he came home also and his two brothers. So the six of us. We kept together. And we, we find out that if- they go back home, they will have to join the army. So coming back from the concentration camp, they don't want to join the army! Even



though this was a Czech army, mind you. So we didn't go back. Instead we went to Germany- Munich. And we stayed there for about six months, until the uncles on my husband's side sent us affidavits.

Q: They were in America?

A: Oh they were long time in America. His whole family. We had no families in America. Because my father was so religious he said that he heard that the Jews working in the factories- he doesn't want to go to America, and none of us, our families should adopt there. But his, ahh, his parents and, and the whole family were here. So we had such good affidavits from all these uncles and aunts, that we gave to those who didn't have anybody in this country. Although they joined then the HIAS, naturally they did everything to everybody to come. Even without the affidavits.

Q: ...they gave you individual affidavits, so you didn't need HIAS, right?

A: We did need HIAS, although, when we arrived, when we arrived, ahh, the three uncles were waiting for us.

Q: What year was that?

A: 1947. And, uhh, and somebody in the office asked them, uhh, 'are they going to pay for them?' You know, for the ship that we came. He said, 'Yes, we'll be more than happy to pay.' So that means that we didn't need their help. So, I mean it was, it was wonderful that they helped those who, uhh, who didn't have anybody here. And they didn't have any money! But we, since the, the uncle, alright, we have to pay the uncles later- a few years later, you know,

Q: You came in what month?

A: The 7<sup>th</sup> of May,

Q: Pretty close to what would have been your yahrzeit according to the kapo...

A: Exactly. Exactly.

Q: Guess you were right. It's a small victory, but...?

A: Exactly. Yes. Yes.

Q: ...you came by boat?

A: Came by boat. Yes.

Q: Left from Bremmerhauffen?

A: Yes

Q: What was the name of the boat...?

A: The Marine Marleen.

Q: Are you sure?

A: I'm positive.

Q: Marine Marleen?

A: Yes. I don't know- we said, The Mariner because we didn't speak English, so now, Marine, Marleen. Is it?

Q: Yes. It's a boat that there's a record of it. It made many trips. Many people came on the Marine Marleen.

A: They were so wonderful, the, the, the nurses on that, that ship. I was pregnant. They just didn't know what to do for me.

Q: What were they like? What do you mean, they didn't know what to do for you?

A: They were bringing me in the morning, juice, breakfast, and 'don't get off the bed,' because that was a, when was a bad day, you know the bed on, hanging on the chain, and kept on going back and forth and, and I was, I was sick being pregnant. I was sick, you know- the doctors told me that I had to go for the check-up before we started out from, from, ahh, where we were in Munich. And I thought he was, I knew he was an American doctor, but I didn't-in uniform, but I didn't know he was Jewish. So, naturally, I had to take off all the clothes, and I'm not, I can't lie because I was in the fifth month, so he looks at me, he says, 'oh you will have a baby!' (in German) 'You will have a baby.' I said, 'yes,' but so scary, so scared, ahh, he says, 'I don't think it's a good idea for you to go because this, ah, boat which is coming and going, they are shipping horses, and cows from Germany and it's not equipped for pregnant women,' I said, 'I don't care. I want to go, because if I'm going to give birth here, they will kill my child because she's a Jewish child.'

Q: Why would they kill your child?

A: Because there were German doctors in the hospital, mostly. And I didn't trust them.

Q: In Munich? You were living in an apartment in Munich?

A: No. There was a larger. It was then, they moved us from Munich to Wasserburg. And there was a larger that used to be for the soldiers...and they emptied it...the Americans, for us D.P.'s. There was a tremendous sign, 'D.P. Camp.'

Q: You had your own room?

A: We had our own room.

Q: Each of you had your own room?

A: Couples or individuals. Had to be two in a room.

Q: ...you were already married?

A: Already married.

Q: In Czechoslovakia?

A: Yes. Yes.

Q: When you got on the boat...were there only Jews on the boat?...

A: No, no. Because there were German, German people, they spoke German, and that time we were terrible, terribly angry at them. And we started to holler, 'You Nazi! Don't speak German!' For some reason, we took such such, chances. Unbelievable! I mean, these people, uhh, they came, they had, uhh, their papers. They weren't D.P.'s, they were Christians.

Q: Why were they leaving?

A: We never knew about that. Maybe one of those S.S.- who knows. Who knows. We never thought about that we should question that. We just said, because we were mad they spoke German and we hated the German language. And we said uh, 'You Nazi stop talking German!'

Q: Why do you think that some German Jews, when they come here they do speak German, even if they know English?

A: German Jews? Well because they were in Germany.

**USHMM Archives RG-50.165\*0030**

**10**

Q: Does it bother you when you hear German spoken?

A: No more, no more, no more.

Q: On the boat, the Captain was American?

A: Ameri-sure, the nurses.

Q: Did you have a private room?

A: No. no, we were about four down and four up in the chain. It, it was really- I took a big chance but Hashem hurried me. I had a beautiful baby ten weeks later.

Q: How long did the trip take?

A: I'm, I'm not sure now how long.

Q: About two weeks?

A: I think more than two weeks. About three weeks.

Q: What did you do all day on the boat?

A: Well, I was so afraid, because once the nurse told me to go up on the deck. I was going on the steps, and in front of me there was a woman and she started to throw up and I got very sick and from that on I never went anywhere. Only stayed in bed.

Q: How was the food?

A: The food, the food mostly, ahh, Wheaten, potatoes, I mean nothing, nothing special, but it was food, you know, after the concentration camp this was, uhh, beautiful for us.

Q: When the boat came in to America, when it sailed in to New York Harbor, did it sail in the daytime or the nighttime?

A: It was daytime.

Q: What do you remember seeing?

A: The only thing, uhh, was a terrible experience that, ahh, I saw a woman, a tall woman with black hair and I kept on hollering and screaming, 'Aunt Rose! Aunt Rose!' and she didn't hear me or she wasn't the one, and she wasn't the one, naturally, she wasn't the

**USHMM Archives RG-50.165\*0030**

**11**

one because that day she died age of 39. Heart attack. Yes. So I was told, that 'No,' she wasn't there. She, she was dead already.

Q: The uncles and aunts that you saw you recognized- known them?

A: When, yeh, when we arrived and we went out and they took us to a hotel right away. Beautiful room. And there were the uncles came there, the three uncles.

Q: You knew them?

A: I knew them from Europe. Yes...

Q: They just happen to leave in the 30's...?

A: Yes, 1930's.

Q: Before you saw the harbor, did you see the Statue of Liberty?

A: Ohhh! Beau-.

Q: Tell me what it was like.

A: Ohhh, just beautiful! Just beautiful! We started to scream, 'We are in America! And, and look at the Statue of Liberty that we heard, we learned in school] and it was something that, that we all of us started to cry so much! That we are free in America!

Q: Was it more than you expected?

A: More. Yes.- We felt like, like it was ours. We didn't we didn't know the difference. That Jews or non-Jews. OURS! OURS! This is OURS! (sighs).

Q: You docked...?

A: And then, yes, docked, yes.

Q: What were they like, the customs people?

A: Very friendly. Very friendly. Very nice, yes.

Q: You didn't have much luggage, right?

A: Not much luggage naturally. But one of them look at me and he says, 'How did you MAKE IT!' He saw that I was pregnant. I said, 'Thank G-d I'm here.'

Q: Did you ever think of going to Israel at the time?

A: That time, yes. Very much so. We had, we had those young, Zionist boys in every camp and we had tremendous signs out, pictures showed that to go to America there was a tremendous black cloud and, and it, even to look at it was terrible and to Israel, everything that beautiful and green trees and we look at each other but we were late because I was become pregnant otherwise we would NEVER end up here.

Q: What do you mean?

A: We wanted to go to Israel.

Q: ...when you say that you were 'late' what do you mean, you were 'late?'

A: Because I was pregnant and when we heard that you, you can't go you just can't sit on a, ehh, plane or, or go on a ship and go to Israel. That time they they went to...Cyprus. So, when, you know, being pregnant and then to go to Cyprus, ehh.

Q: Not so good.

A: That's right. And after, that I came here my brother came as a young man, a single man.

Q: He didn't come on the same boat as you?

A: No. But three months later he came. And then my sister with her husband and a child came two years later, 1949.

Q: Are you sorry you didn't wind up going to Israel?

A: VERY, very, very. When I go to Israel, I feel so guilty. My cousins who, who went there the same time when we came here and they had such a hard time there and, and to know how much they, they love Israel, even though with all that hardship that they went through. To them, this is OURS. This is, you see 'look at, just look at that leave on that tree!' And that's right!

Q: Where do they live?

A: Tel Aviv...Yerushalayim...Haifa. A big family there. My side of the family. All in Israel.

Q: Your side all went to Israel?

A: Aunt and uncles and all the cousins.

Q: But it would have been worse, do you think, or a hardship if you'd been able to go?

A: (She sighs heavily.) Yes. Definitely. Especially, now, since, eh, we hear so much about the, the, the skinheads and the Ku Klux Klan and all that. You know, we keep telling each other that you see, you see, we should have gone to Israel.

Q: Does it represent something in your mind that could become a very serious problem in America?

A: Definitely! Definitely! We have to be really live with an open mind and open ears and eyes because those days when they build Auschwitz, Birkenau and all those crematoriums, us Jews, we didn't know. Nobody knew. Nobody knew. Those who were taken already, especially the men, they were adding more and more barracks which was already there and when we met them there we couldn't, we couldn't talk to them. They were working. They just kept on looking around and when the S.S. turned his back, then they said a few words. Just a few words. 'Be good! Don't talk back!' but so, they were so scared these, these people. Uhh. Just, just to see that (sighing)-.

Q: Do you see any difference between American and Germany in terms of the possibility of something like that happening-?

A: Not Germany. The people here. The people, these-uhhh. This, this freedom in this country. Alright, it is nice, of course, but too much freedom. Much, too much. We have to sit and watch on TV or somebody through their window what these, these Ku Klux Klan's doing. And these, these, uhhh, these people have the nerve to come on TV's and, saying things that it looks so dark. So dark, the future. Seeing, and hearing them on, on TV that so many peoples watching.

Q: What do you think of Jesse Jackson?

A: What I'm thinking?

Q: Does he frighten you?

A: very much so. Very much so.

Q: You realize that he came close to being nominated.

A: (heavy sigh). It'd be the blackest day in our life if he would have come in- terrible for the Jews. Terrible. Terrible. That's why I didn't vote for Bush, because being a registered

Democrat, for some reason, I, I don't know why, I just couldn't, I just couldn't. But then again, I said, 'oh I hope Dukakis won't win because of Jackson.'

Q: Did you vote for Dukakis?

A: Yes.

Q: That's a real conflict.

A: I know. But then again, I, I said to myself, now how can I, as a Democrat, how can I vote for Bush, and Dukakis I don't think that Dukakis will let him do whatever he wants to do if he will be the president. Took a tremendous chance, really!

Q: So you think that Bush is better than Dukakis ehh, would have been?

A: You never know...Dukakis didn't win.

A: Until eh-hh-

Q: Until it's too late.

A: Exactly. Exactly.

Q: But you did elect an orthodox Jewish senator from CT.

A: Yes. Ohh! Lieberman, you talking- ohhhh! What a wonderful feeling. But it's not enough. I wish more and more Jews would be in Congress and have, ehrrr, bigger jobs to know and hear EVERYTHING what's going on. THIS is the most important thing for us Jews.

Q: When you came here in 1947 it all looked optimistic?

A: Oh, tremendous! Tremendous!

Q: They met you at the boat, your uncles?

A: Yes. Yes. Yes.

Q: Did they take you to a hotel?

A: No, the, uh-hh, the HIAS take us, they took us.

Q: How come HIAS was able to take you if you came on an individual addidavit?



A: Because there was nobody, no-when we arrived since, ahhh, the, the aunt was dead, the uncles couldn't be there to wait for us. They came later, late at night. It was about around 12 o'clock when they came. So they not going to let us, uhhh, stay there alone and waiting for, ahh-.

Q: Did HIAS have your name on a list?

A: Oh yeh! Oh, sure!

Q: They were expecting you?

A: Sure, sure.

Q: Who was the worker who met you...was someone put in charge of you?

A: Yes. They had an office in the lobby there asked questions. Beside, we had the names, and the, the papers. Everything there. How they still questioned us. Our names, and where we came from. And that was the time we lost our marriage license. And I had a tremendous problem with the Social Security because of that. So they told me to get the, ahhh, get witnesses. So I kept thinking, 'Who can I have?' All of a sudden I said to myself, wait a minute- we have a wedding picture so I took it up to the Social Security office- and they accepted it. It was enough! (inaudible) I had a Jewish woman, maybe I don't know, but, uhhh.

Q: Harry Golden wrote a book once called, 'Only in America!'

A: Only in America (her voice drops). That's right.

Q: I don't think in Germany they would have accepted it.

A: Ohhhhhh, (heavy sigh) no way!...no way. No way.

Q: Did you stay in the Hotel Marseilles on 103<sup>rd</sup> Street and Broadway?

A: Yes, yes. Beautiful memories. At that time it was like a castle to us. The, the, the room, the bed. Everything! Everything.

Q: How long did you stay?

A: Ahh, about a few hours. Until the uncles came. We didn't sleep-.

Q: You didn't sleep there?

A: We didn't stay overnight, no. They took us-.

Q: Did you stay in the lobby?

A: No, No! In the room. They took us-.

Q: You didn't stay overnight?

A: No. Because they came, you know, and we were such a, ahhh, a big speil they, they made out of us that they took us right away to their home.

Q: Where did they love?

A: In Bronx...South Bronx. Evergreen Avenue.

Q: How long did you stay with them?

A: Oh, for about a week. Naturally, they sat shiva because of the sister. And we stayed with them.

Q: Which sister?

A: The 39 year old...my husband's aunt, were their sister. The uncle's sister. So they, ahh, shiva was over, and, uhhh, the uncle, the one uncle who lived in Bridgeport, he had a, uhhh, business. He was a very fine tailor from Europe. And he had the business and my husband also by trade was a, a tailor and he took him in for a few years they were together and then, uhhh.

Q: ...you moved to Bridgeport very quickly.

A: Very quickly. Yes.

Q: When you went to the Bronx, and when you looked around...think back what were your first impressions of America were. Of the people, of the subways, streets...whatever you can remember.

A: First of all, you know, this was, uhm, to us, we, we came from a small town, from Europe. So subways, and you know we, we never saw, escalators we never saw. So naturally, to us, and, and, and, we kept on saying, that we would love to stay here, that they said- 'no, you, you came from a small town. You will never be happy here. You just go to Bridgeport, and Bridgeport is a smaller town.' But everything, everything, we had one kitchen, and one bedroom with a baby and we were sooo happy! We thought

that this was the, the nicest, the most beautiful apartment! And believe me, it wasn't enough when the baby was starting to, ahh, you know, ahhh-

Q: To move around?

A: Yeh, that's right! But we managed and kept it very nice.

Q: This was in Bridgeport?

A: This was in Bridgeport.

Q: You took the train from New York?

A: No. We came by car. Somebody, one of my uncles went purposely gave us a ride to see the scenery from New York to Connecticut.

Q: What was that like?

A: Ohhhh! Just gorgeous. Just gorgeous! We felt like going out! Please stop to kiss, to kiss the ground everywhere, everywhere.

Q: Like it was Israel?

A: Uh! It was so, so very happy to, to, to come here and to be here (she's sighing.)

Q: Tell me, you went to the supermarket to buy things?

A: Supermarkets to BUY things! And kept saying, 'Oh, look at how much bread! Everything seemed so much! And naturally, uhhh, the money part, you know, it, uhhh, we didn't have much, but at the same time we BOUGHT and BOUGHT, and, and for some reason, we still had money. So we kept saying, that how come that everything is so cheap here! And it's, it's so good and so delicious! Ahhhh. I, I just can't describe it to you that, that feeling. That free feeling we had.

Q: What happened when you first saw a policeman in America?

A: The policeman wasn't as bad as the, uhhh, the, the, the, uh, black people. Ahh, we learned, ahh, about them in, ahh, in our history books. BUT, I never saw them, so when we came, I said, 'Oh, that, that black. Why is he black?' Where is he coming from? Alright? And not only that, I was going downtown and as we went off the bus, the bus driver was hollering, I didn't understand too much English at that time, the only thing I saw that they went to the back of the bus, and I sat down in the front. So I said to myself, 'Now wait a minute, how come I'm sitting there, why they have to go to the back?'

Q: ...this is in Bridgeport?

A: Bridgeport. But I couldn't ask and questions because I didn't speak English. But I couldn't wait to get home and talk to my uncle, who was here already a few years, and then my uncle explained.

Q: But in the north, blacks didn't go to the back of the bus...what made you think that they were going to the back of the bus because they belonged there, because they had to. Maybe that's where their seat was?

A: No, I for some reason I couldn't. I just couldn't figure out why they, they go all of them. As they came up to the front, paid, and went to the back.

Q: You said the bus driver was hollering?

A: Hollering. And I didn't understand why he was hollering. The only thing I notice that they were talking to each other loud. I don't know, they didn't like the idea or what, but they sat down and I said, 'oh this probably, these people have to go to the back because they are black?' And then my uncle said, 'Yes, that's why they have to go to the-.' I just couldn't understand that.

Q: Did you think that maybe they were bad people?

A: No. No. My aunt made a remark, I just, just thought of it, she says, 'you know, these black people not only bad, but they smell bad.' So, I couldn't put two and two together, so up to a few years, I kept telling myself that was the reason. They had to go to the back because they smell (laughing).

Q: ...for the first couple of years?

A: It took a, took a, yes. Yes. Yes. And when I, when I knew the truth, ohhh, it was hurting me so much because it us so terrible. I mean, they are people, too, they are human beings too. And then I, I said to myself, 'see, just like we were Jews, they couldn't stand us.' We couldn't do lot of things, uhhh, when Hungary took over when the Czech was, was uhhh, chased our from Czechoslovakia in 1938, and the Hungarian took over. Uhhhhh! Were they bad, my G-d! (she whispers very, very softly.) What they did to the Jewish businesses. I just can't describe it to you. It's so bad. That's why when I hear a Jew going to, to Hungary, to, ahh, for a vacation, my G-d, you spend your dollars somewhere else! Don't go there! But for some reason the American people couldn't care less. They didn't have the hardship like we had. So they can't imagine. You know what I mean. They-.

- Q: Did you feel any prejudice from American Jews when you first came here?...that they thought of you as a greener...
- A: Naturally, we had the greener, sure, but they said they were called 'greeners' also, and, uh, the only thing, uh, we said that uh, we were very surprised that you didn't do enough for us that we shouldn't reach Auschwitz. You HAD to do something.
- Q: Did they say anything?
- A: They said that 'We tried! And, and we went to the, uh, to the White House, to the steps, and hollered and screamed and the rabbi's' - and all that.
- Q: What did you think of that?
- A: I don't know, I said to myself, uh, may- maybe it's true. Maybe, maybe, eh, they couldn't do anything. Or maybe they were too slow. They, they weren't feeling the, the pain as much as we did THERE. But, as, as the year went by, I understood more and more-.

End of Tape #1, Side A

**Tape #1, Side B**

- Q: You lived in downtown Bridgeport?
- A: No, no. We lived in a, uh, that was a few stores, businesses, bakeries, groceries, small grocery stores and a lot of- it was a Hungarian area. That time.
- Q: Non-Jewish?
- A: Non-Jewish. Just couldn't stand them. And, and some of them had the grocery store, they said, 'Oh, the Christian has businesses too? We only thought that only Jews had businesses!' But I could never go into their business. Never! And I know later, we knew they were innocent because they were here- but just knowing that they were goyim we couldn't, just couldn't. And even to this day, even to this day! I really feel that we, uh, survivors, we are prejudiced. But then, again, we have the reasons many times over, to be.
- Q: Do you belong to any survivor group?
- A: Yes. Yes. That, uh, Meed...We went to Washington, D.C. when we had the Holocaust gathering.

Q: What year was that?

A: That was, uh, 1984, yes. There and, uh, (inaudible) to New York.

Q: From your city?

A: From our city, yes. We had a leader there. We have meetings.

Q: Where?

A: In the Jewish Community Center in Bridgeport.

Q: You have meetings now?

A: Yes. We get together, yes. The people from the- city, yes.

Q: How many people are there from your city?

A: Oh, uhm, it depends on the, the meeting. We see 50, 60 uh...

Q: ...what city?...

A: Bridgeport.

Q: ...from your home city...people from your shtetl.

A: Oh, yeh, sure, sure. We get together in New York, Manhattan. Ah- Zion...38<sup>th</sup> Street. Every year we have this. Not only on the same city, the whole surrounding cities, we get together. And they were for Israel. Everything goes for Israel. Schools...the money that they collect from us, you know, they- we have dinner we pay (inaudible) thirty dollars a couple and everything, all the money goes to Israel.

Q: And they come from where?

A: Come from the people. The peoples who's attending the, ahh, this affair.

Q: As far as the Bridgeport group goes, they're people who come from Europe, but they all live in Bridgeport or Trumbull?

A: Yes, yes. All over yes.

Q: Are they all from Hungary?

- A: No, they from Poland, some of them. Yes, some of them Russia.
- Q: Who organized that?
- A: ...two women survivors who organized and Meed- and his wife came to see the, the, the group, there was the meeting and he gave us a beautiful lecture about, about these things, you know, to, to keep it up and to, uh, to work hard and all that. (heavy sigh)
- Q: You meet...once a month?
- A: No. No. Maybe once in three months.
- Q: What do you do at the meeting? What's it like?
- A: We talk about many things, uhh, the Holocaust, the survivors, lots of them, like my husband died 4 years ago, age of 64 and he went to and then and we, we meet a lot of others who said, 'you know, that this one died, that one died' and they're in their 60's! 60! That's why this is so important. Because we're really, you know, in, in 60's today that's a, it's a young age. But looks like that this is what we got from the, ahh, concentration camp. That, ah, (heavy sigh) we became became, I don't know, sick or whatever.
- Q: Your resistance was low-.
- A: Exactly. Exactly
- Q: How is your own health?
- A: Thank G-d, thank G-d. I, I just can't thank enough, knowing what I went through, and my sister who was with me all the time, and a few friends, and they're, they're all sick. They all have something wrong with them, and I feel-.
- Q: ...has to do with what they went through?
- A: Definitely. Definitely.
- Q: When you came here, you had the baby, did you work afterwards?
- A: No. No. My husband had three jobs in the beginning. Very short time. And then his uncle took him into the business.
- Q: This was a tailor business?

A: Yes, yes, yes. And a very, very good growing business and then when my husband, uhm, knew the business he went in his own with a big cleaning establishment- in Bridgeport and we became very successful.

Q: Did you have other children?

A: No, just one, because I was afraid that this will happen again and I kept going back and forth to the doctors to, to give me pills, to give me anything I don't want to be pregnant again. I don't want any more children. Because this gonna happen again, and it was just terrible.

Q: That what is going to happen again?

A: (heavy sigh) Auschwitz. Will happen again in this country. I kept saying it. It stayed with me even until this day. That's why I, I had only one child which I regret very much today. And not only that, she has only, she has only, one child because of that. Can you imagine?

Q: If you're going to have one, why not have two?

A: Because to suffer, to go through suffering, we, we kept on saying there in, in, in this working camps, that we, why, why were we born? To, to, to go through this? If we EVER survive and get married, we will NEVER have ANY children. We were young girls, we kept on telling each other these things. And it happened in many cases, that, uh, among us friends, at least 15 of them have one child. But their children already have 4 and 5 luckily.

Q: Why have any, if you feel that way?

A: I didn't want to have any. Oh, no! I was so much against it and my husband said too, 'I don't know, we're not going to have any children' so, it, it happened...

Q: Accident?

A: Exactly. It happened, but-

Q: ...sorry?

A: No! No! Sorry? What can I say. Sorry enough and not. And, and not. She married in 1970 (inaudible). She finished college that time. She graduated and married a lovely, lovely Jewish boy. Beautiful family. He was a Harvard lawyer, and my daughter is a high school teacher. Two years later, divorced.



Q: Was he a child of survivors?

A: No. No. American born. Even the grandparents are born here. And two years later, I don't know, she met, she met another guy who went to school with the, the first husband, but when we find out already, it was late. He was a shaggetz. So, he did everything. Everything. Whatever we told him to do. He would convert. Everything. Just let me marry your daughter. You can imagine, US, how we felt it. I think it had a lot to do with, uh, my husband's death.

Q: I'm sure

A: Yes. Yes. (she answers very quietly).

Q: What did she say? Did she say she loved him?

A: She loved him SO much! What a love, and love, and love. I think today she feels differently, but then again, it's a-

Q: Is she still married to him?

A: This marriage didn't break up. The first one did. Alright, I was wishing, and hoping and praying, and-

Q: Did he convert?

A: Yeh.

Q: That boy is Jewish.

A: Well, ahh, -he's Jewish, yes (inaudible)0

Q: but you don't have a family really...machedonim.

A: What do you think why am I here! It hurts me having one child and I have to come alone and being in a place- I don't have to tell you that feeling. (heavy sigh)

Q: So you ever feel that if you come here maybe you'll meet someone?

A: It's very hard. It's awfully hard. Ahh, two years ago, when I was here, ahh, we were going into the elevator, my friend came with me that time, and uhh, he, the guy, noticed my accent and he asked me, 'where you coming from?' I says, 'Czechoslovakia, I said, but my father uh, a Romanian born.' He says, 'Where in Romania?' So I said the, the

town Daiz(?) and he says, 'I'm coming from Daiz(?) as a child of 6 years old. Those days their parents came from Romania. So, we became friends. His wife, and him, and my friend. When I came this time, I saw the guy, so naturally I went up to him because I wanted to meet, you know, him again and his wife. So I says, ah, 'where's your wife?' He says, 'she died two years ago.' (heavy sigh) So, since then he came, we talked, he said, 'how terrible' he says, 'I am alone, also,' which he has two sons. Luckily they were both married well. 'But' he says, 'I'm a sick man.' I said, 'why, what's wrong with you?' He says, 'high blood pressure, sugar,' he, he said a few things. I said to myself, 'that's enough!' I mean, to go into something like this, and I feel bad because he's a very nice guy.

Q: Well he was honest with you.

A: Exactly. He says, 'I don't want to cause tzores. It would be very unfair' he says. So he was, he was really honest, yes, yes. But then again, over 60, especially 65, there's so many sick with our people, I'm talking about! So many!

Q: ...my mother passed away five years ago.

A: How old?

Q: 72.

A: Young.

Q: ...you have to wait for the besheret...

A: Exactly. If there is such a thing- I hope there is.

Q: If you stay in Fairfield, your chances are...almost zero. Here, your chances are maybe 10%.

A: Yes, that's true,

Q: But 10 % is better than nothing.

A: But then again- yes, that's true. But then again, I mean, uh, where else can you go, only places like this.

Q: You got here, you got Brown's, you got the Stevensville.

A: Yes, that's true.

**USHMM Archives RG-50.165\*0030**

**25**

Q: Florida...

A: Too many old people in Florida. It's-

Q: Florida, you get old...

A: Oh, bit it's very, very hard alone. Very, very hard and I'm not alone, you know, there are plenty of widows. More than enough. Uh,

Q: Do you have your brother?

A: Yes, I have my brother. Ah, yes. The business, um, we took him in as a partner because we were very close and knowing that we are the only the three of us, so he took over. I didn't didn't want to stay in the business because every time a customers came, they came- sh- the crying, and, and the, I just couldn't take it any longer. So I told my brother, 'Please take over. You pay me when you will have enough money but I don't want to stay any longer'.

Q: Did you belong to the Orthodox community in Bridgeport?

A: Oh, sure, sure...Statfield Road, Fairfield. Sure. It's an Orthodox shul...the first shul, Hancock Avenue...we have a new shul now. Much modern shul on Statfield Road. Beautiful shul. We have, recently, we have the eriuiv put in now. It's a-...

Q: Your daughter, she went to yeshiva?

A: No. No, No, She just,- those days, uh,-.

Q: There wasn't, right?

A: Naturally. There was- even a Hillel wasn't let alone a yeshiva. But Hebrew school of course from the beginning to the end. She, she davens beautiful. Very active in their their, congregation. But it's not a, not an Orthodox- they don't have in that town, Manchester, N.H. they don't have an Orthodox-.

Q: Where did she go to college?

A: Uh, Boston University...and her husband, ah, I don't remember which school...I don't remember the schools he went. I couldn't care less. Ehr, I was so mad.

Q: Do you see him now, at all?

A: Oh, yeh. Oh. He just doesn't know what to do with me when, when I go there.

Q: But he is nice?

A: He's very nice. Very nice. But with the family- the mishpacha- you have to get-uhhh- (inaudible and a heavy sigh).

Q: What does he do?

A: Attorney. He's very active in the congregation there, you know with my daughter together the, ahh, conservative congregation. They have a rabbi, the rabbi conducts the service very well EXCEPT he comes out of shul and sits in his car, and, and drives home. Shabbas. When I saw that! Uhhh! Uhhh! Terrible. Terrible.

Q: Your grandchild...

A: Grandson. He went to, uhh, the Hebrew Academy Lowell, M.A., he still going, the yarmulke, the (?) tzitzit.

Q: Your daughter must feel guilty.

A: (heavy sigh) Definite- very, very torn (her voice drops into a whisper with a heavy sigh). Very much so. But I'm, I'm happy that he, he wants the little one to go to the Hebrew Academy. He doesn't against it, I mean he wouldn't say a word- but knowing him, ahh, he wants to be, he wants to be Jewish.

Q: What was his nationality?

A: Irish.

Q: At least he wants to and at least you have a grandson.

A: (heavy sigh). Yes. Yes,

Q: And your grandson is by Jewish law, Jewish.

A: I know. I know. What a (inaudible) saver that is. Our rabbi Epstein gave me a, uhh, mohel from Boston- a very, very Orthodox man, sure, I was just happy that, uhh, uhh, he ate at least my cake he eats there. But the rest of the things he didn't touch. But he knew that it was my cake, so he ate it...

Q: After your daughter got older, did you work in the business?

- A: I went, ya, I went to help out until, uhh, the business became bigger that we needed more workers and then I became very active with the shul Sisterhood and I helped out with the Federation many times and also, ah, Amit Yeshiva Women's Organization, life member, so I'm doing all the work all the time.
- Q: It was rough.
- A: Yes. So, so that was my work. That was my work. I was the Sisterhood president for two years. Yes.
- Q: So you're actively involved?
- A: Yes, very much so.
- Q: Do you go to shul every Shabbas?
- A: Yes. Yes. Yes. When, when I'm not going they already asking 'where was I?' Because they know that I'm going always. Yes.
- Q: When you came to America...Bridgeport, did you go to school to learn English./
- A: I couldn't because I had a baby and my husband had the, the three jobs.
- Q: So how did you learn?
- A: Evenings, Sundays- I don't know. Probably-.
- Q: Movies-.
- A: Movies, of course. The radio constantly, and, uh, neighbors, I tried. My daughter is a teacher so every time I write a letter she says, 'mother you wonderful' so I'm so happy. Don't forget, it's over 40 years now. I mean, uh, it would be terrible if I, uh, couldn't (laughing) you know, read or write or speak.
- Q: ...you got people who come to Brooklyn and they continue speaking Yiddish...
- A: ...don't believe in (inaudible) the friends, Hungarian, we speak Hungarian constantly with the friends. We playing cards. The minute we have somebody who doesn't understand Hungarian, we speak only that time, we speak English. Other- otherwise, we always- we look, look around, that everybody speaks Hungarian, then, only Hungarian. And it wasn't easy, really, to, to learn English, because uh, as I say, the friends, and they don't care. You know, sometimes I do tell them, 'you better, better off to speak English,

because, you know, for yourself!’ Ah, they ‘can explain ahh, things, ahh, as, as, as well as as their own language.’ And I hate that Hungarian language.

Q: But you’re stuck.

A: Uhhh.

Q: Do you feel that there’s a difference between the way a survivor looks at life and an American Jew looks at life?

A: Definitely! Definitely!

Q: In what ways do you see the difference?

A: ...we keep saying that the American Jews are so sure that everything will go smooth. And they not worry about anything. And they just, they just out for, for making money and, and going on vacations and, and that’s the only thing they care about, and where we- we, worry, we, we keep saying to each other, all the news we hear, we call each other on the telephone and, and tells us, pretty soon, pretty soon, we gonna end up like we were in Europe- so scared all of us. All of us. After 40, oh, well, well over 40 years now. Still the fear is in us that it will happen.

Q: Do you find yourself talking about that-.

A: All the time, all the time.

Q: ...and when you get together...

A: Yes. Yes.

Q: Do you ever dream about it?

A: Many times, yes. Many times, many times. It’s packing like we packed towards the last day, last day of Pesach, we didn’t have a chance to put away the, the Pesach dishes and this, these things always come especially around Pesach time. It’s very, very bad. Very bad.

Q: Why?

A: Knowing that that time it happened and it could happen here, too. If it will, it will be Pesach time. I don’t know why it’s still in us! Can’t get rid of the, the thought of, of this! Many, many times we keep telling each other...Pesach, we so worried about Pesach all the time.

- Q: If you felt that way, wouldn't it make more sense to go to Israel?
- A: You mean to stay, you mean for good? (inaudible) In this age, in this stage of our lives for (?) what, I mean, what would Israel ah, have from us being there. Alright, we would spend some money, naturally, because we'd have to eat and buy clothes. But that's all. I mean, what else is there? Young people, it's different.
- Q: And you have your family here?
- A: Not much family. On my side, only my brother, my sister, and my daughter. That's it. And there, my, oh, the whole family is there.
- Q: If the Holocaust happened in America...Israel wouldn't be too safe a place either?
- A: No. Definitely. Definitely. But then again, us survivors, we have something in our heads that since Israel has a bomb that when it comes to that again, and we know if, if America wouldn't help Israel, then the only solution would be not to Israel to did-to disappear, from the earth- the whole world would disappear. Because we, we can't have that again that only the Jews to be killed and hurt. You understand what I mean?
- Q: I think about it myself.
- A: Okay? So this is in our minds, and that keeps us going, that this is what will happen. Let's hope it will never happen. But then again, just to know and hopefully, maybe you come up with, with more and more new things because let's face it. Us Jews, we are smart people. Don't you think so?
- Q: ...we're still around.
- A: Exactly. Exactly.
- Q: You made it through that time in Auschwitz...and when you think back about it, what reason was there...what was it that made it possible for you to make it through that terrible time?
- A: Uhhh, the will of, of making it. To, to see our parents, number one, number two, to show the goyim that we didn't die. We are here. And we could question you- 'where did you put our furniture from our homes? We find them empty, just like here. An empty house.' We MUST survive! We MUST go home. And that helped a great deal.
- Q: You mean, you thought about that as you were in Auschwitz?

A: Yes. (she whispers) Seeing that chimney.

Q: Did you really think that it would all end? Didn't it look so hopeless?

A: No. No. No. No. Because one week when we left Auschwitz, we had to go into a small room. A very tiny room where there was the, uhm, gas in the ceiling. We just had to open it somewhere, I don't know where, from the outside, I think. Forty of us in that small room, like sardines, standing all the clothes were already taken off outside. We had to leave it outside. I looked around and I saw a small window. I said to myself, 'if they gonna gas us, at least we gonna keep hitting that window that the air to come in' but it wouldn't work because that window wasn't a window. That was something strong that they put. After I find out- afterward. And all of a sudden, we are staying there about 20 minutes, and we hear somebody outside, a woman's- an S.S. woman's voice said, 'we ran out of gas.' So we weren't killed. When when we went from Auschwitz to Danzig, they they, had to give us a, uhh, shower to be clean, you know, to go from one place to the another, and this, we KNEW that that's going to be a shower. But this, they were ready to kill us.

Q: You mean they weren't really going to give you a shower?

A: No. No. (whispers) When we heard that, that somebody does that in German that we went out (whispering) of the gas- - the Hashem were with us, okay? And this, this is the way we survived, KNOWING that we ARE GOING to survive!

Q: You mean you thought that if you were saved from that, you almost feel that nothing can happen?

A: Yes. Exactly. Exactly. Yes. Yes. (voice drops down to a near-whisper).

Q: What about all those who didn't make it?

A: When you think of G-d, when you think of the explanation. (heavy sigh). The only explanation I could have that, uh, if that's true, that that was written for all those, all those tzaddicks, all those, those very, very frum people. It was, it was written. It was- that the way it was bersherit. That, it, its, this should happen and this many people will survive, and that many will die. I wa- I was always thinking to, to go to a very, very well known rabbi. To give us some explanation. Something. But then again, in Germany, yes, in Munich, there was a very well known rabbi. And when Yom Kippur came, he came to shul and we ALL ran to him. And all that questions. 'Kindlelach, frey gornished.' That's was his answer. So I was afraid, if I'm gonna go here also to a rabbi who used to be my father's rabbi, and now his grandson is in Boro Park. The Sepinke rebbe...my father's rebbe, to go to him and he's gonna give me this answer, so, so what, why should I go? For what? To listen to, to hear this, uh, this much: 'Don't, don't ask



any questions' or, or 'Be, be glad and be happy that you are here today.' But I still believe. I believe SO-o-o deeply. Because going through seeing these, these girls my age, they just, from hunger, they couldn't take it any more. Everywhere I look they're DYING. They, they just about moving. And here I am coming home, not even a scratch. So go and explain this. That is this? My father did everything to, uh, ask Hashem to, to save us.

Q: But then when you ask about your own parents?

A: Exactly. Exactly, exactly, why, why? They have no answer. (heavy sigh) They don't have answer to this. Why? Never. Never. Oh- the way I, I explained it, those of us who survived, we were the lucky ones. Like many thing in life. Luck. Am I right? So this, this- this was luck. That's all I can say.

Q: Did you ever feel though, that when you were in the camp, that you did anything actively to help yourself?...

A: The only thing I did was when we were going from that camp and the, the people, the, Jews who worked in the kitchen, naturally they looked better because they, they had food, they were cooking for the Germans, the S.S., and when we went and we walked about 3 or 4 towns, and then the S.S. said that 'now' I think he was tired- not us. He was tired. And he says, 'now this is a, a, uhm, a place where the, the horses and cows are, and you are going in there, and you gonna sleep over, and next morning we will continue.' I don't know where he went. In the meantime we heard the, the, the bombs be-behind us, the the Russians, the Russian. So we knew that the Russians weren't too far away, but the S.S. wouldn't leave us, naturally, so we went and slept over- but before, the, the, the Polish goy (?) came in and said, 'make sure to sit down, because I'm going to shut the light, and you won't see anything.' So I saw these people, his girls, when they came from the kitchen, that the packages that they brought with them, all food, and here is my sister next to me and dying of hunger, and the goy shut the light, I, I knew, which area they are, these girls with the food, and I stole one bag of food. I don't feel guilty. I NEVER felt guilty because I not only gave that food for my sister, but the people around me, that night in the dark, I FED THEM and told them, 'You have to be STRONG!' And believe me, that food helped us to survive. We read, 'it's never enough whatever we went through.' (Uhhh!)

Q: What do you think if anything could be done to prevent something like this from happening again?

A: The only thing, uhh, as I said that, uhh, our people our Jewish, uhh, men and women to, to seek for a higher jobs constantly to, to go as high as they can just to, just to see and hear everything as far as Jewish- us Jews are concerned.

**USHMM Archives RG-50.165\*0030**

**32**

Q: Do you think education helps?

A: Definitely. That's, that's the only way we could climb the ladder don't you think so?

Q: I mean, educating people about what happened.

A: Oh, yes, that's a must! That's a must!

Q: Did you ever speak to any groups?

A: Yes, I did. As a matter of fact, I was interviewed in the Jewish Community Center and they sent a tape to one of the schools.

Q: Who interviewed you?

A: ...a woman, she's very active in the Federation...and then I was interviewed in the Holocaust gathering in Washington. That was filmed.

Q: Did you all tape? (??)

A: ...my sister and her children, the second generation, yes. Yes.

Q: Oh, and they did it, the second generation group did the interview?

A: Yes, they did the interview. Yes. Yes.

Q: It's very good that people do these tapes, it's very important...

A: Yes. (said 'yes' in a whisper.) This was a film! This was a film. The tape was in Bridgeport in, in the Jewish Community Center that time.

Q: Yale also did interviews.

A: Yes. Oh, yes. As a matter of fact, they were asking us to go to school and speak with the, uh, children to tell of our (?inaudible) and we did go. A few of us, we went.

Q: What do you do?

A: Everybody tries, if they feel they're in possible danger they try to do something to prevent something from happening to them.

Q: Do you, in a way, live with 'your bags packed?' in some way?

A: The only thing, yes. The only thing that the fear like, uh, I was left with a house. I'm, I'm living there because I don't know what to do with my life after I'm, I'm out from there. I'm afraid that something will happen and here I am in a house alone, and I couldn't sell any more, because the something happened with the Jews. I mean, I'm not dreaming. This is, uh, this is, uhh-ummm, I'm sitting and thinking of it.

Q: Well, it happened once.

A: It happened once?

Q: It happened in Europe.

A: Oh, Europe! Naturally, naturally. But I mean here in this country, and, and that fear in me, 'I must, I must get rid of this house! I must sell before anything happens!' (she lowers her voice) I mean, isn't it terrible after so many years, you still thinking in, in this term, that something will happen and, and then that that fear in us constantly! Day and night.

Q: Did you ever talk to a social worker or somebody about this?

A: Yes. Yes.

Q: Did it help?

A: Not much really, not much. Because, you know to say that you have to put these thoughts out of your mind. I mean, it doesn't work like that, you know?- just take it out! You know what I mean.

Q: Was this person Jewish?

A: Yes. Yes. Jewish. Yes.

Q: What prompted you to talk to them?

A: I just thought that maybe it's a good idea to help us to how to get rid of all this, this terrible thought and thinking that, let's say, since my, um, my daughter's husband, is, um, has an Irish background, he has an older mother, she will, she will be dead and I will have her papers, I mean, I'm even ashamed to tell you this. Okay? All these things that I, I have in my mind. And at times I think, 'Am I, am I crazy?' Or, this is something that will stay with me the rest of my life?

( Interviewer assures her that her thinking is not unusual.)

A: It's not unusual? Ohhh. I'm glad to hear it because at times I think I'm really crazy- to think like this.

(Interviewer continues assuring her, telling her that there are some survivors who won't even leave the house. Her response:)

A: Still, still, still.

(Interviewer continues reassuring her- tells her about another survivor who felt he was always being followed, her response was of continued relief:)

A: Uhhh- you see. Alright so I'm not the only one- even to come here (at the resort) and seeing these, these, the waiters and the waitresses, and I thought, 'Ohhh. These people, they, they will get mad or, or jealous to see that, 'Look at the Jews! We are workers here.' And they will do something terrible, when the, the hotel will be FILLED with people! You know, how these pe- it's terrible to live like this! just awful, to live like this. Or, when a, when the Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur comes, we have to have police outside to watch who's coming. I mean, it's, it's, it's, just-.

Q: That's the one advantage of living in Israel...there, you're in the majority, not the minority.

A: Yes. That's true. Yes.

Q: ...I suppose, when you said to me, 'I would have rather gone to Israel because-.'

A: All the young people. All the young people to end up in Israel! To live, and, and go and do everything what is.

Q: Do you ever think that, let's say in a hotel...you don't like something the waiter did, or the busboy, do you ever think that you don't want to say something to him because you don't want he should get a bad impression of Jews?

A: Exactly- Exactly.

Q: But you don't want to ask him to go back to the kitchen and get you something?

A: Exactly. I'd rather go myself- yes- and smiling at them, and, and just don't know what to do with them. Just leave us alone! And don't think of us, that, that we are terrible people. Yes. Many, many times. Many times.

Q: We're smart people- do you think we're good people?

A: Yeh, why not? Yes. We are. We are. We are good people. We just, just to have that feeling that, uhh, that what is this that against all these people against us. Why? Because we are smart, we could use our heads to do things to, to be aggressive, for, for, for things that to better ourselves. And, and they see, 'Oh, the Jews! Look at what they have!' I even told my husband when he bought the house in Fairfield, in an area of, err, um, those days when we came to this country, er, Jews weren't allowed to, to, to buy a house there. I says, 'Can you imagine I will buy a house there and some day- OHHH!- do you know what they can do to us? You see, it's, it's something that it, it's, it's ALWAYS, ALWAYS will be with us. I'm afraid. I'm afraid.

Q: You live in Fairfield or Bridgeport- it's on the border?

A: ...Park Avenue, the right side is Bridgeport, the left side is Fairfield.

Q: I suppose you...dreamt about what happened in Europe when you came and through the years-

A: How many times!

Q: Do you dream about it more now than---in the 50's?

A: No. No. No.

Q: Was it stronger then?

A: ...yes. Ohhhhh! Terrible. We used to scream. Used to holler. Terrible. Terribly nightmares. And that's why when all these friends of mine, they collecting from the, from the German government- I couldn't go through with that. 'Cause I had to tell them from the very beginning and I just couldn't go through with it. I said, 'Uh. I don't want their money. I don't want their money. I, I, I don't want to go to the German doctors there.' I wasn't strong enough, that's all (heavy sigh- soft moan),

Q: But you were strong enough to make your life again here.

A: Yes. Yes. Number one, we were young. Thank Hashem, we were healthy. That was a big help. And, naturally we knew that uh, we have to make our lives there, uhh where we, where we were- when where we settled, you know, and naturally they will help the shul and all the organizations, so, so had to, we had to do something- that, eh, not just help ourselves. Help others too.

Q: When you think back about your life, what are you most proud of? What are you most pleased with, what achievement?

A: The achievement, financially, the achievement that, uhhh, we had-.

End of Tape #1, Side B

**Tape #2, Side A**

Q: That you gave her (daughter) a Jewish education.

A: A Jewish education plus the, uhh, 4-5 years of college because she went for her master's.

Q: At Boston U also?

A: Boston, yes, yes. And very proud of her as far as education is concerned. Otherwise I'm still mad at her in my heart. And she knows that. And many times when holiday, high holiday comes she makes such a big thing that everything should look like she, she had it had home, and-.

Q: But does she feel...

A: Ohhhh (heavy sigh). It doesn't help much. (her voice drops-) It doesn't help much. (oh, ?G-d)

Q: Is she interested, though, in the Holocaust?

A: She's a teacher, she has to talk about it. She's, she's a History teacher and English, naturally, and then, so- everything she teaches. The Holocaust and they have all the, uhh, the, the tapes, the, uhh, Genesis. Everything. She shows the, the, uhh, the students about it and teaching them as much- you can imagine, a Jewish teacher, you do anything and everything to make sure that, their, her students, to, to know and to see what was going on. And she asked many questions. Her father was able to tell, but I, I could never sit down and, and, and first of all, I didn't want to scare her. And second of all, for some reason, I wasn't strong enough to, to tell her from A to Z.

Q: Do you regret that?

A: Today, yes. Now you know why.

Q: Do you go on vacations?...here- do you go away.

- A: Yeh, I went last year to Israel for Pesach, the year before to Miami, but when my husband was alive, this time was the, the busiest season for the goyim, uh, Easter and, and the Jewish Pesach. So we couldn't. Summertime, when we closed up for the week, we ended up in the Catskills.
- Q: Where did you go?
- A: Where do you think?
- Q: Of what year?
- A: What year? In the 7-60's, 70's
- Q: I would say you went to the Pioneer or the Pine View.
- A: No. Stevensville- because we have, uh, a Greenspan family in Fairfield and their son is a rabbi and we asked him, 'what do you think for us-.
- Q: He said it's kosher, it's okay?
- A: Yes. And we did enjoy it.
- Q: Was it the right decision that you feel, to go to Bridgeport, C.T.? Should you have stayed in NYC?
- A: No. No. It was a very, very- the only thing that, uhm, when my daughter was interviewed to go to Yeshiva University, she came home so upset, 'mother, they ask such terrible personal questions, uhh,- if you have a boyfriend, you, you, you have sex with your boyfriend-' and, you know, she was, she was really a real typical VIRGIN! 'This question-OHHHH- I was so embarrassed over-' and that was the reason she didn't want to go to them. But believe me, I, I was hoping and and praying that she should go there. But then again, who knows. She went to Boston University also a lot of Jewish kids. She meet a lovely boy. So it could happen, it could have happened in a, Yeshiva University, too, that she would meet somebody and divorce.
- Q: I guess she doesn't have this feeling that you described- maybe it's because she wasn't born in Europe that when it comes to goyim, it's hard to trust them.
- A: Kept on telling, she was 5 years of age when I keep saying. She went to Nursery school. When she graduated from grammar school, a, uh, a little, uhhh, shaygetzly ask her to go to the prom with him. And, she, she came home and she was so scared. 'You know what, mother?' I said, 'NO way. You CAN'T DO THAT!' And we, we explain to her.

Alright, so finally she, she had a Jewish boy. But she cared for this, this Christian boy. Ohhh (heavy sigh).

Q: It's American.

A: Yes, American.

Q: Has she ever been to Israel?

A: No (whispers) this was my problem because, uhm, every, every time she was ready to go, always something was going on, and as a mother I was worried, you know. 'Don't go this time, you go next time,' -alright?

Q: Do you feel you tried to protect her too much.

A: Exactly. Much, too much. And that's no good. No good. Now I, now I see it's no good. When it's too late-Ohhhh! (heavy sigh).

Q: ...why do you have a photograph of the Lubavitcher Rebbe?

AS: I don't know. I feel very close to him, to the Lubavitcher organization. Very close. And when this was a booth in the airport in, in Israel, and I went there, and I had some money left over, Israeli money. So, 'I'm not gonna take it home, so I'm gonna buy something.' In the meantime, uhh, they didn't have change, so I said, 'I'm gonna pick up change and I come back.' They probably thought I would never come back. So, uh, 'what shall I buy?' I kept looking, looking. So I says, 'you know what? You have those little, um, candelabras,' you know when we travel, to light candles, wherever I go. So I said, 'Give me two, for me and two for my daughter. And here is all the money, and you do whatever you want with it,' So, 'No, wait a minute I give you a picture, also.' So- it's with me ALL the time.

Q: That picture, you have it in your-purse?

A: And I feel so safe, no matter where I go. Isn't that something? (she laughs.)

Conclusion of Interview (See notes next page).



### Interviewer Notes

I made a decision to interview Mrs. Gevirtz quite by accident. What happened was that I was taking a walk with Henny and a woman from England approached us and introduced Mrs. Gevirtz to us as her roommate here, and told us that she thought that it would be very interesting for Mrs. Gevirtz to tell her story. I asked Mrs. Gevirtz if she would do so. And she replied, 'Yes' although not with a great deal of enthusiasm. It was almost as though it was an afterthought for her. She was doing it because I asked her. Mrs. Gevirtz presents herself as a very refined, intelligent woman. You can see that she was once very beautiful. She dresses impeccably. She is very well groomed. Her clothing is of high quality. And when she was interviewed she responded in a very polite manner. She was prompt. She showed up at the interview. And yet, there is a great sadness in her big blue eyes. A great sadness that reflects all the years of suffering that she has had. But there's also a certain brutal frankness you have the sense that here's a woman who has deep feelings, deep emotions and who is very serious.

End of Tape #2, Side A

Conclusion of Interviewer Notes