United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Agnes Vogel
July 9, 1997
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Agnes Vogel on July 9, 1997 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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

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Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jeff and Toby Herr collection. This is an interview with Mrs. Agnes Vogel, conducted by Dan Gediman on the ninth of July, 1997 in Indianapolis, Indiana. This is a follow-up interview to u -- to a USHMM videotaped interview conducted with Mrs. Vogel on July 14th, 1989. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum gratefully acknowledges Jeff and Toby Herr for making this interview possible. This is tape number one, side A. … Yes, very possibly, I -- I will -- I believe real strongly in preserving history. You might want to put that down, cause the sound of the paper rattling.

Answer: [inaudible] Okay.

Q: All right.

A: All right.

Q: Okay, the first -- the first thing that -- that I'm going to do is, they asked me to fill in a couple of gaps in the interview that you did with them on the video. There were a couple of things, n-not so much during the war, but before and immediately after that they wanted me to ask about, to just fill in the gaps. And then we'll focus on from after the war to the present. And if at any point you want to stop and take a

break, or you need, for whatever reason, to stop, or if there's a question I ask that you'd rather not talk about, just say so.

A: Okay.

Q: Like to start by asking you about your family, about -- let's start with your parents. Who were they, what were they like as people, as parents?

A: They were very nice people, they were very good parents. My father's name was Dezsö Wieisz.

Q: How do you spell that, his first name?

A: D-e-z-s-o, with two dots on the O. That's a real Hungarian spelling, it's a real Hungarian name. The family name was Wieisz and after the war, in 1948, they changed the family name to Varga, because of the situation in Hungary at the time.

Q: And how can you s -- how do you spell that?

A: Varga? V-a-r-g-a.

Q: And so at what time would that name change have happened, roughly?

A: I believe it happened after I left from home, and I left the end of '46, so the year it happened, probably the beginning of '48.

Q: And so you say they changed it because of the situation. Do you mean -- how do you mean?

A: Well, I'll go -- let me go back, let me tell you something about my mother. My mother's maiden name was Julia Schwartz. And my mother -- actually both of my

parents were born the northwest -- northeast part of Hungary. And my mother was born in Ungvar, and my father was born in a small town named Boatfaller. They were -- well, what's the word I want to use? My father was quite a few years older than my mother and he waited until she grew up for them to get married.

Q: How much age difference?

A: About eight years, probably. And -- and by that time my father lived in a different city in -- more in the middle of the hung -- eastern part of Hungary, that's where I was born, called Debrecen. And he was a well established businessman at that time. And my mother was a very beautiful woman and they were a very handsome couple. I had three sisters; there was four children in the family, all girls. And I lived a nice life.

Q: Tell me about your sisters, their names.

A: My sisters, oh yeah, I'm the oldest, I'm child number one. I have a sister who is almost five years younger and another one who was born three years after her and one three years after.

Q: And their names?

A: Martha, Mariann -- actually Marianna and Gabriela is the youngest.

Q: Just going to move the microphone a little closer so we can pick you up better. Not a whole lot, but just a little. And they all made it?

A: We all survived, yes. Well, our situation was a little bit different than my husband.

Q: I understand.

A: So we all survived together, we were all together all through that year.

Q: And what has happened to your sisters?

A: They are fine, we all survived. One sister lives in New York. One lives in Scotland and the youngest one stayed home -- home in Hungary to take care of our parents. See, the other two sisters, the two middle girls left Hungary in 1956, after -- during and after the revolution that they had in Hungary then. And one ended up in England and the other one made it to the United States.

Q: So you're the only one that left right away?

A: I left right away.

Q: Well, we'll get to that, cause that's much of what we want to talk about. Were you poor, middle class, well-to-do?

A: Well, it went from good to bad. When I was born my father was -- we weren't rich, but well-to-do. And what I remember as a child growing up is hearing about things. When the crash of the stock market in the United States and the [indecipherable] got over to Europe by the mid 30's, it had an effect on my father's business. And then eventually, in 1938, Hitler was in power and that was getting downhill. And by 1942 my father was in a labor camp.

Q: Your -- your parent's parents, your grandparents, how would you describe th- them in terms of their -- or theirs s-status financially, socially?

A: I don't even know, I remember my grandparents as old people. Somehow they were always old. My pare -- my mother's parents and my grandfather had a business, he was a well-to-do man. They lived in a beautiful home.

Q: He was a what?

A: A well-to-do man. He -- they lived in a beautiful home, and I can still remember [indecipherable] built into the mountain there. And they had the business on the bottom of the -- you know, the street floor and the house was up on top, and it was a beautiful home with beautiful furniture and all that. We used to go there to visit and spent -- I spent a lot of vacation time over there. My grandmother was a beautiful woman, a very stately lady. And my grandfather was a sweet old man.

Q: And on the other side?

A: On the other side they were -- well, it's a strange stories because my two grandparents -- my two grandmothers were sisters. My parents were first cousins. My father's father, he was a different kind of a man, he was -- I don't know how to describe him. I just remember him during the hun -- you know, Jewish holidays. He was a religious man, not overly, but he was you know, the both sides were very observant Jewish people. I remember my father's father during the -- the Succoth holiday. And they always had a sukkah built in the yard, and he would sit there and

take all his meals there and have his prayer book there. Yet, when he got angry, he could yell like -- and scream like a real Hungarian. He had a good temper.

Q: And you had said in the interview that I saw that your -- your father was able to trace your ancestors in Hungary back to the early --

A: Well, when the troubles -- the -- yes --

Q: -- 1700's.

A: -- when the troubles started in the 30's, you had to trace your ancestry back as far as you could go, because by 1938 - '39, they were picking up people who were not so-called Hungarians. See, by that time we had a lot of people coming from Slovakia, from Poland, from other countries to Hungary, and they were mostly, I suppose at that time looking for those people.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Little did we know that nothing is going to help. And yes, my father did trace our ancestry back into Hungary to the 1700's. On paper.

Q: I want to jump around a little bit, cause again we're filling in little gaps in the previous interview. You went to a Catholic school when it's --

A: High school.

Q: High school, 1939. I'm curious, you had gone to Jewish schools prior to that.

A: Yes.

Q: Why not a Jewish high school? How did you end up there?

A: There was no Jewish high school for girls, that's why.

Q: So it was --

A: And this was a specialized school, and unfortunately only the Catholic school system had it.

Q: Specialized in what way?

A: It's more of an art oriented high school.

Q: And you were gifted in art?

A: Sort of.

Q: I understand you still --

A: That was where we learned dress designing, tailoring, sewing, drawing, and all associated with the arts.

Q: Te-Tell me about friendships that you had in high school, both with Jewish girls and non-Jewish girls, if in fact you did have friendships with non-Jewish girls.

A: Actually, well we had quite a few Jewish girls going to that same school where I went. I don't mean too many, but you know, those were very small classes actually, so they had maybe I don't know whether -- the first year I think maybe we had about 10 Jewish girls, and after that they sort of left. They're maybe were two or three of them left altogether in the class, and -- but as far as non-Jewish girls, other than being in the school with them no, I don't think I was really friendly with any of them. That were strange over there, see, because we grew up

separated, you know, from early childhood, and we never mixed with non-Jewish people. We only wil -- saw Jewish kids. So by the time you were a teenager in your late teens in high school it's -- we were friendly but we were never really so-called friends.

Q: Was that by choice or by official design that you'd -- you stayed amongst yourselves?

A: I don't think it was a [indecipherable] really, it just the way it worked out.

Q: Would you -- how would you -- I'm thinking in terms of many American cities where blacks live on one side of town and whites live on another side of town, where -- whereas there might not at this time be a legal reason why they can't live together, they often don't, and I'm wondering was it a similar situation or was it --

A: No, no, no. There was one area where most -- were more dominated by Jewish people, mostly by the real Orthodox and the Hassidic type of Jews, but other than that, no. There was no area where you had to live.

Q: That was my question.

A: No, no, no, no, no, no.

Q: Okay. Cause I know in some cities in Europe there had been the remnants of ghettoes from previous eras.

A: Shtetl, yes --

Q: Right.

A: -- I know, and I've been arguing that. I never lived in a shtetl, no.

Q: That's what I was trying to establish.

A: At least not in my time in Hungary, no.

Q: Okay. So you did not have friends with non-Jewish kids that you were clo --

A: Not close friends, no. But by the time I got to that high school, it was already troubled times. Hitler was already on the horizons and as sweet as the nuns were -- there were a couple of them who were wonderful, and I really think of them highly forever, because they were nice human beings. But then there were others who just as soon would have hand me over to the first Nazi who came about.

Q: Tell me about them. What -- what memories do you have of these nuns that you got that feeling about?

A: Well, I remember especially the one nun -- you know, it -- I mean, you go to a Catholic school and there's -- during the time you go and you have to say some kind of a prayer, at least in those days they did, and I remember at one time this particular nun came up to me and said, you better go down on your knee and pray because what's happening out in the world. And in those days a lot of Jewish people did convert to Catholicism and -- hoping it will save them, but nothing did. Nothing did because you not only had to prove that you lived in Hungary centuries back -- you also had to prove that you were not Jewish centuries back, so it didn't help. I remember when we were in the wagon already, there was a young woman

doctor with us, she never knew she was Jewish. Her parents converted during the first World War or right after, so she was born, you know, as Christian. And yet she was considered a Jew.

Q: This -- so this nun that told you you better get on your knees, wa -- I'm unclear, was she saying that with malice or with concern?

A: No, I think it was malice and no concern, because if it would have been concern, I probably wouldn't remember it the way I do.

Q: What about the other kids? You intimated in your previous interview that you had experienced some -- some anti-Semitic --

A: Well, while we were in the class it was fine, there was no problem. Well, the thing I mentioned then, I believe it was that when we were being marched from the ghetto to the brick factory, there was one of the girls that I went to school with and I used to walk with her home from school, and she thought of nothing picking up a stone and throw it at me. See, people -- we were walking in the middle of the road and the people were standing on both sides on the sidewalk and watching us leaving town.

Q: But back when you were going to school, what did you experience in terms of any -- or did you -- any problems with any of the other Gentile girls?

A: I don't remember any, really.

Q: Okay. Let's talk about the conditions of your deportation from your hometown. W -- How did that come about? You -- you rushed through it a little bit in your previous interview. I mean, how did you find out that it was going to happen and what -- could you tell us, sort of take us through from when you found out that it was going to happen til when you were actually --

A: [indecipherable] okay, let me go back to the Jewish school, 1938, when our principal came into the class -- well, I guess he went to every class, to tell us what's happening in the world and what we may accep -- expect. And he had -- a big guy, and he had tears in his eye -- his eyes as he was talking to us. That was 1938, and I think s -- well, at first -- after that it was getting harder to hold a job if you were a Jew. I remember in 1939 it was when my father lost his job, he was a -- a district manager for a -- a farm machinery company, and he lost his job because he was a Jew. And then 1942 -- well, in 1939, when Hitler gave back the northern part of Hungary that belonged to Czechoslovakia, and that time to Hungary. And my father was in a uniform, the Hungarian army's uniform. He fought in the first World War, so he was called up again to pay the country back. And by 1941 he was called into labor camp, '41 - '42 then they let him out for awhile and then they -- took him back again. In 1944, March 19th, it was on a Sunday afternoon when the Germans -- German army flew over Hungary. I can still see it, it was a dreary, nasty day. No sunshine at all, and I guess it was foreboding of what was coming.

And we saw the plane fly over our city and after that it went one, two, three. They came in on the 19th. By April fifth we had to put on the Jewish star. May sixth we were put into the ghetto. I was watching them building the six foot high wall all around the area. In my town, in Debrecen, they had to make two different ghettos because there was a main road going to the railroad station which they couldn't cut off. So there was a smaller side where we lived and there was a larger side on the other side. So our house happened to be in the smaller area, so that's where we were. And to the day the wall was finished we did not believe it, that it will happen. It was impossible, we lived there forever. I was born there, I grew up there. People were hoping that the mayor of the city, little did they know that he had no say so, won't let it happen. But at any rate, May 6, 1944, we were locked into the ghetto. And in June --

Q: I hate -- I hate to say it, we are going to need to do something about the phone.

A: Well, the only thing you can do is just take it off.

Q: Would you trust me -- I'll be happy to put it back the way it was.

A: Just take it off.

Q: Okay.

A: And just let -- [tape break]

Q: All right. One small thing, and that is, if you could make an effort not to put your hands in front of the microphone. I mean --

A: I'll try.

Q: -- only -- there were -- there were -- there was one time when you were putting your hands like so.

A: I was coughing, I didn't want to cough into the microphone.

Q: No, you were just telling a story and you had your hands --

A: Oh.

Q: So if you could just -- don't be too self conscious, but just be aware --

A: Oh.

Q: -- that if you put your hand in front of it --

A: Okay.

Q: -- it creates a problem. Okay, so you were locked into the ghetto. My question is, when did you find out that you were going to be deported, and how did that come about? How --

A: Well when we found out --

Q: And how did you find out, and were there others deported before you and was it something you were expecting, or --

A: We didn't know what to expect. To this day we don't know how we didn't know, but we did not know what to expect. The way we found out we were gonna go was a Sunday morning that the people came in with the loudspeaker, walked through the stra -- the streets, it was Sunday morning and th -- they said start

packing because by the afternoon you all have to be at the other side in the big ghetto. And then we knew. I mean ho-how long can you stay stupid, right? I mean, you had to know something was happening. My father wasn't home and there we were, my mother and the four of us and a -- a little cousin of mine, my mother's nephew, her sister's son who came with us to live. And that's it. We started to pack whatever we could and by noon people were coming into the house to make sure that we're not taking anything valuable with us. So much so that there were two guys and one woman who came to the house, and the woman took my mother into the bedroom to check her inside, literally, her inside, to make sure that she is not hiding anything in her body that's valuable. And the afternoon we were over at the other side. And that was that. That was Sunday afternoon and then, for a strange reason, luckily, they brought my father back with a bunch of other people in his group. So at that point in time we were all together. My family and a -- a brother of my mother -- father and her -- his sister. And another cousin of mine.

Q: But my question is, what was it like when they took you away from your hometown?

A: From my hometown --

Q: Yes --

A: -- or from the ghetto?

Q: From the ghetto. When -- when you left --

A: Well, we were in our home. After that we were homeless.

Q: Wh-When you were --

A: We were homeless. That's what we were.

Q: -- when you were taken fr-from the ghetto and you were --

A: And then we stayed on the other side. Not long, maybe a few days, I'm not -- I don't remember exactly what it was, four or five days maybe. And they were -- that's when we were walking to the brick factory. And we stayed there for about a week or so, and that was a horror. That was absolute horror. We had to get into groups every day and walk down to the railroad tracks and wait in case we were going to be taken someplace. We didn't know where, but we were going to be taken someplace. And then they started to group people together, and we ended up in a group, they had many children in the families. And I think I was the fifth or sixth there and finally they put us into the wagons and we started off. We went to the border of Hungary and Slovakia and I remember there was one of the Hungarian gendars who was on the -- standing on the back of the train. I guess, now in looking back I think the wagons, the car we were in, the cattle car we were in must have been the last one. Either that or each one of them had one of those guys standing there, traveling with us. And that guy, I remember when it -- they start the train and he said to us, that's as far as I can go with you. God be with you. So he must have been somebody with a little heart, or maybe he knew where we

were supposed to be going. And that was that and I remember at that point I had the feeling that this is it, you know, all of a sudden it just hit that I'll probably never get out of the cattle car alive. And some miracle happened, for some reason we stayed there overnight and the train didn't move and th -- early in the morning it started to roll again and we were looking through the cracks which way we're going and we were going back into Hungary, we were in the middle of Hungary. Next we knew we start to now s -- go to Budapest. And soon after that we kept going and we crossed the border to Austria and -- and there we were. We ended up in Austria.

Q: Let's step back a little bit. What was th-the transport like in the car? What was the -- I know it wasn't very pleasant, but can you describe what the -- what it was like?

A: Well, if you can imagine -- you know what a cattle car looks like? Okay. Can you imagine that filled with about a hundred people or more? Families, children, old people. Small children, some who were lame and not able to move readily, you know, that sort of thing.

Q: Did people stand, sit, lie down?

A: Whatever you were able to do, that's what you did.

Q: And wh-what did you do for water, or relieving yourself, or --

A: Well, they -- they -- we had a bucket of water and we had a bucket for other things, and I remember when we start around the outskirt of Budapest, they gave us some fresh water there, and that was it. We were very lucky because we didn't stay in the wagon very long. It was just one of those freak things that you don't have an answer for.

Q: In your -- in your interview that I saw and read the transcript of, you say that you were supposed to have gone to Auschwitz.

A: That's right.

Q: How did you learn that, that you were supposed to have -- that that train --

A: Well, everybody was supposed to go to Auschwitz. Now we found out here in the United States already, just a few years ago, there is a -- a historian, a Hungarian man, he teaches now at New York University. He wrote a book called, "The Genocide of the Hungarian Jews." You may have heard of it. And he found out that at that point, where we were supposed to be crossing into Poland -- now we were told at the time they couldn't take us through because they bombed the viaduct and the [indecipherable] the train couldn't get through. But what he found out was that there was a group of people who made a deal with the Germans to be taken out of Hungary from Budapest, or wherever, from all over the country. And somebody made a mistake who was directing the -- the cattle cars, and by the time they realized that they took those people on the way to Auschwitz and called

Eichmann, the -- the trainload was too far gone to bring them back. And supposedly Eichmann told him, whoever was in charge, to find another group with the same amount of people in it and take them to Austria. And supposedly that was the group we were in.

Q: What did you know ahead of time? What had filtered through to your community about what was going on and -- I mean, did you -- did you through the grapevine hear -- learn things? Did you listen to the shortwave?

A: We listened -- we listened to the English radio, we listened to the American radio. To the very last day we were hoping and praying that Mr. Roosevelt will come and save us. Well, Mr. Roosevelt didn't come to save us. As wonderful a man as he was, but that he didn't do. We knew there was trouble, because by 1940 - '41, many, many, many Slovakian Jewish people were in Hungary. They all were running away from Slovakia, only to be caught in Hungary.

Q: Had you -- I guess my question is, by the time you were on that train, supposedly for Auschwitz, what did you know of -- about the camps or -- or how people were being killed? Did you know any of that?

A: No, we didn't know anything.

Q: Okay.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Agnes Vogel. This is tape number one, side B. What was life like -- I'm jumping ahead now with the questions, these follow-up questions, in -- is it Strasoff?

A: Strasoff.

Q: Strasoff, before the war ended. What was the conditions like there?

A: Right before the war ended? That was terrible. See, luckily we didn't spend too much time over there, but a short time, about a month and a half while we were there, that was bad. There was no food practically. Sanitary conditions were awful. It was cold. That was bad.

Q: Was there any sort of organizational structure amongst the --

A: We had no time for that. We had no time for that. See this -- this camp wasn't like Auschwitz. We saw no killing over there. There was one day when the put us into the wagons and we were to be taken to Bergen-Belsen. And that was the only cruelty that I saw, when one of those guards, a woman, a Ukrainian woman guard hit my father on the head with a bat of some sort, a piece of wood, because he couldn't run fast enough for her. But other than that there was no other what you would call, you know, cruelty like you hear from people who were in Auschwitz.

Q: Where were your sisters during this time? Were they --

A: We were all together.

Q: Okay.

A: We left our house together and we came back together.

Q: How did you decide to return home after the war? Was it an automatic decision, did you -- was there any debate?

A: It was decided for us, we had no other way to go. When we were -- we were liberated April 10th when the Russians came in and a few [indecipherable] to the west they were still fighting, so there was no way to go except back where we came from.

Q: Were you at all apprehensive about going back there?

A: Oh, of course we were. Then we were leaving -- we were told to leave. There was no choice, we were told to leave because they had to burn down the camp, it was in such an awful condition that that had to be burned.

Q: So at that time there were no displaced person camps or any place --

A: Not for us, no, no. See, there was still fighting, the war wasn't over yet, and then we were liberated.

Q: So you went back to your hometown. What was it like -- you've de -- you've described about -- well, first let me ask you how long was that trip from the --

A: That trip? Over a week. We walked on foot. We somewhere along the line managed to get a wagon with a horse. So some of the people who couldn't do walking well enough -- see, I had a cousin of mine who had polio since he was a

small child, he was two years old and he had polio and he never walked. And so some of those people were sitting on top of the wagon and the rest of us walked. We walked this way and the Russian soldiers came that way.

Q: For -- what -- what did you eat for a week?

A: What did we eat? Well, we stopped at different farmhouses and whatever we could find, we took.

Q: So they were vacant?

A: I'm sorry?

Q: The-These farmhouses were vacant?

A: Most of them, yeah. They left so fast they even left the hot food on the table.

Q: And why did they leave?

A: Be -- they were afraid of the Russians, of course.

Q: When you -- when you got back to -- is it Debrecen, how do you pronounce --

A: Debrecen.

Q: Debrecen. I -- I understand from the interview you gave before that you were received very poorly by the people who were left there, that they were not --

A: Well, I wouldn't say all the people, but when we got off the train in the station and we were walking the main street towards our home, and they looked at us -- but then, these were young people, not older, young people, they greeted us, you know, how come -- what are you doing back here? You were supposed to be dead.

Q: You said not everybody was like that. Can you tell me more about the varieties of different reactions that you might have gotten from --

A: You know, it was such a long time ago and what I can remember is there was really no time to look at reactions because we had nothing on our body except the clothes we left a year ago -- a year before that. And th -- you know, our first -- we walked into the house and there was nothing there. It was totally empty, everything was taken out. So our first priority was to look around and see if we can start a new life. So there was even no time to look and see what people thought and how they reacted.

Q: How -- just so I get an idea before I ask you the next several questions, how long were you there before you made the decision to leave the country?

A: Well, we got back there in 1945, May, and I think by end of the year I decided that I had to leave.

Q: So a little over six months you were there?

A: Yes.

Q: What --

A: I couldn't convince my family to leave in the same time, because, see my mother have -- had at that time two sisters over here and lots of relatives. And I must say they were very nice, they sn -- you know, send the papers right away and

everything that they needed to do, they did, to get us over here as a family. But it took longer than I had patience for, and I wanted to leave.

Q: Let's step back a little bit before that, I -- I'd like to talk to you about what life was like there in your hometown before you decided to leave. You say you were there for about six months or so. How did you -- you -- you came back home, there's noth -- not a st -- there's no furniture, there's no nothing, you --

A: Well, we came back home and you were looking for people you knew before, to see if anybody came back, my uncle, my aunt's husband wasn't with us, he was in a labor camp someplace. Luckily he survived and he came back. Yet her son, who was somewhere in Germany, never made it back home. So we used to go every day to the center point of the Jewish life over there in that time, that was hastily put together, to look at names who they found and you know, who was alive. And that was that.

Q: But you had no money, you had no belongings.

A: We had no money.

Q: How did you get by, what did you eat? How did --

A: [indecipherable] well, there was a place called the Joint Distribution Committee, if you ever heard of it.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And they gave us some clothes, they gave us a little money to get started with. And the rest we just, I don't know, see, I -- I had my parents. I had my father. He took care of all that.

Q: Di-Did he find work?

A: He must have, some kind of a work, because eventually he did do something to provide for us.

Q: But you don't remember what?

A: I don't remember.

Q: Did you see when you went back, former schoolmates f -- I'm ta -- I'm thinking of Gentile folks that you would have known before you were put into the ghetto and before you were taken away?

A: No, not any of my classmates, no. See, it was a total chaos when we went back, it was still soon after really, so-called liberation. Everything was in chaos. The school I -- the Catholic school I went to was disbanded, there were no more nuns around. It was -- I don't know, everybody was everywhere.

Q: Of the Jewish population in your hometown, were you all on that one train that was turned around?

A: Oh, no, no, no, they -- they took 12,000 [indecipherable] the population of 12,000 Jewish people in that city. That city wa -- had a population of the w -- at that time about 120,000 people, and 10 percent were the Jewish population.

Q: And who -- how many made it back alive?

A: Not a whole lot.

Q: Roughly, do you know -- have any idea?

A: See, the transport we were in was they weren't only from Hungary -- from Debrecen, they brought people over there from outlying areas in different stories. So we had people with us from Szolnok, we had people with us from Szeged, from Miskolc, from all over the place. That was, I guess, the biggest city around and so they brought people over there.

Q: But do you have any idea from reading or speaking with people s-since the war has ended, any notion of how many people survived from your hometown, of the Jewish population, roughly?

A: I have a book, I could -- I could look it up for you.

Q: Don’t worry about it.

A: But I’m really not sure. Not -- not too many, I know that.

Q: So what was it like for you to come back to your hometown that had treated you badly, if a -- if I’m making sense, to come back to the same people who had been persecuting you beforehand and to come back and there being such a small number of Jews that were left and I guess -- maybe I’m asking a -- an inappropriate question, that it sounds like your concerns were much more concrete, day to day, what you were going to eat, how were you going to get by. But I guess I’m just

wondering what it was like to come back to your hometown in this chaos and such a different place than you grew up. Was it -- had many other people left?

A: Everybody.

Q: You mean, escaping from the -- the Russians, or --

A: You mean the --

Q: I mean the --

A: -- people who came back?

Q: No, what I'm really referring to is Gentiles from the town. Had they -- was it pretty much intact?

A: Oh, that part of it was -- th-they all stayed. No, they didn't leave.

Q: Okay, cause you were talking about the people in the countryside that had abandoned their farms with the --

A: That was in Austria.

Q: Okay. So you decided to leave, let's go to that part of it. How is it that you -- t-tell me about your decision to leave and why you decided to leave when the rest of your family was staying.

A: Well, for one thing, since I was the oldest in the family -- I saw no future there, for one thing. And I always, since I was a little girl, I always wanted to come to the United States of America.

Q: Why?

A: I'm not sure exactly why, but I -- at the -- you know, when I was little child, I don't know why, because I heard my parents talk about it so much and we have -- we had so many relatives already here. And that sounded like an exciting place to live. So after the war I had a choice of either going to Israel, where I also had relatives, because my father's whole family was in Israel by that time, including my grandparents. And -- or come to the United States. And since my mother had two sisters who were here and they ask me, they says, please go to the United States because I want to go there someday too and be with -- be with my sisters. And they were very nice people, they send me the appropriate papers and here I am.

Q: I want to -- I want to ask you in more detail about that, cause not many other people, it wasn't so easy, in terms of, you know, immigration quotas and other problems. How long -- when did you -- whe -- from when you decided to come, til you actually came, how long did it take to -- to --

A: About two years. Close to two years.

Q: And what did you do in the interim? Did you spend all that time there in Debrecen?

A: No, no, I stayed in Hungary til the very end of 1946, yeah, I worked a little bit.

Q: What did you do?

A: What did I do? It's a good question. See, by that time they had a very good Zionist organization built up already and a lot of young people coming and they had all sorts of offices there, and I worked in one of those places there. And for -- end of '46, in December, or -- yeah, and then I left. And then I went to France, I st -- I stayed in Paris for about eight weeks until I could get in a ship and then I came.

Q: Let's step back a little bit, so you spent all told about a year and a half in Hungary before you went to Paris and then eventually to the U.S.?

A: Right.

Q: I guess I'm trying to get a feel for a daily life for you then. What -- what did you do? What --di-did you have friends, did you simply do things with your family?

A: I had lots of friends.

Q: I'm -- I'm trying to get a f --

A: There was lot of young people who came back from labor camps, from Auschwitz without anybody, without their families. So what -- those were busy times. If you could do away with all the other events that led up to that, that could have been a very nice time. But you know, that sort of thing lingering in the back of your mind, I tried to make the most of it. And everybody was trying to look for a way to get out.

Q: When you say busy times, you tried to make the most of it, I'm trying to get a feel for what it was like for life to begin to get back to something resembling normal. What -- wh-wha -- socially, what did you do? What -- when you --

A: Well, like I said, [indecipherable] there were a lot of young people coming back and I had a lot of friends, and most of my friends, by the way, ended up in -- in Israel. [indecipherable] I was friends with. And they were just, I guess, for lack of a better word, trying to bide our time until we could find a way to get out, is what it was.

Q: So everybody was looking to leave somewhere?

A: Everybody was looking to, there was no -- no future there.

Q: Were there -- were those pretty much the choices, or were -- me-meaning the U.S. or Israel. Were people looking to go to Australia or other parts of the world?

A: Some people did, it depends, you know, where you had connections, or where your interests were. Or whether -- where your luck was, really, to get you wherever you wanted to go.

Q: Did you have -- let me ask you about friends of yours, or extended relatives. I think you've pretty much told me about your extended relatives and what happened to them, but did you have friends that died?

A: Oh yeah, quite a few didn't come back. Yes, and some who even died before because they were taken to labor camp.

Q: Close friends?

A: Some.

Q: So you got to Paris, train? From Hungary to Paris, did you take a train?

A: Mm-hm.

Q: And where did you stay when you were there? You said eight weeks to wait for your papers to come through and to get a ship.

A: Well, see, what happened is my father took me to Budapest, put me on the train and then before the train left, he went around and see if he could find somebody who was going the same way as I was. And sure enough, he did find a young lady, somewhat older than myself at that time, who not only was coming to Paris, but also was going to the United States of America. Not only to the States, but going to the same city that I was going to and to the same neighborhood where I was going to.

Q: Detroit?

A: Detroit, Michigan, yes. To the same area where my family lived, and so we became sort of fast friends and he -- she took care of me. I stayed with her in the same hotel while we were in Paris and he -- she left a few weeks before I did. But she had a nephew over there who was a concert violinist and he's been living in Paris for some time by then. So she put him in charge of me, so to speak. So I was

well taken care of until I got on the ship and my family took me off in the city of New York.

Q: What was it like -- where -- on the ship coming over, were there other Jews that were coming -- immigrating?

A: There were a lot of Jewish people coming, yes. Some were going to Cuba, some to the United States and some Mexico and they were going all over the place.

Q: Do you remember at all how you felt -- I me -- that was th-that trip, about how long did it take?

A: About five days, I believe.

Q: Were you fearful, anxious, excited? How were you -- do you remember at all what -- what it was like? I mean, you di -- here, you've left your entire family behind, this whole horrible experience --

A: But see, I left my family behind in the hope that within a year's time I would be with them also. So I didn't just walk out on them. But I guess it wasn't mean to be because not even a year -- before the year was up after I left, I -- they closed the borders and nobody ever left from there until 1956.

Q: Who closed the borders? Who closed --

A: Who closed the border? The Russians.

Q: So that's why they didn't come to join you.

A: That's right. That's why they couldn't leave, when every -- everything stopped. And by 1956, my parents became ill, my father had a couple of heart attacks. My mother came down with th-the Parkinson disease and there was no way for them to leave. And this is why my youngest sister left home -- I mean, stayed home in 1956, because the other two were already married, and she was still single, being the youngest. She was just a young girl. When I came out here, I remember I used to send her money to take dance classes and I used to send -- I sent her money to buy a bicycle when I started to work. And she was the victim of it all.

Q: And she stayed there.

A: She stayed there and she's still there.

Q: In -- in --

A: That's 1997, right?

Q: In -- in the same town?

A: In the same town, yes. My parents are gone and she's still there.

Q: Do you have any other extended family that still live there?

A: No.

Q: Cousins, or --

A: No, I had two -- I had three cousins who came back from Auschwitz. See, my mother's whole family ended up in Auschwitz, I had four aunts -- five. One, two -- four -- four aunts and an uncle who all perished in Auschwitz. And some younger

cousins who were just small children, and the three who survived were, you know, young adults, and they made it.

Q: So these were all siblings of your mother?

A: Yeah, from my mother's side, yes.

Q: Do you remember at all how she came to learn that and what that was like for her to learn wa -- that all -- was that --

A: [indecipherable]

Q: -- all of her siblings?

A: -- to see -- my cousins, all three of them were home long before we got home because Auschwitz was liberated in January and we didn't get home til April. And they came to see us and that's how we found out what happened.

Q: Was that all of her siblings?

A: Mm-hm, except the two sisters [indecipherable] she had here in the United States.

Q: Do you remember what that was like, her -- I mean, how she dealt with learning that?

A: That was hard. That was hard, but there was no other thing to do but deal with it. You know, there is an interesting thing that I remember, when they were taking the people, the first transport from Hungary to Auschwitz and there was -- my mother's family were among the group, and I remember my mother walk up

[indecipherable] and said, I had a terrible dream. She had a dream seeing the family walking down the road and there were two rows of candles on each side of them, lit, as they were walking down the road. Now by the time we got home it was more or less a fact.

Q: How did you fi -- di -- I mean, how did you feel about this? Did you -- I mean, did your family grieve, did -- did you grieve, did you -- was there time for grieving?

A: There was really no time to grieve like you do nowadays when somebody dies. You had to keep alive. You were alive, you had to go on. But I think you never really stop grieving. That's also just part of our life.

Q: You came to New York on the ship. Do you remember what it was like the first time you saw New York, the first time you saw America?

A: Yes.

Q: What was that like?

A: It was overwhelming. I've never seen such big buildings in my life. Oops. It was exciting, it was unbelievable. I think I must have felt like Alice in Wonderland when I got off the boat.

Q: Were you emotional, was it --

A: I don't know, I'm a very emotional person so I guess I -- that was just exciting.

Q: This may be a kind of a cliché, but I've spoken to other people who have made that trip who were very affected by the Statue of Liberty and you know, all of that and I was wondering if that had any impact at all or was it just [indecipherable]

A: I guess, the fact, it probably did. I remember -- oops -- oh, I have to go back a little bit.

Q: It's okay.

A: On the way to -- from Paris to the ship, you know you take a little boat that carries you out there to the sea. And there was a couple, an older couple sitting across from me and there I was sitting all by myself with a little book of English and Hungarian translation and I tried to read and brush up of whatever English I knew. And they were trying to find out who I was and what does a young girl do on a boat like this all by herself and where I came from and where I'm going and they tried to talk to me and up until that point I thought I could speak English. Well, when I heard them talk, forget it. I didn't understand almost [indecipherable] what they're saying. So I found out eventually that they were from Brooklyn visiting Europe and coming back from Europe and they were very sweet people, they took me under their arm. When they found out I was from Hungary, they went all over the boat searching for a person, another person from Hungary I can be with through the trip so I won't be lost. As it happened there were quite a few Hungarians there, Jews and non-Jews. And the person they found for me to be with

and eat, you know, the meals with, was a non-Jewish person, a guy from Cleveland, of all places, who took his wife to Hungary because she was sick and took her there for some kind of treatment and he was coming back to the States. And when we got to New York, this lady from Brooklyn grabbed my arm and pulled me out to the, you know, end of the wherever there was in the boat. They says, hey look, look, that's the Statue of Liberty. So that was my introduction to the Statue of Liberty.

Q: Let me just move that [indecipherable]. Did you -- let's see, how can I phrase this question? Given what you had just been through in Europe, was it difficult for you to be around non-Jewish people, period? Were you afraid of them, were you concerned? I guess what I'm trying to ask you is --

A: Not really.

Q: No?

A: No. Do you mind if I [indecipherable]

Q: No, not at -- not at all, not at all.

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Agnes Vogel. This is tape number two, side A. I was just asking you, cause I've heard from -- from other survivors who felt very leery to be around Gentiles when they -- when the war was over because they had been turned on by all the Gentiles in their life prior to that and -- and so they had a hard time trusting that it wouldn't happen again. And so that's why I asked the question.

A: Well, I don't know, maybe I'm different, but I never really had too many chances to be with Gentiles, because when we got to Paris, I had some friends already there from home whom I met, they were all Jewish people, young -- young people. So I had no reason to get friendly or get close to any of the Gentiles. And when I got to the United States my family didn't -- weren't friends with any Gentiles. So again, I didn't have a chance to meet any.

Q: Your family met you when the boat came in in New York.

A: Right.

Q: Now refresh my memory, did you -- you had -- did you have relatives there in New York or is everybody in Detroit?

A: No, they came from Detroit. I did have a relative from New York, it's a cousin of my mother whom my aunt and uncle took me to visit, and they lived on Park Avenue someplace in a huge apartment with a beautiful, big, brown dog. And they

were very lovely people. They were very impressed the way I looked, coming from where I came from, and that was that. I never saw them again after that.

Q: Was it at all emotional, your family that you'd never met, I'm assuming --

A: No, not too --

Q: -- coming to meet you?

A: Emotionally what way?

Q: Well, for some other people, coming over here and meeting up with relatives was a big deal for them, for both sides. For the -- for the -- the American relatives, do you know, to be --

A: [indecipherable] with my -- my aunt and my uncle, yes it was a little bit emotional, but with the cousins, these were already second, third generation Americans. They [indecipherable] They lived their life and that was a lot of story.

Q: You said second or third generation Americans, who -- who would have c -- who of your ancestors would have come over that long before?

A: Well my -- oh well, before the tur -- way before the turn of the cen -- middle of the last century --

Q: Okay.

A: -- they were coming over here, the uncles of my parents.

Q: Okay. So in addition to your --

A: A-Aunts and uncles and --

Q: So you had quite a few relatives here, not just your mother's sisters. Okay. How d -- did you spend much time in New York, or -- or did you go directly with them on to Michigan?

A: No, not a whole lot, because they had to come back. See, I arrived here in March and at that time I think the tax time was in March in those days, if I remember right. Also, my -- one of my cousins, my aunt's daughter who picked me up had her birthday in March, so they had to come home, you know, for those reasons. But we drove -- they drove into New York, so we drove back and we stopped on the way in Scranton, Pennsylvania to visit another cousin of my parents, lovely, lovely people. And then we came home, or we came to Detroit.

Q: Now they obviously spoke Hungarian, your --

A: I'm sorry?

Q: They obviously spoke Hungarian --

A: Oh yes.

Q: -- your -- your aunts.

A: Oh yes, they still do.

Q: And the -- the men that they married, were they Americans, were they Hungarians as well, the -- were they married?

A: Oh yes, they all had families.

Q: And where had -- where did these men come from?

A: Where did what?

Q: Your uncles, where did they come from?

A: They were also Hungarians.

Q: Okay, cause I was wondering about you -- the language problem. You had poor English, you've already told us, when you went over -- when you came here, and I was wondering what it was like for you to start to --

A: It's not so much that I had poor English, because I -- I did take English lessons and I wrote -- as far as writing, I wrote very nice letters. My family in Detroit couldn't wait for me to get here. But also, I am a rather -- well, what's the word that I want to use? Bashful? And I don't like to be laughed at. And so I tried when I got here, but then a few of -- little teasing and I clammed up. And I spoke no English until I met my husband-to-be.

Q: I don't think that's an unusual thing. My mother has told me similar things, that until she learned English well, she was uncomfortable speaking it, just for that very reason.

A: But then you can't learn it well unless you start talking.

Q: Right. It's a problem.

A: Yeah.

Q: So, when you got to Detroit -- you were how old by this time?

A: I was 20.

Q: 20. What -- what did you do? What --

A: Well, six weeks after I was here I went to work, they found me a job.

Q: Doing?

A: At a tailor shop. Men's -- it was a men's shop, actually.

Q: And you were d-doing alterations, or --

A: Mm-hm.

Q: And you lived with them, with your -- were there cousins your age, or similar, or --

A: Well, close to my age.

Q: Younger, older?

A: [indecipherable] not exactly my age, but you know [indecipherable] here and there, and most of them were younger.

Q: Did you -- tell me about your first experiences with -- dealing with Americans other than your -- your family, who were immigrants as well, like -- like the people at the tailor shop were -- how did you --

A: They were actually very nice people and there was a very nice lady, a nice Polish lady who worked there also. And she was as sweet as can be. I guess I'm -- I'm really lucky because I fel -- I -- I met very few nasty people on the road. Eventually I -- I did find some of the younger American girls, the so-called -- well, I don't want to say the American princess, but you know, that -- those type of girls.

They had no patience for me. I couldn't speak their language, so that was -- you know, but that was fine, I really didn't need them because there were a lot of people like myself in Detroit at the time and we had a nice group of people we were friends with.

Q: When you say like yourself, other immigrants, or --

A: Yeah. Yeah.

Q: Did you develop friendships with native born people?

A: Mm, not right away. Well, maybe one couple.

Q: And how would you get to know people with these -- did you -- did you go to synagogue here? Were they people in -- in the -- that lived in the neighborhood, were th -- with work?

A: Well, over there in those days -- well, through the families. See, most of the Hungarian families, you know, they all had somebody who survived and coming over. So that's how we met. And then there was the Jewish center in Detroit, that was the center point of going to school over there and meeting people. They just [indecipherable]

Q: You said going to school, did you pursue school?

A: Mm-hm, yeah.

Q: Well, tell me about that.

A: Well not -- I went -- at the beginning I went to the Jewish Center to take some English classes and then I met my husband, then that was -- you know, life became a whole different thing.

Q: How did you -- how did you meet and when did you meet? How long were you here before you met him?

A: Well, I came in March and I met him, I think, a few months later at the Jewish Center. He came in to say hello to the teacher and then he looked around the class and he -- when the class was over he was outside of the door.

Q: And?

A: And that's it.

Q: He was outside the door, and?

A: And was -- you know, we -- he walked me home after that and he -- we started to see each other and that was that.

Q: How long did you court?

A: Well, we met in -- let's see, maybe in April, May, and we got married in February next year, following year.

Q: In Detroit?

A: Mm.

Q: Now he had also an aunt or uncle here, is that right?

A: He had one aunt.

Q: That's what I thought.

A: That's the only relative that he has.

Q: That -- that made it. That's what I thought. Did you, during the time that you were courting, talk much about your respective experiences in the war?

A: Some. Probably not enough.

Q: What do you mean by that?

A: Well, what I mean is, we were mostly trying to look ahead, not back, if it makes any sense.

Q: Mm, I understand that, but you said probably not enough, the implication being that there should have been more.

A: That ch -- maybe, but I don't think at that time he could have taken any more of it. There had to be a time to [indecipherable]. We needed time to sort of settle down and live. Look at life instead of that. Eventually it came true and now we're at the point where we almost talk about nothing else but.

Q: We'll get to that. That seems to be a very consistent experience of people, that there was a -- a period of time, sometimes a very long period of time where it was not comfortable to talk about it amongst themselves, or with others.

A: It's not so much that it wasn't ca -- well, first of all -- let me just go back a little bit. I know when I came out here I had the grandiose notion, you know, that everybody wants to hear my story so I'll be going around and talking about it.

Nobody want to hear the story, come on. We were kidding ourselves. Even my own family, who lost so many members, close family, you try to talk to them, they would change the subject. They couldn't. They couldn't bear listening to it.

Q: But you tried?

A: Of course.

Q: So it sounds like --

A: So then you just gave up. I mean, there was no sense of talking because nobody -- first of all, nobody could really understand what we went through. We could tell them from morning til night and from night til morning and still talk and nobody can understand it. It's -- it's -- those things that happened to us, it's -- it's like a horror story, it's -- in your wildest imagination you couldn't conceive it and picture it, no less understand it.

Q: So, because they couldn't conceptualize it, there was little point in discussing it?

A: Exactly.

Q: Plus in the case of your -- your aunts and uncles, they had lost family, so there was, in addition to the lack of empathy for what you'd been through, there was also that -- the -- the pain and the grief of having lost the family. What about -- did you know other -- other than your husband, before you met your husband, did you know other survivors that were there in Detroit?

A: Yeah, sure.

Q: Did you ever talk to them?

A: Yeah.

Q: What was that like?

A: What could it be like? You just listen. Most of the people I met in Detroit, they all came from Auschwitz. So you know, all I could say is my God, how lucky I was.

Q: This is, you know, I mean no disrespect to ask this, but did you ever feel guilty that you were as lucky as you were?

A: No, not really. I don't think I had or have any reason to feel guilty.

Q: No, but --

A: I just -- what they say, the luck of the draw.

Q: There's no reason you should feel guilty, I just -- there are some people who do feel that.

A: No, I heard that mentioned many times before [indecipherable] but no, I -- I mean, it never even came to my mind that I need to feel guilty.

Q: Was it -- do you remember the first time that you spoke to another survivor who had been in Auschwitz or any of the other death camps, and actually heard from their lips what happened? [phone ringing] Let's wait til it's finished ringing.

A: Yeah, well, the first ones I heard from, what happened in [indecipherable] my cousins who came back, you know, we met them after we got back home to Debrecen and they came to see us. So by that time, you know, by the time I came here I -- I knew about it.

Q: Well, let's --

A: It wasn't all together, you know, new to me.

Q: But -- well then, let me ask you, when your cousins came back to Debrecen and you first heard about it then, do you remember what it was like to -- to hear about that?

A: That was such a long time ago that really -- I really can't --

Q: It's okay.

A: -- I really can't remember what I felt. I'm sure that it must have been awful, but --

Q: Okay. I just thought I would ask. Let's talk about you and your husband. So you met. Do you remember at all the first time that you two talked about your experiences, do you remember?

A: Well --

Q: What was that like?

A: I couldn't believe -- well, first of all he's got something against the Hungarians to begin with, but you have to know him, too. See, he was in Auschwitz for two

and a half years by the time the Hungarian Jews arrived, and he couldn't understand how come that we didn't know anything about it, what was going on. And they didn't run the other way, instead they ended up in Auschwitz. So that -- and I think in some ways -- in some ways I think he held it against me that I was free that much longer, while he was already in camp.

Q: You know, when I first read yours and your husband's stories in the transcripts that they sent me, I was struck by the disparity of your experiences, what he -- he went through and what you went through

A: Oh yeah, exactly.

Q: And wondered whether over the years that's been at all problematic for the two of you to have such different experiences, and w -- and whether it's g -- that's caused --

A: No, not really.

Q: -- any problems or --

A: No [indecipherable] I mean, eventually he understand that it was not my fault, and I had nothing to do with it. No.

Q: I don't know if you can answer this, but because it was such a short period of time after you came to this country that you met your husband, maybe this is not a -- a question you can even answer, but I guess what I'm wondering is whether it's -

- whether you could imagine being married to someone who hadn't had this experience?

A: I don't know. I probably could have. I don't think -- can imagine why I couldn't.

Q: I was just wondering whether -- I mean, certainly I know people in my own life whose -- who are my age whose parents -- where one of them was a survivor and one of them was not. So obviously it happened, but that's -- I'm just wondering in your life whether that was something -- it's -- it's -- it's -- it's an academic question cause you did meet and you did marry, and --

A: And that was that.

Q: I'm sorry?

A: And that -- and that -- that was it. Well, I don't know. I wonder sometime, actually, what would have been like to live with somebody who didn't experience what he did.

Q: What has it been like for you because his -- h-he went through so much. Not that you didn't, but what has it been like as his wife to -- to deal with his experiences secondhand over the past 50-odd years, 50 years or so.

A: Well, at times it hasn't been all that easy, but we managed, we got through it.

Q: When you say not easy, in what way not easy?

A: Well, because of his, I guess because of his personality and because -- oops -- what all those years, you know, did to him and the way he [indecipherable] may have changed his personality and what he could have been like.

Q: Did you have any -- when did you have your first child?

A: 11 months after we got married.

Q: Did you ever have any conversations, was there ever any question in your minds that you would have children?

A: No, not really, that was just the way it's supposed to be.

Q: Well, the reason I ask is I've heard two different things from people. Number one, pondering the now cliché question of do I want to bring children into this world, knowing what I know about what is possible. And the flip side of that which is I want to have as many children as I can to repopulate the world. So that's why I asked.

A: Well, see, in those days they didn't have the birth control pills. I missed out on that.

Q: And you have how many children?

A: Four.

Q: And where did they come -- how long -- I mean, how far apart are they?

A: Well, let's see. 1949 through 1961.

Q: And how f -- what are their names, and --

A: Well, there's four, almost five years between the first two, and then the third one came 16 months later and the fourth one came seven years after that.

Q: And what are their names?

A: Their names?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Howard, Caryn with a C, C-a-r-y-n and in the time I picked th-that name my friend really thought I was crazy.

Q: Why?

A: Because that was a different spelling of -- of Caryn. And today it's all over, but for years I haven't seen it. But anyway, and the next one is Linda, and the younger -- the youngest is Elaine.

Q: She's the one born in '61?

A: '61.

Q: When do you recall first talking to any of your children about what had happened to you and your husband?

A: Well, it wasn't too long after, as soon as my son was old enough to notice things, really. You know, my husband has a number on his arm, which you can see in the dark, big enough. So, you know, children ask questions.

Q: And how do you tell a small child about this?

A: Well, luckily my husband has a very good sense of humor, and so he's got a way of making a joke out of most things. So what do you tell a four or five year old child? Right? You can't go and tell him, cause first of all they wouldn't understand and then, why.

Q: So what did he tell him? Or do you remember at all the gist of it?

A: Well, I remember he told him he was in jail, and he was a prisoner and that was that.

Q: When I was a small boy, the -- the man who cut my hair, the barber at the barbershop had been in Auschwitz and I didn't -- of course I was -- I was the four or five year old child, and I said -- I asked him, what's that on your arm? And he said, well that's my phone -- phone number, so I don't forget my phone number.

A: Yeah, that's what my husband says, too. Not only it's his phone number, it's his house number.

Q: What about when your children were older? Older t -- old enough to understand?

A: Well, we told them, and they knew. They knew that we were a different family from all the other friends they had, because you know, we were -- there was no grandparents, there was no immediate aunts and uncles. No cousins anywhere. But you know, we never made a big deal of it, so they got through it until they were old

enough to understand and they began to learn in school and knew what it was all about.

Q: Do you remember the first time any of your children came to you asking questions in any depth and wanting you to talk about it? Maybe after reading -- seeing something in school or hearing something, or --

A: I think we just sort of, as we went along, you know, as they grew older we told them a little more. So it was a gradual process.

Q: Was it something that you and your husband at all talked about between yourselves, about you know, was their any conscious thought about how to tell them or what to tell them or what not to tell them, or was it just sort of --

A: Not really, no. I mean, like I said, we just, as they grew older and that, we just went along with whatever they were coming up with.

Q: How is it that you came to leave Detroit?

A: Well, because of my husband's job.

Q: I -- I know I'll be talking to him tomorrow, but just basically what does your husband do, or what did he do?

A: At the time he was working for a clothing company, who had several stores, you know, and so that's why we ended up traveling. And then he hooked up with a big -- the discount outfit, one of the first discount stores in the country and we traveled some more.

Q: Where did you go, briefly. How did you -- from -- from --

A: From -- from [indecipherable] we were --

Q: -- from Detroit to here.

A: -- and I went to Grand Rapids first -- Michigan, Grand Rapids, Michigan. From there we went to Binghamton, New York. And then we went -- from there we went back to Detroit again. That was with the discount corporation, and that's how we ended up in Indianapolis and he became a district manager and they moved us to Indiana [indecipherable]. That was three years ago.

Q: I'm sorry?

A: 30 years ago, almost.

Q: So you -- were your children born in different cities along the way, or were --

A: Actually, all four of them were born in Michigan.

Q: You were there that long? Oh yeah, so 30 years ago, that -- so you --

A: Well, we went back.

Q: Right, I see.

A: [indecipherable] when the first three were born in Detroit now, the two of them in Highland Park and the third one was born in the city of Detroit. And then when the last one came about, we went -- we were back in Michigan again.

Q: Hold on one second. So you came here, it's 30 years you said, '67.

A: To Indian --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- Indiana? Indianapolis? Actually, we -- let me see, we came to Michigan City in 1964, and we were there five years, and then from there we came to Indianapolis. So we've been in Indiana for over 30 years.

Q: When -- okay, I'm gonna -- I want to come back to these questions, there's some questions, the things that I mailed to you that they specifically want me to ask, and then I have questions that I've come up with on my own --

A: Well, okay.

Q: -- just in the past day or so, having given this some thought. Hold on for a second. We talked about that. One of the questions -- I'm going now with things that they wanted me to ask you, what -- after having had such a horrible experience, what -- what strength did you draw on to -- to go on, to -- to make a fa --

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: -- absolutely.

A: Three minutes, four minutes.

Q: Take your time. Take as much time as you want. This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Agnes Vogel. This is tape number two, side B. -- asked -- that you'll be asked to do. I was asking you

before the -- the tape -- the last tape ended about what -- what -- what has helped you to -- to cope, to -- with the memories, with the -- the grief, with the -- has your faith been helpful or -- or was that something that you struggled with when the war was over?

A: You mean religion?

Q: Yeah.

A: No, I had no problem with that. The strength -- oh well, once we had a family and we had children, there were no question, I mean you had to go forward, that was that. The children were our strength.

Q: You said religion was not a problem. What did you mean?

A: I -- I am Jewish. I was born one and I always will be. I'm not overly religious. I keep a Jewish home, I raise my kids in the tradition, or I try to.

Q: Let me rephrase the question. I guess some people would say that there's a -- can be a difference between the -- the rituals of being an observant Jew in terms of ke-keeping kosher and high holidays and g-going to temple, and -- and having some sort of relationship with -- with a God, meaning -- how can I pose the question? I guess it's a -- the classic question that many people have coped with over the past 50 years since th-the Holocaust, is -- you know --

A: Where is God?

Q: And how could God have let this happen and all of that. And I'm wondering if you ever had, at any point in your life, pondered any of that, or --

A: Sometime. Sometime, yes. And I think I -- I ask where's God after the war when my parents were so sick, when my mother suffered so much, I think that was the time when I asked where is God, why did she deserve what she got? After what we went through.

Q: Did you come to any conclusions?

A: No. There is really no conclusion. You don't know why. Things just happen. When we started out our life together, I kept kosher. I had Friday nights traditional. Even my own family in Detroit didn't believe it, after what I came from, that I would do something like that. Howe -- my husband couldn't care less. My son was Bar Mitzvah because I dragged him to his classes, literally by his ear. And my husband kept telling me, don't bother, he doesn't have to do it. I said yes, he have to do it, because that's what he is and he have to do it. And so he did. And after we left Detroit, I don't know, I -- there were places we lived where it wasn't easy to keep kosher. There were no kosher butcher. So I bought the meat in the supermarket and I koshered it. Took it to a man who koshered. And gradually I did away with that, too. Not to the point that I ever -- to this day I don't eat pork, and I don't bring it in the house. I don't even eat it out. Now today I have the four kids. My son has nothing to do with religion. My daughter lives here in town, he marry -

- she married a Catholic guy who turned Jewish and today he is more religious than the rabbi, to the point where they don't even answer the telephone from Friday night until Sunday evening when the Shabbas is over. So there.

Q: And which daughter is that?

A: I'm sorry?

Q: Which daughter is that?

A: That's the first one, my oldest.

Q: And --

A: That is the oldest of the girls.

Q: And then the other two daughters, what happened with --

A: Now, the one in New York is not married, and the youngest one is also married, a Swiss guy who is not Jewish, so -- but they did go to a Seder in Switzerland and he enjoyed it very much. And she does the traditional things for the holidays, you know, she bakes the hamantashen and the -- whatever. It comes [indecipherable]

Q: And your single daughter in New York, does she -- is she observant at all?

A: Not too. She comes home for the holidays most of the time, depending how it falls, you know.

Q: I'll obviously be talking to your husband in more depth about this tomorrow, but was he -- you say he -- he wasn't very su-sup-supportive, or maybe that's not the right word, of your --

A: No, that's the right word.

Q: Yeah.

A: [indecipherable] he wanted to do nothing with religion.

Q: Did he humor you? Did --

A: Oh, he went along with it because I wanted to do it, but you know.

Q: Did he join in? Did he do his part in the rituals, and -- or did he --

A: Mm, sort of. Now he's beginning to get into it.

Q: Hm. What about -- I'm still staying with the thread of things that have made your life meaningful since the war, and it's -- this, the largest portion of your life, the -- the past 50 years. I g -- I gather you've retained interest in the arts. I know when you were a girl you were -- I -- I gather you're still doing it, painting ceramics.

A: I'm doing it again now. Th-The -- these kind of paintings pulled me through between having babies.

Q: Tell me about this -- your th -- your -- this passion, hobby, avocation?

A: Ah, no, it -- well, I guess you can call it both. Actually, this goes way back when I was a teenager back home. See, in those days in Europe, this was a beautiful profession.

Q: Why don't you -- why don't -- because this is an audio interview, let's describe what this is.

A: This is what they call a porcelain painting. Porcelain art is what it is. And in those days before the second World War, this was a beautiful profession. And my family had a very good friend who did that, and then when -- when I became a teenager, I took lessons, not from the family friend, but from another young woman, who did some beautiful, beautiful work. And it was just in the early 40's, so we really didn't have much time, but we were hoping, before we knew what was going to happen to us, that someday we gonna come to the United States and bring our beautiful painted porcelain. Well, it didn't happen. Somebody else [indecipherable] otherwise. So then when I came to this country -- see, if I would have ended up -- if my family would have lived in Syracuse, New York, you know, I could have been painting china for 50 years. But since they lived in Detroit, there was no need for that.

Q: I don't understand. Why would Syracuse have been different?

A: Because, I believe in Syracuse, New York, isn't that the home of the Syracuse China Company, whatever? Anyway, so -- a-and then I find out, after I was married already, that they're giving -- they had a very good system in the schools in those days in Europe, as far as adult classes were going, and I found out there was one of these, and I went. And I took some classes over there, and in between kids, you know, when I couldn't go out of the house all day long and he would come home and watch the kids and I would go to class. And I did it. And then I

worked at it when we lived in Flint and I did it when we lived in Michigan City. And then when we moved to Indianapolis I couldn't find anybody to work with and so I hadn't done anything for years until about three years ago, when I met somebody by accident, and so I'm at it again.

Q: What other -- are there other arts that you are attracted to, or get joy out of or -- either doing or observing, or --

A: Well, there's a lot of things I can do, you wouldn't really call it arts, but yeah, I tried stained window -- stained glass. But then the woman I was working with moved away from town and so that was the end of that.

Q: What other things do you enjoy doing -- that bring you joy?

A: I enjoy reading.

Q: Fiction, non-fiction?

A: Both. History. Think it's an interesting subject.

Q: Have you had other classes other than your porcelain?

A: Mm-mm.

Q: Mm-mm. What about any more passive things, concerts, I don't know, opera, ballet, movies?

A: Oh yeah, I -- I worked for a ballet school for 22 years, I just retired --

Q: Doing what?

A: -- end of May. I was running the office.

Q: So you did that after your kids were grown, or did you start to --

A: Well actually, I got into it because of my youngest daughter, believe it or not.

Q: Tell me about that.

A: She -- well, she was a very cute, dainty little girl when she was small and I took her to ballet classes. I started her actually in Michigan City and then -- for two reasons I did that with her, because she was also a very shy child and I figured that will be good and you know, bring her out a little. And the older kids took wer -- when we were in Michigan City were in the children's theater group, and they did great over there. And -- but she was too young for that yet, the little one. And then when we moved to Indianapolis I -- one summer there was nothing to do for her. And so I called up and I took her to the Butler University ballet classes and she got hooked. She wanted to be a ballerina. And that's how I got in there and now she left and I stayed.

Q: Has she continued to dance?

A: She did for awhile, but then she had problem with her back and then she [indecipherable] so she stopped.

Q: Politics. Once you came to this country, did you get involved at all with de -- politics, domestically?

A: Not really. Just on the side.

Q: On the side meaning?

A: I'm in -- actively involved in politics? No. Am I going out campaigning, and that sort of things? No. Well, first of all, I didn't have time for it, it takes time and I had four kids to take care of, so you know, there was nobody else but me for them, so that was out of the question.

Q: When did you become a citizen?

A: Five years to the day I arrived here, I think.

Q: What was that like for you?

A: That was wonderful. It was an -- an unspeakable feeling.

Q: How so?

A: Well, just imagine yourself being thrown out of one country and taken into another and you become a citizen. On the other hand, there is always that little, small voice, you know, in the back of your head, what if it will happen here too? So this is why I think when I -- I raise my kids, all I wanted them to do is whatever they do, to be independent enough so wherever life will take them, they will be able to land on their two feet, because you never know.

Q: I want to talk about all three of those things, but back to your citize -- becoming a citizen. It obviously was a -- a big deal to you.

A: Yes.

Q: It said that --

A: It still is and I take it seriously, not like some other people.

Q: It's funny, it seems like, my mother included, all the -- the people that I know that emigrated here are more patriotic, for lack of a better word, than most of the native born people I know. Perhaps precisely because --

A: Because we know what it is. We know what it's worth.

Q: Did you ever, back when you were in Europe deciding what to do after the war, was there a time where you were really seriously considering going to Israel because your father's family was there?

A: Yeah, I was, because most of my friends were there. And there was, you know, we needed a country.

Q: Have you ever in the interim regretted that decision to come here rather than going there or --

A: N-No. No, no, I never did.

Q: You mentioned -- kind of going all over the place here, chronologically, but you mentioned earlier about when you were in Europe listening to the radio and waiting for Roosevelt to come and help and it never happened. Did that in any way lessen your, I don't know, appreciation for this country, to know that they had abandoned their -- I don't know how to, what to call it, their duties, their -- that they had not behaved better toward the European Jews?

A: Not lessened. I was probably a little bit disappointed that a big, powerful country couldn't do more. But then, you know, as you live here, you learn about

the country, you learn about political procedure, so to speak and you can almost understand.

Q: How were you treated -- yo-you mentioned in passing about the -- y-you didn't want to call them princesses, but there were some American born, presumably Jewish women that you were encountering that were less than welcoming to you, presumably because you -- you had an accent and your English wasn't to -- to their mind --

A: Some still are, that's really -- you know, people are very interesting. See, I -- I did a lot of phone work, I mean answering the phone at work over there. And it's interesting how people react when they hear something different. So I sort of got used to it. You know, at first it was bothering me a little bit, but now I don't care. You don't like it, that's your problem. You know when I would answer the phone and on the other end I hear, oh, did I detect an accent? I said, no, you hear one. Or I would say, you know, no, I don't think so. And then they wanted to know if I was from Germany, or from France, or wherever, you know. And then some people I would try to answer something, they said, I don't understand you. I don't know what you're talking about. Okay.

Q: Did you ever feel -- a-a-and if so, how -- ill treated by other American born Jews here that you, you know, we -- espe -- like let's say you moved to a new town, in your various moves, you know, to Flint and Michigan City --

A: Yes.

Q: -- and Syracuse, or wherever you were at, and here. How were you received by the -- the Jewish communities in the places that you went, as -- as immigrants, as survivors?

A: [indecipherable] but it was very nice. We made friends everywhere we went. It -- it -- it depends, it's so different, you know, the kind of people you meet, in general. Some are nice, and curious and want to get to know you, some, don't bother me.

Q: Do you recall any incidents in any of the places that you lived, ag-again getting back to how people, you know, would come to find out -- I mean, obviously your -- your husband has the tattoo. Did you have any memorable encounters with people, I don't know, neighbors, the grocery store --

A: No, not that kind, but I had through my children, where we lived in Cleveland for a short time and my son went to school there. And th -- he had a fight with a kid behind him who called him -- I was going to say a dirty Jew, but no, it was something else, but there was a Jew in it. They got into a fight for something. That was in Cleveland and then when we lived in Delaware, Newark, Delaware, we lived in a very nice, almost new subdivision over there and there was another family somewhere not too far from our house whose -- the father was an army officer and they had two or three kids and one was as old as my son and they were

good friends. And there was a little boy who was my Caryn's age, the one who lives here in town now, and -- and she had an incident with the kid. She came home one day and she says to me, Mommy, you know what -- I don't remember his name any more -- what he told me on the way to school? I said, what did he say? She said, he told me that it's too bad I wasn't in Germany during the war because then Hitler could have killed me too. And then another day when the -- after that, sometime after that, the afternoon when they come home from school, three comes my daughter with a, you know, stack of books in her hand, with a smile from ear to ear. I said, what happened? She said well -- and says, that boy was bothering me again, was starting again being a Jew and this and that and whatnot. And she says to me, I couldn't listen to it any more, so I picked up my books and I hit him on the head with it. I said, good for you. And that's from the same family, two boys from the same family. So how do you -- how do you figure, how do you account for that? And the older boy would come to my house and play with my son, and then the other one was hassling my daughter.

Q: What about not so much anti-Semitic incidents, but you know, moving to a new neighborhood, cause you moved so much, and you know, people asking you about your survivor experiences, or it coming up in conversation or it -- neighbors --

A: It's interesting, for the most -- most people w-wanted -- they couldn't hear enough about it.

Q: Meaning they asked about it?

A: Mm-hm. Sometime I think more so than the Jewish people.

Q: Why do you think that is?

A: I don't know why it is, but I noticed it, was -- I don't know why, but -- but the Gentiles want to hear more about it than our own people, even today.

Q: Was there a time when you were reticent to talk about it if someone asked you and would -- would th -- was there a time when you would be less than --

A: Well, that depends who you talk to. You know, there was some people you wouldn't want to say anything. There were others who you feel that they genuinely interested, so you don't mind talking about it.

Q: I guess I was thinking more in terms of was there a time in your life where you or your husband were making a conscious effort to put it behind you and not talk about it?

A: W-We were, probably the first maybe 15 - 20 years of our marriage, we just -- just didn't talk about it.

Q: Well, that -- that answers my question. That's a large period of time.

A: Yeah. We just didn't talk about it.

Q: What changed after 15 - 20 years, what -- was there anything that spurred you on to --

A: I think people began to read more and began to hear more. When the television came about, there were more things that came out into the open, and people became interested. And then -- see, when my older kids went through high school, all through school, even here in Indianap -- in -- in Indianapolis from ’69 on, never a word was mentioned in school about it. Nothing. In the early 70’s when they started to teach in the Sunday schools, and that’s when they were start -- beginning to look for survivors to come and -- and speak. But up until then there was really nothing.

Q: What was your first experience -- let me just check how we’re doing here, I think the tape is ending, hol -- [tape break] What was your first experience doing any sort of public speaking about your experiences? Was this your -- being invited to your children’s school, or --

A: I think the first time it was I was asked, it was here in Indianapolis already. I was asked to go to IHC, the Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation where we belong, to talk to a Sunday school class, and before I got there, or before I was to speak, they were showing the film then -- oh God, I can’t remember the title of it. All I know is the --

Q: “Night and Fog?”

A: Pardon?

Q: “Night and Fog?”

A: Yeah. Thank you. And it was the first time I really saw pictures of that kind. And I was so shaken by it, was the word I think, that I almost couldn't do my speaking. And then the other one when I was a little bit more composed, when my youngest daughter was in junior high and she was in an accelerated class and th-the wonderful social studies teacher, and they were reading the Anne Frank story and also some other stuff related to the Holocaust. And in one of those classes, the teacher asked the class if anybody knows anyone who was in a camp. And our little one put her hand up and said yeah, my parents were there. So the teacher wanted to know, so do you think your mother would come in and talk to us? So she called me and I said yeah, I'll be glad to, sure. So we set up a time and I wrote up, you know, my speech, and went [indecipherable] did my speaking. And I know my daughter was very upset with me, cause she said, you sounded just like a teacher. But when the bell came and the class was over, the kids wouldn't let me go. They had so many questions, they wanted to hear more. And the same night the teacher called me again, would I come back and tell them some more. And that was when I told my husband, I said look, I already told them what I know. Maybe you ought to come and hear what the kids have to ask and you talk to them. And that's when, you know, we really started to talk about it to other than us. And then, about the same time there was a -- a book that came out, "The Hoax of the 20th Century," and he got -- my husband got very upset over that and he wrote a letter to the

newspaper and he wrote a letter to Northwestern University. Of course, Mr. Butz never answered, but nevertheless he wrote a -- sent him a letter. And that's when he started to come out.

Q: And when would that have been, approximately?

A: I think it was somewhere in the early 70's, I don't remember exactly what year, '72 - '73 - '74, somewhere in there, in the 70's.

Q: And since then what sort of things have the two of you done in terms of speaking, or --

A: He is the one mostly who does the speaking, I'm not very good at public speaking. He is -- he is very good and he does quite a bit of it.

Q: Well, let me rephrase the questions. Wh-Wh-What's, other than your -- your daughter's class, what sort of places have you gone over the years?

A: Some social clubs, you know, not -- not too many places, really. I let him do the talking.

Q: Can you talk about the long term impact that you think your experiences in the Holocaust have had on you raising your children, perhaps, or tr --

End of Tape Two, Side B

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Agnes Vogel. This is tape number three, side A. And I was just asking Mrs. Vogel about the long term impact that your experiences have had on you in different areas of your life. And the first I was going to ask you about is in your family life and in raising your children.

A: It's like I said before, to make sure that they're -- become independent people. We never -- tried not to teach them hate. We're both rather friendly people and we welcomed anybody who came into the house, so you know, we won't hold grudges against people because that doesn't get you anywhere. And I hope my kids will have enough common sense that they'll know what's right and what's wrong.

Q: How has it affected your, I don't know, we talked about politics briefly, citizenship, your -- your feelings about government and the possibilities of what government can do and should do and should not do. Is it in any way shaped by your experience with what happened to you in Europe?

A: [indecipherable] that's -- that's the thing, that you gotta keep your ears and eyes open.

Q: How so?

A: To listen to what -- not just what people say, but what they do and what they really mean when they say some -- say something, especially in -- people in

government. So I go out and I vote for the best people I think there is to put in to places in the government.

Q: Do you -- your -- you talked earlier about that small voice in the back of your head that says, could this happen here.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Is that voice any quieter, dimmer than it was when you first came over here, when it was fresher in your mind?

A: No.

Q: No?

A: As a matter of fact it's even more lou -- I think it's -- it's maybe louder now than it was before.

Q: Why?

A: Because of what's going on out there and what's happening in Washington and it's what happening -- what's happening in the country.

Q: What things are happening that are most concerning you?

A: The right wing swing of the country. All these fringe societies out there that could easily, given time and a situation, God forbid, can easily become a bigger threat.

Q: Were you -- I want to go back in history and talk to you about some things that have happened, but do you recall how you felt when this bombing happened in Kansas City -- excuse me, Oklahoma City? Was that -- did that concern you?

A: That was terrible. It was a horrible -- it -- it -- I mean, how can it happen in the United States? See, this is what I mean, people like that.

Q: Are there sounds or smells that you have encountered here that bring back memories for you of --

A: Sounds yes, smells, no. But words sometimes.

Q: Like?

A: Maybe it's something, that I hear something and it doesn't take much, it just all of a sudden like a movie, everything comes back.

Q: What kind of words would do that?

A: N-Not any specific words, but you know, you read an article, you -- you hear something on television, and oh, that's it and off you go.

Q: What about sounds, you said sounds, yes. Did you mean things other than words?

A: Like a big bang, an explosion, a siren.

Q: And you've -- you're hair stand up or you -- you -- you -- or you have a flashback or you --

A: Yeah, you could call it a flashback.

Q: Have you ever been concerned or -- or apprehensive or fearful, I don't know, a knock on the door when you're not expecting it, or a phone call late at night, or a sp -- anything along those lines, or --

A: Not really.

Q: Just wondering.

A: No, not really. For the most part I feel pretty secure.

Q: Is that something you've had to work on at all, or are there any things you do, or -- that help you feel more secure, or things that you and your husband have done?

A: I think it just -- like I said before, I think it just evolved. We been, thank God, very lucky. We didn't have many unpleasant experiences, as far as that goes. So you sort of become accustomed to being, you know, on an even -- what's the word I want to use?

Q: Keel?

A: Sort of.

Q: I wanted to talk to you about some -- oh okay, all right, let me -- I'm checking off these questions they wanted me to ask. Your dream life, have you been troubled in your dreams by nightmares, or --

A: Oh, I have crazy dreams all the time. But I'm not sure that it's related to where I come from. Not necessarily.

Q: So you don't -- none -- you don't ha -- specifically have dreams that you've had over the years that --

A: Mm-hm.

Q: -- related directly that you're aware of?

A: No. I had some -- a nightmare not too long ago, I woke up screaming, somebody was going to come and get me. But I don't think it had any relation to -- not consciously.

Q: You went back to Hungary some -- not -- many years later.

A: Yeah, we went back, oh, it's about 10 years ago.

Q: What was that like for you to go back there after so many years?

A: It was [indecipherable]. It was like I was in a strange country, like I've never been there before.

Q: Just because physically it looked different, or --

A: Yes, yes, and it's strange, I mean, things that I remember that I grew up with is not there any more. There was a big, beautiful street in the middle of the city, and we walked through there and I looked and I s -- kept saying, it's -- doesn't look the same as I remember. It used to have, when -- what I remember, it used to have two rows of huge, beautiful trees, and in the summertime it would -- you know, all the branches and the green would come out and then all come together, it's like a --

Q: A tunnel?

A: -- tunnel going through it. And I'm looking and I said, it's not there. I kept asking, I said, what's missing from here? And my sister said to me, oh you're looking for the trees that's no longer there, they cut it down. And went back to the street where we used to live, and I na -- had such an eerie feeling. So that was that.

Q: I know your husband went, did you go together to the Holocaust gathering, the survivor's gathering in the early 80's?

A: [indecipherable] yeah. The one in Israel? Yeah.

Q: Tell me about that. What was that like for you to do that?

A: That was emotional, very emotional. It was -- it was nice. At that time I was still looking, trying to find out what happened. See, I have an aunt who we never really found out what happened to her and her daughter. That's the sister of my mother I mentioned earlier whose -- the husband was taken away in 1941, I believe. They took him to the Ukraine. '42 and early '43, the news came that he died. And my aunt was left with a small child who was about four years old at the time and a daughter who was a young teenager. And she decided to liquidate whatever she had over there and then to come to live with us, because they were very close [indecipherable] my mother. And she wanted to be with us til the war was over. And my parents went in September between the high holidays, between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur to bring the child over to our home, so she should be free to take care of her business and then would follow. Well, it took her longer

than she thought it would, and then around Christmas, December, they came over and -- Christmastime they came over and wanted to take the boy home and he wouldn't go, he wanted to stay with us. And then in the spring my parents wanted to send the child back to her, and my father almost found somebody who was going there with her -- with his daughter and at first they agreed that okay, they're going to take a chance and take the child back. In the last minute they said no, we're afraid to take a child because if they find out you're taking a Jewish child, we get in trouble too, so they didn't take him. And as it happened, he survived, today he is a doctor and he lives in Texas, and his mother and sister is gone and we don't know how and -- but they died in Auschwitz, both of them. And they were young enough to be able to survive.

Q: What other things happened when you went over there, did you see people you knew, did you --

A: I met a lot of people I knew, yes, and so did my husband. And I went to one of the museums in Tel Aviv called the dias -- Diaspora Museum. And to my surprise I found in one of the computers, my whole families' history written up. So that was interesting. And I saw my aunts I had [indecipherable] I haven't seen since I was a small child.

Q: Did you -- other than that gathering, have you had much contact with other survivors living here in the States? Do you have any friends who are also survivors?

A: I have a girlfriend I went to school with, she lives in New York, and that's about it. I really don't -- and the few here in town.

Q: About how many people are there here?

A: Real survivors?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Well, some of them already passed away. Not really a whole lot.

Q: Five, 10 - 20? [indecipherable] 30?

A: There are a few who came over here as young children before -- just before the war, came from Germany. But others [indecipherable] real -- real survivors are us and maybe three, four other people, that's about it.

Q: So th -- what about in other places you lived before you came here?

A: The only place that we met survivors were in Binghamton, New York, where I met some people from my hometown, and Cleveland. Other than that, in Michigan City there, we were, I think, the only survivors there was.

Q: Mm-hm. Well, I was just thinking it must have been a -- a profound experience having had only sporadic contact with other survivors since you came here, to all of a sudden be there with thousands there in Israel.

A: Yes and no. In some ways I think it was a relief, because you know, when two survivors get together, the only thing they talk about, what they went through and what they survived. A-And I think in order to save your sanity, so to speak, you need -- you need some time away from it.

Q: So it sounds like a blessing that -- that you haven't had that many encounters.

A: In some ways.

Q: I can understand that.

A: That's my husband.

Q: Yes. Do you need to communicate at all bef -- cause there's more that --

A: I don't know, how much more do you have to go?

Q: Well, that's really up to you. There are a few key things that I definitely. Can you spare another 15 or 20 minutes?

A: Okay.

Q: Okay. I would ask you about a -- a handful of things that happened in the past 50 years that -- that I'm wondering what your thoughts were about, or feelings about, as it relates to your own experience. The bomb, the atom bomb. The -- the n -- the nuclear age, the -- the fear of annihilation that was so prevalent in the 50's and you know, where -- you know, the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. What was that like?

A: That was nerve-wracking, that was scary. The Cold War was scary because you never really could trust the Russians, so the -- as far as the -- what, the atom bomb in Japan, it was a terrible thing to do, but it had to be done, otherwise we would still be fighting.

Q: What about the -- the trials after the war, the Nuremberg trials and other trials that happened with --

A: They didn't catch enough of them.

Q: Did you follow them very closely?

A: Yes and no. See, the Nuremberg trials were what year?

Q: '47, I think?

A: '48?

Q: Something in there.

A: '47 - '48.

Q: I think, yeah.

A: Those were the years, I don't know, I was really trying to find myself, so to speak.

Q: Mm-hm. During that time when you were perhaps not so apt to be thinking about, talking about what happened?

A: Exactly.

Q: Were you aware of how many Nazis came here, and if so how did you feel when you s -- when you learned of that?

A: I was a little bit surprised and a little bit disappointed in the American government for letting them in. There were way too many in here.

Q: And they weren't just here, they were, you know, working on NASA and --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- you know, the CIA and --

A: Well, they needed them, they had to -- those people they had to bring in because they needed the knowledge. But even with that, where were our American scientists?

Q: I have a general question to ask you. Who do you blame for what happened?

A: For what happened in --

Q: The holo --

A: -- you mean for the Holocaust?

Q: Yes. Who -- who -- where is your anger directed?

A: I think the whole world. There isn't one person you can pick because all the governments in the world knew what was going on and nobody did anything. It's hard to believe but none of those smart people in the government couldn't see through what Hitler was about and they went along with him, country after country?

Q: Do you have any more anger toward the Germans than other people who collaborated with them or went along with them or --

A: I wouldn't call it anger, I have no sense of being angry because that just destroys you. I feel sorry for them.

Q: How so?

A: That they have to live with this, maybe to centuries to come.

Q: Have you had any encounters ever with any younger Germans?

A: Yes. We were in Germany a few ye-years ago, my husband was testifying against some Nazi people from the camp. We met some lovely German people, they didn't know what to do for us. As a matter of fact we became friends. And she practically saved my life while we were there because I became sick over there and she had a friend who was a doctor and you know, she -- she took care of me. So --

Q: Are you aware -- I'm assuming you are, of the -- how the American Jews reacted to what was going on and what they did and didn't do?

A: They didn't do a whole lot either, did they?

Q: I was wondering how you felt when you learned that.

A: Disappointed I suppose, but then I don't think it would have make any difference, because even though this is a free country, it's still the government that decides. It's Washington who makes the decisions. So regardless of what they did, if they would have done more than what they tried, if it would have been any help.

Q: I've been told that there were Jewish leaders who went out of their way to lobby Washington not to let European Jews into the country, back in the late 30's, early 40's because they were afraid of pogroms here and -- and the backlash cause of the depression, that there would be all these immigrants coming over and taking jobs away from Americans and --

A: Well, you see, that started the trouble in Germany. That's why it all started. So this is what I mean when I said earlier they -- that's mostly -- see, the Jewish people are not so eager to hear our stories, the real American Jews.

Q: Wh-Why do you guess that is?

A: Hm?

Q: Why do you guess that is?

A: Well, that's what it is, what you just mentioned, that they were lobbying not to have in the 1930's. So --

Q: What a -- what about the conduct of European Jews who -- like the -- the Jewish councils, the -- th-the people who -- I don't know if you had any encounter in -- in your hometown where there must have been Jews who were in charge of the ghetto?

A: They were [indecipherable] in every city, it -- that was the same everywhere the Germans went. But see, in -- in Hungary they didn't have much time any more. That was -- everything was done in a hurry. Like I said, from March 19th, by the

end of June there were no Jews left in Hungary, everybody was gone except the one who lived in Budapest.

Q: So there wasn't much time for any sort of infrastructure to be --

A: There was no time for it, no. They were gone one, two, three. By that time they knew what they were doing and th-their machinery was oiled pretty good.

Q: Back to things that happened in the interim, between then and now. Were -- what was it like the whole McCarthy era and the red scare and the people who were being persecuted here for, you know, rumors that they were communists and wha-what did you go through with that? Did you know anybody caught up in that?

A: Not personally, no.

Q: What was it like to observe that, having come from the experience that you came from?

A: Well, it was unsettling to say the least, because if it goes one way it could go the other way, too. So there we go.

Q: Si -- explain that, if it can go one way it can go --

A: Well, if one -- one day you persecute the communists, the next day you gonna find somebody else to do the same for, right?

Q: Mm-hm. What about the -- the way blacks were treated here, and the beginnings of the Civil Rights movement and -- what was it like for you -- I mean, there are very few blacks in Europe probably, when you were growing up.

A: I never seen any. One I've seen as a child, Joe Louis was in our town.

Q: So what was it like for you to come to this country and see the -- the segregation and the -- the way, in essence, the blacks were in -- they were -- the ghettoes --

A: Oh, talking about segregation, listen, when I came to this country in 1947 in Detroit, one of the nicest neighborhoods, I remember standing with my aunt waiting for a bus to go downtown, and I look across the street, a big, beautiful apartment building, and there is a plaque on the door. It said no dogs -- I'm trying to remember exactly how it was worded. No dogs, no Jews and no blacks allowed in the building. That was in 1947. And I turned to my aunt and I asked, how could you stand for this? To me it was outrageous. But that took me awhile to -- like all of us who come to this country, you know, from somewhere else and this is a whole different life, and to get to know it, where it came from and what it's all about. No, it's not fair, it's not fair to treat anybody like that, regardless of color.

Q: I guess I was wondering if you felt any particular affinity or connection of -- watching the way they were treated, versus how you were treated.

A: Connection, no, not really, because it's two different things altogether. No, it's -- it's not the same thing, and you can't really bring it to the same level.

Q: I sense I've touched a -- a nerve.

A: No, not really, but it's -- it's not -- that's not the same thing.

Q: How is it different?

A: Because it's true they were treated badly, they were segregated, some of them were lynched, but they weren't taken as a group to the gas chamber as the Jews were. And that is the difference.

Q: I guess I -- what I was asking -- I was not myself making the equation of the two things, I was wondering if you felt particularly disturbed at all or anything, when you came over here to -- to see --

A: Yes, it was disturbing because no -- no human being should be treated like that, there's no reason for it.

Q: Were you at all, when the Civil Rights movement was happening, did you -- were you involved at all in that, or did you --

A: Involved? To some extent, but I wasn't involved in any of the marching as such, but you know, I was for it.

Q: Just wondering.

A: Absolutely.

Q: What about the whole upheaval that went on around the Vietnam war and all the demonstrations and Kent State and you know, the riots and you know, that -- that whole period abou -- of upheaval. Did that frighten you at all, did that concern you? Did that -- did you have any familiar --

A: Frighten me? No, but it was rather -- what's the word I want to use? This is America. That's the United States. People can do anything they want to.

Q: Is that a good thing?

A: In some ways it is, as long as they know what really matters.

Q: I'm -- I'm winding down. What about the whole Watergate scandal and finding out in depth the level of corruption and shenanigans that were going on?

A: That just shows that you can't trust the politicians in Washington.

Q: So it wasn't a particular surprise or shock or --

A: Not really. That was a shock because it happened in the United States and I guess in -- we're supposed to be a little bit better than anybody else in the world, but I guess we're not.

Q: What about various -- how do I characterize them as a group? In the past 50 years there have been some horrible things, either that we just learned about, like in the case of the revelations about what happened with Stalin in Russia and all the millions of people that --

A: [indecipherable] that just a -- that's another thing that nobody wanted to know. I was there. Some people knew about it.

Q: I take it you did.

A: Well, we heard stories.

Q: Hold on, let me just check. I think I have to turn this over.

End of Tape Three, Side A

Beginning Tape Three, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Agnes Vogel. This is tape number three, side B. And I was asking you about things that have happened in terms of other -- I don't know what to call them? Catastrophic events in history, such as the -- the various ways that Stalin did away with millions of people in Russia, in Soviet Union.

A: Well, of course it was shocking, when something like this comes into the open.

Q: Or, you know, Mao in China or Pol Pot in Cambodia, or Idi Amin, or --

A: And the starving of the kids in what was that country in Africa where all those kids were starving awhile back?

Q: Just recently?

A: Well, it's been a few years.

Q: Well, Somalia, then -- that's what you're talking about?

A: Mm-mm.

Q: No?

A: No, Somalia is a latecomer, but --

Q: Ethiopia?

A: -- there was another --

Q: Biafra?

A: Maybe that's what I'm tal -- thinking [indecipherable] sure.

Q: Biafra was the late 60's.

A: Yeah, I think that's the one, when all those kids, children were starving and where was the world?

Q: I guess what I'm wondering is, when you, over the years have learned about something horrible that's in the midst of happening, like in Rwanda all the -- they were both, you know, massacring left and right the -- you know, the -- the two ethnic groups there. Or what has gone on in the past five years in -- in Yugoslavia.

A: I was just going to say -- mention Yugoslavia. Now that, when we saw the pictures coming from there, we looked, I said, my God, it's like concentration camp. There was no reason for that either.

Q: I guess my question to you is, when those things have -- when you've seen those things in the news, or read about them, does it frighten you, does it concern you that --

A: No, it makes you angry. It brings back all the memories, all that we went through and it makes you angry that the world didn't learn.

Q: Have any of those events caused you to take any action, or -- or-or --

A: Action as far as what?

Q: I don't know. Giving money, mobilizing support for -- I -- I'm -- I'm --

A: For who?

Q: I don't know, I'm -- I'm inventing things here. I'll take that the answer is no. Last question, I know I've taken a lot of your time already. Not my last question,

but the last thing that they wanted me to ask you about history. What about observing Israel becoming its own country in ’48 and then the trials and tribulations of the past almost 50 years?

A: It’s 50 years, you’re right.

Q: Has that been -- have there been things that have happened there that have been --

A: It will be 50 years next year.

Q: Next year. Has -- has anything that had happened there concerned you, disturbed you?

A: Everything that happens there concerns me, of course. It’s a beautiful country and it’s long overdue. I mean, Jewish people need the country like that. And they work very hard for it, those people over there.

Q: Let me rephrase the question, when I said concerns you I -- I meant disturbs you.

A: Some of the thing that happens over there, yes.

Q: Such as?

A: Oh, all the problems and bombings they have, where innocent people, innocent children die for no reason. I mean, there is -- there is no -- there is no reason for it, for that. That’s -- it’s a concern for, I think, the whole world.

Q: How did you feel when the -- the whole Intifada started to happen and the -- how -- maybe I'll ask in general how you have felt about the Israeli government's treatment of the Palestinians within their country?

A: See, we just came back from Israel. And what we hear on the news over here and read in the paper, it's a whole different thing than what goes on over there. So we really can't -- can't judge.

Q: Okay. I've just got a couple of questions in closing to ask you and then I'll let you to your dinner.

A: Okay.

Q: What would you like people to understand? Someone, let's say of my generation who certainly did not go through what you went through. Or for that matter people who are of your generation, who were here, or elsewhere and didn't experience what you and your husband experienced. What would you like people to understand that perhaps they don't understand or fully appreciate about the Holocaust and the experiences you had?

A: Well, let me think.

Q: Is there something you would most like people to come away from hearing this interview understanding?

A: Not so much understanding, but maybe more aware of what goes on in the world, and maybe quicker to react on what happens on the other side or wherever it happens.

Q: Meaning elsewhere in the world? On the other side?

A: I mean, yeah, around the world. Because the world is getting smaller every day.

Q: The last question I was going to ask you seems related to your answer, maybe you're already answered it. How do we keep this from happening again?

A: Tolerance, and be aware, and teach your children not to follow blindly.

Q: So if a leader comes up who starts promising things that sound too good to be true?

A: Question it, and don't believe it til you see it. And let's hope that the younger generations will be smart enough to see through somebody like this.

Q: Has there been anybody, any politician si-since you've been in this country that's particularly worried you or any not necessarily politician but figure that's particularly ba -- concerned you, that could be, I don't know, a charismatic enough leader to cause trouble?

A: Yeah, except I can't think of the name of the person.

Q: Give me a hint.

A: But there was one not too long ago in the picture. Pat Robertson is one. Is it -- have I got the right name?

Q: Yes. Oh, hold it, which -- which Pat? There's Pat Buchanan and Pat Robertson, Pat --

A: Well, the both of them. One is the politician, the other [indecipherable] and the other one the -- the religious guy, and they're equally bad.

Q: Is that -- is one of those who you were trying to think of or is there somebody else?

A: [indecipherable] well, there are probably some others around that not too well known at this point, but --

Q: Hm. By any chance, did you ever read the book, "It Can Happen Here?"

A: No.

Q: It was written in the mid-'30's about how a fascist state could start in this country.

A: Sure.

Q: And it's quite a book.

A: Did you read it?

Q: Yeah.

A: It is available in the library?

Q: Sure, it's by Sinclair Lewis.

A: Oh. I think I'll go get it.

Q: It's -- it's quite a book. He wrote it in the middle of the 30's, two years -- 1935, two years after Hitler came to power, and he wrote a very persuasive scenario of exactly how da -- you know, the right politician and the right mix of bad economic situation --

A: Mm-hm [indecipherable] that's all it needs.

Q: -- and the right people to scapegoat and the right crisis to mobilize the country and give the president the proper powers and --

A: The only hope in this country is that -- who they gonna pick for the scapegoat?

Q: How so?

A: Well, they can pick the blacks, they can pick the Jews, they can pick the Hispanics. Who they gonna pick?

Q: Well, there's also the sort of generic, whoever the last people came into the door, you know, as the most recent immigrants that are taking the jobs away, or whatever.

A: Well, I guess we're back to square one again, huh? There we go for the Jews, huh?

Q: I really appreciate all the time you've given us this afternoon. This concludes -- is there anything you'd like to say in closing?

A: Just one more thing. I hope for the government of the United States, that will stay forever what it was written to be.

Q: All right. This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Agnes Vogel, on the ninth day of July, 1997.

End of Tape Two, Side B

Conclusion of Interview