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Interview with GLORIA LYON LYON - 1 10-25-90
Holocaust Oral History Project
Date: 10-25-90 Place: San Francisco, CA
Interviewer: Lani Silver
Transcriber: Margaret McVey

Q. HI. I'M ABOUT TO INTERVIEW GLORIA LYON. ASSISTING ME AS SECOND IS PEGGY COSTER AND JACK CLARK. TODAY IS OCTOBER 25th, AND WE'RE AT THE HOLOCAUST CENTER. THIS IS FOR THE HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT. THIS IS OUR THIRD INTERVIEW WITH GLORIA. THERE WAS A POINT WHERE YOU WEREN'T REALLY A HOLOCAUST EDUCATOR, AND YOU JUST DECIDED TO GO OUT AND TELL PEOPLE YOUR STORY. WHAT HAPPENS THEN?

A. Oh, it was about 14 years ago when the routine mail was dumped on my desk where I worked as a research analyst for ten years -- well, nine and a-half to be exact. And in this pile of mail, there was a brochure that caught my eye. On it was a swastika in black and "Mogen David" over it, and it said across it, "A lie. A Zionist hoax. The Holocaust never happened."

I never will forget that brochure because that's the first time that I have been faced with this type of horror material. I never thought that during my lifetime I would ever reach the point that people would claim the Holocaust never happened. I mean, I didn't think it would ever happen, let alone in my lifetime. And when I saw that, I thought I have some job to do. It's the responsibility I must take on. I have to come out of my cocoon and do something about it. I didn't know what. I was not a public speaker. I had one public speaking course in high school and that was it. And I just didn't know.

It so happened that as I talked about this material, my rabbi at Congregation Nertamid in San Francisco spoke from the pulpit and wove this experience into his message to the congregation.

He said from now on, we rabbis are not the ones who will talk about the Holocaust. You survivors out there will be the ones talking about the Holocaust. And he kept looking at me. I remember pointing to myself, not me. You know, when they would call me up to light the candles, I would shake so that I didn't know how -- I forgot to take a breath of air, and where am I going to catch that next breath of air from? I would be in such bad shape. How could I even give a talk let alone just facing everyone?

But he persisted, and I then said okay. But I didn't know how I'm going to do it. And he gave me a deadline for a particular time when I was going to give the talk and which was several months ahead.

Finally a month before, Karl said to me -- Karl, my husband -- said, "Honey, if you are going to do that talk, I think you ought to take some notes. But if you are not, you better go tell the rabbi about it." And I said, "Well, I don't have to take notes. I could stand up there and talk all day."

My problem is not what to say, but how can I face that audience and talk about this? And so he said then please let him know. So I said, "All right. All right." I knew I had to do it, and yet I had to face the problem.

So Karl consented to finish the dishes and whatever has to be done by me after dinner and that I could just start typing. And Karl moved the typewriter into the living room, made it very convenient for me. And it was just oozing out of me. I was up to two, three in the mornings and would go to work bleary eyed the following day. I decided just to write whatever came to my heart about these experiences. And Karl, of course, realized that this is obviously much too long. She's writing a book or whatever. But he let me just go on and on, night after night.

When I said, "Here it is," he said, "Well, let me help you edit it down to size." And without Carl's help, I really wouldn't have been able to determine what's important to say.

So he has taken the essence of it out. He promised me he's not going to change one word. It's going to be my words and my expressions, and it's going to be my story, not the polished up speech of an attorney, which he is.

So when the time came and I -- a patient congregation listened to me for an hour and a-half. And I broke down so badly several times. I told Karl before, if I break down, just leave me alone and I'll come to. Just give me a chance to overcome it.

About three, four times later, I managed to finish it, and it was very hard. That was really the breakthrough.

I felt so good that I was able to do it. I polished it up, and next I had an audience of 2,000 at Berkeley High School. I thought, oh, God, I'm going to have to speak to large audiences like this. And then they told me I have to be finished by a certain time, and to collect my thoughts, and to -- and keep it all within a short period of time was big problem for me at first. But the talk was totally successful.

Imagine, 2,000 high school students! It was going to be first in a little auditorium and then a larger place. Finally, there was so much interest in this that they opened it up to the entire student body, and everybody wanted to be there. So it was in the community theater, finally, and they kept coming and coming.

I looked and I thought, oh, God, what am I going to do if I falter? But it went well. I broke down a little bit, but not too badly. And slowly, I have been able to overcome these great difficulties, these emotional difficulties, particularly when I had to use the word "mother," I just practically choked. I had such a hard time saying anything about my mother. Still my weakest area.

But since then, I have spoken to over 300 -- before 300 forums, and I feel that I have done a lot of good, working with young people and college-aged students and adults on all levels and in churches and synagogues, social groups.

The one that I recall very fondly just a few

months ago was the California Retired Officers' Association. They had a convention in San Jose. I drove down there, and they received me just wonderfully. Afterwards, I asked for a show of hands how many of them may have liberated concentration camps, and there were over six people who participated in liberating camps. I gave this list to Lani Silver for her Oral History Project.

Q. WHAT OTHER GROUPS HAVE YOU SPOKEN TO?

A. Oh, they vary. The civic organizations. Sunday schools, Hebrew schools. Let's see -- mainly high schools, colleges and universities.

I've been also invited to Nevada where they have a statewide commemoration of the Holocaust, periodically, and I've been invited several times. They flew me up to Nevada, and particularly to Reno. They are in two cities, Reno and Las Vegas. They have two memorial services which involves inviting major high school -- high school or history -- history teachers from high schools. Major high schools. And also certain students from each of these schools to attend to a dinner. It is headed usually on the highest level. The governor of Nevada heads one and the Supreme Court Justice of the State of Nevada heads the other.

It's always done in a casino. At first I thought -- all this dazzling atmosphere. But that's what they do in Nevada, and those are the available large halls. These casinos loan their facilities for the occasion. Wherever I looked, there were mirrors, and it just seemed

to -- also I spoke in Sweden.

But first, let me tell you. I spoke in Germany, in West Germany, which is now history since the reunification of Germany just recently a couple of weeks ago. I spoke at the University of Hanover in German to the history department.

At the time the university went through a -- the students were -- what's the word? -- striking. They were striking because the university was going to impose a fee on the students, on graduating students, and on -- grad students, rather, and they protested that. But they attended my session.

Then we went to Sweden. This was a filming session, by the way, so we filmed it for the documentary film that we are making in Sweden. I spoke in the town at a high school in the town where I was quarantined and taken to -- and quarantined right after the Holocaust. That was so meaningful and so totally different from the students at Hanover University, for example. The reactions were totally different.

Q. IN WHAT WAY?

A. In what way? At Hanover University, the students have never seen a survivor and never heard the story told by a survivor. I was the first one, and they were totally stunned. They have heard about the Holocaust. They read about it, they saw films about it, but this is the first time that they have heard the story of one survivor.

And here they didn't know what to say. After, finally someone raised a hand and said something to the effect that it's not that we haven't heard you; on the contrary, we heard every word of it. But we are so totally shocked by what we heard that we just are speechless.

So I pleaded with them to speak, and let's have a dialogue. I've come from far away, and I'd like to know what they are thinking. They told me that they realize how painful it is for me to speak about this and for them also to learn about their history.

I wanted to make sure that they understand that it's important for them to know their country's history and particularly about the Holocaust.

Q. HOW DO YOU THINK THE PRESENTATION AFFECTS THE STUDENTS IN GENERAL THAT YOU TALKED TO?

A. The students are very moved. Each time, I think, you could hear a pin drop. They are so attentive. They ask many questions. And this varies.

I found that the junior-high-school-age-group students, for example, before whom I didn't even want to speak because I thought they maybe too young -- I would prefer to speak to highschoolers and university and college students rather than junior highschoolers -- really proved me wrong. Junior highschoolers turned out to be very, very special groups, and they are still not -- they readily ask questions, any questions.

For example, at Stanford University, a student

wanted to ask me a question but not openly, not before her peer group. So she sort of came up to the desk behind which I sat, and she whisperingly said, "How did you handle your period?" I said thank you for asking me that question. It's really a question that should be answered to all the students. And I proceeded to answer the question that we didn't get our periods because something was put into our soup. Something by the name of "bromo," or something like that, and it stopped our periods immediately upon arrival. But there were isolated incidents of people who still got their periods.

For example, my mother, which became really fearful because we were afraid that if Josef Mengele had discovered that somebody has a period that he may want to experiment on her.

But I wanted to really compare a Stanford student to a student from a junior high who raised that question, that very question in a large, about 600 some students, before 600 some students in an assembly hall, and nobody thought anything of it. I thought that's the difference in the age groups. How openly a 14-year-old -- uninhibited a 14-year-old still is. And, of course, that's the age I was when I entered the camp. 14.

Q. WHY DO YOU DO IT? WHY DO YOU SPEAK TO SO MANY HIGH SCHOOLS AND JUNIOR HIGHS?

A. It is really very gratifying to know that these students have learned something about this part of history

which they otherwise wouldn't have. They all say that, and they write many letters, thousands of letters. One is more beautiful than the other. The spelling mistakes and the grammar, never mind. You still get the content of it. The urgency. And they urge me on -- don't stop. I hope that you'll come back next year when my sister or brother will come to this school. I will try to sneak in again if you come. And so on. Everywhere I go.

And I think that what they write to me is really how they feel, that they have read about it, most of them, and they have seen films. But to hear a real live survivor is an entirely different experience. It somehow brings that history before them, before their eyes. It's important to them to touch me and to ask questions.

It's too bad that we cannot bring George Washington back, and Lee, and many, many other people who participated in our history. But eventually, of course, we will be gone, and they want to have this opportunity.

Q. IS THERE ANYTHING NEGATIVE? ANY COST TO YOU TO DOING THIS?

A. Oh, of course. For seven years I have not asked anybody to reimburse me for anything. I take time out to do this. It interferes, naturally, with my work. And when I worked -- I still worked full time -- I would take time off and come in on Saturdays and nights to make up for my work, because there was just no one who was able to carry on what I was doing. Very often I would lose pay as a result of it.

And, of course, the cost of getting there. I don't care where it is, I go. I have not turned anyone down yet.

Many times students have asked me would I subject myself to an interview for a report or a Ph.D. thesis or someone who is writing a book and wants to include my experiences, if it turns out to be applicable. And I always make an appointment and sometimes have to double up students from the same school.

But no, I had to carry the cost of that. And thank God that I could do it. But it became very much of a burden after we started the film project because that project has taken an enormous amount of our funds.

I started asking for a contribution toward the film project, which is tax deductible to them since the Film Arts Foundation is our administrator, and through them contributions to the documentary film -- hopefully an educational film -- is tax deductible.

Q. I WANT TO GET INTO THE FILM VERY MUCH. I WANT TO FINISH THIS PART ABOUT YOU AS AN EDUCATOR, IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS RELATED TO THIS.

SO WE'VE HEARD ABOUT SOME OF THE COSTS OF THIS AND THE REWARDS. CAN YOU TELL ME A LITTLE BIT, AGAIN, WHAT MOVIVATES YOU --

A. Well, of course, the motivating factor is, of course, that I must do all I can do to prevent another Holocaust from happening. Only through education can this happen, I feel.

Nothing is so effective than the education of a survivor of the Holocaust. One doesn't have to speak the very best English. One doesn't have to look a certain way or be of a certain age. I feel that the numbers on my arm speak for themselves and my presence there.

I'm not sure if I should do this, but I guess at some point or another in my presentation, show my tattoo as part of the processing that we had to go through in Auschwitz. A-6374. When they see that, they are -- it leaves a lasting impression on the students. And they hear some of the psychological effects that we are aware of and how many we may not be aware of.

For example, in my case, where I lost my sense of smell in Auschwitz to this day. These are just things that I learned to live with, and no big deal so far as I'm concerned. I don't know what I'm missing. But when other people hear it, they are very touched by it and realize that that's also possible when you continually smell that putrid smell that existed in Auschwitz continually.

Q. DO YOU STILL SMELL THAT SMELL?

A. In my mind, I do. I do at times, uh-huh. All I have to do is think of it and it's there. I can put on the finest perfume, I don't smell it. I sense some things through inhaling through my throat, but it's sort of guesswork. And some things I just remember from my childhood such as cinnamon, some very common smells.

Q. SO FOOD, YOU DON'T SMELL THE FOOD?

A. No. I don't. But I have a very keen sense of taste. I taste. You know, the first time I became aware of the fact that I lost my sense of smell was in Sweden. I wasn't aware of it until they gave me some perfume and I laid it on the little glass shelf in their bathroom, when I went to live with with the Swedish family who wanted to adopt me. I didn't know which was perfume because I could not read Swedish, and so I ended up -- you know, I tried to smell one of those bottles, and I didn't know which was mine. I just used one, and I put some on my behind my ears, and it got on, apparently, unlike perfume, it dripped on my brand new dress. They asked me what's that spot on my brand new dress right over here. And I thought, what spot? And I ruined my brand new dress. They realized that I used my foster father's hair oil. In those days that's what they used instead of men's cologne. I couldn't smell it. And so they said, "Can't you tell that this doesn't smell like perfume?" And I said I couldn't tell. That's when I really realized that I can't smell.

Q. HOW DID THAT HAPPEN THAT YOU LOST YOUR SMELL?

A. Well, when I went to Auschwitz, I smelled. I know I smelled because one of the first comments was, "What's that terrible smell everywhere?" And eventually, of course, we found out when I was asked to work in Birkenau at sorting the clothes and packages of the inmates, the new arrivals. And the crematorium burning. The bones and the human beings who were just gassed, just across the street from where I

worked.

It had this terrible effect on me, and that's -- I think that's where it happened. I guess it's Nature's way of protecting the human being. When I think of it, it is really a protective mechanism. And I can live with that. If it was to protect me, that's all right. I could have given my life and never smelled anything. But this way, at least, I can do everything else, and it's a small price to pay for life.

Q. AND THEN AFTER THE WAR, YOUR SENSE OF SMELL NEVER CAME BACK, AND YOU INTERPRET THAT AS PROTECTIVE ALSO?

A. I don't know how to interpret it. I sometimes think that it could well be that it blocks. There are some things that are blocked in my subconscious mind about this experience which was totally horrid.

When you think in terms of thousands of human beings, children and old people entering -- these large columns of human beings entering and never coming out, and you are a part of it because you smell it. It's painful. I don't think that a survivor can ever get over this type of experience. I think we just have to live with it. Learn to live with it and cope.

The problem is we can never really live a normal life because we do different things and these images occur before our eyes. I should speak only about myself, but when I meet a survivor, I have compassion for that person whether I like that person or not. I just know that person went

through so much that only another survivor can understand it. And so whether I like that person or not, it doesn't matter. There is something about that person that I will respect very deeply always because that survivor will never be able to tell all that he or she has lived through, has seen. Not in a thousand human beings living a thousand years could ever capsulize this experience and tell it, tell it all.

Q. WELL, IF WE JUST TOOK, SAY, THE LAST FEW DAYS, COULD YOU TELL ME SOME OF THE IMAGES THAT WENT THROUGH YOUR MIND IN THE LAST FEW DAYS, IF ANY?

A. Actually, the last few days were eventful for me. I'm writing my autobiography, and working on my documentary film, and I was also interviewed by a psychiatrist who came here to San Francisco to a psychiatric convention. She is the associate dean at the medical school in Louisville, Kentucky. The interview may take about an hour, hour and a half.

She arrived shortly after 7:30 and left at one o'clock in the morning. It was a very productive evening in that I felt that I was able to share with her a lot of my experiences. She was actually conducting a survey, and she is going to look at the end result and write a book about her findings. And she wants to include me in it. I was recommended to her by Lani Silver.

I'm very grateful to be a part of a survey since I used to work on surveys myself, and I can value the need

for surveys.

Q. WELL YOU KNOW SHE'S WRITING ABOUT WOMEN IN THE CAMPS. SHE TOLD YOU THAT?

A. No, she didn't. I didn't know that she's writing about women. I thought she was comparing men and women.

Q YES, SHE IS. SHE'S COMPARING.

A. Exactly.

Q. DO YOU HAVE ANY INSIGHTS INTO THAT QUESTION?

A. Well, as you may know, we were not together with men. Women were separated from men. So not until we had a chance to talk with men could we reflect as to what we saw in the camps, in the men's camps, from where we were, and also hear their stories.

I feel that men don't talk as much as women do. I think women have an easier time expressing -- I should say most women -- have an easier time expressing their experiences than men. Men are much more introverted, I think -- most men are about their experiences. But the stories that I've heard and read from the oral histories that Lani Silver has taken, I have -- I'm not sure if all this would make a survey, but those that I read, compared with the women's oral history, I would say that men have suffered actually more than women have. They were abused much more than women had been, as I remember it. And many of them are silent, totally silent about it, even today, compared to women.

Most of the people who talk on the Holocaust are

women that I know. I know a few men who do talk about it, but perhaps you could -- you would know better than I do how they compare. But I'm only comparing those whom I know.

I've talked to my brothers, and even one of them in the labor camp suffered tremendous abuse. And the death marches that they went on, and working in the mines, dynamiting silos and tunnels, and waiting for the debris. The debris would be just coming down and bury them. This was my father and my brother.

We women were assigned to civilians, to work with civilians in the mines. It was much cleaner work than what I hear from the menfolk. So there are many ways that you can compare it. I don't know how it would compare vis-a-vis food. I remember my dad said that they all got double rations in his unit. Still, it wasn't enough in this one particular camp in the mountains of Hartzuno. It was in Dora. In Dora.

Q. ONE OF THE THINGS THE PSYCHIATRIST SAID WAS THAT SHE FELT THAT MEN HAD A MORE ISOLATED EXPERIENCE UNTO THEMSELVES AND THAT WOMEN FORMED FAMILIES WITHIN THE CAMPS, WERE RELATED TO A GROUP OF OTHER WOMEN. WAS THAT YOUR EXPERIENCE?

A. That's my experience also. I had several cousins who were part of our -- if we can call it a "clique." It wasn't really a clique, but it was -- everybody tried to nurture herself and her family. In my case, I had my mother and my sister in one camp, one of the seven camps. I had

several first cousins. And two women who were to become later my sister-in-laws, they were also in Auschwitz with me.

One person I just interviewed in Brooklyn, she just came out of the Soviet Union. We lived across the street from each other. I left her in Auschwitz. And in this interview, she tells me she was also in Bergen-Belsen and Ravensbrück, my second camp and my seventh camp, respectively. Neither of us knew that the other was there. It was most probably at -- it could have been the same time, but it was at a different time. But still we would not have known that the other was there. These camps were huge.

Q. WHEN YOU SAY THERE WAS THIS SORT OF ELEMENT OF HUMAN KINDNESS TOWARDS THIS GROUP OR THAT, YOU FEEL THAT YOU WERE STILL WERE A PERSON CAPABLE OF BEING KIND TO THE PEOPLE IN YOUR GROUP?

A. Well, of course. You depended on each other so much. But it could also be that my sister would eat up my bread, or your best friend would steal your bread because she wanted to live. Somehow you could not think of it in terms of her thinking of me dying. Everybody was really out for herself or himself. It was a dog-eat-dog world.

At the same time, it may seem contradictory, but remember these were abnormal, abnormal situations. People have formed groups and leaned on each other; at the same time they helped each other. But at the same time these very people could eat up your bread, and that's all you had.

That's all you had. So you still were responsible for that bread yourself.

I don't remember my sister eating my bread or my mother eating my bread or my eating their bread, but it often happened that your very closest friend whom you depended on for dear life would eat your bread only to turn around and help you in some other way.

For example, when I had escaped from the truck and got out from the culvert, I got myself into a barrack. This girl gave me her overcoat. She took off an overcoat from a dead person, and that's what she wore. She also gave me that dead person's shoes. Well, wooden shoes. Clogs.

So you see, what's really strange, this very person -- I don't remember how long we were together. In my conscious memory, I left her in Auschwitz. But she apparently came with me to Sweden. I don't remember her throughout my other camps. I know that she was in Sweden because she's on the photograph that was taken in Sweden, and so it's very interesting.

Also, other acts of kindness took place. When we arrived in Auschwitz, well, a couple of days later, my mother who had upper false teeth -- not her lower, just her upper -- she tried to chew into one of these potatoes that was found in the soup that was not cooked, and it cracked her upper teeth. Oh, her life was in danger because of it. I chewed her potato for her after that and gave it to her so that she could eat her potato. It was such a sad thing.

Yeah.

Q. WHAT HAPPENED TO HER?

A. She could no longer use her teeth, her upper teeth. Of course, you were lost in Auschwitz without it. The only way she could do it is by my sister or I chewing this food so that she could eat it.

Q. I DON'T THINK I'VE ASKED YOU IF YOU WEREN'T A GOOD FRIEND, AND DON'T ANSWER, WERE THERE DECISIONS THAT YOU HAD TO MAKE THAT NOW YOU FEEL ASHAMED OF, THAT YOU SAID YOU DIDN'T STEAL BREAD OR TAKE BREAD, BUT WERE THERE OTHER THINGS THAT YOU WISH YOU HAD DONE DIFFERENTLY? WERE THERE HARD CHOICES YOU HAD TO MAKE?

A. Yes. For example, in the concentration camp of Braunschweig, we worked out in the major, major streets, long boulevards that was covered by debris because the Allies bombarded the whole town. And as far as the eye could see there wasn't a single building intact. So the Germans wanted us to clear these roads so that German artillery and vehicles could pass through, and then one -- and so we were divided by small groups along this very long boulevard in Braunschweig.

And one time in my very own group, one person just disappeared from one moment to the next. Where was she? In the meantime, the SS just walked with guns back and forth, on the cleared area, and we had to -- push and shove these boulders and concrete or whatever was on the road.

When the road was clear -- by that I mean when

the SS was a safe distance away -- we heard a sound from down below that "I am in a dark basement and I am safe." At that time, we yelled down to her, "Look around for some food." So she would stay down there, and we would whistle when the coast was clear and she could come up.

We pulled her up, and they would take turns, the women would take turns going down. And they wouldn't let me go down because I was the youngest and I was everyone's little sister. I felt guilty for having been kept safe while they were exposed to danger. So I do feel, even today, that there was -- even though they told me, well, you did your share, you looked out for the safe time, but so did everybody else. You know. And I think that if they had let me go down and face the danger, I would feel a little more heroic. This way, I feel that here they did all the dangerous work so that we could have potatoes to eat.

And when they would come up, they would have their immense coat pockets bulging with black round things, and they were indeed potatoes baked and burned from the fire of the bomb. So we feasted on these potatoes while on that job.

And yes, I think that feeling guilty was very often the case. There were many, many instances in this case. I could never steal from anybody, if my life depended on it, which in the camps it did. But I just could never do that. So it was hard for me to understand why anybody would steal my bread.

Q. WAS YOUR BREAD EVER STOLEN?

A. Oh, yes, several times. And finally my mother said, "Eat your bread right after you get it, honey. That way you know it's in your stomach, even if you do get hungry later." And so that's what I did. I just learned to listen and that sort of echoed in my memory long after mother was no longer with me.

Q. DO PEOPLE TALK A LOT ABOUT THE GUILT, ABOUT SURVIVING WHAT OTHER PEOPLE DIDN'T SURVIVE? WHAT IS THAT?

A. Actually, in my case, you know, I -- my guilt feelings are in the area of having so many of us having survived. I've been reminded of this by other survivors.

First of all, other survivors remind me that I've been in only for 13 months. To me, suffering is suffering, no matter how long you've been there. I think having gone through seven camps at my age is more than enough suffering for a regiment, let alone one human being. I would never wish it on anyone. And that my mother and father survived, even though mother died shortly after she was liberated, and two brothers survived and a sister survived. We were all exposed to the same danger. God helped us and we survived.

I don't know why I should feel guilty that we survived. And that's a terrible feeling, a terrible burden. Survivors should never talk that way to another survivor. In a way, I always feel as though they are trying to diminish my painful experiences, and how wrong they are in doing that.

I could only feel joy when someone has something good to say that has come out of this. So just a sister having survived, well, thank God. I mean, so few have a sister, and here I have a sister and two brothers and a mother and a father who survived. They're not alive anymore, my mother and father, that is.

My sister feels the same way. I talked to her about that. She said, everybody I know is alone, and here we have each other and we're so lucky. But in a way, she says, it feels painful. Naturally. We are very happy to have each other. I just saw her last week. She just got married, remarried after her husband died two and a-half years ago. She married a survivor also, from Romania.

Q. WONDERFUL. WELL, WHAT DOES THAT DO FOR YOUR CONCEPT OF -- HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT HUMAN NATURE?

A. Human beings are very fragile, and sometimes very thoughtless. I think they don't really mean to hurt. I think what they really are saying that how glad I would be if I had a sister or brother or mother or father. I think deep down that's what they are really saying. I feel guilty that they don't, and that I do, or that I did while they were alive. Of course.

Q. WHY IS THAT GUILT AND NOT JUST THAT YOU FEEL BAD FOR THEM? WHY DO YOU FEEL GUILTY?

A. I don't know if I understand it all. I wish I did. It's a very strange kind of guilt feeling. It's not as if mother baked a pastry and I stole half and ate it up.

Where is the pastry when I'm not saying anything? It's an entirely different feeling.

It deals with something deep down in your soul, with your soul deep down, and the things that matter most to a human being, that of having each other. When you are deprived of the most precious possession -- your parents, your family who nurture you, who love you, who gave you that which makes you want to get up in the morning, that strength, that love -- then what else is there left? Life becomes difficult, a struggle. You have to pull yourself up in the morning. You don't just jump up -- oh, what a beautiful day! There is a purpose in living. That guilt feeling is very painful.

Q. HAVE YOU READ BOOKS ABOUT IT? HAVE YOU READ SCHOLARS, SAY, ABOUT THAT GUILT FEELING? ANYTHING ABOUT IT?

A. Not very much. I've read many Holocaust books. I have not yet read one that thinks about it the way I do. I haven't read the right ones. But each book I read emphasizes some other phase of this psyche.

I studied child psychology in college, so I have a little bit of, I guess, a little bit of feeling as to how, you know, what experts think of treating children. What is it that forms a happy child and how you can hurt a child and so on.

But you know, much of that is really applicable to us adults. We feel -- I feel as fragile as a child in many ways. When I talk about the Holocaust, and particularly

that deep-down feeling that you just touched on, I feel very vulnerable. And it is not something I can do anything about. It just wouldn't go away.

Q. IT'S NOT GONE AWAY?

A. It doesn't go away. It stays there and it just pops up. Pops up. Before I came here, I didn't think I'm going to cry. I felt very strong to do this interview. But then I didn't expect to stir up that which is painful to me.

I have a little -- you know, my mother died after the Holocaust from Holocaust-related causes. She is buried in the town where I was born, which was part of Austria-Hungary before World War I and then became Czechoslovakia after World War I. In 1938 it became Hungary again, and so it happened that we went with the Hungarian contingent to Auschwitz.

Now, my mother is buried in the cemetery there. I just have this great need to go and say goodbye to her. Why, she's dead, she's buried. She is six feet underground. How could I say goodbye to her? She won't even hear me. I know, my intellectual self knows this, and yet my emotional self tells me do it. This is your unfinished business. You have to do it. Your mother, you say goodbye to her and you're going to feel better.

So I'm planning this trip with my husband next April. I want to be there on the day when we were deported, April 15. This is the first time that they permit anyone to come into that area which is now part of the Soviet Union

since World War II and part of the Ukraine, Karpato, Ukrajina.

Q. WHAT HOLOCAUST-RELATED CAUSES DID YOUR MOTHER DIE OF?

A. She died of heart failure which she suffered from heart problems in Auschwitz. You know, she couldn't march. She couldn't march anymore towards the end, and she would have palpitations of the heart. We had so many near-misses with her.

At the very end, I wasn't there anymore. My sister tells me that the Germans got into a little Jeep and told them that they had to follow, and there were some other Germans with a Jeep in the back. Anybody who fell behind was shot down.

So there was a death march because the Allies were getting close -- the Russians, in fact -- getting close to Auschwitz. So after a while, my mother said, "I can't take this very much longer." And Annuska, who was only 12 years old, my sister, said, "Mother, you have to continue just for a short time. I'm sure it will be all over." And she went a few more feet. She said, "I don't care what they'll do. I am just not able to go any further. You go on, honey."

And she said, "I'm not leaving you, Mother. They'll shoot you, they will have to shoot me too."

And mother started going across the crowd and nearly ran over her. She was about to sit down when the Germans just took off with the Jeep, and that was the very

end. They could hear the artillery fire already on the other end. That's how she stayed alive, only to hitchhike and walk home and partly by train all the way from Auschwitz. Imagine. What a report. So she eventually died of a heart attack.

Q. WAS ONE OF THE THINGS YOU FELT GUILTY ABOUT WAS ESCAPING YOURSELF WHEN YOU JUMPED OUT OF THE CAR? DO YOU FEEL THAT OR --

A. No. No. I thought they were stupid not to try. When I think back now, I wonder what my chances would be, would have been if more -- if all of us jumped off or, you know, I didn't think of it at the time. In fact I didn't. I don't feel guilty about it. I thought that was pretty good. I thought that was, you know -- no, I don't feel guilty about that. They had the same chance I had.

I think there were two girls who could definitely have done it. One was from Beregszisz from where I went to high school, you know, nearby. I don't know why she didn't jump, except that she didn't think I would have a chance. And frankly, what chances would anybody have getting away?

I didn't know what was going to happen to me after I jumped. I just jumped, and what comes, comes. Actually, I was just too young to really think any further. But there was no time to think. Everything was just momentary, decisions had to be made. So if I stay on this truck, I'm going to be killed. If I jump, maybe somebody will beat me up after I'm found and I'll end up in the same place. All

right. So I'll get beaten up and end up in the same place. At least I will have tried for my life and to get back to my mother.

I never saw my mother again. That's the last time I saw her at that last selection. I don't know why I can't get that out of my system.

Q. THE LAST TIME YOU SAW HER?

A. (Nods.)

Q. I ACTUALLY DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED THE LAST TIME YOU SAW HER. DO YOU WANT TO TELL ME?

A. I'm sorry. Why do I do this? (Crying) In Auschwitz, we went through the selection many times, and this time I was taken out for extermination, sent to the other side. And, of course, we worked at Brezsinka. We knew that it was for extermination. All of us knew.

Q. YOU WORKED WHERE?

A. Brezsinka, we called it, which is in Birkenau. We were housed in Auschwitz, and we marched every day to Birkenau and at night back to Auschwitz where we were housed. We were counted off each day. We had to cross the electric wire fences and heard the orchestra, the Auschwitz orchestra, play, very often, almost daily, as we were counted off there into the other camp and went around a forested area to the area of the gas chambers where we sorted the clothing. We went through all sorts of refuse.

One time my mother found a diamond, a large diamond. She said how good it would be to have this

diamond when we get out of here. See how hopeful she was too? It just seems to run in my family. All of us are like that. And I said, "Don't do it mother, they are likely to inspect us and they'll find it." We still had our shoes from home, and she put it in one of her shoes by the toes. That's where she kept that diamond.

That night we had to remove our shoes and our clothes. They were going to look at us, check us through. My heart started pounding. Annuska was just was beyond herself, and mother said very calmly, "Don't you fret, I'm going to take care of it."

We were standing on -- not fine gravel, but the small stones, and there was also some gravel, but mainly stones. This whole area -- wasn't cemented. She took off her shoes and she turned it upside down just as naturally as if the shoe just fell off as she took it off, and with her other foot she just pushed a little pebble over it.

I took a deep sigh. Thank God for this. Because she would have been beaten to pulp had she been found. She hadn't done it after that, but she meant well. She left everything behind that she worked so hard for, and she wanted to have a good start if and when we get out of here. And at that time, that seemed so hopeless. It was not so long after we arrived. Here we just gave up everything we brought along.

Q. THAT WAS THE LAST TIME YOU SAW YOUR MOTHER?

A. No. No. That was a different selection. I'm

sorry. That other selection was one evening unexpectedly. Josef Mengele appeared, and we were --

Q. WHAT HAPPENED RIGHT BEFORE JOSEF MENGELE APPEARED? WHERE WERE YOU?

A. Where were we? We were in our barracks, I believe. Where were we? Which barracks were we in? We were in our barracks. You know, I'm not hundred percent sure which barracks we were in. We were in some barracks. It's not clear. But there were many people in our barracks. I tend to think it was in our barracks, but I'm not hundred percent sure.

Anyway, we were in a barracks, and Josef Mengele appeared. There was a door, like every barrack had, and you go this way, you go that way. It was a long column that we had to stand in. And people kept -- were very fearful as soon as they saw him. Some people dropped, fainted, because it took a lot of energy to think, to face up to this, whether you're going to live or die, with this man pointing this way or that way to you.

So the people, we just let them -- and just continued in the rows. I was sent to the other side this time. My mother and my twelve-year-old sister were sent with those who were to continue to live. I was there with 30 girls, and this is -- I saw my mother start crying and my sister too and my cousins, and there were some relatives, and they all knew what this meant. This was my death sentence. That's the last time I saw my mother.

Q. MENGELE POINTED AT YOU AND SAID, "GO INTO THIS LINE"?

A. Yes.

Q. WHY --

A. He turned me around. Well, I don't know why, except that I probably was emaciated, which I was, and he probably felt I'm not going to last very long. But I was really very strong yet. I have not stayed inside the barrack once. I kept up with my work.

But these things, there are no real reasons for them, for these selections. He just selected me. And Annuska was selected many times, and saved. But Annuska, my sister, because of her age, was selected each time. The Lagerelteste -- once when we worked for the Weberei -- that's another place -- the Lagerelteste came and talked to the SS and said, "She's a very good little worker." And one time they decided to test her. The SS came in one day to the Weberei. You see, I have to -- I'm backtracking now, to Auschwitz.

The inmates blew up one of the gas chambers, and so we were placed to some other place. They found us work in the Weberei. And what did they do in the Weberei? We braided from cloth, from strips of cloth, something. They took -- some people thought, but I don't know whether it's true or not -- that these are to be fuses to be used in the front. And these braids were about as wide as my hand.

Some people at another place had to cut up on

material from the clothes that the inmates brought that were not good. Our job was to use those cut-up strips and braid them much like hair is braided, and then roll them up in a circular fashion.

So two SS came in one day and -- oh, we were we were cussed out in German. One of them said, "You," pointing to my sister, 12 years old. "You come here." And Annuska went. She was totally frightened. And the SS put his foot up with his boots on, on the chair, and pulled out a chair, put his foot on it and he said, "I want you to braid around my boot, and I want you to braid for two minutes" -- or however long minutes -- about two minutes. And there he was watching his watch while my sister was braiding this. I can't even use the words that were used on us -- but the SS said, "Continue to braid." And, "I want to know how well you are going to braid compared to this child."

Annuska did her best. She was a good little worker for her age. So when she was finished, my poor mother thought this is her end. You know. And so did I. But I kept just watching mother being concerned that she can do her work at this point and not fall apart. And then "<u>gen ug,</u>" he said, "enough," and showed us the amount that she had braided. He said, this is how many inches or centimeters that she had braided in so and so much time. "Now, you are all older, and I want to know how much you can do. All of you start fresh." And that's exactly what he

did. He wanted to compare her to them or them to her. And when they finished, the SS took Annuska and said, "Come with me."

I thought, oh, my God, they're taking her away. And Annuska thought that she is being led to the gas chamber. But soon she came back with an armful of stuff in her arms, herrings and potatoes and soda water, and I don't know what not. The SS took her to a canteen I never even knew existed and gave her all of this to eat and drink. Imagine! I mean such a sight -- in Auschwitz.

This is the way that they played one inmate against another. But she passed many of these selections and the supervisor would come forward and say she is one of my best little workers.

Q. WHEN YOU WERE SELECTED, WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU, THEN?

A. Oh, I was taken to another barrack which was totally dark. And then in the middle of the night, a truck came to take us all away. And one SS guard led us onto the truck, and another came to close the canvas in the back. It worked like drapes. And this other SS spoke Hungarian, and we knew him from our -- from Brezsinka. There he used to be our guard, and he used to talk in Hungarian to us -- not much, but once in a while, and in a very low tone.

Also he showed us pictures of his grandchild. I remember seeing that little grandchild about three, four years old, maybe six at the most, and he remembered my

mother.

All he said to me was, "Te is he in Hungarian," or, "You too? " And I said, (nods). Yes, you know, by nodding. And that's when he spoke up to all of us. We were all on the truck by then. He said, "You all know that we going to the gas chamber. If you want to, you may jump off on the way. If you are found, you are not to give me away," he said, "for I may be able to save other lives yet. But if you do give me away, both you and I will be killed." And then he closed the drapes and he went up front and he slowly drove off. Once that truck crossed the electric wire fence gate -- which was shut immediately after it so that nobody could go in and out of that camp.

We were now over in the next camp, and that is where we all -- that is the way we always went every morning and every night. And I always noticed a deep ditch near the road. So I said to them on the truck, "Who is going to come with me?" Because I thought really, just quickly. I can't even think that fast today as I remember thinking what it was like -- I thought quickly. If I'm going to stay here, I'm going to be killed. If I'm going to jump, they're going to beat me up and I'm going to be burned. But at least, I will have tried. So who is coming with me? Just like that. Nobody responded. You know.

You know, many of them were emaciated and just robbed of all willpower and energy. In fact, even the very last shred of hope. Some of them probably just welcomed the

inevitable, because we felt that sooner or later we all are going to die in those gas chambers. It's a matter of time. How long could we take this? So nobody responded.

We were approaching that area where there was a deep ditch near the road, and I just jumped off the slow moving truck and I hopped down the roadside. There was sheer ice forming on the walls. And I was naked.

I remember very little, as a matter of fact, of this, but I remember my body sticking to the ice, and so I pulled myself away and hopped down. To my surprise, there was something, the shadow of something round, and it was a culvert. I didn't know what it was used for, but there was water running through it and little sort of sheer ice forming along the sides of the water that was running through it. There I was just curled up like so in this culvert.

After a few minutes or so, I heard the sirens go on. They didn't go on because there were bombers bombing Auschwitz. No. They went on because -- whenever somebody was missing or somebody escaped. So I figured that probably the truck by now arrived at the gas chamber and it was minus one person, and they're looking for me.

I know I am missing. I didn't know who else is missing. But I thought that they are looking for me, and soon I heard German voices above. And there I was. Nobody came down to the culvert. I was not discovered. So I stayed there that night, that same night, the following day,

and until the following night when I felt that what will I have accomplished if I don't get out of here?

So I just decided to make my way up to the roadside. In the distance, I saw a tiny little light which looked very much like a little star, and I just followed that little light. Remember, the barracks were all dark because a complete blackout was observed. It was war time, so they observed a complete blackout. I just decided to follow that little light, not really not knowing if it would lead me to a safe place or straight into SS headquarters.

Frankly, I wasn't familiar with this camp, and I thought I lost my sense of direction, and so I just had to take the chance and walk in there, whoever is there or whatever is in that barracks. I don't know.

I think God really must have been walking alongside me, because nobody even stood by the door, inside or outside. I just entered. And there was some light inside. I just picked the first available bunk and I climbed up to the third tier, and somebody started to scream. I put my hand on my mouth. My God, she's going to give me away. I just saved my life. I said, "I'll tell you later."

Well, she gave me her overcoat. And I think this is what -- to get back to my earlier -- to the unfinished part of my earlier story. Then she gave me her overcoat and got herself a coat off of a dead body. And gave me the wooden shoes of a dead person. You could always rely on a dead person. That is about the only way that we improved

our wardrobe in the concentration camp. Yeah.

Q. DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN YOU TELL THIS STORY AGAIN OR IN THIS INTERVIEW OR WITH THE PSYCHIATRIST THE OTHER NIGHT WHO IS WRITING THE BOOK, YOU'VE TOLD YOUR STORY SO MANY TIMES, DO YOU FIND SOMETHING NEW IN EACH TIME? DO YOU GO SOMEPLACE DIFFERENT?

A. Yes. As a matter of fact, in some areas, I find periodically an opening. For example, I didn't know for a long time what I did in Hanover. I thought I did -- I worked in an ammunitions factory. I didn't remember the details. I just couldn't remember for many years. I didn't know what I did, so I didn't say what I did, until the Bhopal incident happened in India.

I was sitting before the television listening to the news, and a report on Bhopal came. Then Americans wanted to know indeed how do we transport those dangerous chemicals? So I recall the state of Georgia -- in the state of Georgia, someone was demonstrating a tank-type truck that's being used to move or transport this very dangerous type of chemical to another state, which -- either to New Jersey or -- I'm not certain to which other state. And the man had a gas mask on, and that's when I remembered what I did in Hanover. That was the key to my subconscious memory.

After that, I didn't hear the news. I just remember I stared at the television, and I just remember seeing myself, working in this factory for the Continental Gummiwerke in Hanover, where there were rows and rows of

women working behind conveyor belts, and that were moving, and these gas masks were moving at I don't know what intervals.

It was my job to do a certain part of that gas mask. And if I could finish it, I could leave it on, and the next person at a certain point would do the next part that she had to do. If not, I would have to remove it and drop it next to me.

We worked with civilian people in this factory who could not stand the fact that we were beaten on the job whenever that pile was getting too big, which meant that we were not doing our share, or what was expected of us.

Mind you, this belt -- and I could just see this as I was watching the television and not seeing anything the television was showing after that -- that sometimes the belt was going too fast.

I remember how it was like seeing monsters in my dreams every night. 12 hours' work with these gas masks brought about this nightmare, this nightmarish dream each time, and the fear that we're not going to be able to do it and that we're going to be beaten for that.

Well, the civilians complained that they didn't want us to be beaten in front of them. On the job. They can't take it. So what did the Germans do? They took down our numbers, and it seemed harmless enough to the German civilians. They didn't know what that meant. Maybe they didn't even notice it. But at night after 12 hours of

work -- hours of work -- in our barracks, numbers so-and-so and so-and-so and so-and-so would be called out and we would have to mete -- they meted out the punishment on us.

Many many years later, to be exact in 1987, I returned to that scene. I scouted the area, and I found the oldest resident living just across the street from where our barracks were. Yes, she said. She's the oldest resident, and she remembers those barracks. In fact, she said, what were those screams that were coming out of those barracks night after night that they could hear. So I told her, I am an old neighbor of yours. And we had a good filming session with her.

Q. I REMEMBER THAT.

I WANT TO ASK YOU WHEN YOU WERE WITH THIS WOMAN WHO CAME TO WRITE A BOOK, YOU'VE TOLD YOUR STORY TO SO MANY HIGH SCHOOLS AND JUNIOR HIGHS, WHEN YOU ARE SITTING WITH HER, WAS THERE SOMETHING THAT LED YOU A CERTAIN DIRECTION THAT YOU HADN'T THOUGHT OF? WAS THERE SOMETHING, OR WAS IT JUST LIKE FOREIGN TO YOU OR --?

A. Not at all boring. Each time I tell it, and I had no notes in front of me as now -- Sometimes I remember additional details. I told her a part of a story to which I do not know the end yet. I just don't know how it developed. And I explained to her how I just seem to remember -- I remember when I only remembered part of it. And then at one point, something triggered another part of it. But I don't remember how it ended up. It's a very

important piece of story.

It had to do with my once having been picked out by Mengele for having had a rash around my stomach area. And I think it was from the filth that eventually showed up, and I probably scratched it and Mengele took me out. He sent me to to, on the little -- I don't know -- for lack of a better word, I'll call it a hospital, but it wasn't a hospital.

Dr. Gizella Pearl from Hungary was the doctor there. I hate to tell the story because it has -- I don't know what the end is, but she set me on this warm steel shelf which was on top of a heater, to dry off the rash, so far as I know. I remember staying there a night or two only, but I don't know exactly how long I was there. But I remember she came to me and she said, "Go back to your mother, to your barrack. This building is going to be liquidated during the night or tomorrow morning." I don't remember. And I hesitated going back. I don't know why. I was afraid perhaps that they were going to shoot me or something if I am found walking. But I don't remember why. But that could be a possibility.

Anyway, so she called somebody else over and said, "Take her to point such and such and then let her proceed on her own." But I don't know where I went. That's as much as I remember.

But I remember another part of this wonderful little beautiful woman. I think she came up to my shoulder,

if that. She looked like a little girl. One night I woke up to screams in my barrack, in Auschwitz, and this young girl was being given a talking-to. She arrived pregnant but she didn't show it. You know, pregnant women were sent to be exterminated. But she didn't show it yet, and so she was sent to live and she began to show.

There was an underground. I didn't know about that. I was too young, I guess, to be trusted with such important information yet. She was there in the barrack and trying to tell the young woman that, please, let's abort this baby. When you'll be free, you can have another one. If not, you will die in the gas chambers. You and your baby.

And she was just throbbing. She was just crying beyond herself. And they were trying to hold her mouth so nobody could hear it, and the women were holding her down and finally yielded to an abortion. And there on the dirty floor in our barrack in Auschwitz, Dr. Gizella Pearl performed an abortion on her with her bare hands so that the woman could survive. She lived. Next day, she was protected because she developed a fever. But she was protected and so she did not go out to stand on -- for the head count. And somehow she was protected, but she lived.

Q. DO YOU KNOW HER NAME?

A. I don't know her name.

Q. DO YOU KNOW THE NAME OF THE MAN THAT SAVED YOUR LIFE, THE SS GUARD?

A. No. I've been looking into that. In fact, very recently we had a guest from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem who works with the famous scholar, Yehuda Bauer. He came here to do research.

I asked him if he happens to know what the names -- whether there were any other Hungarian guards. He says, "Oh yes. There were several Hungarian guards in Auschwitz." And how it came about. He said he actually looked into that after he heard my story because he himself didn't know -- only to find that there were other survivors also who were exposed to some Hungarian guards in Auschwitz.

Q. EXPOSED TO SOME KINDNESS?

A. Kindness. It's interesting to hear. He didn't know the names, but he is still searching further. I really wish I could see that man today because he is my hero. He did say that he was not in Auschwitz by choice. So --

Q. THE NIGHT YOU SPENT WITH THE PSYCHIATRIST, DID ANYTHING ELSE COME UP FOR YOU AT EACH TIME YOU SPEAK? I'M WONDERING WHERE YOU GO TO WITH THAT.

A. I can't remember right now. I just can't remember whether I -- I just don't remember whether there was any new material or not.

Q. I WANT TO GET BACK TO THE QUESTION OF HUMAN NATURE. YOU KNOW WHEN I WAS IN GRADUATE SCHOOL IN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY, THE SUBJECT WAS ALWAYS IS HUMAN NATURE GOOD OR BAD? THAT WAS THE SIMPLEST LEVEL OF IT. WHAT DO YOU SAY?

A. Oh, I think that human beings have to learn to be

good and have to learn to be kind. We're not born, I think, with these facilities; that we learn it from our parents, from our siblings, then we apply it in our daily lives.

We learn to protect each other again as you were protected at home. But these become -- you build your defense mechanisms, your strength and your weaknesses very early on. When life takes you to places like Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen, and so on, they serve you well if you have good strength to draw from, especially if one of them or two of them are with you.

Human beings, you really learn what they are like in situations like that. If they were kind to begin with, some of their kindnesses come through. Even if they steal your bread, there still is something about them that can be a very big help to you.

In my case, for example, they saved my life. After my 7th camp when they were about to shoot us down out in the open fields, there I was beaten unconscious for wanting to pick up macaroni that I spilled out of my lap, the only thing that I would have eaten in about four days. And I never got up. But it -- the survivors who also haven't eaten all those days, they have carried and have dragged me back to the cattle car.

Now, I experienced that if human beings tend to overreact or act badly at one time, that we should not really judge them because the circumstances under which they commit this act has to be taken into consideration. I

don't know what any of us would do under the same circumstances, whether we would be any different, except that these things vary in degrees -- depending, I think, much on our backgrounds.

I think if you were brought up in a kind, loving home, that you tend to be kind and loving, even when a person gets mean and that we feel badly about it and we want to make up for it and we want to do our share to do good. I can't possibly -- very -- I think only in very few cases that people really would want to see you rot there; that, if given a chance, I think human beings help each other.

At times when their lives depend on it, that's different. Then, of course, the question comes up as to whom shall I save? Myself? And obviously I come first, and then what else can I do? Because if you don't save yourself, how can you also -- how can you help anybody else?

And at the same time, all these experiences tend to also harden the human being; makes you realize that what human beings are capable of, how that they can hurt each other. So you learn about their kindnesses but also about their weaknesses. So you come out feeling almost like an expert. These experiences develop your instincts.

Q. HAVE YOU BEEN HARDENED, GLORIA?

A. I think that to some extent, uh-huh. Mostly I feel that I have become sensitized. There are certain things that I cannot take about suffering. I cannot watch

even a game of -- what is it called? A fight. I can't watch the fights. Makes me nauseous right away. I have to walk out of a movie whenever people fight. When I drive a car and I see two kids are, you know, hitting each other -- maybe they are just playing -- I start getting very anxious inside. So I, in many areas, I really have become very sensitized.

But at the same time, I can start screaming at my husband, poor guy. Sometimes it happens. I feel terrible about it when I know he didn't deserve it. I'm not always sweet and nice. I also get upset and I feel unfair. And I feel sometimes some other people get -- become unfair toward me, and so I feel that it's normal to be that way. But it doesn't mean that he's bad, that I am bad, that we just have -- we go through hard times and good times, and they just have to understand how it was, how it was meant.

Q. I SAW YOU TWO HUGGING ON THE STREET ONE DAY. YOU DIDN'T SEE ME FROM MY CAR. DID THE HOLOCAUST EXPERIENCE MAKE YOU THE OPPOSITE ALSO? EVEN MORE LOVING OR TAKING LIFE LESS FOR GRANTED OR TAKING THE RELATIONSHIPS --

A. No. I think the Holocaust made me more sensitive about human beings. I value human life so much more. When I hear about these murders, how senseless all this is, I think the Holocaust sensitized me in this area very much. Human life and human freedoms are most precious to me. Above all.

This is where it all begins, I think, with a

loving human being. A loving, giving human being could do just about anything, given a chance in a free society. I think the two go hand-in-hand -together. If we have those two things along with good health, there is no accounting as to what human beings could do.

But we have to fight our daily battles, and life isn't just smooth. I feel that it's up and down, and we have to take it, take the good with the not so good. That's what it is all about. We call that -- that is what we call life.

I am less likely to want war. I'm aware that so much blood would be shed. At the same time, I feel for freedom. We mustn't let anybody take this very precious thing away from humanity, that freedom is the only -- we were meant to be free, that we must protect it. If it means a war, well, I don't want to name names today in this world, but there is another Hitler and, it seems to me, coming up in the Middle East, and who just wants to grab that whole land in the whole area. That's the way I see it. All over again. The same sort of thing. He must be stopped before he goes too far.

I'm talking about Saddam Hussein. This may be very controversial, but looking at it from my background, I can't help it. I think to him human life is very cheap. He doesn't care what it would cost, and he would use chemical warfare. I just hope that we'll be able to prevent bloodshed there. But he's already turning a lot of

innocent people into gangsters.

Q. I WANT TO ASK YOU ABOUT YOUR FILM. BUT BEFORE I GET TO THAT, I WANT TO ASK YOU HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT THE GERMAN PEOPLE NOW.

A. I hope for the best with the way the German people -- there is nothing we could do about this -- re-unification. I know, historically speaking, it would not have a chance. I do hope that this one will. West Germany has shown its good intentions and has shown -- has tried to reverse the past. I hope that will rub off on the East Germans, rather than the other way around.

I know that West Germany is under a great stress now, economically, and the absorption problems with all these refugees. It is now totally on its own. But we have to take chances in life. I can't say I would have voted for it, but I cannot do anything about it now. It is here, and I think I can just hope for the best. Education is the answer.

Q. AND WHAT'S YOUR LEVEL OF BITTERNESS OR MISTRUST?

A. Again, I think that goes back to your childhood. I really do. I am a very gullible person, even after all this.

I have a bed and breakfast. We had people from 33 different countries over a period of ten and a-half years and all 50 states of the Union, many times over from most of them. I give them keys, and they come and go as they wish in the lower two parts of our home. They could come up to

our level, if they wished.

There is a solarium. Sometimes they sit out there sunning themselves. And I leave the house thinking nothing about them being there alone. Most of the time they are out, of course. They are here to visit the City. But if they had bad intentions, certainly they would steal -- they could do any number of things. But in the ten and a-half years I've done this, I have never missed anything. And what is there really to take? When I think of it, I think this is one thing the Holocaust taught me, and that is that if we don't trust each other, what is there left, really?

I think that the majority of people are decent and good and want to do the right thing. I think that's what this ten and a-half years have proven to me. Oh, it is the small percentage of criminals and those in trouble that the newspaper headlines are all about. And I like to continue to think that way. If I live in a euphoric society, or a world, so be it. I like myself the way I am.

Q. I'D LIKE TO ASK YOU ABOUT THE FILM, THEN I'D LIKE TO SEE IF OUR FRIENDS HAVE ANY QUESTIONS. THE FILM IS VERY EXCITING. WHERE ARE YOU NOW? HOW DID THE FILM DEVELOP? WHAT HAS TO HAPPEN NEXT?

A. Oh, it is so exciting. We have the most moving film footage. I can hardly wait to show it. We still need 80- to $100,000 to finish it.

The latest development with it is a grant from West Germany and from a foundation there -- I don't know

whether I should give its name out -- but it concentrates on doing good in the area of education ~~and~~ related to the Holocaust -- in Germany itself. It's just a small foundation. They found that I'm doing important work and they granted $7,500 toward our film. Now, it's really a drop in the bucket, but it is certainly going to be very helpful to pay for the many expenses that we have in connection with it.

Most of the film footage has been shot. It would be wonderful if this trip back to my birth place could be filmed, but the film could be a good film without it. It could add some good film footage, but we will have to settle for what we can. Be realistic about it.

Some of the most exciting film footage we have was taken in various schools in San Francisco and the Bay Area, and then in Germany before the German students at the University of Hanover, their questions and my answers, and the experiences in discovering -- revisiting, rather -- five of the seven former concentration camps. The ones not visited were Auschwitz and Ravensbruck, because Auschwitz was way out of the way and was too costly for the film crew; and Ravensbruck was in East Germany, way out of the way as well, and too expensive for our budget.

But the other camps, the other five were within 150 miles of each other. We went into East Germany too. It was most exciting to revisit the Continental Gummiwerke. How that came about is simply incredible. First, I was

invited to speak at the history department.

Q. ACTUALLY, YOU TOLD US THAT STORY.

A. Did I?

Q. YOU DID. AND THAT WAS SO MOVING. I DON'T WANT TO PUT YOU THROUGH THAT TWICE.

A. I don't remember. Great.

Q. IT'S ALL DOWN. IT WAS QUITE A STORY.

A. Did I tell you about Braunschweig, the books?

Q. NO.

A. Oh, those are the two stories I wanted to share with you.

Q. GREAT.

A. Braunschweig was my third camp, and it was just a temporary camp, but we were housed there in a barn. We worked on the streets of Braunschweig. The potato incident happened in Braunsweig. But I wish to tell you about my return in 1987 with a film crew.

We couldn't find the place. With the help of a friend and professor of German history -- the historian who was an author also from the university -- we finally found the area from process of elimination, and finally found it and recognized the little brook that I used to hear while I was inside the camp, water running down a little brook, like a little brook. I didn't know if it was a river or -- and so there it was, and next to it was a little house. In front of it was a yard, and a man was out there working in his yard.

So I said to Dr. Stolberg, our friend, I said, "Would you please ask him if he knows that he lived next to a former concentration camp?" And you should have seen this man's face. "No." Just like that. He was totally shocked to learn that he lived next to a former concentration camp, which today is a ceramics warehouse and it has a modern front. But the back is still the same as it was.

Karl is the one who recognized it from my description. He went around the back, and we kept looking at it. The front didn't look familiar, obviously. And you know, separating his house from the camp was a fence and this most beautiful blossoming apple tree. And you could see from his yard the wall of the former camp where the SS used to house their horses and tie them to the walls. And even today, they had rings, metal rings around this long wall of this building -- even today, which helped us to identify it also.

So when the man learned that I survived Auschwitz, he said, "How could I have done that?" He says he heard that everybody who went there did not come back. So I showed him my tattoo and that I did survive it. So he said he was there two years before, and he was rummaging around.

Now, this was not in Auschwitz but a little further over where he came from in Upper Silesia. He said in a garbage can he found three books, and they are leather bound. Would I want to buy them, he asked me. So I said, "Well, I'd like to see it, but let's talk about it." So he

went in and brought out three books. And as soon as we looked at it, we identified it. They were indeed three chumashim. And one of them contained the Ten Commandments and I proceeded to read to him, "Thou shalt not murder, thou shalt honor thy mother and thy father and love thy neighbor as thyself" -- the three of the most important of the ten to me. I read it in Hebrew and translated it on film. So we went into a discussion about this.

And I said, "Look, the spine of these books are broken, one of them, and these books would not have great resale value, but I would very much like to take it back to the Holocaust Center in San Francisco to the library because we are here on a very tight budget and I can't afford to buy it, as much as I would like to." So he said, "Here, you take it. You can read it. To me it means nothing," he said. So I brought it back. After the film is finished I will turn it over to the Holocaust Center.

I was very anxious to read in the back of the books if the custom, perhaps, was the same as where I come from -- family names, dates, and so on. That's what we used to do with the bible. There was scribbling only, and there were names, and some people added up figures, but not what I expected. In any event, it was a very interesting encounter.

Now, his daughter who was right next to him and was playing with little guinea pigs in a little house in the yard. I asked, "How old are you?" And she said, "I am 15."

I said, "That's exactly the age I was when I was a slave laborer next door to your house."

They looked at me as though I'm growing horns. It must have been very strange for them to meet someone who has returned.

We said goodbye after promising to send him a tape of the film, of -- at least this part of the tape when the film is completed.

I corresponded with the little girl for a while, and now it's my turn to write again. I sent her a little package with "San Francisco" on a sweatshirt, cable car and all. But it was really -- it was a very moving experience.

Q. I DIDN'T KNOW THAT STORY. THAT'S INCREDIBLE. WHAT IS A CHUMASH?

A. Chumash is the book that contains the Torah, the five books of Moses. The Torah, the five books of Moses as well as the commentaries by the various sages. So what you could do is, in a Chumash, you could read -- for example, in our synagogue, you can read the original Hebrew as it appears in the Torah, Chumash, and next to it you can read the translation, the exact translation. And each sentence has a number so that if you want to know what this sentence 10 means, just look at sentence 10 in the English, and down the bottom, different rabbis had different interpretations of the meaning of this. You know, in Judaism, everything is free thought. When one rabbi says something, that's not necessarily it. Perhaps another one has a different

meaning. And you may have, yet, another meaning to this. That is what's interesting about it. And you can study it. Chumash is a very cherished book, obviously, to the Jewish people.

Q. I'D LIKE TO ASK, WHAT YOU THINK WE SHOULD DO NOW? MAYBE WE SHOULD TAKE A BREAK. WOULD YOU LIKE TO TAKE A SHORT BREAK AND THEN WE CAN CONTINUE ON PROBABLY UNTIL ABOUT SIX?

JACK CLARK: LET'S SEE. I'D LIKE TO HEAR IF THEY HAVE ANY QUESTIONS. I'D LIKE TO ASK YOU MORE OF HOW THE HOLOCAUST AFFECTED YOUR VIEW OF GOD AND RELIGION. SIX WOULD BE OKAY.

Q. YOU REFER TO THE COCOON YOU WERE IN BEFORE YOU STARTED BEING A HOLOCAUST EDUCATOR. MAYBE WE SHOULD TAKE A FEW MINUTES.

(BREAK)

Interview with GLORIA LYON LYON - 54 10-25-90
(Tape 2 of 2)
Holocaust Oral History Project
Date: Place: San Francisco, CA
Interviewers: Lani Silver
Jack Clark
Peggy Coster

Q. (JACK CLARK:) GLORIA, I KEEP NOTICING THERE IS SUCH A FAMILY-ORIENTATED PERSON THAT YOU ARE PROJECTING HERE. THE ONE QUESTION THAT I KEEP WANTING TO ASK YOU IS, DO YOU FEEL THAT YOU SURVIVED FOR YOURSELF OR DID YOU SURVIVE FOR YOUR FAMILY? CAN YOU ANSWER THAT?

A. Very easily. I have really survived for my mother and my sister, and mainly for my mother. I have always just wanted to prove to her that I'm alive, and that I must keep myself well, otherwise I bring her down. If I go, she goes. We were very close. I am her first child, first daughter after four boys. You can imagine how much I was wanted. I mean I grew up with this story. But we are a very close family. We always were a very close family.

Since the Holocaust, however, those of us who survived and were trapped behind the Iron Curtain, I'm the only one who came to the U.S. from Sweden. From Sweden I came directly here. The rest of my family who were liberated by the Americans and the British and the Russians, they were sent back home. "Home" became the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union took this part of what was Czechoslovakia and what became Hungary, and it became part of the Ukraine, and it is still today part of Ukraine since World War II. You know the turmoil today about this area. Ukraine wants to be independent. That is the part I come from.

The point I wanted to make is they lived through difficult days after the Holocaust only to be trapped behind the Iron Curtain and couldn't come out. I saw them after a hiatus of 17 years in 1962 for the first time. I vowed to myself I would not rest until we brought them to this country. So we did, family by family, starting with my dad.

But I found that because -- they had a very difficult adjustment after the Holocaust, and I had such a good start in life again. I fell into loving hands in Sweden. A Swedish family wanted to adopt me -- couldn't have asked for a better life after the Holocaust. Compared to everybody I know, this was like Gan Eden (The Garden of Eden) for me. And from there, I came to relatives in the U.S.

Of course, this is not to say that I didn't have my own problems dealing with the fact that I was all alone in a strange country whose language I didn't speak. I didn't have any family. I set to work immediately searching for my own family. They wanted to adopt me. I was 15 years old, and they had a little girl one year younger than I. I wanted to go and live with them, but adoption was out of question because I still hoped to find my very own family.

Long after we brought them over here, we found how the years have affected us so differently. And in a way, we are all the same. We've all had this very strong family feeling for each other. But the fact that they had to struggle so much where they were left deep scars in their psychological make-up. And it's clearly evident.

But they still are very, very well-adjusted and happy individuals as people can be. They came here and they were willing to settle, working on -- doing anything just to be in a free country. They didn't go to a movie for so long unless we took them -- I mean for years. All children, everybody, they put their money together so that they could put a down payment down on a little house. And they did. And now the young people have graduated, they have professions, and everyone's name is on the title of this house. I've never seen a deed of trust like that. It's -- to answer the point that you've made, including the children.

Q. WHO IN YOUR FAMILY DO YOU FEEL CREATED THIS MORE THAN THE OTHER INDIVIDUALS, SAY, DO YOU ATTRIBUTE IT TO YOUR FATHER'S TEACHINGS AS A YOUNG GIRL? YOU WERE 14. DID YOU GET THE STRENGTH FROM YOUR FATHER OR DID YOU GET THE STRENGTH FROM YOUR MOTHER, OR DID YOU DETERMINE THAT YOU HAD YOUR OWN STRENGTH? OR WERE YOU ABLE TO FIND THAT YOU HAD YOUR OWN STRENGTH? OR DID YOU GET THE STRENGTH COMBINEDLY FROM THE TWO? COULD YOU ANSWER THAT FOR ME?

A. I think that's a very good question. I thought about this many times, and I feel that dad and mother both made very strong contributions to my well-being. I was very close to both of them. Also we were a large family whom we helped during the latter years.

For example, after 1939 when we had to close our store and we had the farm and vineyard left, but many

people who didn't have any fields closed their stores and used up their cash. And the banks, many times banks -- funds in banks were frozen. They had no money to buy food with or -- we at least grew our own food, and so this was shared. When a cow -- when a cow delivered a calf, there was lots of milk. And we had several cows, and this got spread around.

Eventually, mother even sold some of it because we too eventually became -- well, short of liquid assets, shall we say. We had to -- the children were growing, shoes had to be replaced, clothes became too tight or too short, or whatever, and eventually -- and materials couldn't be gotten, and so eventually, we -- alterations became the way of life. We even took men's pants and turned them into dresses.

So you had to use your imagination. And everybody sort of worked together.

I come from a small town near a city, just nine kilometers from the city. We commuted into the city, mother and dad, on a regular basis once a week. We were in school, you know, to high school. But I think it was a family affair. Everybody helped each other.

When someone's father in the family was taken into the military or into the -- munka tabor (slave labor camp), such as my cousins across the street with six daughters, and my father's sister -- my father became their father too. Their father was taken into the -- not the military service,

to the labor force, the Jewish men were taken into. He disappeared, leaving six kids.

So how does one answer that, really? I think both my mother and father, and grandmother lived with us who I remember telling us lots of stories about American history, by the way, about slavery in America. I just finished writing in my book about that, ~~and how~~ it's amazing -- things came back to me as I wrote it. So I asked her as a little girl, "How come you let your children go to a country that steals people and makes -- turns them into slaves?" I just remember asking that question.

Well, she had her way of answering, that she had children here. All her children were here except for my mother. She said the people who live there, in America, fled from other countries because they did not have freedom. And there, people are generally free. I don't know. The slavery wasn't explained too well. How does one explain slavery and justify it?

Q. YOU CAN'T.

A. No.

Q. THE OTHER QUESTION I WONDER IS BECAUSE OF THE KINDNESS OF THAT ONE HUNGARIAN OFFICER WHO SAID THAT, BASICALLY, YOU COULD ESCAPE OR YOU COULD JUMP OFF THE TRUCK, DID YOU FIND AT ANY TIME OTHER THAN THAT THAT THERE WERE ANY TRACES OF KINDNESS GIVEN TO YOU BY THE NAZIS AT ANY TIME?

A. No. Never. I have found differences among them. For example, some were more sadistic than others, and were simply nice in that that person wouldn't beat you up. But he was to

be feared nevertheless. The word "nice" hardly fits. But then they didn't do anything to prevent any mistreatment by another SS. So I can see these individual differences between them as well.

Mengele didn't beat us up, and yet he could shoot a child just as quickly and easily and perform experiments on twins without thinking anything of it, was convinced that he was helping medical science. I'm not really totally certain that that was the only reason he did it.

THAT'S ALL THE QUESTIONS I HAVE. PROBABLY PEGGY HAS.

Q. (PEGGY COSTER:) DID YOU TALK WITH YOUR CHILDREN FROM THE TIME THEY WERE REAL YOUNG?

A. Did I talk to my children? Yes. My children -- I let my children set the pace. My children started asking me questions when they saw my tattoo, as soon as they became aware that I have a tattoo on my arm, A-6374. I felt that it was up to me to give them concise answers -- limited ones, depending on how much they can understand. Of course, at that time, survivors were still not talking. They were still mum on the Holocaust. We didn't even talk to each other. There was a silent understanding between us that we went through what we did and we know.

Q. OTHER SURVIVORS?

A. We as survivors. But we would not ask each other questions. Even survivors didn't ask each other questions -- rarely would.

One survivor may have said, "I see you've been there

too." And that's it. Or, "You have any parents left?" You know, just -- "yes." "Brothers, sisters?" "Yes." "How did you do it?" It was always some miracle.

But the children would ask some very good questions. "Why were you there? Why did they take you?" "Because I was Jewish." "Well, I'm Jewish too. Will they take me?" "No. They won't take you. They don't exist anymore. They were defeated. We won the war and they were wiped out." And just like so-and-so in history.

So I tried to compare Purim, for example, the celebration of Purim because at that time also, the Jewish people were to be all killed, and instead they ended up and killing the person who wanted to do away with the Jewish people. So that was one way that a young child could understand or compare.

But as they grew older, I dared to tell them more and more, and so the children heard little bits and pieces about my background. And never having heard most of these stories until about 13 or 14 years ago, Dorothy Rabinowitz -- I don't know how many years ago -- Dorothy Rabinowitz came to San Francisco and interviewed me for her book called <u>New Lives: Survivors of the Holocaust Living in America.</u> Dorothy said, "Could we sit in the living room?" And our two boys asked if they could sit in. And she said, "Certainly you can. This is the first time since I've been across the country and this is the first time that the children wanted to sit in and hear the stories. Until now, the children would always leave and find some reason not to be here." And that apparently made her feel really good that they

wanted to hear their mother's story. That's really the first time that our two sons heard my story connected, and it left quite a deep impression on them.

In the meantime, our younger son Jonathan, who is a man of 34 and the older son is 37, David, have come to hear me a number of times when I spoke in their communities.

Q. GLORIA, WE NEED TO TAKE THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF YOUR PHOTOGRAPHS. WE NEED TO DO THAT. THINKING ABOUT WHAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO CONCLUDE THIS INTERVIEW WITH.

A. I think I concluded one of the others with -- well, I think it's very important that we educate our children about the Holocaust, have them learn man's inhumanity to man through what happened during this period, and that racism must be eradicated. We must learn to live with each other. We must find love for each other. I'm sorry. I just don't have the words.

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