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INTERVIEW WITH: MIRIAM MICHAELIS SKOPF

HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

DATE: NOVEMBER 16, 1989

PLACE:

INTERVIEWER: SANDRA BENDAYAN & E. FIELDEN

TRANSCRIBER: SAMM MCGREGOR

1 MS. BENDAYAN: I am Sandra Bendayan. I am here at the
2 Holocaust library. We are doing an interview today which is
3 November 16, 1989, for the oral history project and I am here
4 with--

5 MS. FIELDEN: I am Evelyn Fielden and I am here with
6 Sandra doing the interview with Miriam Skopf.

7 Welcome, Miriam.

8 MRS. SKOPF: Thank you.

9 MS. FIELDEN: Would you like to tell us where you were
10 born and when?

11 MRS. SKOPF: Yes, that is--all right, I was born in
12 Germany, a town Dusseldorf May 1928. I lived there until the
13 9th of November, that is when the Kristallnacht--

14 MS. FIELDEN: What year?

15 MRS. SKOPF: November 1938, right. That was the
16 Kristallnacht.

17 MS. FIELDEN: You went to school there?

18 MRS. SKOPF: I went to school there, but one year
19 prior to that we were not allowed to go to public school, we
20 had to go to Jewish school.

21 MS. FIELDEN: How about your family? What was the
22 make up of your family?

23 MRS. SKOPF: I had two sisters and family of five. My
24 father was in business and we had a very nice life, new
25 community, Jewish community. We belonged to Jewish community
26 and my parents are very active.

27 MS. FIELDEN: Did you go to Jewish school or--

28 MRS. SKOPF: Yes. We were not allowed to go--you know

1 that was about it, just about a year before Kristallnacht.

2 MS. BENDAYAN: Were you a practicing religious family?

3 MRS. SKOPF: Yes, yes.

4 MS. BENDAYAN: Orthodox family?

5 MRS. SKOPF: Not really orthodox, but holidays we had
6 a kosher home, everything was kept--we didn't travel on
7 Saturdays. We, everything, you know.

8 MS. BENDAYAN: Did you have any sense of growing
9 anti-semitism?

10 MRS. SKOPF: I don't think I really knew what was
11 happening, but I knew--I never told my friends in the street
12 my name was Miriam, I told everybody my name was Mary,
13 because they knew if my name was Miriam I was Jewish, so this
14 way I told them my name was Mary.

15 MS. BENDAYAN: So some level you sensed it wasn't--

16 MRS. SKOPF: Right, right, right.

17 MS. FIELDEN: Did you have many non-Jewish girlfriends
18 and boyfriends?

19 MRS. SKOPF: No, just from the neighborhood, you know
20 the street where we lived, but eventually they all
21 disappeared and I had to stay with my own crowd of friends
22 from the Jewish school.

23 MS. FIELDEN: So what happened after Kristallnacht?

24 MRS. SKOPF: They took my father away. Our apartment
25 was completely destroyed and at the time, at that point my
26 mother felt to send the children to Holland on a children's
27 transport.

28 In the meantime my mother tried to get my father out

1 of the Hookenball and she was successful, but he had to leave
2 Germany within three days and she was able to get passage to
3 go to Cuba.

4 MS. BENDAYAN: Do you know how she got him out of the
5 camp?

6 MRS. SKOPF: I think money, I really don't know. At
7 the time I was already in Holland in the children's home, in
8 the sterrick.

9 MS. FIELDEN: What about your brothers? How many
10 sisters?

11 MRS. SKOPF: I have two sister, one sister came along
12 to Holland and my older sister stayed with my mother to
13 finish and try to sell and take along whatever we were able
14 to save.

15 MS. BENDAYAN: Did you have other family in
16 Dusseldorf?

17 MRS. SKOPF: We had a lot of family, but very few came
18 back.

19 MS. FIELDEN: So you were in a children's camp. Could
20 you tell us--

21 MRS. SKOPF: Holland, it was like an orphanage home.
22 It was opened up for Jewish children coming in from Germany
23 and just to take care of them and for the time being you know
24 to get most--that is what everybody's aim was in Germany, to
25 get the young generation out of Germany.

26 MS. FIELDEN: It was run by Jewish people?

27 MRS. SKOPF: It was by Jewish organization, but it was
28 a Catholic orphanage home all run by nuns, but they were very

1 good to us. I still remember, you know.

2 MS. FIELDEN: Could you communicate with your mother?

3 MRS. SKOPF: No, no. We had no communication at all.
4 We didn't know. You know it was too many things happening
5 but then in May 1939 we got a call that we are going on the
6 boat and somebody from the Jewish Committee will pick us up
7 from the orphan home to take us to Paris, and my mother--to
8 meet my mother and then to join my father in Cuba and to the
9 Saint Louis.

10 MS. FIELDEN: Would you tell us a little bit about
11 that?

12 MRS. SKOPF: That was happy time. I saw my mother
13 again and I was looking forward to seeing my father and
14 everything was so beautiful, I didn't even realize what was
15 happening.

16 MS. FIELDEN: How old were you then?

17 MRS. SKOPF: I was about ten, eleven years old, so--

18 MS. BENDAYAN: Were your sisters with you?

19 MRS. SKOPF: Yes. Then we were reunited with my older
20 sister and my other sister joined, came along from Holland at
21 the time.

22 MS. BENDAYAN: Do you know how your father got to
23 Cuba?

24 MRS. SKOPF: On some kind of freighter, I really don't
25 know but he--he wasn't able to work. That was very hard
26 times for him, but he just had to wait until he was able to
27 come to United States for his quota.

28 MS. FIELDEN: Your mother could communicate with your

1 father in Cuba?

2 MRS. SKOPF: I really don't know.

3 MS. BENDAYAN: So there you are reunited and it was
4 happy times?

5 MRS. SKOPF: That is right, we hope the whole family
6 is together again.

7 MS. BENDAYAN: And how long were you in Paris?

8 MRS. SKOPF: We just stayed about two, three days.

9 MS. BENDAYAN: And then what?

10 MRS. SKOPF: And we went from Shapewa, from there and
11 boarded the boat to join my mother to Saint Louis.

12 MS. FIELDEN: That was very famous.

13 MRS. SKOPF: That is right.

14 MS. BENDAYAN: Would you talk about that episode?

15 MRS. SKOPF: It was very happy, I felt very good. I
16 was looking forward, we have a family again and to start new
17 you know and that is all I was concerned about at the time.

18 MS. BENDAYAN: And the story about the Saint Louis?

19 MRS. SKOPF: We were at the harbor for about a week.
20 My father was--he came with a small little boat, we could
21 wave to him. Nobody was allowed off the boat or on the boat
22 and I recall that quite a few people jumped the boat because
23 they knew if the boat has to go back what is going to happen
24 to them. But we did have to go back, we could not land. And
25 we--I think there were a thousand people and 250 people went
26 to Holland, 250 people went to Belgium, England and France
27 and we were chosen to go to Holland.

28 MS. BENDAYAN: Excuse me, you said your father came

1 along--

2 MRS. SKOPF: My father stayed in Cuban.

3 MS. BENDAYAN: Came along side?

4 MRS. SKOPF: Small boat.

5 MS. FIELDEN: Did you see your father?

6 MRS. SKOPF: I saw my father from looking down.

7 Nobody--you weren't allowed to be--nobody was allowed to come
8 on and nobody was allowed to come off.

9 MS. BENDAYAN: That is what was confusing, I thought
10 it was in Cuba.

11 MRS. SKOPF: We were in Cuba. That was--that is
12 right, that was at the harbor; at the harbor.

13 MS. FIELDEN: So how long did you stay in the harbor?

14 MRS. SKOPF: I think about a week or two, being two
15 weeks, something like that and then we had to go back.

16 MS. FIELDEN: A very tramatic experience.

17 MRS. SKOPF; Yes, but I was really young, I really
18 didn't know too much that time, so many things happened to
19 you at the time so it was just overwhelmed.

20 MS. BENDAYAN: Did your mother tell you what was
21 happening as she understood it?

22 MRS. SKOPF: Oh yes, sure.

23 MS. BENDAYAN: Did the children talk among each other?

24 MRS. SKOPF: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. We all--we knew we
25 had to go back some place, we didn't know actually where we
26 were going to end up but when we got to Holland I think
27 Holland was mobilized already and they interned us. We were
28 able to go out and in but they took area housing and that was

1 1939, right, that was about 1939, right, right, was 19--we
2 stayed there for quite a while and the war broke out 1940,
3 right.

4 MS. FIELDEN: No, the war broke out in '39, September.

5 MRS. SKOPF: That is right, in September.

6 We arrived in May, I think it was May, 1939 and the
7 war broke out right in September and then we were naturally
8 interned and the Germans marched in and they just closed up
9 the place and we weren't allowed to go out.

10 MS. FIELDEN: Why were you interned?

11 MRS. SKOPF: In Westerberg.

12 MS. FIELDEN: You were regarded as Germans, did you
13 tell us that before or--

14 MRS. SKOPF: Yes, in Holland they looked upon us as
15 German, not as Jews, so they didn't know what to do with us
16 so they interned us because we had no place to go. We had no
17 money, we didn't have anything. So they felt that was the
18 best solution.

19 MS. FIELDEN: It was a very big camp was it,
20 Westerberg?

21 MRS. SKOPF: It was quite a large place, yes, but
22 later it was enlarged. They built a railroad, you know, to
23 ship all in and out, you know.

24 MS. BENDAYAN: What were the conditions like? Can you
25 remember?

26 MRS. SKOPF: In the beginning it was pretty good. We
27 had like a little house, we had two rooms. We went to the
28 bath house. We had--the food was pretty good. We were able

1 to leave and go, but then when the Germans came in everything
2 changed.

3 MS. BENDAYAN: How were the spirits from the people?

4 MRS. SKOPF: Depressing because nobody knew what was
5 going to happen, where you were going to end up. You knew we
6 going to go--it wasn't too good.

7 MS. FIELDEN: You were together though with your
8 mother and your sisters?

9 MRS. SKOPF: My mother and my two sisters, right,
10 right.

11 MS. FIELDEN: And you could not, of course, hear from
12 your father?

13 MRS. SKOPF: No, no, no. No, there was no connection.
14 We didn't know if my father was able to go to the United
15 States in the meantime because he was just waiting there in
16 Cuba until he was able to enter the United States and then
17 start working or do something, but in Cuba he couldn't work,
18 you weren't allowed to work at the time.

19 MS. BENDAYAN: Did you know anything of the other
20 camps that were interning the Jews?

21 MRS. SKOPF: No, no. No. Then we were completely
22 isolated when the Germans came in, there was nothing, you
23 know.

24 MS. FIELDEN: What about your schooling during all
25 that time?

26 MRS. SKOPF: There were some people who were teachers
27 by profession so they tried to make like little classes and
28 teach, you know, make pass time a little bit and have classes

1 and most important thing everybody wanted that everybody
2 should learn English for the future, everybody had hope you
3 know so learn the language, a little grammar, a little
4 arithmetic and so because nobody, everybody lost the
5 education at that point.

6 MS. FIELDEN: How long did you stay in Westerberg, do
7 you remember?

8 MRS. SKOPF: We stayed about a year and we were send
9 to Bergen-Belsen then.

10 MS. BENDAYAN: On the train?

11 MRS. SKOPF: On the train.

12 MS. BENDAYAN: With were the conditions like in the
13 train, if you remember?

14 MRS. SKOPF: It was just a freight, it was nothing.
15 It was just a box and when we arrived in Bergen-Belsen I
16 still remember the train was surrounded by soldiers and all
17 the dogs--what do you call these dogs?

18 MS. BENDAYAN: German Shepards.

19 MRS. SKOPF: German Shepards. And then we knew when
20 the train stood still and we saw the Germans with the guns
21 and the Shepards, we thought that is pretty bad.

22 MS. FIELDEN: But you were together?

23 MRS. SKOPF: We were together and they took whatever
24 we had they took away from us and we had to march for about I
25 would say I don't know maybe ten--long--off to the camp from
26 the railroad station; we marched for hours.

27 MS. BENDAYAN: Did you say--I mean you said very bad,
28 did you think then that you wouldn't survive, that they would

1 kill you?

2 MRS. SKOPF: We didn't know. You don't even think, at
3 that point your mind goes blank somehow.

4 MS. BENDAYAN: So you entered Bergen-Belsen?

5 MRS. SKOPF: Right.

6 MS. BENDAYAN: And can you tell us about conditions
7 there?

8 MRS. SKOPF: Yes, they were pretty bad. It was just a
9 very tremendous place, all bunkbeds and a straw sack and that
10 is all and that is about it.

11 MS. FIELDEN: But you were not separated each?

12 MRS. SKOPF: That is right. My mother--we were all
13 together, my mother and my sister; we all lived together.

14 MS. BENDAYAN: Were they then performing selections of
15 children from the parents?

16 MRS. SKOPF: No, no. It was a mass of people, mass of
17 people.

18 MS. BENDAYAN: What was your daily life like?

19 MRS. SKOPF: Oh, I worked in the factory. We had to
20 get up very early. We had to be counted in the morning and
21 then they marched us to the factory.

22 MS. FIELDEN: You were awfully young to work in--

23 MRS. SKOPF: Everybody had to work.

24 MS. FIELDEN: Twelve years.

25 MRS. SKOPF: Yes, yes to work.

26 MS. BENDAYAN: And your younger sister?

27 MRS. SKOPF: No, I am the youngest.

28 MS. BENDAYAN: You are the youngest?

1 MRS. SKOPF: I am the youngest. Everybody just went
2 to work. You had to go out.

3 MS. FIELDEN: Where did you go?

4 MRS. SKOPF: I worked in the factories. We had old
5 shoes and old uniforms. We had to rip them apart and save
6 the good parts and it was all sorted and then at one time I
7 worked in the factory, the silk where they had--they made
8 silk out of the animals, cut the--cut it open, take the silk
9 out and sort all that.

10 MS. FIELDEN: Did you have enough to eat?

11 MRS. SKOPF: We just barely survived. We just
12 got--when we came back at night we had some water soup, a
13 piece of bread, this is about it.

14 MS. BENDAYAN: How long did that go on?

15 MRS. SKOPF: Stayed there for about almost four years.

16 MS. FIELDEN: (UNINTELLIGIBLE)

17 MRS. SKOPF: We heard planes coming. We knew
18 something is happening, planes and all, but one morning we
19 got up and they marched us back to the railroad because that
20 is after we heard all the planes coming, so we knew something
21 is happening, but they marched us back and we had no idea
22 where we going or where, whatnot and we finally were
23 liberated in the woods because we were completely surrounded
24 by the Russian soldiers, British soldiers and the American
25 because we heard a lot of shooting going on and planes and
26 then we were liberated. I think it was 1940--just a day
27 after Roosevelt died.

28 MS. BENDAYAN: How did you keep your spirits up in the

1 camp all those--

2 MRS. SKOPF: I don't know. You just live. You don't
3 think so much. We just live day by day. You hope some day
4 it will be over.

5 MS. BENDAYAN: And your mother and sisters?

6 MRS. SKOPF: My mother passed away in the camp a week
7 before we had to leave Bergen-Belsen.

8 MS. BENDAYAN: How bitter.

9 MRS. SKOPF: Yes, every morning they were just dying
10 like flies.

11 MS. FIELDEN: What did she die of?

12 MRS. SKOPF: Under nourishment.

13 MS. FIELDEN: Why did they not give you a number?

14 MRS. SKOPF: We were supposed--we kept saying that my
15 father was American citizen and we supposed--they should not
16 ship us out, we supposed to go--you know we have American
17 citizen papers. But somehow my father could not through the
18 Red Cross, they contacted him but he couldn't produce it
19 because he was not a citizen yet. He knew something was
20 going on.

21 MS. FIELDEN: So he got to the states?

22 MRS. SKOPF: Yes, from Cuba. I think he stayed about
23 a year or two years in Cuba and then he was finally able to
24 get in the United States.

25 MS. BENDAYAN: Yet they paid attention to you when you
26 said my father is a citizen?

27 MRS. SKOPF: That is right. That is right. That is
28 why we didn't get a number, but they wanted to exchange us

1 for soldiers. But the deal didn't go through.

2 MS. BENDAYAN: And so you say your life in the camp
3 was just one day after the other?

4 MRS. SKOPF: That is right. You just go like a
5 yellick, like an animal. You work, you go, you do. They
6 tell you where to go. They tell you what to do, when to go
7 to the bathroom or whatever.

8 MS. FIELDEN: Were you ever physically abused?

9 MRS. SKOPF: No, no.

10 MS. BENDAYAN: A lot of people speak of being abused.

11 MRS. SKOPF: Yes, yes. I know there were things going
12 on, a lot of things going on.

13 MS. BENDAYAN: What about your health? Did you get
14 sick at all during those years?

15 MRS. SKOPF; You got sick, you didn't have time to pay
16 attention.

17 MS. BENDAYAN: You simply weren't sick, no dysentery?

18 MRS. SKOPF: Oh, yes. Everybody had that. Everybody
19 had that.

20 MS. BENDAYAN: Typhoid?

21 MRS. SKOPF: Typhoid, we all had that. Everybody.
22 Either you lived with it or you died with it, that is all.

23 MS. FIELDEN: Your sisters came through all right?

24 MRS. SKOPF: Yes. Yes.

25 MS. FIELDEN: How much older were they than you?

26 MRS. SKOPF: I was born in '28, one sister was born
27 1925, another one was born 1921. So we were pretty close in
28 age.

1 MS. FIELDEN: And your sisters are still alive.

2 MRS. SKOPF: Yes, yes. Here to tell the story and
3 hope it doesn't happen again. That is the only thing you can
4 hope and pray for; right?

5 MS. BENDAYAN: Now, how do you understand that that
6 could have happened?

7 MRS. SKOPF: I don't know, it is just--all of us think
8 only let's hope one thing, it shouldn't happen again. The
9 only thing you have to work for.

10 MS. BENDAYAN: Well, any way back to--you are finally
11 liberated.

12 MRS. SKOPF: Right.

13 MS. BENDAYAN: Can you remember that day?

14 MRS. SKOPF: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. We were liberated by
15 the Americans finally and they just showered us with food and
16 they couldn't do enough for us but they had to stay--they
17 finally realized that we were completely infested by all
18 kinds of bugs and everything so we had to be--what do they
19 call it? Had to get some kind of equipment.

20 MS. BENDAYAN: Delousing?

21 MRS. SKOPF: That is right, that is right.

22 MS. FIELDEN: Like a quarantine?

23 MRS. SKOPF: Quarantine, right. Go through the
24 doctor, clean up, get clean clothes and everything. They put
25 us first into a type of a hospital.

26 MS. BENDAYAN: I bet you were emaciated.

27 MRS. SKOPF: That is right and they had to give us
28 papers, names, was a tremendous process but they were

1 wonderful, you know.

2 MS. FIELDEN: Did you get sick from eating too much?

3 MRS. SKOPF: Oh, yes. Yes, we all got sick eating too
4 much. In fact we had to be hospitalized because we weren't
5 used to have any type of food. I mean I remember soldiers
6 brought us salami and chocolate and everything and we ate it
7 naturally but we got deadly sick.

8 MS. BENDAYAN: What were the symptoms that you had
9 after eating food?

10 MRS. SKOPF: Just very sick, that you just want to
11 die.

12 MS. BENDAYAN: Pains?

13 MRS. SKOPF: Pains, everything. Everything. You name
14 it, we had it. I think we were in the hospital for about a
15 couple of months and then we were placed with a Dutch family.

16 MS. BENDAYAN: You meaning who? Your whole family?
17 All your sisters and you?

18 MRS. SKOPF: No, we separated--you know they weren't
19 able to take three, you know, to one family, took one person
20 at a time.

21 MS. FIELDEN: But you kept in contact?

22 MRS. SKOPF: Oh yes, yes, that was fine.

23 MS. FIELDEN: How much time went by then?

24 MRS. SKOPF: Then the Red Cross, we got in contact
25 with the Red Cross and we finally found where my father--that
26 my father had gone, was able to come to the United States,
27 was in New York and being that I was under 18 we had
28 priorities to come to United States.

1 MS. FIELDEN: All of you?

2 MRS. SKOPF: Yes.

3 MS. FIELDEN: Just because you were under 18?

4 MRS. SKOPF: Right, right.

5 So I think we were liberated I think in December 1945,
6 right, we came to this country December 3rd and joined my
7 father here finally.

8 MS. BENDAYAN: And what kind of a situation did he
9 have here? Did he have a job or--

10 MRS. SKOPF: Oh, yes. My father had a very nice job.
11 He was an engineer educated in Germany and worked for a big
12 company here and he had an apartment ready for us. It was
13 kind of strange living a normal life to have breakfast and
14 lunch and dinner, but I didn't like it too much in the
15 beginning but then we got used to it and made a good life
16 here.

17 MS. BENDAYAN: What didn't you like about it?

18 MRS. SKOPF: Routine, you know. It was just strange.
19 You are not used to it, you feel normal routine.

20 MS. BENDAYAN: Uh-hum.

21 MS. FIELDEN: You talked a lot with your father of
22 course about his experiences?

23 MRS. SKOPF: Right, right.

24 MS. FIELDEN: Can you tell us a little about it, what
25 he went through?

26 MRS. SKOPF: He is--the worst thing for him, he didn't
27 know where we were, what we were doing, who was alive, who
28 wasn't alive, you know. That was the hardest for him.

1 MS. BENDAYAN: Did you have news of any other
2 relatives at this point?

3 MRS. SKOPF: No, everybody was killed. Nobody came
4 back. We knew most of them.

5 MS. FIELDEN: Were you a large family?

6 MRS. SKOPF: Very large family, very large family.

7 MS. BENDAYAN: And nobody survived?

8 MRS. SKOPF: Nobody. I had some cousins, you know,
9 who went to Shanghai. They survived, you know, but otherwise
10 from Germany nobody survived.

11 MS. BENDAYAN: Grandparents?

12 MRS. SKOPF: No. Nobody survived.

13 MS. FIELDEN: Did you know your grandparents?

14 MRS. SKOPF: Yes, yes.

15 MS. FIELDEN: Both of them?

16 MRS. SKOPF: Yes, yes. But nobody came back.

17 MS. BENDAYAN: And after you got to the states how did
18 you put your life back together again? Did you go to school
19 or get a job?

20 MRS. SKOPF: I went--first thing my father told us to
21 go to school at night to learn the language. We were--as a
22 matter of fact in Holland after the war we did go to school
23 to learn English and get some education so my English wasn't
24 too bad, but we went to night school and then I got a job
25 working as a milliner in a store. They were nice people,
26 very comfortable.

27 MS. FIELDEN: In New York?

28 MRS. SKOPF: In New York, and made friends which I am

1 still friends with now, kept up a friendship. Same
2 background, also from Europe, you know. Some came from South
3 America, from all over the world, stayed different places.

4 MS. BENDAYAN: Were you able to talk about your camp
5 experiences after the war with any of them?

6 MRS. SKOPF: Not really, it took time.

7 MS. BENDAYAN: Because you didn't want to or maybe
8 they didn't want to hear?

9 MRS. SKOPF: I don't know, you didn't want--somehow
10 you had to digest it first.

11 MS. FIELDEN: You had children?

12 MRS. SKOPF: Yes.

13 MS. FIELDEN: Did you ever tell your children?

14 MRS. SKOPF: Oh they are very anxious, they want to
15 know.

16 MS. FIELDEN: They want--

17 MRS. SKOPF: Absolutely.

18 MS. FIELDEN: How old are they now?

19 MRS. SKOPF: I have a son who is 32 and a daughter 34.

20 MS. FIELDEN: And you always told them about your
21 experience?

22 MRS. SKOPF: Oh, yes, absolutely. Absolutely. In
23 fact I am supposed to have a reunion now, the Jewish school I
24 went to school in Dusseldorf somehow they all trying to get
25 together. As a matter of fact there was a book published, it
26 is in a museum in Dusseldorf with all the names of the
27 children and the teachers and I thing in spring we will have
28 a reunion.

1 MS. FIELDEN: That is wonderful.

2 MS. BENDAYAN: Have you been back to Germany?

3 MRS. SKOPF: No.

4 MS. BENDAYAN: Not at all?

5 MRS. SKOPF: No.

6 MS. BENDAYAN: What are your feelings about Germany
7 now?

8 MRS. SKOPF: I don't know, I wouldn't trust them.

9 MS. BENDAYAN: You don't trust them?

10 MS. FIELDEN: Here we are with the reunification of
11 Germany.

12 MRS. SKOPF: Yes, but this country was very good to
13 us. Why should I go to Germany?

14 MS. BENDAYAN: Did you go to Israel?

15 MRS. SKOPF: No, that is in New York.

16 MS. BENDAYAN: So in New York--

17 MRS. SKOPF: In New York.

18 MS. BENDAYAN: Not Israel.

19 MRS. SKOPF: No, there is no need. I don't think
20 there is a need for that.

21 MS. FIELDEN: Has your father been back?

22 MRS. SKOPF: No I--my father passed away but he didn't
23 go back, he had no desire. There was no need for it. He
24 made a good living in New York and he wanted to spend his
25 money in this country.

26 MS. FIELDEN: Did you ever get any compensation from
27 the German government.

28 MRS. SKOPF: Just for education.

1 MS. FIELDEN: That is all?

2 MRS. SKOPF: That is all.

3 MS. BENDAYAN: Your father never got anything for it?

4 MRS. SKOPF: No.

5 MS. BENDAYAN: (UNINTELLIGIBLE)

6 MRS. SKOPF: No.

7 MS. BENDAYAN: Do you have a religious point of view
8 now and how does it compare with the way you were brought up?

9 MRS. SKOPF: No, I believe I you need to learn to be
10 grateful for everything. I am not a bitter person. I never
11 will be bitter. I just learned, you know, to take advantage
12 of everything and enjoy.

13 MS. BENDAYAN: Are you practicing now?

14 MRS. SKOPF: Yes, yes.

15 MS. FIELDEN: So you really never lost your faith?

16 MRS. SKOPF: No, I don't think you should--I know a
17 lot of people did, but I just can't. I learned it from my
18 parents to be grateful and to say thank you for all the time.

19 MS. BENDAYAN: How did your sisters fare when they got
20 to New York? What did they do?

21 MRS. SKOPF: They all worked same line, dressmaking,
22 because we had no education. We had to do something. So
23 that was the easiest way. You know my father couldn't
24 support all of us right away.

25 MS. BENDAYAN: Did you marry a survivor?

26 MRS. SKOPF: I married--no, he was able to get out
27 just before the war.

28 MS. BENDAYAN: A German?

1 MRS. SKOPF: Yes, yes. I think he came back on the
2 last boat to United States.

3 MS. FIELDEN: You were married in New York?

4 MRS. SKOPF: Right. Right. We had a very nice life.
5 His family was all alive. His sisters came out, everybody
6 came out just in time. So they were more fortunate. But he
7 passed away with young age and then as a matter of fact I was
8 introduced to somebody who was also in the camp with me at
9 the time, I didn't know he was in the camp. He also was in
10 Bergen-Belsen. I am married to him now.

11 MS. BENDAYAN: So your survivor--

12 MRS. SKOPF: Right, right.

13 MS. FIELDEN: He is German or--

14 MRS. SKOPF: Yes, yes. He was born in Germany, also
15 lived in Holland, came to Holland as a young fellow.

16 MS. FIELDEN: And you didn't know--

17 MRS. SKOPF: No. Just by coincidence we were
18 introduced.

19 MS. FIELDEN: Fate.

20 MRS. SKOPF: I guess so, we were introduced by mutual
21 friends.

22 MS. BENDAYAN: You have something very deeply in
23 common?

24 MRS. SKOPF: Right.

25 MS. BENDAYAN: And his family, was his family able to
26 survive?

27 MRS. SKOPF: Yes. Also in Cuba, his parents as a
28 matter of fact went to Cuba from Germany and then later came

1 to New York. He had a lot of German Jews who went to Cuba
2 who weren't able to come into United States right away.

3 MS. BENDAYAN: What are your thoughts now say about
4 Israel? Do you have any?

5 MRS. SKOPF: We need Israel badly.

6 MS. FIELDEN: Have you been to Israel?

7 MRS. SKOPF: Yes.

8 MS. BENDAYAN: Did you ever entertain the idea of
9 immigrating there?

10 MRS. SKOPF: Oh, absolutely, but when we found out my
11 father was in United States we came here, otherwise we had
12 put in already to go to Israel.

13 MS. BENDAYAN: And your father, he had chosen to come
14 to the United States?

15 MRS. SKOPF: Yes, he came here, was established and I
16 mean the--man to move around. See to me I can move around
17 any time, doesn't mean a thing.

18 MS. BENDAYAN: You don't feel a deep attachment to any
19 one place?

20 MRS. SKOPF: No, no.

21 MS. BENDAYAN: Maybe--it is really a hard question to
22 answer quickly especially but what do you think of the kind
23 of long life effects on you of those early experiences?
24 How--do you ever think how your life might have been
25 different?

26 MRS. SKOPF: I learn to take what it is today and be
27 grateful. I am here comfortable. I just retired and I try
28 to do the things which I wasn't able to do before. That is

1 what I plan to do now.

2 MS. BENDAYAN: You mean to make up for things?

3 MRS. SKOPF: Right.

4 MS. FIELDEN: Things that you lost in your youth or--

5 MRS. SKOPF: Everybody had something. Everybody had
6 something and that is life. You have to learn to make the
7 best out of everything.

8 MS. FIELDEN: You really have a very positive outlook.
9 Do your sisters have the same outlook?

10 MRS. SKOPF: No, no. Just my attitude.

11 MS. FIELDEN: Your attitude, do you attribute it to
12 the fact that you were very young when all this happened to
13 you?

14 MRS. SKOPF: I don't know. I learned this from my
15 father.

16 MS. BENDAYAN: He had that attitude?

17 MRS. SKOPF: Yes. I always made the best out of each
18 situation. Otherwise you can't survive.

19 MS. FIELDEN: Where are your sisters now?

20 MRS. SKOPF: One is in Tucson and one is New York.

21 MS. FIELDEN: You see each other?

22 MRS. SKOPF: Yes, yes. They come here, we go there.

23 In fact I plan to drive to Tucson next couple of
24 months and really enjoy this country--countryside, just take
25 the car and drive.

26 MS. BENDAYAN: What about your health? Did you ever
27 have any long lasting--

28 MRS. SKOPF: Thank God, no. Fine so far.

1 MS. BENDAYAN: What about your sisters?

2 MRS. SKOPF: They do have problems.

3 MS. BENDAYAN: Related to their experiences you think?

4 MRS. SKOPF: I don't know. They don't have positive
5 attitude.

6 MS. BENDAYAN: Uh-hum.

7 MRS. SKOPF: And I don't know, they think too much
8 about themselves, you know.

9 MS. BENDAYAN: About the past?

10 MRS. SKOPF: Right.

11 MS. BENDAYAN: It is ruin them.

12 MRS. SKOPF: Right.

13 MS. BENDAYAN: Are they married to survivors too or--

14 MRS. SKOPF: My sister in Tucson is married to
15 survivor, yes, but she has a very happy life there.

16 MS. BENDAYAN: They have children?

17 MRS. SKOPF: Yes, they have children.

18 MS. BENDAYAN: You are really quite a big family
19 again.

20 MRS. SKOPF: Yes, yes. But you know we don't have
21 aunts and uncle, you know all this. That is all passed away.

22 MS. BENDAYAN: Do you think of anything that kind of
23 you would like to say, a message or I mean certainly your
24 positive attitude is a marvelous thing, but maybe you--

25 MRS. SKOPF: People should learn to give of
26 themselves; right?

27 MS. FIELDEN: I agree.

28 MRS. SKOPF: That is a very poor--if you enjoy to give

1 of yourself, making you feel very good.

2 MS. BENDAYAN: Yes.

3 MRS. SKOPF: See and stick together and help each
4 other.

5 MS. BENDAYAN: Do you think such a thing could ever
6 happen again?

7 MRS. SKOPF: I hope not. I don't know.

8 MS. BENDAYAN: You don't know.

9 MRS. SKOPF: You just have to watch out and work
10 together that it shouldn't happen, because I don't know.

11 That is all we can pray for; right?

12 MS. FIELDEN: Is your father buried here?

13 MRS. SKOPF: In New York, in New York; right.

14 MS. BENDAYAN: Did he ever remarry?

15 MRS. SKOPF: No.

16 MS. BENDAYAN: No?

17 MRS. SKOPF; No, no.

18 MS. FIELDEN: How old was he when he died?

19 MRS. SKOPF: He was almost 70, yes.

20 MS. FIELDEN: How old was your mother when she died.

21 MRS. SKOPF: My mother was about 50. Yes, that is
22 young. But listen--

23 MS. BENDAYAN: To live under such horrible conditions.

24 MRS. SKOPF: That is right and I think she understood
25 more what was going on and more, you know, but you know you
26 live, you know, you don't realize what the world is really
27 all about. You get into situation and you live and you get
28 like a machine. I know.

1 MS. BENDAYAN: Yes, I am understand what you are
2 saying, you go from one day to the next.

3 MRS. SKOPF: You don't think because you live you are
4 being told you get up at 5:00 or whatever time it is, you go
5 outside you are being counted and you march to the factory
6 and you produce what you have to do and it comes evening, you
7 go back and every day is the same thing, the same routine and
8 it changes nothing.

9 MS. BENDAYAN: Were all your sisters together with you
10 the whole time?

11 MRS. SKOPF: Right.

12 MS. BENDAYAN: Did you form any other close
13 relationships?

14 MRS. SKOPF: Yes.

15 MS. FIELDEN: You met a friend of yours right here I
16 understand?

17 MRS. SKOPF: That is right, just now I met somebody.

18 MS. FIELDEN: You hadn't seen or heard of--

19 MRS. SKOPF: 43 years.

20 MS. FIELDEN: Unbelievable.

21 MRS. SKOPF: We were together in Westerberg.

22 MS. FIELDEN: And did you know she was living here in
23 San Francisco?

24 MRS. SKOPF: Yes, just found out. I thought as long
25 as I come into this area we are going to have lunch and going
26 to have a nice afternoon after this.

27 MS. BENDAYAN: Has she changed a lot?

28 MRS. SKOPF: No, she sounds the same way. Her voice

1 is identical, didn't change at all.

2 MS. FIELDEN: Did she go to Belsen also?

3 MRS. SKOPF: I really don't know. I didn't get that
4 much to talk to her yet, I don't know where she ended up.

5 MS. BENDAYAN: You said you were talking about having,
6 forming close relationships in Bergen-Belsen.

7 MRS. SKOPF: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. In fact I met this
8 friend, I went to Holland to see her and somehow we lost our
9 connection, sometimes you do and sometimes you don't but this
10 friend outside I have a feeling we can pick up a lot of
11 things.

12 MS. BENDAYAN: So you went to Holland obviously after
13 the war?

14 MRS. SKOPF: After the war to leave some people we are
15 very close together with but somehow they have problems and I
16 don't know, just didn't work-out.

17 MS. FIELDEN: Did you learn to speak Dutch?

18 MRS. SKOPF: Yes, sure.

19 MS. FIELDEN: In school?

20 MRS. SKOPF: No, we didn't go to school much there.
21 We just if you are in the country you learn the language, you
22 can pick it up easily. If you want to learn you can do
23 anything; right? You just have to make up your mind and you
24 can do it. That is all it is, pick it up easily. You learn.
25 If you want to learn, you can do anything; right?

26 MS. FIELDEN: Right, sure.

27 MRS. SKOPF: You just have to make up your mind and
28 you can do it, that is all it is.

1 MS. BENDAYAN: Can you think of any positive moments
2 in the camps?

3 MRS. SKOPF: I don't remember. I tell you it was
4 just--there were other things on your mind, I don't know.
5 You just saw a lot of people dying and sadness and there was
6 no happiness at all. You just I told you like a machine.

7 MS. BENDAYAN: Did you ever receive any favors from
8 Germans?

9 MRS. SKOPF: (Shakes Head) No contact whatsoever. You
10 try to stay away from them.

11 MS. FIELDEN: Any books at all you could read?

12 MRS. SKOPF: Pardon me?

13 MS. FIELDEN: Did you have books at the camp?

14 MRS. SKOPF: No, they took everything away from us.
15 We had nothing, not anything.

16 MS. BENDAYAN: Clothing was just--

17 MRS. SKOPF: Barely, minimum. We used loose papers or
18 whatever to warm us up, but barely. You know, we had
19 outside, they had water, cold water running so you washed
20 yourself, whatever. But--

21 MS. FIELDEN: About a toilet?

22 MRS. SKOPF: A hole in the ground. That is all it
23 was. With some barricaded around; no bathrooms, nothing.

24 MS. FIELDEN: The winters must have been terribly
25 harsh.

26 MRS. SKOPF: Oh, sure, it was cold.

27 MS. FIELDEN: How did you manage to keep warm?

28 MRS. SKOPF: You just survived. You don't think about

1 it.

2 MS. BENDAYAN: Had you been hearing about the death
3 camps in that period?

4 MRS. SKOPF: We heard about it, Auschwitz, you know so
5 we thought we still better off than others, you know. But we
6 could see through the barbed wire marching in masses of
7 people in and out and back and forth and just all other
8 masses of people all the time.

9 MS. BENDAYAN: But you knew that people were being
10 gassed?

11 MRS. SKOPF: Yes. Yes, that we knew.

12 MS. BENDAYAN: What about the smell? People have
13 commented on it.

14 MRS. SKOPF: That I don't remember. No. I remember
15 the dead bodies but I don't remember because they were just
16 piled on top of each other, whoever died they were being put
17 outside and just piled up and--

18 MS. FIELDEN: Did you have friends your age in camp,
19 children to play with? You didn't have time?

20 MRS. SKOPF: We didn't have time to play. There was
21 no play time. There was only time to work and you went to
22 sleep, you were so tired--you just tried to go to sleep.

23 MS. BENDAYAN: Seven days a week?

24 MRS. SKOPF: Seven days.

25 MS. BENDAYAN: No time out?

26 MRS. SKOPF: No, there was nothing. And if there was
27 time out they made you march outside for a couple of hours.

28 MS. FIELDEN: You never heard music?

1 MRS. SKOPF: (Shakes Head). There was no radio,
2 nothing.

3 MS. BENDAYAN: How many people slept to a bunk?

4 MRS. SKOPF: Sometimes we had to double up. There was
5 three stories high, depends how many people came in, how many
6 people left, all depends. They just piled them in.

7 MS. FIELDEN: You didn't sleep with your mother?

8 MRS. SKOPF: No, no.

9 MS. FIELDEN: Was your mother in a different--

10 MRS. SKOPF: It was a tremendous building. It was
11 just a huge hall. It was just, you know, so thousands of
12 people in.

13 MS. BENDAYAN: You would be all in one room?

14 MRS. SKOPF: Yes, was just like a tremendous place
15 there were no separate rooms, nothing. It was just an open
16 space.

17 MS. FIELDEN: With the bunks?

18 MRS. SKOPF: That is right and just beds and beds and
19 bunks and bunks and bunks and bunks, that is all it was.

20 MS. FIELDEN: Did you manage to get a bunk with your
21 mother or your sisters?

22 MRS. SKOPF: Nearby it was changed and it was just
23 strange set-ups.

24 MS. BENDAYAN: What kind of bedding did you have?

25 MRS. SKOPF: Just a straw sack, no bedding; nothing.

26 MS. BENDAYAN: No covering?

27 MRS. SKOPF: We had some rags or whatever, but nothing
28 much to talk about because if you live for years like this

1 everything you don't wash it, you don't clean it is--it
2 just. . .(Shakes Head)

3 MS. FIELDEN: In other words you were really numbed?

4 MRS. SKOPF: Yes, that is more or less--yes, yes.
5 Your bodies get numb after a while, you know, you don't even
6 know what is going on.

7 MS. BENDAYAN: How did you deal with the dysentery if
8 you had no toilet available, just people just did it any way?

9 MRS. SKOPF: That is right.

10 MS. BENDAYAN: You got used to that?

11 MRS. SKOPF: That is right. Everybody, you know, was
12 in the same boat.

13 MS. BENDAYAN: The coppos in their section, how were
14 they?

15 MRS. SKOPF: We just stayed away from them.

16 MS. BENDAYAN: Stay away from them?

17 MRS. SKOPF: Yes.

18 MS. BENDAYAN: You didn't have any immediate
19 supervision then?

20 MRS. SKOPF: Yes--no, no, no, no.

21 MS. BENDAYAN: To call you up in the morning to get
22 ready to work? No?

23 MRS. SKOPF: There was just somebody--you knew, I
24 don't remember but you had to get up very early. Either they
25 had like some kind of I don't know how it was, some kind of a
26 bell or something that we just had to go out and be counted
27 and then marched to the factory.

28 MS. BENDAYAN: Did you do the same work in the whole

1 four years?

2 MRS. SKOPF: Yes.

3 MS. BENDAYAN: Never changed it?

4 MRS. SKOPF: No, no. No.

5 MS. BENDAYAN: It was an indoor job.

6 MRS. SKOPF: Yes.

7 MS. BENDAYAN: That was good?

8 MRS. SKOPF: That was pretty good.

9 MS. FIELDEN: Did you manage to steal food? Did you
10 find food anywhere?

11 MRS. SKOPF: There was no way to find food unless you
12 worked in the kitchen and I didn't work in the kitchen.

13 MS. BENDAYAN: How about stealing some of the
14 clothing? Could you do that?

15 MRS. SKOPF: I don't think we had--there was a lot of
16 shoes--no, we didn't even think about that. You were being
17 watched. You know everybody was being watched and you just
18 wanted to like a machine sit there and you could do your work
19 and produce and that is it. You just didn't want to move;
20 God forbid, you know.

21 MS. FIELDEN: Where did your mother work?

22 MRS. SKOPF: My mother worked also in one of the
23 factories.

24 MS. FIELDEN: Not in the same one you did?

25 MRS. SKOPF: No, no. No, you know they counted and
26 they took a certain amount of people to one place, certain
27 amount of people to another place. It was different, you
28 know.

1 MS. FIELDEN: Were the factories close by or--

2 MRS. SKOPF: Yes, pretty close by. About an hour,
3 half an hour, something like that.

4 There was no transportation, everything marching, you
5 know, in rows of I think we were four or five and then we
6 marched, they marched you down.

7 MS. BENDAYAN: So when was it that you started talking
8 about your experiences?

9 MRS. SKOPF: Because sometimes--at one point they
10 denied that ever concentration camp existed, I think at this
11 point.

12 MS. BENDAYAN: So-called revisionist history?

13 MRS. SKOPF: Right, right, right.

14 MS. FIELDEN: (UNINTELLIGIBLE)

15 MRS. SKOPF: Yes, something like this.

16 MS. FIELDEN: You mentioned before that you were going
17 to talk in a school?

18 MRS. SKOPF: No, just at the youth group in the Jewish
19 Center. I think, I think they are all about sixteen,
20 seventeen years old the youth, they want to know what really
21 happened so I plan to talk.

22 MS. BENDAYAN: I gather you were talking about your
23 experiences in your family with your husband for quite a long
24 time?

25 MRS. SKOPF: Right, right.

26 MS. BENDAYAN: You didn't go public with it?

27 MRS. SKOPF: Right.

28 MS. BENDAYAN: What is your children's reaction? You

1 say they are curious to know?

2 MRS. SKOPF: Oh, they are very, yes.

3 MS. BENDAYAN: Do they have any thoughts or feelings
4 that you can talk about?

5 MRS. SKOPF: I don't know, really I don't know. They
6 can't--I don't think anybody who hasn't been there can
7 visualize.

8 MS. BENDAYAN: I agree with you.

9 MRS. SKOPF: Am I right?

10 MS. BENDAYAN: I don't know.

11 MRS. SKOPF: I am just saying it is impossible, no
12 matter what details you would go into.

13 MRS. SKOPF: It is just something, it is very
14 difficult to describe or put yourself in the situation.

15 MS. BENDAYAN: You can only get a glimmer.

16 MRS. SKOPF: That is about it.

17 MS. FIELDEN: Did you ever think of writing about it?

18 MRS. SKOPF: One friend I just ran into after many,
19 many years, she also was in children's home like I mentioned
20 before and she also wants to get together with me because we
21 have a lot of interesting stories but we never got to it.
22 She always planned--she lives in New York right now and she
23 would love to write a story with me but I don't know, maybe
24 some day.

25 MS. BENDAYAN: Some interesting stories that you
26 haven't mentioned so far?

27 MRS. SKOPF: Yes, that--how we found each other, how
28 we were separated.

1 MS. FIELDEN: Go ahead.

2 MRS. SKOPF: Found each other again and then separated
3 again, continuously, in the last twenty years and as a matter
4 of fact she did live in New York about ten blocks away from
5 me which I didn't even know.

6 MS. BENDAYAN: Can you talk a little bit about that?

7 MRS. SKOPF: She was born in Berlin and she was taken
8 on the Children's Transport also to Holland and we became
9 very close. Her name was Mary Oftenturer.

10 And somehow we were together in this orphan home and
11 she heard that I am finally at the time able to join my
12 parents and she felt very sad that she was left behind and
13 she couldn't join her parents. And naturally when we went to
14 Cuba we came back and we were put together the same place
15 where she stayed at and she realized I wasn't able to join my
16 father but did join my mother and somehow then we lost each
17 other because I think she did go to another place and finally
18 ended up in Israel and she heard through somebody that I was
19 living in New York. By coincidence we found each other and
20 we lived about ten blocks away.

21 MS. BENDAYAN: How were these coincidences--

22 MRS. SKOPF: Through somebody, I--also this person in
23 Holland and somebody in South America and by coincidence we
24 just found each other and I am sorry to say I had to leave
25 her in New York. We really hit it off very well.

26 MS. FIELDEN: (UNINTELLIGIBLE)

27 MRS. SKOPF: No, I just left New York about, I moved
28 from New York to San Francisco.

1 MS. FIELDEN: I understand.

2 MS. BENDAYAN: Recently.

3 MS. FIELDEN: Since then you have not seen--

4 MRS. SKOPF: Right, right, right.

5 MS. FIELDEN: (UNINTELLIGIBLE)

6 MRS. SKOPF: Yes, I will.

7 MS. BENDAYAN: Why did you move to California?

8 MRS. SKOPF: Children and weather. And I am retired,
9 so I figured now it is my turn to do the things I want to do;
10 right?

11 MS. FIELDEN: Is your husband still working?

12 MRS. SKOPF: No, he just retired also. So we plan to
13 just drive through this country by car, see every nook and
14 crany, see all the beautiful sites and enjoy.

15 MS. FIELDEN: What are your children doing now?

16 MRS. SKOPF: My son is a physician in Connecticut, he
17 is married. And my daughter is a nutritionist here.

18 MS. FIELDEN: She is here.

19 MRS. SKOPF: In California, yes, also. She has an
20 office.

21 MS. FIELDEN: You are a grandmother?

22 MRS. SKOPF: Not yet.

23 MS. FIELDEN: You will be soon?

24 MRS. SKOPF: Yes, hopefully; hopefully, right. So by
25 that I thought now is the time to retire, enjoy the children.
26 They are on their own and now is our turn.

27 MS. FIELDEN: We certainly wish you the very best.

28 MRS. SKOPF: Thank you.

1 MS. FIELDEN: Have a wonderful vacation and with your
2 wonderful positive outlook--

3 MRS. SKOPF: You have to.

4 MS. FIELDEN: Every minute.

5 MRS. SKOPF: I always do, even walking across the
6 street I enjoy everything. The only way you have to enjoy.
7 So I only hope that everything that we won't have to repeat
8 this, that this wouldn't happen; right?

9 MS. BENDAYAN: Right, but do you have any sense of
10 what--beyond hoping what a person might do or not do?

11 MRS. SKOPF: I don't know. I don't know how to put it
12 into words. I really don't know.

13 MS. BENDAYAN: It is difficult--

14 MRS. SKOPF: It is hard, yes.

15 MS. BENDAYAN: --to say.

16 MRS. SKOPF: Yes, it is hard to put into words.

17 MS. BENDAYAN: Is there anything else you can think
18 about telling?

19 MRS. SKOPF: No, I only hope I can do because to have
20 an opportunity to come to this country and really start a new
21 life, good friends, good family and to be grateful.

22 MS. FIELDEN: It is wonderful talking to you, Miriam.

23 MRS. SKOPF: Likewise.

24 MS. FIELDEN: And as I said before, we wish you all
25 the best of luck.

26 MRS. SKOPF: Thank you very much.

27 MS. FIELDEN: We really do.

28 MRS. SKOPF: I hope all will turn out all right for

1 everybody, for our people.

2 MS. BENDAYAN: Yes.

3 MRS. SKOPF: Right.

4 MS. BENDAYAN: For all people.

5 MRS. SKOPF: For everybody.

6 MS. FIELDEN: For everybody.

7 MRS. SKOPF: Everybody should be happy, healthy and
8 enjoy this life. And there are no wars, that is all, that we
9 have peace and no more fighting; color, race, anything.

10 MS. BENDAYAN: Right.

11 MRS. SKOPF: Stick together and help each other out.

12 MS. BENDAYAN: Yes.

13 MRS. SKOPF: That is all I can say.

14 MS. FIELDEN: Thank you very much.

15 MRS. SKOPF: Thank you very much.

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