

Interview with IRVING ZALE

Holocaust Oral History Project

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Transcriber: Cynthia Donald

MS. BENDAYAN: I am Alexandra Bendayan. I am here doing part two of an interview with Irving Zale. Today is the 5th of November, 1993, and we're doing the interview in San Francisco for our Holocaust Oral History Project. John Rand is our producer.

Q. WHERE WE LEFT OFF FROM YOUR LAST INTERVIEW, IRVING, WAS AT THE END OF THE WAR AND YOUR LIBERATION. YOU WERE IN THE SLAVE LABOR CAMP OF --

A. Czestochowa.

Q. CZESTOCHOWA, YOU SAID. OKAY. AND CAN YOU BEGIN TALKING ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED ON THE DAY OF LIBERATION?

A. All right. The day of liberation was the 17th of January, 1945 when the camp was liberated by the Soviet Army. We were told that we can go in any direction that we choose. There was no unified repatriation going on, and I and my friend Robert choose to try to go back to Krakow, a city that I was living before World War II, and try to see whether my relatives came back, whether my parents came back.

So we picked ourselves up and we left the camp. We

spent two more days in Czestochova scrounging up food and clothing, and we tried to hitch a ride on a local train which did not get us very far. From there, we started walking, and we were picked up by a Polish peasant who drove us into Krakow. I arrived in Krakow about probably the 20th of January, 1945. The Polish peasant told us that he was surprised to have encountered some Jews who were liberated from a camp. I walked back to the street that my parents lived, and I was fortunate to have encountered my aunt and uncle who were able to survive in hiding in the city of (Kelsa). They came back to Krakow and claimed their vacant apartment. And I spent the rest of a year and a half with them in their apartment in Krakow.

Krakow at that time after liberation became again a very vibrant, very vital city, very politically oriented. It was the only city that had escaped large scale damage. And my objective was, of course, to try to find where my parents were.

The Jewish community was gradually able to organize a roster of survivors that came back, and one would check this roster every week to see which names were added to the list. And, regretfully, my parents names were never added.

In due time I established contact with my uncle who lived in New York who had left Poland just a few days before the war broke out. And he, of course, initiated my immigration to the United States.

Q. DO YOU REMEMBER HOW YOU FELT ON THAT DAY OF

LIBERATION?

A. Well, I felt very elated. At the same time I was very very lost, not knowing exactly which direction I should proceed. The most logical direction, of course, was the one that I chose, to go back to Krakow.

Q. AND SO YOU HAD OBVIOUSLY THIS BIG MIX OF FEELINGS. YOU DIDN'T KNOW IF YOUR PARENTS WERE ALIVE.

A. Yes. And I was in a strange city, and I knew I did not belong there. My roots were someplace else.

Q. AND HOW HAS THAT KIND OF PLAYED OUT THROUGH YOUR LIFE IN THE SENSE OF WAS IT A TRUE AND TOTAL LIBERATION FOR YOU?

A. Well, I was very young, and I realized I had to move out and shape my own life and do things without my parents' assistance. But, at the same time, I had relatives in Krakow that I was searching for, so, to me, the most logical place was to go back and see who would show up.

Q. DO YOU HAVE ANY SENSE OF SOME PART OF YOUR LIFE THAT IS LOST, MISSING, NOT QUITE THE SAME AS OTHER PEOPLE'S BECAUSE OF YOUR EXPERIENCES?

A. Well, you must understand that shortly after my liberation and my return to Krakow we were confronted with the horrendous news about what the Nazis have done in their various camps. And I think that I counted my lucky star that I was not in a concentration camp, I was not shoved into the interior of Germany, I was relatively close to the city that I came from,

and that I was still alive and kicking, and that I could structure my own life.

It was just horrible to read the stories about Auschwitz and Buchenwald and Mauthausen and all the other concentration camps and the horrors that went on there.

Q. SO YOU FELT RELATIVELY GOOD?

A. I felt relatively good, but at the same time I realized four years of my life and my youth were lost, and my life went on and I had to make the most of it. At the same time I realized also that Poland would not be my final place of residence.

Q. WHY WAS THAT?

A. Well, because we knew that the Poles were very anti-semitic, we knew that the Poles were very anti-Jewish in their attitude. They would have felt that more Jews should have been killed. They were surprised that so many Jews had survived, and I could just not see any economic or educational development in Poland anymore.

Q. HAVE YOU FELT THAT YOU HAVE HAD ANY CONTINUING AFFECTS FROM YOUR HOLOCAUST EXPERIENCES, SAY, IN ANY PHYSICAL PROBLEMS OR SPIRITUAL OR EMOTIONAL?

A. Yeah, physically I think I was undernourished, and I was glad to be back into some kind of a society where food was readily available. Meagerly at the time right after World War II food supplies in Poland were still not adequate, but I could

master my meals. I could fashion my meals, and I was glad to have at least connected with one of my relatives and that we could keep a household and we could resume some kind of a normal living. At the same time I had my physical and, knock on wood, I was in good shape.

Q. DID YOU EVER SUFFER FROM NIGHTMARES?

A. Yes, I have. Those I don't think will ever go away. As I mentioned to you, I periodically have them. I had one when I was in Washington, D.C. during my recent vacation, which sort of prompted me not to go to the Holocaust Museum.

Q. SO THAT IS --

A. So they still linger on.

Q. UH-HUH. THAT LINGERS ON. YOU DON'T HAVE ANY OTHER PHYSICAL PROBLEMS, THOUGH, DO YOU?

A. No. No, now that I'm older I have other ones, but none related to what I really could attribute to malnourishment.

Q. HOW HAS IT BEEN FOR YOU, THAT KNOWLEDGE THAT YOUR PARENTS WERE JUST PLUCKED AND MURDERED?

A. Well, I have since my liberation become to realize that there were various strata of concentration camps, there were various stratas of forced labor camps, and I'm glad I was on the lowest strata, able to survive, and tell the story today of what went on. And, subsequently, I have discovered that maybe in Czestochowa, as I mentioned in my first tape, the Polish Virgin Mary who was the patron of Czestochowa might have

had something to do with my being liberated. She sort of walked with some supernatural being that watched over me. That's the only explanation I could really have because a lot of Jews were liberated in Czestochowa in those two forced labor camps.

Q. SO EVEN THOUGH THIS WAS A CHRISTIAN SYMBOL, IT HAD MEANING TO YOU.

A. Yes, it did.

Q. DO YOU FEEL LIKE ANY OF YOUR RELIGIOUS OR SPIRITUAL BELIEFS CHANGED BECAUSE OF THE HOLOCAUST?

A. Yes. To some extent I think it had broadened my tolerance to other religions. I'm not one-hundred percent say that the Jewish religion is the number one that everybody should embrace. I think I have become a little more tolerant. And within Judaism I have become more tolerant to other branches of Judaism necessarily from the orthodox that do not follow the orthodox line. As long as you have your traditional roots in Judaism, it's fine if you have liberal, orthodox, conservative outlook. I think I became more tolerant to diversification.

Q. DO YOU FEEL LIKE YOU EVER HAD, YOU KNOW, BOUTS OF DEPRESSION OR SADNESS RELATED TO --

A. Yes, I do. I became a widow six years ago, and indirectly this might have influenced my outlook on life, been beaten down when I was a young man, and I have been beaten down in my middle age, I've been beaten down by a loss of my wife. I have also been beaten down by becoming a victim of the corporate

merger mania in 1985, but, thank God, I'm still alive. I could have wound up someplace else to make the most out of it.

Q. SOUNDS LIKE YOU TRY TO HAVE A POSITIVE POINT OF VIEW ABOUT ALL THIS?

A. Yeah. And, as I said, I like to have the younger generation learn from the experiences that I had so that I hope this will never happen again.

Q. WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS WHEN YOU PERHAPS THINK ABOUT THE LIFE YOU HAD COMPARED TO, SAY, ANY OTHER AMERICAN.

A. Well, that's a difficult question for me to answer because I know in America people were having horrendous problems too during the war. There were losses of relatives and sons and daughters in the military service. I went to Gettysburg. I saw some grave sites there that came out of World War II. I went to Arlington cemetery, and I was overwhelmed by the grave sites of soldiers killed in World War II. The astronauts that we lost in the shuttle experience several years ago. Those are vivid reminders that human life is very fragile and that you're glad that you're still around to talk about it.

Q. THIS IS TRUE. DO YOU HAVE ANY UNIQUE EXPERIENCE, SAY, IN YOUR LIFE COMPARED TO EVEN AMERICAN JEWISH PEOPLE?

A. Well, the thing that I became very cognizant of was to try to prevent a resurgence of these atrocities, and right now I'm very bothered with what is going on in Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia and how the United States government is keeping their

distance. It hurts me to see that people are still being haunted and slaughtered because of their religious beliefs, and some people are not tolerant of other faith. That bothers me.

Q. SO GOING BACK WHEN YOU WERE LIBERATED, THE FIRST THING, OBVIOUSLY, YOU WANTED TO DO IS SEE IF YOUR PARENTS WERE ALIVE.

A. Yes.

Q. YOU HADN'T SEEN THEM SINCE ~

A. Yes. That's right.

Q. AND YOU HAD NO KNOWLEDGE OR NEWS OF WHAT MIGHT HAVE HAPPENED TO THEM?

A. No. Let me advance this a little further. I came back to the United States, fortunately, in 1946. I established contact with my uncle who lived in New York. I went back to resume my education in New York. I'd like to advance this now a little. I graduated from high school in New York City, went on to City College, graduated from City College, but in 1953 the United States Army send me a You Are Wanted letter, and I served two years in the military in the United States Army.

At the time of my duty I was fortunate enough to be assigned to France, and in France I had earlier established contact with my uncle who lived in Cologne, the city that I was born. And in 1955 thanks to the United States Army being so close by, I was able to go back to Cologne and spent several weekends with my uncle and his wife and re-establish at least I

know that he lived through the war and the Soviet Union. He was also in a Soviet forced labor camp, but their labor camps were totally different. And I was glad to have come back to the city that I was born and seen the resurgence of a Jewish community in Cologne.

My uncle was relatively well off, was able to be the one that founded the Jewish community in Cologne, and it made me very -- felt very good to be back where my original roots were. See, my original roots were not exactly in Poland, as I mentioned earlier. We moved to Poland in 1938, but Cologne was still the city of my birth.

Q. DID YOU FIND YOUR OLD HOME THERE?

A. Yes. My old home was still there. That part of Cologne did not get bombed, and the Jewish community, the Jewish synagogue was reestablished in the former reformed synagogue in Cologne. Quite a huge edifice, but it was empty on high holidays. The structure was too grandious for the number of people that really attended services there.

Q. DID YOU EVER GET ANY REPARATIONS FROM YOUR --

A. Yes, because I was in the military. I put my uniform on, and my uncle went -- he knew the right officials to go to, and I was able get my reparations right there on the spot. That American uniform had quite an influence in those days.

Q. AND WHAT WAS YOUR UNCLE'S NAME?

A. My uncle's name was Joseph (Salar). He retained the

old spelling of my name. I changed my name when I came to the United States when I got my citizenship papers in 1951 partially on the urgings of my uncle who lived in New York, partially because nobody ever pronounced my name right. So I made --

Q. AND THE UNCLE WHO LIVED IN NEW YORK, WHAT WAS HIS NAME?

Polish
A. His name was Jacob Herzog. And he subsequently also left New York, came to San Francisco, and when we relocated to San Francisco in 1971 he was still alive. He subsequently passed away in 1973.

Q. SO NEITHER OF THESE WERE THE RELATIVES THAT WERE IN HIDING?

A. No.

Q. WHAT WERE THEIR NAMES?

Polish
A. Well, coming back, my uncle who lived in San Francisco's name was Jacob Herzog left Poland just a week before World War II broke out. So, naturally, he survived in the United States. He served in the military in the United States being a doctor. My other uncle, the one that lived in Cologne, whose name was Joseph Salar survived in a forced labor camp in Russia during World War II. And those were really my only --
Polish
and my aunt and uncle in Krakow. This was (Lotka) and (Zigman) Hoffman survived in hiding in Poland, and that was a true miracle.

Q. DID YOU KNOW THEIR STORY?

A. Yes. In part only. My uncle was in touch with another veterinarian, he was a veterinarian, who was able to hide him in another city, and they survived. I don't know much more other details.

Q. OKAY. DID YOU HAVE A BAR MITZVAH?

A. Yes, I was bar mitzvahed in 1938 in Cologne just prior to our leaving Cologne in the orthodox synagogue.

Q. DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF A PRACTICING JEW TODAY?

A. By the way, I want to inject that the orthodox synagogue in Cologne was in the downtown section, was completely demolished, and on its place is now the Cologne opera house, but they put in a commemorative plaque that before Kristallnacht this was the site of the Jewish synagogue.

Q. HOW DID IT GET DEMOLISHED?

A. It got demolished in Crystal Night and then got demolished in 1944 and '5 in an air raid.

Q. ANYWAY, I WAS ASKING IF YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF A PRACTICING JEW?

A. Yes, I am. And I am very happy to know that I'm now a swinger. I both enjoy the reform and I both enjoy the orthodox, and I do enjoy the conservative. And I think they all have something to say for themselves.

Q. OKAY. GOING BACK, CAN YOU REMEMBER, WERE YOUR PARENTS FEELING FEARFUL IN LIKE THE MID THIRTIES OR WHENEVER. I BELIEVE THAT --

A. Yeah, I think I covered that on my first tape. I think we saw the handwriting on the wall. There was just no way for us to get out of Poland. We didn't have the financial resources for a Uruguian passport for several tens of thousands of dollars, so we were just pushed against the wall.

Q. DID YOUR PARENTS HAVE ANY KIND OF PLAN OR NOTION OF WHAT THEY WERE GOING TO DO IF THERE WAS WAR?

A. Yeah. When I was separated from any parents my father told me that when the war is over I'm going to meet them in England because at the time I also had an aunt that lived in England, and we would all meet at my aunt's house in England. That was the plan at --

Q. THE PLAN WAS YOU WOULD SURVIVE THE BEST YOU COULD THROUGH IT.

A. Yeah.

Q. AND THEN LEAVE AS SOON AS YOU WERE ---

A. Yeah. Yeah.

Q. BUT I GUESS THEY COULDN'T PROBABLY DO ANYTHING BETTER, I MEAN ANYTHING SPECIFIC.

A. No. No. Things were so wild and uncertain that you couldn't predict any --

Q. I KNOW THAT YOU WENT WITH YOUR MOTHER TO A SMALL VILLAGE.

A. Yes. That's all covered --

Q. BUT I WAS WONDERING WHY YOUR FATHER DIDN'T GO WITH

YOU?

A. My father was also with us.

Q. OH, HE WAS?

A. Yeah. Yeah.

Q. I THOUGHT THE REFERENCE WAS TO YOUR MOTHER.

A. No, no. My father and mother were all with us in that village, yeah.

Q. OKAY. I WAS WONDERING IF YOU WOULD ALSO ELABORATE A LITTLE. YOU SPOKE ABOUT THE SHOCK YOU FELT WHEN YOU WENT TO POLAND AND MET THE JEWISH GHETTO FOR THE FIRST TIME, AND I WAS WONDERING IF YOU CAN REMEMBER ANYMORE DETAILS OF THAT GHETTO?

A. Well, when I returned to Krakow I did go to where the Jewish ghetto was, but the Nazis had plenty of time to demolish all the signs that there was a ghetto. The walls were broken down, Poles had moved into the area. It looked like a natural part of the city that it was before the ghetto was instituted. There were no more traces of any signs, walls, or anything that this was a Jewish ghetto at one time. As soon as the ghetto was liquidated, the Nazis demolished all the visible signs, and the Poles moved in.

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Q. WHEN YOU WERE IN ~ WERE YOUR PARENTS WORKING, DOING JOBS THERE?

A. Yes. We all worked at different locations.

Q. WHAT WERE YOU YOUR PARENTS DOING THERE? DO YOU KNOW?

A. My mother worked in a laundry, and my father worked in

another one of these recycling stations, I would call them now. They were metal recycling stations.

Q. METAL WAS COLLECTED?

A. Yeah, old trash cans were flattened out and recycled by hand, you know, to be reused.

Q. I BELIEVE THAT'S WHERE YOU SAID YOU WERE INVOLVED IN SOME KIND OF CLEAN-UP OPERATION TOO.

A. Yeah. The ghetto. I used to go into the ghetto every day, and we used to clean out the belongings of the people that were rounded up and sort everything according to the Nazi instructions. China went one place, and books went someplace else, and very systematic dismantlement of their properties.

Q. DO YOU HAVE ANY MEMORIES OF WHAT YOU OBSERVED GOING IN AND OUT OF THE GHETTO REGULARLY?

A. Well, there were no more people living in the ghetto, it was just --

Q. THEY WERE ALL GONE?

A. Yeah, they were all gone.

Q. SO YOU WEREN'T DOING THIS DURING THE PERIOD OF SAY --

A. It was just like walking -- like a thief walks into a house and takes out all the belongings. There were no more tenants in these homes.

Q. SOUNDS LIKE THIS WAS VERY DIFFICULT FOR YOU?

A. Well, it was. But at the same time it gave me an opportunity to be working outside the camp because the

situations in the camp were very, very bad. So I would rather work --

Q. FOR INSTANCE?

A. Well, you were under constant surveillance, and here in the ghetto you worked with the Kapo. Surveillance was not that rigorous. But I would like to advance, if I may, to after the liberation.

Q. OKAY.

A. And going back to 1955 when I again visited Cologne and was able to see the places where I went to school and participate in the -- went back to the Jewish cemetery because some of my grandparents were buried there, and I went to Synagogue for services. And I would like to advance it one more step.

In 1993 I went back to Cologne on an invitation of the city government who instituted a reunion for the former Jewish citizens of Cologne. This time around they couldn't do enough for us. There were receptions, there were discussions. We were taken to different sites, we were involved in talking to the Jewish Christian Friendship Society, the equivalent of the Holocaust Research Center in Cologne.

For the first time I realized a phenomenal discovery that escaped my mind when I was younger, due to the bombing raid in Cologne, they discovered a mikvah that went back to the Medieval ages, to the 14th Century. It was situated right in

front of where the current city hall is. The mikvah was completely excavated. It was German precision. All the dimensions were collated in a pamphlet, in a booklet, and the mikvah is now accessible to touring on certain days. It has been enclosed with a glass dome. It has now become a historical site because it's right smack in front of city hall.

And the Burghermeister was very responsive to us, giving us all kind of literature and talking about historical development of what Jews had contributed to the city of Cologne. It made me feel very good until two days later I was confronted with the riot by Turkish guest workers who had just gone through a memorial service for some of the Turkish guest workers who had been killed by skinheads a week or two earlier.

The riot police was in full force in downtown areas and shopping areas, some windows had been broken in the suburban areas where the Turks lived, and some of the windows had scrawled on it "This once was a Jewish store." which took us back to Kristallnacht.

It was, of course, a reminder that things in Germany are still not stable, that we still have a ultra-right French who uses every opportunity to stage riots against guest workers and foreigners, and this was a very unpleasant reminder, and it sort or eradicated all of the wonderful speeches that I heard a few days earlier.

Q. DID YOU FEEL TERRORIZED AGAIN?

A. No, I didn't feel terrorized, but, personally, as a Jew, seeing these things and seeing the mentality of the skinheads and ultraright fringes, I couldn't help but getting flashbacks.

Q. UH-HUH.

A. So when you ask about the Holocaust having a reminder, some of these reminders keep coming back in different shapes.

Q. AND WHAT ABOUT THE REGULAR NORMAL GERMAN POPULATION IN COLOGNE? DID YOU FEEL ANY --

A. Well, the down in the street German is very, very cognizant of this fact. There were signs on buildings, for instance, saying that the citizens of Cologne come from Belgium, Austria, Yugoslavia, Rumania, we're all one city and one brotherly love, but you know that there is the undercurrent of young people who have been disenfranchised, who have not been able to find jobs, who have been indoctrinated by their old grandparents that every time there is a reversal, the Jews are to blame for it. And they're a minority, but they're there, and they come to the surface every so often.

Q. IS THERE A BIG POPULATION OF JEWS IN COLOGNE?

A. Yeah. Cologne has a large Jewish population primarily because it's also the center of the Israeli ligations and embassy who is maintained in Bonn, and all the commercial facilities that Israel maintains, the Israelis associated, live in Cologne. And there's a lot of Israelis that are business

people that boosted the Jewish population in Cologne.

Q. WHAT ABOUT DO YOU THINK THERE ARE A REASONABLE NUMBER OF ORIGINAL GERMAN JEWS LIVING IN COLOGNE?

A. Yeah, the original citizens, Jewish citizens, of Cologne, I would say about one-quarter of the total Jewish population, the rest is all Jews that came in from other areas of Germany. And you now have an influx of Russian Jews into Germany, Jews that would like to escape Russia but do not wish to go to Israel but find Germany a haven, again, paradoxically, as it was 1925. Employment opportunities for educated Russian citizens are available, and they make their way into Germany and stay there.

Q. DID YOU EVER REVISIT POLAND?

A. No, I have no desire to go back to Poland. I have maintained my linguistic skills in the Polish language every so often with a cousin of mine, but that's the extent. I have no desire to revisit Poland.

Q. SO WERE THE ONLY RELATIVES WHO SURVIVED THOSE UNCLES THAT YOU NAMED?

A. Yeah. And I have a cousin who lives in Philadelphia who survived the war, too. She just moved to Philadelphia.

Q. SO IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU HAVE NO RELATIVES SURVIVING IN POLAND.

A. No.

Q. AND THE ONE UNCLE IN GERMANY.

A. Yeah. He passed away too now. His wife is the only contact with me. And that's the only reason I went back to Germany, because if I did not have the invitation from the Cologne city government for the reunion and my aunt, I would have had no motive going back to Cologne.

Q. DO YOU FEEL LIKE YOU ACTIVELY BOYCOTT GERMANY?

A. Yes. There are times where I feel that I don't like to buy German products. I'm very, very sensitive to reading the papers and picking up the various bits about the progress of the German Free Party, the inroads that they're making in the election, and I'm very alert. I'm very suspicious that if things go -- economically reversals are going on in Germany, the remaining Jews will be the first ones to feel the brunt of the -- that mentally hasn't changed. When peace and prosperity is, it's not prevalent, but when recession sets in, I can see it happening. One of stories I wrote about a year ago is when they had this terrible backlash against foreigners, and it can flare up any time again.

Q. OF COURSE JEWS WERE NOT FOREIGNERS.

A. Yeah, but you see, in today's Germany, Jews are no longer equated as Jews. They're a minority. They're a minority just like the Turks are, just like the Yugoslavs and all the guest workers. They're all bunched into that same pot.

Q. EVEN THOUGH THEY ARE GERMAN BORN.

A. Yeah. The neo-right will classify them as

non-Germans.

Q. DO YOU FEEL INHIBITED OR NEGATIVE WHEN YOU DEAL WITH GERMAN PEOPLE?

A. Yes, I do. My language skills in German are fluent, but when I meet Germans I'm very standoffish. I can't warm up to them because despite the fact that they're very polite, they're very courteous, danke schön and betta schön, you know, but I feel there's a hidden -- and I despise if I see German tourists in San Francisco. I would just love to bump them off the sidewalk.

They're arrogant, they feel that now again they have a -- they don't have a military superiority, thank God, but they have an economic superiority which they like to show off at ever opportunity.

Q. SO AS YOU SAID, YOU GOT IN TOUCH WITH YOUR UNCLE IN THE UNITED STATES, YOU CAME TO THE UNITED STATES AND RESUMED YOUR SCHOOLING. HOW DID YOU DO ALL THIS? WHAT FINANCED YOU?

A. Well, I worked hard, and I saved and was able to save money and eventually got married and got a job, and my company relocated me to San Francisco, and we made a new go on the West Coast.

Q. WHAT WAS YOUR WIFE'S NAME?

A. My wife's maiden name you mean?

Q. HER WHOLE NAME.

A. It was Phyllis Kellerman. Phyllis June Kellerman.

She came from a Brooklyn family. She was a Yankee, but we had a lot of things in common. We got married in New York in 1958, moved out the West Coast in 1971, and she passed away in 1987.

Q. WHERE DID YOU MEET?

A. We met in New York. We were members of an American Youth Hostel group. We used to go on hikes on weekends, and we shared many of the same things in common. Geographically she was well situated, not too far from where I used to live, and similar background, and so brought us together.

Q. SHE WASN'T A SURVIVOR THOUGH?

A. No. She was a Yankee.

Q. A YANKEE. SO SHE, OBVIOUSLY, COULD BRING YOU A FAMILY TOO.

A. That's right. That's right. But I have a daughter and a son. My daughter lives in Studio City, is married now. My son is still a bachelor. He lives in Indiana. Still studying, and, hopefully, will be able to get a job after he graduates.

Q. WHAT IS HE STUDYING?

A. He studies sports management at Indiana State University.

Q. AND WHAT ARE YOUR CHILDREN'S NAMES?

A. My son's name is Jonathan (Set) and my daughter is Beverly (Shrum). And her married name is (Rutsgers).

Q. (RUTSGER)?

*Becky
Rutsgers*

A. Yeah, she married a very nice conservative Jewish boy. Lived in Los Angeles and, nilly willy, she is a southern Californian now.

Q. DO YOU HAVE GRANDCHILDREN.

A. No, not yet. Now, if you like, I would like to read one of my articles --

Q. I WOULD LIKE THAT. GO AHEAD

A. -- that I wrote about my mother. I covered my father in my --

Q. YES.

A. -- I think in my earlier tape. This is an article I wrote on April 27th of last year. "The Way She Looked To Me." Between the haze, the sunshine, the storm and thunder, this is the best recollection of my mother. She was raised in an intellectual environment in Krakow attempting to obtain a doctors degree at (Yagellen) University. Social economic upheavals in a new nation of Poland prevented her from reaching this goal. She married my father, and together with a wave of Polish Jews seeking the sunnier economic climate of the Rymer Republic moved to Cologne.

My mother of short stature with a round face and ever gleaming brown eyes must have endured a cultural shock of adjusting to life in Germany in the early 1920s. I recall my mother as always being in a typical role of a German hausfrau, busy with domestic chores and shopping and taking care of the

baby. At one point of her life, of course, I came into the world. I entered the world as the most difficult child via C-section delivery, the difficulty of which I was constantly reminded of in later years.

Only hazy memories remain of my mother's disposition and attitudes during the very early years of my babyhood. Gradually, though, I realized that I became the sunshine in my mother's life and was showered with affection and devotion. At every opportunity my mother would seek the sunshine in the rose garden or the nearby park. From spring to early winter she would pack a basket with fruits, sandwiches, and roll out the carriage to soak up sunshine and fresh air in the park. Roses are still my passion and enjoyment.

My mother was an extrovert par excellence. Always conversing on the park benches with lady friends. From the C-section delivery to my eating habits, always difficult. To underline the later difficulty, she would whip up a banana and force feed me. In later years I learned to hate bananas even though they were high-priced fruit.

After grammar school my mother took great interest in my scholastic work. She would review my notebooks, correct my spelling, and give me useful hints for my classwork. Her interest in intellectual affairs was also evident in her penchant for reading. I would constantly return books to the public library for her. She would give me a renewal list for

books by one author at a time. Music and an interest in the theater was also in her veins. She was very fond of the Viennese operettas and could hum and sing many selections from the "Merry Widow," "Gypsy Baron," "Frau Luna" from memory.

The clouds began to gather in 1933 with the rise of the Third Reich. My mother's attitude and behavior took a somber note. Life under the Nazis shook us all up, but my mother took it the worst. She stopped humming all those lovely melodies from operettas, and our excursion to the rose garden became less frequent. Gone were also the conversations with the other women on the park benches.

My parents returned to Poland in 1938, and for a brief time my mother was once more happy with familiar surroundings with her sister, two brothers and many friends who resided in Krakow. I would prefer closing the recollection of my mother at this point. I would be leaving with memories of a woman engulfed in the joie de vive, a woman who knew how to bring sunshine into life on a dreary day, a woman who had to struggle for existence and survival during the most bizarre periods of the 20th century.

But the storm brewing in Germany spilled with a thunderous crash into Poland in the year 1939. I became separated from my mother in the fall of 1943 never to see her again. My cousin met my mother in the closing days of World War II at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. She was but a

walking skeleton. My mother was liberated by the United States Army in May of 1945, and perished eight days later.

Q. WHAT A TERRIBLE TRAGEDY. SO YOU NEVER WERE ABLE TO SEE HER AGAIN?

A. No. Now I want to read the other story into the record because you had asked me earlier about what my attitudes were of the Germans. This is an addition to my diary that I kept, and I call it "Encore." It is Thanksgiving Day 1992, and 43 years have passed since the last entry in my memoirs. In the intervening years my personal life underwent many changes. I served in the United States Army, was married to a beautiful lady only to lose her five years ago to cancer, fathered a daughter and a son, moved from New York City to San Rafael in Northern California, and more.

During the intervening years tumultuous events occurred all over the globe. There were many revolutions, wars, famines, new independence movements, the creation of the state of Israel, break up of social mores and customs. And then there was the reunification of the two Germanies in 1990 and the total collapse of the Bolshevik empire. With the reunification of Germany came once again the creeping rise of fascism. For this reason I'm compelled to write again and to keep vigilant before the fires begin to engulf us again.

After the deNazification courts completed their task most of what became the bundesrepublikana replica Deutschland

pulling

entered a relative period of calm and economic well-being. The German industrial complex contributed once again to rapid economic development. This led to the (richest) wonder years of 1950s and 1960s. At the same time West Germany attempted to embrace democratic principles and to redirect its energy to shed the arrogant nationalistic attitudes.

With increased prosperity at home, Germany again marched to the forefront of an economic power to be reckoned with in the world, and nationalistic sentiments rose. Also, Germany had to look for cheap labor to keep up the economic boom. This time cheap labor had to be imported from the underprivileged parts of Eastern Europe, North Africa and the Far East. Jews and gypsies were no longer available for Germany's factories. But prosperity reigned in the Bundesrepublik, the German Democratic Republic. East Germany had embraced the Stalinist structure of economic development along totalitarian lines.

pulling

The German Communists were also quick to develop the social structure of the foundation of the Nazi regimentation ranging from young pioneer youths organization to industrial management, not to forget the party bureaucracy. For most East Germans their social and economic fiber only changed in color from brown to red. But as the German proverb has it, (alles hat ein ender nur die Wartstat svie), all has one end, only a sausage has two, the world economy started to rattle in the late

1970s and through the 1980s and into the 1990s.

With this instability and shakiness in the world economy came a stock realization the Germany that the (workshops) wonder years may grind to a halt. For the first time came layoff in the work force, and the word unemployment was heard in the streets. Simultaneously, discontent started to rise in East Germany. For many years East Germans had been jealous of the prosperity of their Western brethren. East Germans started their mass exodus from the Red paradise. Those that were unable to make it to West Germany regrouped a totalitarian Communist attitudes and adopted a Neo-Nazi philosophy.

With the onset of Germany unification this bubble of discontent finally broke. The world became confronted with two interlocking phenomena. One, West Germany's (workshops) wonder came to a halt. There were a diminishing need for East European guest arbiter and increased need to reemploy West Germanies idle and thrown out of the work force. Two, East Germany (workshops cronkite) was so severe that only a mass of financial infusion of West Germany capital could heal the rundown economy.

Lurking in the background were the discontent young people who began to let out their frustration of being removed from an economic prosperity in West Germany or economic disparity in East Germany. They were seeking an emotional outlet. For similar reason as during the depression of the

1920s they were searching for a scapegoat. And so the young skinheads or Neo-Nazis went on a hunt to harass and even kill the very guest arbiter from Turkey, Yugoslavia, Greece, Algeria they had earlier invited to assist in building the (workshop's) wonder.

The young Nazis had excellent coaches. It was none other than their peers who did escape from the de-Nazification courts still wearing their tattoos with swastikas on their arms and now passing on their wisdom to a younger generation of hoodlums. The original germs from the horrible Hitler years were not wiped out but have found a new breeding ground. The young skinheads have been inoculated by their elders to once again hate and kill a minority judged inferior and not in Germany's best interest.

Encore for Germany. The rest of the world need not to applaud. Get off your seat, become aware, register your disapproval. We must be alert that in Germany history has a way of repeating itself in a very short time span. San Rafael, Thanksgiving Day, 1992.

Q. YES. I'M GLAD YOU READ THAT. SO IT SOUNDS --

A. And that probably will summarize the way I look at things and the way I feel about Germany and my vigilant attitude about them.

Q. YES. I WAS GOING TO ASK YOU. IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU FEEL THAT, AS YOU SAID, CONDITIONS ARE RIPE, THEY COULD HAPPEN AGAIN.

A. (Nods head.)

Q. DO YOU FEEL IT COULD HAPPEN OTHER PLACES BESIDES GERMANY?

A. Yes, perhaps, but not to that extent. Not to that extent. There's a certain ingrained totalitarian anti-foreigner hate in the German frame of mind that I can think of only maybe one or two other places in the world that could spring up again.

Q. LIKE, FOR EXAMPLE?

A. Well, it probably could spring up in Poland. Poland has very few Jews left, has no foreigners, however. And it's springing up in Yugoslavia.

Q. DID YOU EVER EXPERIENCE ANY KINDNESSES FROM GERMANS, POLES, UKRANIANS DURING YOUR SLAVE LABOR YEARS?

A. No. What do you mean? During my --

Q. DURING WHEN YOU WERE IN THE CAMPS.

A. Oh, well, we know that the Poles hated Jews. They were very happy to see the Jews being eradicated. Polish and Russian mentality, as a matter of fact, is the same way. We have to think we should watch things very closely in Russia because the few Russian Jews that are left there, if economic situation comes push to shove, are going to be in the forefront of being annihilated.

Q. WHAT I MEAN IS WHETHER --

A. And Ukrainians are notoriously anti-Jewish oriented. To just give you an example, I have a cousin of my wife who was

considering working in the Ukraine for an American company, went to the Ukraine for an interview, went to Kiev and had the interview, and within a week decided to pick up his heels and leave because he felt the situation was so unstable. And as soon as they found out that he was a Jew, although an American, they started not exactly discriminating, but giving him all kinds of obstacles. And he decided, what the hell, he does not need it. So the germs are there. They're just waiting for the time to come and sprout again.

Q. I WAS WONDERING ALSO WHETHER YOU EVER EXPERIENCED ANY KINDNESS FROM INDIVIDUALS DURING YOUR WAR YEARS BECAUSE I BELIEVE YOU SAID --

A. You must remember, we weren't in contact with any individuals. We were kept under close watch by the German guards, and we knew how the Germans felt about the Jews.

Q. DID YOU EVEN RUN INTO EVEN A GUARD THAT YOU FELT WAS MORE HUMAN?

A. No. I don't want to preclude, I don't want to say that all Germans are Jew haters. I don't want to say that all Poles are Jew haters. All I want to say is that the national sentiment by and large is Jew hating.

Q. YES. I UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU MEAN. STILL, I WAS WONDERING IF UNDER THOSE HORRIBLY --

A. Sure, there were Poles that saved Jews. My aunt and uncle were saved by Jews. There were -- you go to (yabishan)

you'd see numerous sign posts of Polish people who were the (brightest) Gentiles who hid Jews, but by and large, I think the Polish mentality and German mentality is very quick to snap back into an anti-Jewish and anti foreigner sentiments if the economy, if their well-being is threatened.

Q. I APPRECIATE WHAT YOU'RE SAYING. I WAS JUST TRYING TO SEE WHETHER YOU EVER HAD ANY EXPERIENCE IN THOSE HORRIBLE IMPRESSIONABLE TIMES OF PEOPLE.

A. Well, yeah, I had plenty of them.

Q. WISHED TO BE KIND, I MEAN.

A. Somebody who was kind?

Q. YES.

A. Well, there were kind Germans. I read the article in my first session about the German supervisor in the concentration camp who took us into his confidence. He was a Communist, and his outlook was a little more tolerant. But the German Communists have gone down in defeat, so they're not around anymore.

Q. WHEN YOU WERE READING THE ONE ABOUT YOUR MOTHER YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO FOOD, AND I WAS WONDERING IF YOU STILL HAVE --

A. No, now I eat bananas once in awhile.

Q. YOU EAT BANANAS?

A. Yeah. But that was a characteristic thing when I was growing up.

Q. WELL, I PRESUME ALSO THAT BY THE TIME YOU WERE LIBERATED YOU WERE PROBABLY VERY THIN. MAYBE YOU WEREN'T AS STARVED AS --

A. When I was liberated I ate any food that came into my hand. I had a starving for sweets, a starving for fruit, a starving for meats. I was denied all these things. And I will tell you something else, some of these starvings are still with me today. And despite a fact I'm cognizant of my diet, I still adore chocolates, I eat bananas, I love fruit, and I feel that I will never resort to any artificial fruit-like sweetener or --

Q. MEANING SACRINE?

A. Yeah, Sacrine. No, that's a no, no. I'll either have the real stuff or no more because that again brings back flashbacks of what occurred during the war years when I had to use artificial sweeteners, artificial coffee, artificial margarine and stuff. Took me a long time to get used to margarine.

Q. SO THAT WAS ANOTHER KIND OF LEGACY?

A. Right. Right.

Q. IS THAT YOU HAVE THESE FOOD CRAVINGS.

A. Right. Right. And I think you'll find this among a lot of other survivors.

Q. OH, YES. OH, YES.

A. And, actually, bread too. I still cannot throw out bread. I feel bread is very precious. I would rather give it

to the birds rather than dump it into a garbage can.

Q. YES. SO IN MANY WAYS, MAYBE SOME LARGE, SOME SMALL, THAT WAS LIKE SUCH AN INDELIBLE EXPERIENCE.

A. Right. There is a lot to be learned from all this. And I think that I would like to enjoy life for as long as I can because the best years of my life were wasted. And it made me more of a political animal too. I'm more aware of what goes on within our government, within German government, and Germany has got a long way to go to prove they're (brittle) and democratic among democratic nations. I was very shook up when the reunification took place. And I would have loved to see two Germanies at least for a long, long time to come. The Communists loused up their end of it, and the other one just got overwhelmingly prosperous.

Q. DID YOU EVER THINK OF GOING TO ISRAEL? I MEAN TO LIVE.

A. No. I'm a firm believer that a Jewish state should exist, but I don't think I could adopt myself to the hardship. And ideologically I'm committed to the survival of the state of Israel, but living is a little different.

Q. YOU WERE SAYING THAT THERE ARE A LOT OF LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM THE HOLOCAUST.

A. Yeah. The lessons are to be learned that people have to be tolerant of each other, that even there's a diversification of viewpoints, there's a diversification of

ethnic, religious, social, cultural background, you don't just go slamming at each other and going to war and fighting and killing and maiming each other. I'm very appalled about Yugoslavia.

As a matter of fact, the friend that I was liberated from the concentration camp came from Yugoslavia, had longstanding correspondence with him until he passed away and I had hoped to visit Yugoslavia one of these days, and I'm just appalled of how bad things are going, and the Muslims I feel very sorry just as I feel sorry for the other nationalities that are being bombed and maimed there, and the world is just sitting on their behind and they'll do nothing about it.

I'm also very appalled of what's going on in other parts of the world where people are being just harassed because of their religious or ethnic beliefs.

Q. THIS FRIEND OF YOUR, ROBERT.

A. Yeah.

Q. IT SOUNDS LIKE HE MUST HAVE BEEN A GREAT SOURCE OF COMFORT TO YOU.

A. Yeah. Well, he was much older than I am. He was much more compassionate, much more fatherly. I needed a father. I was only 17 at the time, and he was a good friend and a good adult to look up to. Very wise and very experienced and gave me a lot of useful hints of how to survive.

Q. FOR EXAMPLE? CAN YOU REMEMBER ANY?

A. Well, yeah, he would share some of his rations with me sometimes. He said he was not very hungry and I was young and I needed more food. And he also told me to be calm and things will look up, we will get out of this mess some day because he went through the depression, I guess, of the 1920s, and he got hit very hard. And he had a more optimistic outlook on life.

Q. YOU PROBABLY WERE A COMFORT TO HIM TOO.

A. Yes, to some extent, I guess. You needed friends, and we managed to be working together in many phases. Though we came from a completely different background, we were able to adopt each other and --

Q. WAS HE JEWISH TOO?

A. Yeah, of course.

Q. SO HE DECIDED TO RETURN TO YUGOSLAVIA AFTER THE WAR?

A. Yeah, he went back right after the repatriation started. He went back, and he lived for another -- Robert lived for another 10 or 12 years.

Q. BUT YOU NEVER SAW HIM AGAIN?

A. No. I got multiple invitations to visit, but I never took it up. It was too far to go.

Q. DO YOU TALK TO YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT YOUR CAMP EXPERIENCES?

A. Yeah. I would like to now have them have at least one of the copies of the tapes that you will make available to them.

Q. SURE.

A. They like to push it under the rug.

Q. THEY DO HUH?

A. (Nods head.)

Q. YOU'VE TRIED TO TALK TO THEM ABOUT IT.

A. Yeah, but I don't like to -- when I see that I have exhausted my talk, I don't like to push it any further. In due time I think they will know. I'm glad to see there's so much written about it in the newspapers and papers. They do not have to have daddy's first account of it. They can have other accounts, and maybe that will be more meaningful to them.

It's really amazing to see what kind of diversification there is in literature about the Holocaust coming out. And my writing, I think, is very personal, but someday I would like to -- who knows, maybe I will write a book.

Q. MAYBE. PLUS THE PORTRAITS YOU HAVE TRIED TO MAKE OF YOUR PARENTS WILL ALSO, I THINK, BE VALUABLE TO YOUR CHILDREN WHO NEVER KNEW THEM.

A. Yeah. Well, they have a copy of all my articles that I did when I wrote, and I'm glad I took this writing class because I needed a little boost to get me off and use the typewriter and project something. And I'd like some day -- as I said, this article about Germany, I'm very alert. I read the papers, and maybe I'm a little too attentative to the news that comes out of Germany, but I just can't help it. And this Turkish uprising in Cologne will stay in my mind for a long

time.

Q. YOU WERE --

A. It eradicated completely, I mean it wiped out completely all the nice talk that the Burgermeister had, and there were 50 Jewish families invited for this reunion. It wiped all these impressions out. It was like it never happened.

Q. DID YOU RECOGNIZE ANY OF THE OTHER JEWISH FAMILIES THERE?

A. No. No.

Q. DID YOU TALK ABOUT THIS HORRIBLE EXPERIENCE WITH THE TURKISH WORKERS? DID THEY HAVE THE SAME REACTION?

A. Oh, I'm sure they did. I'm sure that we all did. But you see what happened that was unique with me is I went out, and I happened to just pass through that neighborhood where the Turkish people lived. They all live like in the ghetto. There is a certain block of streets. And I don't think the other Jews that were there in Cologne ever went into that area. I just happened to be passing by there on a trolley car ride. I wasn't even aware that that's where they lived. I was on my own that day.

But I'm sure that the impression that they got by seeing all that riot police in the downtown area brought back because, let's face it, the uniforms haven't changed very much since the Nazis and the attitude of the police with the flaring and the bullhorns and all that sort of thing, you know. The

colors were slightly different, but the basic ideas behind how they were curbing this violence was about the same as during the Nazis when the storm troopers tried to break Jewish stores.

Q. WERE YOU EVER AWARE --

A. This time they protected stores, but, anyway, the analogy was there of what it looked many years before that.

Q. DO YOU KNOW WHAT WAS THE OUTCOME OF ALL THIS? WAS THERE ANY LEGAL PROCEEDINGS AGAINST THESE PEOPLE?

A. Well, they caught the guy that did it, and he was between a fire bog and a school dropout and mentally retarded. They could not find any connections between him and the political parties, but I take that with a grain of salt. The political parties, the right wing parties must have been behind some of it. They just used him as a puppet. But he eventually is going to go to a mental institution or something because he was a 16 year old student who never -- came from a broken home, the typical -- you know, the right wing party, the hoodlum party made an impression on him, so he was sympathetic to their feelings, but he was the one that set fire to that home in Solengen. That's where the family was murdered, the four woman and I think two children that were burned.

Q. WERE THERE ANY FURTHER COMMENTS BY THE BURGERMEISTER AFTER THESE EVENTS?

A. No, because our reception was before this happened. You see, this was about half a week before they started rioting,

and the rioting only was as a result of this funeral service. They had burial services for those victims on that day.

Q. DID YOU FIND OUT AFTER THE WAR WHAT WAS THE FATE OF YOUR FATHER?

A. Yeah, my uncle was helpful on that. I got a death certificate. My father died of a heart attack in Mauthausen concentration camp. I have a certificate from the Red Cross some time in early 1944. And my mother died of some other kidney failure in Bergen-Belsen, and I got that Red Cross certificate.

Q. SO DID YOU KNOW WHAT THEIR ROUTE WAS AFTER (FLASHANT)? DID THEY GO DIRECTLY --

A. They went directly to Bergen-Belsen and Mauthausen, yeah.

Q. I GUESS YOU AT LEAST KNOW YOUR MOTHER AT LEAST MADE IT TO LIBERATION.

A. Yeah, my cousin saw her. She said she was just a walking -- for that reason I have no desire -- I would have never gone back to Germany had I not had my surviving aunt there, and had I not had the invitation for the reunion. And they paid my way.

Q. AND SO YOU DID GET -- YOU TOLD ME EARLIER YOU GOT THE REPARATIONS FOR YOUR GOODS FROM COLOGNE.

A. Yeah.

Q. WAS THERE ANY KIND OF REPARATIONS THROUGH THESE

FACTORIES THAT MAYBE --

A. Yeah, you see when I was in the military they offered me a settlement, and I took it because in those years I was single, I didn't know where I would be. I should have opted for a pension because people obviously that had pension milked them for a little more money, but I took a one-time settlement and invested it in those years. I was younger and not so wise. But I have no regret. It was blood money anyway.

Q. YEAH. DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER MEMORIES OR --

A. No, except as I mentioned in my earlier interview today, I forewent my Holocaust admission ticket to the Holocaust museum in Washington, gave it to a younger person who was very appreciative. And I think it's really the younger generation that should be educated because there's still a lot of disbelievers out there. We have some disbelievers in Canada who are very vociferous about that this never happened. And the more we can do to promulgate and interview survivors and have them tell their stories, the better the world will understand.

And we have to be vigilant about the places where Jews were not liked and make sure that no harm is done to them and try to rescue as many as we can out of Russia, out of the Ukraine, out of (Galla Russia), out of Poland, and, eventually, those countries will become (Mutenrhein), and Hitler will laugh in his grave that this happened.

Q. DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER MESSAGES OR ANYTHING YOU WOULD

LIKE TO --

A. No. I can really think of very little. I think I covered most of it. I read most of my material. And I'm appreciative of what you people are doing.

Q. WELL, THANK YOU, AND THANK YOU VERY, VERY MUCH FOR DOING THE DID INTERVIEW. HOW HAS IT BEEN FOR YOU? HAS IT BEEN HARD TO GO BACK INTO TIME AND BRING UP THESE SUBJECTS?

A. Yeah. Well, I have drips and draps that I sometimes do. I have a diary that I kept in the camp in Polish, and I just translated it, and some day I want to connect with somebody who can at least put it on a word processor for me. But I think I've done as much of it as I could by retelling the story.

Q. DOES IT MAKE YOU HAVE YOUR NIGHTMARES AGAIN AS YOU GO?

A. Yeah. Periodically I do.

Q. WELL, I REALLY THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE COURAGE TO DO THAT.

A. Periodically I do, but I thank my lucky star, and I hope it will never happen again.

Q. RIGHT. OKAY.

A. Thank you.

Q. THANK YOU SO MUCH.

A. Thank you.