Interview with Rachel Gordon

Holocaust Oral History Project

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Begin Tape 1, Side 1

Today is November 7, 1990. I am Emily Silverman, an interviewer with the Holocaust Oral History Project of San Francisco, California.

Today we are talking with Rachel Gordon. Assisting in the interview today are Denice Weitzel and Peter Gordon.

Q: GOOD MORNING, RACHEL. AND CAN YOU TELL ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT WHERE YOU'RE FROM.

A: Louder.

Q: CAN YOU TELL ME WHERE YOU'RE FROM AND WHERE YOU GREW UP, ABOUT YOUR FAMILY.

A: I was born in Lithuania, 1912, April the 10th. I lived most of my life, my younger life, on the

border of Germany, near (Tilzick) or (Spizon), which was (East Barshack).

I got married there, the age of 19. I had a son, the age of 21 -- 20-1/2, and we lived in this area when Hitler came in 1933 till 1938.

1938 we had to leave everything, and we choose to go back to Lithuania, where we stayed there till Hitler occupied, started the war to go towards this country, towards Russia. So they stopped. They occupied Lithuania.

In 1941 we lived in (Kovno,) which ~~is~~ was the capital of Lithuania, and they put us in a ghetto which was in a suburban area of Kovno. We were all put in living quarters, several families together, very tight.

And then from there, we had to go for slave labor for the Germans. Each day we went in groups, and each day was a very difficult day. My son was about eight years old, and I had to leave him there in the ghetto. My husband was sick; so we tried to keep him like hiding, he shouldn't have to go to work.

And I used to go every day miles of walking with guards behind us with bayonets. And we walked -- I walked all day long, and then in the evening, they brought us back to the ghetto.

And then it started to eliminate and make the

ghetto -- we were maybe 100,000 people or so -- every day there were less and less of us.

In 1943 we -- our group, small group, got taken to a nearby camp, which it called (Sanch), the name of the little town, little area. In 1944, it came the liquidation of the ghetto and also the labor camp I was in, and they took us to -- there were standing near Kovno, freight trains, cattle trains, and they took us all into these cattle trains, and from there, we drove probably three days. We don't know. We were all like cattle in a crowded -- there was no sitting space. It was all standing. No food, no facilities to go.

And they brought us to a stop where they let off most of the women and children. There weren't too many children left, which were eliminated in the ghetto when they took out -- they came in -- the guards, and mostly, they had helpers -- Lithuanian volunteers, also from Russia, the (Okainyan). They enjoyed doing the job without even any orders to take. And they took out one day all the children, except were a few left, and we have never seen them again. My son was the lucky one that he survived, and a few more.

In 1944 when we came to (Stutthof) -- this was a stop-off from Lithuania to Dachau. So they left mostly the men in the trains and they took the women off,

and some of them with children. But I didn't take my son. He was nine years old, ten years old then. And I decided -- it was a quick decision to make if he should go with me or he should remain with his father, because his father was sent to Dachau.

So we talked it over fast that he may pass as, say, men to work with the men. With the women, he will be too big to be with the women, which it was right. So he remained in the train, and we had to say good-bye, and I start to cry. And my son said, "Mother, don't cry. I have a feeling that we will see each other again." And it was true. I haven't seen his father again, but he survived.

So I was in this Stutthof. We were there six weeks. When we arrived there, they sent us to enclosing, which is like to take a shower. In the other camps, showers were very well-known -- it was gas showers. But this was real showers. So they took away our less belongings we had and they gave us some clothes, like prison clothes. It was blue and gray stripes. One got a coat, one got a pair of pants and a jacket, one got a dress. But this was our new outfits to remain there.

We slept about four women in one bunk -- two this way and two the other way. And food, of course, was the main problem. So after six weeks -- when we came into

this Stutthof, outside we found a big stack loaded with glasses, one big stack with shoes and also clothes. They had a crematorium, and most of the people -- the clothes and the glasses and the shoes were from the people who were already gone.

After six weeks, they decided to send us to work in camps. We were 900 in our group. They gave us clothes -- if it fits or it doesn't fit, it doesn't matter. Some got shoes. I didn't get any shoes. And we had to walk quite a -- had blisters on the feet because it was in July, and it was very hot. We walked quite a long walk -- I cannot even tell how many miles or so -- till we came to a little camp. This was our working camp to stay there, and there were tents, you know, like -- we slept ten in a tent.

Daytime, we had to go to work in the fields, just -- it wasn't really any important work, but we had shovels and we had to dig the ground for trenches, whatever they wanted. And in the evening, we came back to the same place, very worn out and tired and hungry. So we got -- each tent got one bucket with food -- soup, whatever it was -- and we had to divide it. We ate two or three in one bowl -- each one took a sip. We didn't have any knives or forks or spoons. I made a knife -- we had a metal spoon, and I sharpened it on a stone, and it

became -- the side -- became a knife. And this is the way it went.

I cannot even recall how long we stayed in one camp, but they sent us from one to another and quite several. And then it went on August, September, October, November, December. In December it was our last stop in a camp, which it was an old mill, and it was, you know, like terraces, layers. And each -- most of us lay on one level, the other on the other.

At night, I had to go to the bathroom, there was no bathrooms. It was outside, a big hole, and it was a -- for everyone to go there. And then from there, this was the last step. They told us that they have to take us somewhere else, and it was wintertime -- January -- full of snow, frost, and most of us were barefoot, didn't have any shoes, no warm clothes. But very unrealistic that very few died. I don't know. The will to -- for life was so strong, everyone thought, "I will survive" and "I will survive."

Then when they took us -- this was the last walk. We had to walk very, very long walk, and January is the height of the winter in Europe, and we met prisoners of war walking. They led them somewhere -- I wouldn't know where -- and when they saw us, that we could hardly drag ours legs, they took off their scarves and throw it

to us. They took some cans they had -- because the soldiers got better treatment, more or less, than we got -- and they throw it to us, and then they brought us to a place -- it was like wooden area -- and there were tents, different tents. They were round, made out of plastic or veneer. They called it the (fillint) tents.

And there must have been also prisoners -- we don't know whether they were Nazi prisoners or war prisoners. It was empty. It looked like it must have been a military. And we got in there and we lay down and we were very tired and cold and hungry, and most of us fell asleep. Then, early in the morning, one woman got up and she looked out and we didn't see any guards. The German guards disappeared. It turned out that the Russian soldiers, the Russian army, was close coming towards this area; so the German guards didn't care what happened to us. They didn't even feel like killing anymore, and they run away.

So one woman walked out and she looked out. There were no guards. And of course, the aim was mostly food, to survive. And she saw a big, huge army kettle with frozen food which they left -- if they had to go or they were told to go, whatever it happened. And she started with her hands to shovel the frozen food and to eat, and then she came in and she said, "You know, I think

we are free. There are no more guards around." And we couldn't believe it. So we walked out; nobody was there.

So everybody left the tent and we walked out, and soon enough, there was a soldier, a Russian soldier, on a horse -- a rider, on a white horse. I called him the Messiah on the white horse. And we start to talk to him, or he to us, and he said, "From where are you? What are you doing here? How did you survive? How are you still alive?" And he saw the way we looked, and he gave us some instructions to go this and this way, there is a (var) house, a (var) house with food which the German left when they ran away. And most of us did go. We took boxes with a cord to load the cans of food and just like a sled across the snow.

Some of them couldn't do it. There was no strength. And they told us we should go a certain direction, there is a train station, and over there, we will stay overnight, they give us some food and shelter, and then the following day will be different orders what to do with us and where to send us.

This we followed. Some of them died. Very few, but -- some of them overate, and they didn't make it. And we stayed -- the name of this place was (Chicochinik). It used to be a Polish area near (Dansig) somewhere, and the Germans took it over during the war, and it was called

(Garenshtat) after this Nazi Goering. It was actually a resort area in normal times.

And then we came there. It was empty houses, and we just took place, so many and so many just to lay down and to be there. There were lots of mattresses, which we cut and we made shirts and some clothes.

They had also a big -- like a enclosing oven. The clothes we had on was full of lice; so we had to put it in there in order to burn it to be able to put in on back.

And we stayed. We got jobs from the Russian military. They were there occupying the area. We were provided with food. They didn't have a very good opinion about us. They accused us that we worked with the Nazis; this is the reason we survived. They had in mind that we should all have been dead, but because we survived, we did something which helped the Nazis, and this is the reason.

The man on this -- the rider on the white horse was a Jewish man, and he gave us instructions to follow and to find place to be, stay there in this area, (Chicochinik), called because the Germans called it (Garenshtat). The Polish call it (Chicochinik), which was a well-known resort at the time of the Poles.

Over there, we had food. We did a little work. They gave us -- the Russians -- work to do. And

then we met a group of Russian officers, and they were Jewish. They were interested in our fate and our lives, and we had a discussion with them. I had a friend, who is now in Israel for years, and she was a Russian stenographer, and she spoke fluent Russian, and we discussed our future fate -- where to go, what to do.

And this officer told us -- he was a colonel -- and he told us not to go back to Lithuania because it's Russia now. He said you cannot have wars in any other place, and then you will stay here and try a way out to go more West so we will be able to be free and do what we like to do. He gave us some work to do. He had his office, and he has quite a number of soldiers under his -- he -- he was the head of the group. So we did. We were 15 who wants to go with them. So 15 of us decided to go.

So we were loaded on trucks, and the war was still going on, and they went behind the lines to go further to Berlin. This was the aim. And they stopped during the traveling. Germans left their homes and disappeared, they run away. So the soldiers used to go in, and they looked mostly for valuables. We went down and we took linen and we took table cloths and we took blankets and made it in a big pack and load it on the trucks.

And then the day came we arrived in Berlin. And this was in May. The war was still going on. We occupied the Russians East Berlin, and they gave us jobs. They nationalized -- there were meat factories in this area in East Berlin -- it's called the (Hafanzay), the area. There were three meat factories. They assigned me in one to work, and a friend of mine who is in Los Angeles -- she was on the other one. We had shelter, we had food, and whatever we didn't have -- clothes -- we exchanged illegally for food with the German people who lived close by so we could have some clothes and keep -- start a new, cleaner life.

And we stay there about six months. The war was over. We heard that some people survived in the Bavaria area -- like the camps, Dachau and so -- and each one hoped that their families will be alive. I hoped, but I am, by nature, a pessimist. My husband had bleeding ulcers, and I thought that he cannot survive, which it was true.

My son was only 11 years old; so they will just get rid of the children, which they did. He was in Dachau the day when they made the selection and took 130 boys my son's age -- a year older, a year younger -- and my son, they pushed him aside -- "You can walk." He looked strong. He's not very tall, but broad shoulders,

and he looked older than his age. He and maybe five or six, his category -- they remained and they survived.

So I didn't know that, but I thought my son was too young to survive. And then in Berlin, I took sick. I needed hospitalization. I needed surgery, and I was very sick, and I didn't think that anyone -- I knew my brothers and parents are killed, and I didn't hope that my son will survive. So my friend who used to come to see me in the hospital, she said, "You know, Ahala, we have very good news. There are some men survived from the concentration camps in Dachau, but we don't know the names yet." The doctors told her not to give it to me up front, you know, just to prepare.

And I said, "This is very good news. It's good to hear. But I don't have any hope that some of my family is a survivor."

And she said, "You never know. In a war time, always miracles happen." And then the following day she said, "Tomorrow we will find out exactly. There is a list of names who survived, and the names are on the list."

So when she came the next day and she waited how I will react, if it penetrated in my mind. And I said, "Sonia, is there any news?"

She said, "Of course. I was waiting you

should ask." She said, "We have lots of names," but she said, "And there is a name --" my name -- my married name was (Koblikofsky,) which my son changed here for Kobel -- shorter. "-- there is a name like this, but I don't know if it's your husband or your son or what." She just -- and she said, "Tomorrow we will know for sure."

Then the following day I didn't take too much to my mind because I was positive that it couldn't happen the way I put it two and two together -- that he was too little to survive, my husband was too sick to survive. Only you had to be very strong, very healthy, to take it. And they didn't have to kill us; they just let us die from starvation and the conditions.

So the following day my friend came, and she was still taking a test how I will react. And I said, "Sonia, did you hear more about the news?"

And she said, "Yes, there is a list, and there is a name of your son."

"Of my son?" And I thought to myself she wouldn't tease me. She saw what kind of condition I was in, and this is not a teasing matter. So I said, "Really?"

She said, "Yes, some several men are on the list here too."

And I said maybe she is telling me the truth.

Can I -- when can I see him?

And she said, "Would you like to see him now?" And she goes -- walks towards the door. And I said, No, she couldn't play a game with me. It must be real. And I said, "If it's real, I will not cry. I will be strong."

And the door opened. My son was 12 years old. He came in. And the whole staff of the doctors -- this was in a bottom -- hospital in the basement, was the hospital at the time -- and all the doctors and all the nurses, they were standing to see what was going on, the reaction. And he came in, he came to me, and I saw it's him, and I saw it's true. And I said, "Is your father here?" And he said, "No, I have never seen my father." Never talked about it. And he never told me anything.

He knew that his father died in Dachau in a concentration -- in a -- (laga) Lager 2. The camps, the (lagas) went 1, 2, 3, and 4 number.

And this was the meeting. And then when I was released from the hospital, he was there too, and he adjusted. It was a different life, and we take the better very easier to adjust than to the bad things. And after six months, this -- we kept in touch with this Jewish officers, and they suggested, because the Russians had order to send all the refugees, the survivors, to Russia,

not simply to go into a plane or a train -- walking and walking with cattle. They took the cattle from Germany to go to Russia. And this colonel told us, "I will arrange for you to cross the East German border from the Russian to the American zone."

And he took a truck one night, and we load it whatever possessions we had, and we went over to the American zone -- which they had also like a D.P. camp till we were a bigger number -- and they sent us to Bavaria. Over there was the most meeting point from all the refugees from all the survivors to come there, and then they put us in different camps. It's called D.P. camp.

This man who helped us a lot, he lost a wife and two sons. And he was from Lithuania too, but he lived in Russia. And he was a -- a party man with the -- with the Russians, and he couldn't -- but he did for us a lot.

And then I heard somebody told a story what he's doing and they sentenced him to ten years in prison. He was -- he made his time, and from there he went to Israel. And my friend who lives in Israel, she told me that she met him.

We came to the American zone. Of course, it was different. We were in a D.P. camp. We got shelter, food, which America sent to the joint organization. We stay there for four years. Four years.

My son was a restless young boy because he survived the concentration camp. He felt that he's a hero, he's strong, he can do things on his own. And he decided that he's going to Palestine. He does not want to go any other place. We were waiting for a quota to go to America. And he made up his mind, and a few other boys, and a few adults, and they went illegal -- this was a youth group -- to Palestine. They were ~~under~~ on the (ship) Exodus. They were caught and put on the isle ~~Cypress~~ Cyprus. This was in 1947. Then when Israel became independent -- I don't know if you saw the movie Goldie -- Ingrid Bergman -- this is the way it went.

They took the children first because they were caught by the British, and so my son came to Israel in 1948, and he was in a kibbutz. He was restless. He didn't like this life either. Then Egypt and Syria started war with the young Israel, and he joined the army. He was almost killed.

Then after the war, we kept in touch. I was already in America in 1949, and we wanted to make him to come here. He hesitated, but after long pleading with him, promising him that he will have a easier life here and if he doesn't like it, it's a free country, he can always go back. And in 1952, at the age of 20, he came to America.

I remarried in Germany in the D.P. camp. And my second husband has also a son. He lost one son in Auschwitz, and one son is here. And this is (Morrie) Gordon, and my son is Aaron Kobel.

What else would you like to know?

Q: OKAY. I'd LIKE TO GO BACK TO YOUR FAMILY IN LITHUANIA BEFORE THE WAR. CAN YOU TELL ME MORE ABOUT IF YOU HAD SIBLINGS AND BROTHERS AND WHAT YOUR FAMILY LIFE WAS LIKE.

A: I had three brothers. I was the oldest. I had two sisters. They died very little, young. Then I had three brothers. My oldest brother was six years younger than I, and my second brother -- when they -- during the war when they were killed, my oldest brother was just newly married. He was 24. My second brother was 22, and my youngest brother was 18. They were all killed by the Lithuanians.

Q: CAN YOU TELL ME WHAT YOUR BROTHERS' NAMES WERE AND HOW THEY WERE KILLED BY THE LITHUANIANS?

A: When Hitler came, they ran. It was in a small town, and they were killed, and I was told there are always survivors, you know, from this area. A woman came and she said they took them out in the woods and they shot them in the forest, yeah.

Q: IS THIS IN THE 1930s?

A: My brothers. And so is my mother. And my father came to Kovno. I lived in Kovno. And this was already when the war started just. So when I saw him, I said, "How did you come in such a time? Aren't you afraid?"

He said, "I wanted to know how you are and what's going on." And he decided to go back home. At that time they went by buggy and horse and a few others. And going back, they caught them and they killed them -- tortured them and killed my father.

This, I know. And my brothers, the same. My older brother -- his name was David. My second brother was Nachman, and my third brother, the youngest, was Meier.

Q: AND WHAT HAPPENED TO THE WIFE OF THE ONE THAT WAS MARRIED?

A: Killed.

Q: KILLED ALSO. WHAT WAS HER NAME?

A: I don't remember.

Q: IT'S OKAY.

A: I don't remember.

Q: SO WAS YOUR FAMILY OBSERVANT JEWISH OR --

A: I would say conservative more. Yeah. In the little towns in Europe, following the regular rituals -- Friday night, fasting, Saturday going to temple, and the

young people did their things because it was a modern little country.

Q: HOW ABOUT YOUR EDUCATION? UP TO WHAT GRADE --

A: To -- gymnasium was like high school here, and this is what I had.

Q: DID YOU EXPERIENCE ANY ANTI-SEMITISM IN SCHOOL?

A: No, I cannot -- because in Kovno, we had the Lithuanian gymnasium, which Jewish could participate, and we had two Jewish gymnasiums -- one specially left-wing Jewish, and the other one was Hebrew. We learned Hebrew speaking -- the modern Hebrew.

Q: SO IT WAS A JEWISH SCHOOL WHERE YOU WERE TAUGHT MODERN HEBREW. WERE YOU TAUGHT BIBLE AND --

A: Uh-huh.

Q: BUT IT WAS ALL FROM A MODERN PERSPECTIVE?

A: Yeah.

Q: SO THE GIRLS WERE ABLE TO STUDY TORAH?

A: Yeah.

Q: Were they preparing you for (alley yacht) to (pal I stand all yacht,) to Palestine, teaching you Hebrew?

A: Some of them went; some of them went (halutzim.)

Q: PIONEERS?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: WERE YOU A PIONEER?

A: Yeah.

Q: WERE YOU GOING TO GO TO PALESTINE?

A: I wanted to go. My parents objected. I was the only girl, and they didn't want it because life there wasn't like it is -- it even today is modern still in Israel. Life is very, very difficult. But at that time I had friends who went, worked very hard and gave their lives, really, for -- for a Jewish state.

Q: SO YOU WERE A ZIONIST?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: SO WAS IT THAT YOUR PARENTS KEPT YOU BACK FROM BEING A (hamizah?)

A: Yeah.

Q: SO YOU FINISHED THE GYMNASIUM, THEN, AT 12th GRADE?

A: Yeah.

Q: THEN HOW DID YOU MEET YOUR HUSBAND?

A: It's so many years. I don't know. We met, and we were kind of distant relatives yet, some in the family. He was ten years older than I was.

Q: DID SOMEBODY MAKE A (she dedk?)

A: No, no. We met, and it wasn't in Lithuania.

It was on the borderline of Germany. He had a brother there who lived there, and I went to visit him, and we met and then we got married there because my son was born in Germany, in Tilzig. We lived like Oakland to San Francisco, over the bridge. I always, all my entire life, I lived crossing a bridge. In Lithuania I lived in Berkeley across the bridge to Manhattan, and in Oakland crossing the bring to San Francisco. Seems like I like bridges, and I like the smaller part of the town.

Q: WHEN YOU FINISHED GYMNASIUM, DID YOU GO TO WORK RIGHT AWAY?

A: Yes.

Q: WHAT TYPE OF WORK?

A: Yeah. I did -- I took some designing, and then when I got married, I didn't do it because I didn't need it.

Q: How did you do your -- what type of business or --

A: My father was a grain merchant, trading. You don't have it here probably, but in those -- he used to buy from the farmers and sell it to the -- to the stores and bakeries and so forth.

Q: HE WAS LIKE A MIDDLEMAN BETWEEN THE WHOLESALER AND THE RETAILER?

A: (Nods.)

Q: WAS IT A FAMILY BUSINESS?

A: Yeah.

Q: AND HAD THAT BEEN --

A: And strange -- my second husband came from a family who his father had a flour mill.

Q: SO WAS THIS FAMILY BUSINESS FOR A COUPLE OF GENERATIONS, OR WAS IT SOMETHING YOUR FATHER STARTED?

A: No, no, my father started.

Q: AND WERE YOUR BROTHERS IN THE BUSINESS?

A: No. My oldest brother was a salesman in the biggest store we had in hardware or whatever it was, and my younger brother still went to school, and my middle brother worked with my father.

Q: WERE YOU THE OLDEST OR THE MIDDLE CHILD?

A: I was the oldest.

Q: AND HOW MANY BROTHERS DID YOU HAVE?

A: Three.

Q: OKAY. SO YOU WERE THE OLDEST OUT OF THE THREE?

A: Yeah, uh-huh.

Q: SO AFTER YOU GOT MARRIED, YOU DIDN'T GO TO WORK ANYMORE?

A: (Shakes head.)

Q: WHAT DID YOUR HUSBAND DO?

A: We had a business, like -- it was a better --

not grocery, but we had all the delicacies and imported things from other countries. It was a very fine business, and we made a good living.

Q: SO UP UNTIL --

A: This was on the German border -- Memelgibilt, it was called.

Q: CAN YOU SAY THE NAME OF THE TOWN?

A: Memelgibilt is the area. It's like a county or --

Q: SO WHAT HAPPENED TO THE BUSINESS? WHEN DID YOU NOTICE --

A: We left it. Couldn't sell it. We had big lot we were supposed to build a house, and somebody came to buy, we -- they said, "Don't buy it. Hitler is coming, and he will -- he will get it for free." This is the way -- so we left everything and we -- before the war started, we went to the wrong direction. We went to Lithuania from Germany, and then the Germans came in in 1941.

Q: CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT SOME OF THE DIFFICULTIES THAT OCCURRED IN THE TOWN YOU WERE LIVING IN THAT MADE YOU LEAVE WHEN THE NAZIS WERE COMING TO POWER?

A: We had France, German people, we had neighbors, and with one couple we were very close. We used to go out and socialize. And then all of a sudden, I

saw a cold shoulder, and I said to my husband, "You know, I cannot understand it. I do something wrong that (Mrs. Unka,) when she sees me, she turns away."

And maybe sometimes you do something wrong or say something subconsciously. You really don't know what happened. So he said why couldn't you ask her. Sure enough, I ask her, and I said, "How come I see you are so cold and we were such a close friend?"

And she said, (We have to move with the wind. We have to go -- you know, you cannot go against the wind, but you go with the wind.)

And this is what it was because they were afraid of having Jewish friends.

Q: WAS THERE ANY LAWS IN YOUR TOWN THAT WAS CAUSING YOUR OLD FRIENDS TO STOP --

A: In this area Hitler was occupied with taking Poland and Czechoslovakia and all this -- and Austria, and so in here, and it was close to his area. He left it for last. And we (something) when it was Kristallnacht when they burned the synagogues, and so then we left everything and we went.

END OF PART ONE

Q: AND WAS THIS ALSO AT THE SAME TIME THAT YOUR

BROTHERS AND FATHER WERE --

A: No, they lived in a smaller town, and they were there, and then we came to Kovno.

Q: AND WHEN YOUR BROTHERS WERE KILLED BY THE LITHUANIANS, WAS THIS AROUND THE SAME TIME LIKE 1938 OR --

A: They were born there. They lived there all their lives.

Q: AND THESE WERE LITHUANIAN ANTI-SEMITES, OR THE LITHUANIANS WHO KILLED THEM --

A: They called them partisans.

Q: PARTISANS?

A: Yeah, and they -- (something) and one told me -- Lithuanian -- he said, "Oh, we waited a long time for this moment to kill them."

Q: SO IS THIS LIKE A POGROM?

A: No, it's not a pogrom. They just killed because the Nazis gave the orders, and they were free to do whatever they want.

Q: AND THIS WAS -- WHAT YEAR WAS THAT? DO YOU REMEMBER?

A: This was in 1941.

Q: OH, 1941. OKAY. SO WHEN YOU MOVED TO KOVNO, YOU LEFT YOUR BUSINESS AND YOU LEFT EVERYTHING BEHIND?

A: Yeah.

Q: DID YOU HAVE YOUR SON AT THIS POINT?

A: Yeah. So we went to Kovno, which -- we went in 1939, and the Germans came in in 1941. First in 1940 the Russians came; so the Russian occupied Lithuania.

Q: DO YOU REMEMBER KRISTALLNACHT IN KOVNO? CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT IT?

A: Of course. In 1938 we lived like Oakland and San Francisco, and we could see the fires burning. It was closer yet. And this was the end of our time to live and to go.

Q: AND WHERE WERE YOU THAT DAY?

A: So we were in our home in (Evilmemo), it was called -- a little town -- and we left the following day from Lithuania -- was maybe 100 miles or so.

Q: SO DID YOU HAVE TO WALK OR --

A: No, no, we had a truck to go.

Q: AND YOU WERE ABLE TO TAKE SOME OF YOUR BELONGINGS WITH YOU?

A: Yeah.

Q: NOW, WHEN YOU GOT TO KOVNO IN LITHUANIA, WHERE DID YOU LIVE AND WHAT WAS YOUR LIFE LIKE IN (41?)

A: We had a business there, the same business we opened. And then the Russian came, we had to close it because there was no private business allowed. And a year passed by very fast, and then the Germans came and everything was over.

Q: AND THEY TOOK AWAY YOUR BUSINESS?

A: It wasn't ours anymore.

Q: OKAY.

A: They put us in ghetto.

Q: CAN YOU TELL ME MORE ABOUT -- DO YOU REMEMBER THE DAY THAT YOU WERE PUT INTO THE GHETTO IN 1941?

A: This was in -- the Germans occupied Kovno in 1941 in June, and after a months' time, they arranged it already to take all the Jewish people from Kovno -- it was a big city -- and put them -- they made plans to put them in a ghetto, and this was also over the bridge, a little town called ~~Slabatky~~ Slobotka, which in normal times, it was well-known for Yashivas, lots of Jews -- Hebrews -- Yashivas, people who studied for rabbis, whatever. This was the place they did so, and we had to move and go and leave everything and just moved into tiny quarters just to have a place to lay down or to make our home.

Q: DID YOU SHARE YOUR TINY QUARTERS WITH OTHER FAMILIES?

A: Yeah, we shared with a family from Czechoslovakia.

Q: SO THEY WERE BRINGING OTHER PEOPLE INTO THE GHETTO?

A: They ran from Czechoslovakia was occupied before Lithuania, and they didn't know. They went the

wrong direction instead of going somewhere else because lots of Jewish people from Kovno, when the Russians occupied Kovno, Lithuania, in 1940 and then when Hitler came, they went back to Russia. So lots of Jewish people went with the soldiers. They went to Russia. And the people from Czechoslovakia, from other countries, they came to Lithuania, which they picked at that time Lithuania wasn't taken by the Nazis yet.

So we met, about two single men -- they were doctors -- and a couple. We shared the room, the place with -- he was an economist, and she was a teacher. Nice young people.

Q: DO YOU KNOW IF THEY SURVIVED?

A: I don't know.

Q: DO YOU REMEMBER IN SEPTEMBER OF 1941, THERE WAS A ISSUE OF SOMETHING CALLED (juden) PERMITS, OF GETTING PERMITS TO WORK THAT THE (judenite) HAD TO GIVE OUT TO THE KOVNO GHETTO IN 1941? DO YOU REMEMBER ANYTHING ABOUT THIS?

A: To work for the Germans?

Q: RIGHT.

A: Yes, I was working for the Germans.

Q: HOW DID YOU GET YOUR WORKING PAPERS?

A: You didn't need working papers. They took us without papers. Only by the name of -- not even the name

and number.

Q: WHEN THE GERMANS STARTED HAVING THEIR (OKPIN) OR THE ROUNDUPS --

A: Yeah, (okpin,) yeah.

Q: DO YOU REMEMBER ONE OF THE FIRST ONES ON OCTOBER 28, 1941?

A: In October was the big one.

Q: CAN YOU TELL ME MORE ABOUT THAT DAY AND WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU AND YOUR FAMILY?

A: They -- we got orders to leave our places and come to this and this area. Early in the morning in October was the first snowfall. It was cold. My son was ten years old, ten and a half. So -- and he was having the measles without knowing that he has the measles.

We put on everything. We know that we go out of this place, we wouldn't be able come back anymore; so I put all his clothes he had -- underwear -- several pairs -- shirts and sweaters and a coat.

We came to this big place, was a area, must have been maybe 100,000 -- I don't know -- and we stood there for hours and hours and hours. And then in the late afternoon, they came with a plan -- they had a plan already -- the Germans -- to stand in line, let's say, families -- three, five in a family -- father and mother and a couple of children. And then the Germans -- right,

left, right, left, right, left. They took a family and divide it in two parts, and we didn't know which the right part -- the right side will be, if the right side is the good or the left side is good.

We had neighbors. Besides the couple, there was an old grandmother and two daughters and the daughters' two children, because her husband was taken from the ghetto. 500 men were the first to taken out to send away. They never returned. And we stayed with these people and they were all sent on this side and they never came back.

We came back. We were the lucky ones -- my husband and my son and myself. And this went on a whole day, and then in the evening when we came back to our place -- we lived in a apartment building. It was small apartment, and it was occupied by all the Jewish people. And when we same back, half of them weren't -- didn't come back.

And during the night, we heard shooting. They took them out. They dug big graves, a mass grave, and while they were walking, they were shooting them. Some of them weren't even dead. They fell in the -- I have somebody I know who crawled out of the grave -- yeah, to tell the story.

So -- and then the following morning, it was

peaceful, quiet, very little people. Everybody said, "The next move, we are in it," but it didn't happen that way.

Q: DID THIS FRIEND SURVIVE THE WAR -- THE ONE WHO CRAWLED OUT OF THE GRAVE?

A: No, no.

Q: WHAT WAS THE NAME OF THE FRIEND WHO GAVE YOU THAT REPORT?

A: They had two young children like my son and a sister and a mother.

Q: DO YOU REMEMBER HER NAME OR HIS NAME -- THE FRIEND?

A: (Shakes head.)

Q: NO, OKAY. WHAT WAS YOUR DAILY LIFE LIKE IN THE (SOMETHING)? WHAT TYPE OF WORK DID YOU AND YOUR HUSBAND AND YOUR SON DO?

A: What I did?

Q: IN THE GHETTO, YES.

A: My husband did not do. He was sick, and I had to hide him because the Jew -- they put Jewish people as police people to lead the ghetto, to do the dirty work, and I had to hide my husband all the time. And they used to come in the morning to knock on the door or the windows, to call that we have to be early to get up and to work, to go to work. So I was the one who went to work. My husband didn't go.

Q: HOW DID YOU HIDE HIM? WHERE DID YOU HIDE HIM?

A: Under the bed or covered up or I said he was already taken or --

Q: AND WHAT DID YOUR SON DO WHEN YOU WENT TO WORK?

A: Nothing. He was a little boy. I used to tell him, "Couldn't you take a book and read or write or so?"

He said, "What is the purpose? If tomorrow they are killing us, I don't want to do anything. They will kill us." So I let him be free.

Q: AND WHAT TYPE OF WORK DID YOU DO?

A: I worked in a German outfit in a kitchen. There were two cooks because they had maybe 20 or more Gestapo. He was the head of the group. And he was really a murderer. So we went every day. So the men, some they -- they cut wood. The women cleaned the offices and the rooms. I had the head of the post -- his room. I had to -- his office, I had to clean. I spoke German; so it was easier.

And one day, I remember like today. I was dusting and cleaning his office, and he had a big picture of Hitler, and it fell down; so I said this is the end of -- of my life already. He thought maybe I did it on

purpose, you know.

I was shaking, and he was -- it seems he liked me probably, in his own way; so he said next time I should be more careful, you know, this -- he didn't look me in the face, he just, next time I should be more careful, you know.

And I walked in the kitchen to help the cooks to prepare the meals -- they had hot meals twice a day for lunch and dinner -- and to clean up -- we were two women who did it. And the -- one cook was very sympathetic, and he used to let me have some food, what's left, like potatoes, and underneath the potatoes, I had a big canister to bring it into the ghetto for my husband -- food -- and for my son.

And at the gate in the ghetto, there were all there, guards, because the ghetto was barbed wire all around. You couldn't escape. And they used to search us, you know, if we bring in something. We used to bring in some wood on our like a backpack to be able to warm up the apartment.

And this is the way I worked. And I took sick, and I was very, very sick for a long time. And then I came back to work, and they took me. The head of the Gestapo -- he liked me. I did a good job; so he took me back.

And then we had order to move from the ghetto to a different camp also in the area. So we had to go there, and there we did different work. I went to my same job by truck, they used to load us, and my husband went there -- close by, there was a working place which he used to go.

And then when it came the end in 1944 to liquidate all the camps and ghetto, this was where we went -- to Germany, to the concentration camp.

Q: TO (STUTTHOF)? TO THIS CAMP? WHAT'S THE NAME OF THIS CAMP THAT YOU WERE WORKING AT?

A: In Lithuania?

Q: YEAH.

A: This was called -- it's called according the name of the little town, (Shans.) Shans. This was near Kovno. Yeah. They made it a camp.

Q: AND IT WAS A LABOR CAMP?

A: Yeah.

Q: AND YOU WOULD WORK THERE DURING THE DAY AND THEN GO BACK TO THE GHETTO AT NIGHT?

A: Yeah.

Q: AND MEANWHILE YOUR SON WAS STILL STAYING HOME OR JUST STAYING IN THE APARTMENT ALL DAY?

A: He was staying -- yeah, he was staying there, and one day in the camp, Shans, I got up in the morning to

go to work and my husband was supposed to go too because it was very close. So I said, "You know, I think you should take Aaron along because it's no use of being in the camp all day long by himself. You take him, and he will help some." They let it go.

And I came back in the evening when we came back with a truck they brought us back, and one woman was a Jewish actress, and she started to scream. And I said, "What kind of acting is this?"

She said, "Don't you see?" The children used to come to the gate expecting their mothers or fathers to come back. There was no children. "You see," she said, "there are no children at the gate."

So we knew that something went wrong. And this was when my son came with my husband for work, the action was already done. The children who remained in the camp were all taken out. There were no children anymore -- a few of them.

Q: THE ONES WHO HID SURVIVED?

A: Yeah.

Q: WHAT DID YOUR HUSBAND DO WITH YOUR SON AT WORK?

A: He came from work and then my husband was at the gate, and as we saw the picture was clear; so I said, "Is Aaron gone?" And he said, "No, he's hiding in the

barracks under the bed." We don't want the few children who were out at work --

Q: SO AFTER THAT --

A: Yeah, they took us to Germany. This was the end of --

Q: THIS WAS JUST BEFORE THE FINAL LIQUIDATION OF THE GHETTO?

A: Yeah.

Q: THEY FIRST TOOK AWAY THE CHILDREN AND THE SICK AND THE ELDERLY?

A: Yeah. They did it in the ghetto also, and they did it -- I know a family where they came to take -- they had only one child, and they came to take the child, and the mother said, "No, I will go with him." So the German pushed her in -- in the truck also. And she never came back, the both of them. This was Janet's aunt.

Q: DID YOU HAVE ANY CONTACT WITH THE (JUDENRIGHT) OR ANY CONNECTIONS TO THAT IN THE GHETTO?

A: (Shakes head.)

Q: DID YOU HAVE ANY CONNECTIONS TO THE JEWISH POLICE IN THE GHETTO?

A: No. The Jewish police are afraid of their own life, you know; so they got the job and they did what they have to do, and that's it.

Q: DID YOU HAVE ANY CONNECTION OR KNOW ANYBODY

IN THE UNDERGROUND IN THE GHETTO?

A: No.

Q: OR THE CHILDREN THAT -- THE YOUNG PEOPLE THAT JOINED THE PARTISANS AFTERWARDS?

A: No, no. Some of them went to the partisans, to the underground, but very few.

Q: SO WHAT PHYSICALLY DID -- DID WOMEN STOP MENSTRUATING IN THE GHETTO?

A: In concentration camp, not in ghetto. When we went in the labor camps, concentration camp, none of us had the period. None of them. And then when I came to Berlin after a few weeks of more to, say, normalized surrounding, we had.

Q: DO YOU KNOW OF ANY WOMEN WHO GAVE BIRTH IN THE GHETTO?

A: No, not in my --

Q: DO YOU KNOW OF ANY WOMEN WHO LOST BABIES IN THE GHETTO -- MISCARRIAGES?

A: No.

Q: WHEN YOU WERE IN THE GHETTO, DID YOU OR YOUR HUSBAND CONSIDER DOING ANY RESISTANCE WORK?

A: I didn't do anything. I cannot say I am a hero. I did work and did things for my survival. Just survived without trying.

Q: AND HOW MUCH FOOD WERE THEY RATIONING YOU IN

THE GHETTO WHEN YOU WERE LIVING THERE? LIKE A LOAF OF BREAD A WEEK? A DAY?

A: They gave us only a ration -- slices -- a slice of bread for the day, so -- and I always kept a little piece just to keep to my lips to feel that I have something, never finished the whole thing.

And after a day's work, they gave us a bucket of some soup. In the morning for a (tent of ten) we got a bucket of (chickory) or coffee, whatever it's called; so each one took a cup and we washed ourselves in order -- took a sip, and the rest we had to clean ourselves.

Q: WAS THERE A BLACK MARKET IN THE GHETTO OF CHILDREN --

A: Ghetto, I would say yes, but not in the concentration camp.

Q: AND DID YOU OR YOUR HUSBAND OR YOUR SON TRY GETTING STUFF OFF OF THE BLACK MARKET IN THE GHETTO?

A: No, not my son. He was too little. And in ghetto, what did we do? We sold some clothes to the Lithuanian people through the gate for a piece of butter or a chicken or something. We gave away coat -- new -- brand new coat. Yeah, yeah. This is what we did.

Q: WERE THERE ANY CULTURAL ACTIVITIES IN THE GHETTO LIKE A CHOIR OR A BAND OR ANYTHING LIKE THAT THAT YOU REMEMBER?

A: (Shakes head.) Not in our ghetto.

Q: WHAT ABOUT RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE? DID YOU OR YOUR FAMILY OR ANY MEMBER OF ANY OTHER FAMILIES TRY TO OBSERVE SHABBAT OR (PASHROUT) OR THE HOLIDAYS OR ANYTHING?

A: No, nothing, nothing.

Q: OKAY. SO YOUR FINAL DAYS IN THE GHETTO -- CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT THE DAY OF LIQUIDATION, WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU AND YOUR FAMILY?

A: The liquidation of the ghetto?

Q: YES.

A: This was July -- I wasn't in the ghetto anymore. I was in the camp, in Shans camp. The rest of the people were in the ghetto, and of course, the order was to leave, and they were waiting with trucks to take you to the trains. And then, in order to make sure that people didn't hide or remained or so, they burned -- they put fire in each and every barrack and every house -- in the ghetto was mostly houses -- to burn it.

Some people I heard escaped at night while the ghetto was burning, but not too many. Most of them went according the orders.

Q: SO YOU WERE ROUNDED UP AND --

A: Rounded up in Stutthof from Lithuania ghetto and Shans laga. We all was brought to Stutthof. This was the first stop. They left off the women and some

children -- very few children -- and the rest of the men were in the trains, and they went -- sent to Dachau.

Q: WHEN YOU WERE RIDING IN THE CATTLE CARS FROM KOVNO TO STUTTHOF, WHAT HAPPENED EACH TIME YOU HAD TO GET OFF THE TRAIN AND THEY SEPARATED YOU --

A: This was -- this was the only -- the only transportation we had to Stutthof. From Stutthof, we always had to walk from one camp to another, from one labor camp to another. I understand that some people from the labor camps went on a boat, a little boat -- it was divided by a river or so -- but we weren't in this area. We were on ground.

Q: HOW DID YOU SAVE YOUR SON? LIKE YOU SAID THAT YOU --

A: I didn't save him. He just -- he went with his father. I went down -- I was let off with most of the women to Stutthof, and my son went -- remained in the train with his father, and he went on to Dachau.

Q: IN THE TRAIN RIDE OR THE CATTLE CARS TO STUTTHOF, DID PEOPLE DIE? DID YOU LOSE ANY PEOPLE ALONG THE WAY? I MEAN --

A: Some of them. A few jumped from the train. What happened to them, I don't know.

Q: ALL RIGHT. ONCE YOU GOT TO STUTTHOF, WHAT TYPE OF LABOR DID THEY MAKE YOU DO?

A: Stutthof we didn't do anything. They kept us there for six weeks. We had to report every day. They kept us sitting in a burning day outside in the sand on the ground, and they gave us the first meal -- a plate, a bowl of soup without spoons, we had to sip, and it was poison ivy mixed with some flour, and nobody, as hungry as we were, we could not eat it and we could not throw it away either. They watched us. So in the sand we dug some little holes, and little by little, we poured in and covered it with sand. It was impossible to eat it.

Q: DID YOU SHARE FOOD WITH EACH OTHER OR ANYTHING?

A: Nobody shared any. If you get -- if you got your ration when you were lucky to get whatever -- even parents and children were enemies. Many grab -- you know -- like animals. It's hard to describe.

Q: WHEN --

A: Hunger is the worse part of suffering. Torture. When you are beaten up, it doesn't hurt as much. And I was.

Q: WHEN YOU WERE -- THE SIX WEEKS THAT YOU WERE IN STUTTHOF, WERE YOU WITH THE SAME PEOPLE THAT YOU HAD LEFT WITH FROM THE KOVNO GHETTO?

A: Yeah.

Q: WAS THERE ANY OTHER NATIONALITY -- JEWISH

NATIONALS THERE?

A: Yeah. Hungary. From Hungary. Lots of women. Their heads were shaved, and they looked terrible.

Q: YOUR HEADS WEREN'T SHAVED THEN?

A: No, and we don't even have a number.

Q: AND WERE THERE ANY SELECTION PROCESSES OR (something) WHILE YOU WERE THERE IN KOVNO? -- I MEAN IN STUTTHOF, I MEAN, OR DID YOU -- THE WHOLE GROUP SURVIVE? DID THEY ELIMINATE --

A: Our group, we were 900 women. Maybe two or three died on the way when it was so cold, and so -- but otherwise everyone -- and then after the liberation when they got the food, they overate and they died, quite a few. But the rest of them survived.

Q: SO FROM STUTTHOF, YOU THEN WENT ON A MARCH TO DIFFERENT --

A: Different camps.

Q: -- CAMPS?

SO DO YOU REMEMBER THE FIRST CAMP? YOU SAID YOU STOPPED AT ONE CAMP. HOW LONG A JOURNEY DID YOU HAVE TO MAKE AND WHERE DID YOU GO?

A: (Twoons) I remember. I don't remember exactly the names of the camps. And (Torren) was the last -- Torren was the last camp. It's more on the Polish/German area border. And we were liberated not too

far away. It was a day's walking in the snow til we got to this last camp where we were liberated. We were left, abandoned by the Nazis, by the guards, and then the Russians came.

Q: WHAT TYPE OF LABOR DID YOU DO IN THESE DIFFERENT CAMPS?

A: In the camps? In one camp I used to sew, to patch up some -- to take out from a coat a piece of material and make a mitten, you know, because you couldn't hold the shovel in our hand because of the dark, frozen ground. How much -- when you are hungry and when you are tired and sick, how much can you dig? But this was only a play for them to let us do. It wasn't a very active, important work. And in every camp the same.

Q: YOU SEWED -- YOU DID SEWING AS A LABOR IN EVERY CAMP?

A: For the --

Q: WERE THEY GERMAN UNIFORMS OR --

A: No, no. Only for our prisoners to make -- cut off piece of blanket and make a pair of slippers, you know. We didn't even have yarn. We pulled the yarn from the blanket. It was the military blankets, you know. And a knife -- we had sharpened the end of a spoon, of a metal spoon.

Q: SO WAS THIS FOR THE GERMANS, OR WAS THIS FOR

YOURSELVES?

A: This was sewing for ourselves, for our camp.

Q: AND THAT WAS THE LABOR YOU WERE PERMITTED TO DO --

A: Yeah, yeah, in one camp.

Q: WHAT'S THE NAME OF THAT CAMP THEY PERMITTED THAT? DO YOU REMEMBER?

A: I don't know the names of the camps. (Twoons) and (Torren.) I know these two. And the rest I don't remember.

Q: SO YOU WERE SEWING OUT OF ANYTHING THAT YOU COULD GET AHOLD OF -- THE BLANKETS, THE THREADS FROM YOUR UNIFORMS --

A: Yeah, that's right.

Q: -- JUST TO MAKE SOME CLOTHING FOR PROTECTION OR SURVIVAL?

A: Yeah, um-hmm, or the clothes were all shredded. Only to sew up to cover the body.

Q: AND THE GERMANS DID NOT PUNISH YOU FOR THIS TYPE OF ACTIVITY?

A: No, no.

Q: WHAT TYPE OF LABOR DID THE GERMANS FORCE YOU TO DO WHILE YOU WERE IN THE CAMPS? DID THEY MAKE YOU CLEAN? DID THEY --

A: With us, it wasn't anything important what we

did, really. Most of the time spent in the fields in the -- to dig trenches.

Q: FOR THE GERMAN SOLDIERS?

A: For the Germans, yeah.

Q: SO WHAT YOU REMEMBER FROM EACH CAMP IS THEY WOULD TAKE YOU OUT AND YOU WOULD BE LIKE LABOR UNITS --

A: Uh-huh.

Q: -- DIGGING UP TRENCHES?

A: Yeah.

Q: AND SO YOU WOULD GET UP IN THE MORNING -- HOW WOULD YOUR DAY GO? YOU HAD ROLL CALL, AND THEN YOU WERE TAKEN OUT INTO THE FIELD AND THEN BROUGHT BACK IN THE EVENING?

A: Uh-huh, and they watched us all day long, each move we made.

Q: DID ANYBODY TRY TO ESCAPE?

A: (Shakes head.) There was no escape, or we weren't very -- very -- I would say up to -- didn't have the guts. Who knows.

Q: DID YOU MAKE SOME CLOSE FRIENDS FROM THE WOMEN -- THE 900 WOMEN -- THAT WERE GOING FROM CAMP TO CAMP? DID YOU HAVE ANY SPECIAL FRIENDSHIPS?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT THEM?

A: I have a friend -- she's in Israel -- and we

became very close friends, and I slept with her in the same tent. This was the first experience. It was in November. Very cold. Freezing. And we slept like -- our bedding was straw like in a pigsty, and the people who laid in the center of the tent -- they had more air. The ones who laid closer to the end, their hair used to freeze from the steam and the frozen air to the tent. So then I cut a piece from a coat, and I made a hat, you know, at night, to sleep so they should be warmer. We stepped from the snow and from the dirt into our room, so to speak. And this is the way we -- full of dirt and lice.

Q: AND YOU WERE BAREFOOT?

A: I had a pair of men's shoes, but I didn't have any socks; so it rubbed my feet very bad. It was very -- some of them didn't have any shoes at all, and some of them got gangrene and passed away.

Q: THIS SPECIAL FRIEND IN ISRAEL DID YOU MEET IN STUTTHOF?

A: No, I -- wait a minute. I don't know if I met her in Stutthof or in ghetto. I believe in Stutthof. Yeah.

Q: AND WERE YOU SHARING A BARRACKS TOGETHER?

A: Yeah.

Q: DID YOU SHARE BED SPACE TOGETHER THROUGHOUT YOUR WHOLE --

A: Yeah, uh-huh.

Q: DID YOU TRY TO KEEP UP EACH OTHER'S MORALE, OR JUST -- IT WAS JUST --

A: There wasn't too many who were really optimistic. We had one woman -- she was an author, a poetess -- and she made a poem for the future -- that we will survive.

And our tent was -- we had at night to close it with buttons. There was no zippers in our time. And she said, "You know, when we will survive and I have an uncle in America, and we will come to the uncle, I think I wouldn't ring the bell. I will just look where the buttons are to open the door," you know.

And then we didn't have any sofas to sit on. We didn't know what is this. I don't know what a sofa is. So we have to lay on the straw. Where is the straw where we were laying on. This was our carpet and bedding. And, you know, there was times in the evening we used to talk and dream of liberation and better times. And this was all not really a reality for us. It was only a dream which sometimes it happens and which it happened. Not to all, but it happened. The survivors who survived, to them, the dream came true.

Q: AND SO WHEN YOU WOULD COME BACK FROM YOUR LONG DAY IN THE FIELDS, YOU WOULD, AT NIGHT --

A: At night we had got a bucket of soup. This was our dinner time. We ate. We were dirty, frozen, tired, and each one lay down. Some of them fell asleep, and some of them felt like talking.

We didn't know -- we were cut off from the world. We didn't know any news. We didn't know anything what's going on. We didn't have any connections.

Q: I WANT TO JUST GO BACK TO THE TIME YOU WERE IN THE GHETTO AND THEN IN THESE CAMPS, DID YOU HAVE ANY CONNECTIONS LIKE WITH RELATIVES ON THE OUTSIDE WHEN YOU WERE IN THE (KOVNER) GHETTO?

A: No.

Q: NO INFORMATION?

A: (Shakes head.)

Q: AND THEN WHEN YOU WERE --

A: When we were in a camp, I believe -- I don't know. I don't remember which camp -- so we heard they tried assassination of Hitler, you know, but it didn't materialize. We got it through somebody -- the news.

Q: HOW DID YOU GET THE NEWS?

A: Walking in the fields from a outsider.

Q: A PEASANT? A --

A: From a -- I believe it was a Polish person.

Q: SO HOW MANY CAMPS DO YOU REMEMBER GOING TO TO GET TO YOUR LAST CAMP? THERE WAS THE CAMP AFTER --

A: It was Kovno ghetto and then Shans and then Stutthof and then we went four -- four camps, labor camps, in Germany.

Q: AND THE TREATMENT WAS ALWAYS THE SAME IN EACH CAMP, OR WAS THERE ANY DIFFERENCE WITH THE GERMANS IN THE WAY YOU WERE TREATED OR --

A: No.

Q: -- ANYTHING?

A: No.

Q: ANYBODY SHOW YOU ANY HUMILITY?

A: No.

Q: EXCEPT FOR THAT TIME WHEN YOU KNOCKED DOWN THE PICTURE OF HITLER? THAT WAS THE ONLY GESTAPO OFFICER --

A: No, no.

Q: SO WHEN YOU FINALLY GOT TO YOUR LAST CAMP, YOU TOLD US A LITTLE ABOUT THE DAY YOU WERE LIBERATED, THIS FRIEND WENT OUT --

A: I don't remember this camp, the name of the camp, but we were liberated in the night. We were brought to a place in the woods, an empty barracks, and then I told you one woman walked out in the morning -- she had to go (potty) or so -- and she looked around. There was no Germans, no guards.

So she tried a step further and a step

further till she saw a big kettle of frozen food, and she grabbed it. This was the main aim. You know? And this was the day of liberation. Yeah. We realized that we are free from the Germans and a new beginning and we didn't know where. We knew it wasn't -- it will not be easy, but it's a step in the right direction, but we didn't know how it will turn out.

Q: WHAT DO YOU THINK -- YOU SAID THAT MOST OF THE WOMEN SURVIVED WHO WERE ON YOUR CAMP MARCH WITH YOU -- YOUR 900 WOMEN, ABOUT. WHAT DO YOU THINK KEPT THEM ALIVE, YOU KNOW? WHAT KEPT UP THEIR SPIRITS?

A: Of course, when you feel that you are not guarded anymore by Nazis, by murderers, you feel that there is hope, there is a new life. We don't know how to start, where to go, what to do, how life will be, and if you will find someone from your family or you are alone or you are the only survivor.

And this, everybody was -- had in their minds. Will I find someone or am I the only one and what shall we do? We were still young. And I was 33. And we didn't make any plans where to go or what to do. So with time, as the day, every day, each day passed by, became more to reality that life is here and you have to work and eat and do and plan what the outcome will be.

Q: SO THEN YOUR MESSIAH ON THE WHITE HORSE

SHOWED UP?

A: Yeah, I have written about him. Uh-huh. And he gave us instructions where to get food, where to go, how to continue our -- but we had to go buy food in the deep snow -- tired, hungry, worn out.

Q: SO YOU HEADED BACK TO BERLIN?

A: From there, no. From there, it was more closer in Germany. It's more East Germany. And he told us to go to this train station and there we will be supplied with a piece of bread and some hot drink or so and we will stay there overnight laying on the floor just to rest, and in the morning to continue for another 15 miles walk though this (Chicochinik), which it was the resort.

And over there, they had a staff of Russian people, soldiers, and it was only military, and they will try to support us and to give us jobs or food or shelter.

Q: AT THE TRAIN STATION, THE REST STOP ON YOUR WAY TO CHICOCHINIK, WERE THOSE RUSSIANS GIVING OUT FOOD?

A: Yeah.

Q: AND THEN YOU GOT TO CHICOCHINIK AND --

A: From Chicochinik, I told you we got this officers, the Russian officers, which they met us and they talked to us, and if we are willing to go along with them -- because the war wasn't ended yet, because we were

liberated in 1945 in January. The war was over in May.

Q: DID YOU TRY TO GET INFORMATION AT ANY POINT ABOUT YOUR RELATIVES OR TRY TO SEND MESSAGES OR ANYTHING WHEN YOU WERE GOING FROM --

A: No, no.

Q: -- FROM THE TRAIN STATION TO CHICOCHINIK?

A: No, no.

Q: SO --

A: Til we came to Berlin, and then the official war was over and then people started to gather information. It was free. And people went looking for relatives all over because train rides were free for the refugees, for the survivors, and you could go -- because I was in Berlin and my son was liberated in Dachau, in Germany, Bavaria. And he came looking for me in Berlin, so --

Q: HOW DID SURVIVORS -- DID THEY GIVE YOU LITTLE TICKETS OR YOU JUST TOLD THE TRAIN DRIVER YOU'RE A SURVIVOR AND THEY WOULD GIVE YOU COURTESY?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: AND THESE WERE GERMANS?

A: This was --

Q: RUSSIANS?

A: This was the Russians. No, the Russians weren't -- this was in Bavaria -- American. The American

army was in Bavaria. They liberated most of the people from Dachau.

Q: WHAT MADE YOUR SON DECIDE TO COME TO BERLIN? HOW DID HE GET TO BERLIN TO LOOK FOR YOU THERE?

A: There were more men there and people were looking for relatives to find, and the woman who was there with me, she was looking for her husband and a son. And she left where -- where we were liberated, and she was just going, and when she saw the man and she saw a little boy, she said, "What is your name?" And when he told her the name, she said, "You know, I have good news for you. Your mother is alive. I was with her, and she's in Berlin." So he aimed for Berlin.

Q: AND WHERE DID HE GET THIS -- IN BAVARIA HE GOT THIS INFORMATION?

A: Yeah, he was in Dachau, yeah.

Q: AND THIS WOMAN -- WAS SHE A GOOD FRIEND OF YOURS OR JUST --

A: We were together in concentration camps -- Stutthof and other camps.

Q: THIS IS THE SAME FRIEND WHO IS NOW IN ISRAEL?

A: No, no, different.

Q: SO SHE PASSED ON THE -- AND THEN YOUR SON --

A: She lived -- I don't know if she's still alive, but she has two daughters, and they lived in

Los Angeles. I met her a couple of times.

Q: WHAT TYPE OF ILLNESS DID YOU HAVE THAT YOU WERE HOSPITALIZED? WHAT -- DID YOU HAVE TYPHOID OR WHAT CAUSED YOU TO BE HOSPITALIZED IN BERLIN?

A: Oh, I needed surgery.

Q: SURGERY ON --

A: I had hysterectomy, and I was bleeding very bad, and I had to have the surgery then. So it -- a German doctor had to operate on me. Can you imagine how it feels? So anyway --

Q: WAS THIS CAUSED BY ALL THE STRESS YOU WERE UNDER IN THE WAR?

A: I don't know. I don't know.

Q: THEN AFTER YOU AND YOUR SON GOT TOGETHER, YOU WENT TO THE --

A: We were in -- from the east zone. We escaped to the west zone, to the American zone, and from there we went to Bavaria, came to Munich. And over there, where they -- center, gathering place from all the -- all the victims who survived, all the survivors, and they were assigned in this camp and another camp, from many, many areas which they settled there -- survivors -- and being taken care of through the joint distribution to provide us with food, with shelter, with clothes.

Q: THE RUSSIANS WERE TAKING THE --

A: No, the Russians were in the east.

Q: RIGHT, BUT YOU HAD LEFT THE RUSSIAN ZONE FOR THE AMERICAN ZONE BECAUSE THE RUSSIANS WERE TAKING THE SURVIVORS BACK TO RUSSIA?

A: Yeah.

Q: WHAT WERE THEY USING THEM AS? LABOR?

A: Yeah. No, we couldn't stay there too long because if we are from the Eastern Europe, we have to go back home. (Roidena) is (home, homeland) and this what we were supposed -- and under their conditions and their orders, which it wasn't very pleasant. So we had to escape.

Q: AND THIS COLONEL GAVE YOU ALL THE INFORMATION ABOUT WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN TO THE RUSSIAN -- TO THE JEWS WHO WERE STAYING IN THE EAST ZONE AND THE RUSSIAN ZONE -- THE COLONEL, THE RUSSIAN COLONEL THAT HELPED YOU?

A: We weren't -- we dealt, actually -- in my case, we dealt with the Jewish Russians, and they were very sympathetic and they were -- really, they planned our future, to go to the American zone and to be there, which the most gathering and survivors were there. And from there we will have -- be able to make our own plans for the future, which in Russia we wouldn't be able to.

Q: NOW, THE PERSON WHO GAVE YOU THIS -- JEWISH RUSSIAN WHO GAVE YOU THIS INFORMATION -- HE WAS IN PRISON

FOR TEN YEARS? YOU STATED EARLIER THAT ONE OF THE JEWISH RUSSIAN OFFICERS THAT HELPED YOU ALONG WAS IN PRISON FOR TEN YEARS.

A: Yeah.

Q: WHAT WAS HIS CRIME?

A: His crime because he -- he helped us to escape from the Russian, and he helped us a lot.

Q: AND THAT WAS A CRIME?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: YOUR FRIEND IN BERLIN THAT TOLD YOU ABOUT YOUR SON -- HER NAME WAS SONIA?

A: Sonia.

Q: WAS SHE THE SAME FRIEND THAT WAS WITH YOU IN STUTTHOF AND ALL THOSE CAMPS?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: IS SHE THE ONE IN ISRAEL NOW?

A: Yeah, she is in Israel.

Q: AND SO SHE --

A: I just got a letter from her. She visited me about 20 years ago.

Q: AND THEN IN THE D.P. CAMPS, YOUR SON BECAME A ZIONIST?

A: He became -- his dream was to build Israel, a Jewish land. He will be the (doer), and any other country, he said, he told me, will be the same problem

with -- to destroy the Jews except Israel; so he went.

Q: AND YOU DIDN'T FEEL THE SAME WAY? I MEAN BECAUSE EARLIER IN YOUR YOUTH, YOU WERE A PIONEER YOURSELF.

A: Yeah.

Q: AND THEN YOUR SON WAS CARRYING OUT THIS DREAM, BUT YOU FELT IT WOULD BE BETTER FOR YOU IN AMERICA?

A: I really don't know. You know, at this age, you don't think anymore what you are thinking when you were young.

Q: DID YOU HAVE ANY RELATIVES OR ANY FRIENDS IN AMERICA THAT MADE YOU WANT TO COME?

A: In America, yes.

Q: RELATIVES?

A: I had an uncle and aunt from my mother's side, and I had some aunts and uncles from my father's side. But somehow, the relationship wasn't very close.

Q: DID YOU TRY, AT THIS POINT IN BERLIN IN THE D.P. CAMPS, TO GET INFORMATION OUTSIDE OF YOUR HUSBAND AND SON ABOUT ANY OTHER RELATIVES IN YOUR FAMILY -- AUNTS, UNCLES?

A: Yes.

Q: HOW DID YOU GO ABOUT GETTING THAT INFORMATION?

A: There were some people who were involved in

searching for survivors.

Q: ANYBODY SURVIVED IN YOUR FAMILY OUTSIDE OF YOUR SON?

A: (Shakes head.) Not that I know of.

Q: HAVE YOU GONE BACK TO (~~YADVASHIM~~ YAD VASHEM) OR --

A: In Israel?

Q: -- OR ANY OF THE ARCHIVES IN EUROPE OR ANYTHING?

A: Yeah.

Q: AND DID YOU LOOK UP AND SEE WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM?

A: Yeah, yeah. There was no names of mine.

Q: HOW DID YOU GET TO AMERICA AFTER FOUR YEARS IN THE D.P. CAMP? WHAT WAS YOUR TRIP LIKE? HOW DID THAT HAPPEN?

A: We were near Munich. There was a camp called (Felderfink), and we waited for our quarter because the Lithuanian people had a very small quarter. The Polish people had a larger quarter. And my husband, my second husband, had brought his family here, and they decided to send papers, affidavit, to come out, and it wasn't very fruitful for us. And we waited from 1945 to 1949 in this D.P. camp until finally we got our permission to go.

And then we went to Munich and took a train, and we went to (Bremmen, Bremmenhaufen,) and over there we

had a military ship, which it wasn't a cruise ship. It was -- (General Holbrook) and we were loaded, and this ship took 10 days, 12 days, and we arrived in New York.

And we lived in New York about five years, and then my husband had a heart attack and his son went to -- to California. He had a uncle here. So he thought maybe California is better climate, and so -- and in 1955, we decided to move from Brooklyn to California.

Q: HOW DID YOU MEET YOUR SECOND HUSBAND?

A: In the D.P. camp. His first wife died shortly -- two weeks before liberation, and her parents lived in Kovno in the same court where I used to live. We never knew each other. And then a friend of his -- we lived in the same area; so they introduced me to him, and this was it.

Q: AND YOUR SON -- HE WENT OFF TO PALESTINE. HOW DID HE GET TO PALESTINE? WITH THE YOUTH MOVEMENT OR YOU SAID --

A: Whose son?

Q: YOUR SON. HE WENT IN 1947 TO --

A: To Israel, and he came to New York in 1952.

Q: WHEN HE WAS GOING TO PALESTINE, BECAUSE IT WAS A DIFFICULT TIME TO GET TO PALESTINE, DID HE GO WITH LIKE A YOUTH MOVEMENT?

A: (Nods.)

Q: WHICH MOVEMENT?

A: This was the (Utalia) number two. I don't know. They went by numbers.

Q: AND DID HE HAVE TO BE SMUGGLED IN TO --

A: No, they went with a ship, and the ship was being taken by the British, and then they put him on the ~~Cypress,~~ Cyprus this island of ~~Cypress~~ Cyprus.

Q: AND HE WAS IN A CAMP IN ~~CYPRESS~~ Cyprus?

A: Yeah, for nine months. And then Israel became independent; so they let -- at first the children were taken.

Q: I HAVE SOME MORE QUESTIONS. HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE GERMAN UNIFICATION TODAY?

A: Germany -- what kind of feelings can I describe? For Germany?

Q: NO, WELL, NOT FOR GERMANY. LIKE YOU'RE AGAINST IT FOR THE TWO GERMANYS COMING TOGETHER --

A: I don't like it because Germany will become stronger, and this is not so good. This is my opinion. I don't know if I'm right. You know, I don't think if most of our people, the survivors, if they are very pleased with this reunification.

Q: DO YOU THINK IT COULD HAPPEN AGAIN?

A: Possible. Not for my time, perhaps, but generations to come, it may, because most of them enjoyed

it. They will go down in history. Not a very nice way, but they like it. They are not ashamed what their parents did. This is now second and third generation.

Q: WHAT DO YOU THINK -- YOU, PERSONALLY -- HOW DO YOU THINK YOU HAVE CHANGED FROM YOUR EXPERIENCES WITH THE HOLOCAUST IN ANY WAYS?

A: I don't know. People change anyway, and with age, people change as life goes on with bad experiences, good experiences, whatever happens. A person changes, has different opinions, and looks at life from a different angle, and it's gone, it's gone.

And the future is not really for -- at my age, there is not much future left; so I don't dig into it and I don't really think what it will happen, what it will be because this is not for us to tell. Time does its own thing. It's mostly -- it stays with the past more than with the future.

Q: DID IT AFFECT YOUR FAITH IN ANY WAY IN -- IF YOU HAD ANY, YOU KNOW, BELIEF IN GOD OR NO BELIEF IN GOD OR IN HUMANITY?

A: Some -- personally, no. I was always the same. Maybe a little bit weaker in faith, but some people I know became strongly religious and some people just went away from it, no beliefs at all.

Q: AND WHERE DO YOU STAND?

A: Hmm?

Q: WHERE DO YOU STAND?

A: I am still the same the way I used to be, I would say, in beliefs. I believe in God. I believe it has to be that way. And some people say why did God let -- do all these things, but there is no answer. It could be questions, but no answer for it.

And I don't know if it's God's doing or God knows about what happened. We are the chosen. The Jewish people are the chosen. I don't know -- we are chosen -- we have been chosen to suffer and maybe because we are strong, to survive. We are not getting any bigger. We will always be a minority because, as soon as we get a little stronger, we are being killed. So we will never take a major -- a major number, but history will tell that we are survivors.

MS. SILVERMAN: DENISE, DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS YOU'D LIKE TO ASK?

MR. GORDON: I do.

Q: RACHEL, WHEN DID YOU FIRST REALIZE THAT YOU WERE HATED AS A JEW?

A: I cannot hear you.

Q: WHEN DID YOU FIRST REALIZE, AS A JEW, YOU WERE HATED IN YOUR TOWN?

A: That I am what?

Q: When did you feel anti-Semitism in your little town in Lithuania?

A: Oh, of course. Before the war even, yeah. There is not a Jewish area where Jews lived, mingled with gentiles. There is not. Even in Israel they have a great majority of non-Jewish people, but in European countries, big or small, there were always gentile and Jews -- very few Jews, more gentiles -- and it showed that nobody liked Jewish people because Jewish people, I would say, a clever little nation, very ambitious in one way or the other, and the gentile lived in the small country where there are farmers, ignorant people. And so they couldn't stand it.

Q: WERE THERE ANY POGROMS WHEN YOU WERE A CHILD?

A: Not in my -- not in my country, no. Not in Lithuania.

Q: NOT IN THE REGION?

A: No.

Q: WERE THERE EVER TO YOUR GRANDPARENTS OR --

A: My grandparents were -- one set of grandparents were in Lithuania, and one was in (~~Billarussia~~ Byelarussia) in a small town, and in their time there was no pogroms.

Q: YOUR WHOLE EDUCATION WAS ALWAYS IN A JEWISH SCHOOL?

A: Yeah.

Q: SO YOU NEVER EXPERIENCED REALLY INTERACTING IN A SCHOOL LEVEL WITH NON-JEWS?

A: Oh, mostly not.

Q: YOUR THREE BROTHERS WERE SHOT BY LOCAL PEOPLE?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: WAS THIS ORGANIZED, OR WAS IT SPONTANEOUS?

A: No, this was when Hitler occupied, came in, when the war started and Hitler occupied Lithuania; so there was only one aim -- to kill. And they volunteered to do this work for the Germans.

Q: WERE THEY SHOT AS PART OF A LARGER GROUP, OR WERE THEY JUST TAKEN FROM YOUR HOUSE?

A: No idea.

Q: NO IDEA?

A: Only what I heard that the last killings in my hometown, they took them to a forest and they shot them. Just --

Q: THIS WAS IN 1941?

A: 1941, yeah.

Q: SO THEY WERE ROUNDING UP THE WHOLE TOWN, YOU THINK?

A: Yeah.

Q: TRYING TO TAKE THEM TO A GHETTO OR --

A: This was a small town. There was no ghetto,

you know. This was just the beginning. They didn't have to move from one area to another. They just liquidated. Some of them ran away and came to Kovno to the ghetto. So this is the information I had.

There was always one in a thousand or one in a million, yeah. She looked very gentile -- blond -- and she didn't look Jewish at all, and she struggled; so it took her a long time to come into the ghetto, and she told the story, what happened in this town.

Q: WERE THEY DOING THIS TO NEIGHBORING TOWNS TOO?

A: Yeah.

Q: WHEN YOU WERE IN THESE FOUR OR FIVE DIFFERENT WORK CAMPS, DID YOU NOTICE ANY OF THE WOMEN GOING OUT OF THEIR WAY TO HELP OTHER WOMEN SURVIVE?

A: You have to repeat it.

Q: HE WAS ASKING IF, IN THE TIME THAT YOU WERE IN THE WORK CAMPS, DID YOU KNOW ANY OTHER WOMEN IN YOUR GROUP GOING OUT OF THEIR WAY TO HELP EACH OTHER?

A: No. Nobody helped each other. Everyone -- if it was possible to help themselves, but it was -- it is very difficult to describe because, when you live in a normal time, a normal life, you have friends, and friends, when it comes a crisis or so, help each other.

In this particular case, even relatives, even

close families, became vicious animals. And perhaps it is normal that way to live to see your life ending before it began. And it is awful.

Everyone has a strong drive for life, to be alive, to be a survivor, to -- I will make it, you know. Why should I help you? And there wasn't even any possibilities of helping. There wasn't anything one can do for each other, could do or --

Q: HOW ABOUT THE MORALE? LIKE YOU SHARED THE STORY OF THE WOMAN WHO SHARED HER POEM WITH EVERYBODY.

A: Yeah, uh-huh.

Q: WERE THERE ANY OTHER PEOPLE --

A: Sometimes --

Q: -- MAKING UP SONGS OR --

A: Yes, yes.

Q: DO YOU REMEMBER ANY -- CAN YOU TELL US ONE OF THE SONGS THAT YOU REMEMBER?

A: Um-hmm, um-hmm. Yeah, there was moments of, you know, one started and the other follows and said maybe it could be, you know. It gives you a little morale. Maybe it will happen the way we would like to because this is the unknown. We don't know what tomorrow will bring. I have a poem, and I -- you don't understand Yiddish.

Q: But you can say it in Yiddish. If you want to read it --

MR. GORDON: Sure.

Q: YES. DO YOU HAVE IT WITH YOU? READ IT ON THE TAPE.

A: I wrote that my liberation, the way we were liberated by the Russians -- because each one has a different story to tell. And I wrote this -- I rewrote it because the paper was a little piece of scratch paper, and then it turned yellow already. So now I redid it, and this was Torren was the last stop. This is a day in camp, the way we started in the labor camp.

(Poem read in Yiddish and English.)

Q: DID YOU WRITE THAT THEN OR DID YOU WRITE THAT --

A: I wrote it then on a little scratch of paper, and then I rewrote it and the paper got yellow. It's 50 years, 45 years.

Q: SO WHERE DID YOU FIND THE PAPER TO WRITE IT ON?

A: We had -- we had little things which we exchanged for someone -- with someone, in the fields.

Q: WHAT DID YOU EXCHANGE TO GET YOUR PAPER TO WRITE ON?

A: Margarine. Piece of margarine, for a needle, sometimes.

Q: AND WHAT DID YOU USE TO WRITE ON THAT PIECE

OF PAPER?

(End of Tape 1)

Q: HOW DID YOU GET YOUR LITTLE PEN?

A: Some people -- some women of ours walking in the fields and they got together with the gentile people, they did many things which wasn't allowed to do, and they did it and somehow to get like a little piece of paper or a pen or a needle or -- minor things. Some people did it. They gave.

Q: AND THEN AFTER YOU WROTE THAT POEM, DID YOU SHARE IT WITH ANYBODY, OR DID YOU KEEP IT TO YOURSELF? DID YOU SHARE IT WITH YOUR FRIEND OR --

A: Yeah, uh-huh.

Q: SONIA?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: AND DID YOU READ IT TO A GROUP OF WOMEN?

A: I have two friends Sonia: One in Los Angeles and one I was with her all the time also.

Q: WHAT'S THE NAME OF THE OTHER FRIEND? THE NAME OF THE OTHER FRIEND. SONIA AND --

A: Sonia Adelson and Sonia Epstein.

Q: OH, TWO SONIAS?

A: Yeah, uh-huh.

Q: AND SO YOU SHARED IT WITH YOUR FRIENDS?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: AND DID YOU SHARE IT WITH A GROUP BIGGER THAN THAT?

A: Yeah, uh-huh.

Q: CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT -- DID THAT HAPPEN IN THE EVENING, HOW YOU SHARED IT?

A: Oh, we -- we shared it in the evening when we were together in the barracks. I also -- we used to get -- I became a cosmetician. We took a bead, red beads, and I took a little piece of margarine and we made like a cream to put on rouge.

Q: SO WHEN WOULD YOU DO THAT? IN THE EVENING?

A: Yeah.

Q: AND DID YOU WEAR ROUGE TO WORK?

A: (Shakes head.)

Q: WAS THERE ANY OTHER THINGS YOU DID TO KEEP UP YOUR MORALE, LIKE MAKING SOME ROUGE OR --

A: No, no.

Q: -- LIPSTICK?

A: We didn't have any lipstick, and at the time we were young. It wasn't so necessary for the lipstick because the whole appearance didn't look so good. We were dirty. Full of lice, full of dirt. Because one woman took some water and she washed herself instead of drinking, and she got beaten up by this guard terribly.

We were like animals. Just like animals. Even the mentality becomes different. The same intelligent person who used to be became completely a different one. I'm surprised that I am still alive. I'm 78 years old, and I think I have some of my faculties. I cannot see too well, I cannot hear well, and some other things, but I'm still functioning, and memory is pretty good. I have a pretty good memory still working well.

Q: WHEN YOU WOKE UP AND YOUR FRIEND TOLD YOU THAT THE GERMANS WERE GONE AND THE CAMP WAS EMPTY, THERE WERE NO GUARDS, WHAT THOUGHTS DID YOU HAVE?

Q: HE ASKED THE DAY OF THE LIBERATION WHEN YOUR FRIEND WENT OUTSIDE OF THE TENT AND NOTICED THAT THERE WAS NO GUARDS, THE QUESTION IS WHAT THOUGHTS WENT THROUGH YOUR MIND AT THAT MOMENT?

A: I don't think because the people were so excited and we didn't believe that this is true, that it can happen to us, that we are the survivors. And we didn't know what it is in front of us, what it will happen and how the future will really work, but we knew that we are alive and we are free.

What the difficulties in life will come, nobody can foresee. Even the good things, we don't foresee. So we take a step at a time and we just went. We became stronger. We walked better in the freezing

snow. We didn't feel -- I wrote the liberation, and this what I wrote in this part of -- because we felt that we are alive, we survived, and we have to be strong to start a new life.

Q: I HAVE SOME QUESTIONS TOO, RACHEL.

STUTTHOF WAS AN EXTERMINATION CAMP; RIGHT?

A: Which one?

Q: STUTTHOF.

A: Stutthof, yeah.

Q: WAS AN EXTERMINATION CAMP?

A: It had a crematorium. It wasn't as big as the other camps, but it had all the necessities for killing there.

Q: IT SOUNDS LIKE IT WAS MOSTLY WOMEN AND CHILDREN THERE. IS THAT TRUE?

A: Not too many children.

Q: BUT MOSTLY WOMEN?

A: Women only.

Q: THERE WERE NO MEN. DID THE WOMEN WORK IN THE CREMATORIUMS?

A: No, no, no, no. We didn't work at all. This -- this concentration camp, we didn't work because this was like a preparation for the future for the other camps, labor camps; so this was only a stop-off and prepare us for the rest of the -- of the time.

Q: SO DID THE -- GO AHEAD. I'M SORRY.

A: So we were there, they gave us our showers, they changed our clothes like the prisoners' clothes, the striped -- we had to count -- be counted every day, we got our meals -- no matter what it was -- for the daily existence. At night we slept there, and then it was time for us to ship out. And this what they did.

So we didn't do any work at all over there. Just waiting. And this wasn't so easy either because the uncertainty, the unknown what it will happen because when they send us to the showers, we knew. We heard about the gas showers, and we thought this will be. But we came out through the other side naked. The men were standing there -- the Gestapo -- and they were with sticks in their hand, and they hit us, and then they gave us a bundle of the striped clothes.

Q: ARE THERE OTHER IMAGES THAT ARE WITH YOU FROM THAT PARTICULAR CAMP -- THINGS THAT ARE STUCK IN YOUR HEAD THAT YOU CAN'T EVER --

A: Of course. How can you forget it? I don't even have to write it down. This is always like fresh -- each and every words which I told you. Maybe I left out something, but this is -- I can tell it over and over again because this is the way it was. Some details probably missing yet, you know, and this is in your mind,

being never forget it. Never.

Q: AT THE MOMENT YOU WERE BEING TOLD YOU WERE GOING TO HAVE TO TAKE SHOWERS AND YOU HAD ALREADY HEARD THE RUMORS FROM PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE, DID ANYBODY TRY TO ESCAPE OR COMMIT SUICIDE OR ANYTHING BEFORE THEY WENT INTO THE SHOWER?

A: In the shower you cannot commit --

Q: NO, BUT BEFORE WHEN YOU WERE BEING TOLD --

A: In the ghetto, a couple of people -- one jumped into a well, you know -- and maybe two or three cases of suicide, but nobody because everybody had strong hopes no matter what that they cannot destroy a nation and they can destroy some. And everybody thought maybe I will be the one who will survive, you know.

So and this is the way it went. Not too many suicide. Very hard to believe. I think the German people committed more suicide than the rest of the European Jews.

Q: GERMAN JEWS?

A: The German Jews, yeah, uh-huh, because they were more disappointed probably. They thought they are German first and Jews second and Hitler made even third and fourth and fifth generation where there was a Jew, just bring it out to the surface and count him as a Jew and punish him as a Jew the way he wanted. Yeah, so they were really more disappointed. It was their fatherland --

this what they called -- and they didn't like too much the east European Jews, the (Austune), they used to call, you know. So they had reason just to be more disappointed.

Q: DID YOU MEET, IN YOUR EXPERIENCES IN THE DIFFERENT CAMPS IN THE GHETTO, ANY GERMAN JEWS THAT --

A: No, but here in America I have some friends, German Jews. Some of them came just as the war started; some came as the war was approaching; and some of them were in concentration camps too, yeah.

Q: WHEN YOU WERE IN THE GHETTO AND YOU SAID YOU GOT VERY ILL AT ONE POINT, WAS THERE ANY KIND OF MEDICAL CARE AT ALL?

A: (Nods.)

Q: THERE WAS?

A: We had a clinic, and it was attended by Jewish physicians, yeah. Jewish surgeon and a woman doctor and another woman, uh-huh.

Q: SO YOU WERE MADE WELL BY THEM BY RESTING, BY --

A: They took care of -- yeah, uh-huh.

Q: WHAT WAS THAT ILLNESS THAT YOU WERE SICK WITH?

A: I had a mastectomy at the age of 31. It wasn't necessary.

Q: IT WAS EXPERIMENTAL?

A: I don't know. I cannot tell you, for the Jewish doctor.

Q: IT WASN'T CANCER OR ANYTHING?

A: (Shakes head.) We didn't have any x-rays or any facilities anyway. But I had a friend, a nurse, and she assisted, and she said it wasn't necessary. And I had to go that way. I was sick for months and months, and then, when I came to the concentration camp, I was so sore and I was so sick.

When people met me after the war, they said, "You survived?" And I said, "Yes." And I lived to be this age and have a beautiful daughter-in-law. She's very good -- good person. She cries easily. I cannot cry. I cannot cry.

Q: ONE MORE QUESTION. THE OFFICER -- WHAT WAS HIS NAME? THE OFFICER THAT HELPED YOU SO MUCH. DO YOU REMEMBER --

A: (Marshack.)

Q: WAS HE THE ONE THAT WAS IMPRISONED?

A: No. I don't know -- he was in -- he lived in Israel after he was -- I don't know if his time was up or he escaped or whatever happened. He was in Israel, and he remarried, I understand, and he wrote a book. I have to ask my friend if he's still alive.

Q: DID YOU HAVE ANY MORE POEMS OR SONGS OR

ANYTHING THAT YOU MADE UP --

A: Only my liberation, the -- the way, how it went because each one was liberated different. Each experience was different.

Q: JUST VERY SIMPLY, YOUR MOTHER'S NAME AND YOUR FATHER'S NAME.

A: My father's name was Wolf Stern. My mother's name was Goldie Stern. Maiden name, (Rock.)

Q: SO YOUR MAIDEN NAME IS STERN?

A: My maiden name Stern, yeah. Stern in English is different than Stern in Yiddish or German -- (Stan.) Stern is Stan (Cohan.)

Q: DID YOU HAVE ANY MORE QUESTIONS? DENICE, DID YOU HAVE ANY MORE QUESTIONS?

DENICE: NO, I GUESS NOT.

A: I told you in two hours which I went through years of suffering. And it seems so easy to give it away, all the accumulation for so many years of suffering, and you write it down in a book and you make a little note of it, and that's it. This is a person's life put together in a few pages.

Q: DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING ELSE YOU'D LIKE TO SAY, RACHEL? DO YOU HAVE ANY COMMENTS YOU'D LIKE TO MAKE OR MEMORIES YOU WANT TO SHARE?

A: (Shakes head.) No, I think this is -- do you

need more? You took it from day one through til today. Life in America is also different from each other survivor. Some struggled very difficult, made a living, some of them became very famous and very rich, and this is the way it goes in a normal life too.

But the experience -- each one has different experiences. You must know because you interview quite many. How many people did you interview in your time of interviews?

Q: I HAVEN'T KEPT COUNT.

A: Did you count?

Q: WELL, THE CENTER HAS PROBABLY INTERVIEWED OVER 700.

A: Yeah. How many survivors are altogether? Do you have any count of it -- from the war, is there a statistic?

Q: YEAH, THERE ARE STATISTICS.

A: I read in a trivia that all the Jews all over the world altogether are about 14 and a half million.

Q: YEAH, THAT'S THE NUMBER OF JEWS THERE ARE TODAY IN THE WORLD.

SO IF THERE'S NOTHING MORE THAT ANYBODY WOULD LIKE TO ASK OR ADD, I WANT TO THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR SHARING YOUR STORY WITH US, AND JUST THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

A: I don't know if it revived my life or it made

me sadder to go through all the emotional -- I would say it's easier to tell after it happened, but still, it's very emotional, very heavy. There are very few people who survived and has a child a survivor.

Q: THAT'S VERY UNUSUAL?

A: Because most of the survivors made a new life after the war, and if they have a married life with new children -- which they must be in their 40's -- after the war, which I am mother and son survivor, which my son is a miracle survivor. Thank you so much.

Q: OKAY. SO TELL US ABOUT THIS --

A: You could see the number?

Q: YEAH. OKAY. SO TELL US ABOUT THIS LITTLE MEDAL NOW.

A: This is the number -- which we all were numbered, you know, like prisoners don't have a name. They have only numbers. And this was my number, and we carried this on a piece of white cloth here or on the sleeve. And then when we were liberated, we met in Berlin with a few friends, we decided that the number should be remain forever, we should remember.

And we made a little charm. This was our first gem. We had some -- and we put it on a chain to wear it, so and this is it. This is 45 years old.

Q: THE NUMBER ON IT IS Z 3082 or S 3082, and on

the back it says "Stutthof."

A: Stutthof.

Q: STUTTHOF. DID YOU ADD THE NAME STUTTHOF TO IT OR --

A: We made everything there.

Q: AND THE NUMBER S 3082 -- DID YOU CARRY THAT NUMBER? WAS THAT YOUR NUMBER THROUGHOUT ALL THE CAMPS?

A: (Nods.)

Q: IS THAT WHAT THEY REFERRED TO YOU AS AND CALLED YOU IN ROLL CALL AND EVERYTHING?

A: Yeah.

Q: AND THEN WHEN YOU WERE IN BERLIN, A BUNCH OF YOUR FRIENDS --

A: We decided.

Q: THE TWO SONIAS?

A: Yeah, we did it into a charm, and this is it. I don't wear it, but I keep it.

Q: HOW MANY PEOPLE MADE CHARMS? HOW MANY OF YOUR FRIENDS?

A: We were a group about 20.

Q: DID THEY ALL MAKE CHARMS WITH THE NUMBER AND THE NAME OF THE CAMPS THEY WERE IN?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: DO YOU REMEMBER HOW THAT NUMBER WAS ASSIGNED TO YOU BACK IN STUTTHOF? THE DAY --

A: When we came into the camp, this, what we were given, we had to wear it.

Q: AFTER THE SHOWERS --

A: In the ghetto, we wore Star of David, yellow, front and back. And in the concentration camp, they put just a piece of cloth with a number.

Q: WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT FOR YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS TO REMEMBER THE EXPERIENCE --

A: Hmm?

Q: WHY DON'T YOU JUST WANT TO FORGET THE EXPERIENCE AND MOVE ON WITH YOUR LIVES? WHY WAS IT IMPORTANT TO HAVE THIS CHARM AS A --

A: I don't look at this every day, but it is there, and this is part of my past somehow. I don't dwell on it, and I don't -- but sometimes because we were numbered, you know -- in normal life, we go by name, and this -- this life, we went through was only a number.

Q: SO IT WAS A BOND THAT THE 20 HAVE YOU HAD AS A REMEMBRANCE OF --

A: No, I don't know. We just -- it just lays among my possessions.

Q: AT THE TIME WHEN YOU WERE MAKING THESE MEDALLIONS, WHAT WAS THE CONVERSATION?

A: Nothing. It's only to remember what number we were there, like I remember my name. I was called by

my name, and I -- everybody knows me Rachel Gordon. This was my name in the concentration camp. This was my name, actually.

Q: AND DID YOU PUT IT ONLY ON A JEWISH STAR FOR THE DOUBLE MEANING -- FOR THE YELLOW STAR THAT YOU WORE IN THE GHETTO AND THE JEWISH STAR YOU NOW WEAR WITH PRIDE?

A: No. This I knew how -- what number I was -- the number was how many of our group -- this is eight --

Q: 3082 --

A: 3,082, yeah.

Q: WITH A (ZED,) A NAZI SHAPED S.

A: It's not really important, but -- but we did it then as we were liberated, we had certain ideas, you know. We didn't think of it to forget our past, but this was part of it, and we thought it's a clever idea of doing it.

Q: DID YOU EVER WEAR IT?

A: No. I cannot even see it. So this is the way it goes. You know, it's maybe silly to people, but to me, it is part -- part of the past, which wasn't a good past, but it is -- this reminds me I was there and I was a number. Now I am a human being, even I'm old, but I'm still a human being, with a name -- with two names, and this is the way normal life goes.

But this wasn't a normal time. I don't know

if many -- because most of the people from Auschwitz, they had the numbers tatooed, you know, and I had the number here.

Does it sound normal to keep onto it?

Q: OF COURSE. AND PASS IT ON. (inaudible.)

A: I keep it in my jewelry box all the time.

Q: MAYBE YOUR FAMILY COULD FRAME IT. WELL, THIS IS A VERY, VERY IMPORTANT --

A: Did you have anybody with something like this, with their numbers?

Q: NOT A MEDAL. SOME PEOPLE SHOWED US THEIR TATTOOS.

A: No, so we didn't get -- our hair wasn't shaved and the tatoos weren't done.

Q: WAS YOUR HAIR CUT AT ALL? WAS IT CUT SHORT OR JUST YOU WERE ABLE TO KEEP YOUR LONG HAIR?

A: No, normal, but when we came into this concentration camp in Dachau, we met -- they brought out a group of women from Hungary, and they looked wild, and the guard was hitting them with a stick they should run like cattle, you know. And they came barefoot, and they had dresses not the same color we had. They had brown and gray stripes. And their hair was shaved, and their faces -- their eyes looked awful. And the guard said to us, "You see, those are your people, and you will look

that way too."

Q: THIS IS IN STUTTHOF OR --

A: In Stutthof, yeah.

Q: THE HUNGARIAN WOMEN HAD BEEN THERE LONGER?

A: Yeah.

Q: DID YOUR FRIENDS -- THE TWO SONIAS -- DID THEY MAKE SOMETHING LIKE THIS?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: WAS ANYBODY IN STUTTHOF CREMATED OR KILLED WHILE YOU WERE THERE DURING YOUR SIX WEEKS?

A: I don't think so. Not from our group. Must be many because we found the stacks of the glasses and the stacks of the shoes like a hay stack, very -- and those were things of people who were in the crematorium.

Q: THERE WAS A GAS CHAMBER IN THIS CAMP?

A: The crematorium, yes.

Q: AND THEN THERE WAS A CREMATORIUM FOR THE BODIES?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: SO YOU SAW ALL THE EVIDENCE OF IT WHEN YOU WERE THERE?

A: That's right, that's right.

Q: FOR SOME REASON YOUR GROUP --

A: The people were brought in before us, you know.

Q: SO YOU THINK THE FAMILIES OF THE HUNGARIAN WOMEN WERE FAMILIES YOU DON'T KNOW? DID YOU SPEAK TO ANY OF THESE HUNGARIAN WOMEN, ANY COMMUNICATION?

A: We weren't allowed. They were separated. Different barracks. We had a guard in this Stutthof, in this area. He was from Poland -- Polish, and you know Helen Taub asked me, "Do you remember the man who beat us up and who was so mean?"

And I said, "Yes, his name was Max."

"Oh," she said, "I forgot." Yeah.

Q: AND WAS HE A POLISH CHRISTIAN --

A: He was a Polish Christian guard, yeah. They put him because they know he will do a good job.

Q: WAS HE AN ANTI-SEMITE?

A: Yeah, uh-huh.

Q: Were there any women guards at any point at any of these camps?

A: No, we had -- actually, we had women, our own Jewish women. Some of them were assigned to be the eldest and to keep -- keep us in -- in -- intact.

Q: They were (CAPPOS)?

A: Cappos, that's right. They got the job and they were privileged, they had more privileges; so, you know, because everyone -- everyone is going out just to make their own life a little safer or better or whatever,

and they don't care if it's your relatives or if it's your friends or whatever it is. But the (cappos) go down in history not with very good names, you know.

Q: Rachel, what would you like to tell the world with your medallion? What would you like to tell them with that?

A: I just keep it for keepsake. That's -- that's what I -- I don't look at this every day, or I don't -- I keep it around and I go through once in a while this and I say this what I wore. It could have been done and made to anything else -- just a number; so we thought this looked more -- like it is more valuable, that it looks like something you can wear it. Okay?