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by Isabel Allegria  
Elliot Cassman

RITA KUHN DURLING

Born in Berlin Germany  
Now: Berkeley

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A. I'm Rita Kuhn Durling. Kuhn is my maiden name and I want to change it to that, so I'm Rita Kuhn. I was born in Berlin, Germany, in 1927 and lived there until the end of the war, and was -- for three years before the war ended -- I was a forced laborer, in 1942 became a forced laborer and was there when the Russians came.

Q. What did your parents do?

A. My father was working -- I suppose you would call him -- He was a banker. I'm not exactly sure, but I think he was a stockbroker. I don't -- I don't know. He worked in a, what I think is a stock exchange in Germany. And he lost his job in 1933 the minute Hitler came into power, and then was without work for four years. He couldn't find any work, and those were tough years for us. And fortunately for my -- because my mother's family is not Jewish they helped us out as much as they could.

But it was tough going there for a while until he got a job in 19-whatever, '37, I think -- or maybe -- No, actually it was in the Jewish community and he, ironically enough, he was responsible, he was working to help Jews get out of Germany. And that was his primary job there. He did a lot for that. And then it came time -- We didn't want to leave. He didn't want to leave Berlin because of his mother -- was still alive, and his mother

1 was not only old but quite ill. And she died in 1936.  
 2 And at that time it would have been a good time for us to  
 3 get out, because he could have -- He had no relatives  
 4 in -- anywhere, you know, in either America, England, or  
 5 somehow -- People had relatives -- or Israel. So it  
 6 might have been a little bit harder for us, but he could  
 7 have managed it. But it was too late. At that time  
 8 there was -- The quota was set.

9 QF By 1936?

10 A Yeah, '37.

11 QF '37.

12 A Right.

13 QM What was your mother doing?

14 A She was just a housewife.

15 QM And you had how many siblings?

16 A And I had other -- I have another brother, and  
 17 -- who was two years younger than I am. And he did not --  
 18 He couldn't finish school. They -- I finished school.  
 19 I had to change from a neighborhood school, just a German  
 20 school, to a Jewish school sometime. I don't remember  
 21 when, maybe 1937. I don't know the dates. But I  
 22 finished that. I finished, you know, that school. And  
 23 then right after I finished they drafted me for forced  
 24 labor, and my brother never had to become a forced  
 25 laborer -- either too young, or they skipped him, I

1 think.

2 Q.M Were your parents religious? Were they  
3 practicing --

4 A I wouldn't call --

5 Q.M -- Jews?

6 A They practiced, yes, but --

7 Q.M Were they Reform Jews?

8 A Yes. Um-hmm. Yes.

9 Q.M Was there -- was there any -- because your  
10 mother wasn't Jewish was there -- Did you feel like you  
11 were part of the Jewish community or weren't part of the  
12 Jewish community?

13 A I always considered myself Jewish. We had --  
14 Since my mother's family wasn't Jewish we celebrated  
15 Christmas with them, and we sort of lived in two worlds  
16 to some extent. But that was because it was family and  
17 it wasn't anything that I did out of, you know, from  
18 conviction. And in fact, I -- What I was saying in my  
19 letter to my daughter was -- I was, you know what I told  
20 you, I wasn't -- nothing big was made of being Jewish --  
21 And I wasn't even aware until I was six years old, and  
22 I started school. And, of course, that was when Hitler  
23 came, had already come into power. And the teacher, one  
24 day -- Everything was fine. I was in school. Of course  
25 I didn't look Jewish so it wasn't -- My father doesn't

1 look Jewish at all. My mother looks more Jewish than  
2 my father. And when I was six, as I say, sometime during  
3 the first school year the teacher asked the class whether  
4 anyone here was Jewish. And I looked around and no one  
5 raised a hand, and I wasn't really, you know, I wasn't  
6 really aware of, you know -- not sure that I was Jewish.  
7 But I raised my hand anyway, and I don't -- That's all  
8 I remember. I don't know why.

9           And I came home and I said to my father --  
10 And I was the only one in the class. And I came home  
11 and I asked my father, told my father what the teacher  
12 asked, and he says -- "Daddy, am I Jewish? He said,  
13 "Yeah, of course." And so that was, from that day on,  
14 becoming a very conscious thing. Because -- I think one  
15 of the reasons the teacher asked was -- She was a very  
16 nice lady -- She was not -- Even at that early age, I  
17 think they tried to -- Sometime or other they tried to  
18 recruit people for the Hitler Youth and of course that  
19 would exclude me. And so I stayed in that school for --  
20 until I had to leave, until I had to change to a Jewish  
21 school. And the Jewish school that I went to was con-  
22 nected with our old Synagogue that we lived by. We  
23 lived right across the street from there.

24           So -- And there were very early haggings of  
25 children that somehow found out that my family, and --

1 that I was Jewish, and so, you know, it made playing in  
2 the street sometimes very difficult. They had their  
3 own invenitol (phonetic) new language, you know, to  
4 haggle us like that, so -- That was very, very early,  
5 you know.

6 But I can also remember one day very soon  
7 after I started school my father warning me to be very  
8 careful going to school and avoid -- just behave; just  
9 walk straight, not make any noise, not walk, you know.  
10 and watch out for the people in the brown uniforms, and  
11 just, you know, don't antagonize them in any way possible.  
12 So those were the earliest childhood memories of Hitler's  
13 regime.

14 QM Did you have friends that were Jewish and  
15 friends that weren't Jewish?

16 A. While I was going to the German school I had  
17 friends who were not Jewish. I've some pictures even  
18 taken at that time, and then I'd played -- Another girl  
19 living in the house that we were living in, she was not  
20 Jewish. But after I came, after I went to Jewish school,  
21 I had -- all my friends were Jewish. And I'll show you  
22 some of -- pictures. And I had a -- when you leave  
23 school you have what you have here, like a yearbook, you  
24 know, and we have that. And I have it right there and  
25 all these friends wrote little sayings and then their

1 names on it, and they're all gone. All gone. Not one  
2 of them, you know. In fact, one of the friends I had,  
3 my best girlfriend, was an epileptic, and I was --  
4 helped her with many, many of her seizures. And then I  
5 was, my -- 19 -- when was it? Talks about it here, too,  
6 you see, all the dates, the -- what they call -- what he  
7 calls of her big, for big action, I was already a forced  
8 laborer -- 1942, and the way he talks about it. Anyway,  
9 we, this friend of mine and I, were both forced laborers  
10 together, and I was arrested from work. And I was working  
11 in the factory then. I started at seven and worked until  
12 six, and five minutes after seven that one day the SS  
13 came into the factory and, you know, what -- collected  
14 all of us. And this friend of mine had already been  
15 arrested earlier. And I found out that within one week  
16 she had like a hundred attacks, epileptic seizures, and  
17 I don't think she even survived the trip. But anyway  
18 during that I was arrested.

19 Q.M What year was that?

20 A. I -- When was it? In 19 -- It was February  
21 1942 -- I'm pretty sure -- it talks about here.

22 +M And you were going -- up to then you were going  
23 to school and --

24 A. No. I mean I was, I went -- I think I finished  
25 school 1942. I'm not sure about the date, maybe '41.

1 And -- or maybe 1942, I don't remember the -- I have to  
2 find it. Because I marked the day, because I, I'm not  
3 very good on dates. Then something else, I have some-  
4 thing else.

5 Okay, February, 1943, is that. Yeah. These are  
6 some of the dates that --

7 QF Is that when you finished the --

8 A And I think I graduated -- I mean I left school  
9 very, very soon before that. Because as soon as I  
10 finished school they drafted me and -- So I was -- Yeah,  
11 that's in February, That's when I -- they came to the  
12 factory where I was working and rounded us all up and  
13 loaded us on trucks and took us to -- Well, we didn't  
14 know where they were going to take us, because they put  
15 the screening on and covered the truck. And when they  
16 unloaded us, wherever it was, I think it was -- used to  
17 be a big dance hall, former dance hall. And we were  
18 one of the earliest people there, first people there.  
19 And I was there all day until all the people from Berlin  
20 came. And the place was then just really, you know,  
21 crowded, and I had no idea what was going to happen.

22 We were all -- I remember all of us -- They  
23 separated women and men, and all women were getting rid  
24 of jewelry and threw them down the toilet, or money they  
25 had, because of getting rid of things and not wanting to

1 leave them. And then I just was there all day, and they  
2 didn't give us anything to eat or anything. And more  
3 people came in, not no one I knew at that point.

4 And then there were rumors then that people  
5 told me of "They're going to let you go." I said, "Why?"  
6 "Well, because you're a -- called a mischenling" (sp),  
7 a mixed -- I mean a mixed marriage, child of a mixed  
8 marriage. We said, "Well, I don't know. We'll see."  
9 But around, I don't know, 10:00 at night -- they called  
10 people, they kept calling people -- and around 10:00,  
11 I think, maybe 9:30 or 10:00, I heard my name being called  
12 and others, and we -- I went down where they were all  
13 sitting in a row, all these SS men, and people ahead of  
14 me were, you know, they had all their papers and --  
15 very organized -- and sorting people out and I -- There  
16 were only two ways to go. If you had -- if they asked  
17 you to go there you knew that you were going to go on a,  
18 you know, transport to a concentration camp. And -- or  
19 that way, and that was You can go home. So I waited and  
20 waited and a lot of people before me had to go that way.  
21 The girl in front of me, the man said "You can go home."  
22 And then came my turn and he asked my name and, you know,  
23 asked whether my mother was living with us. And I said,  
24 "yes." And she says, "\_\_\_\_\_ you can go home." So I --  
25 I didn't believe it. I did not believe it. I went out



1 of there and was completely -- I had no idea where I was  
2 in Berlin --

3 QF They just let you go?

4 A Yeah. And it was dark and they just said, "You  
5 can go home." I'm not even sure I had any money. Yes,  
6 I did have some. Anyway, I came home. I found my way  
7 home. And I rang the doorbell to my place. I had no  
8 idea what happened to my father or brother. And I rang  
9 the doorbell, and--like 11:00 at night -- and a lady,  
10 a German lady with whom we shared an apartment, opened  
11 the door, and she called out my name, "Rita" and my  
12 father came stumbling out, actually really stumbling out  
13 of the kitchen and said his familiar \_\_\_\_\_, you know,  
14 and he just -- I had to support him. He was practically  
15 collapsed. He had been home that day. He had -- He was  
16 sick or something. And they, you know, they just thought  
17 they'd never see me again.

18 QM Where were you arrested from?

19 A From the factory. That was what they call  
20 Fabrik accion. All over it was the day that they rounded  
21 up most of the Jews. I think the book tells you how many  
22 they caught that day. And so then, then I was home for  
23 about a week. And during that week -- and that was, as  
24 I say, wasn't just, I think that lasted a whole week, the  
25 program. And during that week I wasn't working. I mean

1 they had -- I was home and one day -- My mother used to  
2 go and get the ration cards for us. And you have to  
3 know that Jews got very different ration cards from  
4 Germans. We had no butter, no white bread, no milk, no  
5 meat; and it was, you know, just minimum. And also we  
6 had -- We couldn't buy clothes or anything like that.  
7 So my mother always, for some reason we felt she should  
8 get the ration cards, and she had to go to some schools  
9 to get them. One day, when she was getting she came  
10 back and she says, "They didn't give them to me. You  
11 have to go yourself," my father, brother, and I. And my  
12 father said, "Well, that's it," you know. And we knew  
13 then. That's a bad sign. And he said, "Well," he said,  
14 "Well, put layers of clothes on. Put extra clothes on."  
15 And so we did. And we went to the place and they got  
16 our names and said "You come and visit me," -- and my  
17 father, brother, and I, my mother not, and "Come with  
18 us." These were all SS or SSA, whatever, brown and black  
19 uniforms. So we -- He took us to a room, and we were  
20 the first people there, too. And -- in whatever, empty  
21 classroom, perhaps it was. I remember it was empty.  
22 And he locked the door after us. And so again, you know,  
23 it's what happens to you, you know, when I was first  
24 arrested, you know. I was prepared to die. It's a  
25 very, you know, there's something happens that you almost

1 feel -- I felt no fear. I don't think I ever felt fear,  
2 really, or terror, even throughout the whole time in  
3 Berlin, you know, the bombs fell on us -- Somehow -- I  
4 don't know why, I just could not be easily terrorized.  
5 There is something, almost, you feel, almost what --  
6 superior, almost, to your captors. You feel these are  
7 insane -- I don't know. Anyway we were, I don't remember  
8 any great fear, you know, when we knew, my father and I.  
9 My father was shaking, my father was. Maybe it's differ-  
10 ent people, too.

11 QF It's spiritual in a way.

12 A Perhaps, yeah. Perhaps. And I think not  
13 everyone. My father was shaking, and he -- oh, he was  
14 pretty, he was pretty -- what -- ready to face whatever  
15 was going to face. He, he was very worried about my  
16 mother, and so, anyway, after a while we -- More and more  
17 people from the neighborhood came. And we were all in  
18 that room and waited. I don't remember how long.

19 At one point I heard cries outside. And I  
20 didn't recognize them at first, just a woman just crying,  
21 screaming, and saying, "My children, my children, you  
22 can't take my children," and "Let me go with my children."  
23 And it was my mother. She was just screaming to these  
24 police, you know, these SS officers. She was just  
25 beside herself. I've never, never seen my mother lose

1 her cool at all. She was very, very quiet. Very, you  
2 know, never raising her voice or anything. And so, and  
3 then at one point my father had a German friend, and --  
4 who was very supportive always and very helpful. We had  
5 Jewish friends, but this happened to be one of the  
6 German friends who -- And at one point I saw him stick his  
7 head into the door, and he wanted to give us something  
8 to take on the way. We had to leave, and they let him  
9 through for some reason. And they would not let my  
10 mother come in and say anything to us. And then after  
11 they had all their quota of people together they loaded  
12 us on a truck again, and we were the last ones to go on  
13 it. I just remember leaving, you know, the truck leaving  
14 and seeing my mother standing there and -- just stone  
15 still. She could not move a muscle in her face. She  
16 was just -- I see her still, and I can -- I mean after  
17 her initial outbreak she was just frozen. And then they  
18 drove us off and came into this, and I'm not even sure,  
19 again, the street, except this book talks about it and  
20 this is the most interesting part in this book, where  
21 they collected, I think it was, either Rosenstrasse  
22 (phonetic) or Hadenbedestrasse (phonetic), I don't  
23 remember. It was one of those, you know, the -- what do  
24 you call those places where they -- detention camps or  
25 where they keep people before they, you know.

1 QM Transit camps?

2 A. Yeah. Where they go through all that. And  
3 that was really, for me, an experience I will never for-  
4 get.

5 QM Let me understand. This is the second time you  
6 were arrested?

7 A. The second time that I was arrested, yes.

8 QF You were arrested twice then.

9 A. Twice. The first time, you know. And this --

10 QM And that was for the second time that they came  
11 to your house.

12 A. No. We had to go to --

13 QM You had -- They called. You had to go.

14 A. We had to get our -- That was a pretext --

15 QM Had you ever --

16 A. -- It was a trap.

17 QM Yes. Had you ever discussed in your family  
18 that you might be arrested or what things might happen?

19 A. We knew about it. We knew. I mean this all  
20 started very, very gradually. These transports. People  
21 just disappearing. And at first it was handled in a  
22 very bureaucratic manner. People were given, sent cards,  
23 certain color cards. And I don't remember what the colors  
24 meant, you know. If you had a yellow or a blue or a red  
25 or something you knew you were going to be sent away.

1 Or if you -- I don't remember. And so we knew that.  
2 And we knew there was such a thing as -- We didn't call  
3 them concentration camps. They were work camps. People  
4 were sent to work camps. And of course, being a forced  
5 laborer and in Berlin, we just felt, "Well, they're just  
6 drafting people to do their work." And in the beginning  
7 we used to collect things and send to the camps, clothes  
8 or food. And we would all contribute and send them to  
9 people who were -- But they had no idea, you know. We  
10 knew that they were deprived. We had no, no idea, or  
11 that they had hard labor. So then maybe we'd send  
12 clothes and some food. And that was the earliest indica-  
13 tion. But this, these programs, this one big sweep  
14 came quite late.

15 Q.M Who got krib kristalnot (phonetic), did you  
16 have any of --

17 A I remember, yeah. I had those. I write about  
18 it to my daughter. I've told my children a lot -- becau  
19 Because I was going, I was then still going to a Jewish  
20 school.

21 Q.M Still a student?

22 A Student. I was what -- ten, ten or eleven.  
23 And I remember going to school that day and thinking,  
24 you know, just like any other day. And shortly before  
25 I came to the school a friend of mine, another student,

1 came running towards me and said that the synagogue was  
2 burning. And, of course, I -- you see, I forget things,  
3 too. I want to forget. I walked one of the main streets  
4 to the school, and of course, I could see all the stores  
5 being smashed and the red paint, the stars, and arriving  
6 like that -- all of it -- See, I kept this as my only --  
7 and then I --

8 QF Kept the ones that you used, the one that you  
9 wore?

10 A Yeah, that we had to wear that. My mother  
11 lined it, see, so we could take it off. And we had to  
12 wear that all the time. And I had many. That was the  
13 only that I had. Because I, you know, I was forced  
14 laborer, they got dirty. And everything was stamped  
15 with this, see. Our ration cards, any kind of, you know,  
16 what, document, was stamped all over that. So -- And then,  
17 you know, the stores, we saw them with the red ink, you  
18 know. That was pretty ghastly, as I walked to  
19 school. So I knew something was happening. I'm not  
20 sure my father knew, because he would have warned me.  
21 And then --

22 QM But your father was working to try to get  
23 people out, right?

24 A Yeah. At that time he was still working for  
25 the Jewish community.

1 Q.F I was wondering, how did your father, since  
2 he was not half Jewish himself, he was --

3 A Hm-umm. He was all Jewish.

4 Q.F -- all Jewish. And he just recently died?

5 A He died in '78 -- \_\_\_\_\_

6 Q.F What was it like for him in terms of not being  
7 half Jewish, did he have to suffer more during that --

8 Q.M -- compared to your mother.

9 Q.F -- Compared to yourself or your mother?

10 Because you were half Jewish and she was --

11 A Not really. Not really. My father was a forced  
12 laborer, too. Four years, for four years. And I --  
13 well, if I say not suffer more but suffer consciously.

14 Q.F Yeah.

15 A There's a difference. I think when you're very  
16 young -- and I grew up with it, you know. I grew up  
17 with, from very early, I mean I remember -- As I say, I  
18 think I, even before I went to school I had people hassle  
19 me. And -- But my father, I think suffered more because  
20 before Hitler came into power he was a very rich man,  
21 you know. He was well to -- very well to do. We had two  
22 cars: an American car and a French car, and a chauffeur.  
23 And he was very well to do. He lost everything but  
24 everything. And --

25 Q.M When did he lose --



1           A.     In 1933. In 1930, I mean, just maybe. I  
2 don't remember the date, but maybe months after -- Hitler  
3 came into power in April, right, something.

4           QM    Yeah.

5           QF    And they just took --

6           A.     Yeah. They took everything from him.

7           QF    How did they know that he was Jewish?

8           A.     Oh, that's -- in your birth certificate you  
9 say -- My birth certificate says Mosaic, you know, and we  
10 have to write Mosaic and Mosad (phonetic).

11          QM    That means mixed marriage?

12          A.     No, no. That means Jewish.

13          QM    Oh.

14          A.     Mosaic, Mosad -- what is it?

15          QM    Mosaic?

16          A.     Yeah. Religion of, you know, Moses. In  
17 German that's how you -- And I guess people just know.

18          QM    Since your father lost his business and he  
19 wasn't earning income what was -- What were your living  
20 conditions?

21          A.     I don't know. All I know is my father just  
22 going out every day and knocking on people's doors trying  
23 to get work, trying to get some kind of income. And  
24 of course he really, he lost, you know, then, whatever  
25 savings he had. They took everything. And I just

1 remember my father coming home every day. I remember  
2 him stooped over, and saying nothing, you know. So I  
3 don't know what we lived on. I was, as I say, I was very  
4 young. And the only thing I remember, too, is that we  
5 had to change. We moved somehow. After my brother was  
6 born we didn't live with my grandmother any more. I  
7 don't -- Again, this is all very vague. But we moved to  
8 an apartment or flat that was very damp, and I guess  
9 that's the only rent we could afford. And my mother con-  
10 tracted TB there. And she was -- Again, that's also  
11 something I cannot remember. She was very, very ill.  
12 She was near dying in 1932, perhaps. And just because --  
13 She had a very good doctor who saved her life. I remember  
14 she had a scare here -- saved her -- and I didn't, I  
15 wasn't even aware of that, you know. My father was very  
16 protective of telling us what was going on. I just knew  
17 my mother was gone. And she was always ailing after  
18 that. So those were some of the hardships. And as they  
19 need be, and my mother's family helped some, somewhat,  
20 but they didn't have much themselves.

21 QF What was this like? Maybe if you can tell  
22 them a little bit about the forced laborer and what sort  
23 of work you did --

24 A. Well --

25 QF -- in the factories.

1           A       -- in the factory I was, I guess it was a  
2 factory that manufactured war materials. I'm not sure  
3 exactly, ammunition or something. At least part of an  
4 ammunition. We did batteries of some kind. And I just  
5 worked on big machines that, I don't know, that put  
6 pieces or something, I mean there was -- I can't describe  
7 it. It was metal. We had to push metal through a  
8 machine and then, you know, got certain shapes out of it.  
9 And we had to drill holes in it or do, you know, various  
10 things.

11           QM     And where did you sleep at night?

12           A       I was home. I was living at home the whole  
13 time.

14           QM     And your brother? Was he doing forced labor,  
15 too?

16           A       Hm-umm.

17           QM     He was living at home, too?

18           A       He was living at home the whole time. And  
19 he had to -- Yeah. He had to quit school. He could  
20 not continue school, but he was never drafted for forced  
21 labor. And so that -- I was working in the factory for  
22 one year. And then the program started. And I was  
23 arrested from that factory. And I was working there, as  
24 I say, from like seven to six. Those were the hours.

25                   And my father -- I can't remember. My father

1 worked for a railroad company. And then after my second  
2 arrest, you know, we stayed in that place for -- The  
3 one arrest I was alone and then I came home and then a  
4 week, within a week we were, my father and my brother  
5 and I were arrested and came to this place wherever it  
6 was, and there were people there already. And we stayed  
7 there overnight and were released the next day. But  
8 there the experience was, as I say, quite memorable  
9 because it reflects on the German character.

10 We got to know the German SS really well. And  
11 it's -- it was very strange because we were never, I was  
12 never mistreated by them, by any of them. I mean we  
13 lived, later we lived in an apartment right across from  
14 the headquarters, the SS. They saw me go by with this  
15 thing every day to work. They never hassled me, you  
16 know, never. I don't know. I don't understand it. And  
17 here this book talks about, and it's very, very moving,  
18 very, sort of -- I was part of this history. It's really  
19 incredible. Because I didn't really know all this -- He  
20 gives a background, there was a demonstration in that,  
21 whatever, camp of Germans who had family, either wives,  
22 brothers, sisters, cousins, whatever, friends. And they  
23 had a huge demonstration, the only one throughout the 12  
24 years, and people -- And this man here thinks that the  
25 people who were in that particular detention camp were

1 not deported because of that demonstration. I don't  
2 know. And as I say, I have it marked somewhere where he  
3 talks about what people say.

4           Anyway, what I heard after we were there -- We  
5 stayed overnight there, and I remember, you know, we  
6 lived. We had to sleep on a straw mattress, and I couldn't  
7 eat their soup. I couldn't eat anything there. And --  
8 But the women in my, in the room with me, said that at  
9 the time of the demonstration the -- one of the SS men  
10 came into their room and said, "You hear them? You hear  
11 these people out there..." you know, "how they're calling  
12 to you? These are Germans. See how loyal they are to  
13 you? We are proud of them." You know, she said that.  
14 "These are our Germans," you know, the German loyalty,  
15 and you know, \_\_\_\_\_, this big honor, you see. It makes  
16 your flesh crawl. And yeah, he was that -- He was just  
17 really proud, you know, that these Germans stood up for  
18 their Jewish members of their family.

19           QF    Maybe that had something to do with the fact  
20 that you lived right across the street from the head-  
21 quarters and --

22           A    No, no. That had nothing. Hm-umm. This was  
23 just the German, very, you know -- mentality. And  
24 another of the same SS men said there was a woman in the  
25 camp who had a husband and son who were not Jewish. And

1 the SS men called in the husband and the son of this  
2 woman and said, "Do you want to take her home?" And  
3 they hesitated. And he said, "Well, if you take her  
4 home with you, she lives with you, then she'll be safe.  
5 She won't be deported." And the husband and the son  
6 refused to take her home, said, "No, we don't want to  
7 have anything to do" --

8 QF Granddaughter?

9 A. Mother and wife. Wife and mother. They were  
10 either afraid or they --

11 QM Afraid for themselves.

12 A. Yes. And he said, "You German swines, he, the  
13 SS man said. "You don't deserve to be German." And he  
14 bawled them out.

15 QF So anyway he was --

16 A. Yeah. And they were, they were, they was -- and  
17 that, that the book doesn't talk about that. I mean  
18 that's what these women said. And he also, the same  
19 man would say, "I treat the men," the Jewish men, "with  
20 strictness," or I don't remember the German, "and the  
21 women with politeness," or, you know, \_\_\_\_\_ "and the  
22 children with affection." This was the same man.

23 Well, you know, there were Jewish here -- And  
24 the book talks about it, too -- There were Jewish trai-  
25 tors. People who were -- worked for the Gestapo. And of

1 course they didn't fare so well.

2 I had a cousin who had an aunt -- my father's  
3 cousin who was Jewish and her sister was deported and  
4 died in concentration camp and she was -- Once married a  
5 German count and didn't tell them that she was Jewish,  
6 because she was so beautiful. She was in one of those  
7 magazines, you know, the four beautiful women out of the  
8 four corners of the world? She was representative of  
9 this German beauty. She was all Jewish. And they never  
10 found out. But her husband found out at a party when --  
11 after two years or so; they were married for two years.  
12 She had a son. And they went to one of those gala  
13 affairs, you know. And one of the friends said to the  
14 Count, to her husband, says, "What a beautiful wife you  
15 have. It's incredible what beauty she is. And it's so  
16 hard to believe she's Jewish." He said, "Jewish?" And  
17 he divorced her the next day.

18 QM I bet she was sent to a concentration camp.

19 A. And she was. Well, she was sent to a concen-  
20 tration camp, to Raysenschtat (phonetic), because her  
21 son refused to live with her, with my cousin. He didn't,  
22 you know. Either he was afraid for himself or because --  
23 I don't know. The fear, the element of fear was just,  
24 you know, unbelievable.

25 QM Did the people when you were -- The second

1 time when you were arrested and you were taken in a  
2 truck, someplace, that was still in Berlin though, right?

3 A That was still in Berlin, yeah.

4 QM You were just working with women? It was just  
5 segregated?

6 A No, no. I wasn't, working in the factory, I  
7 was working with everyone.

8 QM In the factory, uh-huh.

9 A And then with the S -- and during -- In the  
10 camp where they, you know, detention camp, they -- I was  
11 there only with women in one room. And I was there, as  
12 I say, only for a day and a half. And the next day they,  
13 again, they went through our paper. And I didn't see  
14 my father or my brother very much. And I think I under-  
15 stand my aunt may have even been in the same place, the  
16 one who was sent to concentration camp. And so the next  
17 day, again they would let us go because, because of my  
18 mother. And then after that arrest -- are you uncomfort-  
19 able?

20 QF I don't mind -- getting comfortable --

21 A After that arrest I worked at a railroad  
22 station for two more years until the end of the war.

23 QM So they let you go again. And again you were  
24 able to go home?

25 A Yes.



1 QM And so you would walk to work every day and  
2 then --

3 A Well, I was -- Yeah. I was -- I took the train  
4 to work and go home, yeah. And, again, I was, you know,  
5 11 hours labor and with very little food to go on. And  
6 there in that I was with other forced laborers from all  
7 over the world. We worked with Ukranians. We worked  
8 with French and Spanish who had been, you know, drafted  
9 too.

10 QF What memory stands out in the train of time  
11 when you were in forced labor? What memory stands out  
12 for you?

13 A Well, two memories or three, maybe, main  
14 memories that I still remember with -- Well, actually,  
15 while I was in the factory, when I was working in the  
16 factory something that concerned me and something that  
17 concerned my friend, but the episode that concerned me  
18 was -- The factory, people there, were on the whole,  
19 what I should say, humane. In fact, the factory was  
20 owned by a Swede and people were working there, the  
21 Germans, but they were all really very, very nice to all  
22 the Jewish workers there. There was never any discrim-  
23 ation. That was pretty amazing, maybe also very lucky.  
24 I don't know. But I really think there wasn't that much  
25 anti-Semitism in Berlin. Berlin -- it's known for that.

1 Berlin was one city where there was -- If there was any  
2 kind of anti-Nazi sentiment it was in Berlin. Berliners  
3 are cosmopolitan. I mean it's really true. And knowing  
4 they were cosmopolitan -- But Berlin Jews were integrated  
5 into the whole social structure. It's really true. And  
6 so I think in some ways Berliners, I mean there was a  
7 lot of, you know, anti-Semitism, but it wasn't as out-  
8 spoken or as overt as maybe in a small town even. Sure,  
9 small towns are much worse than a cosmopolitan city like  
10 Berlin. So anyway, the workers there were very decent.

11 Q.M You worked with Jews and Nazis.

12 A Yeah, yeah. And maybe I -- Some of them even  
13 wore their little button, you know, saying that they  
14 belonged to the Nazi Party, and, you know, and that we  
15 had, for instance, we had -- I had -- We had to wear the  
16 star. One time I -- I do a lot of memory then you come  
17 to --

18 Q.F Yeah. There sure is.

19 A But the one time -- good ones and bad ones --  
20 but one time we had SS coming to the factory and --  
21 running out?

22 Q.M Is it?

23 Q.F Almost.

24 Q.M Maybe we should just turn it over now. Let's  
25 just do that.

1 A. Yeah.

2 And I turned around and I said, "Don't you  
3 see this?" And he said, "Yes, I've seen it. It doesn't  
4 matter." And another time a very bad memory is I have,  
5 as I say, most of the coworkers, the German coworkers  
6 there, as I said, quite -- always friendly and treated  
7 us just like, you know, we belonged there. And -- But  
8 one time I made a mistake. I don't remember what. And  
9 so -- you know, one of the things I had to produce --  
10 And one of the foremen, guess he was a foreman, came and  
11 got very angry. Well, he came at me with a hammer and  
12 was going to hit me over the head with a hammer. And I  
13 saw him coming. So all I remember, I saw him coming, and  
14 I just withdrew, and I just -- And he didn't do it, you  
15 know. He stopped in mid air. But it really, it just  
16 brought things out in me. It just, the whole -- I mean  
17 everything: the danger, the threat, you know, the con-  
18 stant threat we were under every day, you know. And  
19 you -- It all sort of crashed in on me and I started  
20 crying, and I cried. I remember really crying. And I  
21 lost consciousness. And when I came too, well, my friend,  
22 my Jewish friend I told you about was over me and the  
23 foreman, other workers -- and said, "Rita, what happened?"  
24 And I said, "What happened?" I mean, I did let loose,  
25 scream with total hysteria. And I didn't remember

1 anything of it. But it just, that was -- And then the  
2 guy who did it, came at me with the hammer, he apologized  
3 later.

4 And then another bad incident that didn't  
5 involve me, but my friend Mia, the epileptic. And she  
6 was working on a machine -- And I sometimes worked on  
7 it, too -- where you drill holes in a piece of metal  
8 and you had to -- I never liked this machine, was scared  
9 of it because it, you know, was really scary. But she  
10 bent down at one point. I remember how it happened. She  
11 bent down, maybe to adjust the water or whatever had to  
12 be, you know, I don't remember that. And her hair got  
13 caught and -- in the drill. And I heard her screaming.  
14 And I was sitting right next, right behind her, you know,  
15 on the machine. I heard her screaming. I rushed to her,  
16 and there she was screaming. And I turned off the thing.  
17 And she had a huge hole, and her hair was --

18 Q.F Pitiful.

19 A Yeah. And then that. And they took care of  
20 her, though, the people in the factory, immediately.  
21 They were very helpful. And so that was, that was a  
22 memory for the, at the factory I had.

23 And then other things with -- I remember when  
24 I first had to start on the railroad. I was very scared.  
25 I came home and I -- we were interviewed, you know, the

1 boss interviewed; not interviewed but whatever you have  
2 to do when you start a job --

3 Q.F Yeah.

4 A Got our names and our \_\_\_\_\_ And I looked out  
5 the window, and I saw all these tracks, and I saw no  
6 way to walk. I just, you know, I saw it from the office  
7 window. I said, "I have to go out there and work?" ~~It's~~  
8 Train -- There's nowhere to walk, you know, the trains  
9 are going to come. And because -- I wasn't ready to  
10 walk. So my work consisted of two things. I had to,  
11 all day long we had to carry a ladder and we had to wash  
12 windows of the train cars. Mostly transport, I mean  
13 military transports. And they were pretty dirty. All --  
14 Came all the way back from Russia or wherever they had  
15 to go. And that was my job, a whole troop of us. And,  
16 again, I had to wear this thing all the time, and I was  
17 never hassled. People accepted us as part of the work  
18 force.

19 Q.M Did you, when you were in forced labor, did you  
20 work in Berlin throughout the war?

21 A Um-hmm. Uh-hmm. Only in Berlin, yes.

22 Q.M What was it like? I mean, you mentioned  
23 there were people, of course, being deported and brought  
24 to Berlin from all over the world, what was -- Did you  
25 get to meet these people or what? What was that like?

1           A       The -- My memory of it is that the French and  
2 the Spanish people were for the -- were very, very  
3 intermixed, intermingled with us, with other people.  
4 They were very, you know, really. The Ukranians kept  
5 to themselves. In fact I had, often had the feeling that  
6 the Ukranians were anti-Semitic. I learned a few words  
7 Russian there, you know. But they really kept to them-  
8 selves, but from everyone, you know, they just did not --  
9 But I almost had a feeling that they were a little,  
10 slightly anti-Semitic. And, but for the rest, you know,  
11 all of us -- In fact, I have a picture that was taken,  
12 I'm pretty sure it was taken during -- See, this is --  
13 I came --

14           QF       I was wanting to ask you what the, how you got  
15 to the United States and --

16           A       See this is a Spanish worker, and these are  
17 two of my friends. And I think one of them is all  
18 Jewish and another one is mixed Jewish and of them,  
19 of course, and --

20           QM       This was at the railroad?

21           A       At the -- Yeah. I think so. That's where  
22 they were working. And he's, yes, he was very good  
23 friend -- I mean we intermixed with the other workers,  
24 but not the Ukranians. And the railroad -- I have no  
25 really bad memories, this. I mean it was bad, you know.

1 Every day I had to start working I'd just take myself  
2 somewhere and cried. And we had to work outside and --

3 Q.M What about in the winter?

4 A Yeah.

5 Q.M Did they give you clothing?

6 A Hm-umm, no. No. In fact I had, often I had  
7 both my hands and feet were frostbitten many times,  
8 because you had to wash windows in cold water and, you  
9 know, and carry the ladder -- and the cold. And that's  
10 where I think the --

11 Q.F How did you --

12 A My shoe -- I didn't have proper shoes and  
13 that's why, you know, probably where I got the cancer.  
14 And then, no, they didn't get anything, get any clothes  
15 for us. Uh-uh. We had to provide our own. And at one  
16 point I did a job that I hated. We had to crawl under-  
17 neath railroad cars, you know, in the ditch there, and  
18 oil certain parts. And that was, that was a ghastly  
19 job. I mean, I mean everybody. We had to do it. It  
20 was work that Germans had to do to -- so --

21 Q.F in the mud and everything?

22 A No. It was, we, you know -- There the train  
23 would be on a --

24 Q.F On a track.

25 A Not on a track, on a ditch, you know. And we

1 went under, inside the ridge and then oiled parts of it.  
2 And we had to carry the oil can. I had, my whole leg  
3 was always full of oil and everything, because I didn't  
4 have things to protect me really. My poor mother had to  
5 clean all my clothes. But there weren't any really  
6 traumatic experiences, you know, connected with that  
7 except one time, you know. Just something, again, that  
8 wasn't anything because I was Jewish, but because I was  
9 working in a place that was subhuman. We didn't make  
10 out -- a train would come, locomotive -- and we didn't  
11 make it out in time out of the ditch, and so we had to  
12 duck down, you know, get down in the ditch and have that  
13 locomotive go over us. And that was a bold scare. I  
14 mean -- Again, the German workers, you know, the foreman  
15 or whoever it was, warned us. He said, "Best be careful,"  
16 I don't remember what, but he gave us directions to avoid  
17 the water, you know, the locomotive drips water down,  
18 hot water, you see. And he, you know, he was helping.  
19 He wasn't -- So there was no -- That was so amazing I  
20 mean. And again, maybe that's because it was Berlin?  
21 People with their little buttons, with their swastika,  
22 you know, would talk, you know, would treat fairly  
23 decently. It's -- Yeah. And it's a huge contradiction  
24 that I don't understand to this day. And we had a --  
25 Do you have any question, because -- while I'm on the  
subject of the German mentality --



1 QF You were mentioning something about the  
2 character, the German character.

3 A Yeah. There was a woman living next door to  
4 us in the same apartment building who worked with the  
5 Gestapo, and she was a spy for the Gestapo. She went --  
6 That's all I know. And she had a daughter with whom I  
7 became friends, sort of, during the war, already. She  
8 was somewhat younger than I. And she liked us, this  
9 Gestapo woman. She liked our family. She liked my  
10 mother, particularly. And she liked my mother because  
11 she was loyal to her Jewish family. She thought my  
12 mother was heroic, you know. She admired my mother for  
13 her loyalty, for her doing things for her Jewish family,  
14 you know. So, again -- Yeah. The idea now that the  
15 German idea, you know, the kind of almost sick romantic  
16 spirit and then, you know -- They go for ideals, you  
17 know, for abstracts and absolutes like honor and \_\_\_\_\_  
18 and courage and -- Yeah.

19 QF Wagner music?

20 A Yeah. And so, again, she liked it. And with  
21 her I, as I say, I talk about that in my other story.  
22 With her I almost, my survival is still a miracle to me.  
23 Because when after the war my father met a former colleague  
24 of his who had become -- who emigrated to America and  
25 came back to Germany as a, you know, American officer --

1 He joined the Army -- and he saw my father on the street  
2 one day in Berlin and he called, "Fritz?" And my father  
3 said whatever his name was, and he says, "Is it really  
4 you, Fritz?" I mean, "You're alive?"

5 He said, "Yeah, I'm alive."

6 "Your family?"

7 "My family is alive."

8 "I don't believe it. I just came from head-  
9 quarters," somewhere, SS headquarters, "and we went  
10 through all the files, and I found your file, your name,  
11 your daughter's, your son's name and all across it was  
12 'Exterminated' printed. A big stamp 'Exterminate.'"

13 And I don't know to this day whether it was a  
14 clerical error, which Germans aren't likely to make or  
15 my, my, you know -- I've thought about it lately, because,  
16 you know, the whole idea of survival -- is that I can  
17 only -- I can only think of one thing: either a clerical  
18 error, you know, while we were arrested somebody by  
19 mistake stamped it, which is unlikely because they were  
20 so methodical, you know, when they interrogated us, you  
21 know, they had all the files and they kept notes; or  
22 the Gestapo, this woman was, that she put the stamp on  
23 them in order to --

24 Q.F. So they wouldn't be looking for you?

25 A. Right.

1           QF    They would actually look for people that they  
2 knew hadn't been --

3           A    Um-hmm.  Because towards the end of the war,  
4 you know, and books talk about it, too -- And that again,  
5 for me -- They didn't care whether you were mixed or not.  
6 In fact, we were told by German soldiers and also by a  
7 Russian soldier -- who we considered our liberators, the  
8 Russians -- But we were told that during the last day  
9 of the war the SS and German troops were destroying --  
10 And as the last expression of their revenge and hatred  
11 they hung Jews like us from trees in Berlin, you know,  
12 as a kind of last retaliation.  And our, our sector, our  
13 particular, our particular sector in Berlin was spared  
14 for a lot of rea -- I mean we didn't get bombed very,  
15 very heavily.  There was no more street fighting.  Other  
16 parts of Berlin, you know, there was heavy street  
17 fighting.

18                   And all we saw was the German soldiers coming  
19 through our basement.  We lived in the basement for the  
20 last ten days, because it was constant artillery and  
21 bombardment.  So -- And they were coming through, and  
22 they said, "The Russians are just behind us."  And so,  
23 you know, again, they didn't, after, they didn't want  
24 any, you know, they didn't, they didn't consider anyone,  
25 mixed married or not, it didn't matter.  I mean they

1 probably would never have done anything to my mother.

2 They considered my mother an aryan.

3 QM Even though she converted?

4 A Yes. Yes. Now, in the Jewish religion she  
5 would be considered, you know, a Jew. No, she -- they,  
6 they didn't count her. And that, that didn't, you know  
7 that didn't count with them, her conversion and her,  
8 you know, -- for whatever reason, I don't know.

9 QM What was your family life like during the time  
10 that you were working at the railroad? You'd come home  
11 at seven or eight in the evening --

12 A Yeah, late in the evening, or sometimes I had  
13 to work night shifts.

14 QM Uh-huh. Your family was intact still.

15 A My family was intact. My mother was home. My  
16 mother did as best as she could to make life comfortable  
17 for us. I don't remember -- I remember -- And of course  
18 we didn't have much food. And --

19 QM What kind of things were you eating?

20 A But then -- soups. Barley soups. I remember  
21 barley soups. I can't eat barley now. And I remember  
22 eating -- It was pretty bad. And potato soups. Potatoes  
23 that had -- especially in the wintertime, you know, they  
24 had frozen. And when potatoes freeze they get very  
25 sweet, you know. We didn't eat much meat or anything.

1 I don't -- And of course we had no heat, you know, in  
2 the midst of winter. And so we had to -- And then it  
3 wasn't just going to work, but we had, for the last two  
4 or three years in Berlin, we had constant air raids, and  
5 so I got very little sleep, because we had to go down  
6 sometimes twice a night and stay down there, too.

7 Q.M Was your house ever bombed?

8 A Yes, but not seriously. Again, as I say, our  
9 sector -- For some reason there wasn't very heavy damage  
10 done, maybe because there was no industry or something.  
11 Some sectors were spared. Others were completely, totally,  
12 not one house standing. But -- or the inner city, you  
13 know, was heavily bombarded. No, as I say, it was  
14 frightening though. I still, to this day, I can't hear  
15 airplanes going, you know.

16 Q.F Were there things throughout this period that  
17 you've been sharing with us that, things that you  
18 enjoyed like maybe moments of any kind of enjoyment or  
19 singing, any sort of thing that you --

20 A Hm-umm. No. No. Singing like what? No, there  
21 was -- I mean on the contrary. Very early -- I think  
22 that what I, if there's any kind of -- speak of enjoy-  
23 ment -- There was a lot of love in my family and  
24 especially my mother, who was -- never complained, never,  
25 never complained, never just never said anything about

1 how difficult. My father complained plenty. He was a  
2 real whiner. He was a real whiner. And I remember,  
3 you know, as I say, I never remember anything, my mother  
4 even showing, I mean her concern came out in taking care  
5 of things. And that, that's -- I can't remember. If  
6 there was anything I pushed it back, or it wasn't any-  
7 thing very pronounced. Because I remember certainly my  
8 father complaining; and anger, a lot of anger from my  
9 father but not with my mother. And, yeah, there was a  
10 certain kind of family solidarity. I had a cousin who  
11 was in the Hitler Youth.

12 QM On your mother's side?

13 A. Yes. My mother's sister's son.

14 QM Did you ever have a confrontation?

15 A. Yes, yes, in front of my mother, and my mother  
16 was scared, said, "Rita don't ever do that again." And  
17 I said, "Why not?"

18 QM What did you do?

19 A. I had always had discussions. I had discus-  
20 sions with this Gestapo woman. My mother and I -- She  
21 had tea. Well, I was young and, you know, foolish,  
22 perhaps. I don't know. I don't think -- Whether I  
23 would do it today, maybe I would, but -- I had a huge  
24 argument with her, you know. And I said, "Hitler. How  
25 can you believe in him," I said, you know. "Don't you

1 realize what he's doing?" And she, of course, she told  
2 me her -- And we had a discussion, I mean. It wasn't  
3 anything. She told me what good he was -- I don't know.  
4 I don't remember. And I said, "He's" -- you know. And  
5 my mother, later on, she was getting paler and paler,  
6 you know (laughter). And she told me afterwards, "Rita,"  
7 you know, "that was not too wise." I said, "Well, what  
8 do I have to lose?"

9           And I had arguments with my cousin, I had  
10 argument with -- Yeah, with a Nazi, somebody going -- I  
11 don't remember. I don't know. There was, that was the  
12 only shred of dignity, you know, that you clung to. I  
13 wasn't going to, to whine and to, you know, to submit in  
14 any way, hu-uh.

15           Q.M   Were there -- I assume there weren't very many  
16 Jews around at this point. By '43 most of the Jews in  
17 Berlin had been taken away, right?

18           A.    Yeah. Yeah. I don't remember now this --  
19 The book mentions a number. There was. Originally there  
20 was.

21           Q.M   Was there any talk in your family about what,  
22 what their fate was?

23           A.    Well, I, as I say, all my friends disappeared,  
24 you know, eventually, all my Jewish friends. And -- Oh,  
25 there's one incident on the rail when I was working there.

1 I -- we didn't know, you know. I mean they all dis-  
2 appeared, my family, members of my family disappeared.  
3 My father counted 12 very, very close members of his  
4 family and, of course, others who were more remote. But  
5 12 very close members who died -- Who were, you know,  
6 deported. And we didn't know, of course. They dis-  
7 appeared. We didn't know what would happen to them.  
8 But there was really not much anybody, you know -- It's  
9 it's true.

10 Except one day during work on the railroad  
11 someone came with a report and said, "I talked to  
12 somebody, I met somebody who had escaped from concentra-  
13 tion camp." Who had made it. And they had stories they  
14 told us of what happened. So then we knew.

15 QM You believed them.

16 A We believed. Oh yes. You know, we believe  
17 them as much as you can believe anything like that.  
18 Yeah. I don't think he made it up, or he hallucinated,  
19 you know. And -- But I believed him that this was,  
20 perhaps, an incident, you know, maybe, you know, how  
21 you -- In any kind of totalitarian, you know, you have  
22 a scapegoat. You have people, you know, as a warning  
23 you do that. Just like the highjackers now, they killed  
24 one man to scare the others, you know. And so I thought  
25 maybe these incidents were warnings to people, "If you



1 don't behave," you know, "this is what's going to happen."

2 But noone had any idea what really happened, and --

3           And I remember when I went -- After the war I  
4 went to a movie, and before the show, before the movie  
5 started they showed us in a newscast. And they showed  
6 the liberation of a concentration camp, the British  
7 liberating a concentration camp. And I saw it, you know,  
8 the pictures. And I, I'm not even sure that I sat  
9 through it. I think I did. But I heard Germans beside  
10 me saying, "Oh, that's just made up. It didn't really  
11 happen. They just, whatever, you know, staged it. We  
12 couldn't have done anything like that, you know, they  
13 couldn't have done" -- And when I heard that I said,  
14 "I'm leaving this country. I am not staying here."

15           Q.F    What -- I wanted to ask about the liberation.  
16 What was, maybe, what was that like for you? If you  
17 want to talk about that -- When the Russians liberated  
18 your sector.

19           A       Well, as I say, this one story here that I  
20 told -- Sasha is one of our cats' name, and he's named  
21 after a Russian soldier. And those were hard days. The  
22 ten days. But the liberation itself was mixed. We  
23 looked forward to them, you know, in fact we couldn't  
24 wait, you know. We heard, of course, what was happening,  
25 the Allies were winning. And we knew that they were

1 coming to Berlin and that the Russians would be the  
2 first ones to come, to get there. And the first Russian  
3 I met, you know -- Right in front of our house was a  
4 barricade, along the whole street so that -- to, whatever,  
5 keep tanks from coming through. And they built those in  
6 strategic points. There was one in front of our house.  
7 And so the last ten days, as I say, we lived in the  
8 basement of our apartment house.

9           And -- Oh, there's one other story that I  
10 have to tell you because it involves this Gestapo woman,  
11 ironically enough. The, one of those days, I don't  
12 remember -- We were constantly under bombardment. And  
13 then the first days it was -- The Russians just didn't  
14 seize at all. And then it tapered off a little bit.  
15 They had sort of -- You could almost tell: two hours of  
16 bombardment, an hour rest, or something, you know, with  
17 sort of a rhythm to it. And during one of those hours  
18 my father and I had to go upstairs to our apartment to  
19 get something for our life below there. And while we  
20 were there we heard this whistling sound, huge whistling,  
21 and there were -- We heard them before, and they were  
22 called stilene (phonetic) or we called them. They were  
23 very highly explosive small bombs that -- that is they  
24 had a lot of, what --

25           Q.M    Impact.

1           A.     -- impact. Yeah. I mean they -- ald also the  
2 noise, this roaring, like a siren except much, much  
3 worse, coming down. So we heard that thing coming and  
4 it was coming closer and closer to us, and just as it  
5 was coming close enough that we thought it might hit any  
6 time, you know, my father said, "Get away from the  
7 window." And he pulled me into the hallway, and it hit.  
8 The whole house shook. It hit. And I was thinking that  
9 that was close, you know. We only thought it was the  
10 next house, the house next door or where -- And so it --  
11 Then there was nothing after that. And we went down as  
12 fast as we could. We went down to the basement.

13                     And a little later my father asked me to go  
14 shopping for -- to go out to get bread. And it was --  
15 Here was our house, and it was just around the corner.  
16 There was like the street here. It was a bakery. Here  
17 was our house, and there was a bakery on this side. And  
18 I went to the corner from our house and turned into the  
19 street and I could barely recognize the street. It  
20 looked very, very strange, very different. I almost  
21 thought I had turned the wrong way. And I looked at the  
22 trees completely bare of leaves, you know, just -- and  
23 the houses were all sort of, you know, --

24           Q.M     Shot at --

25           A.     Yeah. Were -- had holes in them, you know,

1 where shells had hit. And there was an awful smell. I  
2 could smell. So -- And I walked to the bakery like a  
3 dutiful daughter to go get bread, and I walked --

4 QM And it was still open for business?

5 A Yeah. They were open. Stores were open during  
6 the whole time, you know, certain hours of the day. And  
7 then people, of course, had to stand in line because --  
8 So -- And I walked towards the street, towards -- And I  
9 couldn't find the bakery. And I looked at the house and  
10 the trees, and I could see pieces of clothes and human  
11 flesh hanging from trees. And I walked on and still  
12 looking for the bakery and still not believing what I  
13 saw. And I saw a woman on the street dead with her legs  
14 blown off, and I came close to -- I still couldn't find  
15 the bakery, damn bakery. And then finally I did see a  
16 big hole inside of the house. And next to the house I  
17 heard people crying in the door -- I mean in the hallway.  
18 And that's where the bomb hit.

19 QF In the bakery?

20 A In front of all those people standing, you  
21 know, in front of the bakery. And all these people were  
22 standing there in line and what was -- and, and, you know,  
23 either killed and a lot of them wounded, and the --

24 QF Senseless.

25 A -- the Gestapo woman was there, too. She was

1 standing in line as far as we know. Her daughter, you  
2 know, said that "My mother probably was there," she said.  
3 "She was going to go out and get bread." And we never  
4 saw her again. We don't know to this day whether she  
5 was killed. My, my grandfather because he was of World  
6 War I -- that, you know, he -- I mean he didn't mind  
7 going, looking at all the corpses. And he couldn't find  
8 anything of her. And we don't know to this day whether  
9 she was just really blown to bits there or that she  
10 escaped with the Gestapo.

11 QF Well, she could be alive then?

12 A She could still be, you know, not any more, but  
13 maybe -- not alive, but she could -- escaped with all  
14 the other SS, retreating SS, because she had certainly  
15 friends there. But we don't know to this day. And the  
16 daughter never found out, you know. So that was, you  
17 know, the one incident.

18 And then when the Russians finally came, yes.  
19 Then the last day after the German soldiers came through  
20 our basement there was no more bombardment at all. It  
21 was deathly quiet, the whole city. So they said they'll  
22 be here the next day. And of course everybody in the  
23 house, the Germans, you know -- We were the only Jews  
24 in our apartment house -- they were all just shaking in  
25 their boots. During the whole air raids they had reserved

1 room for us which was not fortified because we could  
2 not be with them, you know, in the same part of the  
3 shelter. And though they had, you know separate -- But  
4 then when the, when the Russians are coming said, "Will  
5 you put in a good word for us," you know. And no one  
6 wanted to go out and meet the Russians, or, you know, go  
7 see -- go scouting, you know, and see what, what, where  
8 they are, whether they are already there, and so they  
9 said, "Well, why don't you put on your star?" And I  
10 talk about that in my, in my account, you know, the irony  
11 of it.

12 QF Yeah. Yeah.

13 A Here we were, we were, you know, this ignominy.  
14 The star of our shame then became our shield of libera-  
15 tion, you know. And so we put on our star again. I  
16 hadn't worn this, you know, for a long time because  
17 eventually nobody really wore them any more. We all --  
18 We would, you know, wear them and you would hold some-  
19 thing over that, you know, carry a bag or a book or  
20 something and then gradually take it off, because it wa  
21 dangerous to wear that thing.

22 So -- And then we were, my father and I went  
23 up. My father was going to go out. And I said, "Well,  
24 I'll come with you, you know, and see what's happening."  
25 And so we walked up the barricade and there was -- The

1 street was completely deserted. It looked so eerie.  
2 And then of course across from us at SS Headquarters it  
3 was just empty. It was really like a ghost with the, you  
4 know.

5 And so we waited, and I said, "Nothing is  
6 happening, let's go down." I said, "Oh wait Dad, there's  
7 someone coming." And so he was coming from this corner  
8 again, and there was, we saw one Russian soldier, or  
9 two Russian soldiers, excuse me. A little fellow 14  
10 years old. And he came towards the barricade and walked  
11 up, and here we were, you know, with our star and said,  
12 he said -- He spoke some German. He was, you know -- He  
13 spoke some German. I said, "You are Jews?"

14 "Uh-uh. There are no Jews any more in Europe.  
15 Hitler killed them all." This is not, you know --  
16 Because you know that SS men took those. They put on  
17 their civilian clothes and wore the star. He would not  
18 believe us at first that we were really Jews. And he  
19 said -- And I don't remember how we had to prove it.  
20 Maybe we had to say a prayer in Hebrew, and that's some-  
21 thing, you know -- And so we did, you know, we said the  
22 Schma Israel (phonetic) or whatever, you know, to prove.  
23 We said something in Hebrew. And he said, "Okay. I  
24 believe you now." And that was Sasha. That was the one  
25 Russian soldier I met personally. And of course then he

1 told -- And as I say, the whole story is about him and  
2 my experiences with the Russians because he said, you  
3 know, "The Russians who are coming, you know, who are  
4 coming through the occu --

5 All that's -- I mean the story of our libera-  
6 tion is just very complex. My father, you know -- That  
7 we saw the Russian tanks coming in after a while. And  
8 my father had to -- They recruited my father to help  
9 them find the radio station, radio tower. That was the  
10 first thing they were going to occupy.

11 Q.M Because he was Jewish?

12 A. Well --

13 Q.F Just to help?

14 A. -- just to help, you know. They took him.  
15 They trusted him, yes. And so I remember seeing my  
16 father get into a Russian tank, and I was -- For a minute  
17 I thought, you know -- I saw the truck again and remem-  
18 bered. I didn't, all I saw was uniforms, you know, and  
19 I freaked out completely. And they reassured me that  
20 nothing was going to happen. He was going to come back.  
21 And he did. And so, you know -- And then Sasha, that  
22 was his name, the Russian soldier, warned me. He said,  
23 "There are some soldiers who will be very unruly, and  
24 there's going to be some rape. And he said, "I can help.  
25 I can protect you from my men,"--and he was a sergeant --



1 "from my company, but I can't protect you against the  
2 others." And so I, as I say, I thought all the time  
3 that I was safe. Actually, you know, when I think of it  
4 we got worse treatment from Russians than we got from  
5 Nazis ever, believe it or not. And there was also some  
6 good ones. But my experiences, my encounters in those --  
7 first week was pretty awful.

8           And so one, one -- The first incident was, you  
9 know, that -- When they came looking they had all the  
10 people in the house, they said, wanted them all congregated  
11 in one room and so we did. We didn't know why.  
12 Maybe they thought, "Oh, they want to take a concensus  
13 or something." That's what occupation troops do, you  
14 know. And so we were sitting in this room, and all the  
15 women were making themselves look ugly. I mean we wore  
16 our kerchiefs down, and, you know, our hair -- just  
17 inconspicuous as possible. And so we were all sitting  
18 in this room and three officers came into the room  
19 looking around and looking -- well, I thought looking at  
20 the women particularly. And so, a couple of the soldiers  
21 came walk -- officers came walking over to where I was  
22 sitting, and I said, "Oh, no. This can't be. This  
23 cannot be. After all these years" -- And this -- There  
24 was a girl living in our apartment -- she had -- Because  
25 we had to share -- who was a prostitute. And -- But a

1 time my mother -- Everyone was in the living room.  
2 There were about two soldiers coming, one totally drunk,  
3 could barely stand on his feet, says, "Come, frau."  
4 That's what they say, you know. And I told them, you  
5 know, I showed them, "No, you can't do this to me," you  
6 know. "I'm Jewish -- I'm Jewish, too."

7 QM So again you showed them --

8 A Yeah, oh yeah. Didn't help with them. They  
9 just wanted it. But they didn't get it. And so they  
10 left, you know, and then another day -- And then I found  
11 a hiding place in my, in our apartment, so that I could  
12 just hid, you know, if there was another knock. My  
13 father and brother would open the door and hopefully  
14 nothing would happen to them. And my mother would have  
15 a back way she left, you know, whenever there was a  
16 knock on the door, on the door. She left the back step,  
17 I mean back staircase. So one day I was there in my  
18 hiding place and we heard a knock, and my father opened  
19 the door, and I heard a shot ring out. And I couldn't  
20 move from where I was. I, my first impulse was to, of  
21 course, to run and find out. I said, "Well, I can't  
22 do that," you know, because my father -- I couldn't do  
23 it because my father -- They had said, "Frau here?" And  
24 my father had said "No." And so if I show up, you know,  
25 of course then it would be the end. And so I waited

1 until they left. And my father came to us shaking and  
2 pale. He said, "There were two soldiers again standing  
3 there, one completely drunk, you know, again, barely  
4 stand on his feet," and when he said, "There's no, there's  
5 no woman here," he didn't believe him and he waived his  
6 pistol at him and wanted to shoot my father, but missed  
7 him and hit the wall above him, behind him.

8 And my father said, "This is enough. I've had  
9 enough. Now we have had 12 years of this," you know,  
10 "and I'm not going to take that." So he went to the  
11 mayor to, whatever, you know, who was in charge of our  
12 district, and complained -- \_\_\_\_\_ and complained.  
13 And after that the mayor wrote a piece of paper. I can  
14 see it still. It was beautiful Russian script and --  
15 Which read that this family is Jewish and is not to be  
16 harassed and has suffered enough, and if there's any more  
17 harassment then there's going to be penalty or something  
18 like that.

19 QF I think I need to turn this tape over.

20 A. So that was, you know -- We never had anything  
21 like that happen.

22 QM Can you tell me when it was that -- when you  
23 first saw or heard about the death camps after the war?

24 A. Ih-huh. Well, as I told you before, I heard  
25 about some atrocities that happened because there was

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1 someone escaped, but we thought it was just sort of used  
2 as an example for people, you know, "If you don't follow  
3 our rules that's what happens to people." We had no  
4 idea that it was a mass extermination until I went to a  
5 movie after the war, a movie in 1945 or '46, soon after.  
6 And there was a newsreel and they showed the liberation  
7 of some concentration camp. I don't remember which it  
8 was, maybe Bagengersen (phonetic) by the British and so  
9 And that's when they showed all the details. We saw the  
10 loads of corpses and some of the people still being res-  
11 cued and, you know, we just -- I was horrified and that's  
12 the first time I had any inkling that it was truly, you  
13 know, a maxx execution or a death camp. And everyone was  
14 horrified in the movie. And so -- to such an extent  
15 it was so, so unreal, almost, what you saw. It was just  
16 so unbelievable, even for me, although I, I believed  
17 it -- that people behind me said, "This, this is not  
18 real. This is not, this is not what happened. This is,  
19 whatever, staged or they just put that on or they" --  
20 And I think I left the movie. I didn't even wait to  
21 see the movie. And I just left the movie and soon after  
22 left Germany because, because if that's what people  
23 think. You know, actually during, even during the --  
24 While we were waiting in line to get into the movie to  
25 get tickets I heard comments, you know, of --

1 anti-Semitic comments already and -- or just statements  
2 about the war that I didn't much appreciate. So I  
3 had made up my mind. I mean we had all made up our mind,  
4 our whole family, to leave. But that certainly triggered  
5 it, when I didn't feel that the Germans could ever accept  
6 the responsibility at least, maybe some but not a lot of  
7 them -- couldn't accept responsibility, what their  
8 government had done. And --

9 QM Did you experience any other, any direct  
10 anti-Semitism after the war was over?

11 A Not direct, really.

12 QM But you could sense that it was still under  
13 the surface?

14 A Yeah. Yes. Of course, I, you know, I had --  
15 I didn't sense it because -- I mean I didn't look Jewish.  
16 And I didn't have to wear the star any more so there  
17 was no reason why anyone should, you know. But just from  
18 general comments about how people felt, you know, bad  
19 things. It just alienated me. And then, as, as I said,  
20 my -- This friend of mine who had survived Auschwitz  
21 came, came back and although she didn't talk much about  
22 her experiences at all -- except to say that her father  
23 and her mother and one brother died. I think her --  
24 All she said was that her, her mother died in the infir-  
25 mary and her brother and father were gassed and how she

1 survived. She never talked about that. She didn't talk  
2 much about it. But we both sort of nurtured each other,  
3 you know, at that time hatred for Germans.

4 No, as I say, anti-Semitism, not directly. On,  
5 on the contrary, I mean there were, there was one, I  
6 think I told you about the German professor who estab-  
7 lished a school for Jewish or half-Jewish or people who  
8 were unable to finish their education during the war.  
9 And he had a special school for them. So there were  
10 gestures like that that were hopeful to people, for some  
11 people who wanted to, you know, repair the damage. But  
12 I just, you know, I think the reason is I just, I saw no  
13 future for myself in Germany and then --

14 Q.M Did you have any experience with DP camps?

15 A. Yeah. One, a very short one, a very brief  
16 one, and not at all negative one. I, I can't remember  
17 what year it was, '46 or '47, my mother was sent to a  
18 sanitarium for her TB by Americans, and it was near  
19 Munich, and they said, they told us that the children  
20 can come, too, to some camp nearby. And we didn't know  
21 what know what kind of camp it was. We thought it was a  
22 nice, you know, summer camp for young people. And so we  
23 took my mother, my mother to her sanitorium, and we were  
24 driven to this camp. And it turned out to be a DP camp.  
25 Yes. But it was, it was actually pretty amazing. I,

1 you know, I don't have too vivid a recollection of it.  
2 There were mostly Polish, Hungarian, or Eastern Jews who  
3 had, you know, I don't -- of course most of the German  
4 Jews who had survived the concentration camp would go to  
5 their homes. I, I think that. But that's why I think  
6 it must have been quite a bit after the end of the war  
7 because they all looked pretty well fed by that time.  
8 And we were all, I guess -- If they were at all scarred  
9 or traumatized by what they've been -- We were all trau-  
10 matized. So I don't remember any particular people who,  
11 you know, who struck me as, as just real victims, you  
12 know, because we were all victims. So there was that  
13 community between us and, and what I encountered in the  
14 DP camp is just this tremendous and -- struggle for  
15 survival, of making, making, you know, making something,  
16 making a living. And this -- they segregate. They  
17 separated the women and men, and so I was living with  
18 older women. And all I remember is we lived in very  
19 crowded quarters, you know. There was hardly room, you  
20 know, to walk in the room. They were all full of beds.  
21 And there was nothing else to do. It was just, you know--  
22 lived in barracks, and there's nothing for my brother and  
23 myself to do except to get out.

24           Yeah. I don't remember how long I stayed in  
25 the DP camp but this was, for me it was too long. I

1 needed to get back. By that time I had already started  
2 school, you know, in Berlin, this special school that  
3 was established by this German professor. So I wanted  
4 to get back. And I heard from some, from a woman in, in  
5 my room, said, "Well, I know a group of men who are  
6 smuggling things over the border illegally. Why don't  
7 you go with them?" And I said, "Well, will they take  
8 me," you know.

9 Well, sure. Maybe you can give them," whatever,  
10 \$10 or whatever it was, I don't remember. Or maybe I  
11 didn't have any money and I said, "I don't have any  
12 money."

13 "Oh, they'll take you," or I don't remember  
14 that even. I remember some things about it but not  
15 that. And they, I had a heavy suitcase with all my  
16 stuff. And they had little things, you know, sometimes  
17 little, you know briefcases and -- because they smuggled  
18 gold or -- I don't remember what else they -- So I  
19 decided to join them. And they took me, and they said,  
20 "We'll take care of you. Sure, we'll get you to Berlin  
21 in time." And so we started out and, at night, and we  
22 took a train somewhere to another part of Germany that --  
23 They had done it often before. They knew all the places  
24 across the border that were safe to cross, you know,  
25 and not to be detected by the Russians. And I think it



1 was Hanover, maybe that, and some not too far from  
2 Berlin where we had to go. And we stayed overnight  
3 there in Hanover, and then got ready to -- We, we took  
4 the train now and stayed overnight, and then we had to  
5 go on foot over the border. And so we started out at  
6 dark, when it was dark, and took some food with us from  
7 the house we stayed in, this lady who helps these illegal  
8 smugglers. And so we walked across the highway there.  
9 And it was in the midst of winter, and it was snow  
10 everywhere, everywhere it was white. But we walked along  
11 the highway to get to this, get to the place. And then  
12 it was, as I said, in the middle of the night. And --  
13 But we saw a car coming, the headlights of a car coming,  
14 and the leader of the group said, "Oh, get into the  
15 snow! Get off the road into the snow!" So we all got  
16 off the road and jumped into the snow and hid in the  
17 snow. And the car passed us and nothing happened. And  
18 so then we trotted on, you know. My suitcase was  
19 exchanged, you know, we, everyone helped me carry the  
20 suitcase. No one gave me their gold to carry.

21 And, and then, as I said, we must have made it.  
22 I don't remember, again, what at one point but we, we  
23 just walked on and eventually someone said, "Now we are,  
24 we are safe," and went to some station and said, "You  
25 can catch a train from there to Berlin." That's what I

1 did, and got back late at night. And my father was  
2 waiting up for me, probably expecting never to see me  
3 again or at least see me in prison, but we were lucky.  
4 So that is how I got back to Berlin.

5 QM Could you tell me when you, when you left  
6 Germany and how you left.

7 A Well, I, I left in June '48, 1948. And after  
8 many hassles with the bureaucracy and papers and, as I  
9 say, I think we decided to, to leave quite early, my  
10 whole family. But then my mother was, was detained in  
11 Germany for -- until her TB cleared up. And I thought  
12 I'd go ahead and -- especially since I had somewhat,  
13 already in America, my -- this girlfriend who was in  
14 Boston. And she urged me to come and said, "I can take  
15 care of you," you know, "You can stay with me, and you  
16 can -- I can even get you a job as HIAS agent." So she  
17 kept urging me and I said -- And she made it sound very  
18 enticing. That this -- "You'll like it here." And so  
19 that, that helped me decide, and it wasn't an easy deci-  
20 sion to make. But I was hopeful and optimistic that my  
21 mother could follow and my whole family could follow.  
22 And that was pretty -- Actually the American Consulate  
23 told us that there shouldn't be any problem eventually.

24 And so when I, I left in '48. And I don't  
25 remember even when it was, maybe in '49 or soon after

1 that I found out my, my, my family, my my brother and  
2 parents were getting ready to come and my mother developed  
3 the Parkinson's disease. But I think she just practical-  
4 ly woke up one day not being able to get out of bed, you  
5 know, she had a stroke of some kind. And so then I heard  
6 about it, and my father wrote to me and said what happened,  
7 She just couldn't get out of bed. She couldn't get, you  
8 know -- It was a tremendous shock. And she had that,  
9 she had Parkinson's disease until she died and was an  
10 invalid for most of that, of her remaining years.

11 QM It must have been difficult to -- when you  
12 realized that you were going to have to live your life  
13 in America away from your family.

14 A Yeah. I think it was very difficult. I --  
15 Especially when I found out that, that, that there was  
16 no hope for them to come. It was very difficult, espe-  
17 cially since my father made it difficult for me. Because  
18 he, he always felt I shouldn't have left, you know. He  
19 didn't want me to go in the first place. I mean, he  
20 didn't want me to leave alone without them. As my  
21 mother said, "I can't keep you here. I understand why  
22 you want to go. It's your life and I can't, you know --  
23 It's -- You're young and you deserve to have a life, you  
24 know, after all you went through here." So, she, she was  
25 always -- That's the way she was. She was always self

1 sacrificing and -- But my father was very, very difficult  
2 about it all, and -- And he, in fact, you know, to tell  
3 you the truth he blamed me for my mother's illness and  
4 eventually for my mother's death. So that's -- you know,  
5 I, I -- He was a difficult man, but I don't think that  
6 his experiences made -- easier for him. He became more  
7 difficult because of what he had, you know, what he went  
8 through.

9 Of course my -- you know, I -- That was a very,  
10 that was the most difficult time. I just -- the guilt  
11 of, the guilt of surviving, you know, to begin with. And  
12 then the guilt of wanting to survive, of asking for  
13 something for myself, you know -- and that was a high  
14 price, perhaps, to pay.

15 But, you know, I'm a parent now. I have to do  
16 that for my children. I'm not going to keep them, you  
17 know. I know that. I've certainly learned my lesson.  
18 And I -- My mother knew. It was very difficult for her.  
19 I mean I had letters from her.

20 But my brother was very good about, you know,  
21 after. And he had, you know -- We was talking before  
22 that he and I are so different. I mean he had differ-  
23 ent experiences. He was never a forced laborer. But  
24 he's much better, I think, at repressing some of those  
25 things, too, of just not wanting to remember. But

1 shortly after the war -- And he was in very deep trouble,  
2 psychological trouble. It was very, very difficult for  
3 him. He was suicidal almost. And, as I see it now as  
4 just as a result of, you know, the experience. I mean  
5 he was practically, I mean he was young. He was at home  
6 all the time. But home because like a prison, you know.  
7 I mean life was a prison anyway. He never knew what was  
8 going to happen the next minute. Every step on the  
9 stairs, you know, that you heard, heavy footsteps, you  
10 knew it might be for you. So -- But for him it was very  
11 difficult, and he had no friends. And he couldn't make  
12 any friends. And so all he had was at home with my  
13 mother all the time and my mother's family. So that  
14 must have made him really feel like solitary confinement  
15 practically. And I think that, you know, he reacted to  
16 that.

17 And so there was some very, very difficult  
18 years. And especially after my mother. But, as I say,  
19 he kept his head, you know. He told me, "Rita, you're  
20 not responsible for momma's illness. Hitler is responsi-  
21 ble for it," you know. Said, you know, "Your mother,"  
22 you know, "Our mother is -- It's a nervous disorder that  
23 has a long history." And so he set my mind at ease  
24 somewhat. But, of course, it seemed -- Fate seemed very  
25 cruel, that after all we had experienced together and

1 stuck together as a family that, you know, now we had to  
2 be separated.

3 QM What was your life like? Where did you go  
4 when you came to America? What were you doing?

5 A Well, at first I was in New York for -- I  
6 don't remember how many months, maybe not even months,  
7 some weeks. And I worked in a factory again. But it  
8 was, it was very different. I worked in a Jewish  
9 factory. They made hats or something. I don't remember,  
10 caps. And then I changed, and I worked in another  
11 factory. And then for -- I -- It only was about two  
12 weeks or so. No, not longer than that. Really just  
13 waiting for, you know, papers or sort of -- to be able  
14 to go to Boston and join this friend of mine. And I  
15 did. I went to Boston and lived with her for a while.

16 QM Were you working then or going to school?

17 A Let's see, in Boston. Hmm. Oh, HIAS sent me  
18 to Boston. And --

19 QM What's that?

20 A The Hebrew Immigration Aid Society. Now they  
21 sent me to Boston, and I don't remember now. I lived  
22 with my friend, my girlfriend. I don't think I was  
23 working. I don't think. She worked for HIAS. They got  
24 her a job, and they didn't have one for me, I don't think.  
25 Or maybe I did for a while, work in an office. I can't

1 remember. But then I decided to, to, to leave her, you  
2 know, to live by myself. And all I can remember -- I  
3 don't think I had any real job. The only thing I can  
4 remember is I went to night school, to Boston University  
5 and the first real -- the job I had was something that  
6 was, was living with a family.

7 QM Was it difficult living with her because she  
8 was a survivor?

9 A Yeah. Yes. Yes.

10 QM And you were, two survivors in --

11 A Right. As long as we were in Berlin together  
12 we got along very well. We, we had a lot of anger to  
13 share and a lot of fun to share. And we learned English  
14 together and, you know, we just went to movies and --  
15 As long as she was in Berlin -- Because she left sooner.  
16 But once she was here, I don't know. I don't know what  
17 happened to her. She was just a different person, you  
18 know. She -- I think if I remember, I mean -- She had  
19 to forget, too. And she tried.

20 One of the things that I remember now that she  
21 did -- I think I told you earlier once that she was very,  
22 very homely, extremely homely person, so much that  
23 children made fun of her in school, you know. She had  
24 this long, small face, no chin, very, very Jewish nose.  
25 I mean really large. She had a small face and her nose

1 just -- It was -- And then she had freckles, and it was  
2 red hair, I -- She was really -- And one of the first  
3 things she did, and I think it's significant or some --  
4 you know, of her trying to acclimatize and finding her  
5 new identity she was -- What do you call it, head of the  
6 family who sponsored, sponsored her, and they, they paid  
7 for an operation for her nose. She had her nose made  
8 aryan looking, you know, so she wouldn't have any Jewish  
9 nose any more. And, you know, that's -- at the time,  
10 you know, I, I sort of saw, recognized that as her way  
11 of denying what had happened to her and who she was.  
12 And -- But yet she couldn't, of course.

13           And -- Yeah. And I think she made me feel,  
14 "Well, you haven't experienced anything. You haven't  
15 experienced any suffering because you haven't been in a  
16 concentration camp." And you know, I was willing to  
17 admit that, but -- So it was a very -- I don't remember  
18 details. I just remember there was just too much tension.  
19 And also, she had been here for a year, and she had to  
20 show me. And she treated me like a little sister,  
21 telling me what is the American way to do things, you  
22 know. She tried desparately, yes, to find, you know,  
23 her place in this new life. And so I, I just --

24           QM   How did you go about finding your place in this  
25 new life?



1           A       I'm asking myself this question today.

2           (laughter) It hasn't been easy.

3           QM     What kind of things did you do, books that you  
4 read or --

5           A       Well, I've always been a reader. I, in fact,  
6 I sort of attribute my, what, my psychological survival  
7 or emotional survival at all that I just didn't go  
8 crazy -- My father, my father was really wounded by and,  
9 it manifested itself in all different ways. He was just  
10 psychologically ruined. And -- But I, I think that, you  
11 know, I think my reading kept me from, from just brooding  
12 or just, you know, just -- Yeah, feeling engulfed in what  
13 was happening and -- I mean I took books down while the  
14 bombs were falling, you know, in our neighborhood. I  
15 just read all the time, whenever I could.

16                   And that's another thing, you know, that,  
17 that reminds me, too, of another thing. There was a  
18 woman, a German woman, she was a doctor's wife, who  
19 recognized that in me, the need to stay above things, to  
20 stay aloof, you know, to hold onto something sane, you  
21 know, in all this insanity. And she recognized my love  
22 of reading, and she volunteered to give me French lessons,  
23 you know, in all this. You know, here I was working  
24 11 hours a day, dead tired and not getting enough sleep  
25 because we had to get, you know, to the shelter once,

1 twice a night or so, and, you know, she wanted to give  
2 me French lessons. That was really another of those,  
3 at that time, a heroic gesture to, to do that, to help a  
4 Jewish girl, you know. And there were other people  
5 around and so. Yeah. And I think that's what I did  
6 when I first came here I took night classes.

7 QM You knew English?

8 A I knew some English, you know, I -- There was  
9 a time when I first came to Boston and I lived by myself  
10 I just knew some English to begin with but it was very  
11 academic English, you know. We read Shakespeare. I  
12 didn't have a -- every day, you know, language. So I  
13 had tr -- I had difficulty understanding directions,  
14 like I ended up in Brooklyn once, you know, taking the  
15 wrong subway because I couldn't understand direction.  
16 But I listened to radio. I listened to soap operas. I  
17 went to movies a lot. So I picked up the current jargon.

18 And then when I went to Boston and lived with  
19 the family I, I went to night school very, very soon,  
20 already, starting in '48 and -- Soon after I came to  
21 America. And I had no trouble, you know understanding  
22 lectures in class. I had much more trouble understand-  
23 ing -- No, I had, really had very little trouble, I must  
24 say. I picked it up very fast, English.

25 And going to school helped, too. Because, I

1 mean in '49 HIAS sent me to college. I actually had a  
2 scholarship from Simmons College in Boston but HIAS paid  
3 for everything else. And I was a full-time student until  
4 I got my cancer here. And -- in '49, that was in '49,  
5 too. But I went back to school right after my, that was  
6 taken care of.

7 Q.M All right. What was that, again? It was  
8 something --

9 A Well, that was a, a cancer. That was a melanoma  
10 on my foot, on my toe. And I was told at the time that  
11 that was a result of, of doing forced labor in improper  
12 shoe wear. Not wearing, you know, the right shoe wears.  
13 It was because it was -- I mean the doctor said right  
14 away, "What did you do," you know, and -- "during the  
15 war?" I told him. He said, "What kind of shoe wear,"  
16 you know. I said, "Well" -- And I had, you know -- So he,  
17 he -- It was his conclusion.

18 Q.M When did you meet your former husband?

19 A Let's see. We met -- Came in '48. We met in  
20 1950, I think, or at least '50 or '51, maybe '51. Yeah.  
21 Three years after I came here I was still going to college.  
22 And we met in Boston, in Cambridge. I was living in  
23 Cambridge at the time.

24 Q.M Was he Jewish?

25 A Nope. Nope.

1 QM Can you talk about what the -- what your  
2 experience was when you married him and marrying into a  
3 Christian family?

4 A Well, dear. It was such a -- Sometimes I won-  
5 der that some of the things that I experienced, this  
6 marrying into a Christian family and my whole years of  
7 marriage, which was 14 years, were not, in some ways  
8 scarred or more traumatic than living through Nazi  
9 Germany. I mean that's, it's -- Making a -- That's a  
10 very heavy statement, I realize. But because it was  
11 a more personal thing. I mean the Nazis were almost  
12 impersonal. They were just out there. It was pure evil,  
13 you know -- It seemed like. And you could feel so damned  
14 self righteous about it, you know. You could fee, you  
15 know -- But when you marry into what is considered a  
16 normal American family and, you know, it's -- You have  
17 no expectations so you, you -- And you meet with certain  
18 kinds of bigotry -- It's harder to take. It wounds more,  
19 you know, because it's more -- more personal. But, I  
20 mean, I think I had always sort of ambivalences about  
21 him.

22 What attracted me about my husband was the fact  
23 that he was -- seemed interested in the same things. I  
24 was interested in -- which was, you know, the humanities,  
25 literature, musci, all things that I was craving at the

1 time, that I had sort of, you know, idealized, you know,  
2 during, during the war years. I idealized that kind of  
3 life, especially music.

4 I mean we had no music, you know. We were --  
5 the radios were taken away from Jews -- was one of the  
6 first things they did. Any kind of music. My father  
7 was a musician, played piano. He was a composer, you  
8 know. And -- But all that was taken away, and so we had  
9 nonmusic. I remember once, you know, opening my window  
10 and hearing a piano from way away down the street and I  
11 just listened avidly, like hungry. So I, I, as I say,  
12 I think I was just craving, you know, for these things.

13 And he sort of represented all that to me.  
14 It's like the promised land. And, and so that's what  
15 attracted me, but there are a lot of other things that  
16 didn't, that disturbed me, too. His particular kind of  
17 intellectualism disturbed me. And it wasn't so much that  
18 he was, you know -- came from a Christian family, but  
19 he, himself was not, was not a practicing Christian.  
20 Although I think that some of his -- I realize now some  
21 of the moralistic things, attitudes he had, perhaps,  
22 were part of his -- So -- Yeah. I think it was a kind  
23 of taking refuge in some security that this family sort  
24 of symbolized. I mean of stability and well-ordered  
25 life, all the things that, you know, that I was not

1 familiar with.

2 Q.M When you had children did you ever talk to  
3 them about your experiences, and how did your past relate  
4 to how you were raising your children?

5 A Well, well, when I married my -- For my  
6 husband -- I married him with a lie because his family  
7 did not, I mean his parents did not want the rest of the  
8 family to know that I was Jewish. My mother-in-law's  
9 father and brother were ministers. My father-in-law's  
10 father was a minister, and he was dead. But his sister,  
11 in that family they were fundamentalists, so -- But my  
12 mother-in-law's family's all Methodist and, as I say, all,  
13 you know, not only members of a church but ministers of  
14 the church. So they said, "Well, we don't want to tell  
15 them yet. Maybe when they get to know you, after they  
16 get to know you we'll tell them the truth." And so, well,  
17 I agreed. I said, "Well, you know, I'm one against how  
18 many." And also, it was an old habit, you know, I  
19 suppose, of feeling that I'm not part of the rest of  
20 humanity. I have to somehow hide it or deny it although  
21 I didn't deny it, of course, during the war, but here I  
22 had to and that made me -- That was very, very, very  
23 difficult.

24 I, I, I mean there were times, you know, I  
25 think I cried almost every day the first years of my

1 marriage, the first year, just, just rage, you know, of  
2 the injustice and not understanding. And also feeling,  
3 "Why should I do this? Why did I do it." The guilt  
4 about it and -- But I was pregnant, you know, and I was,  
5 I was just feeling trapped, I guess. And feeling, "Well,  
6 maybe, maybe it was all for the better. Maybe the truth  
7 will come out and when it comes out it will be okay."

8 Q.M Did it come out?

9 A. Yes, eventually it did.

10 Q.M What was --

11 A. And they accepted it, I mean they, you know --  
12 There was no big deal, you know. There's no reason why  
13 they couldn't have been told right away. But I, I felt  
14 I had to prove myself first. I had to prove myself  
15 worthy of their respect. And just, just being Jewish  
16 would already be in my disfavor, you know. I mean I  
17 tell people now, I have even talked to ministers about  
18 this and they say, you know -- So it, it's perhaps that  
19 particular family. And it's, you know, maybe representa-  
20 tive of other families, too. So --

21 Q.M What about -- How did your parents relate to  
22 your relationship with your husband?

23 A. Well, at first, you know, I told him. And he  
24 knew about it. And I don't know how much I told him.  
25 But he, he knew quite a bit and so it was no secret from

1 him and that's why it was so difficult for me that he  
2 would agree, that he would say to his parents, "Okay,"  
3 you know, instead of saying, "Well, her having to deny  
4 being Jewish would deny a lot of," you know, "a lot of  
5 her experiences," and why. So you see the silences or  
6 the hushing about this already started. Then -- And  
7 of course my parents and all knew, too.

8 QM They didn't?

9 A They did.

10 QM They knew that.

11 A They knew that I was a survivor of, you know --

12 In fact my father-in-law was much more sympathetic than  
13 she was because she was the one whose family -- So --  
14 No, we talked about -- And there was no secret except  
15 that my husband, my husband did not want -- I think he  
16 had difficulty as a whole with my particular kind of  
17 experience. He was from a completely, I mean absolutely  
18 different background. His childhood was very sheltered.  
19 And it was middle class America, protected, the only  
20 child, and he was always a good student, you know,  
21 successful. And everyone supported him and nurtured him  
22 and fussed over him. And my back -- you know. I was so  
23 completely different. Not that my parents didn't fuss  
24 over me, but I -- So that, that was, that created a lot  
25 of dif -- you know, a lot of tension between us, a lot



1 of distance between us. But it also, I think it was  
2 something I needed, I wanted at the time.

3 QM It was a tradeoff.

4 A Yeah. It was, perhaps a safety valve for me.  
5 I bet I could feel that the denial that the family  
6 expected of me was perhaps half ruled by me. I don't  
7 know. That in some ways I wanted it, too, because  
8 although it hurt me -- I mean for instance, as an  
9 example, as a -- What I remember about my wedding --  
10 There was a family wedding. Only the family was there,  
11 his family and none of my friends. I mean I didn't  
12 invite any of my friends. It was to be decided that it  
13 must be his family. And everyone gave a toast. Grandpa  
14 was a minister. The uncle was a minister. They all  
15 gave a toast. And it was very nice, very lovely. And  
16 I felt very welcomed and all that, you know. And my  
17 father-in-law gave a toast.

18 And about two days later, I think it was two  
19 days later, maybe it was more than that. It was a week,  
20 month later, he says, "Rita," you know, "I, I notice  
21 something, and I feel very, very badly about it, because  
22 no one mentioned your parents," you know, "No one said  
23 anything -- 'Wouldn't it be nice if Rita's parents were  
24 here, too.'" And I noticed it. I wanted them to be  
25 there. I missed them. And my father-in-law, as I say,

1 was, he was very, he was a very -- I really admired him  
2 a lot. He was very different from his son. And -- But  
3 he said, "I really, I should have -- I couldn't expect  
4 anyone else to remember it, but I should have, and I  
5 feel really badly. And please forgive me." And I know,  
6 you know, he meant no harm, how I must have felt, you  
7 know, and, and "I certainly would like to have your  
8 family, would have," you know. But again, it wasn't  
9 indic -- you know, it was like if this was forgotten I  
10 have no past, you know. And, and that wasn't -- And  
11 that's how it continued somehow.

12 My former husband had difficulty, I think. Not  
13 that I didn't talk about it. I, we had -- my -- He had  
14 lots of Jewish friends. In fact most of his friends were  
15 Jewish. It happens in academia, you know, usually. So --  
16 And I was telling of my -- was telling these people my  
17 story. But there was always sort of a limit. He want --  
18 He didn't want me to -- He didn't want to have to make  
19 allowances for, you know -- which I didn't want him to,  
20 but -- A better understanding of what motivates people,  
21 what effects people, you know, after an experience like  
22 that would have helped us, rather than sort of deny it.

23 And when the children got older -- Your ques-  
24 tion, to answer your question, is yes. When they were  
25 old enough to, to learn about it in schools, and they

1 heard about it in school, and they saw movies about the  
2 war and saw pictures of concentration camps and the  
3 fighting, yeah. Then I started talking to them and --  
4 But it was always sort of talk like I was telling about  
5 a third person, you know, another person. And --

6 QM It was hard for them to realize that it was  
7 you that had experienced it?

8 A Yeah. I was -- It was, it was extremely diffi-  
9 cult.

10 QM They couldn't connect it with a person they  
11 knew.

12 A Well, yes, they could. Actually I think they  
13 could, but it was very difficult for them. And my  
14 children, my, my daughters were the only ones -- My son  
15 has his own scars. I mean he has childhood experiences  
16 in his adolescence, you know. Anytime he sees -- You  
17 know, it was during the Viet Nam war there were demon-  
18 strators, Nazis here, you know, he just felt rage. He  
19 felt, like the violence, you know. He was -- surprised  
20 himself. Scared himself. The violence he felt. And he  
21 had, once he had to stand up. He had got into a fight  
22 with somebody because somebody attacked me for being  
23 German and so, you know, he got into a big fight with  
24 a boy.

25 But it was my, my daughters were the only ones

1 who, during those movies in school, would just either,  
2 would burst out, you know, just break down in tears,  
3 and they'd have to leave. And the teacher always said,  
4 "What's the matter? What's the matter?" And one of my  
5 daughters said, "My mother was there." And so they,  
6 they had a very close connection, a very close associa-  
7 tion.

8           At least, I mean I've always sort of thought  
9 how my experiences in Germany have affected me in my --  
10 especially my relationship to authority figures, you  
11 know, whether it's a professor or boss or so. And my --  
12 but it's becoming more acute now, I think, now that I've  
13 sort of raised children, when I have to assert myself or  
14 so -- And -- But part of what I, I think I have realized  
15 in the last, maybe three or four years is the kind of  
16 denial that's been going on and why I married whom I  
17 married. I think it was part of that denial, part of the  
18 feeling -- What I was trying to tell you before -- is of  
19 feeling a member of a majority and -- but always feeling  
20 an outsider. I have never felt a part of, you know, the  
21 kind of, what environment or milieu I married into, you  
22 know, except for the, some of the Jewish friends that,  
23 that we had. And their experience was so different so  
24 there was already -- and we didn't, I didn't even tell  
25 them. I told them but I didn't feel that there was any

1 kind of connection, you know. All I could get from them  
2 was -- is "Oh, how awful," you know. You know, "I can  
3 imagine." Yeah. And that's all, you know, I think it,  
4 it was perhaps. I think it happens.

5 I mean I remember reading the book that --  
6 Children of the Survivors of the Holocaust -- that  
7 certain families, either they became very, very Jewish  
8 or they denied it. And I was sort of in between.  
9 Because I -- It wasn't only that I was Jewish but that  
10 I was also German, you know. And so that had a kind of  
11 negative connotation at times. And -- But it's, it's  
12 only really just the last few years and I, I felt I  
13 probably did that. That that was one way of surviving  
14 in some way, of doing something for myself that I needed  
15 to do. Maybe it was not so much whether it was my  
16 emotional survival but it's my intellectual survival  
17 and, and I don't know. It's, it, it does raise questions  
18 in me, you know, sometimes. Why I haven't, I haven't  
19 missed out on something that I haven't gone the wrong way.  
20 I don't entirely regret having chosen my, my profession,  
21 but I don't feel quite comfortable with it either.

22 QM Did you think that you married him, that had  
23 something to do with your relationship to authority  
24 figures?

25 A Oh, definitely, yes. I mean there's also, you

1 know, there's clearly a father figure. I mean the  
2 problems I had with him was also. And, yeah. I think  
3 I wasn't ready to accept my freedom. I had just --  
4 wasn't going to take responsibility, responsibility for  
5 it. I mean it was given to me, you know, after -- in  
6 1945. But I wasn't really free yet. And I think maybe  
7 it just was too frightening to think that I could actually  
8 now take control of my life, and I married someone who  
9 did it for me.

10 I mean I had a chance to marry a Jew when I  
11 first came to this country. We came together from --  
12 left Germany together and, and he was a Hungarian Jew  
13 who had also survived. He and his brother both lived in  
14 hiding. So his experiences were similar to mine when,  
15 you know. We had not too much discrepancy between our  
16 experiences. And we both had hard, very hard times but  
17 not the most horrible times. But there I was able to  
18 say, "No. I have other plans for my life." I felt  
19 freer to say that.

20 I had -- I left Germany. I left my family for  
21 a very definite reason. And I felt it like a betrayal,  
22 you know, if I didn't, didn't pursue that, if I just took  
23 refuge in marriage. And, you know, I often think, "Well,  
24 I've probably made a, made, made a big mistake." I  
25 don't know. But at the time it seemed the right thing to

1 do. And it was what I wanted to do with my life. So --  
2 And, and, you know, and yeah.

3 My former husband somehow and other -- This,  
4 this man was educated. He was a lawyer. In Hungary he  
5 was trained. He was somewhat older than I was, not that --  
6 eight years older, so -- He was very educated. And I'm  
7 sure, you know, we had things in common. But I still, as  
8 I say, I still don't understand. There are some answers,  
9 I suppose, why I, you know, the marriage, why it helped  
10 relate it to my experiences in Germany. And I think one  
11 of the -- answer is that yes, that somehow when I was  
12 really faced with, with taking responsibility for my  
13 life I might not have been quite ready for it. Because  
14 I had, you know, during all the -- during my whole grow-  
15 ing years I never had to take responsibility. I mean I--  
16 we didn't -- never made any plans, couldn't.

17 Q.M Did you ever go back to Germany after --

18 A. Um-hmm.

19 Q.M -- after you moved here?

20 A. Um-hmm.

21 Q.M What was that like?

22 A. I went -- Well, I went back, let's see, 1954  
23 when my son was two years old. And my mother, my parents  
24 were both alive still. And I really just stayed with  
25 them. I didn't do much else. And my mother was already

1 quite ill. And she was still able to walk around but not  
2 much. She was an invalid. So I stayed with them for a  
3 month; oh, no, three months, actually. Three months.  
4 And I didn't mix much with the German, you know. I had  
5 no friends left anywhere. And my, all my friends had  
6 been Jewish. And there was my mother's family, that's  
7 all, really. And I don't know. My -- I guess it felt  
8 all right. I don't remember much about it. I spent so  
9 much time at home with them. And they enjoyed my, my  
10 two-year-old so much that that's all that, you know, it  
11 seems like. That's all right.

12           And then when it was very -- It was lovely, you  
13 know. Except my father made things difficult for me at  
14 one point, and I just wanted to, had to get out a little  
15 bit, you know. And I was, I was newly married and I  
16 was still interested in keeping up with my husband's  
17 career. And so he was teaching a course in Shakespeare  
18 so I wanted to do some reading while I was in Germany.  
19 And my father just didn't like me to leave my mother  
20 alone and so I -- And in fact I went to a theatre to a,  
21 to a play and to a performance, and he called me up  
22 during intermission, wanted me to come home, said, "I'm  
23 sick. I don't feel well. Will you come home?" I said,  
24 "No. I'm not coming home." And my father was very  
25 possessive, too. Very.



1 QM Now I know what you mean by difficult.

2 A Yes. So -- Yeah. He, he really took on the  
3 martyr's, you know, syndrome. He was something of a  
4 hypochondriac. He really wanted pity. He wanted --  
5 I mean really pity, not just sympathy but, you know, he  
6 needed a lot of strokes after the war. And there was  
7 some people who, for whom that had, you know -- was a  
8 result of the experience. And my mother was completely  
9 opposite.

10 But -- And then I went back, '54, and then I  
11 went back in '63 for one month. Then I don't, again, I  
12 was -- mostly family visits. So I don't really have any  
13 feeling or any memory of what it was like. And that's  
14 something I would like to do, go back to Germany now and--

15 QM For you.

16 A Yes. I think it really would be important for  
17 me. I'm begin -- In fact, I'm beginning to feel rather  
18 curious. I mean for a long time I didn't want to hear  
19 anything about Germany, what was going on in Germany, or  
20 hardly read anything, you know, I mean read literature --  
21 but not present-day Germany.

22 And I had a letter from my brother, for  
23 instance, you know, he -- in response to something I have  
24 written. And, and he sort of said, "Germany has changed  
25 since you left. Your memory of Germany is not what it's

1 like now." So I'm, I'm curious, you know about it.  
2 Because it's important to me, because I am part German,  
3 too. And, and so I, you know, I think I might have told  
4 you that I'd like to go back there and see what it's  
5 like. What the private people -- whether I can. I mean  
6 I know that, I know that they are, you know, it's not  
7 that, that I have to go back to confirm that there are  
8 good Germans, you know. That, that's not -- Because I  
9 know there are. And -- But just how it failed for me.  
10 And, and then, you know, go, go to Germany first and  
11 then go to Israel.

12 I, I think that what I would like to --  
13 There's sometimes I wonder, you know, what -- And then  
14 something I have to, I really feel I have to work on  
15 still and perhaps talk to other people about it, is the  
16 survival itself, you know, he times. But more of a  
17 problem is surviving the survival, you know. And that,  
18 experiences like that. You know, it creates a lot of,  
19 well, different emotions as well as anger which I --  
20 And there are a lot of just insecurities, of not --  
21 Well, I think that that is -- Perhaps you as Jewish  
22 people feel that, too. There's always that discrimina-  
23 tion. I mean minority groups feel that. Women feel  
24 that. But it's, I think it's, it becomes, you know,  
25 proportionally it becomes magnified when you have, you

1 know, when you have met with so much hatred and violence  
2 that, you know -- As I say, I still -- I feel I'm doing  
3 pretty well. And I have done pretty well. And I have  
4 survived the survival. I mean there are people I know  
5 that, people who didn't make it as well. And you hear  
6 stories of -- and, in fact, in fact, in the book of  
7 Children of the Survivors of the Holocaust parents are  
8 just -- makes your blood curl, you know.

9 Q.M Is, is there a --

10 A. \_\_\_\_\_

11 Q.M -- one thing that's difficult --

12 A. It's different, I mean, you know.

13 Q.M -- is to feel like you were -- It wasn't you.  
14 It wasn't because of something you did that you were a  
15 victim of persecution. Is that something that is --  
16 to work on in a way? Is that something that that --

17 A. Yeah. Well, it's, it's right. It's not because  
18 because of what I did.

19 Q.M But there's a natural inclination to feel that  
20 that if you're punished it must be because you did  
21 something bad.

22 A. Yeah, but that never, that never entered, you  
23 know. I mean we knew we didn't do anything bad. I  
24 never felt guilty. I never felt guilty for, for the pun --  
25 In fact that's why I just -- And it didn't make me feel

1 less of a believer. I felt that I believed what I  
2 believed in, my religious beliefs. I had no sense of  
3 inferiority about that.

4 And, in fact, when I was 12 years old and  
5 things got to be very threatening, I mean there was --  
6 That was in 1939. It was also the beginning of the war.  
7 And I think deportations already started. I mean they  
8 had started early but they became increasingly, you know,  
9 the larger numbers. And the threat to the Jews was very  
10 obvious by that -- when I was 12. And my father, my --  
11 was beside himself. He thought of every possible way of  
12 saving the family. And I -- and he -- He said, he  
13 suggested that, that my brother and I let ourselves be  
14 baptised as Christians, thinking that that might save  
15 us. And I just refused. I threw a fit. And I said,  
16 "I'm not." You know I had to go through with it  
17 eventually because I was 12 and my father had, you know,  
18 had authority. So I, and I talk about that in my letter.  
19 And I had to go to, what, Sunday School. I brought  
20 lessons and, and that's not, that's no big thing, I  
21 mean, I read the Bible, you know. I don't mind reading  
22 the New Testament or learning about it and learning about  
23 another, you know, a Jewish prophet. Because that's the  
24 way I see him. And so that didn't bother me. But the  
25 fact that I, you know, the baptism itself bothered me.

1 Not for any, what, religious prejudice I had but I felt  
2 like a real traitor. I felt like, you know, there's,  
3 there's going to be my p -- I'm going to be punished for  
4 that. And so I never wanted that. And even -- As I say,  
5 I was young. I didn't really know what was going on. We  
6 had nothing to do with it. But what I'm saying is that  
7 I was never -- felt guilty of believing what I believe  
8 in, being a Jew. And it's not that, it just -- but there  
9 is a, there is, there's never any doubt, you know, that  
10 I had, or I mean I had --

11 If I had any doubt at all of any kind of reli-  
12 gion it's, you know, it's not the Jewish or the -- I  
13 have questions about any religion as, as, as a totality,  
14 you know. I'm -- don't -- I can't accept everything,  
15 you know, I'm much too critical, I'm much too -- my  
16 faith is a different kind of faith.

17 But -- So it's, it's very, very, as I say,  
18 it's a very, very confusing and very -- thing to, to  
19 feel you're inferior because of what you believe in --  
20 for your convictions. And that's what I felt in America  
21 when I married into a Christian family. I had members  
22 of the family pray for my conversion, for my salvation.  
23 And so when I say that I have difficulty now of telling  
24 people I'm Jewish, "Yes, I'm German, but I'm Jewish."  
25 I still have difficulty. I had no difficulty with saying

1 it in Germany, but I have difficulty with admitting to it  
2 here in America because the prejudice is much more  
3 subtle. And every -- In Germany everything was so out,  
4 so blatant and so insane, so mad. But here everything's,  
5 seems much more rational somehow and --

6 Q.F The anti-Semitism in the United States feels  
7 more subtle?

8 A. Much, much more subtle.

9 Q.M How do you --

10 A. Or any kind of prejudice. I mean whether it's,  
11 you know, their class prejudice or racial prejudice.

12 Q.F It's subtle.

13 A. It's more subtle. It's like "Oh, you're Jewish.  
14 Oh, you must be such," you know. You always feel, "Oh,  
15 you like money too much," or you, you know, all the old  
16 prejudice, or "You just" you know, whatever, you know,  
17 you have this, the stigma that has or the bad traits  
18 that have been attributed to Jews.

19 And, as I say, it's only really in the last  
20 few years that I have sometimes openly admitted it, the  
21 fact, in letters of application I write to jobs I mention  
22 it whenever I can, you know, that I'm a survivor. That  
23 I lived in Nazi Germany. I -- it helped my, my son  
24 become in the war a CO, conscientious objector. I  
25 wrote a letter to the service, you know, to the -- And

1 so -- But yeah. It's a very -- It goes very deep, you  
2 know, and it still affects your dealings with everyday  
3 situations.

4 But I, I think that I'm not, you know, alone  
5 in that or as survivors are not alone in that. I mean it  
6 happens to any person who has been persecuted. I mean  
7 women have that problem, you know, of asserting them-  
8 selves and sticking up for their rights or whatever, you  
9 know, and saying, "Blacks have it." And so that, I  
10 feel is universal. And, yeah, something -- a lesson  
11 that we all have to learn. But I think that there are  
12 times when I, when I have felt, and I've been reading  
13 Hiam Fat of Wanderings (phonetic), have you?

14 QF Oh, I read that. It was hard to understand  
15 though.

16 A. Really?

17 QF Very convoluted but maybe if I was younger.

18 A. Uh-huh. I read -- there's another book that  
19 I read about Jewish history under his name, Jew's History  
20 and God. It was very good, too.

21 And, yeah. I love reading that stuff now,  
22 because I really feel I can identify that, a lot of it.  
23 and, and take pride, you know. I mean I feel this is  
24 something that no one has ever given me -- taking pride  
25 in being Jewish. My father was that way more so. But

1 he was also very paranoid about it at the same time  
2 understandingly enough.

3           And in, in fact now I feel sometimes it feels  
4 that way, but I am an exile in something -- many, many,  
5 in very deep ways, you know. Maybe -- problem is they  
6 all talk about the exile, the wandering. I am an exile.  
7 I really have come to terms with that. I really have  
8 started to realize that. And I've always felt an exile  
9 in America. I've felt an outsider and never felt part  
10 of American society, you know. I -- not only because  
11 there was a culture -- I mean there isn't all that  
12 cultural difference that is certain, you know. But  
13 Americans and Europeans aren't all that much -- discrep-  
14 ancy. And I was young enough, and I came here to adjust.  
15 But I just feel "These people don't know," you know.  
16 And I've always felt drawn to people who have had some  
17 kind of trauma in their lives that you, you know --  
18 They're my best friends, you know. I mean people who  
19 have, like my husband -- had never had hard hour in his  
20 life. And I think I needed that at the time, what he  
21 had to offer, the family. There was security. There was,  
22 you know, a kind of joyous acceptance of life and a  
23 great family solidarity -- everything I never had in my  
24 life.

25           My life, my family was disbursed, you know,



1 was broken up. Not my immediate family but every -- my  
2 friends, all. And here was this kind of center, you  
3 know, it was -- and I think I needed that, although I  
4 had to pay a high price for it. And -- But he represent-  
5 ed everything I never had: a happy childhood, secure,  
6 everyone taking care of him, you know, and seeing to him  
7 that he got everything, that he got his education and,  
8 you know. And, yeah. He had everything I didn't, and  
9 yet I hated him for it, and I wanted it. You know, it's--  
10 So it's --

11 QF Difficultt?

12 A Yeah. And, as I said, for a while it was a  
13 heaven but I think it's -- It wasn't really, you know.  
14 It was -- And so I have, you know, I don't know what --  
15 And I think that's why I, I was thinking it. Maybe it  
16 would help if I met other survivors. If -- at least  
17 people -- I'm not sure. It depends how much I could,  
18 you know, take it and, and -- Because I know when I get  
19 back into that time and I read about it or when I hear  
20 about it I lose my sense of reality with what's happening  
21 now.

22 QM Do you feel like you go back in time?

23 A Yeah. I feel everything else that is happening  
24 now is irrelevant, is unimportant and there is a -- I  
25 don't know what it is. Yeah. It, it -- Life seems very

1 meaningless, you know, when I look back. It's so trivial,  
2 you know, and so it's difficult. I mean that's why I  
3 say that surviving the survival you do things. And then  
4 you go on in your everyday -- You have your goals. And I  
5 have achieved some of my goals and -- But as my children  
6 are telling me now -- who are old enough, you know, to  
7 talk about it -- I have neglected part of myself, too.  
8 I have, you know -- They know that there's part of me  
9 that I have, yeah, I have neglected and -- Because I was  
10 busy doing other things. And so they are very much  
11 behind me in doing things to, you know, come to terms  
12 with, with that.

13 Q.F That's good.

14 Q.M What part of yourself?

15 A. My Jewish part. My Judaism. And I don't  
16 know -- whether I'm afraid of it still, where it would,  
17 you know, take me -- Whether it would -- Yeah. I'm even  
18 playing, toying around with the idea of going to Israel  
19 at this point, of joining a kibbutz. I met people from  
20 Israel, and I have, you know, actual friends there. It's  
21 all very, very, very strange, you know, very confusing.

22 Q.M Is this interview part of that?

23 A. I think so, yeah. Actually, yeah, it is. And  
24 also while you mention that, I, in my coming out of my  
25 hiding the last few years -- I mean it's -- I have friends

1 who know about my story. I don't talk to them. I don't  
2 tell them very much because I really feel at this point  
3 people don't want to hear about it. They don't want to  
4 be burdened with it, you know. I'm sure you can under-  
5 stand that really. You know, they don't -- They hear  
6 about it. They say, "Oh, you did. You did. Oh, really."  
7 And I feel "Okay that's all I want to hear," you know.  
8 So that's been a problem that, you know. And well --  
9 And why should they, you know, I mean I don't know. But  
10 especially non-Jewish people you have difficulties.  
11 So -- But anyway, I was at a, a party once, a year or  
12 two ago. A year ago. And someone said, "Oh, you're  
13 from Germany." I said, "Yeah," and went through my  
14 whole thing. The whole spiel, you know. "I'm from  
15 Germany."

16 "Where are you from?"

17 "Berlin."

18 "Oh. When did you come here?"

19 And so forth. "Yeah, I lived there throughout  
20 the whole war and" -- I mean then all of you -- go all  
21 through all this, through all the bombardment and all  
22 the destruction and they say, "Yeah. Yeah." And also  
23 through the Nazi persecution. And so I talked to this  
24 person about it, you know, and I said, "Yeah, I was  
25 Jewish and" --

1 "Oh, that, too."

2 And so he, he listened. He was very interested.  
3 But he was interested for a very strange reason. He was  
4 interested because he's of German descent. His mother is  
5 German. His mother was -- came to America, I don't  
6 remember when. Maybe in the '30s, sometime. But she  
7 belonged to the Hitler Youth for a while. So he was --  
8 He's also -- He's had infantile paralysis. So he's in a  
9 wheelchair. But he has his German affinities, you know--  
10 puzzle him or something. And he's interested in that  
11 whole period in history so he reads a lot about it, and

12 Q.F He knows a lot about it.

13 A. Yeah, he -- yeah. Because of, yeah, and he  
14 because of that, his mother's involvement, his grand-  
15 mother is German, too. So he was interested in my story  
16 But from the German point of view, see. And, in fact,  
17 he was going to give me an interview with a video. He  
18 has a video. He's a video expert, and he was going to  
19 videotape me and have me talk just like we do now. And  
20 that's what started it. And so we have sort of -- He's  
21 sort of still interested. I think he would still be  
22 interested in doing. I don't know whether you know any-  
23 thing about other people -- do that, you know.

24 Q.M Not video.

25 A. No, I don't know. I mean I don't know whether-

1 Anyway, he's interested. And that's how it really  
2 started. And I did some soul searching. And -- But I  
3 want to do it with him. We had some meetings, we had  
4 some talks about it. I was saying to him -- He read  
5 this part and liked it. And he read the story I wrote.  
6 And so I didn't have any responses. But I don't know.  
7 There, again, you see, I don't know whether I can talk to  
8 him about it. I have to get in touch first with my being  
9 Jewish. He was more interested in my -- in the stories  
10 I told him about the German Nazi, you know, the German SS  
11 and so forth, and the German mentality or the German  
12 personalities. And -- But again, as I say, it, it's,  
13 it's -- I realize it was difficult for me to talk about,  
14 you know, my, my associations, you know, with with  
15 Judaism so --

16 QM Sounds like your children helped you a lot with  
17 that in the last few years when you started --

18 A Externalizing.

19 QM Is that right?

20 A Well, they, yeah. Well In, in some ways they--  
21 helping -- They're in -- Well, let's see. They're,  
22 they're very interested parties, let's say. Ruth is  
23 less so, although she doesn't want to hear it too -- I  
24 mean she hears about it but it's only recently.

25 I mean -- Actually it's not so recently. In

1 their early teens they started listening, you know,  
2 didn't mind hearing. But they're having problems them-  
3 selves. They feel that they're a child of a survivor of  
4 the Holocaust, whatever message, whatever came through to  
5 them. And they're having difficulties. I think Rachel  
6 worked through it to some extent.

7 My son Kenneth is trying to, you know, for  
8 instance he had, he got in fights, you know, with people  
9 who heard that -- When he was -- When he was a teenager  
10 he invertly -- Nazi -- When he thought Nazis, I mean  
11 people in Nazi, you know -- with their swastika. And  
12 he, he thought he would just go -- He felt ready to get  
13 them by the throat, yeah. The rage he felt, you know,  
14 he -- And it scares him. And the fear. Both the rage  
15 and the fear really are frightening to them.

16 And Rachel, you know, has felt, you know --  
17 Well, well it's very -- gets very complicated, of knowing  
18 that their mother went through very extraordinary experi-  
19 ences both persecution and, and the war in Berlin. And  
20 if you read anything about Berlin, you know 80% was  
21 destroyed, you know, it was constant. And -- So that  
22 their fantacies about it, you know -- what it must be  
23 like to, you know -- When I tell them sometimes what it  
24 was like. It's the same question of, you know, it's,  
25 it's become so -- kind of existential question for them.

1 As if what the author of The Children of the Survivors  
2 of the Holocaust -- They say children feel they, they're  
3 less of, less worthy people because they haven't suffered  
4 and other things. So it -- that's psychologically very  
5 complicated. And the feeling of, of bigotry, you know,  
6 that they need. And, I don't know, as I say, it's some-  
7 thing they have to work through.

8 But it's, it's, at least it helps. If you say  
9 it help, it helps being able to talk to them about it.  
10 And, in fact, I'm much more. I can be of more help to  
11 them than they can be of me because they, they can only  
12 fantimize about it. I've been there, you know. They  
13 can empathize but, and -- You know, as I say, I have  
14 tried to because my own childhood was so, so turbulent  
15 and so invaded with hatred all around me except for  
16 immediate friends that -- and all kinds of hardships and  
17 deprivations, that I, you know, I try to protect my  
18 children from it. And I try to protect them even from  
19 knowing about what happened. But there must be -- I  
20 know there have been, I'm sure, at times when I got --  
21 the message came through to them that when they make  
22 demands on me and they ask for un -- things like "Why  
23 don't we have a car? Why don't we have that," you know,  
24 or "I want this. I want that." And I, inside me, I  
25 said, you know, "Why should you have that? Why should

1 you ask for that? I didn't have," you know, there is --  
2 You cannot, even though you don't say it, there must be  
3 something that comes through to children, you know, of --

4 And some parents, you know -- I know in that  
5 book they, they expect it. They externalize it, you  
6 know. The story of her mother who -- unfortunately an  
7 Auschwitz survivor -- whose child misbehaved as children  
8 will do and made it very difficult for her \_\_\_\_\_ and  
9 she couldn't cope with it. You know, said, "Oh. For  
10 this I survived Auschwitz?" I mean telling a child that.

11 QF I read that somewhere, that, too.

12 A You know. And -- But it's, it's there, you  
13 know. It's, it's just -- I, I never said that, and I  
14 never, I never made my children feel "Well, I didn't have  
15 it, why should you have it." On the contrary, you know,  
16 I tried to make -- Tried to maybe overdo in giving them  
17 the things they want. I mean there's some things we  
18 couldn't afford, but I didn't want them to have the same  
19 experiences I had. I wanted them to be warm in the  
20 wintertime, you know. I wanted them to be well fed and  
21 have nice clothes, not walk around in shoes that are too  
22 tight for you, you know.

23 QF There was a -- and I recall, rather, that there  
24 was a study done and they used that quote in talking about  
25 survivors and correlating what effects had on their



1 children and the consequences.

2           A       Yeah. As I say, the effects -- And, and I  
3 think particularly that is maybe -- at least as much as  
4 I could tell from talking to Rachel, you know, she takes--  
5 She has a lot of imagination. They all do. She just,  
6 one night she said, you know, she had almost hallucina-  
7 tions of being, you know, bombs falling on her just  
8 because she -- Well, of course they have seen movies in  
9 high school, you know, they show you pictures. They  
10 show you pictures of concentration camps, too. And my,  
11 my children I know always, they always said, and they  
12 were in high school and saw pictures of the war, they'd  
13 burst out crying. They could never sit through all  
14 these, these movies, you know. And the teacher always  
15 said, "Why what's happened? Why are you," you know,  
16 because -- like my daughter Sara would -- "Why are you  
17 crying?" You know, all the other children would go  
18 through it. "My mother was there," she said. And so  
19 that, that, you know, that is, that has to do something  
20 to, you know, leave a mark on a child in some way.

21                   And, as I say, there are a lot of things they,  
22 they don't know, especially things that happened after I  
23 came to America. I mean it's very -- It's not easy for  
24 me to talk about their father with them. They're much  
25 more willing to listen to some of it. And they know

1 about what happened in the family. I've told them. They  
2 don't like it, you know. But it's their father and it's  
3 their grandmother, you know. And the grandmother is very  
4 good to them, to me still.

5 Q.F -- your purpose for doing the interview. But  
6 now that we've done it what are some of your thoughts  
7 about having done the interview?

8 A. Well --

9 Q.F Your reflections on it?

10 A. Well --

11 Q.F Your reflections on it?

12 A. Well, as I say, for me it's, it's good to do  
13 because -- to talk about it publicly, I think. And --  
14 But it's also for me a statement of what I feel is some  
15 kind of search on my own, you know, for myself, and  
16 getting me back in, into, into a world I think that I  
17 have denied for a long time. And so it's, it's, I think  
18 it's a part of the search for \_\_\_\_\_ in some way, but  
19 it's also a -- Yeah -- a way of making different associa-  
20 tions in my life that I have for whatever reason -- I  
21 think they were painful reasons -- avoided. And I do  
22 feel that, more and more that my personal experiences  
23 were a part of a historical moment in time and I think  
24 the more we know about it the better off we are. And  
25 so that I feel as a person, a member of society, that I

1 owe something to, to the, you know, to the future to --  
2 of remembering the past and because, you know, I was,  
3 you know, I was a part of that past and -- And I think  
4 these are the only reasons, really.

5           For me I think it's just a beginning, somehow  
6 I feel, the first step towards something. I don't know  
7 what is going to come of it, and that's one thing my, my  
8 children really have encouraged me to do, are very  
9 excited about it. And also they, they -- Well, I mean  
10 Rachel's son talked about going to Israel. My son talks  
11 about going to Israel. And I feel it's something that is  
12 very, very serious in a -- as a kind of, I don't know, as  
13 a kind of pilgrimage almost, to use that. I think what  
14 I would like to do is, it's just -- I have to keep my  
15 life sort of in order, you know, and I -- What I was --  
16 When I was afraid of talking about these things -- but I  
17 guess I tried. I have some very real things, you know,  
18 that I -- like looking for jobs or doing some -- my  
19 studies, you know, continue but then have nothing to do  
20 with, really, with my being Jewish. There's a discrep-  
21 ancy and it's this constant juggling around from one  
22 world into another and, and my being German, too.

23           I mean my -- I'm in German literature, major  
24 in German literature and not only am I compatible with  
25 literature but -- And I've chosen Middle Ages of all

1 things because German -- See, I have difficulty with the  
2 German language, speaking it, and that I'm part German,  
3 and I'm teaching German, but I have difficulty expressing  
4 myself in German. I don't speak German very well any  
5 more -- and yet another way, you know, of pushing that  
6 aside, that part of me. And I love the German language.  
7 It's so expressive, you know. It's very -- I just love  
8 it, what it can say. But I don't like to speak it. And  
9 I read it all the time and -- But I chose, I realize that  
10 I chose the Middle Ages because middle high German,  
11 that's an older German, sounds like yiddish. It's very  
12 close to yiddish. You know, and I didn't realize it.

13 I mean somehow, you see, all these things I  
14 didn't recognize, you know. But now I realize that I  
15 love that language, the middle high German. It's beauti-  
16 ful. It's very melodious and it sounds very familiar  
17 to me, whereas modern German doesn't. And I hear the,  
18 the bellows, you know, of -- I hear the SS, you know,  
19 when I hear German still.

20 And so -- Well, you know, I -- there, there are  
21 all kinds of stories that you hear -- You know, my cousin  
22 was brainwashed. I mean he -- when I had arguments with  
23 the Gestapo woman or somebody who belonged to the party  
24 and my cousin -- Yeah. They were brainwashed. They  
25 spouted all these slogans, you know. And the "great

1 idealism," you know. And you also heard stories of  
2 people, people who had to do what they had to do like  
3 arresting people like me and my family, and people on  
4 the trucks. They had to get drunk or they had to be  
5 drugged. They took drugs or they, they had a good bit  
6 of, you know, whatever, whiskey before they could do  
7 that. And my, my father's German friends whom I told  
8 you about told her that after the war, or maybe it was  
9 during the war, I'm not sure, he was -- Somebody at the  
10 bar, a young SS -- We were -- during the war, because he  
11 was still in uniform -- SS soldier. And he had one leg  
12 amputated and so, you know, they talked, and he said,  
13 "yeah, it happens. I don't know where." Told him about  
14 it. He said, "You know -- And it serves me right. It  
15 serves me right. That's my punishment for being" --

16 So yeah, it's -- Yeah. It's -- Brainwashing  
17 is almost too, too simple a word, you know, like they  
18 accuse the hijackers of being brainwashed because they  
19 had -- It's, it is a kind of brainwashing. And now my  
20 father told me about a friend, a Jewish friend of his,  
21 who very early in the early years of Hitler regime, went  
22 to one of his speeches in a big stadium. This happened  
23 to be -- I don't know why he went. We went, we went to  
24 parades, you know, my father took us to parades. I saw  
25 Hitler, you know, a few feet away from me in the car,

1 you know, with all his buddies. And my father put us on  
2 his shoulder. I mean yeah -- this -- the kind of, I  
3 don't know what it is, his furoray (phonetic) that swept  
4 the country and kind of -- And if you'd been there --  
5 There's these flags and there's this, and this, all this  
6 much ado, you know. There was -- And especially after --  
7 and Hitler came at a very bad time in Germany, you know.  
8 People were struggling, coming out of a depression and  
9 what not. He was their savior. And yeah, we went and,  
10 and his friends, you know, said he listened to one of  
11 his speeches and he \_\_\_\_\_ -- applaud, you know. And he  
12 said, and then he said, "Well, listen. He's talking  
13 against me, you know. He's talking against the Jews,  
14 you know." And that's how it was. And you listened to  
15 his sp-eches on the radio. I heard both him and  
16 Goebbels speak, you know. There was, I mean I, I didn't  
17 carry away for it, but it's just, yeah. It's, it -- this  
18 diabolical. There is something, yeah.

19 I have read. I have read. I can't read  
20 anything. I mean I can barely read things like this, and  
21 I can -- I cannot read anything that has -- books written  
22 on the Third Reich. I, I -- I mean people do, you know,  
23 read a lot and, as I say, this, but I can't. But here or  
24 there I sometimes read, you know, about Hitler. And  
25 there's one book I read because it had to do with my

1 dissertation. I wrote my dissertation on Midevil Symbol  
2 of the Grail. And there is a book, I can't remember,  
3 something about a spear of destiny, and it talks about  
4 Hitler. And this man, of course, doesn't like it, who  
5 wrote the book. But you can see how he, even he was  
6 fascinated with this man, you know. There was -- I don't  
7 know what it was about and that, you know, I never met  
8 him before. There is, there's something so uncanny,  
9 you know, in this kind of daemonic personality that --  
10 evil in itself has, has a certain kind of beauty almost  
11 or attraction that, you know, that is, yeah. It's --

12 QF He attracted to, how he attracted so many  
13 people?

14 A And especially when you use language. I mean  
15 I can see it in politicians now, you know, how people,  
16 when you hear a -- politicians speak, you know, you can--  
17 Well, many of you say, "Oh, yeah. He's right." And  
18 then you think, you know, you have to step back for  
19 awhile and think about the rhetoric. And -- But it was  
20 other things I was -- I mean, as I say, it was not just  
21 the rhetoric but it was what he really did for his  
22 country, giving people jobs, and it was -- Yeah. I  
23 think it was, especially the young people, I'm sure there  
24 was a lot of brainwashing. And people didn't know what  
25 was going on at first except maybe people who lived near

1 concentration camps, you know. But it was --

2 QM Even they would kind of --

3 A They would just turn, yeah. They would just  
4 turn. I read a book called The Hiding Place by a Dutch  
5 family who protected Jews and were reported to concentra-  
6 tion camp, and they were living, they were in concentra-  
7 tion camp in Robinsburg (sp?) and, and the town near it,  
8 you know, they would go to the, to their work, and the  
9 Germans would see them on the street and they would just  
10 turn away or not look at them. So --

11 QM There's this documentary I saw. It's a bril-  
12 liant documentary. These filmmakers went to Germany and  
13 they filmed this -- little people in a small village.

14 A Yeah. I heard a report that some group --  
15 I don't know what they call themselves -- who are digging  
16 up, and they're, in fact, they're --

17 QM Yeah. They're high school students going to --  
18 doing research in different towns --

19 A Right. Right. And yea. It's pretty amazing.  
20 And I think, yeah, the older people are more likely to  
21 deny it and you know, I, for instance, what -- that  
22 Bitburg (sp?) thing, you know, that really got me up.  
23 I mean that -- that was the first time I thought I wanted  
24 to be a political activist. I wrote a letter to Reagan,  
25 and I didn't send it. But I wrote it. And so -- But,



1 you know, that -- I suppose -- I mean I know that they  
2 have memorials now in Germany and that the German people  
3 are reminded periodically that this really happened,  
4 and I suppose -- it's -- I, I think maybe that happened --  
5 is happening, the further you get away, I mean while you  
6 have the younger people, the further you get away from  
7 this period, you know, the younger people are not involved.  
8 They have only inherited the sins of their father, they  
9 haven't, you know. But the people who were -- lived at  
10 that time and who -- they, they feel that guilt and even  
11 they have -- even if they haven't done anything they feel  
12 somehow responsible for what happened. And I think the  
13 further you get away from it the more likely that you  
14 are to take responsibility like the young people now.

15 Q.M I get the feeling in listening to your story  
16 that you're between things in a way. There's a lot of --  
17 between Jew and German --

18 A Yeah.

19 Q.M -- between, between Germany and the United  
20 States, between --

21 A I'm not so much between Germany and the United  
22 States. I have no feeling or no nostalgia. I never  
23 missed Germany. I'm curious. I mean I want to go back  
24 and see --

25 Q.M Did you have this German and Jewish --

1           A.     -- how I feel. Well, I'm, I have -- I'm a  
2 cultural GERman. I mean I, I admire my GERman history,  
3 I mean cultural history. And on the other hand a lot of,  
4 you know, a lot of good things have come out of Germany.  
5 A lot of good Jews have come out of Germany, too, you  
6 know. Freud and Marx and what not. So -- Einstein.  
7 Yeah, I'm proud of my heritage, my cultural heritage  
8 and, you know. I like Bethoven, and he wasn't a Jew,  
9 you know. But I, I'm only a -- So, you know, I, I'm --  
10 and that's why it's -- My -- Rachel once said to me when  
11 she came from, after that, her thing at the meeting at  
12 the Holocaust Conference in Europe -- She met Eli Weasel  
13 (sp?) there, too. It's a -- love this man. He's a  
14 beautiful man. And she called me after one of -- One day  
15 she was there, and she was so touched by it, she said,  
16 "Mom, they're beautiful people," you know, "They're  
17 beautiful people," and, you know, the way they go --  
18 There's only one woman who she said, "They're loving  
19 people," she said, "They're forgiving people." That's  
20 her overall impression, you know. There's no anger or  
21 hatred left there, you know. They're gone through it.

22                   And there's only one woman, she said she lis-  
23 tened to her talk, who said, you know, she wants to kill  
24 Germans even now. And -- all Germans, doesn't matter,  
25 would have \_\_\_\_\_ my mother, too, you know. My mother

1 was more of a Jew, you know, than some Jewish mothers  
2 in lots of ways.

3 But she called me and then she says, "Mom."  
4 I was really taken aback by her question because I sort  
5 of -- said, "Why are you studying German literature?  
6 Why are you getting your Ph.D. in German literature?"  
7 And for a while, you know, there, there again, you see,  
8 I felt guilty. I said, "Yeah. Why am I?"

9 "Why aren't you studying Jewish," you know,  
10 something Jewish?" And I said, "Well" -- And so I tried  
11 to explain it to her, you know, at that time. I, I  
12 said, "Well, you know, not everything German's bad,  
13 Rachel. And what I am studying is a lot of good things  
14 in Germany. There's a lot of tolerance, too. And a lot  
15 of good people. And besides, I" -- And so that's what I--  
16 it's -- And I said, "It's easier for me to study some-  
17 thing German because I'm not emotionally involved with  
18 it, intellectually involved with it," you know, the  
19 literature or whatever. And mostly literature because  
20 I'm not interested in politics and history and I don't  
21 want to hear about it. But -- So I say, I'm very unin-  
22 volved, I mean intellectually detached from it. But  
23 anything Jewish I get emotionally involved and it's very  
24 painful for me. And -- still.

25 And that's why I, I think I'm in between, you

1 know. My intellectual life is with, you know with  
2 German culture, but my emotional life -- and I said that  
3 in my letter to, to my daughter -- my emotional life, my  
4 spiritual life I think is this -- my Jewish heritage.  
5 And, as I say, that's why I would, you know, why I  
6 couldn't go to synagogue here. I mean I would yet have  
7 to find one that gives me the same feeling I had. It's  
8 just too, it's, it's too -- It really is too painful,  
9 you know.

10           And I remember when -- the time when our  
11 synagogue was burned and I, you know, I, I, as I told  
12 you, and I didn't finish with it, as I said, my friend  
13 came running, and I just screamed, you know, all over  
14 the street and -- they thought our synagogue was burning.  
15 And I called -- I talked to everyone, all the Germans  
16 on the street, I said, "Our synagogue is burning. Our  
17 synagogue is burning." And I told everyone, and they  
18 just turned away. It was just, you know. And, you  
19 know, there was also our school. And then we had to go  
20 to another school after that, but it's just -- seems, as  
21 I say, that part still seems more real sometimes than  
22 what's -- what would be happening here. I mean on the  
23 emotional level and for spiritual.

24           QM I'm sure that it might be true for a lot of  
25 people about the trauma situation. I haven't done the

1 theory on trauma, but at one with -- That's like one of  
2 the Vietnamese, Viet Nam vets have recurring -- that they  
3 can't, you know, focus on their lives here --

4 A Right. Right. Yeah.

5 QM But it was so powerful, that experience. He  
6 didn't --

7 A I also --

8 QM -- had a bad -- so intense. It was just the  
9 intensity of the emotion.

10 A Well that and, well, of course, and then, of  
11 course, in any, any kind of war situation, I'm sure, you  
12 know, it's Viet Nam or wherever it is, would have that  
13 trauma effect. But I think there's a Viet, there's a  
14 Viet Nam, there's a -- the Vietnamese \_\_\_\_\_ is, is  
15 magnified or is intensified because of the, the bad rap  
16 they got here, because of the stigmata that was attached  
17 to them. So -- And, and perhaps also for feeling guilty  
18 they must have, you know.

19 I, I met, I met a man who, a soldier, who --  
20 of the second world war -- and we, we were talking and I  
21 told him my story. You know, "I was in Berlin" and he  
22 says, "You were in Berlin? You mean I might have dropped  
23 a bomb on you?" He was -- And he said he still has  
24 nightmares of that. And he can still see the bombs  
25 falling and exploding. And he, he knew there were people

1 there, innocent people, civilians. He still --  
2 It just, you know, wrecked his life in a way. And he,  
3 you know, it's psychologically -- He still has feelings  
4 of guilt about it or -- Although he was doing it for a  
5 good cause. But it doesn't help. He still -- The  
6 emotional impact is unavoidable.

7 QF I imagine. The question just comes up: What  
8 are your views on war in general?

9 A I mean I have, you know, I, I just -- I  
10 wouldn't even -- And for better or for worse -- I don't  
11 know.

12 What it did to my son -- I wouldn't let him  
13 wear uniforms. I wouldn't let him join the Boy Scouts,  
14 for instance. That's how bad it was. You know, my --  
15 And I wouldn't, I get still when my children fight, you  
16 know. I don't like them -- to see them fight. And yeah--  
17 I think that, that an experience like that -- And it's  
18 something that you cannot share and that -- That's why  
19 I think I feel the isolation sometimes or the sense of  
20 exile. Your whole values change or are affected by that.

21 When you had, when you had to live, I mean  
22 literally live with the Angel of Death, as the Jews say,  
23 day-by-day life takes on a different meaning after that,  
24 you know. And this is something that I see around me,  
25 you know, the people who value or, I don't know, who

1 don't value life really, throw it away or they have --  
2 It's, it just changes your whole perspective on what is  
3 important. Yeah.

4 I, I, I mean it's -- even just very recently --  
5 that's another thing, that's very recently -- For a long  
6 time I was a completely apolitical person. I didn't  
7 read newspapers. I couldn't listen to news. I could --  
8 I was the most uninvolved person. I didn't know what  
9 was going on in American politics. And it wasn't some-  
10 thing that I did deliberately, it was just an instinct,  
11 you know. I just did not want anything to do with  
12 politics. I didn't really know.

13 And now I do. I listen to news constantly.  
14 And, and I know that, that -- I don't know whether, you  
15 know, maybe it's for -- whether it's different for me  
16 or whether other people, you know, other, you know,  
17 people who haven't gone through it. But I always feel I  
18 want to become an activist. I want to do something, and  
19 I'm no longer satisfied with just living my life. And I  
20 feel I owe it to something, someone that I should do  
21 something. I don't know what it is, what it should be.  
22 I get very restless. I feel very dissatisfied with my  
23 own preoccupations, you know. And I think that is,  
24 perhaps, that sense I had, as I told you, when I first  
25 found myself when I survived, that I have to make my life

1 worth of something.

2           And, you know, of course raising a family had--  
3 was, was a very rewarding and worthwhile experience, but  
4 I get deeply disturbed when I, you know, what I -- where  
5 and here-- it's going, still going on in the world. And  
6 it sounds all so familiar. And then I hear people like  
7 Reagan talking about, you know, using things like -- I  
8 mean using such facile rhetoric and, and \_\_\_\_\_ thing and  
9 being so, you know, completely underdramatic and spouting  
10 forth, you know, that -- Alienating people and -- without  
11 trying to understand the other side. It's --

12           QF    What if you mention some of the things that are  
13 important. What are some of the things that are important  
14 for you after the experiences that you've had?

15           A.    Well, I, I always had, well, I had great  
16 trouble and -- with American materialism.

17           QF    Materialism?

18           A.    Yeah. I had, I have a lot of trouble with  
19 American capitalism. It really is, is something that  
20 disturbs me and anyone I know that Americans are often  
21 labeled that way -- and Europe's -- looks at Americans  
22 as just being interested in money, you know, making it and  
23 having this and that and -- But it doesn't mean anything  
24 to me. It's not that I don't like comforts, but it has  
25 never meant anything to me. I could -- I would never



1 do anything just to make money. That's one thing that I  
2 think -- And I, I feel, I feel very strongly and I feel,  
3 you know, these, you know -- of any kind of bigotry of  
4 whatever nature it is. I mean oppression whether it's  
5 for religious or for, you know, ethnic reasons. And  
6 that's where I, you know, that's where I, I, you know,  
7 yeah. I get very, very sort of living all over again,  
8 living that experience all over again. But it, as I  
9 say, it's -- I just feel I should do something, and I  
10 don't know where to start, where to go, where to -- like  
11 what to, you know. Maybe I should go to Israel.

12 QF Sounds like you're doing something really,  
13 really good --

14 A Well, as I say, if I go to Israel then it just  
15 would -- It does mean putting one life away.

16 QM Have you ever been there?

17 A No. Or at least, you know, I don't think that  
18 I could take what I have acquired and make use of it.  
19 Maybe I can but then --

20 QM It'll be good to go just as a visit, first --  
21 It's very different.

22 A Yeah, as I say, I have, I have friends and --  
23 in HIFA (phonetic) and he's actually -- He teaches at  
24 the university and she's -- teaches in a kibbutz. And I,  
25 you know -- without \_\_\_\_\_ I just would go. I want to

1 visit Jerusalem. And, yeah. I just really wanted to  
2 see what it feels like. I'm not going there with any  
3 expectations or plans, just the same reason -- For the  
4 same reason I want to go back to Germany and see what it  
5 feels like. I mean I, I'm -- Even just lately I've  
6 become a little more interested in what was going on in  
7 Germany. I read German. I'm -- teach German. I have a  
8 private student who brings me magazines to read and so I  
9 find out about and -- all the good things, too, happening  
10 still.

11           Yeah, and you know, it really was a holocaust  
12 not just for six million Jews. You know that there were  
13 12 million other people killed, too. The Russians, a  
14 lot of Christians, a lot of Germans. I mean it, you know,  
15 it was -- In the historical perspective it was just one  
16 of those -- I mean it -- I don't think any, anything  
17 like that ever happened in history on such a large scale,  
18 the amount of people killed either in, you know, as I  
19 say, in concentration camps and the Jews were actually a  
20 much smaller part of it. Some people and I, I, in the  
21 book I read, they don't even think it was six million.  
22 They think it was much closer to four million only. It  
23 doesn't matter, of course, but you know, it's, it's in a--  
24 statistics, you know. You, you have just -- And there  
25 were less Jews killed than Russians in the prison, yes,

1 by the Germans, I mean, in, in camps, other people.

2 Yeah. I, I don't know. I have statistics somewhere.

3 So it, it's just that period in our history  
4 that's just, you know -- And, as I say, I think that we  
5 might -- not that we should forget about it or ever, you  
6 know, and as even our President said, you know, we should --  
7 We'll never for-, we shouldn't forget about it always,  
8 the Germans. We can't because it's still happening.  
9 It's happening in all corners of the world. You know,  
10 it's, it's just -- You just, really, sometimes it --  
11 hearing that and having witnessed it, having looked evil  
12 almost in the eye, you know. I mean really pure evil,  
13 that kind of -- no matter how much brainwashing went on.  
14 I don't know whether a really essentially good person  
15 can be brainwashed, but -- because there were those who  
16 weren't brainwashed and who'd rather die and went to  
17 concentration camps. I mean would risk their lives, you  
18 know.

19 QM And you can't say that every Nazi was brain-  
20 washed, either.

21 A No. No. Some of them did very -- they, they--  
22 very convinced that what they were doing was -- The story  
23 about Mengele, you know, he never had any remorse as far  
24 as anyone could tell. And here he was listening to  
25 classical music, you know, loving it, loving children,

1 you know, the little Mexican children. And yeah. It's  
2 reading books on philosophy -- all that you can get you,  
3 I can see that. (laughter) Especially nature. So --

4 QF It's strange I know --

5 A. But it's -- Yeah. The great contradiction, you  
6 know.

7 QM Even in your story there's contra- -- there's  
8 contradictions in that, that are hard to explain. Every,  
9 every interview there are things that have been, they  
10 just, you know, they just happened and you can't --  
11 there was no rational reason.

12 A. Hm-umm. No. As, and they say I, I argued with  
13 the person who was probably responsible, the Gestapo  
14 woman, for quite a few deaths, you know. I talked to  
15 her, and she felt friendly to us. She may even have  
16 saved our lives for all I know. You know, if she was  
17 the one who put that stamp on it. And I argued with her,  
18 and she fervently believed that what Hitler was doing was  
19 for the good of every -- and for the good of the country.  
20 And she was just very rational, very calm about it, I  
21 remember, you know, she'd be. Neither one of us got  
22 excited about it or angry. And, as I say, she might  
23 even, you know, she wanted to help our family. She  
24 might have. Yeah. It's, it's, it's like -- It's almost--  
25 She's an example, or some of those SS men are examples

1 of not really hating the individual Jew, you know,  
2 necessarily, but this -- an abstract, some abstraction  
3 that they hate. You know, as I say, I don't think that  
4 was so true in concentration camps. There was -- on the  
5 other hand, you know, these people forgot, you know,  
6 they must have just shed all the humanity and regarded  
7 you as a person not as a number. And --

8 QM Because they had an ideology --

9 A Yeah.

10 QM It was hooked up to, to a greater something  
11 outside of, really, what was happening.

12 A Well, not only that, but Hitler told them that  
13 wasn't only that he hated Jews, but he hated Asi- --  
14 you know, Eastern -- well, the Eastern block particularly  
15 Gypsies and --

16 QF Basically hated everybody that wasn't aryan?

17 A Aryan. More or -- Yeah. Right.

18 QM He had a scale. It was a little scale kind of--

19 A Yeah. Right. I mean he had sort of, you  
20 know -- (laughter).

21 QF Thanks a lot. It was very nice.  
22  
23  
24  
25

1 Dear Lani Silver:

2 Many thanks for letting me have a part in this  
3 important project. By way of explanation of symbols,  
4 etc., that I have made in the attached transcript you  
5 will be interested in the following:

6 Q.F - means question, the voice sounded female

7 Q.M - means question, the voice sounded male. It  
8 sounded like there were two male voices at one point;  
9 however, I was unable to distinguish one from the other  
10 on a regular basis and the one only seemed to be there  
11 for a short term.

12 (sp) - I didn't have reference books readily avail-  
13 able for the spelling of these items and I wanted you  
14 to be sure to check if the spelling is important for  
15 the transcript.

16 (phonetic) - I wasn't sure what was said, so I  
17 placed the word on the page as closely as I could hear  
18 it.

19 \_\_\_\_\_ - something was said in this spot but I  
20 could not clarify it enough to make it out.

21 Please note that I have penciled in the tape nota-  
22 tions so you'd have an idea where the tape began and  
23 ended. I apologize for forgetting to note it at one  
24 point, but you can figure that out closely by counting  
25 the regular points for the other notations.

Once again, thank you. *Donna Shulmeister*