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2 Interview with: HELEN CHALEF

3
4 Reporter/Transcriber: ALAN F. BOWIN, R.P.R.

5
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10 BY THE INTERVIEWER:

11 Q. The first thing I'd like you to do is
12 tell me your name, please.

13 A. I'm Helen Chalef.

14 Q. And Chalef was?

15 A. My married name.

16 Q. Your married name.

17 And what was your name at birth?

18 A. Fels-mann.

19 Q. Felsmann. And when were you born?

20 A. February 3rd, 1932.

21 Q. 1932. And where were you born?

22 A. I was born in Bar-acs-zosa, which was
23 Czechoslovakia at that time.

24 Q. 1932?

25 A. Um-hum.

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2 Q. So what was the first sign of the Nazi
3 occupation that you saw as a child?

4 A. I don't remember the year that Hungary
5 took over Bar-acs-zosa, and I remember, we were
6 waiting for them to come in, wearing boutonnières
7 and waving flags. All the streets were lined with
8 people.

9 And I remember excitement at home, my mother
10 and father talking about Hungary is going to come
11 and rescue us.

12 And there were pictures of Hor-ti Nich-losh,
13 who was the head or premier. What was he called?

14 Q. Hor-ti Nich-losh was the chancellor
15 or --

16 A. I don't know, it was a kingdom without
17 a king, and he was the head of the -- of it.

18 Q. Um-hum.

19 A. So there were pictures.

20 Q. Everywhere?

21 A. Everywhere. In the window, and there
22 were candles on each side of the picture. It was
23 almost like they were glorifying the whole -- the
24 whole event.

25 And I remember that in front of the troop

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2 marching in, the soldiers, there were leather-
3 jacketed men, not uniformed, but in leather jackets
4 and tall leather boots.

5 Q. You remember that?

6 A. Well, you go ahead. It was a little
7 different in our -- you.

8 Q. You lived in a border area, so?

9 A. No, this was in Bar-acs-zosa.

10 Q. In Bar-acs-zosa?

11 A. This was right in Bar-acs-zosa.

12 They had come off the station. We lived by
13 the small -- a railroad station, and they had come
14 off the train --

15 Q. Um-hum.

16 A. (Continuing) -- and were walking
17 through the town, so we were really the first
18 recipients of this wonder.

19 And while we were still waving the flag,
20 there were men with beards and young boys with
21 payis that were among the flag wavers, and I
22 remember one of the -- of these men, not the
23 uniformed ones but with the leather jacket, who
24 came out and just picked the boy up by the payis
25 and the man -- and an old man with a beard, his

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2 face was smashed in. And that was the welcoming
3 that we got. That was our reward for waiting for
4 them.

5 And my next memory -- I -- I forgot an awful
6 lot of things. I remember my father was drafted
7 just before. And my mother ran a Korch-fi. It's
8 more than an inn, but --

9 VOICE: It's a liquor store, like a
10 liquor -- it's an inn. Like an inn is what it is.

11 A. It's an inn, a small inn.

12 VOICE: People stop by to have a drink.

13 A. And have some, like, you know, pletzels
14 and --

15 VOICE: Kif-li.

16 A. Crescents with butter and cheese and,
17 you know, they'd have a little coffee.

18 And my mother ran it because my father wasn't
19 there. And --

20 Q. That's where you -- because your father
21 had been drafted?

22 A. Yeah.

23 Q. Prior to the time your father had been
24 drafted, did your parents live together?

25 A. I think, just before. Just before. My

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2 father was drafted maybe weeks before this, Hungary
3 coming in, or the So-ba-cho-va-tosh.

4 Q. You were taken away?

5 A. I'm talking about before we left, I
6 think this was.

7 VOICE: Forty-four?

8 A. Not before the (inaudible.)

9 VOICE: Oh, so it was after the -- after
10 '33. It could have been in 1939 when everybody
11 lost their licenses.

12 A. It was '39 (inaudible.) That's right.
13 And there were two soldiers that were accompanying
14 my mother, they said, for protection, because my
15 father wasn't there.

16 And the next thing I remember is that the
17 license was taken away to operate the business.
18 Jews were no longer allowed to own property or
19 businesses, and what followed next is that they
20 took all the stock because since we didn't have
21 license to sell it, we had no right to sell it.
22 We'd be breaking the law.

23 And then we had to go -- there was no way for
24 us to live because we also lost the house. We had
25 no right to own property, so the house and the

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property was also confiscated. So we went to live with my father's parents, who lived further in. They lived at the foot of the mountains (inaudible) which was --

VOICE: You might be surprised about the fact that there's a (inaudible.)

A. It was bordering very close to Poland, and it was small and rather backward. My grandfather owned land still over there and he also had a mill where they draw the grain from all over to make into flour, and sunflower seeds into oil, so that there was a way of survival.

And then my father who came home and he went to work in the woods, cutting down trees, the only thing available, really, in between being drafted.

It seems like my father would be home in the winter, as I remember. Summer, spring and fall, he was a soldier.

But we had people who started coming in and they would come late at night and I remember we were put to sleep, and they expected the children to sleep so soundly that they hear nothing. And I remember stories being told of massacres and drownings and (inaudible).

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2 Q. Drownings what?

3 A. In the Nap-per.

4 VOICE: The Nap-per River.

5 A. And people lined up and digging
6 graves. And then (inaudible).

7 VOICE: What, in fact, Helen is talking
8 about is equal to the men who went from town to
9 town, having crossed the Caucasian Mountains, to
10 warn the Jewish population of the towns about
11 what's happening in Poland and (inaudible).

12 Helen is now describing how she heard about
13 the atrocities of the Jews in neighboring coun-
14 tries, and since she lived right by the -- at this
15 point, in Hungary but just on this side of the bor-
16 der from Poland, and how she heard about it as a
17 young girl traveled (inaudible).

18 SECOND VOICE: Could we start with
19 (inaudible) telling the story?

20 Q. Yeah, I would like you just to con-
21 tinue, and you'll be able to pick it up. But I
22 don't want you to keep repeating what you've
23 already said.

24 VOICE: She can --

25 Q. Just pick up where you left off.

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2 A. I remember that discussions between my
3 mother and grandmother and my aunt as to trying to
4 figure out whether the man was in fact not lying,
5 because it's impossible. Poland was always doing
6 wonderful things like that, but it would pass, and
7 they probably grossly exaggerated the dangers and
8 it most definitely could not happen here. I mean,
9 after all, this is Hungary and Hungarians were not
10 like the Poles. They're not -- they may not love
11 the Jew, but they're not that antisemitic and
12 they're not that vicious, and what this man was
13 describing was even too vicious for the Poles to
14 do.

15 But there were a lot of them. There wasn't
16 just that man. The drownings; that people were
17 taken out at night from the homes, and that they
18 were taken into the woods and had to dig ditches
19 and then kneel there, and bullets were put through
20 their heads; that mothers were begging for the life
21 of the babies that they held at their arms.

22 And I thought it was nightmares, except that
23 I remember later when I was awake that they were
24 discussing it, and my mother would try to tell me
25 that I heard it wrong and I was mistaken. And I

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2 would think about it.

3 Q. (Inaudible).

4 A. Yes, they wanted to protect us for as
5 long as possible from that kind of knowledge, es-
6 pecially since they knew it couldn't happen to us.

7 Q. They knew it couldn't happen to you, or
8 they didn't want to believe it could happen?

9 A. No, they just didn't believe. But you
10 know, it was Hungary, it was Czechoslovakia, it was
11 a place where that kind of thing was just not
12 commonplace. But Poland and Russia were, I mean,
13 known.

14 Q. For pogroms?

15 A. For pogroms and being vitriolic where
16 the Jews are concerned.

17 Um, the next thing, I remember my father
18 coming home, because he had a wound under his arm,
19 a boil of some kind, which he irritated until it
20 became large and sore, so he was sent home.

21 Q. From the military?

22 A. From the military.

23 Q. To be healed?

24 A. Um-hum. And he was begging my mother
25 to take me and leave my brother and my baby sister,

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who was just born. She was about three weeks old.

Q. It was just the two of you?

A. There were -- I had a brother and then the baby was born. So there were three of us (inaudible). My brother was five years younger than me. Shon-du, Shmeal.

Q. And the baby (inaudible)?

A. The baby was three weeks old. She died when she was five months old (inaudible).

My mother became ill and I was taking care of her, and I think I forgot she was in the (inaudible), and I waited a little too long. The baby was a little too long in the water; she got pneumonia and died.

Q. I'm sure not --

A. (Inaudible) that's one baby I wanted desperately not to (inaudible). And when my daughter was born, she looked exactly like my sister, and I always had the feeling that she was my -- she was my sister coming back.

Q. So tell us about your -- the threat of being taken away and how you ended up and where you ended up just before the (inaudible)?

A. This is very important.

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2 Q. What happened? (Inaudible).

3 A. With the schools or --

4 Q. Where were you -- were you --

5 (Inaudible.)

6 Q. You're asking very --

7 A. It's very --

8 Q. I'll tell you what.

9 A. The difference what happened to me and
10 others, aside from the fact that we came from a
11 city which was very difficult, the adjustment, and
12 I spoke -- at the time, I spoke Hungarian and
13 Jewish, and Czech. But the village over there,
14 they spoke Lis-tene, which was a language I didn't
15 speak, which was a combination of Ukraine and
16 Russian.

17 And so, I was placed in a school where
18 classes were held in Hungarian and found out later
19 that the teachers' children and the officials'
20 children were the only ones that attended that
21 school. And by my manner of speech, they either
22 assumed -- or because of my manner of speech, they
23 accepted me without checking or caring that I was
24 Jewish.

25 And then, later, I was told that I was there

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2 by the grace of them because Jews were not allowed
3 to be in that class and that, in truth, I should be
4 in the other school.

5 Q. So this was about 1940 or 1941?

6 A. That was about 1940 -- the end of '40
7 and beginning of '41. Because short -- and I
8 thanked them very much for the courtesy and I went
9 to the other school, and, of course, I learned to
10 speak the language shortly after.

11 But shortly after that, I was -- before the
12 year was out, before the school year was out, we
13 were already informed that Jews were not allowed to
14 go to school at all.

15 Q. So you had to stop going to the other
16 school?

17 A. I had to stop going to the other
18 school. And by spring -- that -- it was the first
19 day of Pesoch, it was actually the first Seder that
20 they came for us. We didn't know really that the
21 rounding up started. There was a lot of gossip, a
22 lot of rumors going around, but we didn't know.

23 My mother just safeguarded me, took my
24 earrings out of my ears, because she was afraid
25 that they'll tear them out. Couldn't have it. My

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2 ears were (inaudible).

3 And they came with a bayonet, my mother, to
4 give up all the jewels, and Jews are known to be
5 rich and hiding, and where does she hide all the
6 treasures? And she tried to tell them that most
7 everything has already been taken and that my
8 father wasn't around to earn a living, and that
9 indeed we had nothing. And she just took off her
10 wedding band and gave it to them, and I don't
11 remember the (inaudible).

12 And then we were herded out and she reminded
13 me of the, seal the padlock and the seal on the
14 door, while we watched (inaudible).

15 And we were taken to this railroad station
16 and put into open cattle cars, and all the church
17 bells ringing. I forgot about that. They buried
18 us before we even left the town.

19 And we were taken to Bar-acs-zosa, into the
20 brick factory (inaudible).

21 And they made room in the sand -- there were
22 rows where we tried to make some sort of shelter by
23 laying quilts around to separate us from one ano-
24 ther, I guess, like a mother bird makes a nest for
25 her children. It's a pretty close description.

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2 It seems like the only memory I have of my
3 mother is crying or trying not to. She was such a
4 beautiful woman, quite (inaudible) a number
5 (inaudible) is Teresa. That picture of her, and I
6 look at her, it reminds me just how beautiful she
7 was and that she never lived to be more than 36
8 years old -- 34.

9 I remember very little of my stay in there.
10 I remember there were some problems and fear. Fear
11 seems to be the only thing I remember, and myself
12 against it (inaudible).

13 And the -- we were taken from -- I don't
14 remember, I don't even remember how.

15 Q. Would you mind if I interrupted you?

16 A. Sure

17 Q. (Inaudible.)

18 A. In the ghetto, with the jewelry? And I
19 remember -- and I remember that I think my mother
20 was examined for whether or not she had jewelry.
21 The man was nasty because she had no jewelry to
22 give him. He didn't seem to want to understand
23 that we were hungry at home and we were not that
24 wealthy, because all means of making a livelihood
25 was taken from us.

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2 I remember my mother was highly outraged, not
3 so much anger as she felt invaded, and later I
4 realized that the resentment in her to see if she
5 had -- whether she had jewels in her body. She
6 was so humiliated, and I remember very well
7 (inaudible) a man came into every (inaudible) and
8 asked for jewelry, collected jewelry, with the SS
9 standing behind him.

10 And they really examined us. They really
11 examined all of us to see if we had been hiding,
12 because we didn't seem to give it to them. They
13 weren't sure we had any.

14 And I remember one of the pillows had a lump
15 in it -- they were sure that jewelry was sewn into
16 it -- and just cut it open because the Germans
17 needed it (inaudible).

18 Q. How long were you in the (inaudible)
19 before you were (inaudible)?

20 A. A short time.

21 Q. A week?

22 A. Weeks, maybe two. And then I don't
23 remember how, but we were taken to the train
24 station, and we got packed onto the train to go
25 and we didn't know where.

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2 Q. Before you -- you were in the
3 (inaudible) with your mother?

4 A. And my brother.

5 Q. And your brother?

6 A. And my aunts; my grandmother, my
7 father's mother; two aunts; a young uncle, who was,
8 I think, two years older than I, my father's
9 youngest brother. Another one had run away just
10 before we were rounded up.

11 Q. One of your father's brothers --

12 A. Remember him (inaudible) just
13 disappeared.

14 Q. What were you thinking at this time?
15 You spoke of your mother being terribly sad and
16 crying. What was your memory of her crying and
17 trying not to cry? What did you think this was --
18 was going to happen to you? What did you think you
19 might be going (inaudible)? Did you talk about
20 that?

21 A. I tried not to think, but I remembered
22 what the man -- and there was a steady progression
23 of men that came across and were telling these
24 things and raising -- trying to raise money to get
25 some help for the people of the ghettos, in Poland,

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2 like. My eyes were very blue at the time, and
3 sometimes they'd be gray, and my hair was very
4 blond, almost a (inaudible) and so was my mother's
5 and my father too, light headed. And my eyes. And
6 I was strong enough and old enough where he thought
7 I could make the trip over the border, over the
8 woods.

9 And my mother just couldn't, and she felt
10 that if what he was telling her was indeed true,
11 that the little children would need her presence to
12 comfort them so they wouldn't be so afraid.

13 Nobody really could conceive the enormity to
14 which the Germans were going to obliterate us.

15 Even while we were in Auschwitz and I saw the
16 flames coming and I knew -- I knew it was my mother
17 burning and that I would be next, I really could
18 not conceive it, so I blocked it. I was 12 years
19 old, so it was easy for me to play a game: It
20 doesn't exist and I'm not here. And to this day, I
21 have to force myself to accept realities that I
22 cannot handle. I seem to fall into the same trap,
23 so I either hid --

24 (End of tape, side one.)

25 A. (Continuing) What I didn't say before

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2 was that, on the train, in the cattle cars, my
3 brother got sick and so did my mother. There was
4 no air; there was just a tiny little hole, and the
5 waste buckets were terrible.

6 So when we arrived in Kot-to-vits -- that was
7 a stop -- and somebody was brave enough to ask for
8 water, at that point, they put something across the
9 window so we don't see and we're not viewed. Even
10 that air was closed off to us.

11 And the next thing, the train screeched to a
12 halt, was in Auschwitz, and whistles blowing and
13 dogs, and they opened the doors. And the women had
14 to line up in one direction and the men in the
15 other, and the children and the old in still
16 another.

17 And I was walking with my mother and I was
18 holding her hand, and a man that I later learned
19 was Mengele was holding a cane in one hand and the
20 dog on a leash on another, and he was just mo-
21 tioning in which direction he wanted, and if people
22 wouldn't go, he would smack them and push them.

23 And he hit on my hand that was holding my
24 mother's and I released it, and he shoved her in
25 one direction and me another, and I became

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hysterical and I started screaming for my mother.

And my aunt -- he told me not to.

My mother was going in a different place, and my aunt begged him to let me go with my mother; she said I was only ten years old. And in my hysteria, that was embedded in my memory for many, many years. So, indeed, I thought when I entered Auschwitz I was ten years old. I just didn't seem to make any connection that when I came out I was 13 and I was only there a year, not quite a year.

And I was very hysterical at this point, and Mengele sat down and pulled me over next to him and he wanted to know -- he asked me who I was, what my name was, and was I indeed a Jewish -- especially since my name was Felsmann, which is not a Jewish name. It's not at least --

Q. (Inaudible.)

A. Felsmans and Feldmans are Jews; Felsmans are with N's and double N. And he told me that my mother is not well, so she's going to a place where she will take care of my brother and she will take it easy, and I'll be nice and strong and I'll go to work and I'll see her on Sunday.

And then he turned me over to my aunt and he

1 Helen Chalef

2 said, "I'm holding you responsible for her. You
3 hold on to her." And with that, he left and my
4 mother was nowhere in sight. She was in the back
5 and she (inaudible) was gone.

6 And he looked for me after the showers. He
7 seemed to be ever present in my life over there. I
8 got separated from my aunts because I didn't
9 recognize them.

10 Q. After they had been shaved?

11 A. After they had been shaved, I didn't
12 see them. We come from an orthodox family and the
13 body doesn't seem to me (inaudible) it doesn't seem
14 to make it (inaudible).

15 So thereby, I never saw them again. On top
16 of which, the hair and the shouting and confusion,
17 and going in line, and --

18 VOICE: (Inaudible) but fear. It seemed
19 like all the eyes in the man was like a crazy man.

20 A. I didn't understand what he was say-
21 ing. Waiting, when I get into the showers, to be
22 sure to take a (inaudible) in (inaudible) and I
23 didn't know what he was talking about. And I did
24 later, though.

25 And then he (inaudible) in the confusion,

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2 marched and (inaudible) got close, you had to fall
3 in line. You were shorn and sprayed and examined,
4 and we passed a line where we had to walk. We had
5 to walk with our arms above our heads to see if
6 there was anything abnormal in our bodies, and we
7 were all then given clothes at the other end and
8 taken to barracks.

9 And there were big lime pits, which I was
10 sure we were going to be thrown into every step of
11 the way.

12 Q. Lime?

13 A. They had big lime pits, were all along
14 the way. We were going from -- from (inaudible)
15 showers into A-Lock-er, in Auschwitz and Berkinau,
16 which was the work camp, and I was so terrified.

17 And in the space there were bunks. In the
18 space of what would be a queen-size bed, 12 people
19 were put and one thin blanket given. In the
20 barracks were tiers, three tiers. They were almost
21 like caves because of the depth, and the bricks
22 that -- that they would build up and the wooden
23 planks across, putting up the mattress. We were to
24 be there all the time we were inside. Everybody
25 was cold.

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2 The next morning, when we were routed out and
3 we were made to stand in line, we were told that
4 it's Sel-la-pow and what it meant, and I remember
5 it was so cold that my teeth wouldn't stop
6 chattering because all we had on was the thin, gray
7 pants with nothing under it.

8 And I heard a little voice behind me say --
9 and she was very cold -- "Could you put your arms
10 around me?" And when she did and I looked down, I
11 recognized my cousin, and we were never separated
12 after that.

13 Once Mengele tried. Mengele would make all
14 the selections (inaudible) and I didn't know where
15 the lines were. I didn't know, when he motioned in
16 a direction, what that meant. But there were three
17 groups that he would select into, and one was the
18 big, husky, strong women; the others were very
19 weak, or small or with sores, and somehow I knew I
20 didn't like being there; and then there was a third
21 group that was safe.

22 And once, he separated me from my cousin, and
23 I was already getting very afraid (inaudible) and
24 so did she. And we were in a group -- I was in a
25 group I didn't like, and she was in one that I

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2 liked, less, but I wasn't going to be without her.
3 There was just no way. I had a feeling that we
4 were going to the crematorium. If I go over to
5 her, I was sure I was going to the crematorium.
6 But without her, I didn't want to, I didn't want to
7 (inaudible).

8 And he was with his back to me, and he always
9 stood with his legs apart.

10 Q. Mengele?

11 A. Mengele. Remember that? With his back
12 (inaudible) and his boots. And I crawled between
13 his legs over to my cousin and he caught me,
14 Mengele. I thought, Oh, God, he's going to beat me
15 to death, and instead he started laughing. He
16 laughed at the audacity, and he wanted to know why
17 I did it, and why would I want to go to that
18 group? And I said, "Because my cousin is there.
19 And whatever happens to her, I want to be part of
20 it."

21 So he took us both at that point and, with
22 360 women, sent us to a work camp, with instruc-
23 tions that I was to get preferential treatment.

24 My cousin looks a lot like me.

25 Q. Was she fair?

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2 A. Very fair, but she had brown eyes.

3 And in the work camp --

4 Q. You were sent out of Berkinau for the
5 first -- you had been there for how long?

6 A. I would say, about three months.

7 Q. Three months?

8 A. Three or four months.

9 Q. So this was summer or fall?

10 A. It was still warm.

11 Q. It was still warm?

12 A. Time then and now again seems to
13 disappear. It doesn't have borders for me.

14 Q. Um-hum.

15 A. That was about the only decent time
16 that I could remember.

17 We worked in the ammunition factories, and
18 there were Czech people who came there, as well,
19 civilians.

20 Q. Could you tell us where?

21 A. I don't remember. It was outside
22 Bres-low (inaudible).

23 Q. You had a work assignment in Berkinau?

24 A. No. No. As a matter of fact, what I
25 forgot to tell you is that I'm not tattooed.

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2 Q. You're not tattooed?

3 A. And we were standing in line to be
4 tattooed and Mengele came by and there were -- one
5 girl was being tattooed and the next one was my
6 cousin in front of me, and I, and we stopped with
7 the girl being tattooed (inaudible), so that
8 neither my cousin nor I had one.

9 At the time, I thought it was because why
10 bother to tattoo us if we're going to die? Because
11 he did that a lot. He did not bother with
12 tattooing people who were not going to live to
13 carry them.

14 From Huns-feld, we stayed in barracks that
15 were built for the military, and I don't know, for
16 some reason, they didn't use them, but it was new.
17 It was new -- new wood. I remember the smell of
18 the fresh wood, and it was very unusual also.
19 There were straw mattresses in the barracks and one
20 bunk per person.

21 Q. So these were lavish accommodations?

22 A. Very lavish. And the Wermacht was
23 watching us, not the SS.

24 And there was one SS woman in charge, and
25 she's the one who oversaw my meals, and my meals

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2 were the same as hers.

3 Q. The same food and the same amount?

4 A. The same food. I don't know whether it
5 was the same amount or not, but it was more -- it's
6 more than I -- I could eat as my (inaudible).

7 Q. You were able to?

8 A. I was able to. I was forced to eat in
9 the kitchen, but you can always carry some out and
10 (inaudible).

11 Q. What other kinds of special
12 preferential treatment did you get there?

13 A. I had a coat, I had warm socks and I
14 had shoes that fit. And later in the winter, for
15 Christmas, I got a pair of boots and which came in
16 wonderfully handy because the Russians were
17 coming. They (inaudible) away fast (inaudible) and
18 we had to evacuate suddenly, instantly. And 360 of
19 us left Huns-feld. Three of us died in Luff-hau-
20 sen. Anybody who stopped or sat down or fell was
21 shot. They didn't have time. We crossed the
22 bridge in the dark.

23 They warned the townspeople not to come near
24 us. Some of them came anyway with big pots of
25 steaming -- I don't know whether it was coffee or

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2 whatever, was liquid, and they wanted to carry it
3 to us, and they were shot giving it to us
4 (inaudible), shot carrying it to us. And they
5 really meant (inaudible).

6 A dream I had when I was about -- between
7 eight and ten, of my grandmother foretelling me of
8 this (inaudible) while she was dying, I was
9 dreaming that she said I was in a procession and
10 that I was not hungry and I was not tired and I was
11 not cold, and I should keep walking, and not to
12 turn around, not to look back, never to look back,
13 just to keep walking.

14 And through this march, I kept on hearing her
15 all over again, so I grabbed my cousin on one side
16 of me and a red-headed kid on the other and I kept
17 (inaudible), as I heard they'd do to them
18 (inaudible), not cold, and we were walking, and to
19 keep walking.

20 And we were walking and we didn't look, and
21 because I was warmer than they, I could carry
22 them. And the three of us survived to Mauthausen,
23 and a week later we were taken to Dachau.

24 And I don't know how long we were in Dachau.
25 It would seem like it was -- they started moving us

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2 because the allies were coming and there were
3 bombs. And in Dachau, we were taken by train, open
4 cattle cars, that kept on changing direction, and I
5 remember the bombs coming and hearing them, seeing
6 the fires.

7 And we went to Bergen-Belsen where I was
8 liberated by the British. And they -- by the time
9 they arrived, I was so sick that the food they gave
10 me, I couldn't eat.

11 Q. Typhus?

12 A. Um-hum.

13 A. And because I couldn't eat, I'm here to
14 tell you the story, because I remember waking up
15 and the food was put -- we had a red metal bowl
16 that was the lifeline. I mean, it was everything,
17 and this thick -- they had this, like, pop-i-kash
18 was poured over the grease; there was a thick layer
19 of grease and the lice were crawling on it. And I
20 remember watching it with morbid fascination, and
21 people were dying so quickly afterwards, much,
22 much, much more than before.

23 By the time I was able to swallow, they had
24 powdered eggs and they had powdered milk, and they
25 had tea, and that too was a lucky break for me. It

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2 seemed that the (inaudible) hand of God was
3 (inaudible) covering me all the way through.

4 And it's very frustrating when I don't know
5 why (inaudible) some I'd like (inaudible), and I
6 don't feel I've done anything with my life to make
7 it work out myself. We lost so many who were in
8 the position to give, to enhance mankind. I've
9 heard the lies in the (inaudible) Germany. It
10 seems almost a sacrilege that (inaudible).

11 Anyway, they put me in a hospital. One of
12 the doctors wanted to adopt me, but I was taken
13 away from my cousin and I couldn't come.

14 Q. You were taken away from your cousin in
15 the hospital or before then?

16 A. We'd been moved to the hospital and
17 somehow I couldn't find her, and I was terrified,
18 and I didn't want to talk about adoption. I didn't
19 want her (inaudible) to have anything (inaudible)
20 except my cousin (inaudible) and I think that she
21 had the same experience; she didn't want to be
22 adopted; she didn't want to go to anyone; she
23 wanted me, because we thought we were the only ones
24 that were -- that were left.

25 And later, we discovered the Swedes had asked

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about the sickened children in the concentration camps. Having -- being bold, (inaudible) we thought it (inaudible) and Garden of Eden (inaudible) Sweden.

After the war -- anything else you would like to know?

VOICE: (Inaudible) about the bath?

Q. (Inaudible.)

A. We were so emaciated, and they had heard stories. They had heard, you know, all kinds of it, that we were badly in need of a bath, and so they had put us in these wonderful big tubs with sudsy water, and they scrubbed us down.

And the Swedish tradition is that you showered in cold water, but they had heard the stories of the showers, and this was 92 or 90 (inaudible) they came to help.

And she went under the shower with me. She put her face first to show me that it was safe, but she stayed with me all the time, and since there was a language barrier she was just cooing and happy, making sounds that denoted that I was safe. And we had it fresh and new and soft clothes to put on.

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2 VOICE: How about the delousing, the
3 scrubbing with DDT?

4 A. I didn't know that. They didn't tell
5 me. It didn't smell like the DDT that they used in
6 delousing in Auschwitz (inaudible).

7 Q. I want to ask you some questions about
8 your recollection of Mengele. It sounds like that
9 interaction was really critical to the time you
10 were in Auschwitz.

11 I want you to try and remember, if you can,
12 what you were thinking, what you understood about
13 who he was and how he had singled you out at the
14 time, because you were obviously aware that he had
15 singled you out (inaudible).

16 A. And I was always terrified, as was
17 everybody else, and, you know, the same way that we
18 knew the people were going to the ovens (inaudible)
19 and we had a bigger idea (inaudible), which was
20 groups, (inaudible) and we were slated for that.
21 You had to believe that, that you were just afraid
22 of. Fear and smell is -- is the ever present
23 memory I have of -- especially of Auschwitz.

24 See, in Bergen-Belsen they didn't even bother
25 anymore.

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2 Q. There weren't crematoriums?

3 A. I don't think they were in use
4 anymore. I didn't know. The people were dying and
5 they were on the way out, which we didn't know, so
6 they didn't have time.

7 And the anger towards us seemed to be
8 stronger and different than it was before.

9 Q. The anger once you were in Belsen?

10 A. Yes, the guards, the Germans, because
11 in Auschwitz, it was -- it would seem ludicrous to
12 say that we were treated somewhat more like humans,
13 because we were always subhuman with them, but, at
14 least, we were a useful tool.

15 By the time we were -- arrived in Bergen-
16 Belsen, we were a nuisance; we were in their way;
17 we were hampering them. And it wasn't until many
18 years later when I (inaudible) back (inaudible)
19 Easter and I (inaudible) back what was (inaudible)
20 during that time that it made sense, because they
21 had families they wanted to evacuate and they had
22 to be with us, they had to guard us, and we're --
23 who were we? We weren't even to be used as workers
24 anymore, and we were still alive.

25 It was also so strange to me and lucky that I

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2 didn't see the (inaudible) that they had baked
3 enough for us.

4 In Bergen-Belsen (inaudible) because when I
5 woke up and I saw the open gate (inaudible) I be-
6 came sick with worry. I saw the gates were open
7 and I walked out, and I didn't know where I was
8 going. I just walked. I saw an open gate and I
9 walked, and my cousin was sick and she couldn't
10 walk.

11 And I found myself in a farmhouse, and I went
12 in and I saw eggs and saw bread, and I saw a little
13 box with a red cross on it and I knew that there
14 were salves in it, and I opened because she had big
15 running sores on her. I had like a rash that was
16 itching (inaudible) it was all between my fingers.
17 My hands were raw, but she had running sores.

18 And there was something in it, in a tube,
19 that smelled like Hoo-saj-ay.

20 Do you remember that, what that was?

21 It was a salve that we used to use at home,
22 and I knew it was an ointment but I wasn't sure
23 just what it was used for, but it seemed oily and
24 everything seemed to be oily and smelled like
25 medicine.

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2 I took (inaudible) and when I realized
3 (inaudible) I couldn't carry that, I didn't have
4 the strength to carry it. So I had to make
5 decisions and I left the eggs because I couldn't --
6 because they would break and they would (inaudible)
7 when I would run and they hampered me.

8 But I took bread and I took the salves and
9 just barely made it back.

10 Q. These were the -- these were the people
11 who lived there (inaudible) and as though you were
12 a ghost?

13 A. Yeah. I think I was a ghost. I was an
14 apparition. Because (inaudible) was going on
15 anyway, so how can they stop? I didn't exist
16 (inaudible). But when I think back now, I wonder
17 where that scarecrow got distracted and managed to
18 come.

19 But, in all honesty, I had no -- no idea what
20 I was doing, and I have no idea how I found my way
21 there or my way back, back to Belsen, back to the
22 camp, back to the barracks.

23 Q. Back to your cousin?

24 A. Yeah. And, by the way, she is -- she's
25 absolutely wonderful. She lives in Tel Aviv and

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2 she has three children, one more beautiful than the
3 other. She's a doctor and she's married to a
4 nuclear physicist.

5 Q. Oh, my.

6 A. And the only time we were separated was
7 when she went to Israel and I came to America.

8 Q. Was she mature when you (inaudible)?

9 A. One year older, and my other cousin was
10 two years older than (inaudible).

11 Q. (Inaudible.)

12 A. She has four lovely children
13 (inaudible) and I don't know, you ask questions
14 because I don't know what you want to know.

15 Q. I want to ask you about the guards in
16 the work camp. You said that you were not going to
17 -- there was an SS woman who was in charge of you?

18 A. But we were guarded by the Wermacht.

19 Q. How was that different?

20 A. It was human treatment. They spoke
21 with us; they treated us gently. There were no
22 dogs when we walked to work. There were four
23 guards, four of them, that would walk with us. The
24 SS woman, we did not see at all. Once in awhile --
25 I am the one who would see her most frequently.

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2 Q. She gave you her meals?

3 A. No. I'm not sure if the meals that I
4 received were her remains or if they were prepared
5 along with hers, but it was the cooks in the
6 kitchen that gave me.

7 But the general treatment of all of us, the
8 food supply of all of us, was far superior.

9 For instance, in Auschwitz, while I was
10 there, I remember getting salami about this size,
11 this thickness, maybe this large. It was like a
12 thick kal-bas would be, on once --

13 VOICE: (Inaudible.)

14 A. And that's where we got -- and we got
15 --

16 VOICE: We got very special treatment
17 from the guards and the (inaudible).

18 A. I never got beaten, not once. I was
19 shoved once and it was in annoyance, and the shove
20 was so gentle that there was a spot on my
21 (inaudible).

22 But -- so I can imagine what it was like for
23 the ones that did get beaten. I was not touched at
24 all.

25 Q. (Inaudible) you were with someone,

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2 right (inaudible)?

3 A. I was in Auschwitz at the camp where I
4 was; it was overlooking the children's camp. There
5 were some twins there and triplets, but there were
6 mainly children. And I remember being so angry
7 because it was so beautifully (inaudible) in their
8 hair and it was shining, and they had ribbon in
9 their hair. And I thought how wonderful it would
10 be, and the barracks were smaller and had flowers
11 outside it, and they put, like, grass around it.
12 It was something like a home.

13 And then we learned that they were there for
14 experiments.

15 Q. When did you learn that?

16 A. Shortly before I left Auschwitz.

17 Q. Who told you that?

18 A. One of the Polish guards, the same one
19 who told me what -- why I'm not going to see my
20 mother (inaudible). They were called the Black
21 Au-bis-ters (inaudible) we were waiting and nothing
22 was said. They knew what they were waiting for.
23 Something in Auschwitz (inaudible) was very bad
24 cold, and we started it, it was terribly cold.

25 By the time they finished, it was so hot that

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2 our heads felt like they weren't even there because
3 there was nothing to protect it. I have shorn,
4 totally shorn. Your heads, it's just this terrible
5 heat beating down on you, and you have to stand,
6 stand -- and to this day, I hate to stand. I can't
7 stand. I can walk, no problem, but standing I
8 cannot handle. I feel I -- after -- at most, two
9 minutes, I feel like I'm going to pass out if I
10 have to stand.

11 Um, I had a digression. I'm sorry, I forgot
12 the point I was making.

13 Q. How you found out about the
14 crematorium.

15 A. This was before we were waiting to see
16 mother. It was dark, and it was -- the flames were
17 shooting out of the chimney and the smell was so
18 thick. We didn't know what that smell was, it was
19 just horribly sweet. And finally, somebody had
20 enough courage to ask, and she looked at us and
21 started laughing and said, "You see that flame?
22 That is your mother, your father, everybody and
23 everyone you know." That (inaudible) that's your
24 mother (inaudible).

25 And she didn't mean to be cruel, she just

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2 meant to shock us into submission, into doing what
3 we were told to do, as quickly as we were told, so
4 that we would -- if there is a chance to survive,
5 that we should.

6 And when she saw me looking at the children
7 in the other camp and I (inaudible) she told me not
8 to because (inaudible) animals. They were tortured
9 and tested and (inaudible).

10 Q. (Inaudible.)

11 A. (Inaudible.)

12 Q. How long had you been at Auschwitz when
13 she told you these stories (inaudible) was it --

14 A. Last two weeks, at most. At most.

15 And later, in Sweden, in Ca-tree-na Hall,
16 there was one of those children that left, and the
17 experiment done on her, from what I understand -- I
18 don't know for sure, but from what I heard -- was
19 that they had tried to see if a penis can grow on
20 her and whether it would function. At the time,
21 she was six years old.

22 I don't know whether you heard of one woman
23 who was taken out of the gas chamber because her
24 husband was a Nazi and an appeal was made?

25 Q. She was Jewish?

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2 A. Yes. Not -- well, to the Germans, she
3 was Jewish. She was in Ca-tree-na Hall where I
4 was. She survived. I don't know where she is
5 now.

6 Q. Does she have children? Does she
7 (inaudible)?

8 A. I'm not sure, because she managed to
9 pose for the picture, the group picture of us. But
10 she was the only one always being by herself, and
11 she had a special nurse with her (inaudible) so I
12 didn't talk, no.

13 Q. You were in Sweden for two years?

14 A. (Inaudible). I came two months and
15 they set up a school system for us. The best I can
16 describe to you is what happened in Sweden to us is
17 they fed us, clothed us, healed us, educated us,
18 turned around and thanked us for being there be-
19 cause we were the only way they could thank
20 (inaudible) God for helping us come out of the war
21 (inaudible) and that their children were not
22 (inaudible) mean and the parents were not
23 (inaudible) so that we walked away, somehow, a head
24 taller because we were finally able to do something
25 to repay them for what they did for us. In no

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2 other way, just for being the recipient of what
3 they had to give.

4 Did you know that the workers had donated,
5 one day a month, their fees, their wages for --
6 towards helping support us?

7 Q. The Swedish workers?

8 A. The Swedish workers. The Swedish
9 doctors were donating free time to help us.

10 Like the dentist that I went to, because I
11 wanted to get out of quarantine. We were staying
12 in quarantine and the only way we could get out was
13 if they had teeth -- you know, problems with our
14 teeth, because everything else was set up and it
15 was there for us.

16 And she examined my mouth because my teeth
17 needed cleaning, but there was no problem,
18 where I could have an (inaudible) but she didn't
19 want me to be caught in a lie, so she put like
20 metal over the tooth just to have some (inaudible.)
21 And I remember she had a husband and ate some
22 (inaudible) and told her, did you have a chance to
23 try that (inaudible) yet? They were keeping us
24 happy (inaudible). And by the time I arrived back
25 in Ca-tree-na Hall, a box of candy was waiting for

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1
2 me to test my teeth.

3 They had brought -- there's a place called
4 Bon-nen-stock. It's a place where there was an
5 outlet from the sea, and on one side and on the
6 other side is forest. It's absolutely beautiful in
7 the north of -- in Sweden, which they have for
8 crippled children and for orphans for summer
9 vacations.

10 They took that building and set it up as a
11 school system for us. They brought in teachers
12 from all over, among us, to teach us. And our
13 headmaster was a very, very special man. He's
14 still in Sweden. He was a headmaster at a boys'
15 school in Austria. He was in charge of us. And
16 the Swedish Government just wanted to make sure
17 that we learned everything and brought a teacher
18 from Israel to teach us Hebrew, to teach us Israeli
19 history, but, most of all, to teach us pride in our
20 heritage, because we had given that up, because we
21 were a dumb animal that was incarcerated and
22 slaughtered and beaten, that we were subhuman. And
23 really, as much as we fought against it, we did
24 accept that, and they tried very hard to obliterate
25 that.

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2 Also, since most of us would have had to go
3 to -- I keep calling it Israel, but then it was
4 Palestine, and most of us would have had to go the
5 illegal way because the quota was so small; and
6 that they had what they called the Shaliach which
7 had come and had to tell us what the situation was,
8 and to train us so that when we arrived we could
9 stand a chance of surviving because we'd know what
10 to do. Then we wouldn't be disillusioned because
11 the British came to pick us up.

12 How can you say anything about a people and a
13 country that would care enough to do that? And
14 coming specially on top of an Auschwitz and a
15 Bergen-Belsen, it's like I saw the extremes that
16 mankind is capable of. All I can say is thank God
17 for Sweden, especially for Sweden. I want to thank
18 God (inaudible).

19 Q. What happened in 1947?

20 A. I can't remember. They had all kinds
21 of agencies which would search along with the Red
22 Cross and other agencies for relatives, and I put
23 an ad in the Hungarian-American newspaper because I
24 remembered I had two uncles. And through a series
25 of coincidences (inaudible), because we'd never met

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1
2 them (inaudible).

3 They were at a friend's house, they saw it,
4 and my family tree was accurate enough that they
5 recognized the inaccuracies of where they were,
6 because I had them living in New York but they
7 never lived there. They lived in Chicago, but by
8 the time they went there, they (inaudible) and they
9 wrote to me and then brought me out here, which was
10 (inaudible).

11 I think there were many times that they
12 regretted having brought me, as I regretted coming,
13 because we -- there should have been somebody to
14 prepare them for what they were going to have.

15 They thought they're getting a 15-year-old
16 child or a young adult, and what they got was a
17 mess. Suddenly, the nightmares came, which I
18 didn't have in Sweden.

19 On one level I was -- I was an infant, and on
20 another I was ancient, and they didn't know what to
21 make of me (inaudible).

22 And the best example of that was when my aunt
23 suggested that I join the military so that I would
24 get a free education and training and instant
25 citizenship. That itself told me she had no

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1
2 concept of what I was going through, or who I was.

3 When she suggested that she send me back
4 here, I was so grateful, I pleaded with her to
5 please send me, but that would not have sat very
6 well with the community. So they got -- they found
7 out about (Mr. Dalmar) (Marina Del Mar), who had a
8 child care service. They used to be an orphanage,
9 and they were a child care service who took over,
10 with psychologists, with psychiatrists, with
11 trained social workers, who tried to make some sort
12 of adjustment in our lives, and I went -- they
13 placed me in a foster home.

14 Q. How old were you then?

15 A. I was 16.

16 Q. So this was about a year after you came
17 to --

18 A. That was the most I could -- we could
19 handle each other. And I (inaudible).

20 Q. Which was? How many (inaudible)?

21 A. I was 19. And my foster father and I
22 had a lot of fights in which I was packing, because
23 I would go out with boys that he didn't approve
24 of. I was going out with boys who couldn't give me
25 anything. They were like me. They were survivors,

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2 and what can -- what can they do for me? Why don't
3 I go out with American boys who have a future?

4 Q. So you were part of the survivors
5 community even then?

6 A. I came back into a survivors community,
7 which was wonderful because I didn't have to lie
8 and tell them stories that never happened
9 (inaudible) or the atrocities that didn't happen,
10 the atrocities that they could recognize as such,
11 like being raped and beaten and tortured. That
12 they could have understood.

13 And when they discovered that I wasn't and I
14 wasn't even tattooed, then suddenly they backed off
15 and said I lied; I probably wasn't even in a
16 concentration camp.

17 Q. This was --

18 A. In Orange County, in Santa Anna, where
19 my aunt and uncle lived.

20 The only reality in that time, in that one
21 year, came from my English teacher, who wasn't
22 Jewish.

23 Q. What did she do?

24 A. She didn't ask; she just treated me
25 like I was a human being who had -- needed a little

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2 bit more understanding. I don't know. To the kids
3 I was -- I was cute. I said things in a cute way
4 and I had to repeat it to everybody: "Oh, did you
5 hear how Helen said that? That was cute. Would
6 you say it again?" And I hated it.

7 When I came here, I found -- I spoke English,
8 but I learned it from an Austrian who taught the
9 British version. So it was the Austrian accent,
10 the British version, plus my accent, and you'd have
11 to be a mind reader to understand what I was say-
12 ing. When I wrote it, everybody knew what I said,
13 what it meant; but to hear it, like the kids said,
14 it was cute.

15 I didn't have to talk about what happened. I
16 didn't have to explain myself to them because they
17 went through pretty much the same, different
18 variations of the same thing. We found that we
19 were very comfortable with each other and we, sort
20 of, made up a family. We all chose sisters and
21 brothers. We weren't friends; we had -- we needed
22 family; we needed to belong.

23 One other wonderful thing in Los Angeles,
24 growing up, was that they had survivors dances once
25 a month, so that all of us would get together and

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2 constantly find one another.

3 Q. And was that how you found each other?

4 A. That's how we -- really didn't, but we
5 became friends; we formed a make-believe -- a
6 let's-pretend family, and, unfortunately, our
7 relationships to family were also let's-pretend
8 because we didn't know how.

9 One of the biggest problems I had encountered
10 when I became a mother is, I didn't know what a
11 mother was, how a mother behaves, what she does.
12 To me, she was something like the Holy Grail, this
13 precious being that was taken from me, and sud-
14 denly I'm it, and what do I do?

15 I was afraid to pick up my baby and hold her
16 because -- and it wasn't that I didn't know how to
17 hold a baby, because I did before, at home. I held
18 my brother, I cared for my baby sister and -- but
19 she was -- she -- but suddenly I was a mother. It
20 wasn't my brother I was holding; it wasn't my
21 sister; there wasn't my mother standing behind me,
22 you know, watching that I was safe. I had to
23 provide the safety and I didn't know how.

24 Q. Because you didn't feel (inaudible)?

25 A. I didn't feel it, and I didn't feel

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2 that I was all that precious because I was me. Now
3 how can I -- how can I now be a mother? And I was
4 so ashamed of this that I couldn't even discuss it
5 with anyone. It took many years for me to -- to
6 admit it, and, thank God, I have a wonderful first
7 child.

8 And when I had asked her to forgive me for
9 the things that I had done wrong, she just looked
10 at me and didn't comprehend what I was saying,
11 because to her I was doing it (inaudible) wrong
12 (inaudible) and, thank God, she had the wisdom to
13 take (inaudible) all the things I failed to teach
14 her. And she is (inaudible) she would be
15 (inaudible) but it's like it wasn't myself, not me
16 (inaudible).

17 My relationship with everyone was pretty much
18 on the same level, that I wasn't -- I wasn't that
19 sure. There was no one to teach.

20 My foster parents, they were nice people,
21 they certainly tried to do their best for us, but
22 they did it largely because they needed the money.
23 They had (inaudible).

24 In the first foster home, there were two
25 others, sisters (inaudible), the younger of which

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had become my friend. The foster parents' daughter
became my friend, which was --

(End of tape.)