Interview with LINDA BREDER

Holocaust Oral History Project

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[Begin Tape 1]

Q. Today is Wednesday, June 26th, 1991. I'm Judith Backover, with the Holocaust Oral History Project, interviewing Linda Breder. With us today is Sandra Bendayan. We're at the Holocaust Center at San Francisco.

Good afternoon, Linda.

A. Hi.

Q. I would like to ask you to begin by telling us when and where you were born and discussing your wartime experiences.

A. Well, I was born in Czechoslovakia in '24, and in the eastern part, which is Slovakia. I grew up in a small city with a large Jewish population. We were five children, three brothers and two sisters, and between the three brothers was my twin brother.

We lived in this city until the war came in 1938. I have to be so very brief, because the time is short. I could talk days and days. It never will end.

So when Hitler came into Czechoslovakia in 1938, I was 14. Right after, in '38, Czechoslovakia was torn apart. A part was taken by Germany, the Sudaten, and Slovakia got independent with the head of the state, Monsignor Doctor (Yosef D. Sahuras), a Catholic priest.

Right afterwards, when the new state started, they adopted the Nuremberg laws, and I remember it was the 1st of

September, I was in school, and suddenly the sirens started blowing, and we had to leave the school, and that was the end of my school years in the city.

We lived on the main street. We had to leave from the main street, all the Jewish families, they moved us to the back of the city. We thought this time that something horrible happened to us. We didn't know what's going to be later on. We lived together with a couple of families in (Vandume), lots of children, lots of nervousness, and naturally no school, but still we managed, one of the Jewish teachers got together the teenagers and the children, and we continued our education.

In the meantime, they confiscated everything that we owned. My father didn't have too much savings, so we didn't have actually too much food. So they went to the villages with my brothers, cutting wood, and as they worked they didn't get money, but they got flour, eggs, and kinds of food on which we lived.

In 1942, unexpected, one day, the Hlinka guard, it was the Slovakia SS, came into the houses and picked up the girls from 16 to 25. Since I was in this age group, I was one of them too. They concentrated us in a city close to the Polish border, and one night, it was March the 26th, the Hlinka guard rolled us -- we had to roll up -- I'm a little bit nervous, because I'm going back, and, you know, it's

like I have to cry and I have to talk. So that's a part of my life. But give me a few minutes, okay? Every time I start, it's the same thing. For me it feels like it was yesterday.

So on March 25 or 26, I don't know exactly the date, we had to go out from the Army barracks, the roll call. It was still dark, very early in the morning, and we marched towards the railroad station.

We saw in the far distance already on the tracks, cattle cars. We had no idea those are waiting for us. We were one thousand, mostly all from the eastern part of Slovakia, from the cities and villages, and when we got close to the railroad station, the cattle cars were already open, and they are pretty high, so we had really to push each other to get into it.

The cars were empty. No straw, no nothing, except two buckets. One filled with water, and one empty. After we all one thousand were pushed into this train, the cattle cars were locked and closed by the Hlinka guards and we started moving.

The only thing that they told us was that we were going to work for Germany, and we believed them. So we traveled maybe a night, maybe more, I don't recall exactly the time. But suddenly the train stopped, and we didn't have a chance to look out, because the opening from the cattle car was

almost under the roof, so since I was smaller than the rest of my girlfriends, I stepped on their shoulders and I looked out.

And I saw signs in Polish. So I said, girls, we are not in Germany, we are in Poland. But they still didn't open the car, so we couldn't empty the bucket, which was already overflowing from the waste that 60 or so girls used. We were actually pushed together, crammed together. The only way we could move, we had to sit. When one got up, the other could move. And the water was gone.

But still we didn't have any idea where we are going. Absolutely none. I have to mention, we were the first women whatsoever, Jewish women, which arrived in and was deported to Auschwitz. And I was with the first transport.

Before us, Auschwitz was actually a prison camp. Prisoners were there who were sent mostly for life or for long term imprisonment.

So we kept going on, another hour. I have no idea of the time that went by, and afterwards the train stopped again, and at the Polish station where we stopped -- I have to go back -- they were still the Hlinka guards, the Slovakia SS, but then in Poland took over the SS guards, and the SS guards -- I mean -- I can't use the term, I'm too nervous -- they were actually our guards until we arrived to Auschwitz.

The train stopped in the middle of the field, not at the camp, because the railroad didn't go at this time all the way to Auschwitz, but about two or three kilometers before, in the middle of the field. And suddenly they opened the cattle cars and started screaming in German, Raus, raus, raus.

And we had to jump, because it was a ditch. On the side where the train was stopped was a deep ditch, so we had to jump. We were all very young so it didn't really make any difference. And to line up, five in the line.

And we were one thousand, and one doctor, male, named Dr. Kaufman. He was living in the city not far from my city of (Berg). And usually on vacation time -- I had aunts living there, so I was there on vacation, so I knew the doctor personally, because he had a girl my age, and we used to play together.

So when the SS guards, when we lined up, and the SS guards spotted a man among the thousand women, they started laughing and kicking and beating him, asking him, oh, one man and a thousand women, did you have a good time? And he just said, I am a doctor, and I am here for help in case they need some medical attention.

They didn't listen, just kicked him and beat him with their, you know, guns, what they had on, and actually they killed him in front of us, and that was my first experience

with death.

Then we had to march from there, another few kilometers. Suddenly we saw a big place with lots of barracks, surrounded with barbed wires, and we came to the entrance. There was a big gate with a big sign, "Work Lets You Free." The gate opened. We marched in. On the left side I saw a big building with a big chimney, so we thought probably this is the factory where we were going to work. But actually it was the crematoria. We didn't know. We had no idea.

We were the first women who arrived, Jewish women who arrived in Auschwitz, a thousand. So they weren't prepared for us. Only they fenced up, apart from the camp that was already standing, ten Barracks, two-story brick barracks, and in front of the barracks was this big chimney building, which naturally later we knew it was the crematoria.

So we were placed in barrack ten, a thousand of us. First we had to line up, and they counted us and counted. But I have to mention also, a day before we came, a thousand German prisoners sentenced to life in prison or long term were brought to Auschwitz from Ravensburg. Ravensburg was a women's camp close to Berlin where only women prisoners were at this time.

So those were brought in, those thousand Germans brought into Auschwitz to be our capos. I don't know if you

know what the "capo" means. Okay. So they were already in uniforms, and they took over the command over us. The SS guard came in, counted us, and we had to go into one barrack.

The barrack had little rooms, maybe 12 by 15 or a little larger. Nothing in it. No straw, no heat. In March in this part of the country, it's very, very cold. Winter, frost, snow. And we were very lightly dressed, because we thought when we left -- and they didn't allow to take too much things, just a very small package, so I had a very thin coat, light shoes. I was freezing.

But they pushed us in one room, 80, maybe more, I don't recall exactly. So we had enough only to sit very tight to each other. But it was good because we warmed each other. But again, we didn't have water in the train. And when we came to this barracks, down in the basement was a little washroom, and water was just dripping from a pipe, alongside the room. So we were fighting, everybody wanted water, everybody needed to go to the bathroom. And there were only about five, six toilets in the other corner.

So it was life and death. Who was stronger, made it. Who didn't, had to wait almost the whole night. And the capos were beating, schnell there, schnell here, pushing into the room, searching for the room, searching for your friends, because you wanted to keep together with your

friends. You didn't want to be separated.

So finally, late at night, we settled down, and it was quiet. It came 4:00 in the morning -- but I have to mention also, at this time we could go into the camp in our civilian clothing. Whatever we had we took along. But we had to leave our suitcases between the two barracks, between barrack 9 and ten, on a pile. So we left it there. So whatever we had in our pockets or so we could use.

Next morning, at 4:00, it was already a siren. Roll call. We had to leave very fast our places and line up in front of the barrack, five in a row, and the SS came in and counted us. And in the meantime, screaming and yelling. Everybody wanted to stay next to their sister, mother or friend. It was something awful.

And soon they counted us, the SS left, and the capos raged again, but we were so hungry, we got in the morning only a little soup, dark water, but at least it was water, and nothing else. And we had to just roam around outside. They wouldn't let us into the barrack in the daytime.

But they built between two barracks a big tent, and a day or two days later we had again in the morning to line up, go through the same procedure, and they took the first 50 from the roll and lined us up in front of the tent, and I was between the first 50, and we came in the tent. On the side were SS guards standing, women and men, and in the

middle of the tent was a big pool with dark water up to the knee.

So I went to the first one. I had to strip. Then the second one looked at my teeth. Then the third one was a gynecologist. She examined me. And then I had to jump in the pool, dip myself in with my hair, and then I was shaved everywhere. And the last thing what I got, they throw at me a uniform. Before we came, 75,000 Russian prisoners of war were there in Birkenau already, and they killed them. And their uniforms, they were given to us.

Even, you know, they were stiff, full of lice, and stiff from blood. I got a uniform maybe from a six-foot soldier. I am hardly five one. Can you imagine how I looked in it? I had to put on everything and line up, and wait until the rest went through the same procedure.

I got the Russian uniform. I got wooden clogs, a red bowl and a wooden spoon. That was the outfit for life, and nothing else. And line up.

Well, all the thousand went through. We got soup, a soup made from potato peels and sand and who knows what else, maybe when the SS washed themselves, they poured that in the soup. And that was our first meal.

And so it went on. A day later another transport from Slovakia, and another and another, day by day by day. In May we were already 47,000 women in the small camp from

Slovakia. It was so crowded at ten Barracks, people were sitting and sleeping outside everywhere. And transports started to come in. The first transport after Slovakia came from Holland, France, Belgium. Then came Saloniki, Greece, some Italian. All Europe was there.

End of August, ten Barracks, Auschwitz, was so full, there was no room even where to stand. But in the meantime we were taken already, certain units, out to work in the fields. So I was working in the fields at this time. And we had to spray fertilizer on the frozen fields. Naturally, the wooden clogs, you couldn't run fast, because the soil, it was yellow soil. When you put in your foot, you couldn't take it out, because the heel went so close to your skin, so you didn't have time to pull out your foot. So naturally the wooden clogs we lost. We had to run around barefoot.

Nothing on our heads. And the manure -- it was manure, actually, not fertilizer. We had to spread it with our bare hands, because no tools, no nothing. And in (lufsla), it means running, and the SS on horses, and we had to run and to do that. And later on we had to plant little -- I don't know what it was, green things. I don't know what.

So when the SS didn't see, we chewed up the roots, because we were very hungry. And then, you know, we had to go to work from not to see -- we didn't see the light, and return when it was almost dark, but before it was completely

dark, so we wouldn't escape.

They were guarding us when we marched on both sides, with dogs, there and back. Lunch was only 15, 20 minutes, and they brought us some hot -- I wouldn't say what, and you were lucky when you got it because we had to line up and the cup was just poured in the red bowl, and the last few didn't get nothing, so there was fights there too, who didn't get first. Every second of your life you had to fight for life, to fight for your food, to fight for the line, to fight to get back in the barracks, 24 hours fighting.

And like I said, at the end of August, we were maybe 80,000 women in this small place. So one day, again, the morning when we lined up for work, and who couldn't work, and we had to march. So we marched over a bridge, we crossed the bridge. Underneath was a big railroad station, about five kilometers, and we arrived to a new camp. It was Birkenau.

That was actually a part of Auschwitz, big Auschwitz. We thought Auschwitz is horror. We didn't know what Birkenau -- what to expect there. First of all, we walked in, it was the barracks on one side, stone barracks, it looks like stalls for animals; on the other side, wooden barracks. The wooden was there for non-Jews, because non-Jewish came there too. But those non-Jewish people were either caught by resisting the Nazis or who were in

prisons. Mostly those were students, protestors. Some of them were just for little thieves, stealing, or just the neighbors informers and so on.

So they had privileges because they were not the underdogs like we were, so they got the wooden barracks. The stone barracks were little, tiny barracks, with little openings on each side, no roof, no heating, just bunks alongside the wall.

There were three bunks. The first bunk was on the floor. Then there was a few wooden, I would say, wooden things there. No straw. No blankets, nothing. And the third one was under the roof. So you were fighting for the best one. Actually I got the upper one, with my friends, because always one had to go and occupy the whole thing.

So I don't know, it was this size. Ten to one bunk, so the only way you could lie down was sideways. And with nothing to cover ourselves. And we were full of lice. You just put in and threw it. Our bodies, you know, were just red spots everywhere. The uniform, the Russian uniform was working on our bodies, because it was moving from the lice. We didn't have hair, naturally, but anyway the lice kept there.

And from malnutrition we had bones everywhere. I still have big holes here. You see here my hole? It was so deep one finger could get in. But when we went to work, it was

always a selection. So they always spotted if somebody has something. So I took dirt and I smeared it out, always. So it took one year. And the bone got deeper and deeper, infected.

I said a little, but I didn't mean nothing. Because I could tell you many stories, we don't have time for it.

So there in the barracks, transports, when we were relocated to Birkenau, they were -- the first camp for the women was B-1, and the men were also in these camps. My husband was there, but I never met him in camp. And transports started coming. And before December, before Christmas, one day we couldn't go to work. At this time I was working already, and I was assigned to a unit which was called Canada, where I was sorting clothing from the people who came, and we had to first search each garment to look for valuables. And then we were 300 girls in this unit, and then the rest of them had each to separate coats and underwear and shoes in a different pile, and putting ten and ten pieces together.

And then when it was cleaned and neatly packed, they were shipped back to Germany, and those clothing the Germans distributed to the families who had their sons on the front. So the irony, killing the Jews, taking everything that they had, including tearing out their gold teeth and they awarded the German families for their bravery on the

front.

So that was my job, working in this unit, and there I survived because I worked inside. I could steal food, which the people brought along. And it was warmer there. But we lived in the working place. We were separated from the rest of the camp. So we kept neat and clean. We could bathe, so we didn't have lice. And our working time was 12 hours, in two shifts. Only two barracks for 300 girls were our living barracks.

When one shift left we slept in the same bunks. So we just changed. And naturally SS guards all around. And in this unit I worked actually from beginning of 1943 until Auschwitz was evacuated, because the Russian front came close, and the 18th of January, 1945, we were evacuated, and this evacuation was called the death march. I survived the death march too. Can you imagine, it was in January very, very cold. The snow at this time was three meters high. We walked through the Carpathian mountains, not through the villages, so they wouldn't see us.

So at this time in Auschwitz there were about two to 300,000 inmates still, because the new arrivals and the surrounding camps, but (Novitsa), (Vedevasta), (Eegefarbenstri), Siemens (Vereka), you know, tens of thousands of inmates were working in those German factories.

So they all have to -- it was all around Auschwitz, five, ten kilometers from the main camp, and the 18th of January, all of us had to evacuate. They didn't have time to destroy us, because they promised us anyway, we never will go out alive, and mainly, we 300 who worked at this unit between the four crematorias, that the only way to freedom is through the chimney that you see here. No way out.

So I waited and worked. Many of us, my friends, committed suicide. They just went to the high voltage fence and committed suicide. They didn't want to wait. What's the use, to live another day, to see your family, your children going to the gas chamber, because we saw the gas chamber was from us about 30 meters, we saw them lined up waiting for their deaths.

So I said, personally, I have time tomorrow. I'm not going to do that. Maybe some miracle will happen. So the 18th of January when we evacuated, many -- and we had to walk in the snow, and we were not well dressed, and we slept on the snow and we ate the snow. So who went out of line or was behind was shot on the spot. So, you know, the road to freedom, to my freedom, because I survived, was through the bodies of my friends who didn't make it, who were shot. They would have made it, because we helped each other. But the SS was very cruel.

They were on horses, and we were on foot. And we were the malnourished and the sick and the bitter, and they didn't care. We were not there, they said, for life. We came to our deaths.

I survived the death march and I came to Ravensburg, that was also the prison camp, but, you know, the camps which had already been taken -- liberated by the Allies and by the Russians. They pushed the able bodies forward to Germany because they needed us for work. We had clean the airports, we had to clean the -- everything we had to do. So they need us, and who made it, that was not shot, they used us.

So I came -- the last camp was way behind Berlin, know Brandenburg, and there I was liberated, the 5th of May, 1945.

You know, in between, I have so many stories to tell you, but I don't know if you have some question you would like me to explain. I'm happy to do it.

Q. I know from your first tape that several of your friends from Czechoslovakia also survived with you, and that you speak with them, and you also speak with other survivors in a group called Tikva. I would like you to talk about, when you get together with other survivors, what sorts of things come up? What do you discuss?

A. Yes, I have girl survivors with whom I survived

from the first minute, since 1942, and many of them are from my city, and I know them before the war. We know each other's -- and the families, when we were children. And I have six girlfriends who live still in Bratislava, where we were living until 1966, and we have -- this year I had two of my girlfriends here in San Francisco.

I invited them, and they were with us four weeks. They are in Czechoslovakia. They live under Communist rule, but I did for 20 years too, and they don't have the means to afford them to come, and so I paid their fare, just to get them out, once in a lifetime.

I am fortunate, and they are not. I am fortunate I came to the States and made a good living, had my children well educated, and they are on their own, and they are doing pretty well. So I said, I'm going to share with them, because we shared our lives and now I would like to give them a little bit of happiness too.

And besides this, we wanted to be together. So they were here for four weeks. Last month I went back to Bratislava, where they live now, and I visited them.

And I was working very hard, 20 years, just to put through my children to college and make a living. Now, since I am retired, I always am involved in my fellow survivors; but I was so busy making a living and raising a family, I didn't have time to commit myself to something,

which I always wanted to do.

So now I am retired, and I am very close with the survivors here in San Francisco, in the Bay area. So one day, Mr. (Cluftin) from Israel came, and I went to listen to his speech, what he has to say. So he said they formed in Israel a group of survivors for survivors, self-help for survivors. So since we were there and we listened to him and he was very successful, they formed a group, they helped survivors who are physically sick or mentally disabled, and they need badly help.

The families that they raised live far away, and some of them never got married, and they are in poor mental and physical condition. And no outside help. And many are even ashamed to ask for help. And a survivor relates better to a survivor than to a strangeer. So we said, how about we are going to start to search here in the Bay area for survivors and see if we can do something for them.

So six of us got together, it was Dr. (Laura Shelley), (Blanca Seifter), and Sarah, she is a social worker, her last name is Sarah -- (Huberger), and me, and Ruth (Fisher), where we meet now, and we started to form a group and decided we will help each other.

And the group we named Tikva, which means hope. But we didn't have any finances, nowhere to meet. So we meet always in another house. I forgot to tell you also, we have

two child survivors in the group, (~~Olga~~ Odette Meyer) and (Mariana Solomon). So finally we got nonprofit status, and now they are searching for help, because the Tikva, the new center where we make -- we, the six to eight girls, we pay ourselves for postage, for everything. We have already volunteers, a psychologist, social workers who will volunteer their work to help us.

But we need something more. We need a room where we can meet. We need finances for paper, for printing. So I hope so, we will get some outside help. And we could start doing what we always wanted, to help each other and to help our fellow survivors. So far, so good. We did pretty good. Our first meeting was the 14th of July last year, at the Hebrew Academy, and we got together over 300 survivors, which was amazing.

The food, we had donated. We went to ask David's Delicatessen, bagels and all kinds of goodies, but we got them together. And it was wonderful, to see people, everybody looks for friends, they didn't know they lived close by here in the Bay area. And we intend in the future to give a little light to those who gave up, even when they survived the horrors of the war, and those in their families. We always are waiting for our golden age. Our golden age is not so golden.

And we hope that it will somehow -- and we will work

very, very closely with the Oral History Project, because of what we can give these survivors and what we gave to the Oral History, our memories, and recorded everything which each of us remembers, and each one of us survived the camps in a different way.

And I think so, we deserve at least that people who need help will get it. And I hope Tikva and the Oral History will be a big help to our fellow survivors. We have -- our time is getting shorter and shorter. We are living the last years of our lives. I am one of the younger survivors. But you have survivors who are in the 80s and more. So the last few years at least, bring a little light to their lives.

And that's our project, and that's what we would love to do. I mean, those who clearly are able still, physically, mentally. I always thought that when I survive, I am immortal, when I was working and was still in the process, building and raising the children and being busy. I never thought of it. I thought I will be healthy and young and pretty all my life. And I look in the mirror, it's not so. I'm mortal like everybody else.

But, you know, now life expectancy is longer, and I intend to live 100, maybe 120. Maybe when we meet after 100, you tell me.

Q. Good for you. Come back for another interview

then.

A. I'll be back. I'm 67. In 30 years we will meet right here.

Q. It's a date.

A. It's a date, definitely. I go a lot, I am invited as guest speaker to different schools and colleges, not only that work close with my fellow survivors and sufferers, but I want to talk also to the young people, and to explain to them how lucky they are, living in a free society and having a chance to be what they want to be.

I am open to questions, and I would be more than happy to tell you everything of what personally I experienced. I don't talk about others, because believe me, in the same place, at the same work, each of us saw things differently. And they had different experiences, like I did.

I tell you only personal, what I saw with my eyes, and how I felt.

Q. Did you feel a relief when you first told your story?

A. First, after the war, when somebody who was interested and wanted to hear what happened and what I told, I couldn't talk at all. I was crying more than talking. But still, I was talking. But, you know, when you cry, it's very hard to get out what you would like to hear. With years and time, it's getting -- I can talk about it more

fluently, and in between, cry a little bit, because it's still inside me and hurts very much.

Q. So even with all these years of mourning, mourning for your own life as well as --

A. I'm going to mourn until my death, which is 120, like I said.

Q. Yes. Good for you.

A. But it's inside me. I go to bed with it, and I get up with it. I do my chores with it. When I laugh and have a good time, it's in me.

I tell you, when we go once in a while up gambling, which I enjoy, so on the way up, when you go to Tahoe, it's a kind of landscape like we used to have in Czechoslovakia in the high mountains, and I always cry, because I feel I have a good time, and I enjoy the scenery, I enjoy the view of the beautiful mountains and the snow. And my poor twin brother and my family were so brutally killed, and they actually died very young, murdered I would say better. And why me? Why I was spared and I can enjoy this?

So then, you know, somehow I lock myself in and I don't look, because I don't want to enjoy it, because I said, I don't deserve it.

Q. That sounds like other people who have talked about that unexplainable feeling, feeling guilty just for living.

A. I don't feel guilty for living. I feel I was spared, because somebody has to have a purpose in life, a purpose to do something or to record. I am like a chronicler. I was spared for a chronicle, what happened to my family and to millions of others who were not so lucky that they had one family member to mourn.

So I mourn for everybody, not only for my family, but the millions who didn't have a chance to see one of theirs, to see to it that the name will be once in a while mentioned, or they are not forgotten. But all of those who were massacred and brutally killed are always in my heart.

And I am really -- I feel like one of the chosen, believe me, chosen to be here and talk about it.

Q. So this is another main motive for you telling your story?

A. Tell your story, and another thing is, I promise myself, when I have time, and I did what every parent had to do, raise a family and put them on their feet, to do what I want to do and what I feel to do. I feel now that I am going to be committed to Tikva, to the organization that we formed, and I am going to work hard to see that the unfortunate who are lonely and sick and bitter -- I am talking more or less about the survivors from camp, because survivors are two groups; survivors who survived escaping Hitler in '37 with all their families and all their wealth

and belongings, but in a strange country, those are survivors too, but the lucky ones; and survivors, children who were spared by non-Jewish families and saved, so they were sheltered and didn't experience the horror that we did.

So why are they survivors like we who went through hell? So I am talking about those survivors, personally, me, and I am not talking about the group which we started, because those are all committed to do something and help those people. And I hope we will have some help, some grants to be able to do it. For the time being we do everything, paying for all the expenses that we need, thank God we can afford it, here $100, there $100. So we got together and we do it, until we can seek for some outside help.

So that's my commitment now. And believe me, I mean it. And I'm going to do my best to see that we are together with Oral History Project and with Lani, which I admire very much, and I saw, the first time I talked to Lani, that she is the right person for it. And I am very proud of her, that she made it, and she brought the history alive.

Q. Yes, I agree.

A. Very much so.

Q. I wanted to ask you, when you said you felt you were chosen, do you mean in some kind of religious point of

view?

A. Something like that.

Q. Do you feel open to talking about that?

A. By "chosen" I mean, if somebody is spared from the horrors, so it's something that will keep a hand over you, so, you know, you will survive it. So I felt, you know, I was never religious, although I come from Orthodox Jewish family. I always felt that human beings are equal. You don't choose your birth parents. You belong just -- you know, you were born into it.

So you continue. But once, you know, when you survived this horror and these awful things, and millions didn't do so, something had to be to save my life. Even I contributed much to it because I wanted to survive. I didn't want to give up. Even when I was sick, I had typhoid, I had wounds over my whole body, but I was very lucky.

I had very good friends, and survival in camp means you have to have friends, because you take care of each other, and you won't let down your friend. You do it even if it costs your life, because you feel, you for me and me for you.

So that was part of my survival, too. But all of us, the group, we were four or five, maybe more, some of them already died natural deaths, some of them are in mental institutions, but I am lucky that I am here, and here with

you, and talking about it. So it means something, something, you know, unnatural or something -- or only it's my belief or my strong will, I don't know.

But I'm just saying, I feel like I'm chosen for it, like you choose -- you go to college and you choose the best student to the job what you need. So maybe I was chosen for this job, to be here.

Q. Maybe.

A. I don't know. But I believe in it. So that's the main thing. And it keeps me going.

Q. Yes. It keeps you going.

A. Yes, it does.

Q. I hear what you're saying about your purpose for Tikva. What is your purpose when you tell your story here to this project and to the school children?

A. My project is, when I talk to the school children, even sometimes I have 500, 700 students, from the 700, if 1 percent will continue and won't forget, I did very well. So I'm not counting everybody whom I'm talking to. I just want that it never, ever in the world will happen again, what happened to us. And what I talk, be aware. Don't let a small group or a small individual rise. So that is my purpose, to warn. It happened, and it could happen again. Be aware.

And Tikva is for me very important, because until one

survivor of us is alive, he deserves at least at the end of his life a little attention. And until now, nobody gave us any whatsoever. So I feel that the people who are alive, at least they owe us. I don't mean financially. I just mean if we are in need of a talk or a little help, or taken somewhere, that we are here to do it.

And that's the purpose of Tikva, not to be forgotten, and to help our fellow survivors, at least -- how long? The few years that we have here? That is biological. We come and go, regardless of where we were.

But since, you know, we experienced this thing, we want to help those people who had the same experience like we had, to make a little brighter their last years in their lives.

Q. So what have you been doing along those lines?

A. First of all, we have a hard time just to put together a meeting place and persuade the authorities who are in charge of different, you know, projects, that what we want to do, because it's fine, we have the Jewish Family Service, social workers there who are very busy with the Russian immigrants, no time for us, because we are here already 50 years after the war. So we are a forgotten species.

Whenever we bring this up, they say, it's social workers, it isn't this. But nobody cares. When we came, no

person was interested in our suffering.

We made our true -- all of us, I'm not talking about me personally who came 20 years later. I didn't have any help. I didn't have any welfare or any help with my children, putting them through school. I worked my way out, and so did the rest of us, from cleaning houses just to make a living. We never asked. It didn't come even into my mind to go and ask for financial help or for, you know, health-wise help, the dentist or so.

We pinched the pennies, and I had, you know -- so much I have for the children need clothing, the children need this. I didn't buy, five years when I came from Czechoslovakia, a pair of panties for me. I wore what I have, because my daughter went to high school, she is a young girl, I didn't want her to be differently dressed than the rest. I want her to be equal with the rest of her schoolmates.

So everything went there. My boy went to the service, he was drafted. So I didn't need that money. But my daughter needed. We needed rent, we needed to make a living. And we needed a little bit extra in case my husband loses his job or I don't have it, which I was not used to. In Communism you work or not work. You have a job, you have a job. At least you have for food and rent. That's it.

But coming from living in Communism, coming from a

totalitarian society, coming from a totalitarian society to a free society, you're on your own. It's very hard. But we made it.

We adjusted very nicely. And I am very proud to say, without any help from the Jewish community, absolutely. The only help we got, they paid for our tickets from (Siela) Vienna to San Francisco, Hias, that's a Jewish organization. And my husband got the job after two weeks, and right away we got a letter, we have to pay it back.

So we wrote, we can afford to pay back every month $10. No more. So they said okay. So we paid back month by month, I think it was $1,200 for all four of us, and we paid back every penny. After we finished, every month we already had -- we sent a donation, $100 every month so they can pay for other immigrants to come to the States. So believe me, we paid it well back.

Q. You certainly have.

A. So we really didn't -- I was not used, and we didn't know even about it that we could get a little financial help, so we didn't have to -- I worked actually 12, 24 hours. I had been working at a rest home, retirement home.

Q. What do you mean, work 24 hours?

A. 24 hours, I worked eight hours a day, then I had to work in my home. And then, you know, my sister, who was

here already since 1943, I took a loan from her, $3,000, and I put a down payment down, and I was my own boss. I ran a retirement home, with six people. So at this time, in 1967, you could buy a house with 5 percent down payment, and the houses were cheap.

So I bought one, I said, if I can work for somebody, so why not for myself? So we lived there in one room, and the rest we rented. And so I started. So I worked 24 hours, because I had to work at night, the night watch, the cook, the cleaning woman, and the nurse, taking care of them. And I did it all by myself, and my husband worked at the bakery at night.

We worked five years this way. So we made a little money, I accumulated, then we sold the house, made a little profit, and put down for a larger one. We had three mortgages again. So I worked really very, very hard.

Q. Yes, you did.

A. But I didn't give up. We had two children, we want to provide for them a better life than we had. And we made it. So I'm proud because without outside help, we did it ourselves. And now with Tikva, I really enjoy doing it, and I enjoy the company of the rest of my fellow friends, very much so. You know, when we get together, it's such joy to be with them.

And we talk -- what do you think we talk about,

mostly? What happened in camp. When we get together, our only, you know, talk is experience in the camp. Whatever I do, we talk about literature, about music, and suddenly we are back there, where we came from, because that's our most harsh experience, it's so rooted in us, in every piece of our body and our soul. Suddenly it just pours out of me. And so does it from others, too.

So it's, you know, I don't know if ever any people had this experience like we had.

Q. I don't either.

A. I saw, you know, the movie from Vietnam, and so I know those people went through also horrors, and I understand it very much, and I am very sorry for those people, Cambodia and Vietnam, and other horrors which are going on because of drugs in Colombia, killers and killing. But none of those are same compared to the Holocaust that we went through. The killing, the torturing, yes. But something else was taken from us, that was not taken from them.

We were killed and tortured only because of our religious background. No other reason. We were not anti anything. And killing somebody only because my grandparents were Jews, and I was a regular citizen, who contributed to -- and my forefathers, do you know how many centuries we lived in the same region?

We can record back to the 17th, the same region, we have lived there in peace, our neighbors, mixed neighborhood, we were not in ghettos, we were not separated. And suddenly from one day to another, everything turns around. We are those dirty Jews.

I never knew before. My friends were mostly non-Jewish. We with respected their religion, they respected ours. And overnight we were different.

Q. Your whole world was --

A. Everything, correct, everything. In such a short time. Unbelievable. And like I say, it's in me, in us all. We talk about it, we sleep with it, we eat with it. It's not one occasion that something doesn't come up.

Q. How do you explain what you said before, that when you were going by the countryside, you made yourself not look? What is in you that is making you not enjoy that?

A. Because I feel that I would enjoy it when I would have here a brother, a sister -- a sister I have. I mean somebody from the family who was exterminated. Enjoying life. I enjoy life, and they had to be just cut off, not even in the middle of life. At the start of life. My youngest stepsister was three years old. So that's the horror, and that's the thing which, you know, makes us somehow different than others.

I mean, we eat the same thing, we socialize. But

inside you always feel so isolated, unless you are with the same people in the group, you feel closer.

It's my feeling. Maybe other survivors have different feelings, because many of them, first of all, they never wanted to admit they were survivors, they never wanted to talk about it. And then, you know, when they get older, I know one social worker, she didn't marry Jewish, she didn't tell her husband she was Jewish, and now she suffers and cries all the time.

Maybe she wanted to spare him, because you are always afraid that suddenly a knock on the door and they will come and take you and take away everything, your children, everything they confiscate, everything which happened to us.

Q. Do you still feel that way?

A. Not since I am in America, but when I was living 20 years, until '66, in Communism, all the time, because the Communists did that too. You know, we married in 1948. In 1953, after it was a trial with Slansky, you know, in Czechoslovakia, the same time that it went on in Russia, anti-Jewish sentiment, we were thrown out of our apartment.

My husband was working at the ministry of agriculture, in forestry. The only Jew. They threw him out of his job. And they threw us out of the apartment because one official wanted it. It was a house outside the city, in a beautiful neighborhood, and he wanted to live there.

So they just came and threw us out, put out all our belongings on the street. I was at work, I came home and everything was out. So I always had a feeling, 20 years, knock, knock, knock. You live here, you are the Jews? Out, we don't want Jews here. So 20 years after the war experience, the same thing, couldn't get a job.

I applied for a job in a bookstore. And they had an opening. They said, here you have a form, you fill it out and bring it in. You know the questions, your religion, so I wrote everything. I came there, he looked, the manager, at the application, and he said, well, I don't need you anymore, we have already filled a place.

I said, what do you mean, you filled a place? Yesterday you said you wanted me, yesterday, and today when I brought in, you said no? Because I am a Jew? He said, I didn't say so. Yes, you said. That's the reason. So you know what I did? I went again, looked for another job. I got an application. I lied on everything. I didn't fill out where I was, what we did, because in Communism you don't have to fill out religion, because they are atheists. So I got the job.

So I'm just telling, they force you to lie. So you always are afraid, knock, knock. But here I'm not, which is wonderful, because -- and that's what I wanted for my children. That was the main reason to come to the States,

to apply.

I would go to Israel too, but here I have my sister. I wanted to be with my sister. So that's the reason we came here, only to be united with the only family I have, since my husband has no family whatsoever. So we came. So here I have a feeling, I feel free, because of the mixture of religions. There we had only two religions. Either you're a Christian or you're a Jew. No other religion.

Q. You weren't supposed to be any religion, really.

A. In Communism we shouldn't be. So it was not important to fill out the religion. So I didn't. He couldn't even ask me. I said -- because those, you know, heads, managers, it was a publishing company, actually, those are Communists. We were not Communists. We never were affiliated with any political organization, because we had the experience in the war.

When it was -- in Communism they said, you are a capitalist. Now I was a month ago back in Bratislava, my friend, because the children are there, they have a job. Now they are accusing them, they are Communists. So you can't win there. You can't win. But living in a free society like here, it's a big luxury. Not every country can afford it.

Democracy in Europe is entirely different. I saw it in Germany, Austria, and now in the new eastern part, which are

starting going back. Czechoslovakia won't have any problem, because it was a democracy before. But Russia will never have democracy. They jumped from Communism straight to this new era, and they can't make it because they are not used to it. But Czechoslovakia was before.

And it's forming, but I was very disappointed. I said, it's going to take a long time to go back, because, you know, it's free speech. Everybody can say what they want. And so the element who was pro-Nazi are raising their heads, and it goes again, Jews are there and Jews are there, and they are hardly Jews.

Before the war, Czechoslovakia had 375,000 Jews. Hardly 20,000 survived after the war, in '46. From '46 until now, many emigrated. Many died. So registered -- I read this week another view about Czechoslovakian Jewry, there is hardly, practicing, one thousand Jews registered. Hardly. There is no rabbi. You can't get kosher meat at all.

There are a few families who are kosher. They bring in kosher meat from Vienna, because Vienna is only a half an hour drive. So I said, and then there are going to be elections. There are about 30 parties. So the nationalist party, who was the Hlinka party, the pro-Fascist party, they had slogans, and I saw a poster with a Slovakian emblem, like it was in the time when Slovakia was independent and

the priest was president.

It said the same words which hit my eyes, and I was shocked. "Slovakia for Slovakians." They don't want the Czechs to be together. But this title, when they were independent, the same letters, the same colors, the same poster was below, and "All Jews to Palestine." So only one sentence was missing there.

So I was shocked. And then, you know, I talked in the street with people, and I said, how are you doing, they didn't know I am American, because I am a Slovak, and they said, "You see all the Jews, look, privatization." I said, "What do you mean all? Who survived? I don't see even here a synagogue. I see nothing." "You don't know. They are all hiding. They took different names."

So I was shocked. Bad. Very bad. It will take a long time, although the President is, know, intellectual, and very good, but he alone can't make it. But Slovakia, Bohemia, Czechs, and Moravians are different. But Slovakia was always a clerical state. And the church was always preaching anti-Jewish. And it's so rooted, it will take at least -- more than two generations to redo it. And I don't believe it ever will.

So it hurts me very much. And I say, I have nobody there. My mother died there, but all the graves are desecrated. Swastikas. Broken, stolen. So it's not

there. So why should I go again there?

But, you know, somehow -- I saw yesterday a film on nature, like the salmon go back to the place of birth. So I thought, I go always back to see if it's there. But the houses are not there. They are demolished, where my parents lived. Everything.

Q. Nothing to see?

A. No. And from Germany, we didn't get any compensation. Not a penny. You know why? Because we were not eligible because we were living in Eastern Europe. And when we came back -- when we came here, and I applied, it was too late. But now when I saw the consulate I told him, I am very good to be a witness against the Nazis, which is called a showcase, a show trial for you, but I am not good enough to get compensation for my forced labor.

I am not asking for the lives, for the suffering, but the forced labor. And the consul said to fill out an application, maybe he can do something. It's not that -- he said, you know, you are a social case. I said, that's not the point. I am not talking -- I said, I worked for it. And the Reich took the money for it. So I think you owe us for forced labor.

So he said to fill out -- send in a letter, he will try. But I said, I am not asking because I'm a social case. I am asking because I deserve it. I worked for it.

Q. Good point.

A. Yes.

[End tape 1]

[Begin tape 2]

Q. This is an interview of Linda Breder, the Northern California Oral History Project in San Francisco. I'm Judy Heim. Today is February 7th, '94. This is a continuation, because Linda had an interview a few years ago, and was very, very informative.

Linda, you remembered some additional information that we're very interested in hearing.

A. Yes, I remember -- although, you know, remembering is every day, you never forget it, but this was something special.

It happened in December, 1944. And I worked in a special unit close to the gas chamber, and the unit was called Canada. We were about 600 girls there, young, between maybe 16 to 25, 26. And our job was sorting the clothes after the people who were slaughtered in the gas chamber, which was not far away from our working place. It was about 40 feet.

So we saw everything, because we were only divided from the crematorias and from the killing fields with the barbed wire, not -- you know, it was not high voltage inside the camp, again, apart from the rest, because we were doing

things which the SS guard didn't want the rest of the inmates to see.

So I was working through the year. I came in 1942. So from the first transport that we came, we were really only a very few left alive.

Excuse me. I am after a cold. I had three weeks a very bad cold.

And so in '44, in December, they lined us up in front of the gate, which went to another camp, and they didn't tell us nothing. And the whole working unit. So we stood in the line, and when I came close to the gate, there were tables, nurses which were not Jewish, and they started drawing blood from each of us.

And, you know, the front is very close, and pretty soon the war will be over, but we know we wouldn't make it, because they promised they would never let us go. At the last minute they always pointed at the crematoria, there is your road to freedom.

I have to have a moment. It takes, you know -- it's going to be, March, 52 years since I was deported to Auschwitz. But the memories are still very, very alive. And they drew blood from each of us, and then we lined up again. We had to wait in line. They didn't let us go back to our working place, not to the barracks where we were sleeping, actually, and nothing else, only sleeping, because

we were two shifts, each one worked 12 hours, so at night you went to work, in the day you went to the same bunks.

Then we lined up again, and they give each of us a loaf of bread and a piece of some wurst, some salami, and we could go back to our working place. And we knew that it's the end because when they draw already blood from Jewish people, they mix the blood from the most hated, you know, group, what they consider as not even people but underdogs, so we knew freedom will come, but we never knew that we would be able to see it.

And it happened, actually, which triggered my memory back, in our group, from the Greek transports, some girls -- the Greek transports that had come in the end of '42 or beginning of '43, and we had two very beautiful Greek girls, I worked with them in the same barrack, Suzie, one name was, and the other was Lucia or something like that.

And after we had, you know, this experience with drawing blood, in the evening -- I was working at this time in the day shift -- the SS guards which we had said we are going to have a special treat, we are going to go to the sauna.

The sauna was surrounded with barbed wire, but we have to go through the gate, because the people who are selected, and who they chose to go to live temporarily until they squeeze out the blood from them, they had to go there, and

they shaved them and they took a shower. The sauna was so big, 2000 people could fit in at once, and shower heads on the top.

So we thought they might use it instead of the gas chamber, because we know they will drive us into the sauna. So we really hesitated to go, but we didn't have any choice. We were very surprised. They improvised a stage there, and the two girls were singing, and they were singing O Solo Mio. We were listening, sitting on the floor and listening.

So last year, at the Channukah party which Tikva had, so we had David (Orner), and he sang the O Solo Mio. Then I remembered what happened. It really, you know, sometimes it evokes the memory of you when you hear something or you see something.

This time it happened, and I thought I had to call up the Oral History Project. I talked to Barbara Goodman about it, because the same day I went to the Holocaust Library and I said, it's very important, because until it's in my memory, we are not getting younger, so I might -- it just slipped out. So that's the reason I came, because I wanted this to be recorded.

I don't think too many people are alive still from the transport, from the first transport. And since my memory's really okay, so I wanted -- this is very important, because,

you know, they say now from Farrakhan we, the Jews, are bloodsuckers. Who are actually the bloodsuckers? Literally they sucked out from us, before they wanted to kill us, even our blood.

Q. When you said that, they wanted to take the last bit of blood from you --

A. Yes, the last minute before actually -- in January, 1945, we were attending the death march, which you know, it was recorded many times, so I don't want to repeat myself, but that's the story which I wanted --

Q. It was important because --

A. Very, because it's not anywhere. I read lots about the Holocaust, and I still have friends who remember, but only we who worked there at the special unit experienced that. And nowhere else in Auschwitz. So we were the ones from the last minute which, you know, they used them.

Q. Did it give you any sense of hope if you knew they were that desperate?

A. If you didn't have hope, not only me, all of us who are there, because we were there, healthy, because we could steal the food, and the conditions were better, and they didn't beat us really because they needed us to do schnell, schnell, you know, it was 20 barracks full of clothing, of everything, shoes and belongings that other people brought along.

So they wanted this to ship to Germany, so we were already working three years, we worked very fast, schnell, schnell. So we had still hope. If we didn't have hope we wouldn't go on living.

Q. And you knew, you had information --

A. We had the information about the war because the transport kept coming in the last minute. Since we obtained their luggage, so we found newspapers, so we knew that the war is going to end, they lost, but who knows who will survive to see it? Everything was only American, that really survived, few of us, in different ways, I mean, but we who worked there and survived, that's a special miracle.

Q. Absolutely.

A. It's something which we didn't expect. But that's the reason we cherish our lives now.

Q. Did you say the date was in 1944 --

A. The date I don't know.

Q. Wintertime?

A. Wintertime, yes. It was very cold. It is part of the north, actually, around Auschwitz, it's very, very cold.

Q. Do you think it was after December, though?

A. No, December, definitely. Very close to Christmas -- Christmas -- very close to the new year, because about two weeks later, three weeks later, we were already at the death march, which was another miracle, that

we survived that. I mean, I survived. Many of my friends, after three years living there -- "living," it was not living -- but going on, because we thought -- they thought they would survive. So they were slaughtered in the death march. So it's just a miracle.

Q. So actually taking your blood was a prelude to the end.

A. To the end, because they knew, you know, we heard already the fire from the distance, that it's going on, because the Russians were already very close. They were in Katowice, and it's only 60 kilometers from Auschwitz. But it didn't take them very long. But they took us along to Germany for work.

Q. Then you went on the death march?

A. Yes, and I was in Germany, Ravensburg, then in (Malhuf) and Rastatt and then in Brandenburg. That was the worst years -- I mean, months, that we suffered, the last four months.

Q. When did the guards finally -- the soldiers found you --

A. They didn't find us. I still was working in a munition factory, in a tunnel, inside a hill, and the guards didn't show up. We ran out, and we were free. We didn't know what to do with our freedom. We didn't know. We were bewildered.

Q. You were expecting the guards to come back to you?

A. We didn't expect the guards to come back, but we were afraid that they are somewhere hiding and they will kill us anyway. So we just run, run out, and then we went to the city. But the Russians came in with tanks, so after, you know, a couple of hours, and the Russians came, and then they took us to barracks because we were full of lice and sick, and they loused us and gave us food, and were very nice to us.

Q. Were you still wearing the Russian uniforms?

A. No, at this time, no, because I worked in Canada, we could exchange for the civilian clothes, but they made on the clothes with paint red crosses on our backs and the front, so they -- it didn't -- you wouldn't be able to take them off, because it was a paint which you can't remove.

So red, with the brush, in the front across and in the back across. So actually we had civilian clothes, but marked. When you go out, everybody knew we are, you know, still inmates, prisoners.

Q. Where did you live when you were working in the factory at the end?

A. They had barracks right there. We couldn't go out. And mostly our foremen were already German civilians.

Q. They weren't using soldiers anymore?

A. Yes, but the guards were SS. And, you know, all

the time -- and before, when I was in Ravensburg, they were from all over the camps, you know, concentrated, because one was liberated, they pushed us over to Germany to clean the cities, to clean the airfields, because it was bombarded all the time.

The Germans were hiding in shelters and we had to stay on the fields. But we prayed that the bomb would kill us.

Q. And then they walked you back every night --

A. Yes, to the airfield and back to the barracks, where we were guarded. So still they were treating us very harshly. We didn't have food. There was no water, and no salt at all. So it was much less than in the camp. In the camp you have rations, but you know you have it in the morning, a tea, lunchtime was sand soup, in the evening you get a sliver of bread, or potatoes. So it was nothing.

Q. And when you finished working in one place they took you to another place to work somewhere else?

A. There was always plenty of room, because the airfields, you know how huge they are, so there was always something to clean, or to remove from somewhere, or to work in the factory, because prisoners were plenty, so -- and it was plenty of work for us there.

Q. Were you still with the women from Canada?

A. With the few, we grouped together and helped each other. Each of us, we were in different places, with

100,000 people, you want to go fast, fast, you want to mingle in so you won't be on the side at all, because it was always danger that in the side you will be the first one killed. So you tried to get in the center and go forward, rush, so they wouldn't hit you.

So we lost each other. Only the few, six or seven which were together, kept together until the last minute, and we were liberated, yes, from the first transport.

Q. Was there anyone from the first transport who was with you until the end?

A. Yes. Yes. And they live still in Czechoslovakia. I have, how many, four or five from the first transport, yes.

Q. I know that you went back to see them in Czechoslovakia.

A. Yes, I went back a few times, and they visited me, too. Yes. Well, you know, it's very sad that even, you know, they didn't emigrate anywhere, and they have a very hard life there. Now they life in Slovakia. The pension is not enough even to cover their apartments, their rent. So ~~they~~ help them out.

Q. Do you feel there is anti-Semitism still in Slovakia?

A. Yes, they feel, and there is. You know, the Slovaks were the ones who actually deported us. It was the

Slovakian state. And the same people are there. I mean, the old generation is mostly gone, but my generation is still alive, and in the Hlinka guard, it's like the SS, so they are still alive. First they were, you know, guardists, then they were Communists, and now they are again going with the flow. They are again Slovaks. But nothing has changed in their feeling, in their thinking of us. Nothing. Absolutely nothing. They are saying we are lucky we left and we are here, but here is quite a lot also.

You have the skinheads, the killings, and when you listen to Farrakhan, where are we going to go? But thank God it's not like in Europe. In Europe you didn't have so many nationalities and so many religions. They were two only. Either you're a Christian or a Jew. So if one is hurt the other is already up on their toes. So I don't feel that, you know. But it's spreading.

Q. It's very scary.

A. Very bad.

Q. I really appreciate you sharing this information with us.

A. I feel I had to do it. Who else? When we are gone, you have only the memories.

Q. That's very important, actually, because it's an historical event of why that would have happened.

A. Yes. That's important. But however, there are so

many books, and now Schindler's List. But it's still nonbelievers. There are still nonbelievers.

Q. What is your feeling? Had you read Schindler's List before?

A. Yes. I went when it was shown to a special group, and I was at this time there. Actually I had talked also to Mr. (Pepper Topolnik), Leopold, because one is my very good girlfriend, she lives in Bratislava. I talked to her, she says she remembers very well Paul (Deck) and his wife. I talked to him and said, why don't you call her? He remembered the family very well.

So, you know, so I know the story already when I came back, when they were living. Her parents and two teenage children were in the same apartment building where we were living, so I knew the story, a long time ago.

But it was very moving, you know. They can't put in all the details. Each camp was different. But the killings were in every camp the same. In every camp the same. But some of them had a better chance.

First of all, there the families were together, and where we came, we were all separated right away. So that was --

Q. Were you separated at the death march?

A. Only those who were already sorted out, because when we came -- not my transport, we were young girls. The

first transport, all of us went in. But later on when my parents came and my brothers, they were sent straight to the gas chamber. So only the ones who they thought -- able bodies, I would say.

Q. Because you were healthier then?

A. Yes. But in Plaszow, the families were there, until the last minute. The killing went on, and they sent them, you know, it was just for a while there, the selections were there, and they sent them to Auschwitz. But some of the families then survived. But it didn't happen in Auschwitz. It didn't happen -- Auschwitz was the worst. The factory of death.

Q. Thank you very much for sharing this.

A. You're welcome. If something else triggers my mind, I will be back.

Q. And I'll come back for you.

A. Good. I'm glad to see you again after so many years.

Q. You look better than ever.

A. I do? Thank you very much. Thank you. And I was sick three weeks.

Q. But you look wonderful.

A. Thank you. I try my best to make up the lost years.

Q. That's very important.

A. I want to be, you know -- I always said, I have to live until 140, because I was 18 years when I was there, so you don't count 18 years. Normal life, people live now to 110. So we have to add the extra 18 lost years.

I tried to do my best. It's an excellent life, and you learn in camp, everything is perfect. I am happy with everything. I'm happy I get up in the morning, and it's nice weather, it's not fog. I'm miserable, I feel depressed when it's fog, because Auschwitz was always foggy.

And then, you know, I have a roof over my head. I have a husband who was three years in camp, and we understand each other. My children are married, they do well, both of them. They never were on drugs. They never drank, they don't smoke, they have good positions, well educated, five grandchildren. My oldest granddaughter is 24, she has two children, so we are already great grandparents.

Q. Wonderful.

A. And five grandchildren. My oldest is 24. The youngest is three. My two youngest boys, one goes to Hillel Brandeis. Before he went to the Hebrew Academy. Although my daughter didn't marry a Jewish man. But she is Jewish, the children -- but they get a good Jewish education, which we felt it's important.

He goes to the temple in Burlingame, to kindergarten, but my daughter signed him up to Hillel Brandeis. So why

should I complain? They are healthy. I am happy that they are okay. I'm still alive. I can't complain. I have what to eat. I have a roof over my head. I don't expect too much more.

Q. You have a wonderful support group.

A. We have a very, very good -- and, you know, I enjoy being in company of my fellow Jewish people. I belong to B'nai Mona, Emuna I am very active there, and I am volunteering at Montefiore Center, and I keep myself busy and try to help out with the people, survivors who are in need for company or sick or so. And we formed a group actually, Tikva, self-help, survivors for survivors.

Q. When we spoke last time that group had formed, and I know it's come a long way.

A. Very good. It came along, many people know about us, and we have survivors who call when they are in need or they are rejected from other organizations. And we see what can be done. So it's a good feeling, to help --

Q. Do you have a newsletter?

A. Yes, we have a newsletter. It's wonderful to be alive and be around, you know, people whom you cherish.

Q. We appreciate your coming today.

A. It was a pleasure being here. And I wanted to be here, because I wanted to tell my story. I hope so other people come forward, too.

Q. Yes.

A. They do now, when they get old?

Q. Yes, I hope maybe with the movie out, people will think more about --

A. Yes. I haven't thought, next year is going to be 50 years since the end of the war. I have to ask Lani or maybe John, do they do something about that?

Q. I don't know. That's a good question.

A. Because they have to prepare for it. It's very important, 50 years.

Q. The anniversary of the liberation.

A. Yes, of the liberation. And the Oral History Project, because I had a photographer, German, a young guy, he said John gave him my telephone number, and he is a specialist, portrait photographer. He wanted to photograph survivors, and he's going to have exhibition, Survivors After 50 Years Of Liberation.

Q. How interesting.

A. So if a German guy --

Q. Wants to do that --

A. And he says he's born here in America, of German parents. He feels very, very bad about what happened to us, and what they did to us, the Germans, so somehow he felt that at least -- he's only 22 or 24 -- that to photograph Jewish survivors and have an exhibition here and in Germany,

with the subtitle, and he said he will ask if I could sign it and put in some words to it, and he wants to have it, a portrait for the exhibition.

I'm wondering they don't do nothing, because when they take special pictures of survivors, and he wants to show it like a German, so how about our people who are remembering?

Q. And then there is a file here.

A. I thought so. Maybe they will put out a book with excerpts from --

Q. People's stories?

A. People's stories, excerpts, to the 50th anniversary of liberation. I have to talk to Lani, to give her -- because if this guy hadn't come it wouldn't even come to my mind.

Q. It's a wonderful idea. Thank you.

A. Excuse me. I have to cry.

Q. I know, it's hard when you say these things. It breaks your heart.

A. Yes.

Q. But it's good that you can remember and can tell people. And you say it so beautifully. You say it from the heart. You say what you have to say so beautifully.

A. I say it. I don't have a script, I don't write it down. I just say what I feel.

Q. Thank you.

A. Thank you.

[End tape 2]

LINDA BREDER
San Francisco

Our small town was in Czechoslovakia. There were about 1,000 jews out of the 10,000 people living there.

Before the war we had good lives. My parents were religious and they have five children.

I was in public school when Hitler came in, but we were thrown out because we were jews. The town also didn't want us to live on the main street so we had to move to the back of the town. Even though we had curfews and we weren't restricted, we thought - this will pass.

WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU WHEN THE DEPORTATIONS STARTED?

In 1942, the Nazi's came into our homes and told us that women 16 - 42 had to go with them. We weren't allowed to bring anything.

They shipped us out one night at 3 in the morning. We were in cattle cars for three days - without food, without much air. A hundred people were squeezed into these small cars, and people began to die. There were no windows.

When the train stopped, and someone said, "We're in Auschwitz." We didn't think much about it, in a way. Who knew what Auschwitz was. But then we heard the Germans screaming 'Raus! Raus' The SS guards started pushing us. There was one man with us, a doctor. It was him alone with 1,000 women. The Germans thought this was terribly funny and they started making fun of him. Then they beat him, and right in front of us they killed him. This was our first experience in Auschwitz.

WHAT WERE THE CAMPS LIKE?

We were bewil dered at first. We didn't know what was going on. They told us we were to go to work and then we marched a few kilometers to Barracks #10. There were no beds, nothing.

It was so cold. There was no heating, no water, no toilets. We were thirsty and hungry.

We started stepping on each other because there was no place to lie down. We had to sleep in each others laps. You had a little bit of straw but soon everyone was itching and scratching. There were a million ticks and fleas. This, of course, was one reason, almost everyone got typhus.

The kapos started beating us right away. Can you imagine seeing all of this when you were raised as this protected girl. We'd had such sheltered religious lives.

We had no food for four more days.

We were always having to line up and be counted. Five in a row. The Germans would stand there and say, "Look at the, those dirty jews." They'd say worse, but I can't mention it.

They told us we were filthy jews and needed to be cleaned up. We got into lines and the doctors would examine us all over. They'd say: "Oh, my god, they're still maidens."

They gave us a cup of water to wash up with and then they gave us these Russian unfiroms. They had just killed a lot of Russians, and we got those dirty bloody uniforms. They then shaved our heads and everywhere else.

THEN DID THEY GIVE YOU THE NUMBERS ON YOUR ARM?

Yes, but it was still early in the war and they didn't know how to do it. So - unlike later - every dot was a separate shot. Can you see how many dots make up these numbers? We screamed like hell but compared to what happened later, we can't compare.

HOW WERE YOU ALL HANDLING THIS EMOTIONALLY?

Girls would get so depressed and out of their minds that they'd jump out of the windows from the third floor. A girl from my town said, 'We'll never get out of here alive.' But I said, 'I've got to get out of here and tell the world.' But that was not easy. I was in the camps three and a half years.

HOW DID YOU LEARN ABOUT THE EXTERMINATIONS?

We actually built the gas chambers. I was on the first transport and at that time there was only one crematorium and it was where they'd burn the dead. The people I came with were the first to be gassed there, and at that time there were many experiments on the type of gas they should use. It was horrible, that screaming.

HOW DID YOU SURVIVE?

I was lucky. My work was at the clothing area. All of the clothes they took away from the six million had to be cleaned and put into different piles and sent back to Germany. The officers would say 'It's cold in Germany.' Like we didn't know it!

Working in Canada, as the clothing center was called, gave me the opportunity to trade clothes for food. If I hadn't I'd never be alive. If you want to survive in a camp like Auschwitz you need a good job, and you need to have good friends.

WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU AFTER THE WAR?

I went home hoping there might be someone alive. My mother comes from a big family - ten children. And my fathers side had eleven. I am the only one who survived.

I met my husband after the war ended. We came back to after the war and the Communists took over in 1948. Every year for 20 years we applied for exit visas. Every year it was denied. I didn't give up though. Suddenly in 1966 we got the visa, and in two weeks we were out of the country.

HOW DO YOU COPE WITH SUCH HORRIBLE MEMORIES?

I look back all the time but it's already 39 years and you can't change it. I want to go on living but I will never forget. Sometimes I go out and speak about the experience. It's painful and sometimes I cry - but I speak hoping it won't happen again. People can't forget.

WHAT DID YOU TELL YOUR CHILDREN?

They saw the number on my arm and they'd ask what happened. My children would say: 'Why don't we have grandparents?'

When my boy was about three years old he made a rifle from a piece of wood and marched in the backyard saying 'I'm going to kill all those fascists who killed my grandmother and grandfather.