

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Irene Hizme
November 22, 1995
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Irene Hizme, conducted by Regine Beyer on November 22, 1995 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Oceanside, NY and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

Ms. Hizme requests that whoever reads the transcript or listens to the oral testimony to be aware of two statements made on tape 1, side A and tape 1, side B. In reviewing her oral testimony Ms. Hizme clarifies statements made in her interview. Ms. Hizme stated that Mrs. Mucha was very strict and Ms. Hizme knew that if she did not meet expectations she would be punished. She was not hit often, as she was very good. As far as the gentleman, perhaps a boyfriend of Mrs. Mucha, is concerned, she doesn't know how often he visited. She remembers seeing him only once or twice and there was a drinking problem.

IRENE HIZME

November 22, 1995

- Q: I would like to start with where you were born, and when, and what your name was at birth, and what your name is now?
- A: Okay, that's easy enough. I was born in Czechoslovakia in 1937. My name was Renata Goodman, and today I'm Irene Hizme.
- Q: You did not stay very long in the town that you born in, right?
- A: Right. I guess about three or four years, and I have a twin brother by the name of Rene.
- Q: Where did you go after you left your birth town?
- A: We went with my mother to Razenstadt (ph). We were sent there and I think we were there -- I don't really recall how long, but in 1943 we were sent to Auschwitz from Theresienstadt.
- Q: I would like to go back just a little bit to clear -- you went to Prague first, and lived there for a little while, right?
- A: Yes. I think we lived in Prague. We were born in the outskirts of Prague in a place called Tetraslifkanov(ph).
- Q: Could you give me a sense of your family a little bit? You mentioned a brother. Do you have other siblings?
- A: No, but there was a father, and my mother and Rene and I and my memories are not very vivid, but we lived in an apartment, upstairs, because I remember because I used to watch the street and there was a trolley, and it had the number 22 on it.
- Q: Do you remember whether your brother and you were close?
- A: Yes. We were each other's friends, playmates. We always played together. I don't remember ever socializing with any other children.
- Q: Did you know that you were twins?
- A: I don't think so. Just that we belonged to each other.
- Q: Do you recall your parents at all?
- A: Not very clearly. I just recall moments of things we sometimes did together, and I

remember we used to go to the park together with my dad and my mom. But my dad was -- one night there was a big commotion and some men came in and they took him away, and I just remember my mother was crying and we also were crying. It just was a terrible memory for me, and we never saw him again after that. My mother, I remember in particular, she used to play a game with us at night -- at least I'm the one that wanted to play this game. I wanted her to set us up, hand positions and to think that we could sleep that way the whole night. I remember that.

Q: The memory of your father being taken away, was that the earliest memory that you now know had to do with the Nazi occupation?

A: I'm not sure if that's -- I don't think I knew it had to do with anything. To me life was the way it was. I always -- there was a feeling that my parents were not happy. There was something going on, but of course I didn't know. I didn't feel anything. I didn't understand about my father being taken away, and I don't think my mother really explained it to us. I think we always felt that he was going to come back.

Q: Do you remember soldiers taking him, or is it just a memory of him being taken away?

A: It was some men. I don't know if they were soldiers.

Q: Do you recall anything in particular about that night, anything more?

A: Not really, not really.

Q: When you went to Theresienstadt, what do you remember getting there?

A: Well, I remember that we went on this train and it was quite nice, I thought. Then we were just in a new place.

Q: You were together?

A: I was together, Rene and I and my mother, and I don't have a clue to what we did during the day. My memories of Theresienstadt are really very vague except again, just for moments here and there. I remember cobblestone roads. I remember watching carts with dead bodies, but it didn't mean anything to me. I didn't understand what was going on. I was with Rene, and I was with my mother and so it was fine.

Q: You don't remember any kind of activity that you did there?

A: I really can't remember.

Q: You do remember music from there sometimes?

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A: Yes, there was music, concerts, sitting in an audience and watching some kind of presentation. Yes, I remember that. I think that's it.

Q: You had to go on a train again?

A: Yes, that was when -- it was December '43 and it was a very cold night. It was snowing and there was snow on the ground and I remember it seemed like we had a long walk, a very long way to get to the train. We were walking with my mom who was carrying a suitcase and she said we were moving. But I remember that on this walk it was a lot of people. It was not just us and there were soldiers and there were dogs barking and every once in a while there would be a gun shot, and I think people were dropping-- falling down to the ground. I don't really think I understood that they were killed or that they were dead. I didn't know what was going on. I know I didn't want to walk. I just wanted to stop and sit down, I was so tired. My mother just kind of pushed me on and said you must come. You must be still and just walk. The next thing I knew we were on this very crowded train. It was not like the train we had taken to Theresienstadt. It was just standing room and you were squeezed very tight. People were crying and moaning. It was awful. People had to -- I don't recall having any food. I remember we were hungry and it was so tight you really had hardly room to breath and I was little so all I can remember is legs. I was scared. Even though Renee was there and my mother, but I remember being scared.

Q: Do you have any sense of how long -- how much time was spent on the train?

A: No. It seemed very long, but I don't know what the ride really is even today. I've never asked anybody how long is it from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz, but it seemed endless. When we finally -- when the train finally stopped and we got out, and we walked again for a while to this big barn like structure, whatever and it had bunk beds in it. It had a stove like thing down the center and that was our new home.

Q: What happened when you got off the train, do you remember in more detail what the procedure was?

A: Not too much actually. I just know my mom was holding on to us, and we just followed her and many other people. We were all going to the same place obviously.

Q: Do you remember getting tattooed?

A: It's a very vague -- very vague. I wish I could recall it better. I do vaguely remember it.

Q: What are your memories then of this place of Auschwitz? What do you remember?

A: Well, --.

Q: Did you stay together at first?

A: In the beginning we were together and it was also with many other Czech families. I just remember it was just very sad. I used to see people get hit. I know we were hungry almost all the time, and it was cold. There were soldiers and I really didn't understand what was going on. We had to stand in line waiting for things and every once in a while my mom took us. We went to the hospital for the doctor to look at us and I remember the very first time, especially because Rene -- I always felt he was a crybaby and I was afraid that he was going to cry, and I knew that if he cried something terrible might happen to him. I went first and to be examined and I was -- I didn't utter a sound. The whole time I kept hoping that Rene was going to be good too, because I didn't want anything to happen to him. So, we went with our mother. I also -- before we came to Auschwitz I remember there was one time where I remember we sat with our mother and we were being photographed, and I remember that particular moment. As it turns out we subsequently learned those were actually propaganda photographs that were sent out, and I have the picture today of Rene, my mother and I in Theresienstadt.

Q: What was it about that moment that makes you remember? Is there anything particular about it?

A: Well, we were kind of like on stage. I think they kept saying smile, but we really didn't feel much like it, but what I remember was being like close to my mother, feeling her coat and just the closeness of her.

Q: But you could not stay together for very long?

A: No, at some point -- I know now it was six months afterwards we were separated from our mother. I remember it as being physically really taken from her, and I definitely remember a scream from her and I remember her getting hit by a soldier or some person and I just remember really -- it was very, very sad. I just somehow knew I'd never see her again. Well, in fact that is what happened because the entire lager was killed that night, and also not only was I separated from my mom, but then Rene and I were also separated because we were -- though we were twins, we were of the opposite sex, so they didn't keep twins of the opposite sex together. So, Rene was put in with twin boys, and I went in with the twin girls.

Q: Did you know where he was? Were you aware of him being there?

A: I think throughout the whole time that I was in Auschwitz, I always felt in my heart that Rene was okay. I had a vague idea where he was. It was from my bunk it was a little over to the right near some chimneys or something, and in fact he really was there. That's how I remember it. There was once some kind of a fire and I was terribly scared that Rene's bunk may be caught up in that, but luckily he wasn't.

Q: Did you see him sometimes?

A: Well, I don't recall that I saw him, although Rene says that he did once catch a glimpse of me, so, it's possible that I saw him too, but it didn't quite register for me. But somehow I always knew at some point no matter what this was, and I didn't understand what any of this was, that we'd somehow be together again. You asked earlier about memories of Auschwitz and I guess most of them are really quite bad and I don't like speaking of them very much and I haven't spoken about some at all and I might never because I can't. But Auschwitz, the things that I remember very clearly is having to stand for hours for roll call, and I remember that I was one of the youngest and I was little and I always tried to hide behind somebody else, somebody taller so that I would not be seen. I think this was my mode of operation, is to be invisible and you can't get into trouble. I used to get a piece of bread, usually in the morning, with some black stuff to drink and I remember that I would always, since I was always -- maybe it was in the afternoon -- because I was always hungriest in the morning so I thought it would be really clever for me to try to save this piece of bread so I would have it the next day and of course it usually was gone and I didn't understand it but now in retrospect I think the rats and mice at Auschwitz must have loved me. They knew who to come to. I remember standing in line, humiliated standing outside in the cold naked waiting to get into the showers and also terribly scared because somehow I knew that you didn't always come out of the shower. I didn't know quite what happened, but I knew you didn't always come back. I'm amazed at my, I guess call it chutzpa, because I had a locket on my neck, a gold locket from my mom and I was determined to hang on to this and of course if they had seen it, I don't know what would happened to me, but I took it off my neck and held on to in my hand and somehow got passed the guard. I think what happened is in the showers it finally dropped out of my hand. But there was a little bit of me that said I got away -- I saved my locket. I remember once that I actually hid among dead bodies and I don't know exactly what was going on but I thought if I really lay still and make believe I was dead I would somehow escape whatever was happening. There was always this cloud of smoke in Auschwitz and there was always this smell that after a while I heard comments you know they're burning people. It's flesh burning. I don't think I still understood exactly. I said, you know, it couldn't be. I think my most horrendous memories are those of Doctor Mengala and the hospital and I seemed to be a favorite candidate. I don't know why but I remember getting injections and I remember having some little surgeries here and there, and things with electrical wires. I spent a lot of time in the hospital. I was pretty sick very often, but somehow I held on because I knew that Rene needed me. I had to get by.

Q: How did you know it was Doctor Mengele?

A: Oh, I don't really think I really knew. I think I know that today. It was just a doctor. It just seemed like he was in charge. I mean to me he was like in charge of everything, next to God.

Q: You were alone there from your family, but did you relate to other women? Do you

remember women of different ages? What was the relationship between you and the others you were with?

A: Unfortunately I think I really for whatever reason, I had no relationship with anybody. I was a very quiet child, very introverted. I was scared. I didn't mingle. It didn't seem like there were any children my age. They were a little bit older, and I somehow didn't belong and so I found myself just being kind of an observer. I watched a lot and I always again tried to make myself invisible. Always get behind somebody tall, behind a bunk, behind whatever. One very, very sad experience for me was one night when I had to actually go to the latrines and somehow I got so totally disoriented that I just could not remember where my bunk was and I remember trying to just -- I remember it was almost dawn and I knew that if they found me I'd be in real trouble so I tried to just get into anybody's bunk and maybe it was the people or the times but I was just being pushed away and being told this is not your place. This is not your place, but finally there was one woman and I don't know who she is, she finally said -- just grabbed me and let me come in with her. It was very sad. I missed my mom a lot.

Q: So, you did not have an experience that other women have had of women taking care of each other a little bit in the camp?

A: Not really. I also know that twin girls also had camaraderie because they had their siblings. But I think my overwhelming sense was just loneliness. I felt that I was just alone, always all alone and didn't belong anywhere.

Q: How did you get through those days? Did you talk to yourself? You had to do something?

A: Well, I think I day-dreamed a little about -- I don't know exactly about what. I think I used to remember that I had a doll and I had trains and the toys I used to have, little building blocks. I remembered my mom and I used to remember the walks in the park with my parents. I think that's how I got through.

Q: Were you ever beaten?

A: Not that I -- no. No, but I did witness other people being beaten, and I witnessed people being shot and people running into the electric wire, fences, but no, I tried to keep out of trouble. I had a sense that I had to be really good and listen and obey and I did.

Q: What happened when finally liberation came and the Red Army came? Do you remember that particular day?

A: Well, what I remember is that there was a difference. Suddenly there was a difference in the camp. I don't think that I understood that it was liberation day because I don't think I understood that we were at war. To me, I guess I always hated that the saddest thing is

that I really thought that what I had in Auschwitz was the way everybody lived. This was life, but there was a change, a definite change. There was a lot of scurrying about. Things weren't as strict. There seemed to be -- there was no order suddenly. There was just no order, and at that time I was extremely sick and I was lying on the ground. I could not move. I think if another week had passed I probably would have been dead, and I just remembered that a Polish woman picked me up and she piggy-back carried me all the way to her home in Auschwitz. That's what happened to me.

Q: So you were very weak then, very sick, then when they came in?

A: Right, and I saw people running here and there and there was some kind of shouting. It seemed there was a little almost joy like something good happened, but I couldn't move. So, I was just wondering what was going to happen to me.

Q: So, this woman carried you to her home and that's where you stayed for a while?

A: Yes, she lived right in the town proper of Auschwitz and I was very sick. I remember being in bed. I remember -- it must have been a doctor who came to see me and I remember these hot glasses on my back. A lot of that, and eventually I guess I got better because I got enrolled in school. I started going to school and I went to church. I knew that she was not Jewish. I also somehow knew that I was Jewish, but Jewish was not good, and so I wanted very much to be catholic. That was fine with me.

Q: How did you communicate with her? She was Polish?

A: I think I very quickly learned how to speak Polish because I had no trouble in school. I had no trouble in church. I understood everything. So, maybe as a child it was easy for me to pick up the language.

Q: How did you communicate in the camps? Did you understand people there? What languages do you remember?

A: I have to be honest, I don't think I spoke to anybody, but I understood everything that was being said because I think that I did speak German. My dad and mom were originally from Germany and they fled to Czechoslovakia and that's where we were born, but I believe we spoke German, because I still understand some German today, so that's probably true.

Q: Can you describe a little bit the new life that you had there at this house? What was it like? Did she have other children? Did she want to know what had happened to you?

A: Actually in retrospect now it was probably very peculiar. No, she did not want to know anything. She had no other children. There was a man who would come and be there every once in a while, but I don't know exactly what he was to her or not to her. I had a

very strict regiment that I had to follow. I had to take care of bunny rabbits and sometimes she served these bunny rabbits and I didn't want to eat them but I had to because if I didn't I would get hit. She was very strict. When she enrolled me in school, she knew exactly how long it should take me to walk home from school, and if I was home two minutes late, I'd get hit. With all of this, it was certainly better than Auschwitz. I did get food. The bathroom was outside in the yard. I had to clean the floors, set the table, and do various other chores. I don't think she ever hugged me or kissed me. In the summer time she had some family living outside of the city and we would make this very long journey. It seemed like a couple of hours worth, to a farm, and there there were some children, and all I can remember is that they made fun of my number and nobody said anything. I cried. I cried because I wanted to be catholic and they were telling me I wasn't. I surprising did very well at school. But it was not -- there was no love in the home, but she obviously -- she fed me, she clothed me and she expected certain things from me. The gentleman who frequented the house at times-- I didn't understand then, but I think he had a drinking problem, and if I was in the way of his temper then I got it.

Q: He would hit you then?

A: Yes. I think I must have been with her for at least a year, perhaps a little longer, because I remember Christmas, and I remember her telling me if I was very, very good I would may be get a present from Santa who was going to come out of the sky. Of course I believed her and I stayed up all night looking for this Santa who never came, and so I decided I must be really bad.

Q: Did you get a present?

A: No. I did get a cookie from somebody, a gingerbread cookie. That was it.

Q: Did you eat it or did you save it?

A: No, I saved it.

Q: So, nobody during that time--, you stayed there for about two years?

A: I don't think it was that long. A little over a year I think.

Q: Nobody ever asked you what happened and when the children made fun of you, what did they say?

A: They were saying something about me being Jewish and that I was a prisoner. I really didn't understand. It so happened that at the time that I was with this woman, the Russians had occupied this town and almost diagonally across from her is where the Russian soldiers were living, or maybe it was an embassy. And I do remember that she used to send me to there with some kind of packages, which I really don't know what any

of this was, but I have to say that the Russian soldiers were very nice and very loving, and I liked going there. The other thing that is very hard for me to talk about even now is one of the things that she used to take me -- we used to go back to Auschwitz and we would sift through the remains, ashes and look for gold teeth. She used to give me a sieve and I had to with a spoon or whatever had to pile it up and shake it and of course I had to find at least one piece of gold otherwise I was going to get it. So, I had to be a busy little beaver there, but the feeling that I knew that what I was doing was something so not right. I felt like I was -- even though I was young and didn't understand, I felt like I was touching something that shouldn't be touched and that this was not right. But we went looking for gold.

Q: Do you have any nice memories of that lady, anything that has to do with warmth?

A: Well, I have to say, and this might sound strange, but I loved going to church because it was beautiful. The windows, the statues, the music. I only wanted to know when I was ever going to get called up for the -- to get that little wafer that looked so wonderful. But I never got it, I never got called up, but I loved going to church.

Q: So, you wanted to be catholic?

A: Absolutely. Then one fine day, I didn't know at that time, but now I know that it was Vahasala (ph), a Jewish organization, and there were other children in Polish homes and they were rescuing them, and one fine day I found myself, I was told that I was going that I had to leave and that I was going to go someplace else. It probably will sound bizarre but I was actually sad that I was leaving. Not that it was wonderful, but it was the only home I had and it was certainly better than Auschwitz. I wound up in an orphanage, a Jewish orphanage and there I met a girl, a few years older than I, and she kind of became my mother figure. Her name is Miriam and we are friends to this day, and she is the only person I spoke to for about two years. I never spoke to anybody. I hated this place. It was Jewish. It was not organized. It was sloppy, not neat, nothing ever was on time. I remember looking out the window with Miriam -- she also was not too happy-- and we kept thinking how we could escape as we were holding our rosary beads, how we could escape from this Jewish place and get back into the church. I was just really very unhappy, very unhappy. I wanted to go back.

Q: But Miriam was Jewish?

A: Yes, Miriam was Jewish, but she was like me. She was also indoctrinated at that point. We thought we were doing our rosaries and saying our little things and --. Then we were moved again, and this time we went to France to another orphanage and there were a lot of children at this place. It was somewhat better because I guess there were more children and not so many adults. But, again, I felt out of place for some reason. I would listen as many of the children relate their tales of what happened to them and how they got to be here, and many of them were hidden by catholic or non Jewish families. Some of them

still had relatives and parents and were just waiting to be reunited. Some had hidden with the partisans in the woods, and some had been housed I think actually by ministers and clergy. I was the only child with a number. In fact, I was the only child from a concentration camp. So, when I heard all the stories that were being told, I said, they're never going to believe where I was and I never spoke about it. I never spoke about it. Nobody asked me. The adults didn't ask and I only spoke to Miriam. I was Miss Goody Two Shoes. I had to be the best at everything. We had lessons and classes and I was the top student. I did everything well, to perfection. It was sickening.

Q: Why did you do that?

A: I think I wanted attention and I think I thought if I was the best I'd get more attention some how. It was to the point where when the entire -- all the children were vaccinated and that really hurt and every body was in bed the next day. Not me, I was up early, I was bringing breakfast to everything. Not that my arm didn't hurt. It hurt just as much. I had the same fever everybody else did, but no, I had to show that I was above this. An injection wasn't going to get me down. I remember when a lot of us when we got there we had these sores on our bodies, I think scabies or whatever and we had to every day go and get medication to put on this stuff. Sometimes the children would wince and cry, but not me. Miss Perfect here never cried. I needed nothing. But I was crying the whole time inside. I was so lonely. I just desperately wanted somebody just to hug me, just to hug me, and I didn't know how to go about getting somebody to do that. But Miriam became sort of my surrogate mother. She used to do my hair. I had these long curls and --.

Q: Did you tell anybody that you had a brother? Did you tell the woman in Poland?

A: No.

Q: What was her name?

A: Her name was Mrs. Mucha and no I never told her and no I never --

Q: Did you tell Miriam?

A: I think I might have told Miriam and I guess in the search after this I did find an aunt in England. I was not searching but who ever was doing this who actually is my mother's sister and she was in England with her husband and a son, a young son, about my age, and she was asked if she wanted to take me. I guess it was a hard time for her because she said no, things weren't good and she already had a son and a husband and she didn't think she could handle another child. She knew we were twins so --.

Q: Before I ask you the question about Rene you said that you had long, long curls. Did you like yourself at all then? Was it important to you to look nice?

A: It seemed to have been important in some way. I don't know if I liked myself. I think I thought I was bad. I must have been bad because all these terrible things had happened to me. If I had been good, none of this could have happened to me. I guess a little childish reasoning there.

Q: So, what happened after? You and Miriam did not go together?

A: No. What happened was, as I said, some children they found homes for. Some were actually blessed enough to be reunited with family, and then a lot of them were sent to Israel. It was the beginnings of Aliat Israel, and Miriam was slated for that, and I thought I would be as well because I wanted to go with her. But I was told by this gentleman who used to come to visit us at Fluebane that he was going to take me to America. Lucky me. I didn't want to go to America. I wanted to go with Miriam. She was the only person who I felt close to and so this very nice gentleman said to me, well it will only be for a little bit and we'll bring you right back. I believed him. The next thing I knew was I was together with another little boy who was selected from another orphanage. We were on this big airplane on the way to America. Nobody explained about a plane. We had -- they sent a young woman with us who spoke only French. The boy spoke only French. I spoke Polish. Didn't understand a word of French, barely. I mean I know that we were in France, but we always, the children we spoke Polish. I thought a thousand times this plane was going to blow up. I had no idea what a plane even was, but we did finally land. Then, it turned out there was a lot of commotion about us. Subsequently, I learned that we were chosen to raise money for the war orphans of Europe by this organization called Rescue Children, and I guess we were quite successful because they did raise quite a bit of money. We stayed at hotels and I saw white bread. I saw things that were totally magical to me. We were taken to this store, this Sax Fifth Avenue, or Barnwitz, I don't remember -- floors and floors of -- I could not believe my eyes. They bought us things and they gave us things. It was unbelievable, unbelievable. But I have to be honest, I only wanted to go back and be with Miriam and go to Israel and all these extraneous things, the teddy bears, the dolls, the chocolate didn't mean anything to me, even though it was exciting. When it came time to ask well when am I going back, this very nice gentleman said to me, we're not sending you back.

Q: How did you feel about that?

A: Terrible. I was very, very upset. There was a very loving and caring family by whom I stayed. It was a temporary arrangement. I thought I was staying permanently however. She had a son and she was pregnant and gave birth to a daughter, I think, around that time, and I thought that this was going to be my home. They sent me to school, and I quickly learned English and Hebrew. I don't know how, but within -- well, I just first started school with them, but then it turned out --

Q: You thought that you would stay there?

A: I thought, but it seemed that it was really just a temporary arrangement and they were trying to place me. There was a family that was interested in me, but they wanted to try me out. So, I was invited to spend shobot with them, and they had a little girl that was about a year younger than me and a boy. He must have been about four or five years younger than me. I spent Shobot there and I was very uncomfortable the whole time. They thought that I would be a good playmate for their daughter. There was only one problem. I didn't know how to play. I had never played. She had lots of games, lots of dolls. I really didn't know what to do with this stuff and I was again, I was very introverted, very quiet, not at all talkative, not at all bubbly. It just happens that the little boy also came with me for that Shobot and he was exactly the opposite of me. He was extraverted, bubbly, cute, a child anybody would want. So, when they brought us back, I guess they must have told these people that well, I didn't quite work out, but they'd be very interested in the little boy. So, that is what in fact happened. So the search was on to find me a home and I think at that time, I did tell Eva Best, who was the woman, that I had a twin brother. Her husband, who was at that time the director of Rescue Children, started making inquiries. They also found a wonderful, wonderful family who had originally wanted to adopt a boy and were thinking that they were going to get Charlie who when they were told that the home they thought was for me didn't quite work out, would they be interested in a girl. It seems now that she has a twin brother, would they be interested. So, this was more than they ever anticipated or expected, but they said certainly. We'll be happy to take them. And they did come to see me and they had seen me and they knew that I was introverted and shy. I never said hello to them. I never looked at them. It didn't matter. They were up to the challenge. So, very shortly after that, Eva Best took me over to Mr. and Mrs. Myer Slatkin who eventually adopted me and Rene, but that's a whole story, but I was not happy in the beginning because again, I felt like I had been given away again. This was the Polish woman. It was the orphanage in Prague, it was the orphanage in France and now it was this woman. It seemed like nobody really wanted me and I only wanted to keep going back to Eva Best and I know that my mom though, she tried real hard. She bought me things. She tried to get me involved in going shopping and things, but I only wanted to go back to Eva Best. It took quite a long time before I got really used to being with them. I continued in the same school, and they were exceptionally loving to me. I started in the third grade in I think December and I think by March and April I was in fifth grade with children my age. To the credit of my mom who worked really hard with me on English. Hebrew I was on my own because she didn't know Hebrew, but I seemed to have done well. In fact, I excelled at Hebrew and they had a lot of patience. Slowly, slowly, I realized that this was going to be my home, and when they heard that I had a brother they right away got busy looking for him and they spared absolutely no expense and believe me, lucky they had it, but they spent thousands of dollars to find Rene and to be finally able to get him here. But the one thing all through this is nobody ever asked me "What happened to you?" Nobody ever asked. Nobody ever wanted to know.

Q: What time was that now?

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A: This was -- we're about 1948, December '47, 1948 January, with the Slotkins now.

Q: What kind of school did you go to?

A: It was a private school, a Yushiva, an Orthodox Jewish school. It followed the traditions of what I had learned in Fluebane, because that was also run by an Orthodox group. I felt that I had a great need to excel and I did. I graduated at the top of the class and won a scholarship in eighth grade.

End of Tape #1

Tape #2

Q: You just talked about the great need to excel that you even got a scholarship. Where do you think that great need came from?

A: I think because I felt really that I must have been bad to have so many horrible things happen to me that I wanted to prove to my new parents that I was worth adopting and that they could be proud of me, that I could be good. I think that was my need. Of course, I have to say that perhaps it wasn't so hard to excel at school because I came from a very European kind of view of education where everything was very strict. You never spoke back to the teacher. You wouldn't dare show up without your assignment completed. Here I noticed that children just yelled things out in class and even spoke among themselves while the teacher was giving the lesson. I thought they were going to get killed but I saw the teacher just said "be quiet," and nothing terrible was happening. A lot of times they came to school and they didn't have the homework and I just could not relate to this. I thought something just terrible, terrible would happen if I came without my homework or if I spoke out of turn. So, I really, really could not understand the American system. It was very hard for me. I felt very outside all the time. I never kind of quite got into the fun of the activities at school. I always had a certain sadness and memories that just kept haunting me. It didn't help that nobody ever asked me anything or wanted to even know. Even at school and though I'm quite sure that all the teachers were perfectly aware that I was their one and only Holocaust student, a survivor student. No teacher ever befriended me especially or tried to help me especially. They just kind of let me be. But then again, now I'm thinking about it, I was very, very shy and very introverted and maybe they thought it was better to just let me be. My mother helped me a great deal with the English. She worked with me constantly because she was a teacher and she had a great deal of patience. Hebrew I was on my own. As great as I had all the material things I could wish for, and I seemingly fit in very well with the crowd. I was in the right crowd. I was among the most popular. I was in the right clique, but it was never right for me because nobody -- I had a lot of problems inside that I didn't know how to deal with and it seemed nobody else knew either at that time. Also, I got the feeling that if I ever spoke about prewar things, somehow my parents didn't like that. They wanted me to forget and just accept this as a new life, as a new start and just go on from there and forget everything from the past. I had a lot of trouble with this because I very often had dreams and flashbacks and I had nobody to tell.

Q: What kind of flashbacks came particularly strong or what are the recurring memories?

A: I was terribly afraid of electrical things, a lightening storm, or anything. I mean if my mom said plug in the radio, it was like "do I have to, couldn't Debbie do that?" I don't know why, but I got this huge anxiety attack when anything electrical came into play. I know there was a shower in the house and I never wanted to take a shower. I always wanted only to take a bath. That seemed better somehow because no matter how hard I tried, everytime I took a shower I could not help but remember waiting in line and how

humiliating it was and how cold and how scared I was. I was afraid I would die. Train rides. It's a big treat for child. Let's go to New York. We'll go through the tunnel. Wow. I had to make believe this was a real thrill but when I got on the train all I could think of was it's a journey into oblivion. I just wanted to get off, and I couldn't say it. I had to say, "oh, I love this. This is great." So, it was really very difficult. I only liked stale bread. My mother only served fresh stuff. I would always leave things out. I'd save them for later so they would get stale. Bizarre. She didn't understand. She didn't have a clue, and I felt strange. I really did.

Q: Did people see your tattoo?

A: Well, I was so totally ashamed of my tattoo because I felt that this was a mark of some sort that I had committed some great grievance sin for which I had been adequately punished, but I certainly didn't want anybody to know that I was in a concentration camp. I mean that was like, my God, I would sooner die than have someone know. So, my mom was very understanding about this. In the winter I only wore long sleeved things and then in the summer she bought all these pancake powders and started mixing them to match my skin. Every morning she'd get this waterproof stuff and she'd mix the color to be exactly right and we'd feather it and powder it and I thought it was really quite good, but in all honesty, anybody who had any eyes would have seen that there was something on my arm that I was covering, but no one ever asked. In fact, it's strange, I remember over hearing a teacher in my school. Somebody who came to teach after I was already there and somebody must have been saying "See her, she's the little girl that came from the concentration camps" and this person in total ignorance and I heard this said "It couldn't be. No children survived the concentration camps." So, blotto me out totally. I had no -- they had no psychologists. My parents never thought of it. I was in desperate need.

Q: Do you remember the first time you felt really at home there. Was there anything in particular that made you feel, now I can trust the situation?

A: I think it was a very gradual -- I know they overwhelmed me with presents in the beginning. I got this doll -- in fact I still have her. She's probably a treasure. It's a honey bunch doll. Dick Tracy, whatever, and a carriage. I was the envy of everybody. I was overwhelmed. I think the trust came little by little because I saw how my mom always worked with me on my school things. Whenever I needed anything for school, she would take me, anything at all. When I saw how they were trying to unite me with Rene, I think that's when I knew that these people really care. Again, it didn't feel like my real mother and father, but I guess as close as I could come to that. It happened.

Q: What had happened to Rene in the meantime and how did you get reunited?

A: Well, Rene was at Auschwitz when the Red Army came, and he did go on that march whatever. Somehow there was a Doctor Kilina who liked Rene alot and he took him home, back to Czechoslovakia and Rene became part of his family, kind of. Sometime

thereafter, this Doctor Kilina had to flee because the communists had already taken over Czechoslovakia and someone had something about him. Anyway, it was necessary for him to escape to Israel. So, he had to leave Rene, and it really broke his heart because Rene talks with great love for this man. He knew how to reach a little boy who had been through trauma. He knew just what this little boy needed. He needed a bicycle, you know. It broke his heart, but he gave Rene into the care of his sister. In the meantime, Rescue Children was trying to locate Rene. I don't know what enroutes they were or were not making but when I came to America to raise all this money, Life Magazine had done a complete story about me. It seemed when Doctor Kilina got to Israel, he happened to pick up that Life Magazine issue, saw my name, Irene Goodman, and it clicked for him. That must be Rene's twin sister. And that's really how he called and that's how we found out where Rene was. Of course that was wonderful because then I started writing to Rene and my parents really did -- it was very hard to get him out from behind the Iron Curtain. He had to go to Switzerland to a boarding school for a while, but Rene loved it because he learned how to ski. He really was just up in the mountains and he had a great time there. Then I think he had to go to Germany for while, but anyway, make a very long arduous path with lots of politicians helping, lots of money passing hands and the help of a most unique individual, and I'm going to name him, Mr. Maurice Enwright who saved hundreds of children, all just out of the kindness of his heart. People just paid his expenses and he brought children back. He spent a lot of time with Rene and finally came the day when he came to America. That was quite a day.

Q: How was it when you two met again? You hadn't seen each other for --?

A: Since 1945, and this was now 1950. When I was told he was coming I was very excited, very excited, but I didn't know how I was going to speak to him because you see I was now speaking English. I had forgotten my Polish, not totally yet, but practically because I was still in correspondence with my friend Miriam, and he spoke Czech. He was learning English in this school in Switzerland but -- so I was a little apprehensive and I wasn't quite sure, and with all this build up and everything when we finally saw each other it was like we just stared at each other. It's not like we ran towards each other. We just looked at each other and I thought, gee I'm much bigger than him. He seemed kind of small next to me. I guess that's what happens when a girl is twelve and a boy is twelve, because he very quickly out distanced me the following year. But, there was a feeling that we completed some kind of a journey. Something came to completion and I remember thinking that my real parents would be happy to see that we are together. It wasn't until the next day that we actually started to talk a little. It was not fireworks or anything like that.

Q: Did you have somebody now to talk to about your experience or did you not talk to Rene much about it either?

A: It would seem that perhaps we would talk about this, but somehow I think the atmosphere in the house was again, to forget. This is a new life, this is America. So, that even Rene

and I, I only remember one conversation with him and it didn't have anything to do with the time in Auschwitz or in Theresienstadt. It had to do with a memory I had of long ago of him getting bitten by a bee when we were children. That led us to talking about some of the toys we had and going to the park. We only had this conversation once, and in fact, Rene and I were not terribly close. Again, Rene was more extroverted and more social and not as interested in studies and more into fun. So, we were very opposite and again unfortunately I excelled at school and Rene didn't, so my parents were constantly holding me up as an example. A terrible thing to do to any children. So, in a sense Rene resented me a little but what happened was the less he did what he should have been doing, the more I felt I had to make up. So, I had to be not only super smart, but super duper extraordinary smart. I had to excel at everything. So, Rene was more into social things and I was more into being very studious and quiet, but I'm sure it just came out in different ways for me and Rene, because he certainly had bad memories that he needed to deal with, and for me I sublimated myself in my studies and excelling. By the time I graduated high school I was the salutatorian of the class. I was the editor of the year book. I was the captain of the cheerleading squad. I was on the basketball team. You name it, I did it. I joined the crowd. I knew how to do that.

Q: Was it difficult for you to trust anybody except maybe your parents or to trust the situation?

A: Yes. Yes, I always felt that whatever I had, it could all be gone tomorrow. I never felt that it would be ongoing and that I could be lucky enough to really have a good life. So, I was a very serious young girl and teen.

Q: Did you date at all? Being a good American girl in some ways --?

A: I'll say I started dating later than my girlfriends. I was not interested in dating. I don't think I knew how to form relationships like that. It was very difficult for me. I didn't start dating until I was well into college, probably close to my senior year.

Q: You mentioned earlier that your name in Life Magazine article was Irene Goodman. How did the change -- you were born --?

A: Renatta Goodman. Well, I think the Polish lady took a few liberties with my name. I guess she didn't care for Renatta and name me Iranka, which I guess is a Polish name. When I came to America, again, nobody really asked me what my name was or wasn't. In France I was known as Iranka, but I knew that I was Renatta but nobody really asked me there either. I guess here in America my parents just made it American and decided Irene. They said Irene, I probably nodded my head and was Irene. To compound this, now I remember I also had a Hebrew name, Rifca, which I found out from my aunt. When I was enrolled in this school and the teacher asked me what my name was I said it was Rifca and he said to me, well, I have two other Rifcas in this class. It's going to be too confusing for me to have a third one, so I think we'll call you Esther. That's exactly how

it happened.

Q: So you did not have a history that was validated? You did not have a name that was validated? Who were you?

A: I don't know. I was this Esther Irene, whoever that was and that was somebody who needed to excel for my parents, to make them happy that they had adopted me. That was the whole thing.

Q: What did you major in in terms of education? What kind of profession did you pursue?

A: It may seem odd but I had always wanted to be a doctor, even though the thought of going to a doctor is a nightmare, for me, or anything to do with being sick is not acceptable and hospitals are totally out of the question for me. But I wanted to be a doctor. I found when I started college and even in high school I was very good at the sciences. I enjoyed them. I liked math, which was a terrible thing because all girls were supposed to be stupid in math at that time, and that didn't gain me much popularity. I mean I even still liked math when I was in college so I minored in it and minored in physics and majored in chemistry. I didn't go on to be a doctor because the home that I was raised in, being a very traditional orthodox Jewish home and you know "orthodox Jewish girls didn't go to medical school." They got married, they had children and they became teachers. They became teachers. I knew I didn't want to be a teacher, so I became a biochemist and I did research, chemistry. I worked for Cornell Medical College and Albert Einstein.

Q: Did you teach at all?

A: I did teach also after a while. In high school I taught biology and chemistry and physics. I did teach, although I said I'd never teach, I did. That was actually a horror for me because now I actually had to demonstrate things to the children and here we went with electrical things. But I got smart. I asked for volunteers to plug in things and push the switches and do the things. I've gotten over that now that I'm passed 50, but it was a long time. Housework, doing the vacuuming or plugging in anything for years and years would bring on major anxiety attacks, which I didn't understand. Now I understand that it was just anxiety attacks.

Q: When did you begin to talk about your experiences?

A: Actually not until 1985. My husband knew that I was a Holocaust survivor. My children knew. It was becoming a little bit more okay to be a Holocaust survivor. People were finally interested. Then Benjamin Meade has started this whole big group and there was the very first Holocaust reunion and I thought I might even go to it. I was pretty excited about it but I don't know if I might have mentioned it to somebody casually that I'm a Holocaust survivor and they just kind of looked at me and said, "you're too young, it

couldn't be." They negated my whole thing and what could you remember and what could you possibly remember you were so little. So, I didn't go to the reunion and I felt very -- I didn't feel like I really belonged there either. It's kind of a strange thing. My whole life is trying to find where I belong and here I didn't even feel welcome with other Holocaust survivors because they somehow belittled my experience. Kind of felt I couldn't remember much and how terrible could it have been. Needless to say, they were so ignorant because they didn't have a clue as to what the Mengele twins had undergone. It wasn't until 1985 when there was actually an organization of twins that came about because of the first Holocaust gathering in '83 in Washington where Eva Core a twin went, and she started searching for other twins, because she too didn't feel comfortable with the other Holocaust survivors. We didn't have anything in common somehow. And so, when she called to tell me that she is a twin and we are having a reunion in Israel in January and I said "there were other twins besides Rene and me who survived Auschwitz." For sure I thought that Rene and I were the only ones. Absolutely, the only children to survive. She started telling me no, there are a hundred and some odd all over the world and this I said, I remember I called Rene in June and said "We have to go to this. We have to."

Q: So, you decided to go?

A: No, Eva was -- everybody was going to Auschwitz first and then on to Israel to hold this mock trial of Mengele, but Rene and I felt that we just -- going to Auschwitz was a little too much. We told Eva we'd meet her in Israel, and that's what we in fact did. I was amazed to see so many twins. I was hoping that I would recognize somebody. I was hoping somebody might recognize me, but it just didn't happen for me. Rene was luckier. He did find twins who remembered him very specifically and in some way that's bizarre, but it kind of validated that he was really there, and yes what you think happened, happened. But I wasn't getting any validation for me and I still felt like well, if none of them recognize me, where was I. Was I in a different place? Was I in the hospital so much, or was I just so extremely quiet. Eva -- it seemed like a lot of the other twins remembered each other. I was only three or four years younger and I don't know if that made the big difference or whether I was just so quiet and kept so to myself that nobody just ever noticed me. Because I really truly did not speak to anybody. I remember that. I spoke to no one. So, for me the trip, though I saw the twins and when I heard some of their stories, oh yeah, I remember that. It confirmed some things for me but I didn't feel totally validated because I didn't find anybody who really knew me until I met these older twins from Australia. They were originally from Czechoslovakia also and they had been to Theresienstadt and I don't know if they said it to make me feel good, which is probably what it was, but they thought that vaguely they had remembered me from the hospital. They had worked as nurses in the hospital and they thought they remembered a little girl with long, blondish hair. Well, there probably weren't too many because heads were shaved in Auschwitz, except the twins. My head was never shaved so I always had this long hair. Then there was another woman, Ruth Elias, a horrendous story, but she was also from Czechoslovakia. She was on the same transport with us to Auschwitz and she

thought that she remembered me from the Czech lager. So, I had to be satisfied with that.

Q: Was that the experience that made you do more research? Did you ever try to find out what really happened to your father?

A: Never before. I never read Holocaust books. I did in late 1970s attend some lectures by Elli Resell, but now I felt I needed to find out more and I did start looking and asking questions and I guess doing major research on what really happened. I learned a lot. I was able to find out a lot. I found out that there are very good records at the Polish Museum in Auschwitz and I was able to get documentation about me and experiments on me and when. While we were in Israel for this reunion, we also managed to find our transport stubs on what seats we had to Auschwitz with my mom and Rene and actually found a thing that said that my mom had died in Auschwitz at this kibbutz where they housed all the Czech documentation. I don't recall the name. We didn't find anything about my father there, but I found out just this passed year actually since having been to the Holocaust Museum, I found out a great deal about my dad and even got a picture from the Auschwitz Museum of him in his prisoner's garb. I can't tell you what that was like. Because I have a great many photographs and I could see from when he was healthy and everything was good and to see what he looked like now in Auschwitz was really a shock. Also, we learned that he was killed as a prisoner and I can only hope that he didn't have too many days there and that he didn't suffer. But I'm now continually looking, I discovered this great book The Chronicles of Auschwitz and I'm in there. My number, everything, so I'm pretty well documented and so is Rene. My dad is in there too. I'd like to -- I don't know enough about my mother except for what we found at that kibbutz that she died in Auschwitz, but I'm like on a search to find out more what happened after we were separated. I don't know if I'll succeed.

Q: You just mentioned your number again, would you tell us the number?

A: It's 70917.

Q: You also said that you learned more about what was done to you. Do you know what was done?

A: Well, again I'm not 100 percent sure. It does show that I did have some kind of blood work up. I had some kind of injections. I don't think I ever got all my documents. It was just what they had. I don't really know what was done to me, but it couldn't have been good.

Q: I would like to go to your family, this family now. When did you and how did you meet your husband?

A: I actually met him on a blind date and that's how we met. This is my second marriage. I don't speak about this too much. I was married once before, for a very short time and my

oldest girl is from that marriage. Unfortunately I was married to a wife abuser. I wouldn't have been able to get out of the marriage. I probably felt I deserved to be treated this way except something about having a baby. I said I in my heart knew I could never subject a child to this kind of an atmosphere and that's what really gave me the strength and also a very good friend and neighbor who helped me through this very trying time. And then of course my parents -- I was ashamed to tell my parents, so we had this charade for about six months. I felt I would be disappointing them somehow that I had failed at my marriage but I finally owned up to it and of course they came and collected me. They didn't like him anyway. Again, I married perhaps not for the right reasons. I still felt very alone. Most of my friends were getting married and I wanted to have a family of my own. I felt I had nothing and this man had had a bad marriage, he had a son, and what could be better? I could be a mom to this 13 year old. I was 22. What did I know. It seems nothing. So, part of me also staying in this marriage was for the son's sake because I tried to smooth things over because he was pretty strict with his son also. I saw there was nothing I could really do that would change and I needed to get out for my own child and so I did.

Q: How long were you married?

A: I think six months.

Q: And then you met --?

A: Then I met Sammy on a blind date. I don't know if I was in the marriage frame of mind because I was beginning to see that I had a lot of things going on that were not resolved. I had trouble with relationships and I wasn't trusting and of course I was a little scared of men too. I didn't have the best image of men after the doctors in Auschwitz either so, but I don't know. Sammy was just so sweet. I married Sammy because he was kind. That was his outstanding quality and it's nothing against him if things had been different, I don't think Sammy would have been the kind of person I would have married, but I married him because I knew he would be good to me and he wouldn't hit me and he was kind.

Q: You did not really talk to him about how you felt about your problems either?

A: No, never.

Q: How did you live with that? Were there nightmares?

A: Yes, nightmares. He used to wake me up. He'd always ask me what's the matter and I'd say "Nothing, just a little nightmare." I did not talk about it. Just before I married Sammy we were living with my parents and my daughter Lori and Lori had noticed my number and she was about six or seven at the time and she asked me what that was and I started telling her that I had been in a concentration camp. I wasn't going into details and my mother overheard me and she says, "You don't need to be telling her this." So, again, I just didn't know what to say. I said, "Mom I'm not telling her anything, but you know

how can I not explain to her the number on my arm?" But, my mother said you don't have to tell her anything. So, I think Lori knew after that that I had survived but she never asked me anything. I never volunteered anything else. Part of it was my own thing was that I didn't want to lay this heavy burden. I wanted my kids to have a childhood. I wanted them to have everything that I didn't and that's probably why I also remarried. I wanted Lori to have a father.

Q: When did you ever do something for yourself?

A: Good question. I don't know, I don't have an answer. I'm still the person who feels she needs to do for others, even though at this point in my life where I have this MS and I don't get out that much, one of the highlights of my week is visiting sick patients at the hospital and trying to bring cheer to terminal patients who are suffering with cancer. The only time -- I guess that's the answer to your answer. I do something for myself by helping out people.

Q: Is the MS, do you know whether or not that is in any way connected or might have been connected to things that happened?

A: Well, it can be definitely acknowledged because they really don't know that much about MS, but my neurologist said that certainly whatever happened to me predisposed me to an illness so that it wound up being MS. But certainly all those injections and the circumstances of my childhood could certainly lay the ground work for this.

Q: Did you ever go back to Czechoslovakia or did you ever visit Germany?

A: I've never been back to Czechoslovakia or Poland, but I did visit Germany as I found out not too long ago that my father has a sister who lives in Dresden. I was fortunate in having a wonderful, wonderful girlfriend who said, "Come on. I'll take you. I'll treat you the trip and I'll go with you and we'll do it together." So, we did. That was -- I think it was in 1987 or 1988 when I made the trip and I met my aunt and her daughter. My first cousin, and I can't describe in words the moment that we saw each other. This was truly something that they never thought they'd ever see me. They knew all about me. They knew about Rene. My parents had been in touch with them when we were born and sent many, many photographs to my aunt. So, it was a dream kind of come true. I never thought I'd be able to go to Dresden. It was still before the Wall came down, and we spent four or five days with my aunt and cousin and my aunt told me lots of stories that she remembered and she showed me the many, many photographs and letters that my father had written to her from Prague. She even gave me the letters, and at the end of the trip she gave me all these precious, precious photographs and it was like getting a life. It was my life and she gave it to me. She gave me a knick knack, a little music box that used to belong to my father and so it's very special. It was also very special because I feel that I don't think we'll ever see each other again, but we are in correspondence. She just sent me beautiful embroidered tablecloths. It's wonderful.

Q: Did you get a sense whether or not people in East Germany at that time knew that much about the Holocaust?

A: Interestingly enough, I think they knew hardly anything. My aunt, though she knew of the suffering, after all she did live through the Dresden bombing which killed my grandparents, she did not have any idea of what was happening and what happened to us in the concentration camps. She speaks German and we used an interpreter, a young woman in her late 30s who was absolutely astounded at the things I was saying. She had no idea, not a clue, that this is what had happened. It was very sobering and kind of upsetting to me to see the such a trauma was going unacknowledged. People knew very little.

Q: Things have changed in that respect in America a little bit in the late '70s and early '80s?

A: Yes, people did start talking about it and there was some recognition and we had Holocaust Memorial Day and a lot of literature has come out, but there are always those who say what do we need this for and I always say, look at the world today. You shouldn't ask why you need to learn. Look at this world today. Look where we are. We haven't yet learned. We haven't learned not to hate.

Q: You started speaking publicly or in schools about that. Tell me a little bit about the reasons for doing that and what it was like to do that after so many decades of not speaking about it?

A: It was extremely difficult for me when I came back from Israel and there was quite a bit of publicity in magazines and New York Times on which we appeared. I had friends who had known me many, many years who are totally astounded, shocked. They could not believe that I was a Holocaust survivor. They said "You're so American." I took that as a compliment of sorts, but I also as Rene and I started talking and June started talking and started telling my children and Sam a little bit. I realized that I have an obligation, that I had an obligation to my parents, if not to anybody else, to speak about this. I suddenly found myself talking to schools, synagogues, appearing on TV, appearing in books and talking. I also had the very good fortune to after the trip to Israel to make connection with a Doctor Kestenberg who saw me professionally and also as a friend and encouraged me to write poetry or talk about it and that has helped me greatly. I don't often talk, maybe two or three times a year because that saying it gets easier as you keep doing it, it isn't at all true with this. Somehow, it's harder. Every time I give a talk or give an interview I get pushed back into that time and it takes me weeks to get out of the depression. I don't know why, whether it's because I'm older and I'm beginning to see that I'm at the end of my life rather than at the beginning or whether I feel so hopeless about the world because of the way it's going, feeling that all that's happened that somehow there was such an evil unleashed in Auschwitz that it's lingering to this day. We haven't learned or been able to rise above it. It was something not of this world happened there and it continues. It

continues, where I don't know. It's hard.

Q: Do you still think that you are being hurt now, differently, understood differently than all your life?

A: I know my mom even though she's gone now but when I first started speaking she never came to anything. She never watched any of the TV shows. She could never look at the books. In a way I wanted her to. I wanted her to be a little proud of me, not that I'd rather have done something else greater, but this is what I have. I'm trying to make -- to do something for humanity with it. If I can just touch one person to kind of give over the message that we're all people and we all have feelings and we shouldn't hate. You don't have to agree with me. We don't have to be the same religion but we can respect each other. We don't even have to like each other if that's too difficult, but there's a sanctity to human life which we've totally lost sight of and my friends understand me better today, but even today I'm still very much that little girl who's scared of authority. Policemen terrify me. I'm still very much that little Holocaust kid who's there in Auschwitz.

Q: Are you still trying to deal with everything yourself then, or have you ever seen a therapist or have you asked your family to help you in a different way? Have you ever reached out?

A: Yes. As I said, Doctor Kestenberg has seen me professionally as a therapist and that's been helpful to me. I think speaking with my brother -- we've gotten very, very close. We're almost inseparable. It's too bad we live such a distance. My children, it's still hard to talk to them but I think they're very interested. They always want to look at the pictures. They always want to know what's the latest thing and what did I find out. They come to my lectures. They come to the TV things even though they don't want to be part of this. But it's hard for their kids too, because even though in my attempt all my life to protect them from this, I guess I was a little bizarre. I mean, I was a strange mother. Let's go back to the stale bread. They laughed me out of the house all the time with that, but my values seem to be somewhat different. So, I think they saw some crying and things that they didn't understand. At a joyous thing you'd find me crying because I'm saying "My mom and dad aren't here." And what would life have been like, and I wish my parents could know my kids. Would they finally be proud of me. It's hard. I think my kids have somehow subliminally absorbed some of my hurt even though I tried desperately to protect them and not be an overprotective mother. I deliberately leaned back the other way. "Yeah, you can cross the street, okay." I'm joking about that, but I really tried to be -- I was always reading these child rearing books from Doctor Spock to everybody. I wanted to be sure that I was not making them nuts with my worries and fears.

End of Tape #2

Tape #3

Q: Can you describe for me a little bit this home here? What feelings do you have? What makes it home for you?

A: Well, I never thought about that. Well, my children would make it home for me, but my older daughter is now married and my younger one about to get married in Israel. So, I miss them a great deal but I have photos everywhere. I think what makes this home for me is the fact that I have finally gotten my hands on some memorabilia from my early childhood and I have a vast collection of pictures of myself with Rene and my parents and just looking at them I can piece together the kind of life we must have had and the kind of life my parents tried to provide for us. It looks like we were very happy children, so I think my parents did a really good job. In some ways, maybe their love and their strength helped both of us survive somehow.

Q: You do have MS now. What is it like for you to live with that?

A: In a word it's a horror. The worst thing about having MS is that I've actually had to go to a doctor and I actually have to go to the hospital. I actually need therapy. I have to keep dealing with these medical people which for me is a nightmare. It's my own trauma. I never wanted to go to doctors, and don't like them much. I try to stay out of hospitals. But I've had to come to terms with the fact that this illness I do need the therapy and I do need a doctor's supervision of medication and I can really say is that somehow I've been blessed I don't know whether by my parents who are gone, but I've been blessed with a neurologist who is so sensitive to my needs and understands my hang up with doctors and is so gentle and just kind of try to point me in the right direction and never pushes. He is actually not just my doctor anymore, he's just become one of my very best friends. So, that's turned out okay. But I still, when he says "Go to the lab for blood work." I say "Do I have to? I really don't want to. Can we do it next month?" And he says, "Okay, we'll wait."

Q: Is there any distinction by the way between your feelings about female or male doctors because it seems that male doctors --?

A: Actually my neurologist is a male doctor. I've always tried to find myself a female doctor very unsuccessfully, so that's where I am. The other thing I hate about MS besides the medical side of it, is that I'm no different than any other MS person. It's robbed me of my independence and my need to excel and be independent and do for others and this really curtails that a lot. I find that I need to depend on people, which is very hard for me because I've never found that I really could depend on people and I do have now some wonderful friends that I can depend on but I'm still in the end and I try not to ask too much from anybody because I fell I'll overstep my requests and it will be hard to do things for me all the time so very often I just suffer it out myself. I still feel alone.

- Q: So this particular illness has in a way is doing the same thing to you that your experience in the Holocaust has done for you, has it?
- A: Yes, very much so. And it's also society and the way they react to someone who's not well. That doesn't help. Although I try to educate them and joke a lot with them. I keep telling people that just because I'm in a wheel chair doesn't mean that I don't have a brain. You don't have to talk slowly to me and stuff like that. Just kind of, when you think about it, it's sad that this has to be said in the year 1995. You'd think we'd be more educated.
- Q: We have talked about the impact of the Holocaust on your life and also this interview, but if I were to ask you to think and describe in one capsule, how do you feel that experience has really shaped your life, what would you say?
- A: That's really a hard question. I can only really say that no matter how hard I try, everything in my life always leads back to the Holocaust and Auschwitz. It's just always, always there beneath everything. Perhaps, it has made me in a strange kind of way I think I'm strong because of it. People always tell me, "Oh, you're so strong." I don't know if I'm strong but I feel I have an endurance that's beyond the average. I can tolerate more things. I have more patience. I appreciate things more because I always know how elusive they can be and how very quickly things could change. That's it.
- Q: For so many years your memories were denied, now that you're working on that much more in a positive way and also trying to work through it in therapy and so on, do you feel that some memories are safer to be buried to be gone?
- A: Yes, I do. I've talked about a lot things and I talk with my therapist about a great many memories and things, but there is -- I find there is some kind of a line. There are certain things I don't want to even try to put to words because I can't. I can't and I don't want to.
- Q: Have you seen those movies that came out -- there was a great debate in the Jewish community too, anyway, do you think that experience can be expressed adequately in popular films or how do you feel about that?
- A: I think it's a two sided thing. It's important to do it. A lot of people will not read the books and not attend the lectures and a lot of people need to have things -- movies that are popular. I think it's always watered down, and somehow it takes away from it. I'm not even expressing it properly but it was so horrible and so awesome and so out of this world that you can dilute it and make it into a popular film, it just loses.
- Q: Is there anything that you would like to say?
- A: I have a lot to learn.
- Q: There are some memorabilia from your life here on the sofa and it would be nice if

maybe you could say something about them maybe one after another.

A: This is Life Magazine from November 1947 and it is an article about me and another little boy who came from Europe to help raise funds for the European war orphans and we're pictured sitting on a step of some sort and behind us are all these clothes that have been bought for us. More clothes than we've ever seen in our life. I'm sitting -- I have long curls. I always say that's probably why they chose me to be this so-called poster child. I notice that I'm wearing a plaid dress which was one of the best dresses in the orphanage and that is the only dress I came with. In the orphanage we wore the same clothing every single day and then for the sabbath we would get a new pretty little dress and then back into our old -- it would get washed and we'd get it back again on Sunday. We didn't have designer jeans or I have to have a blue sweater today or a red sweater tomorrow. We had what we had. I see about five outfits for me with a coat and a hat and Charlie also. We each had a -- I'm holding on to a pink teddy bear and Charlie is holding on to a very nice gray elephant.

Q: And that is the article that Doctor Kilina saw and recognized you?

A: Right. He recognized the name Irene Goodman.

Q: Now which one has the letters?

A: The letter is in that one. On occasion packages would come to the orphanage from America with clothing and shoes and always Mr. Tenzer would bring us Barton's candy and gum which we kids just could not get enough of. One day a shipment came and there was this beautiful red sandals and I had been wearing brown shoes and this plain dress. We wore the same clothing every single day except for Shobot and I really wanted those red shoes desperately. So, when we got to trying them on the shoes were really tight on me but I said "They feel great. They're perfect. I love them." I got them. The next day we were on an outing near Paris and we went on this long walk and I'm walking in my red sandals and before very long I can barely walk because I've got blisters and sores and my feet are bleeding. The shoes don't fit me. The shoes don't fit and the counselor who was with us noticed and looked at my feet and said "Why did you say that they fit?" "I wanted red shoes and they were the only red shoes." I hated my brown shoes. The out shot of the story was they took the red shoes away from me, but they had to buy me shoes and I got the white, white sandals.

Q: So there was a little bit of vanity there?

A: Absolutely.

Q: Here's the letter you sent Rene.

A: Actually, these are two letters that I wrote to Rene after we found him. I could read them.

They're kind of funny. This is written March 5, 1950. "Dear Rene. I thought you had lots of fun. I had lots of fun in school. We saw a play about Esther and (in Hebrew.) Today, I'm going ice skating with my friend." I've drawn a picture of an ice skate. "Love and kisses, Irene."

Q: What's the date on that?

A: March 5, 1950. Now, another letter, but it's not dated. It's probably around the same time. "Dear Rene, I received your letter and I'm glad that you are well and enjoyed your trip to the Tatra mountains. I live near the ocean and soon we will go bathing every day. My school and piano keep me very busy. I'm learning how to ride a bicycle. Dear Rene, I hope you will be together soon with me. Lot's of love and kisses from all of us. Your loving sister, Irene." The English is not so great.

Q: This is another --?

A: This is a little hand-operated music box with an angel at the top on a tree with birds. It belongs to my father and my aunt in Dresden gave it to me when I visited her, and it plays this song in German. "All the Birds are Here Again." That little angel on top has a mandolin and it turns around as the music is playing.

Q: I forgot to ask you one question. Do you have any hobbies?

A: Yes, I love calligraphy. It's just the love of my life. I discovered -- well, I've always loved letters but I wasn't aware of the so-called "art of calligraphy" until about 1978. But, if I look at some of my notebooks from years back I can see even grade school I was making these fancy letters and always printing neatly, taking great pride in my writing. Then, I discovered calligraphy. I used to do it -- I thought I was getting fairly good at it and then this MS came along and kind of cut my career, but I love it so much that I continue doing it with my shaky hand by using weights. I use a mouse stick as well and I look like a person from outer space when I do it but it really brings me a great deal of joy. I love making pictures out of words. I do it especially for friends. I love making cards and I make my neurologist a calendar every year on his birthday and he's got an office full of my work hanging on the walls. You don't see the work now. It's all behind the sofa because we've recently papered here, so everything came down. I think if not for my calligraphy I would lose my sanity.

Q: You have also done poetry?

A: Yes. And I also -- a well kept secret, I do poetry. I started it because Doctor Kestenberg has suggested to me that I write. When I brought her the first poem she said you should really do this. You really have a knack and every time I've done something she has made sure it has gotten into a journal, into a book, into a something. I don't feel I have the talent. I think they're just poems, but she likes them.

Q: Would you be willing to share one or two?

A: I could.

Q: So, these are one or two poems that you have written?

A: Yes, and most of my poems are really a reflection of how I felt as a child because that's how I understood things around me. This particular poem was written -- it was about Rene, my mother and I are going from Theresienstadt and we're on this march to the train that's going to Auschwitz. "The long column painfully marches on a journey to the end surrounded by the darkness black with terror yet untold. Silence shattered by rifle fire, dogs ferociously bark, bodies falling to the ground eventually lie still. The snow so white upon the field is muddy slush beneath my feet. Icy chill invades my bones, fingers aflame with searing pain, weariness engulfs me. Mother quickly prods me on. I hold back my tears and silently march on." This is one that I wrote about a memory I have about hiding among dead bodies. I was six and half years old at the time. "Some nights transport me back to a time where absolute fear was mine. Like a stone between dead bodies I lie holding my breath afraid I'll die. The earth a cold wet gritty slime, stiff limbs with mine intertwine. A shiver or twitch will reveal that I am one who still can feel. I wait with a pounding heart. Will the bullets split it apart? I shut my eyes so they won't see the sadness, fear inside of me."

Q: Thank you.

Conclusion of Interview