

It's only in retrospect now that June is talking about it a little, but I do remember when I was in Poland that every once in a while we would take this long, seemed like a long walk to me, and we'd sift through these mounds of ashes looking. She told me I should be looking for gold. And I couldn't stand doing it.

These were the crematory ashes then, possibly.

It was just the worst, the worst. It was horrible. And in the town where she lived, right across the street, her apartment faced this kind of village square-- I don't know, everybody is to the right of me-- but to the right down the road was where the Russian soldiers who are housed. And I recall that she would sometimes send me there with things to-- They would get--

Trade or-?

I don't know what. Was always wrapped up and she would make me go there. And I hated going there because I was terrified of these Russian soldiers. Although they were very nice, but I was scared of soldiers. It was a soldier and my recollection of soldiers was not something I wanted, somebody I wanted to deal with. Not after Auschwitz. So it was very scary for me, but she would make me go. I have no idea what transpired here.

I do want to say one thing about the Slotkin family. That it's amazing to me now that I'm a parent and have children that they had the willingness and the charity to extend themselves to a war orphan like Irene. And then not knowing at all what I'd be like, certainly a questionable background. And to spend these huge amounts of funds to send somebody to Europe to get me, to bring me over here and to adopt me at the age of 12. I'm not sure I could do it knowing where I came from, I just don't know.

I really have to say that these are the most marvelous people to be able to do such a thing. And I think there are other stories like that, too. I think the Jewish community really went out at that time once they knew what was going on really into the open. And it's things like this. And I think this should be known. I think the atrocities of what happened should be known, but I think some of the good things that came of it should also be publicized.

When did you learn what became of your mother? Did you seek out the information to confirm what happened to her?

Well it was confirmed in 1985 when we went to this museum and give l'chaim in Israel. But I think I knew right then and there when it happened.

What about your father? Did you ever find out where he was sent? Was that ever attainable?

It was found out.

Yes, sometime in December 1941 he was taken into Auschwitz because the records came back. One record that we have of his demise says December 1941. And he might have been one of the earliest prisoners who actually helped build Birkenau. That was when it was being built. They sent in political prisoners at that time and he fit that bill.

Because of his import-export background?

And therefore the accusation of spy activity.

It seems that he was first sent to the Petschkuv prison, which was actually the Petschkuv palace and the Nazis turned it into an interrogation prison where no one ever returned. We learned about this from other people who lived in Czechoslovakia at the time and we met them in 1985.

I do remember going with our mother to a place with packages.

Maybe you went to visit.

I think so. I don't remember ever visiting but seeing him. But I do remember going to this very sound, fortress-like structure bringing packages.

There's a marker outside the Petschkuv now with the names of all the people who went through there. So it's possible their dad's name is on it.

What was his name?

Herbert Guttman.

There are some documented stories from some of the other twins about, at least for the boys, being taken to a field to play soccer. Do you have any recollection?

Obviously, I wasn't big enough to be picked on either team. I would do well playing--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

--courtyard where they did play in between two buildings.

I played soccer after the war in Czechoslovakia a little bit. It's the national pastime like baseball is here.

One of the older twins talk to us in 1985 and you just mentioned that Rene was shepherded by this communist [GERMAN] that each person kind of in the pecking order this twin had to take care of that twin or this person had to take care of that twin. And since Rene and Pepe, Peter Greenfield, were the youngest they were given an adult male. And this fellow was named Otto and he was the one who kind of kept Rene away from the wires and kind of taught them--

My mother, Mrs. Slotkin.

Come on in. Come on in.

How are you?

We were just talking about you in glowing terms.

Look at this. Look at this. Oh, my goodness. It's gorgeous It's unbelievable. A beautiful skirt.

Well, I hope we get married soon, so

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

This is a gentleman from the Holocaust museum in Washington, and he's making Irene and Rene part of the permanent archives and exhibit. And you're part of it too now.

I don't want to be quoted. I want to forget about it. I can't go through that every time.

Yes, it takes time.

I know what you told me. This is years and years and I still can't get over it.

Well, it was a horrible thing.

But you did your share.

Yeah. I'm going to get a chair.

I get through enough

Yeah Mom, sit down. How are you feeling?

Well, I'm tired.

Probably because you're cleaning, huh?

Because I'm cleaning for Passover and I'm-- There's a bunch of tools for Ellie, electric tools. I have a bag for her in the car. Go get them. They're in back seat. And also candy.

Oh.