

**United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Oral History**

**Interview with Irene Hizme and Rene Slotkin**

**RG.50.233.0056**

**April 12, 1992**

**Oceanside, New York**

## **Abstract**

This is an oral history of twins, Rene Slotkin (born Rene Guttman [Gutman]) and Irene Hizme (born Renatta [Renate] Guttman), recorded on April 12, 1992 in Oceanside, New York.

The twins describe their stories and memories, starting from their birth on December 21, 1937 in Teplice-Sanov, Czech Republic, and continuing through their early lives in Prague, their experiences in the camps, and their eventual immigration to the United States. Their father, Herbert Guttman, was arrested as a political prisoner in December of 1941 and eventually he was taken to Auchwitz, where he died. In 1943, Rene, Irene, and their mother Ita were deported to the Theresienstadt concentration camp and then later sent to Auschwitz, where the family was separated and where their mother perished.

Although the siblings were kept completely separate while at Auschwitz, both children became subjects in Joseph Mengele's medical experiments on twins. Upon liberation, they did not reunite for several years, during which time they were sent to various homes and orphanages. Thanks in part to an article in *Life Magazine* that contained a profile of Ms. Hizme, Irene was brought to America by Operation Rescue Children and adopted by an American couple, the Slotkins. When the Slotkins discovered that Irene had a brother, they began searching for Rene, and eventually found him living in Czechoslovakia. The family adopted Rene as well, bringing him to the United States in 1950.

## **Interview with Irene Hizme and Rene Slotkin**

**April 12, 1992**

**Oceanside, New York**

R: My name is Rene Slotkin. This is now April, 1992. I was born Rene Guttman [Gutman] in 1937 in Tepice-Sanov (Teplitz Schoenau) which is in Czechoslovakia (Czech Republic).

What is your specific birth date?

R: December 21, 1937. And I am not sure how long we actually lived – or how long I stayed in Tepice-Sanov, but my first recollection is living in Prague. Um... Irene, you have something?

I: Oh sure. My name is Irene Hizme and I was Renatta (Renate) Guttman, I was born the same day and I am a half an hour older than Rene. Um... I don't remember Teplice-Sanov but I do remember Prague and we lived upstairs in an apartment. We had a terrace— it overlooked a yard, um... I don't think it was a very big apartment. I kind of remember a lot of things being in one room. Um... our crib – we slept in a crib – and it was in the room where our parents' bed was as well. And someplace down always was a table. That's kind of all I remember. There was a long flight of stairs to get upstairs.

R: Yeah, the staircase – I remember that too. 'Cause I remember falling on the stairs once and cutting my chin and having a burning sensation when I was treated for it. And, lo and behold, years after, after the war when I first remembered this, I looked and there is a little scar there.

You recently took a trip where you recall a certain streetcar or a trolley?

R: Well, after the war, I returned to Prague because— because we had some friends who had some documents and pictures of us when we were much younger, before the war with our parents. I do remember then seeing a trolley car with the number 22. I didn't know what was 22 at the time but the image is 2-2. We followed the routes of the tram at that time – number 22 – and I was able to locate this particular apartment building and it turned out to be the right one, so that was a bit exciting. But even more exciting was being able to, at the time, to get – this must have been in 1948 – just before I started my trek to the United States, to be able to get actual pictures of myself and Irene and my parents together. It sort of really gave me some roots for the first time ever— something tangible to be able to look at and know that I had a beginning and parents like everyone else.

I: I have very sporadic memories of our childhood, but I do remember that we were beautifully clothed. We had beautiful clothing – matching outfits. You know there was always— I remember, particularly, we had these um... you know— not these, with bells on them so our mom could hold us with like a leash. Not a leash, but you know what I'm talking about— I don't know how you call that— how do you call that?

A harness—

I: A harness. And they had these little bells on them. I remember that very clearly. I remember also very often going to a park which must have been near our home, with our parents. And most vividly, I remember, one time there was a huge storm and we went to the park afterwards and all these trees had fallen down and we were climbing – you know like kids do – on them, walking along the trees— it was really a lot of fun.

R: The pictures are of us, our parents and ourselves in the park.

I: We even have pictures in the park. And I remember – this is just something that came to my head – I remember candy that we used to get. Like a marmalade, um... it's like the Passover candy that they used to make. You know those jelly... jelly kind of candies. I remember that for some strange reason.

Do you remember what they tasted like?

I: Yeah, kind of orangey. That was weird, I just... we also had, we had a certain number of toys. And we used to play upstairs in the apartment, the one specifically I remember, we had punches (ph 058) like conductors on a train and we would play train a lot and we would punch the tickets. And I also remember having a doll, which Rene very nicely threw down from the balcony and smashed to smithereens. Yes.

Was that one of those celluloid dolls from the time or...

I: Yeah...

R: It was big.

I: Yeah, a big doll.

R: From that period, what I remember is being in the yard of this building and stepping on a bee—

I: Yeah, he was bitten—

R: And I was bitten by a bee and even now, when I think about it, my foot starts itching.

I: Yeah, right on the bottom of your foot, I remember that so clearly, it's funny.

Did they take you to a hospital or was it just taken care of at home, do you remember?

R: I think it was just taken care of the way you would take care of a bite today.

I: And the other thing I remember so clearly, is when mom used to put us to bed, we played kind of a game. She would put our hands in a certain order and we would see if we could wake up in the same position. Do you remember that?

R: No.

I: I remember that.

So you shared a crib?

I: Yes, we shared a crib. You were on the... right.

What have you learned now in terms of what your father did, in terms of his occupation?

R: My father was in the export/import business and I think this somehow led to his accusation of being a spy— because I imagine that he had dealings with foreign countries. He was originally from Germany, the whole family is from Germany so this is what he was accused of, and I think on the basis of that he was jailed and sent to the camps. My mother I don't know.

I: Our mom, she also worked, she was very good in math, so I think she had something equivalent to possibly an accounting job, which of course, once laws that you couldn't hire Jews came about, you know she was laid off. But she did have a good job.

Do you know if you were a fairly well-off family or typical middle class or...?

R: I can only judge by the clothing that we wore from the photographs we have, we can show you. We seem very well dressed and our parents also.

I: I think...by that time, our parents had fled from Dresden to Czechoslovakia where we were born, but I think our aunts from Dresden kept sending us clothes. It was our aunt that sent us clothes. Because our parents could not buy anything. Because by then our father was out of work and so was our mom.

R: In other words, after we left Germany— when they left Germany, that was the whole down...

I: Yeah, they no longer had any source of support and it was our aunt that sent...

When did they leave Germany?

I: Well we were born in '37 so it must have been around then.

I see.

I: There are a series of letters between their father and the aunt in Germany— about ten letters that we have, describing the children's behavior and how...

R: Yeah, that is terrific to have.

I: Memories for the future... they are wonderful. They're in German.

You don't know specifically what your father imported and exported?

R: No.

But he was arrested in Czechoslovakia, I see. Do you have any recollections of his being taken or...

I: I do. I definitely do, again, not clearly but, one night, there was a knock on the door, a very loud knock— and there were soldiers who had come and they came to take our father away. I remember our mom was crying. We didn't know what happened. It was late at night and we never saw him again after – at least I don't...

R: I just remember what she said. It was a disturbing event, it did happen but that's about it.

About how old were you at the time?

R: I would say four.

And are you the only children of your parents. No brothers or sisters?

(Silence on the tape for a few seconds)

Any other memories that you would like to talk about?

I: Something in the letters, maybe? I can't recall the letters. I do remember at some point that we used to stand on line to get food— I sort of remember that. Um... the people stood on line.

Do you know if your family was religious?

I: I have no recollection.

R: None.

Did relatives ever come to visit you in Czechoslovakia, that you recall?

R: No

I: I do remember once though, that in the summer, it must have been summertime, I don't know when, but we went someplace where there was water, like a beach. That's all I can remember.

R: It would have to be a lake.

I: Maybe a lake, I don't know but I remember being...

R: I don't remember it. See what thirty minutes makes? A big difference.

One of those memories... (everyone laughs). Well, you have good recollections of being injured (to Rene). What do you recall about the changes in Prague or changes in your life once the Germans occupied? Or what is the first significant memory you have of a real change in your lifestyle?

I: My first significant memory is waiting to get on this train to go someplace. It was a nice train though, you know it was like a sleeper or something, with windows.

R: I think that was Theresienstadt that we were going to. I remember too, chronologically speaking, that is the next memory after. Because the previous memories, it wasn't a good life... a good existence, I don't think.

I: Umm, it was, I think I... as a child, I sensed something was not right but...

R: That's right, that's what I'm saying.

I: Our mother was rather sad.

R: 'Cause I don't remember my father, obviously my mother— she would have to have been sad.

I: I remember a certain sadness, but the next thing, as I said, was really this train ride to someplace else to live.

R: That was Theresienstadt.

I: That was Theresienstadt.

Do you remember taking anything with you, in particular?

I: Well, we did have some stuff but... I... this is... I... the only thing I recall is that I had a locket. I had a locket that I... a heart, and I remember having that for a long time even when I arrived in Auschwitz and I was very brazen. We would stand on line for the showers and we would have to strip naked and I had enough presence of mind to know that I had to take this thing off and I would hold on to it. I don't know how I did it, but I did it. I lost the locket however, somewhere.

What did the locket look like?

I: It was a heart shaped locket. It had pictures inside of it— I don't recall.

This was a gift from your mother?

I: It must have been, probably.

You don't recall taking a toy with you or umm...?

R: The only thing I remember was my mother's shoulder and the texture of the dress that she wore.

On that day, or...?

R: Not on that day, but from Theresienstadt. That's one of the things – since you asked us something tangible – this is what I do remember. And I think there was a picture taken—

I: Picture taken of us—

R: Picture was taken of us at that point in time and—

I: We have the picture.

R: Yeah, we got the picture and you know, it confirms this shoulder that I was leaning on. We have it right here. And, but I don't remember taking anything with me, like a personal toy or anything like that. No, I don't.

So you remember how her dress felt?

R: Yeah, it was coarse...

I: But I do remember that our mom did carry a bag with something. That I remember but I don't know what was in it really.

Do you remember anything about the train journey itself, and getting to the train station outside Theresienstadt?

I: Actually, the train ride was kind of... I don't know, I enjoyed it. I think it was maybe our first train ride. It was a pretty nice train ride. It wasn't bad, as I recall, that trip to Theresienstadt.

R: I have a blank on that.

You do? You don't remember the march to Theresienstadt? What are your first memories of Theresienstadt?

I: Unfortunately, I think I have very minimal memories of Theresienstadt. Again, only, I remember cobblestone roads, pavements, brick buildings, I always see these bridges over water, I don't know if it's from there, I don't know, but that comes to mind.

Were you staying with your mother there? Were you still with her?

R: Yes, yes. I remember you being sick there (to Irene).

I: It's possible, I was sick a lot...

R: Over there, I do remember you being ill.

Was she taken away to the hospital in the camp or...

R: To some infirmary but she didn't stay overnight or anything. She would just go there and come back.

I: And in Theresienstadt, I also remember standing on line and I remember the carts with dead bodies.



R: Yeah and on the cobblestone too.

I: They just... yeah.

R: Hard pushing, the wheels would get stuck between these rocks and everything would come to a halt and they would have to get everybody on the side to get this thing started again, rolling and they lost a few bodies every once in a while, that rolled off.

I: Umm...

Do you recall what your day to day life was like there? Did you... there was an underground school. Do you recall ever getting taught...

I: I can't recall. I think we were too young for the school. I am not sure we attended. But I don't know.

R: I don't recall.

I: I don't recall it at all. Well recently, there was a film made about Theresienstadt and in the film footage, which we saw in the Village just this year, there was a kindergarten, and on the bottom steps I spotted Rene in the film, so he was part of the kindergarten group, whether they were active or not. It was part of the Nazi propaganda film footage.

Oh, I see.

I: I don't recall.

R: I don't recall either. It is possible.

I: It is possible. And I don't know if you recall this, I don't know if it's an \_\_\_\_ (?? ph 14) time for me, but at one point, do you remember standing in a field, just for hours and hours on end, I don't know for what. No? It is just something that is kind of flitting in and out of my head lately, but I can't exactly recall...

R: I remember something, it was fields, it was dark, was dark and I think we were waiting for the train to Auschwitz.

I: No that's a different...

R: That's a different... 'Cause I remember taking quite a walk towards that train.

I: Oh yeah, I remember that too, but that, no, this was just a lot of people were there and we were just kind of standing around waiting.

Well that did happen. There was an occurrence like that where many people were taken out of the camp and held in a field, in a forest outside of Theresienstadt.

I: Really?

Yeah, so this is what I have read and what I have heard from other survivors.

R: And what was the purpose of that?

Well actually, last night Inge Auerbacher talked about that too, for what she remembered, she was an older child, that it looked as though they had plans to kill everybody. You know, she put it, “Babi Yar style,” you know, shoot people into mass graves, but it didn’t materialize for some reason – luckily – and everyone went back to the camp, back to Theresienstadt, so that might have been— it might be that you recall.

I: Hmm. Well, on occasion, that is how they handled epidemics. There was some kind of disease and they couldn’t handle it, well that would be their medical solution.

And actually, before the film, they did deport many people also, before they filmed the propaganda movie. Because they knew that it was too crowded. Do you remember if your mother was with you all day or did she leave you during the days as if to go to some kind of labor detail?

R: I don’t think that she was with us all day but I ... I do remember running wild in the place. I do. And I’m throwing things into windows and from windows down, and I’m sure that happened while I was unsupervised.

Do you remember if you were with other kids?

R: Yeah, yes. War games, I guess you would call them.

I: Don’t you remember drawing, some inkling of memory, I think you once mentioned to me. I don’t know, it doesn’t come to me at this moment. The head of the children’s school was in your transport from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz and his name I forgot but it will come to me in a minute. Very influential person, because he kept such a wonderful spirit among the children there and um... I think that when I mentioned it to you once, you did remember drawing.

Do you remember any thoughts you had about these wagons with dead bodies, I mean, did you think it was interesting as a child, do you recall any thought you had then?

I: My thoughts were that I didn’t understand it, didn’t understand what it was but I...

R: I don’t think that it made the emotional impact that it would to somebody a lot older. ‘Cause it was just something... we were learning new things and I think it was just another thing for us to learn.

I: It was life, whatever it was, that is what happened to some people.

Do you have any memory of wearing a star?

I: I don’t.

R: I do.

What do you recall about that?

R: Hmm.

Do you recall getting it, or do you just recall wearing it...

R: I just had it. I don't know where even. I don't know... where would that have been.

Probably in Prague.

R: In Prague, yeah, yeah. Very small, but it was there and "Juden." I remember people pointing to us because of it but uh... it's the first time I ever...

I: Mentioning Prague, I just remembered something. And probably – maybe this didn't even happen – because Prague was never bombed was it? I remember sirens, I remember sirens and I remember that we would go downstairs— must have been Prague because where else would I have gone downstairs?

Was this a large building that you lived in? Many apartments or do you know...?

R: Not terribly, I would say like six, seven stories. Right?

I: Yeah, something like that.

R: Going down...

I: Yes, yes. And all the other people in the building went down too— there were other people there too. Yeah. Was there food down there or any provisions?

R: Would this fit?

Yeah, it could. I don't know off hand but it might.

R: It is very vague— very misty.

In your home, did you speak German? Do you remember?

I: I think we spoke German. Because I seem to understand Yiddish after the war and I couldn't figure out how, so— it had to be.

An early implant—

I: An early implant from someplace. See, the grownups thought that I didn't understand what they were saying but I understood.

R: Seemingly, we understood but I don't remember what language, but when anybody spoke, especially the Germans there, I knew exactly what they were saying. So that would have to be. But I am sure that since we grew up in Czechoslovakia, that we must have learned that too— the first few years.

I: But see...

R: Or you don't think that we were out all that much?

I: No, I don't think that we were out and I think that you learned Czech after the war, because I have no recollection of Czech at all, German yes.

R: I don't remember the language, I just remember understanding.

Do you remember, do you have any memories of any of the S.S. guards or the soldiers? What they looked like or um... treatment of other people or of yourself?

I: Well the first recollection that I have of the S.S. – I guess – or the soldiers or whatever, was when we took this very long walk in Theresienstadt to the train that was to take us to Auschwitz.

R: There were dogs there...

I: And they had dogs there. It was a long column of people who were marching, it was at night, there was snow on the ground and it was very, bitterly cold. And if people didn't walk quickly enough, they would shoot them. They would just shoot the people. There were shots that rang out and I just saw bodies kind of falling. I don't know – again – I don't think that I really understood that they were dead or that they weren't going to get up again and there were dogs and I remember that I was kind of tired and I didn't want to go on this trip— my mom...

R: Our mother held us by our hands, pulling us,

I: Pulling us...

R: I remember that.

You were being roused awake or...

I: Well, it was at night...

R: It was at night, but it started... at the evening, it was probably... it wasn't an arousal in the middle of the night, it was something that was ongoing in the evening...

I: And it seemed like a very long walk, but that might have been that we were so little...

Little legs—

I: Little legs, it seems that the transport card, which was posted on the wall in Theresienstadt – and that is when you knew your time had come to go. We recovered these transport tickets and they are in a museum in Israel, in a kibbutz – Givat Chaim Yihud – they have a whole slew of things about Czech-all the Czech families that were in Theresienstadt and that's in fact, where Rene and I found an affidavit that indicated that our mother had died in Auschwitz.

R: And our names are there—

I: Our names—

R: With dates of birth are there, everything is there.

I: And what transport numbers – the numbers that we had on the transport – to Theresienstadt and from Theresienstadt and to Auschwitz and the dates.

R: December 15—

I: December 15 to Auschwitz...

R: To Auschwitz— 1943.

I: To Theresienstadt it was August.

R: About a year-August—

I: 1942. Or September 9, I am not sure, I always get confused.

R: No it was August...

I: Yeah, it was August.

R: A little over a year...

I: There was also another artist that was on that same transport – and he has drawn account after account of what happened that night – and you can see in his black and white drawings the pitch black of night and the entrance into Auschwitz – the spilling out of the prisoners from the cattle cars – and it's a very clear image of what they actually went through. Bernard... um... I forgot his name.

This photograph of you two and your mother, where was this taken, do you remember?

I: Theresienstadt

R: Theresienstadt

Was there...do you remember why it was taken, did there just happen to be a photographer in Theresienstadt?

They were doing these things...

I: Doing these things and I think they sent it out to family members to say – “We’re fine. Everything is great.”

Do you think that this was probably done early? Do you recall that it happened shortly after you arrived in the camp?

R: I couldn't say. We were there over a year, empirically, knowing this now. I don't recall.

I: It is hard to tell.

R: But looking at us, I would say that we looked pretty good— so—

I: So it might have been early.

R: Early.

Do you have any memory of the clothes that you were wearing?

R: No, I remember what my mother was wearing – how it felt.

I: But I remember... my hair.

R: I remember your dress... that dress... colors.

I: I remember that dress.

R: Sort of reddish, purplish...

I: Reddish, purplish right. Yeah. And I remember—

R: —and there was yellow lines, right??

I: Yes! Yes!

So the squares are purplish?

R: Yeah, basically a purplish background, they were like squares and also like yellow.

I: See that.

R: But obviously this is the first time ever that I am remembering this.

I: But I remember that my mom always made me a thing on top of my head...

R: Yeah the long—

I: I had long hair and she always had... yeah right.

What was your mother's name?

R: Ita.

And so you recall walking to the transport to Auschwitz, and the dogs and the guards shooting people who were straggling I guess.

Or beating them, or yelling and the dogs barking. Yeah, they just had to get the trains loaded.

I: It was horrible.

R: Yeah, it was our first real display of real uh... force against the people – that I remember.

I: It was horrible.

And your mother was pulling you along? Had you by the hand.

R: Yeah. She had two of us, she couldn't carry much of anything else right?

I: But she also did, she still had something. A small parcel of some sort.

What do you recall about the transport itself?

I: That was horrible.

R: That I remember. Uh... we were absolutely jammed into this car, I can smell the stench of what went on in there. Everything went on in there. And we were there for a very, very long time. People were trying to faint and fall down, but they almost couldn't because—

I: It was so crowded, you couldn't turn around or anything. It seemed like an endless journey. Just an endless journey.

You were all together in a car.

I: Yeah, with lots and lots of other people. There was nothing to eat. I remember being very thirsty. I remember biting my hand.

What did biting your hand do?

I: I wanted to cry but I knew that— I didn't dare cry, I think

R: That was really a strange environment, we really didn't know what was going on. This was so unnatural.

I: I didn't understand what was happening.

R: Heard the clickety click of the train rolling, just on and on and on.

Do you remember anything about your mother on this transport? Anything that she was doing or saying to you?

R: She was up there— I was down.

I: Yeah, she was standing.

R: She was holding us close, that is all I remember. There wasn't any contact.

I: I kind of remember hanging on to her legs.

R: Yeah right.

I: I remember that I wanted to sit down. I wanted to sit, but there was no space, you couldn't turn around.

Do you remember other children on the transport?

R: No.

Did your mother have any food with her? Do you recall her passing any bread to you or potato or...?

I: I would think that she must have had something but I don't remember.

So this journey took quite a while? Several days?

I: At least a day, I would think. We arrived December 18, so it took three days.

R: I think that there were people who died on that ride.

I: Oh, there were.

R: Because, when they opened the doors, they were lying, there was no movement down.

You remember that?

R: Yeah. The stench was unbelievable. That I can smell every once in a while, actually. "Heraus"— it was German again and the dogs and "schnell," "macht schnell." And again your mother had you— you were thrown out of the train?

I: And miraculously enough, we stayed with our mother. There was a whole Czech Lager, a special family Lager for the Czech families that everybody stayed together—men, women and children. It was a special— from December to March, we stayed together.

So, other twins have recounted them yelling for twins, "Zwilling, Zwilling" (ph 445). Do you recall that?

I: We heard that also but it didn't mean anything. Well— maybe it did but I don't... because I remember that we went with our mother to the hospital to be... whatever— to be checked out and the reason I remember this – I love to tell this story – the reason I remember this is because he (Rene) was such a cry-baby when it came to doctors. Now, I was scared that he was going to cry and that they were going to beat him up or hit him, because I was such a stoic. (Laughs)

So somebody examined you two and your mother?

I: I remember that she was with us, one time, she was there with us. But that might have been when they knew that we were twins.

Did you two, did you know you were twins? It might sound like a silly question, but...

I: I don't think so.



R: No, no. It had no meaning. It took on meaning later, I think, when we were separated and I first got into the group of the male twins that I realized I was a twin. Even then, I wasn't sure that I knew that it was different than being just a normal kid. But what it really meant uh...

So after it was "Haraus" out of the cars, you were taken directly to this Lager?

I: This barrack, yeah, this Lager where all the other Czech families were and my recollections of then are really— again, we were with our mother, there was very little food— I remember we used to get a piece of dark, black bread and um...some kind of slop to drink— I don't know, something that tasted awful and but I recall seeing people beaten in that Lager, I don't know why. But...

Were there just women and children in that Lager or did it seem like whole families were together?

I: I think it seemed like whole families were together. But I am not... what do you recall?

R: I don't have any recollection of any of this until we were separated and then I start to pick up memories. Because I was totally on my own then, and then I really had to... it seems like we were really guarded. I just don't remember any of the outside things that happened.

I: I remember, sometimes we had to stand outside in the mornings for something or other-when our mother was there-I don't know.

Any other recollections of your day in this Lager? Do you think you were just in there the whole day or...until these Appells came about?

I: I have no...

R: Not in that period. I start remembering after we were separated, I started to have day activities and then I start remembering our morning roll calls uh... I remember the bigger and older were taken off to work and uh...

Where were you taken then? You were removed...

I: At some point, I think it was in March of that year or April or whatever, maybe in June...

R: '44

I: No, it was '43

R: No, '44. We got there in...

I: That's right, December '43, so sometime in '44, I recall one particular terrible day when I just recall that we were ripped away from our mother and I recall a loud scream and um... I knew something— something had happened. You know, something was happening that was terrible.

Was it your scream that you heard or...

I: I think it was my mother's.

R: I think it was my mother's.

I: She was trying to hold on to us and we were just grabbed...

R: Pulled away from her—

I: Pulled away from her and...

This was within the Lager?

I: Yeah, inside. And then the next thing I knew, I was in someplace different with just other women and girls and Rene wasn't there anymore and my mom wasn't there anymore.

How were you taken to this new place? Do you remember, were you walked, or did they put you in a truck or...?

I: I don't recall.

What are your recollections about this? (To Rene)

R: Same. The very same. And then I was just there in this new surrounding—it was very close to one of the ovens – the Crematoria – because I saw people walking in constantly— one way. And that is where I start remembering how my days were – hunting through garbage for a potato and seeing these daily beatings in the roll call lines in the mornings. Also, very vividly, I remember, prisoners – the Russian soldiers and the Polish soldiers – they were shot. They were lined up against the ditch and they were just shot. And the children – I was just six years old – we would look over the pit and see some of them still twitching and I remember pulling – not me, but some of the older boys – they pulled one fellow out who was obviously still alive but he did have a big swelling in his head – which had to be a bullet most probably – and they took him into the barracks and put him on one of the bunks. I don't know what happened to him. But these things happened almost daily – the shootings. Somebody was always being shot. There I also remember the sirens – they were more frequent occurrences as the war grew – the sirens and the hum of the airplanes above and always an S.S. trooper standing in front of the barracks at the time, outside.

I am just going to pause this for one second.

\*START OF SIDE TWO (2)-COUNTER 625

So Rene, you were taken from your mother and brought to Lager B-2B uh...how were you initiated into the new Lager? What do you remember first about coming there? Did anybody show you the—

R: Yeah, there was concern by older people who were like me – they were twins, this I know now – and one of their big concerns was getting me a pair of shoes.

You were barefoot at the time?

R: I must have been, or maybe they didn't fit or something. I needed shoes, and somehow they managed through the black market to get me shoes for a loaf of bread. I even remember the color of the shoes – they were a yucky brown, you know – up to here. They covered the knee— no, not the knee, the ankle. And they were like, you know, a caramel color brown. But they were almost like brand new and so I felt like I was being taken care of, but it was a totally different existence. I was really... my eyes were opened, I questioned like, "What's going on?" "Who is the master of this?" I remember asking, "Who is in charge here?" You know like who can I ask? Who can I talk to? And in the background, all the mornings, the cold, the hunt for potatoes in the garbage and the endless lines of people walking to this...and...

Did you go around with other twins or the other people in the... the other children looking for scraps?

R: I always remember being alone. Totally alone. I know they were there but the hunt was always alone.

Do you remember a time that you were especially successful in finding something to eat? A substantial piece of bread, a whole potato?

Yeah, these moments happened, but I had to go inside and have it cut up so that I could warm it on the stove inside.

You warmed the potato?

R: Yeah, there were moments. They were wonderful moments when you found something that you could really eat but nothing really substantial like finding a box or anything like that. Maybe a big potato that wasn't totally rotten— that was a find.

You mentioned that you were questioning many things. Did you... what did people tell you or... what did you ask about this procession going into the gas chambers?

R: I never asked that, that was just something that was happening. But I asked, "Who is the master of... who is the master of the world?" I think I asked. I was told "Hitler" Okay. I was satisfied. That was an answer.

The prisoners answered you that.

R: Yeah. And part of, I guess, daily activity – I have to retell – is the sleeping thing at night. On these bunk beds and \_\_\_\_ (??ph 55) and so close to the wood, smelling it and also getting pushed and many times, just being able to squeeze in someplace, to have a space. But alone.

Did you always sleep in the same approximate spot?

R: I was just asking myself the same question. I don't remember. I don't recall. Do you remember anything about that in your...?

I: Well, you know, my memories are a little different than Rene's. But we did have bunk beds as well, and there was this long oven down the center, and I think we were somewhat assigned to beds, but I am not sure that everybody always went to these same beds. I particularly remember one night, having to get up and having to go to the bathroom— well, not that they had bathrooms but... outside in the back, and then coming back and getting totally confused as to what side of the barrack my bed was on. And I really got into a state of panic, but I knew I had to get into a bed, and I kept going over— you know, I would go over and ask somebody if I could just come in next to them, and I remember being pushed away and them saying, "This is not your bed." And the more his happened, you know I just was panicking, and so I remember climbing over the oven and saying well maybe... I was so confused. And finally somebody had pity on me and let me come in with them.

Was anybody taking...did anybody "adopt" you?

I: No. There was just no kind of organization of any sort. It seemed to me that most of the girls were older. I didn't really see too many— certainly not younger than me— I don't recall. And no one seemed to be in charge and I... I remember particularly being extremely, extremely lonely. It was like the worst thing. There was no one. And I remember that we would receive bread and some soup, and I tried to save my piece of bread, I figured that if I held on to it longer that I would have it for the whole day. But then somebody always stole it from me at night. Now, I don't know if it was somebody else or it was the rats who ate it, but I never had it in the morning. And um...did I learn? No, I did this every night. I remember that there were two girls that were with me and they had little pouches, and they used to hide their bread in the little pouches.

It was a separate pouch?

I: Yeah, a little thing... I... and I would say, oh I wish I had one of those— but I didn't. Um... I vividly also remember going to the hospital. And being sick. And I remember standing— that's when I remember standing for roll call— that was in Auschwitz in the morning— almost every morning.

Once you were in that Lager...

I: Yes, definitely. And I remember it distinctly because I always tried to hide behind somebody big so that I wouldn't be seen, so that I wouldn't be chosen for anything. I didn't question – I hardly spoke to anyone – but I was beginning to comprehend from what I was hearing that terrible things were going on— that whatever was happening was terrible. Although to me at this time— this was life and I didn't remember anything else. I didn't think this was wrong, right or otherwise. I just knew that if I wasn't spotted, I wouldn't maybe get chosen for something and um...I remembered that I could – from out of the door of the barrack – I could, at some point... I remembered that I had a brother, and I remembered that he was to the right— this way. And if I

looked out this way, then his barrack was there. And I remember this on a night in particular when there was some kind of explosion and there was a big fire and I was terrified that his barrack was the one that was on fire. Um... I remember often seeing people run into the fence and uh... get electrocuted. And I remember on one particular occasion— and there were dead bodies on the ground, I remember one time trying to hide among these dead bodies. I don't exactly know why— I don't know what it was I was scared of, I think I just wanted to disappear and thought that maybe this was a good, convenient way to do it.

These were bodies outside the barrack, stacked up or...?

I: Yeah, just...right. And I thought that this way, I could hide somehow and it would all be over. I don't really know what went through my mind. It was a child's idea – you know – be still like everybody else and no one will notice me.

What about the other children in that particular Lager?

I: There were some older children but I again— it seemed like they hung around with each other. So now, later on, I know that they were other twin girls, so I guess that they hung around with each other. I didn't have my twin— because he was... we were not of the same sex so it was a little harder. But throughout all the time in the hospital and through experiments and through horrible times, I always felt that Rene was alive and I said that I have to stay alive to take care of him. This was like my mission in life and I very clearly remember umm... standing on line – it was always cold, of course – and we were going into the showers, standing naked and again. I bring up the locket – for a long time, I was miraculously able to hang on, hide the fact that I had this locket, and always put it back on after I came out of the showers. I also remember that somehow I knew already that not everybody came out of the showers, so every time we were lined up like this, I remember that fear, like oh my God, is this the last time?

After the shower you would be lined up?

I: No— before. Before.

What happened when you got sick?

I: I was in the hospital.

Did you get yourself to the hospital or...

I: I think somebody else must have. Periodically, I was taken to the hospital because I had certain medical procedures I guess, done to me— like— again— I don't remember exactly why, or what for, or the very detailed specifics. But I can remember that, at one point, I had blood taken out from my neck. You know... I don't... but it is vivid because it was extremely painful. And another time, I was strapped to a table of some sort, and there was a doctor – he was in white and he had a scalpel. Well, I didn't know it was a scalpel then. I realize it now that it was... and um... he cut me. And I remember also being x-rayed. I remember a lot of x-rays, kind of stuff and of course being measured and stuff like that. But I also remember – and I don't know what this has to do with anything – but wires. Wires attached to me and um... something with

electric... I don't know. And, I remember, um... remember seeing in one room— in some room, I don't know... there were eyes. Don't ask me—

Like eyes? Just independent eyes?

I: I don't know. But I also remember getting injections that made me very sick because then I found myself in kind of a hospital bed or something and um... I remember throwing up a lot and having diarrhea, and I was extremely sick. I remember though that there was some nurse there who kind of looked after me, and I think there was one point when they were cleaning out the hospital. I don't know— again, now, they were probably just going to kill everybody, I am not sure, but there...it was a very hurried kind of thing. There was a big commotion and this person grabbed me and just stuck me under her skirt and it was all dark and she just said be quiet. You know— she didn't have to tell me twice and um...I think she saved me, I think she saved me from something... I don't know.

When the doctor cut you, do you remember anything about it?

I: I just remember I must have fainted or... I don't remember anything else after that except waking up in a lot of pain.

And during any of those examinations, you were never with Rene?

I: No. The only time I remember being with him is when we went with our mom that time. I don't ever remember being there again with Rene. 'Cause I never saw you again after that. At least I don't remember seeing you.

R: I was there a couple of times, but nothing like... at least I don't recall— the only thing I recall is being measured, the touch of the very cold instruments and the word "Runken" – that's x-ray, I think, in German. I remember that. So there was a lot of that going on but that's about all.

What were the measurements?

R: Around the head, body, head, everything. Because they were sort of trying to... they were putting you in between something, to see how, I guess how big— it wasn't like they were taking a tape measure, they put you against something cold, steel—

I: There was steel, it was very cold.

R: Very cold.

Who was the person doing the procedure? Um, did they talk to you or ask you anything?

I: Um, I just remember being terrified, and I knew that I had to just not cry and just do everything that I was told. No matter what.

When you were... How was it that you knew you were taken to be examined? Did, one morning, somebody— soldier come in and take you, or did you know that on a particular day you would go?

R: I was walked over by one of the older boys. I am sure that I was the youngest kid there. I was walked over by one of the older boys and that was it.

Do you have a recollection of the “twins’ father?” The gentleman Zvi Spegel (ph 202)?

R: He could have been the one. I know of him only in... 1985, I learned of him. I met [him] in Israel, Zvi Spegel.

Did he remember you?

R: No. I think his mind was sort of on the blink at that point. But there was somebody else in 1985 who remembered me, which was very heartwarming.

I: And he was part of Zvi Spegel’s group.

R: And he was part of that group so obviously I was there.

Some of the other male twins have described seeing each other... seeing the Soviet prisoners in the next half of the barracks. Do you recall any older men there?

R: Yeah. The only... the Soviet... the soldiers, I remember they were periodically shot, they were the ones that were always taken and disposed of... the partisans (ph 214)?

I: Do you remember Adolph (ph 215)?

R: No. But the only one I would remember is that young kid— that one other one that I met in Israel.

I: Peter Grainfield?

R: Yeah. Peter. Very vaguely. I met this man in Israel and he was the only one that would have been my size.

I: He was about a year younger.

R: And that was extremely young. Because I don’t think the older boys would— even socially they wouldn’t associate with us. Because I think that the next up was at least three or four years older and at that point, that is a big difference so— we were alone, except that I was told that I played with him. And I kept looking at him and uh... I sort of... it stirred some memories, but nothing specific. Nothing specific really. What I was going to say... You were asking about who did some of the experimentation – the Museum at Auschwitz now has the documents, which we got copies of, of our names – both our names and numbers – matching and all that. Irene has a document where there is a signature of blood testing and Mengele’s signature on the bottom of it—so he could have been one of the gentlemen who participated in this—pretty sure.

They took blood from you as well?

R: I don’t recall them taking blood from me, no.

But you recall the x-ray procedures?

R: I recall the x-rays and measuring, that I remember. The other things...

Did these x-ray procedures take a long time?

Time didn't have much meaning to me. It just happened.

You both had numbers? You were both tattooed?

R: Yes.

What do you recall about receiving those numbers? Was that when you first entered Auschwitz or when you were transferred to the separate Lagers?

I: Since our numbers are so different, I would imagine that it must have been when we were separated because we had totally different numbers.

R: Yeah, my number, I remember it being put on, it hurt. There was an awful stench all around me, it was muddy and it was like a needle pricking me, but in terms of time, when they put it, I can't put it anywhere.

You said it was muddy. It was done outside?

R: It was muddy when I walked up to... yeah, it was done outside. Whoever it was, they were sitting at a desk with a cover over it but I stepped into it like from outside. And um... I'll show you my number, I have a very clear number. It reads this way: 169061. And that's confirmed by some of the records. But when I first saw that number with my name next to it – also, only in the last few years – that really gave me the chills again, confirming dreams, memories of long, long ago. Which still affect you, I guess. I'm sure they do.

Did anyone tell you that you had to be accountable for this number in some way?

R: You know, after the war, which is really— for children, I think, the hardest part— this is like another Holocaust starting or use... That's how I look at it. I took an awful lot of beatings because of this number because that identified me as a Jew, in Czechoslovakia, after the war, when everything was supposedly very nice and good. There was no relief for children who... seven years old, all alone. I mean parents can appreciate this sort of thing. When you become a parent you will understand.

Irene, do you have recollections of receiving a number?

I: I drew a blank on that. I do remember just vaguely, a needle jabbing my arm but I didn't make anything of it. I just saw that everyone had one of those— I wanted one also. I wanted to be like everyone else.

You described an explosion you heard. Do you recall this explosion— fire coming out?

R: No. But my feelings about Irene being alive, the way that she felt, I felt that too. And I do remember seeing her once, through the wires, and I knew it was her... it had to be. Some time had elapsed since we were separated, uh... I think it was toward the end, but I knew that she was alive because of that— I just knew that she was alive. That just confirmed the whole thing for me— that she never died in my thinking— she was always alive in my consciousness until we met in the States many years later.

What are your next memories about Auschwitz?



R: Well, just prior to liberation, there was this incident of us being taken and almost done away with by another officer other than Mengele and uh... very clearly do I remember this incident.

Another doctor?

R: I don't know if it was a doctor, an officer. And I remember Mengele coming in just in the nick of time in his green convertible and stopping this whole procession, and I also remember – and Irene I guess had that feeling many times – I knew that this was going to be deadly. I mean this fear instinct I guess – I had a feeling that this could be the end for me – and the horrible feeling. So Mengele stopped this. And also, towards the end of... there was this march that we all went on, that they marched us out of... I mean, the last week or so— weeks... again, time is meaningless— but I do remember a lot of excitement among the German soldiers and distant artillery fire getting louder and louder and them taking us on to this march— that was a pretty gruesome type affair because they – again – shot anybody or just... anybody who wouldn't/couldn't continue they just...

This was January, 1945?

R: This was January. Right. And that was a long, long haul if I remember. I can't put it in terms of hours, but then all of a sudden the German soldiers were gone and the Russian soldiers were around us – in white uniforms. I remember one officer being on a horse – I think it was a pink horse (laughs). A very big— huge animal. But they were all dressed in white and that was the liberation.

So you were en route on the march? You hadn't reached anywhere in particular?

R: No, no.

And you realized that people were being shot if they were straggling behind?

R: Yes.

Do you remember making a conscious effort to—

R: Yes. I had to keep going, and she was my strength, and I knew I had to make it for her, as was the case for many of my other hardships that came about later. She gave me the strength to keep going.

Did you have a blanket with you or anything?

R: Don't recall.

Do you recall getting any bread rations before the march?

R: Nothing. I do remember the Russians marched us into a warehouse of some kind after this happened and there was a tremendous scramble for food. I wanted to get in on this. I do remember getting a can of some kind and rolling it and then I finally got somebody to open it— it was sauerkraut. That is my memory of this thing – big yellow, yellow, golden kind of a can – it was huge to me then. I don't know how big it really was, but I had to roll it, I couldn't lift it.

Surely, you ate it?

R: I had something of it. A lot of people didn't do so well because they overate, I understand. That was liberation from Auschwitz.

And for you Irene?

I: I went... I must have been at a different camp (laughs). Kind of towards the end, before liberation as I know it now, I sensed something had changed. Uh... there wasn't— suddenly there wasn't this order in the day anymore. We weren't being put outside, we weren't standing... somehow there was no order anymore and I – at that point – was, I must have been quite sick because I remember just that I was on the ground. I couldn't get up. And there were other people also lying on the ground – I don't know if it was because they were hungry or sick or what. I do remember something had changed— I wasn't quite aware of what— but there seemed to be people who were kind of a little bit... saying that we're saved – I didn't know what that meant – and the next thing I knew was that I was picked up by some Polish lady and she took me.

Within the camp? You were still within the camp?

I: In the camp, but she took me out of the camp. So I was not part of this march – you know, that was not me – I was already gone. And um... I was with her a while.

Where did she take you?

I: It seemed she lived in Auschwitz, in the town proper, and she took me to her house.

For how long did you stay with her?

I: I was there until Rescue Children extricated me. It must have been...

This is an organization?

I: Yes, an organization to get back Jewish children. But um... I remember Christmas very vividly, so I was there at least a year. I remember her telling me that Santa Claus is going to come out of the moon— she says to me— I believed her. Yeah, right!

Did she have other children?

I: No.

It was just her? Was she married?

I: Um... I think she was married, but I was an only child.

I guess, I suppose you learned Polish?

I learned Polish.

And when did this relief organization find you and take you?

I guess about a year later and um... I first went to Prague to an orphanage and then I went to France to an orphanage and then a different orphanage blah, blah, blah... a lot of orphanages. I got shuttled around a bit.

And Rene, after liberation and the warehouse, what was your...

R: The next recollection I have, I understand that I was in a hospital in Bratislava – so I am told – and I had some TB – tuberculosis – a touch of it. And the next... the memories for me, really begin in Czechoslovakia in a town called Košice (Kaschau) (ph 390), in an orphanage. A big orphanage in a hospital complex.

Was this specifically a Jewish orphanage?

No. There were nuns, Mothers, around taking care. And uh... there was an administrator there – a doctor Kelina (ph 395) who, after some time, took me out and uh... with his wife— they had no children, and I lived with them. Subsequently, they had a child— Did they have a child? Or am I mixing it up with the other one?

I: They didn't have any children.

R: No, they did not. I am mixing him up with his brother. I lived with him for a while and they had to flee because somehow the Communists... somebody made some statements regarding this man and he just got wind of it and he had to flee. So he left me with his sister and that's the family – the Mann family – and lived with them for a good number of years. They were the ones that had the other children, Bebe and Otto (ph 410) and they treated me very well. There I went to school – in Czechoslovakia – but there again, I was the only visible Jew and they were waiting for me everyday after school with stones.

So the other Czech children...

R: There was one other Jew, I remember, but we both had to run for our young lives at the time. And it was a good thing that we were still young and so the people that were waiting for us couldn't do all that much harm. They were still youngsters also, but they were serious and they were mean— so we had to run. I mean that after we were let out, we had to...

Sprint home?

R: Sprint home, very fast, sprint a long way too, because I lived very close to the school, they knew – they blocked my way – so I had to go somewhere else. It was always a big circle— sometimes it led into the fields.

What was the name again?

R: Kojista (ph 429).

And the family's name?

R: Mann.

M-A-N-N?

R: Yes, M-A-N-N, Joseph Mann and...

I: Edith.

R: Edith, yes.

This was the sister...

R: The sister yes, of Doctor Kalina.

Unknown Woman: Just as an interesting point, later on we found out from people in New York City here, that the search for the Jewish children that had been taken for a million reasons into Polish homes – Christian homes – the way that they discovered who was a Jew in these homes was that the rescuers would go to the town Bishop, or whoever was the religious cleric in the town, and they would ask for all the baptismal certificates of the children. And if there were four children in one home and three baptismal certificates, the fourth one was the Jew. And they would exchange monies, or whatever the town needed – the Bishop I am sure was paid also – and then the children were rescued. So, because of that, the American Jewish Organizations were trying to raise funds to have monies to pay for these children and through one of these organizations called Rescue Child, they were having dinner after dinner,

I: It was called Rescue Children.

Unknown Woman: ...Rescue Children, Inc., one of them – the prime mover of this – was a gentleman from Long Island and he, he went into Europe to one of his orphanages that had been set up for all these rescued orphans and he found Irene in one of them. And he said, “Oh, you’d be perfect to come back to America and just help us raise funds.” This was just, like, your picture perfect orphan— with beautiful, full banana curls and a sweet face. And somehow he convinced her that she should come to America with him. and subsequently, she was made part of this *Life Magazine* article – Nov. 17, 1948... all about... 1947... right, that’s how Irene was taken out of the Polish home, by the way. One of these emissaries of Rescue Child... Rescue Children Inc...

I: Well I’m not sure, there were other organizations that worked in Poland. I think that Rescue Children came into the forefront later on when many of these children were in France and they were trying to find their parents here in America— find relatives for them or else ship them to Israel or whatever. But when I was in Poland, you know Rene was talking about school – I was in – she was obviously a Catholic lady— I was in all Catholic school and I went to church...

R: So did I. I went to church.

Did you know that you were Jewish?

R: Yes. I went to the end of the line. Many times I snuck away when they went to church, but many times I did go and went through the whole... whatever I went through.

I: I went to Church. I knew I was Jewish because I had this number on my arm. I also was— as Rene said, I also was— getting very sick. Because I lay in bed, and I remember doctors coming and flitting in and out of fever, or whatever. And um... she was a very strict lady. I had to feed her bunny rabbits— she had rabbits. Which she would then cook. I couldn’t eat them because I was taking care of them. And, in the summer, she had family that lived out on a farm, and I remember that it was a very long walk— it took almost half a day to get there. And there were other children there and I hated going there because they made fun of me because I had this number. And nobody defended me and I cried. I cried a lot.

What would they say to you?

I: They made fun of me because I had this number— that I'm a prisoner of some sort, they kept saying. I cried a lot. But, with everything, when the Jewish organization – which might have been the Joint Distribution... uh I don't know... Distribution Co., came to pull me out of that home, I had really come to like being Catholic. I thought it was like... nifty. You know, Church, the whole bit, rosary beads. And I didn't want to leave – you know I really did not – I was very upset. I remember the first orphanage where I came to, I met somebody who I am still friends with to this day – her name is Miriam, she lives in Israel. And she was about seven years older than me, and she kind of became my mother figure— but she had also had... was from Poland and we were both sitting there with the Rosary beads plotting our escape from this orphanage because we wanted to go back, you know.

Back to Poland?

I: Right.

This was when you were in Prague?

I: Yes.

So they removed you to Prague and from Prague you were taken to Paris.

I: Yeah, I was outside of Paris in 525, and that's where I was selected actually by Herbert Tenszer – he used to be a Congressman from here – and he chose me to come. And he promised me that he would send me back— promised. He didn't keep his promise.

So you came to New York at that time?

I: Yeah.

And Rene, you had an exodus out of Europe also?

R: Well, my exodus really tied to...related to her being taken in by somebody who lived out here on Long Island. A friend of Herbert Tenzer – was widely active in the organization – Mayer and Dina Slotkin – which is my name now – Rene Slotkin. And they took Irene in and that had to be maybe like '48.

I: Yeah, it was at one point before I came to them, I was with the Novicks, and they dragged out of me that I had a brother. Because I had never spoken about it and...

R: So they took Irene into their home, right here in the Five Towns, and then they started to search for missing Rene. And it is a long and fascinating story but uh... *Life Magazine* was somehow instrumental in locating me because this Dr. Kalina that I mentioned, had escaped. He had gone to Israel and somehow...

Was he Jewish?

R: Yes. And he had gotten hold of this *Life Magazine*, and in it, he saw Irene as Irene Guttman. The names clicked and he put it together – so he got in touch somehow with somebody here in New York and told them that I was living in Czechoslovakia with his sister. And they – the

Slotkins – sent somebody over into Europe to get me out. And there was a lot of red tape, I had to go through Germany and documentation and Switzerland for a while— not a direct route, and uh... I finally ended up...

I: 1950—

R: 1950, March 29, in Idlewild Airport, rainy night— I'll never forget that and we were reunited on that evening.

So you remembered your last name. There was no reason why you should remember that your last name was Guttman, but I suppose you did.

R: Well, why? That was my name, all the way through until... that was always my name— I knew my name.

I: The Polish lady changed my name from Renatta to Ivenka (ph 588). So that's how Irene came.

Unknown Woman: Zvi Spiegel also reinforced everybody's identity in the camp— for the boys. He would have the boys... a newcomer come in right away, and they were greeted in like a circle and everybody would introduce themselves so their names were constantly being reinforced and who they were.

End of Tape 1 counter number 598

Tape 2

I: It is only in retrospect now that June is talking about it a little that I do remember when I was in Poland, that every once in a while we would take this long walk – it seemed like a long walk to me – and we would shift through this mountain of ashes – looking – she told me I should be looking for gold. And it was just... I couldn't stand doing it... it was just...

So these were crematory ashes then?

I: It was just the worst. The worst. It was horrible. And in the town where she lived – right across – her apartment kind of faced this village square – but to the right, down the road, was where the Russian soldiers were housed and I recall that she would sometimes send me there with things to...

To trade or what?

I: I don't know what, it was always wrapped up. So she would make me go there, and I hated going there because I was afraid of these Russian soldiers-although they were very nice – I was scared of soldiers – it was a soldier and my recollection of soldiers was not somebody that 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.

R: I do want to say one thing about the Slotkin family. That it is amazing to me now that I am a parent and have children, that they had the willingness and uh...the charity to extend themselves to a war orphan like Irene and then not knowing at all what I would 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 am not sure that I could do it, knowing where I came from. I just don't know— I really have to say that these were the most marvelous people to be able to do such a thing. And uh... I think that there are other stories like that too. The Jewish community really went out at that time, once they knew what was going on really and in the open and things like this and I think that this should be known. I think the atrocities of what happened should be known, but I think that some of the good things that came about should also be publicized.

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

R: It was confirmed in '85, when we went to this museum in (ph 034), Israel. But I think I knew, right then and there when it happened.

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

R: It was found out.

June: Sometime in December 1941, he was taken to 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 that actually helped at Birkenau. That was when it was being built. They sent it political prisoners at that time and he fit that bill.

Because of his import/export background?

R: Therefore accusations of spy activity.

Unknown Woman: It seems that he was the first sent to the Petschek (Petschkův) (ph042) prison – which was actually the Petschek Palace and the Nazis turned it into an interrogation prison from where no one ever returned. We learned... got this from other people who lived in Czechoslovakia at the time and we met them in 1985.

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

Unknown Woman: Maybe you went to visit.

R: Maybe. I don't remember visiting or seeing, but I do remember going to this very sound, fortress-like structure and bringing packages.

Unknown Woman: There's a marker outside the Petschek now with the names of all the people who went through there— so it's possible that their dad's name is on it.

What was his name?

R: Herbert. Herbert Guttman.

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

R: Obviously I wasn't big enough to be picked for the team. No, I don't remember. I played soccer after the war in Czechoslovakia, a little bit like a national pastime, like baseball is here.

Unknown Woman: One of the older twins who talked to us in 1985 – and he just mentioned – that Rene was shepherded by this communist. Zvi Spegel set each person in kind of a 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 Grainfield – 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.

Interviewer's Notes:

Doorbell rings, Mrs. Slotkin (mother) enters. Some exchange of conversation between family members— no more interview on tape.