

**Interview with Edwarda Rorat**  
**February 25, 1996**

Question: So the easiest thing first, is your name and where are we, please?

Answer: My address, you mean?

Q: Yeah, just general, yeah. Just to identify the tape, that's all. You can say Manhattan, that's enough, if you don't want to give your exact address.

A: Edwarda Rorat, Manhattan, New York.

Q: Dr. Rorat, as I understand it, Rorat wasn't the name you were born with?

A: Yes, this is adopted name.

Q: Explain that to me?

A: I was adopted by the people who saved my life and Rorat is their name. My original name was Edwarda Kleinfeldt(ph).

Q: At what time did you change your name?

A: They adopted me when I was probably 15 or 16.

Q: Who adopted you?

A: The people who saved my life.

Q: Okay, let's get a little more specific here, you were 15 or 16, what precipitated this, what year was this?

A: Why they adopted me? That's a long story, you mean start from the beginning?

Q: You were born in 1935?

A: Oh, I try to hide my age a little bit.

Q: Okay, well we don't need to go back that far, and if you were 15, we're talking 1950?

A: After the war.

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Q: Okay, this interview is to cover really events after the war, so it's, do you remember when the war ended, do you remember hearing about it?

A: Oh, I do remember, yes I remember. People were returning from, the survivors, the underground people and whoever survived was returning and the villagers were happily greeting them, the band was playing and everybody was expecting somebody, so did I. So I do remember that day, I waited that my parents might return. I knew they were dead, but somehow, somehow I thought that it was possible, so that was the day of liberation. Of course they never returned, they were dead. That's how I remember the war.

Q: Did somebody say to you today is the end?

A: Nobody really talked much to me, I mean that's not how the villagers behave and most of the people didn't treat me like I was their equal, I was the, I was the rotten \_\_\_\_\_ and the people who adopted me, I mean, they were hard-working people and they were not affectionate or into psychology or explaining, you know, no one explained anything to me.

Q: Where was this?

A: That was in the village.

Q: Name?

A: Alshanka(ph), it's not on the map, it was very small place.

Q: If we were to look on the map, where, that is a larger city would Alshanka(ph) be near?

A: Oh, the larger city's Lublin(ph), that's the eastern part of Poland. My father chose this area for hiding because it was extremely remote, had no roads, no lights, no schools, no

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offices, no civilization.

Q: How old were you when you started to live in Alshanka(ph)?

A: When my parents were hiding. I'm really not very clear about my age, we had no documents, we had nothing, but when we were in Alshanka(ph), I was a few years old. I don't exactly know, a few years old. I know when they were killed I was seven.

Q: But still you waited for them?

A: Yes, it's very strange what, I don't understand psychologically, yes I waited for them. I mean, strange things remind us. First I waited for them, knowing when they were dead and I also knew the circumstances of their death, but then for the rest of my adult life, not for the rest, until twenty something, I completely eliminated the thought of them ever being there, like I eliminated the fact that I had parents. I don't understand it, maybe that was the way of surviving the trauma.

Q: I need you to help clarify some chronology for me, because I'm a little confused. You were born Kleinfeldt(ph)?

A: Yes.

Q: Then when your parents put you into hiding, was it that time that you were adopted by another family \_\_\_\_\_?

A: Oh no, no, no, after my parents were killed, I was not immediately taken by those people who eventually adopted me. I was with the first, probably two years, with some people who were very cruel and very mean to me, so I don't even like talking about them. Rorat are the

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people who later took me, when I was almost dying. So the first family, I did not mention, the second family is Rorat.

Q: Okay, so the war ended, people are in the streets, there's a band playing, you're waiting for your parents, did you consciously know at that time, did you have information that they were dead?

A: Oh yes, yes.

Q: Because you saw it?

A: Yeah. Well, like I could hear the sound of the guns and I, on some subconscious level, knew that they were my parents because I had reactions, I suddenly couldn't walk, so that was unusual for a child a few years old, so that was immediate reaction to this, yeah, I knew they were not there any more.

Q: So we're at that day, you're standing and waiting for them to come, do you remember what you were wearing, do you remember what it looked like that day, what it smelled like that day?

A: This is after the war, you mean?

Q: Mm-hm, do you remember that day?

A: No, I only remember that the band was playing and everybody was happy, greeting whoever returned and I waited until the whole village already left and I was still waiting and I was very sad. I actually forgot that moment, it just came to me recently, during some activities, that also the band was playing and suddenly the moment came to me. Usually

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when I talk about those things I feel like my larynx is opposing me.

Q: Do you remember what the band was playing?

A: Something like marches, something of the sort.

Q: Were people singing?

A: Oh, I am sure, yes, it was sort of a happy moment.

Q: Were you by yourself or were you with other people?

A: By myself, the usual. The other people did not really associate with me.

Q: You were alone?

A: Yes, I was usually alone after my parents death.

Q: So you were a 10 year old, standing there alone, with all these people celebrating?

A: Let's see, 10? Probably not 10 yet. But I don't know if you understand what being Jewish was, I mean, that was something like being a cockroach or something, I don't know what to compare it to. These people are very anti-Semitic. So no, I was usually alone. That was nothing different.

Q: How long did you wait there with everybody?

A: Probably a few hours.

Q: Then what?

A: And then I went back to my usual, being in the farm.

Q: So tell me what, the war is over, you're no longer . . .

A: In hiding. Yes, no more in hiding and I was this family, old, sick, uneducated people who

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saved my life and who are poor, who work hard, and I also work hard with them. I know that to, I mean it was clear that to win her approval was to work, efficiently and I was needed, they were poor people, so I was always working and no playing, really.

Q: What kind of work did you do?

A: Oh, in the farm, taking care of their cow and finding a pasture for the cow, because they did not have land of their own, so I spent lots of time with the cow alone in the woods. And being eight and later nine or so, preparing food for them when they worked. I had to stand on the stool to reach the stove, I was very small and I stopped growing. So I cooked for them, I cleaned, took care of the little tiny store they had, the grocery, so that's type of work.

Q: At that time, were you aware of what it meant, that the war was over? Did you know that you were no longer in hiding from that time?

A: Yes, yes. I didn't see any Germans any more and I didn't hide any more, yes.

Q: What did that feel like?

A: It felt much safer, but I pretty much, I was pretty much used to danger already. I mean each time I saw Germans, I knew this meant a possible death for me, or possible for the people who are saving me, but my life was always in danger, a peasant could kill me, I understood that being Jewish was the worst thing on earth, so I was pretty much used to it.

Q: So when you no longer had to feel that way and had to feel like you had to hide who you were, did that open something in you?

A: I really don't know, because I don't think I knew how to be happy, how to celebrate

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something. I still was pretty, on the same level, serious-looking kid. I didn't cry, but I didn't laugh either.

Q: So you didn't go out to the cow and say to the cow, look we're free, let's run off together?

A: Probably not. I really didn't, I don't remember being really a child. As far as being a child I only know that I cuddled the cow. That was like feeling she was my mother, probably. But otherwise being pretty serious.

Q: Even when you had the chance to lighten up?

A: I don't really remember moments like that. That's why I don't exactly know how to play. I was in some retreat, can I digress now? I was in some retreat, people obviously with psychological problem go there and the game was to play like little children. The instruction was go on the floor and play like little children and for a moment I said, I wanted to leave the room and they said, where are you going, and I said, I don't know how to play, I really mean it, so I don't want to spoil it to other people. So there, I know it is the grown up \_\_\_\_\_ on the floor on their fours and they were hilarious, how they start playing with pillows, with pulling each other, pushing, falling and all sorts of funny things, it didn't occur to me, no. No, I don't remember being a child like that. Did I express it? I also never had toys. So that was on the same retreat, that there was some sharing and questions were asked, a little similar, like you asking those details and they ask, the idea was to get back to your childhood, so everybody was sharing how their room looked like when they were children, what kind of toys they had, the color of their clothes, lamp, whatever was there and

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I was just listening, and I didn't want to share but they really ask me to, so then I say, sorry, but I never had toys, I slept in the barn or somewhere else outdoor, I had no toys. And I was \_\_\_\_\_ that a few months later, my birthday, big teddy bear arrived, it's over there, you didn't see it. Somebody from the group, I don't know how she found my birthday and my address and said, this is fun, you can still have toys. So that's about toys.

Q: Do you play with the teddy bear?

A: Not really, because I'm not accustomed to playing with any, I never had toys, so there.

Q: A lot of adults have toys.

A: I know, I know, but that's something that one got used to at a certain time and it continues, I never got used to that. I could still pick the teddy bears, but somehow I did not. We're talking about playing right, yeah, so that's about playing, not really much into playing.

Q: You said you didn't have friends then either, after liberation?

A: There was a neighbor girl I remember, about my age, but I didn't have time to play, because they needed me and I never wanted to disappoint the people who took care of me and they were the poorest really, practically, in the village, so no, so I really didn't play, I was needed, I needed to help her around the house, the woman.

Q: At the time of liberation, after the war then, was there any effort on your behalf or on someone else's behalf for you to leave that village or that family and identify yourself as a Jew again, different \_\_\_\_?

A: Yes, such opportunity did come. There were people, Jews with organizations that were



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taking children and they wanted to take me, but I was so much attached already to these people and I already was becoming anti-Semitic myself, that I did not have desire to leave them, actually I didn't want to.

Q: What were these people's names?

A: Rorat.

Q: Oh, these were the Rorats?

A: Yes, the first family, we didn't talk about it.

Q: Okay. Did they formerly adopt you?

A: Yes. Rorat, that's how my name became.

Q: When that happened, did you decide at that point you were no longer a Kleinfeldt(ph)?

A: Actually I was no longer Kleinfeldt(ph) during the war, they changed my name to disguise the Jewishness, so I had some other name, Alshevskaph), it was the name of the village, so they gave it to me, so I was no longer Kleinfeldt(ph) any way, I was Alshevskaph), just any name.

Q: So when you were a kid and at that point when you didn't have to hide any more, what was your identity, who did you think you were, who were you for you?

A: This was difficult, but I don't think I had time, or thought much about it, I mean, with the first family, my only occupation was to keep alive and somehow withstand the abuse. With this family I wanted to be helpful, so I was either working, doing something with them, and then I started going to school, so my life was pretty busy. I don't think I thought much about

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my identity or anything and most likely I tried to block my past, most likely because I did realize sometime later on, that I eliminated my parents entirely, so most likely I also try not to think of anything much. I don't know what a child does. Maybe this is survival methods.

Q: Did you identify with being Jewish?

A: Well the people reminded me of this every moment of my life. Not only that I'm Jewish, but that I'm scabby Jewish, it doesn't translate exactly into English, does it? Scabby, lousy, rotten, dirty Jew, all those things. So yes, I did know I was different, I was Jewish.

Q: So at the point that you didn't have to hide this any more, was that at least a feeling for you of, like the equivalent of coming out, of saying okay, yes I'm a Jew and yes that's fine.

A: No, I never thought was fine, because nobody else thought it was fine and I did not think it was fine. I actually felt very inferior, very ugly, very inferior.

Q: You were saying that there were efforts made after the war, on different Jewish organizations, what was going on that you were aware of?

A: Well, I had my sister, not with me, but she was already with Jewish people in Lublin, which is the bigger city and she wrote me that we have an opportunity to leave Poland and possibly go to United States, but I was separated with my sister, we were not close and now her asking me to join her wasn't, it wasn't, I don't know, it didn't mean as much to me as being with this woman who was taking care of me. I didn't want to hurt her feelings and somehow I was not very much concerned with my sister. I knew that she will do all right, she was older than I, stronger and everything and maybe their methods were not the best, the

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people who came to the village to talk me into leaving the village, leaving my adoptive parents. They didn't talk to me, I mean, they tried to kidnap me because they knew I don't want to leave, so they either tried to kidnap, or if they contacted me they were saying the worst things about the villagers, so that didn't play with me, so no, so that's why I didn't go. I didn't leave them.

Q: How long did you stay in the village with them?

A: I mean, in their house 13, 14, but later there were no more schools, even to that age, I have to walk several miles to school, there was no school in that little place, but at 14 there was not even enough school in the next, I don't know how you call it, next village and so I had to go to Lublin and then I \_\_\_\_\_ them very early, so that I was with them until the age of 14 and later only occasionally for the next number of years.

Q: Okay, so essentially you came to adolescence after the war?

A: Yes.

Q: You matured after the war, you were a kid before that?

A: Yes, mm-hm.

Q: You said that you went to school outside of the village, can you just tell me what kind of school it was, what you would do every day? You'd get up, you'd say hello to the cow, you'd ...

A: I usually, I mean I started going to school in the village where we lived, that was during the war and that was pretty traumatic to me because the teacher was Ukrainian and he was, I

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was the only Jewish kid in the class and he hated my guts. He absolutely couldn't stand me. He was a cruel person altogether, he used to beat up the other children. But I was so good in learning, in behaving, in everything, that he'd no excuse to hit me, there was no excuse and he absolutely couldn't stand a Jewess, so he continuously used to just call me something, it was sarcastic, it was unpleasant and eventually he did hit me. And that was the time I could not be hit any more, that was sort of a saturation point in my life. So I came home and I said I will not go to that school again, that's why I had to march several miles to another school, rather than going to this one. So it was pretty difficult for a few years old child to go through school and forest, not a single person there. I had to leave early, before sunrise, I mean it was dark and go by myself. There were wild animals around and walk, so I wasn't easy. And then after school, the same thing, walking several miles by myself, but the good thought was that studying always came very easy to me compared to the other children that it did feel good to be a good student and my adoptive parents were very proud of me. But that again, it really, nothing was ever simple. When I was too good there, the children were jealous and they also could call me, oh she's so good because she's Jewish and almost being the best student was almost like an insult that that's because Jews, you know, they are so manipulative and so shrewd and whatever. They turn it in \_\_\_\_\_. The teachers like me, but the children were not on my side when I was good. Anyway.

Q: Did their parents ever try and get you out of the school?

A: Oh no, no, they were very, very conscious of education, even though they were illiterate,

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they felt I have to be educated. They believe in that.

Q: What about the parents of the other children, was there any resentment by them?

A: I really don't know. The other children had hard time learning. I suppose because of my background I had it easier, my parents were educated and that probably was in my genes. So I had it real easy, I was delayed with my schooling because of the war and the way I was catching up, I was practically flying through those classes. So that's why I could finish really on time, otherwise it wouldn't have been possible.

Q: I want you to help me get a picture, and actual, so I can make a little movie \_\_\_\_\_ and describe, what kinds of trees were in the woods, did you walk through the woods, was it dense, was it dark, were they poplar trees? Take me there.

A: Okay, I'm leaving the house when it's still dark and walking through the fields of wheat and potatoes and probably mostly wheats and you know, the wheats the bread is made of and nothing else, no roads, just tiny separation between the, tiny roads like only for walking, the roads that people made walking to the church, so it's not really a road, is a passage, that's what you call it, it's a passage, most of the people in summer were bare feet, so did I, so in summer bare feet actually, I had no shoes and in winter I wore some shoes but the tiny walk, I mean you couldn't even see from distance, tiny road. Not even enough for bicycle, just for walking. So part of this are wheats, potato fields and part of this just forest, dark forests. Often was the wild pigs, whatever you call and wild dogs. I was pretty scared of all those animals, sometimes I was so scared, I climbed the tree and waited until they disappear, or

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when I carry some food with me, I gave it to dogs and they ate it and then I felt safe with them. And in the winter it was deep snow, sometimes up to my shoulders or more, I have to part the snow with my arms. In summer it was not too bad, I walked bare feet and I loved the blue sky and lots of poppies, you know the red flowers? They grow there in abundance in fields. And the birds were singing so I think this is my love of nature. Did I describe my walks?

Q: Sounds like a really nice part of your day.

A: That was after the war of course, yeah.

Q: And then you would get to the school, what did the school look like, was it a wooden building or what?

A: Yeah, the school, when I walked several miles to this other place, this was already better place than my school in my village. It was a small room, nothing really special. I particularly like classes of religion. The priest was giving them and he was teaching of all those miracles that happen in Catholic religion. Of course I was educated and brought up actually in Catholic experience, so I was learning this. Of all the miracles that happen in Catholicism and I suppose this was pleasant to me. Maybe I thought that miracles will happen to me too, I don't know. And I was reading all the books on the subject. So actually this is my most pleasant thought, the priest. He was not anti-Semitic, at least didn't let me feel it.

Q: Did you feel any conflict between, being brought up as a Jew that you were not to

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worship idols in Catholicism with it's love of idols?

A: A conflict within myself? No, I was very curious to learn this Catholic religion, it was very soothing to me, I like the miracles and as I told to you, I eliminated the thought of my parents from my mind and I did not remember if my parents were religious or not, I don't remember any of that. So I was trying to learn what I was taught.

Q: Did you pray for a miracle?

A: I sort of did, yes, I remember at one time I was such a good girl that it was my way to be loved by these people and I was so much in a hurry to prepare for them the meal when they were returning from working hard in the field. I wanted to cook for them and I lost the key and I thought, if I don't find that key, how will I cook for them, that thought was unbearable. I just didn't know what to do, that I behaved in such a way that I win them. I don't know if I prayed for it. I really don't remember praying, don't forget that I was brought up Catholic and then I was educated in my very sensitive years as a Communist, so when I think of it now, it all get little blurred and confused and then I came to this Capitalistic country and became a doctor, so altogether nothing goes together really.

Q: Okay, you're in this Catholic school, you're praying for a miracle of the finding of the key. The key gets found, you know there's some validity to this thing.

A: Oh yes, yes, yes, yes. But I really don't, I must tell you I don't dwell much on my past life. Actually I pretty much avoided talking about myself altogether, so by not talking about it I guess I don't remember how I, did I pray? No, all I wanted, not to be called a dirty, lousy

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Jewess.

Q: Did that happen? Did people stop calling you that?

A: Well, I was moving on to better school, then eventually went into Lublin, so no, yeah, they did stop calling me openly that, that changed, yes.

Q: How many people lived in the village that you were in?

A: Even that hard for me to tell now, maybe 50? It was a very small place and they had their children and so on, but it was very tiny village.

Q: So were they individual farms that were spread out or?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And these were dairy farms, primarily?

A: It was individual farming \_\_\_\_\_ no farms, like my family had only one cow and that was actually just for their survival, not for selling. They were very poor people, the only one richer man was the one that initially took me. The one who was killing Jews and I was, really a nightmare to think about. So he was the richer one yes.

Q: And then a nicer family took you?

A: The Rorats, yes.

Q: How did that come to be?

A: You want me to talk about that?

Q: It seems that this is very important for you.

A: The first family who took me right after my parents were killed, they were forced to take



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me, this was the order from superior, from another, that's a different story still. But he and his daughter who mostly, whom I mostly remember as the worst person on earth, hated me with passion, and all my complexes really I think, date from that period. Her name was Wanda. She was very unattractive and they called her spinster those days. And most of the time I spent with her, they asked me to do the work of adult person, like bringing water from the river uphill, carrying it, I was this skinny, undernourished, seven year old kid carrying water, I spilled it most often, probably. Washed dishes, and taking care of cows, cleaning and they didn't even give me food, I remember eating the water where you wash the dishes, I found out this \_\_\_\_, you know. So the water that the dishes and pots were washed, that's what I was eating. I had no room to sleep, I slept on the floor and very soon I was infested with the lice and fleas and any possible thing. Mostly lice, they were crawling all over me, so yeah, I was covered with scabs and I was ugly and skinny and everything and she was very cruel. She always threatened me with the knife and I do have many knife scars from her, that was the way to talk to the Jewess was the knife poking.

Q: You have scars now?

A: Mm-hm, yes.

Q: That are visible?

A: Yeah, they are.

Q: May I see?

A: Yeah. Let's see, you want more light? \_\_\_\_\_ mangled this finger once,

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almost came off, by the knife, you can see the scar go around. It healed, it healed beautifully, I remember holding it together, otherwise the tip of the finger would have come off. Practically \_\_\_\_\_, it did heal nicely, though. \_\_\_\_\_ the knife you can see, there, protecting myself, practically each one. Let' see, where is it, it's my, part of the hand practically came off. And also the way she talks, I think most of those complexes are from there, this was one \_\_\_\_\_. She also told me that my lies will drown me in the water, and I believed is I had such a big lies, so she thought they will just pull me and drown me and then I was so scared, became so scared of the water that I don't swim to this day. And altogether she was telling me that I should go to ghetto like all those ugly Jews who are walking, we saw them going through the village to ghettos and she said I should be going with them and I should die. I mean all this, this was the worst period of my life and so you ask how the other people took me. After, I don't know if it was year or year and half or two, I'm not clear, that I became very sick and couldn't even walk so she just kicked me out and I was outside of the house, I couldn't walk, couldn't get up and the other family find out that the Jewess, that's how they referred to me, is dying. And she decided to take me, I don't know why. The Germans killed her son, maybe that's the reason. So that's when these people, Rorat, took me and helped me to recover. That's shortly speaking, what happened.

Q: When I watched the video tape before, they rescued you from being attacked by geese, is that right?

A: Mm-hm. Yes, yeah I'm still afraid of geese. Yeah, you know I stopped growing after. I

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actually was not growing until the age of 18 so this was a time I was very small and skinny, almost retarded in growth, fortunately only in physical growth, so even geese attacked me when I was walking through the village and they were, I mean, so loud and so aggressive with their wings hitting me and they make noises. So I don't think that's so unusual, but the unusual thing is that he, I recall later Mr. Rorat was telling to Mrs. Rorat, you know, there were about 20 geese on top of her, hitting her and biting, and that noise and after I scared them all her face was dry, not even one tear. So they find it very strange and I find it strange too, but I knew, I mean I do remember I never cry, there was no, why to cry, there was no one to dry my tears, so I didn't cry and I didn't laugh either.

Q: When did you start crying?

A: I remember crying, yes, I remember crying, I think I was already in \_\_\_\_\_ and I must have been 17 or 18 year old and I saw a Russian movie and I do distinctly remember the movie was about a boy who lost his parents and all his life, he didn't really lose it, somehow he was separated or whatever and the whole movie was about how much he wanted to meet his wife, not wife, his mother. He dreamed about her, he was obsessed how he would like to see his mother. I don't remember circumstances that he was separated and at the end of the movie he finds his mother and this is so rejoiceful for him, he's so happy and the reason I am telling about it, this is the first time I cry, I remember that I was trying to stop myself from crying, it was in the movie and I tried so hard that I had laryngeal swelling after I came from the movie, I could not speak at all for a while. It was so powerful to me

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that he did find his mother, I obviously identify with it, how much I would like to have mine.

So I think this was the first time I cry, probably 18 years of age. And then later I learned that, I learned crying yeah, it's pretty nice to cry. I only cry when I talk about my past, these days and since I rarely talk about myself, about the past, I rarely cry, unless situation like speaking with you on the subject or on some psychologically oriented retreats that I started frequenting, yeah.

Q: When did you start doing that?

A: Like probably like 10 years ago or so.

Q: What caused you to, at that point, do this?

A: Excuse me?

Q: Why 10 years ago, what prompted you 10 years ago to start?

A: I don't know, I mean maybe I was going through some sort of, I wouldn't call it crisis, but maybe aging, so I became interested in Eastern philosophy. I said that's the only one missing, let's see, I was born Jewish, I was brought up Catholic, educated Communist, then came to this Capitalistic country, so somehow eastern philosophy was needed to bring me back to some sort of tranquillity I guess. So that's the retreat I found, which was run by the guru.

Q: \_\_\_\_\_?

A: His name was Guru \_\_\_\_\_, that's in Massachusetts and I have been going there for several years, I don't any more, I don't get attached to anything in my life, that's

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another, do you know about that? Did I talk about this or not? Yeah, I cannot have relationships, I cannot get attached to anybody. I just keep moving. Going on somewhere, or always running away from, so I don't go to that retreat any more.

Q: But it let you cry.

A: Yeah, oh in that place I cried, yes, they encourage that.

Q: So now you don't cry. Then you were crying.

A: I do with you, yes.

Q: You don't want any other reasons for crying?

A: One could cry when one is happy, I suppose.

Q: Do you?

A: Probably not, no, no. The tears only go when I talk about my past.

Q: What about in the movies?

A: No, because I'm very well controlled and since there are other people in the movies, I wouldn't allow myself. I am very good at controlling myself, I'm very good at denying myself anything that I feel I should. Let's see what else I'm good at. Not getting attached to anyone, whom I like in particular.

Q: Why is that good?

A: I don't know if it's good, but I do not get attached, so I don't get hurt that way. Maybe that's the explanation. Yes. So I do not stay in relationship, I don't stay in anything. That's what I just mentioned about the retreat, it was wonderful to me and it had to end, like

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everything else.

Q: How long have you lived in this apartment?

A: Well that's the stable place, I live here since I came to this country in 1960. I always thought that I will move somewhere that somehow, I don't know, I don't really plan my life, I just go with the flow, so nothing happens, I'm here.

Q: Well, let's go backwards then again, we'll go to rewind, because we, you said you were, you know you were born Jewish, raised Catholic, then became a Communist, we haven't gotten there yet.

A: Educated Communist, yes.

Q: So we haven't gotten there yet.

A: Sorry. My life is very long and very complicated.

Q: Come on, you're not so old, so. Okay, so we're still back, it's after liberation, you're going to the Catholic school, you like the priest because you can pray and there are miracles and you find a key and this validates that there are miracles. Until when did you stay in this village going to the Catholic school?

A: Until the age of 14, that's the end of this school we call this \_\_\_\_\_, I mean the elementary school, you finish when you are 14, so that was the end of that one.

Q: And then?

A: Then I went to Lublin, which is big city and again my, Rorat put me in Catholic school. They were Catholics and I was the only Jewish person in this Catholic school and that was a

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private Catholic school, we had no penny to pay for it.

Q: How did you pay for it then?

A: This is, this is, really, this moment I also recall by being in this retreat, they had those different eastern tricks, I shouldn't call it that way, that you meditate and sort of empty your mind and that's why the memories might come and that's how it happened, that this moment came to me, that I did know I have to go to school because I would not disappoint my foster parents and I don't know how she was planning to do this. We did need the money, so here I'm in the school and I don't know how it came to me that I had this courage, determination or what, I went to the, I went to see the, how do you call the person who's really in charge of the whole school, the principal, principal. And I do remember entering his office, since I was very tiny, as I told you I wasn't growing. I remember his desk seemed so huge that when I think of his desk it almost seems like a skyscraper in New York to me now, it was so huge and since I was so small I only could see the desk, I couldn't even see his face, he was sitting behind it and he must have a hard time seeing me also, because I remember he stood up from his desk and looked down at me and ask what I want, I mean probably children never go to see principal, I somehow made my way to his office and there I am. So he ask what I want and I told him I need to be in this school, I have to get the education, but my foster parents have no money. He said, but this is private school and I said I really don't know what I can do but I don't have money and I suppose he must have been touched somehow that he allowed me to stay in that school, not only stay in the school, but also in the

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dormitory, which was also private and need to be paid and that was also without money. So that, that's just that. I have moments in my life that are difficult to explain, he is one of them.

Also the way, why I wasn't killed, that's another difficult moment to explain. So there. So I went for two years without paying a penny, to this Catholic school, yes.

Q: Were you also good in that, a good student there?

A: Yes, excellent.

Q: What subjects were you really good at?

A: In everything, in everything, you know, this was my way to, I know this was my way to win the approval, the same, anything I do, I work very hard to win approval and I knew that teachers like you very much if you learn what they were teaching. So I did. I study hard and I was always best in class so the teachers love me, yes. That was my Catholic school in Lublin. I have some sad thoughts from this, however. I could see my difference. This was private Catholic school. The children were sort of well off, nicely dressed. They were receiving visitors, their families and I never had visitors, it was too expensive and too long trip for my foster parents to visit. So I had no visitors, I had no nice clothes. So I guess I was, started understanding a little more so this was rather sad for me. That's my Lublin Catholic years.

Q: You still seem sad to me.

A: Because we talking about my past.

Q: But even when you talk about the present and not having attachments that sounds sad.



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A: Oh, now we are in the present?

Q: No, we're flipping around, I'm not very \_\_\_\_\_ person.

A: Yes.

Q: You said too, I mean you alluded to that sometimes you wonder why you weren't killed.

A: Oh, I don't wonder about the Communists are we ready for the Communist period?

Q: We're ready for the Communists, we're ready for any period you're ready for.

A: Well, so the next, when I was probably 16, I suddenly was in the Communist school in different city.

Q: Hold it, hold it, we haven't gotten there, we're still, you haven't graduated from this . . .

A: Two years, yes. I didn't graduate but the opportunity arrived to go to another place.

Q: Okay, while you were in the Catholic school . . .

A: In Lublin.

Q: In Lublin and living in the dormitory and this whole thing, who did you tell other kids you were, I'm sure, kids always ask each other about themselves.

A: Oh yeah, they knew, in Poland, in eastern part of Poland where I was, nobody asked the question, they look and you knew, they immediately knew I was Jewish, I looked different. I have brown eyes, brown, curly hair. All the Catholics over there have blue eyes and blonde, straight hair. There was no question, they all knew I was Jewish and orphaned.

Q: How did they treat you?

A: By this time I think sort of better, but I was so much poorer, I didn't dress the way they

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were. I think they had their own cliques.

Q: Did you have friends?

A: I don't really remember, because this was such a different environment. No, I don't, yeah actually I did, now that I recall, yes I was friendly with one girl, she was crippled, she walked with the, what do you call it?

Q: Crutches?

A: Crutches, yes. So yes I was friends with her, she had a very nice family. I don't remember why she was crippled. I think something congenital. Yes, so I was friends with her. So you ready for the Communist?

Q: I'm interested what it was like to have a friend, friendly?

A: Honestly it was much nicer, but I wasn't really like everybody else, I learned to be secretive, I had to be secretive during the war, not to talk about myself, be extremely careful, that I am now one of the farmer's children, had to pretend to strangers and of course if German would come to class. That I became, I just was secretive. You cannot be that friendly when you're closed in and I suppose that's where my custom is, from those years that I ask other people to talk about themselves and I do not talk about me.

Q: But it was a time, it was after the end of the war, you didn't have to be secretive any more.

A: Yes, but this became a custom, this became me, not to trust, not to say something that I shouldn't have say. And this perpetuates.

Q: Okay, the Communists came along. Well tell me how you went from the one school to

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the next, what happened there?

A: I mean the way it happened is that, in this part of Poland, this is closer to the mountain, I suppose there was not much iodine and my thyroid started growing. That's all what I needed, having these things growing in front of me and the doctor in school said, I have to be near the sea, that's the Baltic Sea, Polish, that's the north and there was no way I could afford to go anywhere, any place and strangely enough, this was the time I received letter from Stettin, which is near the Baltic Sea, the north, from some very distant cousin from my real parents. Distant cousin, though. She survived the war and found out that I was alive and that's what they did, she wrote me a letter, would I like to visit her in Stettin? So, to make long story short, I did take a long trip by train across Poland from Lublin to Stettin, with a little trepidation because I knew she was Jewish and I had very strange feelings about the Jewish people by now. I acquire anti-Semitism by osmosis or by whatever. I have never seen nice looking Jews during the war, I only saw then in hiding, with beards, smelling and wearing awful clothes and of course being reminded that being Jewish is the worst thing that can happen to anyone. So I had this strange feeling so I am going to feel about meeting her. And then I did meet her, it was nice in some way and difficult in others and her husband was a true Communist, they put me in the Communist school. So from now on I was in the Communist school.

Q: You said you had trepidation about meeting these people, you didn't feel good about Jews, you were anti-Semitic and so forth, so when you did meet them, what was your feeling

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then?

A: Well they spoke Yiddish and somehow that language I find very difficult to tolerate, especially that I start having friends who are visiting me at times, and I was actually ashamed that there was Yiddish spoken around, that this is openly Jewish home and I saw him reading Jewish newspaper and somehow I felt aversion toward this. I have seen during the war that the Jews that were killed had these papers with them. So this was the difficult part.

Q: Did you feel any recognition of part of yourself?

A: No. Also my upbringing was different, I grew up in the village in poverty that you can not imagine and they were older, I was by then probably 16. I don't know their age, they sort of look old. They survived in Siberia the war. So now the Communist indoctrination started in school.

Q: Where was your sister during all this time?

A: My sister was in America.

Q: And what happened with all the Jewish relief agencies that had been trying to get a hold of you?

A: Oh, that was in Lublin \_\_\_\_\_ was already over with.

Q: They gave up?

A: Yeah, now I was with my distant cousin.

Q: How did she find you?

A: I don't know how she found me but she was trying to tell me that my parents were highly

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educated, that I come from such a grand tradition and she, I never had enough listening about my parents, I mean, she was very distant cousin, but she did know my mother, or remember her and knew of my father and she had such wonderful manners, she was well brought up. I was brought up by cow, I mean. The way she spoke, this was someone with education and mannerism and so on, so that part I admire, she spoke beautifully and knew literature and art and times before the war, so from that it was different for me, yes, but I did miss my adopted peasants and eventually I brought them to Stettin and I just moved, living with them.

Q: You lived with the Rorats, in Stettin?

A: Yeah, I brought them to Stettin, like all across the Poland they came and this was city that was rather overwhelming for them at first, but we lived together.

Q: What was your life like there, did you work or go to, or only go to school, or . . .

A: Initially I went to school yes, when I lived with Barbara, that's my Jewish cousin, I had to take care of her children and there was difficult to study, you know, it's all very long, I don't want to bore you with that, but it sort of, now I was \_\_\_\_\_ school and there was some Jewish children too. Jews and non-Jewish and Communist as you know, so now it should have been all right, but again I mean I was different with my background, I was still clinging to my Catholicism. I was brought up in this poverty in the woods, I must have been like a wild child, so again I didn't exactly fit. This was the time that the girls really were noticing boys and being, playing, I didn't know how to play. I didn't really have time because now again I had to win approval of Barbara, my Jewish cousin, she expected me to

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return home early to take care of her children, so with the boys, I didn't know they exist until  
I was about 18 I guess, so this is still before the boy . . .

**End of Tape 1**

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### **Tape 2**

A: You see, with Communism it becomes again difficult because now I had to hide my true identity of my parents because Communist \_\_\_\_\_ well, let me start from the beginning. I had to be on scholarship since I had no money, I had to have some money for staying alive, so I needed scholarship and scholarship they would only give if I come from either working class or peasant class. Farmers, if they knew where I truly come from I would get nothing, I might even be persecuted for those, these were the Stalin days, you know \_\_\_\_\_, yes Stalin days, yes. So now I have to really try to hide my true origin and this was a little difficult because now I was with my Jewish cousins, so the whole thing was so complicated I always have to pretend that I am the peasant's daughter and I didn't quite look like peasant, even though I was brought up, I mean I didn't exactly look and behave, when it's something that one inherits I suppose, the manners of a certain class I guess, so this was very, this was at times very difficult to such an extent that the members of the, you see the children are a member of the youthful Communist organization, the older of course are the true Communists, so they call me eventually and ask, well I had to explain the truth, I have to tell the truth, yes I was adopted, true I lied, I was adopted, my parents did exist, aha, but you survived. So this is suspicious, how you survived, right, the Germans had the order of killing Jews whenever they found them and children too, so here I tell the real story, I must tell you, I never learn how to lie, I'm very bad at it, so how did it happen and I had to tell them the truth, that the German came into the hiding, dragged the parents, killed

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them and looked at me, thought I was pretty and they didn't kill me, so that sounds too naive and too ridiculous, they didn't believe it, right? They didn't and something didn't work and the whole thing was so ridiculous, how could it possibly be something suspicious when I was six or seven at the time of that, how could I? So then I became angry because I do have my temper when I let it and I said, all right, I collaborated, and that really finish it, but they were upset with me that this was the arrogant way of me to answer and it really aggravated me so that's what I remember, that for a long time I had to hide that I am actually Jewish. As a peasant it was much better for me, but eventually this come out, I mean they find out my Jewish cousins, oh blah, blah, so I had to tell the truth, that I am Jewish and I was not killed, I don't know why, but it really was at times very difficult with the Communism, I had a very bad influence at home because my cousin was not Communist, her husband was, she was not and neither were my peasants, Rorat, so I had that influence at home and hear the propaganda at school, so I really, I had problems with that and then since I was the best student, I of course had to be in the forefront of the organization and everything and they ask me to report on other kids from the class, to report if they have family in America or maybe or so, oh I have to also hide that I had sister in America so that \_\_\_\_\_. They were so strict that, the Communists that is, that no one should have contact with the Imperialistic, rotten, Capitalistic country, so of course I had to keep it secret that I had sister there. It wasn't easy to keep all those secrets. So they called me once and asked me to bring the information from the class and I never learned how to lie and I did not learn how to be diplomatic. The



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people who brought me up were not diplomatic, the villagers. So I said no, I will not be spy.

That was not the way to answer. If it was now I would and then I wouldn't of course. Since I was so direct and so straight, I said I will not be spy, so he slapped me and I have hard time with being slapped. I had enough of that in my past. So there, that's the Communist years.

Q: How long were you in the school?

A: For two years, until I finish, this is different system, in there it's when you finish 18, you finish the, what do you call it here, \_\_\_\_\_, and then after that you're ready to go to the University. So that was until the age 18 and then I went to medical school and I was Communist of course.

Q: Why did you go to medical school?

A: It was not my decision. I really did, I was not used to decide anything in my life, I mean I didn't have opportunity to decide, it was decided for me, right, when did I have a voice for anything. So when I finished school at 18 I had no idea what I want to do, I never knew how to make any decisions. But since I was so good again in school the teachers were saying I should go to medical school because this is needed in after war Poland, they had no doctors, Poland was, as you know, nonexistent practically, all destroyed, damaged, bombed. And they needed doctors, so that's what the teachers said, I should go into medicine and it's competitive, it's difficult to get in and I probably have a chance, I should. Yeah, I do remember now, I wanted to be a teacher for some reason. If I need to study I mean, then I would become a teacher, I think, or maybe veterinarian, I did love animals. But they say no

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they don't need veterinarians, they have enough teachers and I should go to medical school. So I did. I always follow what I was told and I was actually hoping that I will not pass the competitive exam. But I did pass competitive exam. And then I was hoping, maybe they will not accept me because then the Communists have to approve you, if you're good or not, after I pass the competitive exam, then I have to face the board of Communists. And I was hoping maybe then I flunk and I almost did, almost did. Because they ask some questions about the political system and something, it was give and take. And I did answer truthfully, almost every, not almost, practically everybody was disappointed with Communism and so was I, but you don't say it to them, right, if you want to be admitted to medical school or to anywhere, but I told the truth and they were absolutely shocked because no one who has any brain would do this. I remember they were sort of bored with interviewing and here I come and they all lifted their head and I do remember they ask if it is the Communist organization that taught me that honesty. You see, they were, and they were sure I would say yes, that I learned this in Communist organization, but no I didn't give them the satisfaction. I said no, I learn it from my foster parents, that I always have to be truthful and that was the end of interview and there were several other students sent in there and after we left they say, okay good-bye Edwarda, they will never take you to medical school, how can you answer in such a truthful way, that's not the way to do it. But they were impressed with my frankness and this actually they need, they always wanted to have good students in the Communist organization and they did try to recruit somebody like me, so yeah, they did take me, in spite

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of my not really wanting to. So I end up in medical school, that was next.

Q: What was that experience like?

A: It was very difficult for me at the beginning because the first year or so in Polish medical school is a lot of the basic sciences and also seeing the cadavers and doing autopsy on them and I could not tolerate this. I have seen enough cadavers in my childhood. You know, the German killing, I have seen so many dead people and I had a very hard time with it.

Q: What happened the first time you were confronted with a cadaver?

A: Oh for me this wasn't the first time, I had seen many before.

Q: I meant in medical school.

A: Yeah, I did not like that memory to come alive. I didn't like it and I was hoping that I will flunk and be thrown out.

Q: Well let's get to that moment, the first time you walked into a classroom, operating theater, whatever, in medical school and there's a cadaver.

A: Well I probably gasp. Remember I told you, I learned to hide my emotions too well and I just had to get over this.

Q: You didn't throw up, you didn't go screaming and run out of the room?

A: Oh no, I don't do such things, no never in my life did I allow myself to scream or behave out of expected.

Q: How about when you're alone, do you allow yourself to do those things?

A: No. No, became like a robot.

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Q: You mean if I left this room right now, you wouldn't say okay, I'm going to start screaming?

A: No.

Q: Get rid of her, I'm glad she's out of here, but \_\_\_\_\_?

A: No, no, it's such a part of me, it's so ingrained in me that I have to be accepted that I couldn't scream because the neighbors wouldn't accept it, remember? I have neighbors, very acoustic apartments, no, so I couldn't do that. That's from my childhood, I have to be accepted.

Q: Okay, so we're in medical school, Communist medical school, whatever that may mean, I have no idea.

A: Yeah, well like it was very difficult to study, it's a very demanding, very demanding and I of course had to be on scholarship, otherwise I had no means of supporting myself. There were no jobs like here students can get jobs, there were no such thing. So I had to behave in the Communist organization and always have to be best student, so that's very difficult. I had to really study, otherwise I would lose scholarship.

Q: Is this the first time you had to actually study in school?

A: Well I actually did study before, but here yes, it was hard for me also. And by then my sister started sending me little \_\_\_\_\_ from here and once they saw me wearing nylon stockings and I lost scholarship and I really, well I got it back later because I had to go to the dean of school and told him, if I don't have the scholarship, then I cannot study, so

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then they gave me back, but I had to still be secretive about my contact with America. And what else. I mean they did ask me to give something back for the scholarship, I have to do something for the system. And what I choose was to teach in lower classes, being a teacher, or teach illiterates, I was very good at that because I did teach my foster mother how to read and write, she was illiterate. I taught her that in her old age, so I was already good at that, so I now I was teaching illiterates to give back something to the Communist system. So I was either teaching in classes or teaching illiterates or going to help with the removing the bricks and ruins wherever it needs, area of the city needs to be cleaned, they didn't have enough workers, they wanted students to help and of course they want who got scholarship. So I would go to try to remove the bricks and all the debris that was there. Or at the time of, how do you call, when the wheat is grown, when the peasants harvest, the time of harvest I would go to the villages to help. Also at the time when potatoes are ready, I don't know how that is called, that the farmers needed help. So that's what I would do.

Q: Were you politically active at all?

A: I did what I need to do, but I was very resistant. So it was mostly like a social world that I did, not speeches or anything like that, I couldn't possibly do that.

Q: Meetings?

A: Meetings, yes, but I was not active in that. They always recruited me and liked to show that I am in the organization because I'm a good student, but I was not active, I could not make speeches, I didn't believe in it, so just marching in the very important holiday May 1st.

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Marching with the red flag and wearing green shirt and red tie and of course doing the social work, that was the part of my organization.

Q: During this time you said your sister had been writing you and sending you, well I don't think that was, the nylon stockings \_\_\_\_\_, but . . .

A: Yeah, yeah not much, a little bit, but I had to be careful with it because I had to pretend of course I had no contact with America and my cousin's husband, Barbara in Stettin, he was a true Communist, not the one just did it because to survive, he was one of the very few who truly believed in it and he was really a wonderful man in a way that I mean giving, honest, ethical and not opportunist, so I really like him, but when he told me that I have to return my sister letters, that was a little hard to swallow, but then I stopped living with them, so that was under control.

Q: How did your sister get in touch with you?

A: She was writing.

Q: Yeah, but how did that come to be, how did she know how to find you?

A: Oh, I didn't tell you that. My sister came to this country with the help of Jewish organizations, and that's how Barbara found her, through Jewish organizations, so actually my sister told her that I'm in the village and gave her my address, that's how Barbara wrote me letters. And later I suppose they did communicate with each other. Two of the letters were probably not just to me, maybe to Barbara also. So that's the Communist time.

Q: Okay, so your distant cousin's husband said you have to return the letters and then you

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moved from their home to the Rorat's?

A: I brought the Rorat to Stettin and then I lived with them, of course very modestly, we find them some little job that he was a, how do you call, he lived in the building, in the office building which closes at night and they needed a man to close the doors and take care of it, it was like a superintendent of the office building. That's where we lived, in a basement apartment, the basement was pretty nice, so I lived with them. They had the apartment and some little salary.

Q: This was in the, in what years?

A: In Stettin, I finished medical school in '59, so this was in the fifties.

Q: You stayed with them until you finished medical school?

A: Yes.

Q: Were you happy then?

A: Well by then we started having problems because by then obviously I was a woman and I had, we are not going into this, but toward the end of my regular school I met a man who loved me to death and I did love him, but the problem was she probably would never accept anybody for me. She had a terrible marriage and she didn't believe in marriages and nobody was good enough for me and he was 10 years older and divorced and she hated his guts, so we started having problems, yes.

Q: This is Mrs. Rorat?

A: Yes, mm-hm.

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Q: Why did you say we're not going into this?

A: I mean because you wouldn't want to hear beginning, how it was, what happens when I grew up, right? When I developed and this would be another chapter, another book maybe, so I skipped that and just told you, this is the circumstances that I did, met that man who was probably for me or maybe not. I married him, but I never stay in relationships so I didn't stay in this one either.

Q: But I'm interested in that process of, becoming a woman is becoming aware in a very definite way, you become aware of your body, you become aware of other people's reaction to you, it changes everything.

A: Yes.

Q: And because you were older when this happened, I would think you would be more intellectually able to look at what was happening and reflect on that.

A: I had very difficult time to become mature and all that, I wasn't prepared for this, I mean my foster parents she never talked to me about what it is to be a woman, what it is about men and I wasn't prepared for any of this, how you relate to men and don't forget, in my important years I was a Catholic, so that's against sex, sex is dirty. So that was pretty tough for me, that period. And it didn't much help that I was raped first time when I was a virgin, so that didn't really help in my development.

Q: When was that?

A: I was probably, I told you I didn't develop until I was 18, and that happened, yes when I



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was I think 18 or 19, yes.

Q: You were raped?

A: Mm-hm. So that didn't help much about my concept of men and relationship and so on.

Q: This was in medical school?

A: No, it was before medical school, I was on vacation.

Q: Did you have anyone to talk to about this?

A: Not when it happened, because it happened in the woods. It was very painful, it was awful, unexpected, I did not feel any other actions to men yet, I was scared of them and he just jumped me, overpowered me and did that. It was painful, it was awful, it was just \_\_\_\_.

I think that the physical pain I always could get over, I mean pain was nothing for me, but the psychologically, psychological rape, that I do have hard time with that. I wanted to kill him. I grabbed a stone and I missed his head but it was very close to that. That was tough.

Q: Was it someone you knew?

A: I didn't know him, he was, this was on vacation for students and he didn't belong there, he was not a student, he was older so he knew how to lure me into conversation and a walk and so on, so I really didn't know him, but I had a conversation with him. That person, I was completely unaware, men, woman, I was really, I told you, like a wild kid. Anyway, that's a long time ago.

Q: Yeah, but it's affected you still.

A: It probably did, yes.

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Q: So we were up to this, the boyfriend.

A: Oh, what happens after this rape, no I, so that sort of again stopped me from relating to men.

Q: Could you talk to your foster mother about this?

A: No, not to her.

Q: To anyone, to your cousin?

A: I did to my cousin and she was very upset by this, yeah. I was living with Barbara at the time, this was vacation. Yeah, but it was done. Yeah, I did talk to her and I drop out from medical school, I couldn't deal with it. But I did return and made up for the lost time, so there was no delay.

Q: How long did you drop out?

A: It wasn't long, I think was for maybe a few months. That's a lot in medical school, but I did return and made up. So where are we?

Q: The 10 years older boyfriend.

A: Oh, I see, yes, this was in medical school and he was a professor already and that was the biggest love of my life, but also it was very difficult for us, I mean I come from such a screwed up life, I was not prepared for relationship. He was, he had a hot temper and I don't think he was best in psychology and also he really didn't know much about me because remember, I don't talk about myself. He didn't even know that I had real parents before. He didn't know that and here we are intimate with, this is the person I was most intimate in my

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life and eventually married to, he didn't know my past, he didn't know about me and I just didn't know anything about men, I mean it takes something to keep a relationship going. I had no concept of it and especially that suddenly I was recognized as attractive. I was the only one, or very few who was dark hair and dark eyes and now that I developed, oh well they start noticing me and he couldn't deal with it, he was extremely jealous over me and continuously would fight about it and I couldn't deal with him accusing me of something. I mean I have no interest with other men and I felt he was accusing me continuously, we were having fights, we were breaking up, it was so difficult for me, because here, for the first time here, I love somebody, it's a wonderful feeling and especially the way he was loving, only Slavs know how, I mean showering with these words, with affection, with being there all the time, I can't describe it. And of course I was drawn into this and then we would have terrible fights. Somebody would look at me and he thought I looked at them too, and we just had fights so it was very difficult for me, it was hard to be with him and it was impossible to be without him, so there.

Q: During this time you, I'm trying to get the chronology right, at this point had you graduated from med school yet or just \_\_\_\_\_ school?

A: Not really, or maybe, well I had to speed up with medical school because now we're coming to going to America, right?

Q: You don't have to speed up anything, but we're just trying to figure out, you were . . .

A: Toward the end of medical school, yes.

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Q: And then you married this man, you said?

A: Well we officially married, only I really talk about it, we officially married only shortly before I came to this country. Because I always have that fear of marriage and I think I even, I think even with him I wasn't sure I want to be married.

Q: What changed?

A: So I did marry him shortly before I left and then I never returned.

Q: So you graduated from med school?

A: Mm-hm.

Q: This is prior to marrying him, right?

A: Yes, about the same time.

Q: And after med school, did you go into an internship or residency?

A: Oh yes, this was part of the end, the end of it.

Q: In what area?

A: Oh the internship is rotating through different departments.

Q: So you're still in the same city?

A: Oh yes, yes, yes.

Q: And then at some point you married him?

A: Yes.

Q: Was it a big ceremony?

A: No, I never wanted to marry, so one day, you know, we did not have cars, it was all very,

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I mean we're still poor and here he's, I think he was associate professor, or what I am now and he was writing a motorcycle, that was the way of moving around. So he, one day he said let's go for a ride as we sometimes did and he took me to city hall, arrived there and he said let's get married and I said okay and I called my best woman friend from medical school to be a witness and my foster father, so there we were, we're not even specially dressed and we went to a restaurant for dinner after that, that was it.

Q: And your foster mother who didn't really like him, what happened then with her? You said your father came, but not your foster mother.

A: Yes, she wouldn't.

Q: Did you then move in with him, did you have an apartment together or something?

A: This was just, I was already going, I was ready to go to States already. He did have an apartment and I used to spend nights there, but that was in between his apartment and my foster parents \_\_\_\_\_ here and there.

Q: So you said, but you were going to go to the States?

A: Yes.

Q: So how did that come to be, that you were going to go to the States?

A: As you know, my sister was in States already for a long time and the new law came that, I don't know if you remember there was so called Iron Curtain that no one could leave from Communist country and come to this, right? It was just not, it was illegal, so suddenly the law changed that if somebody in the Communist country could prove that his immediate

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family was in the United States, then they were allowed to emigrate. So that changed and I received letter from my sister saying, you know law is changed now and we are the only two sisters and I would like to invite you to come to this country and that took many years, so that was before I met my future husband and although I had a little hard time with it, don't forget I was brainwashed against America, this was the rotten Imperialism, the worst system in the world, corrupted. That's from every point of view and the way they were, just brainwashed us, showing this funny Americans, all they like to do it chew gums and what else was it, and drink Coke. Later on Polish people are drinking Coke too, but at that time it was funny and ridiculous, chewing gum and drinking Coke, no culture or nothing and I had no interest in going to place like that you know, so my sister was a stranger. So I really did not have interest but my cousin Barbara and other people who were really not so devoted Communists, said don't listen to all this, you have only one sister, you should play along, you go there and if you don't like it, you come back, so that's what I started doing.

Q: Okay, go back to the, starting with the visa, the passport.

A: Oh, I applied for this, this was very complicated, the visa, the passport, the papers, the documents and I had to travel to Warsaw, that's where the officials were and I live in Stettin, so that was, it took some time and I was just playing along, but actually was not ready to go to America. And eventually they said they would, oh I see, Barbara said I have to finish medical school, that I should not go to America before I finish and she probably was smart,

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so that then it pleases me too, because I really didn't want to go to America, so okay I'm studying, prolonging the passport, the visa, prolonging. Apparently you can prolong it for some time, but not forever, so when I married, around the time I was going to marry my husband, my passport and my visa was not going to be prolonged any more. I was prolonging so long, that I think my passport expire when I was on the trip, you know, during the trip to States. So obviously couldn't prolong any more, so there, that's how the trip to United State came along. My sister paid for a trip, I thought that it was round trip. That's how I parted with my husband. It was very hard for me to leave him behind. I thought my heart will break, how I missed him when I came here. I couldn't stand the separation. Only later I understood that I cannot stand any separation with any person that I care for and for him this was such a deep love I felt that that separation almost killed me, I couldn't stand it, I wanted immediately to return to Poland, but my sister would not pay the trip. She didn't have any money, neither did I. So I could not return.

Q: What year was this that you left?

A: December, '59.

Q: '59. Physically how did you travel?

A: Well she paid for, was train to France and the boat, I was on the boat for I don't know how many days and I vomited full time, so I couldn't eat, it was Queen Elizabeth. It wasn't expensive, but it was Queen Elizabeth and I was every day vomiting, it was obviously emotional, I couldn't stand leaving my husband behind and going to this disgusting, rotten,

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Imperialistic country where I didn't know the language, I didn't know anything about it and I was taught that these people have no hearts, no soul, no \_\_\_\_\_. That's where I was going.

Q: Did you ever think about just not getting on that boat?

A: I did, but you see I'm a responsible person, she paid for the trip and actually my husband was a good man, he did not want to stop me from it, he said this is maybe the only opportunity that you're going to see your sister, your only sister and everybody would like to see America, so he said he did not want to be the one to stop me from it, he trusted that we will be united in one way or the other.

Q: So you came to America, you landed here?

A: Yes, in New York.

Q: As the boat was approaching, what was going through your mind?

A: I was just missing my background, my culture, my husband first of all and I was curious what it would be to meet my sister, she was not waiting for me, it was her husband and he didn't speak one word of Polish and I didn't speak any English, so we could not communicate. And then he brought me into leafy New Jersey, long drive. My sister had the little baby, was busy with that, she did not want to speak Polish. She had her, you see she left Poland not so long after the war and she always remembered this as the anti-Semitic country where she has the memory of tragic childhood. My memories of that probably healed a little bit. I went to school there, I had my friends there, I had Rorat to love me and



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this was my country and my language, but not for her.

Q: When the boat was coming in, do you remember what you saw first of this country?

A: Oh, those skyscrapers and the cement and buildings, I didn't like it, you remember I'm a country girl. I like the trees and animals and the blue sky and birds and I didn't like what I saw.

Q: What time of day was it?

A: I think, yeah, it was a day, during the day. And also I vomited through the entire passage, day and night, so I must have been pretty exhausted from this. It was emotional for sure.

Q: So you arrived expecting to see the sister you hadn't seen in how many years?

A: Oh gosh, I think by now, let me count off the years, I'm not good at counting those. Parted when we were eight. 15 years or so? But we were never that close so I don't know.

Q: So you meet the husband, with whom you can't communicate and you have this drive to?

A: New Jersey.

Q: Where in New Jersey?

A: I think it was called red something. Red, I don't know, red something.

Q: You're exhausted, you're emotionally exhausted and you see her, who you haven't seen in 15 years, what was that meeting like?

A: You see, even though I grew up without parents, without love, without emotion, still you know, we would hug or something in Poland, here we come, she comes and gives me this kiss in the air, like, not even hug, I think I romanticized the whole thing, but she is a little

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baby there. So it was just like I came for a weekend or something, like nothing ever happened and then she doesn't want to speak Polish. She didn't have easy life here also, when she arrived and so she has her own story.

Q: Are you in touch with her?

A: No.

Q: How about with her children?

A: Yes, we keep, I keep in touch with them, one now lives in New York and we are okay.

Q: So there you are in a strange place, with a language you don't speak . . .

A: Red Bank. That was the name, yes.

Q: What happened then?

A: We live in Red Bank, it's a very small place in New Jersey, winter, she's busy with her kid, a tiny baby and I can't sleep at night, I'm missing Poland, I'm missing my husband, I think my heart's going to break. Oh, I think I cried for, we talked before that I didn't cry during these years of growing up? During this time I cried enough for all the years that I didn't. I kept writing letters to him and he couldn't help me and I just decided no, I cannot be here, I really had nothing in common with my sister, nothing interested me here, I was just extremely homesick and miserable and so I decided I must go back and the only way to go back was to earn some money. Where, how, all I knew, that I have a profession, although I don't speak English. So the next thing is my brother-in-law is going to New York because his old mother lives in New York in the Bronx and I said to him, I don't know how we

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communicated but by then I was walking with dictionary and trying to learn something. By the way, I was not allowed to learn English, it was the Capitalistic language when I was studying, it was not allowed to study English and I wouldn't jeopardize my scholarship, so I did not. I learned some \_\_\_\_\_ German, some French I knew from my parents, but no English. So by now I communicated a little bit with him and he agreed that I would go with him to New York. While he went to visit his mother up in the Bronx, I walk around and I see it says hospital. That I knew means hospital. In my language it's \_\_\_\_\_, that's similar. So I went to that hospital and walked to the superintendent and made some little conversation that I am a physician and I don't speak English, but I would like to work there. And he immediately liked me, he said most of the physicians don't speak English, but none of them tells me that they don't speak English. So you see my honesty sometimes win people over. Not always, but sometimes it did. So he said, okay, I do need intern. I didn't know what it means to be intern in the city hospital that that was, so that's the next situation, I work in the hospital as an intern without speaking English, hardly.

Q: This is here in the Bronx?

A: City hospital, working day and night. I was not prepared, because our medical schools didn't function that way. After you finish medical school, then you assisted to somebody, we didn't have such huge hospital. Here they just, you know what city hospitals are, right? So that was really a shock to my system that they didn't care if the patient lives or dies. There was one intern for hundreds of patients and no one told me anything, practically. I was

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totally and completely lost. And then I was, as you remember I went there because I want to earn money and return to Poland and then I found out how little they pay because I get room and board. The salary was so little that it would take long time to earn that money. Anyway I was saving everything and eventually I had enough to return to Poland so I went to the superintendent and I say I want to leave and he said oh, you signed the contract, you cannot leave. At that time I didn't know I could sue, I could do, I didn't even know about lawyers existed, in Poland nobody sue anybody that I know of. I didn't have money for such things, so I had to stay longer. And so on, so the time went by and I did not return.

Q: How long were you there at the hospital?

A: Oh, internship was one year and it was very eventful. Can I be excused for a moment?  
(pause) . . . the hospitals, maybe I shouldn't.

Q: Now I want to ask about, before I forget, when you came here, from being in an environment where you were a communist, it was, that was Joe McCarthy with the House on American Activities committee, it was an intensely Reds under the Bed time.

A: '59 yes, mm-hm, but I did not have contact with any of that, somehow. You mean in this country? No, none whatsoever, on the contrary, when I was leaving Poland I remember speaking to American Consul, it was necessary. And with my honesty, I mean it was already clear, I have my passport, it will expire soon, I'm leaving and I'm turning to him and telling him, do you realize that I belong to a youthful Communist party and he said, did I ask you any question? I said no, but I thought I should tell you and he said, no I didn't ask you and

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I'm not interested. That was strange to me. That was American Consul, obviously they knew what it meant belonging to youthful Communist party or to any party. Most people didn't believe in, so he didn't take it seriously. And no one ever questioned me about anything here. In the hospital all they needed was the working body, that's all they were interested.

Q: So that never became an issue while you were here?

A: Never.

Q: And clearly your sister and her husband didn't feel that they were in any sort of . . .

A: Yes, actually they did. He apparently had problem with his clearance because of the situation you're saying and he did work for Lockheed, which you know is, you know what that means. So actually I remember she or he said, soon after I arrive, at least his clearance won't be a problem any more, that I'm here, not there. But otherwise no, I never experience anything else about my background here.

Q: Okay, you said it was an eventful year, that first year in the hospital?

A: Extremely, I mean because it was such hard work, day and night and what I learned in medical school was, I mean while we stay in medical school was clearly helping patients and it was almost, I mean we were indoctrinated by the patient is everything. It wasn't for money, there wasn't any money in Poland, medicine or no medicine there was no money, so it wasn't for money, it was not prestigious, anybody, everybody in Poland work and since medicine didn't have any money, then somehow nobody thought much of being physician or

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teacher or anything, so all those things didn't matter. So here I am in the city hospital and if I tell you one example you will understand my awakening to reality and different reality than I was prepared to, okay? Here I am working at night as I told you, unable to cope with all those patients and I'm only one, but anyway I quickly develop system that I will tend to the one who is dying and somehow the rest will take care of itself, so here it is, one patient dying, I have to give him intravenous infusion and while he's already in shock, his veins are collapse, it's difficult to find it, eventually I found the vein, the infusion is going, I'm very happy, I did what I need to do, but now I have to go to see other patients, so I told one nurse, don't do anything on the floor, just keep around him in case infusion is not going or when it is over, since I didn't know when I would be back, just stay by him, watch this infusion going and when it's finished, change the bottle or call me, don't do anything else, anything that I write any orders, I do myself, stay here. She said all right. She was a minority nurse. And I went to take care of other patients and I return, I don't know after how long, maybe half an hour, maybe longer. The bottle is empty by now, the infusion is finished long time ago, by now the air is in it, she's nowhere to be found until I open the bathroom, she's sitting in the bathroom and reading newspaper and smoking cigarettes. And the patient is dead of course. The infusion stopped, he was in shock, he's dead, she never changes and this infuriated me so much that I grabbed this empty bottle and I threw it at her, but I missed, I missed her head and I told her she's dismissed, she must leave the floor, so she did. Of course I said it with anger. So next day superintendent calls me, that's not the one who hire me, this was different

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superintendent and he tells me I understand you insulted the nurse. I said yes. And he said, you have to apologize to her. And I said, I'm not going to. So he said, if you don't apologize, then you are going to be fired because I have enough interns, but we don't have enough nurses. So that was the awakening, okay? That was a rude awakening, he said he doesn't care that the patient died. It was clear. Well he didn't fire me because there was opposition by other doctors that I'm such a good intern and so on, but that among other things was awakening what medicine is like and what life is.

Q: But if you'd been fired it would have broken your contract, you could have gotten back to Poland . . .

A: Yes, I didn't know it would be then, I didn't think of it, it was just shocking, he didn't fire me, they told me I cannot leave and he didn't fire me, all right.

Q: It would have been a solution.

A: Yeah, it would have been but it didn't happen that way.

Q: You said that you went into medicine without any great desire to be in medicine, to be a doctor, did that change?

A: It did change, yes. I didn't like the initial encounter, I told you, the cadavers and the basic sciences, but that was only the beginning. Later we start dealing with patients and I got very much involved in it and yes, it did interest me.

Q: Did you see any transference, that where you had been saved, you were saving?

A: I didn't think of that, but it did give me wonderful feeling to do something for patients and

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yeah, it is a wonderful feeling, no question about that.

Q: But it wasn't that you were in some way paying back?

A: No, I didn't think of it this way.

Q: Have you?

A: I tell you, I don't really reflect much on those things. It seems I was just going with the flow. You see, I didn't make many decisions, somebody always make them for me. That's why I feel lost sometimes now, no one makes them for me any more. So I don't make them either.

Q: So the year of internship is over?

A: Yes.

Q: You're still living with your . . .

A: In the hospital.

Q: Okay, in the hospital, then what happens?

A: I mean, toward the end of this I found out somebody was helping me, a doctor, a sort of, anonymously he was helping me. At night he would take my night calls without me knowing. Was helping me a lot instead of helping me also openly and so on, he was a Yugoslav man, a doctor there, ahead of me or something. And before you know he told me he loves me. Of course, let's see, oh I was hiding that I was married because I was brought up that every man likes to fool around with married woman, that's how it was in Poland, that was the time of virginity, so of course the virgin woman would not fool around, but married



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one would, so I was hiding the fact that I was married. And he was helping me around, this is from Slavic country, familiar, we could communicate a little more in our language, which was easier for me than English and he was pretty unhappy here himself, was hard for him. So we became closer and closer, he told me he loves me and one day, before much thinking about it, we did become intimate and that was really very shocking to me, that it wasn't really that much different than with my husband, because he always told me that what we do and this is so special, it's only between us, with no other men you would ever feel that and it's only, I mean I can't say it in English, I was really, don't forget, I was a Catholic and I didn't know anything about these things. He told me this is between us and forever and here it is, it's not so much different with this man and this man is like an angel to me, helping me, he doesn't fight with me, he seems so good. So I start doubting, suddenly start doubting, I had no one to discuss these things with. I start doubting if my relationship, which is so difficult, if it is so special. And being really stupid, I wrote my husband that I betrayed him, that was the word, if you have sex with somebody else, that's betrayal. As you know, I was always straightforward and I remained that way. I didn't know I don't supposed to tell him. So I wrote him that and then I didn't think there was a way he could forgive me and probably he couldn't so he has really, he had the nervous breakdown at that. I mean Polish people are different than what you know here and the time changed now, who gets a nervous breakdown over a woman now, a woman doesn't mean much, does it? So, he did get the nervous breakdown and then they let every postpone, he ended up in the institution for a

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short time. And I thought there was no way back after what I told him, so I didn't return. And of course, quite soon after I find out, I don't love this man. But then I never stayed in any relationship in my life and after I find out, I don't love this man. But then I never stayed in any relationship in my life, so sooner I was in with this one.

Q: Were you in contact with your husband after that point?

A: I was writing to him later that he absolutely should divorce me, he deserves better and I beg him to marry somebody else. I really meant it, I feel very guilty, I feel very bad and eventually he did marry someone who looks just like me. So I don't know, that's that part.

Q: But you didn't marry again?

A: No.

Q: Okay, so this guy you weren't in love with, the Yugoslavian guy, you're out of the internship, what are you doing for work?

A: Then you become resident and since I don't like making many, I mean I still didn't know about New York, I was working the day and night so I thought this was the hospital, the only hospital in New York and I apply for residency and they didn't take me because that was that super that I insulted the nurse. As I understand now, she went to the union, you know, they had problems on, so he didn't want me as a resident and that's just wonderful. This was one of the hospital that later became the worst, the absolute worst, it wasn't then yet, then, so I had to look for another one and that man friend, the Yugoslav helped me to find another, which was much nicer and I had to take exams, I need time to study, so I couldn't select any

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specialty, I need to select specialty that I could study at night, not work at night and that's how I end up in pathology, which I am now.

Q: Just by accident?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: That's like most things for you.

A: Yes, because I don't decide.

Q: So you did your residency in pathology?

A: Yes.

Q: Where?

A: In Queens, which the \_\_\_\_\_ was nice and light for me, there were trees, there was a park around, with green, not like Bronx, I hated this Bronx. You know, Stettin is a beautiful city, beautiful and finding myself in the Bronx was a shocking to my system, so suddenly in Queens now, it was green, the park around and the director of pathology was the most beautiful woman in the world as a person, as a person. And I got so attached to her, obvious, she didn't have children, I think she sort of, maybe she had some maternal feelings towards me, everybody felt she loved me, I really didn't see it that way, but I love her so that was fine. I think that was the main reason I stay in pathology and I wanted so much to please her that I went into my usual, standing on my head, to work, do everything that could be done, so needless to say I was the best worker, the best teacher, learned the field perfectly.

And she treated me so well, so I really didn't have the anxiety that I have now and tension. I

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felt like this was my best mother, so I also start socializing. This was a nice time for me in my life, yes. But I find out that I do not stay in relationship. That took me years later to find out what it is. I always thought I don't find the right man, but find out later that that's not, everybody finds the right man if one looks for one. So that's the pathology.

Q: But you started, but your life changed, so you had friends, you were socializing?

A: Yes, oh yes, men.

Q: Was that difficult for you to start having that kind of life or did it?

A: No, because they find me attractive. I find men easily, without looking for them and the work was very satisfying for me. I find out that I am very good in diagnosis and doing, quite \_\_\_\_\_ I start doing with only experienced doctor do, making diagnosis on the spot during surgery, very responsible and I was very good at it, that gave me good feeling as a physician and also I had the nice, nice atmosphere at work, which really helped.

Q: Did you have woman friends?

A: Yes, but I had started, started discovering men, so that was the, yeah I had woman friends too.

Q: So you kind of had a delayed adolescence?

A: Yes, I really did. And this woman who I adored so much was already old and she had to retire, so she retired and another man became director and was also a gentleman, wonderful man, I also had very good working relationship with him so it continued for me good, but then the hospital start getting pushed, as you know, the medicine is already being in a

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difficult financial situation for years and this hospital was one of the hospital on the list to be closed possibly, so that second director left to another institution and asked me if I liked to go with him to work with him, but I didn't, he was going to Catholic institution and I thought no, I don't need that. That was one of the reasons, so I didn't go with him, but I didn't like to stay, he left and this hospital was on the list to be closed, so I thought I should do something and then I received telephone call from Beth Israel Hospital, because my reputation already spread, how good I was, so I received call from Beth Israel, without me looking for it, would I like to come for interview because they would like to hire me. So I went for interview, didn't check anything about director, about the place, about the salary, about my title, just jumped into because I needed a place, so that's how I moved to Beth Israel and that's how I moved to the city. That was a different world. That was very difficult for me. The director there was, I have not enough word for it. It was just, it cannot compare to what I had before, it was . . .

**End of Tape 2**

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### **Tape 3**

Q: So you were at Beth Israel there, it's difficult . . .

A: Yes, it's difficult because as I said I was straightforward, I did not know the politic, how, I mean it's just the whole thing. I am not a person who knows how to play the games, is the word. I am emotional, easily hurt, take things personally and all this \_\_\_\_\_ didn't work. I even found out that when I was the most popular with clinicians, make brilliant diagnosis, the doctor loved my lectures the most, I was doing perfect and I found out, this was an absolute shock for me, that the better I did, the less director cared for me. I don't even want to get on the subject. So this was extremely frustrating and I mean this is life, right. If you have parents they teach you all those things, I see how people are teaching the little children when they're growing up what life is about. My life was trying to survive, no one taught me this. Some people picked it from the air, I obviously didn't. So here I found this extremely difficult and continue having this difficulty, it's not the medicine. I'm the most popular teacher because I'm straightforward and I teach so well, I speak clearly. I don't know, somehow the doctors always say I'm the best teacher and it always was through my life. So, my diagnosis are excellent, my teaching is perfect, my work is like I was a robot. I never get sick, I'm never late, I'm reliable and you know what? This doesn't do me much. So that's as far as success in the, because it's almost like a corporation the hospital, you have to get along with so many people and I do get along, but I don't know how to be a politician.

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Q: Are you happy?

A: I don't know what this word is, you know what, I am okay if I am content. If no one hurts me, this is plenty for me.

Q: You're still afraid of being hurt?

A: Yes. I don't know why it means so much to me but I think if somebody's attacking me or I think it's going to attack me or something, I think it's immediately I feel those things, that I am not good, those complexes come back, that I am the worst, yeah, that image, that bad image of myself come back. I think that's what it is, why would I otherwise be so afraid of being hurt. I'm very independent, that's the positive part, I can count on myself, I can be alone anywhere, I can travel alone, I can go to restaurants alone, I don't mind being alone, that is independence. I went as far in my field as one could. I could go higher, like trying to become director, but I never wanted that last stop, either being afraid of so-called success or I don't really like being in position of such politics and power and so on, I don't need it. But also something prevents me from that, I think knowing that I'm not politician enough. I actually like diagnosing, I don't like politics. Happy, I know that my personal life leaves much to be wished for or desired, but I did find out that relationship doesn't work for me. It brings me as much happiness as there is, but also as much suffering. So it almost like comes to neutral, right? That I stop thinking about it, I stop looking for it, so it's like a fact that I cannot have relationship. It's just something that I didn't learn to be and I had no relationship in my childhood and later. I don't know how to be in it. I get so easily hurt. The better a

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relationship is, the more difficult it is for me because I suspect they leave me, I think. I become clinging, I become possessive, even if I don't show, the partner feels it. And I did hear it on more than one occasion that I smother him. I think my clinging, my insecurity in that is so obvious that the partner can't take it, or there are no such people who would understand, get along with this, so it, I'm always afraid they leave me and if they don't leave me I leave them, I don't know, it's just the relationship I find difficult. It's the happiest moment for me and it's also the toughest and so without a relationship, life is not full. When I work it seems it's completely full, my work is so demanding and I give so much out of myself that during the day I never know, once I get there nothing exists, no private life, no nothing, I'm so involved. I'm \_\_\_\_\_ I don't know if this is an escape for me that I don't think of anything else. Maybe it is an escape. So that's what I become absorbed in and life goes on.

Q: Have you tried to reconnect with your Jewish, to your Jewish . . .

A: Oh yes, I told you after my American period, I wanted to be American.

Q: What do you mean your American period?

A: The time that I wanted to be like Americans and associated with American, American American, not Jewish even. And then eventually . . .

Q: Wait, wait, wait, wait, you're passing over something important. You had a certain, you wanted to be something else, you wanted to be American?

A: Yes. Like a WASP, probably.



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Q: How did you go about that?

A: Well you know, I had the selection of choosing, right, the people who found me attractive, I could select. No, about my being Jewish, still had mixed feelings about that, I did not find Jewish men attractive. Jewish people. So that made it easy not to socialize with them, right? And I didn't. Then I did, eventually I did and then sort of like coming around again I socialize more with European background. I find that I know more what I'm dealing with. If they tell me something I can see if they mean it, if they don't, I had very hard time with American hypocrisy, I come from different culture. There, if people like you they tell you, if they didn't like you they didn't say they do. They never say I like to see you if they didn't mean it. So here I come to the socializing and the people say oh it was great meeting you and I like to see you again, I was taking this exactly as that, I waited for them to call, they never did and all these disappointments, I couldn't understand the hypocrisy, I found it very difficult, so that's what I call my American period. I would say it was super, I found it superficial, the link with the American people. So I think now, if I think of my closest friends, they are European and some are Jews with similar background as I have, I find that wonderful. Actually my last relationship was with a Jewish man, who also had the, well, had some background during the war but his both parents lived and he really didn't have much hardship except he understood what it means to be a Jew and confronted with anti-Semitism and so on. I find that this was so great for me, something in common. But that ended, as all my other relationship. Actually he ended it, I was very surprised.

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Q: You talk mostly about your relationships with men, as opposed to men and women, people in general.

A: Yeah, with women, yeah I had some women friends, don't forget that I left my friends in Poland, the friends that, I mean I think the most serious friends are the one who date from your young years, from school, growing up, right, when you have time to prove yourself? My old friends were left behind, I have to have new friends in this country. So some women, some women I think are jealous of me or something, I was afraid of them maybe, I don't know. I'm okay now with friends with women, but it's the same like with men. If I like women very much, if this is close relationship, I start being possessive also the way I am for men. I think it's again the fear that they leave me. Is that a ridiculous thing, I cannot change it. So at this point, I don't want to be that close to anybody, because then I cling.

Q: Do you think of yourself now as Jewish or as Catholic or as what?

A: Jewish because I, you know, I had to take sides, political situation here and also taking holiday in the hospital, I mean somebody has to cover Catholic days and somebody has to cover Jewish, so I took the Jewish. I take Jewish holidays, even it doesn't feel to me like a holiday at all, but at least I present it to the world that I'm Jewish. So the holidays don't touch me, but I take it just to show the front that I'm Jewish and I don't work on Jewish holidays. And also I think politically I am pro-Israel, is something in me that I have no question about it, I am pro-Israel and I was very proud when they win the war in '67. I find it so amazing that suddenly they were best soldier, best army and this country is so strong and

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the whole world admires them. I find it's just like I woke up from the dream, since I was indoctrinated that Jews are cowards, as you know, there's no way they could fight, so many jokes about it. That they're cowards, they don't know anything and I mean, it's endless and suddenly this was, I felt so proud going to Israel and seeing that.

Q: When you came to this country, did you at any point go into a synagogue?

A: Yes, that again, you know, I don't plan anything, it was a Jewish holiday, some big Jewish holiday, I don't know which one and I didn't realize you have to apply, call before, make arrangement, buy ticket. Don't forget, I used to go to the church whenever I felt like it, the door was always open. So I go there and I say I would like to go and he says do you have a ticket, did you apply? I say no, but I can pay now. He said no, it's too late, you cannot come in, and just closed the door in front of my nose. That's now how I imagined the, any how do you say, a synagogue or church or any praying place. I find that very disappointing. And I gave it another chance, I went to synagogue again and I am very disciplined person, very organized, I am well behaved and I have certain concept of how the place of prayer looks like. I was seeing the Catholics remember, when they play the music or the priest is having ceremony and people are quietly sitting and listening and praying, so here I'm in synagogue, everybody's talking around and laughing and I don't know, I find it very disorganized, I didn't like the way it looked, you see, I didn't grow up in that spirit. And the prayer is in the language I don't understand, so all together I feel Jewish in some point. Feel Jewish, whatever that means, but the religion I don't. And the holidays I didn't grow up with, but I

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do, since I have Jewish friends now from Europe, I do celebrate Yom Kippur with them and Rosh Hashanah. So is that similar to your other interviews?

Q: Varies, it varies, but how about for Passover, do you have a seder or go to a seder?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Do you feel any kinship with the message of freedom from oppression?

A: Oh that, of course I do, yes, yes. I'm actually touched reading the book, when you read during holiday, it tells you about Jewish past and all the suffering. I'm deeply touched by that, yes. But I will never be able to really disperse it any more, that's for sure. I do feel Jewish, which is a big step for me.

Q: How did you come to give up the Catholicism?

A: How did that happen, oh I think Communism ended it, because ended, I mean being religious in a communist, that's a laughable matter, it just doesn't exist.

Q: Are you attracted to any kind of religion, any kind of spirituality?

A: I'm attracted to this Buddhism or I don't really know the religion but I notice the acceptance of everybody, I mean in this retreat that the guru was conducting, it's believing in yourself more, not in any god that I always had hard time to imagine where is her, where was he with all that suffering was happening? I couldn't believe it at that time, where was God? As a child I felt that, I really did feel cheated that he's not protecting me. So in this retreat, it's more like believing in yourself and loving human being, trusting yourself. I mean, it's the same wisdom, not hurting anyone right, not hurting yourself. It's looking for spiritual peace,

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not expecting anything after you die. I find it that it was the best religion during the Christmas they have Christmas tree and they have Hanukkah candles and any other religion that you want to observe. But this is for my recreation, during the daily life I don't have time for any religion. It seems my religion is the work I guess, I'm totally absorbed in it. This gave me, I think, it's satisfying that I'm okay. That part is satisfying.

Q: When you say that you're not in relationships for long, it seems that you weren't in any kind of relationship for long.

A: Correct, yes. It's just they didn't last for me. I think it must be combination of factors, one of them is that I am independent, I know that I can live without relationship. I can live on my own and since I am so adept at denying myself anything, I can deny myself even happiness that you find through intimacy and love in relationship with a man. I tried, it didn't work for me and at this point I certainly am not going to go searching for the man, for the person, right?

Q: Why not?

A: Seems like other things matter more to me, obviously is not that essential.

Q: Have you ever thought about adopting children, or having a child?

A: No, I never had that, no. I always thought I will be married and have children but I never went out of my way. With children definitely not, because when I became pregnant, I did nothing for a second that I wanted, I would go for abortion. I think it's something about the past and I don't exactly know how to explain it. Maybe I didn't think I could be the right

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parent after my screwed up past. I really felt tormented many times. Now I know better how to deal with the torment, that because I learned methods that the nature put me back in the best of moods so I seek that when I'm down. The dogs, for example.

Q: There are no dogs here.

A: I don't have anything that I would love to have, I have no dogs, I have no relationship as you know, I am not attached to anything. No point of getting attached, right, they leave me, so I have no dogs, no. But I know more how to deal with the torment that I may feel. The nature always works for me and I learned the meditation now, that helps too.

Q: I look out your window and I see only buildings, no nature.

A: Actually, you didn't see the park? You came late, there is a park and actually could hear the birds. When I first moved here, there were less building, but eventually became crowded, yes. I never thought I would be living in the big city. I don't think I belong here, that's not what I like, but I don't think I'm going to make any more changes in my life, I need some sort of something familiar, something that keeps me grounded and I started here and I stay here. Same with my jobs, I don't move unless something happens. I don't look actively for it. My personal life might not exist, but the work does.

Q: So you've had the same job since you moved to Beth Israel?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And the same apartment since you started at Beth Israel?

A: Yes. No changes. I've had some relationships, but those as you know, come and go. I

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traveled somewhat. Did some exercises, pursue my retreat.

Q: Have you ever been back to Poland?

A: Yes.

Q: When was that?

A: That was in, probably in 1967. I went with the idea of returning, maybe. And that trip showed me that you cannot go back home, as your American writer said, because home changed and you changed, so I obviously could not be there. That was at least good.

Q: You went back to your home?

A: To Stettin.

Q: You went to Stettin?

A: Stettin, yes.

Q: Why did you choose there, you could have chosen other places to go to.

A: Well I went to Stettin with the idea of seeing my foster parents, they were still alive and my husband was there, my best friend was there and that was the city that I left.

Q: Tell me about that experience.

A: That experience was really, it was clear I could not go back home because the Communist system was really very difficult to live in, nothing ever worked. However, when I lived there we rebelled, but we lived with it, didn't know any other way. But now when I came back I absolutely had no patience and no tolerance for this type of bad service, was still Communism when I went there. And the rudeness and I mean the attitude to work, I mean

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there is no ethics, everything was corruption. And I never liked Communism and this time it was not tolerable for me, I just know I couldn't live in that country again.

Q: When you decided to come to see if perhaps you wanted to move back . . .

A: With just the idea maybe I will return to Poland, yes.

Q: So just the plane ride must have been incredibly exciting.

A: Yes, when I get very excited the things happen, vomiting again, in anticipation.

Q: Did anyone meet you when you got off the plane?

A: No.

Q: Did people know you were coming?

A: That's little complicated because I landed in Warsaw, I spend a few days, or was I going to Italy, I don't remember and from Warsaw I ask somebody, I paid him to make telephone call to Stettin and tell my ex-husband that I will be coming, so he's oh yeah, I spoke to him, \_\_\_\_\_ is fine. So I was so in anticipation that I just couldn't wait, I couldn't bear \_\_\_\_\_ what it would be like. I arrived, he wasn't there. So I was pretty disappointed. Then I find out that like anything else in Poland, that person took the money and never call him. But then when he find out I'm there, he immediately arrives and we both cried like little children. So I came back and it was clear that I will not return to Poland.

Q: When you saw your husband, was he at that point your ex-husband, had he remarried?

A: Yes, he was remarried and had a child and was very attached to his child. And we talked little about, we had to be careful, I didn't want to cause any problems, I'm a very ethical



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person, I don't want to create problem for his present wife, so we're careful about that he visited me. And we talked about past, he said that he should have risked, thinking now he should have risked his life and leave Poland illegally to join me. That's what he think he should have done, but he didn't at that time. That was number one, number two said he would have forgive me that I betrayed him, \_\_\_\_\_ romantic interlude.

Q: And what was it like to see your foster parents?

A: Oh, I mean I was very attached to them, it was wonderful for me and I'm happy that I managed to do for them what I could, I bought them apartment in Lublin. American apartment, which was expensive for me those days and it was so special that they live in American apartment, had American television and wear these good clothes and so on, so I feel very good that I could do that, she was very proud. Of course they died long time ago. But I did love doing something for them. I always did.

Q: Are you still in touch with your ex-husband?

A: Not at this point, he tried to write and occasionally we wrote to each other and he even wanted to come and visit here. I was against it, I did not invite him. I didn't want to open old wounds. He wasn't coming with his wife.

Q: Have you gone back since '67?

A: To Poland, no I didn't go again, no.

Q: Are you in touch with anyone from Stettin?

A: I was for awhile with some woman friend and I am now with one friend from medical

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school who lives in Sweden now, so we correspond. I even saw her in summer, she was visiting her friends and we spend some time. She even ask if I could visit her there in summer, I'm not so sure I will. I don't like staying in somebody's house. You know, I'm careful now about getting too close to somebody, do you understand that? On the one hand I want it the most, on the other hand I'm afraid of it.

Q: What happened some years back, what was it 10 years back, you said you started going to these retreats, started opening up again.

A: Yes, oh this was great for me for awhile, yes. It was absolutely great for me. Like I always thought I should have a house in the country because I love the country and so on, but then you know I had ideas about it would be even more work for me, I don't like being alone in the house and so on, but it was always in the back of my mind, why don't I have a house. So when I discover that retreat, I suddenly had the place in the country and I had friends and that guru, that guru was, I can't begin to tell you. Better than any gods that I believed in because Stalin was also god for me when I was growing up, the educate, I believed he was a god. So this was the best of gods. He was so charismatic and such a, so much wisdom and he also came from a very poor background in India, he was the poorest, he didn't have shoes. So he had that sort of some wisdom that I could identify with very well. And his teaching was not to have too many possessions because then they possess you and many of the things really rang the truth to me and it was just great. And one of the greetings was people hug there and that hugging, oh did I hug. So the hugging and the

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peaceful meditation and that love that was there, it was just the best love that I receive, asking nothing in return, no judgments passed and the level of communication was just what I need and always wanted. It wasn't an empty level, how are you, fine and I'm fine and you don't really want to know how I am and what's my problem, nothing, this is how we communicate in the big city. Over there the communication was one person listen and the other talks. And really talks, about the issues, the problems that the most secretive, the most, the ideas, the thoughts that we most attach, be completely open, not being afraid that you will be judged, it would be used against you. It was just incredible and then that person stops and listen what the other one says. That, I call communication. So it really helped me a lot, a lot. And then he was ousted last year. That's him.

Q: [end of side one of tape three]. . . the guru, okay this is 3B, okay in the back row, photos?

A: Oh the back, you mean this one? Oh, my parents. These are my true parents and after them is my foster mother and those are my pictures, the only two pictures that I have while I was growing up and one is a baby, me as a baby. And I was, oh here is foster mother, who's got chickens. So I was just saying that this was the influence of the eastern philosophy \_\_\_\_\_ that you have to accept yourself, no matter what anybody else says, this is essential. And I start feeling you know, a certain compassion for myself and framed my pictures and officially recognize my parents, who I always thought they left me, they left me, they rejected me, I couldn't, as a child I couldn't understand any other way, that they had no choice, but that's what clicked, that they deserted me, so here they are, officially recognized.

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Q: \_\_\_\_\_ people.

A: Excuse me?

Q: It's very beautiful.

A: Which one?

Q: Oh, just the whole arrangement, all the photographs and the frames.

A: I mean this \_\_\_\_\_ pictures that were special because I don't have any pictures from when I was a child, nothing, the pictures of these parents are from their identification and of me, no other pictures. I mean, I have hundreds of them in this country but, they are not very special.

Q: A cow, you have a picture of a cow.

A: This is a friend's, friend took picture of a cow and gave me, I mean this was very sweet of him and since then somebody else gave me a cow, because they know how attached I was to that cow in the village.

Q: You've got a couple of cows?

A: Yes, now I have to start being more secretive about it or the apartment will end up being a barn.

Q: You still have an affinity for cows?

A: Yes. I suppose when children grow with their toys, they're attached to their toys, right? When they grow with their parents, they're attached to their parents. I didn't grow with parents and I didn't grow with toys, I grew with a cow and this was very special time for me,

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I did, I mean I hugged that cow, she licked me, she followed me everywhere, I slept with her.

It was very reassuring, this big, I thought person in my imagination she was warm, big, sweet to me. She never thought I was ugly Jewess.

Q: What was her name?

A: Chervona(ph), means red. She was red and white. So that picture somebody saw the cow was similar and he took it and give me. Imagining this is the cow. The other cow's in here. They're very peaceful animals \_\_\_\_\_ good, you know. And the fact that they nourish you, I mean all the milk they give and then you got the cheese and maybe butter and the other, buttermilk and everything else, I mean it's, it's wonderful.

Q: Who are the dogs?

A: Oh the dog, yes, you know I love dogs. This was dog of a friend and we were friends for awhile and I was very attached to her dogs. I never met the dog I didn't like so this is one of the dogs that I really liked a lot. I'm not friends with her any more, you know how it goes with me, my relationship do end.

Q: You say this like it's going to be your life pattern and will never change.

A: I thought that, now that I understand it that it would be different, but no it isn't. Apparently cannot be changed, with all my education, with all the work, all myself in that regard. The happy relationship is so wonderful for me that I cling like my life depend on it. Apparently that suffocates the other person. I don't know if I simplify this, but that's the explanation I see to it.

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Q: When did you start, or have you always told people about your experiences?

A: No, I don't talk about this.

Q: How did you come to talk about it for the Holocaust Memorial Museum?

A: I did open up on EST and also in this retreat. So that opens up and if I am really close now with someone, yes I tell them briefly what my past is, I mean sooner or later they ask where is your father, where is your mother, what toys did you have or something of this sort so then briefly I would tell them, yes I would.

Q: Have you ever gone to gatherings for Holocaust survivors?

A: Yes, I did, when it was in New York in '91. I was very touched by that experience, very much.

Q: This is when the hidden, the gathering of hidden children?

A: Yes, that's where I met my last relationship, he was there too. And one would think that the two of us would get along so well and we did in some ways, but then in the other, he had his problems, and obviously I had mine. I was so disappointed when he left. It breaks me apart still, with all the work that I did on the subject, on myself that being left, being rejected I take it is just not acceptable still.

Q: What was the experience like of going to that gathering in '91 and really opening up to other people with similar experience for the first time?

A: It was very profound being one of the people, because I, you know, I mean, seeing that the other people in similar situation and this \_\_\_\_\_ and I mean it was great,

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great experience, but later on I tried to follow, they were meeting in New York here and there, I did go and it just wasn't the same, I mean it was \_\_\_\_\_, the people just come and talk about themselves, about their mundane problems. I just didn't feel I have, nothing was there for me, I didn't go again, just once I think.

Q: But that first gathering that you went to, was it freeing for you?

A: Yes, but I was already sort of freed, I told you I went through EST, that was very tough, that was actually my most freeing experience, the est. I found out how much rage I have in me and how much scarring is there. It was something I couldn't even comprehend, because they has this technique of blocking your conscious so only the subconscious, something that you buried deep down would come up. This was when my recollection came about how the war ended for example, how I went to the principal asking him to keep me in school without paying, all those small things that I thought I've completely forgot, but most of all how much rage is there, buried deep. Well maybe rage is just one of the feelings. How much pain is there after all those years. So in some way it was liberating, in some other ways it was disappointing to find out because I always thought I dealt with it very well, I blocked my childhood, I blocked my past. I was tough on the surface, not crying, going along with my work, with my studying, with my life. And actually I was pleased how I overcome the tragic past and there I find out I didn't overcome, all of this is in me, it's just buried there. So that was the sad and disappointing part, knowing that the past is sabotaging me quite often and just cannot separate it, it's there. So I have moments that I am more patient with myself

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now. And so there, and I really don't like much dwelling on the past because nothing I can do about that and I just hope that this interview help somebody. I know how people who never lived through the war have no idea what's important and how they don't handle the real emergencies well and I must say I feel very proud of myself how well I handle emergencies.

It seems I handle emergencies better than I handle peaceful times. I'm not maybe used to much of that. The people who never had to really, they didn't live through poverty, they didn't live through the war, they didn't live through tragedy, they're so attached to their little things, their chocolate they didn't have or it starts snowing, they don't have right clothes, I mean the smallest thing, they actually fall apart. So when I look at this I say, my gosh, I am so equipped to life in some ways. In some ways, not in others.

Q: Do you ever find yourself helping other people through difficulty because you've had that experience?

A: I find that most of my life, I only listen to other people, I don't talk about myself. I only find them important and never me, that's how I live and then I start rebelling against this, actually through this retreat of mine I found out what true loving is, it means truly accepting the other human beings and I start rebelling, these friends who really don't give a damn about me.

Q: So when you meet people now you say, look we won't be friends for long, don't get too close?

A: No, that's not the issue, the issue is I'm afraid to be too close because I know that this will



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end and then I would be heartbroken so that's I'm not getting close, but I became more realistic about friends who are really not friends. That now I would like something in return. Through my life I was always giver, giver, giver, giver, I must say that that changed lately, I would like this to be at least both ways. Where were we? Oh yes, helping. It's just work and giving, giving, giving. Do you know that I will never know how to ask about my salary, or increase or my needs of vacation or anything. I don't know how to do this and if it's not given to me, I'm very disappointed. I think one should be recognize and this should be part of it and I find life is not like that. So if I'm not given increase, I will not ask for it. I will never ask for vacation when I want it, I only take it when nobody else wants it. I will say this is a giver. That's how it is at work. But I also do count my blessings, I'm in perfect health. I never had to take any drugs or alcohol or any other addictions. I manage without, the way I manage. So those are the blessings. I suppose my profession is too. It is a very interesting and gratifying profession. And I \_\_\_\_\_ being in this country counts too, I certainly don't like what's happening in Poland, I mean the way of this persecution \_\_\_\_\_ during the war. Now it's after the war and nothing much changed, sometimes but not all along and I don't like the politics, I don't care what's happening there so this is a blessing, being here, but I am transplanted at the old age, I do miss my language, I miss the culture in which I grew, my poetry, my jokes, which never could be translated, the customs and so on and so on and this one cannot replace.

Q: Do you think of yourself now as Polish or as American?

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A: As American.

Q: When you went back in '67, did you see any of the people who had particularly abused you when you were a child?

A: No, this was different part of Poland, that was . . .

Q: So in Stettin there were no people who were like that?

A: No, I would have to go to Lublin in that village and somehow I didn't think of doing that and also I do not keep revenge, I don't have this in me. I did have chance to punish them after the war, the father of Wanda was tried, he was in jail, he was found that he killed some Jewish people and she probably didn't kill, she was the woman, but she certainly was cruel to me and I could have hurt them if I testify that I remember something of them killing Jews and you know I could not. I went to jail and I saw him old and lost weight and looked so miserable and I just, I don't know, I just could not bring myself to say anything against him, so I didn't and the years, so that helped him that I did not testify against him. And years later when my sister find out that I didn't testify against him, she absolutely couldn't stand me. How could I? How could I do nothing? I just couldn't. Time passed and I did not feel anything toward him, I had no feelings good or bad and maybe, I mean this is how I am, if I felt that hate to him or to others it probably would destroy me.

Q: When was the last time you saw your sister?

A: Few years ago, I don't know how long, it was on the wedding of her daughter. We really were separated, we're different people and maybe we have similar problems, she has

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problems with relationships, with feelings, with things and I don't know what it is, maybe both are too proud, too afraid to show our feelings, so hurt or what. We don't relate. But she knows all about me through her daughters and I know about her through her daughters. So there.

Q: Have you talked to your nieces about your experiences?

A: Actually very little, but I did tell them little more than my sister. My sister did not want them to know about the war, about our experiences, she wanted them to be normal American children and this really didn't always work, because it wasn't easy to be her child, as I found out. And they were in troubles, coming to me. So in my small ways I was telling them that they have to be more understanding toward their mother. No one could change my sister, so I wouldn't tell her that she does something wrong, but I told them many things that I'm sure make their life easier together. I told them at one time, what would you do if you suddenly didn't have your mommy and your daddy and they say, Edie are you crazy, that's impossible, so I said just imagine that she was without parents, was younger than you and not only that there was no food and clothes and no shelter, but she could be killed any time, any minute, that's how she was growing up. So they were looking at me completely shocked, that's not possible, so I told them, that leaves something, that does leave people like this do have problems later on and if she has, if she doesn't communicate with you the way you imagine, just think of that. So I think that that helped them. And I do not dwell on other experienced, I don't think that they are that curious or that it's needed. But sometimes they see my values,

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that I don't have that in me, that I have to prove something, that I have to show off, that at any time I needed the greatest jewelry or the fashion clothes or something. They don't understand it that I don't have these aspirations. So I think that also helped them because they were always desiring to have something. So I think yeah, I think that that helped them. I talk to them sometimes about the, my values, maybe our discussions a little more profound that they have them at home. They say, sometimes we talk, what do you talk with your mother about, it's usually about shopping, about whom will you marry, I mean. So it's a little different topic that I would have with them. I would tell them that the money's not going to make you happy or a different person. It makes life easier, but doesn't solve the problems. This is our topics. I think we talked about everything, didn't we? Or I talked, you ask. Maybe we change the rolls now.

Q: Thank you very much.

**Conclusion of Interview.**