United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Bella Mischkinsky
June 10, 1998
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Bella Mischkinsky, conducted by Arwin Donohue on June 10, 1998 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Gaithersburg, Maryland and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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

Interview with Bella Mischkinsky
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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 Bella Mischkinsky, conducted in Gaithersburg, Maryland at the home of Bella's sister, Irene Glossberg, on June 10th, 1998, by Arwin Donohue. This is a post-Holocaust interview that follows up on a USHMM Holocaust era video interview, conducted with Bella on July 12th, 1995. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum gratefully acknowledges Jeff and Toby Herr for making this interview possible, this is tape number one, side A. Okay, I'm going to just -- for the sake of summarizing on tape, say that we're -- we're going to start out by going back into some of the Holocaust era and pre-war experiences that weren't discussed in the first interview. So -- and then we'll -- and then we'll focus on the post Holocaust material, after we've done some of that. And we're going to try not to repeat what was already said in the video interview, just -- just to do new stuff. So, why don't we start out Bella, by you stating your -- your name today and -- and your name at birth.

Answer: My name is Bella Mischkinsky. I was born September 9th, 1922 in Lódz, Poland.

Q: And we know from the first interview that you were born Bella Berger. How -- ho -- and -- and then you -- how -- how did you get the name Mischkinsky?

A: After marrying my husband, Ike Mischkinsky, I adopted his name, Mischkinsky.

Q: And then later you married Hank Bermanis. How did you decide to keep the name Mischkinsky? Was that an issue at all?

A: It was a matter of convenience. It's too much hassle to go through all the papers and changing names and whatnot, so I decided to officially go by Mischkinsky and whether I was referred to as Mrs. Bermanis or Mischkinsky or Bella, was of no importance or difference to either of us.

Q: We -- will you describe something about -- you -- you had said in the first interview, a few things about you childhood in Lódz and how you were sort of a happy go lucky young girl and -- and you weren't really a -- a joiner, or a member of groups or anything. And you mentioned a little bit about your -- your family and their political interests. Or -- your father was a Bundist and they weren't particularly religious. I wanted to get more of a sense of your relationships within your family and if you could state your father's name and your mother's name and say something -- and -- and your sister's name and say something about your early relationships as a child before the war, with each of them.

Q: Well, my mother's name was Gitla Voidaslavsky -- was her maiden name and she married my father, Natan Berger and she adopted -- adopted his name, so she was Gitla Berger. My sister is my junior. She was born in 1930, her name is Irene, known at that time as Irene Berger. My relationship with my parents was -- it wasn't close, but it wasn't antagonistic. My mother was busy working. She was a terrible housekeeper, hated housework, loved to be with people, loved to work. Also, that was not the common standard at that time in Poland. But she was the happiest when she was among people and when she

was working. My father had a job, not a very strict one. He was much more educated than my mother. He liked different things than my mother. I could never find a common bond why they ever got married, except the custom in Poland at that time was that -- what do they call? Thedushetimeshat. Some family introduces a man, other family introduces a woman and they decided that they would make a couple and they get married. There was no courting, dating, or any of that. And I imagine that's why they got married. I never found them very competitive to each other. My father pretty much went his way. He was a terrific mathematician. He loved politics. He loved cafés, good life. My mother was just devoted to work, work, work. So I was pretty much left on my own. I would say that my home base was rather my grandmother's home, where there was somebody there, than my parents home.

Q: Now, which grandmother was this?

A: My father's mother.

Q: And what was her name?

A: Hiya. Hiya Berger. And my grandfather was a just -- a terrific Hassidic man, but very astute, very educated, very respected and he belonged to the -- I think you could call it sect, of the gedda rabbin -- rabbins -- rabbins -- whatever the name is. Because the Jews were kind of separated by belonging to different rabbis -- who was next to God. Leaders. But the religious life never interested me. I had no special feelings towards God or even religion, except knowing that I am Jewish. Couldn't describe what it meant. Probably because I was born to Jewish parents and was surrounded home with the Jewish tradition, but it did not

affect me at all. Politically my father's -- he had four brothers, two sisters and I had a slew of cousin and inevitably, every one belonged to a different part of the political organizations at that time. I was not a joiner, but I was listening, cause I loved to discuss things. I guess that's something the Jews had, discuss issues to death. So they were talking about Zionism, Bundism and all shades of Zionism. Hammish -- hammish hatiyere and the revers in this groups and many other ones. So I was exposed to it, but not a participant. I never joined any organizations. I am just not a joiner.

Q: Did you have any Zionist sentiments at all as a result of that, or did you feel completely uninterested in it?

A: No, I had no Zionist interests at all. The concert of Palestine and our homeland, that was not something my mind was preoccupied. I was probably more Polish than Jewish, except being Jewish definitely. I had no interest in the Jewish life at that time.

Q: Did your parents have any kind of religion that they -- that they were bringing you and Irene up with, that they were -- you know, that they -- did they -- did they bring you to Temple on high holidays or was the -- it really -- pretty much secular Jewish household?

A: No, my parents didn't -- my grandparents, that are Orthodox, so I observed the Jewish holidays and attitudes towards religion through them, but not through my parents. My parents never gave me a Jewish education and I never showed any interest in it. But I do have a sentiment and terrific memories of my grandparents home, who were real true believers. So, Friday night was a big holiday. My grandma got -- put the best chaidel on and the long dress and that hose. Set up a white tablecloths and candles and holly. And my

grandpa -- father came back from Shul and took the honored place at the table and was -- had all the respect of the children and grandchildren and -- so that it was always a feeling of religion in their house. On Passover, was a tremendous holiday, joy for us children. Had to change dishes, you have to burn homitz and all those things. But I really -- I was not a participant, but I was an observant and I had no objection to it, as long as I did not have to do anything about it, but enjoy the atmosphere of my grandparents home.

Q: So you attended a public s-school then, did you?

A: Yeah, I attended the public grammar school and then I went to a private high school.

Q: Would that --

A: Public schools were compulsory. High schools were private. But I attended a private high school, which was very much influenced by the Bundist movement.

Q: Was it a secular high school?

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah. Okay. What did you think of -- of the Bundist movement?

A: Of the what?

Q: The Bundist movement? What -- what kind of --

A: I couldn't care less. Well -- but I know they did not believe in a homeland like Israel. They were anti-Zionist. They believed in peace on earth wherever you are. They were more a s-socialist movement Certainly not a religious one.

Q: Where did your real interests lie? Was there anything that -- that you -- that really excited you as a child?

A: I didn't have any special interests. I was a very happy young girl. Had lots of friends, was going to school. I wanted the world to be wonderful, everybody should love everybody else. And I really felt a part of Poland. I considered Poland my home. Unfortunately I found out differently in '39. But until then, I really felt very Polish.

Q: You mentioned in the first interview that your friends were both Jewish and Christian and that, you know, that there was a very open feeling, or atmosphere and then -- and then the anti-Semitic incidents started happening and you described the -- the escalating laws and decre-decrees and so forth. Were there any personal experiences that you had, say with friends who -- who -- you know, non-Jewish friends who sort of turned on you after the war started or experiences like that?

A: No, I don't know of anybody -- my personal friends to turn on me, but they stopped being friends by sheer not being able to be together. So, it was nothing personal. They did not turn away all of a sudden because they found out I was Jewish. It was never a secret to them. And some of my friends went to a very, very prestigious Polish high schools. And their contact with the Jews was not tremendous, but it never made any difference to me and I don't think to them. We were never discussing religion or the influence on -- we were just friends. Young people finding a lot of things in common.

Q: But they just stopped talking to you after the -- after the German [indecipherable]

A: Well, we were separated. We no longer could go out on the streets. We no longer had the same rights. So a lot of my acquaintances, Jewish acquaintances, were shu -- cut off too. Because we no longer could visit, we no longer could do the things we did before which

bound us together. Schools were closed. So there was really being cut off from the rest of society.

Q: What about your relationship with Irene? I realize she was much younger than -- she wa -- was she eight years younger than you? Something like that. So when the war started, she's -- she [indecipherable]

A: Yes. My relationship to Irene was different. I just loved her. She was a sweet, young girl and since we were left alone so much, we developed a very close relationship. A close relationship, me being so much older and she being so much younger, but she was cute, adorable, loving and I was just crazy about her.

Q: Even as -- even as a young girl?

A: Even as a youngest girl. Also I had to take her sometimes on a date with me, but I never resented it. I had a devotion -- to me, never disappeared in all those years of separation. As a matter of fact, for some reason, she stills feels that feeling of -- not only love, but it goes further than love. That feeling of responsibility for me, since I lost my husband and I no longer am the same person I was. She feels doubly responsible. She cannot be happy if I am not happy. And I cannot just press a button and say, "Hey sis, be happy even if I am not happy." It just doesn't work with her like that. She is stubborn. She gets an idea to her head and shortly of splitting her head and taking the idea out, you cannot change it. Was it hard for you to leave? I mean, when you and you father left Lódz -- Lódz, looking for a place in the Russian zone that -- that your family could relocate, did you -- did you have any idea at

all or any sense that you would be split u -- your -- your family would be split up the way that it was?

A: No, I did not. We both, father and I and mother and Irene felt it is just a temporary resettlement. At that time you just didn't pick up and take your whole family. You were always thinking of providing for them. So we were like scouting out the territory. The borders were still opened. We send for Irene and mother and then we'll live happily for ever after. It didn't work that way, but those were the feelings at that time.

Q: And I'm interested in hearing your -- about -- more about that moment that you had been betrayed by the maid of the family and -- in that -- at the farm, that -- that you arrived at and the Germans arrived to arrest you, and you and your father escaped and then you dis -- running away and you discover that you're separated from your father. What did you -- what -- what did you feel in that moment of -- of realizing that you were alone and that your father wasn't there?

A: It was a frightening feel-feeling. I had no -- I didn't know how I'm going to act or react or what the future is going to bring. But I just knew that all of a sudden, I'm in a strange place, all by myself. I don't know where I am. I don't know what I am going to do, but here I am. Until some woman, who was outside, looked at me and said, "Hey little girl, you don't belong here. And anyway it's scary for you, what are you doing outside? Come with me to my house."

Q: Did you have any ideas or thoughts about what might have happened to your father?

A: No, I had no idea, but I figured out just -- I ran in one direction and he ran in another direction. I didn't know which direction he went to and he didn't know which direction I went to. It was night, it was the forest. I had no idea where we were. We just put our trust in the people who were going to bring us over to the Russian occupied part of Poland. And we left it at that. There was no alternative plan, there was no in case we separated. It didn't enter our mind. So I was fully unprepared for it.

Q: And you describe going on to Bialystok from there and there was a -- was it in Bialystok that there was a woman who -- who -- I mean approached you on the street and took you in?

A: Yes, it was in Bialystok. That was a very, very hard experience, getting to Bialystok. Now we no longer had Germans, but I no longer belonged any place. I had no money, no clothes, no documents, no place to go. And that was a very frightening experience. What next? Probably go back to Lódz was one of those thoughts -- after Lódz -- Lódz was home. That it's changed, we don't visualize those things until we experience them. But that still meant home, so I was toying with the idea of maybe get back to Lódz. But then I met that woman and she said to me, "Hey, you're all by yourself, you want to go to school." I always wanted to go to school. One of those ideas. She says, "Why don't you come with me? I live in that small town of Oashmiani and I am sure you will be able to go to school there and kind of make a comfortable life." Since I had nothing to lose, whether I go back three days later or a week later, it didn't matter.

Q: Did you -- did you try to get in touch with your mother and -- and Irene?

A: No, there was no way of getting in touch. There was no post office, there were no telephones, there was no ways of communicating, shortly of going back and being lucky to find them there. And I had no thoughts that I wouldn't find them there. After all, I left them in our home, why should I find them someplace else? So our knowledge of what Germans had -- what the future they mapped out for us, was not very extensive, except knowing that they hate the Jews. But that as far as my imagination went --

Q: What was the name of the -- of the woman who you met in Bialystok, who offered you to go to Oashmiani?

A: I can't think of her name right now, but I am sure it will come back to me.

Q: I was interested in -- in -- well, there -- there was a theme that you mentioned that you didn't want to -- that you were always very careful not to put yourself under a f -- one family's control. That -- that you didn't want -- that there was that sense of reserve as far as trusting people.

A: The Poles.

Q: The Poles, in particular?

A: Yeah. And I heard -- I made many friends, Polish friends, in Oashmiani, especially the bookkeeper of that place I worked, an elderly man who was very kind and very nice and it's ahead of time, but when he found out the ghetto's going to be liquidated, he met me in front of the gates and said, "Bella, don't let them send you out. I place you with my niece on a farm and you going to be safe there." He -- I knew him from before, he was very sincere and very honest. I really loved the guy. He was a elderly gentleman. And I say, "Okay." And

then I got cold feet. I say, “No. I cannot put myself in a place where I am completely at the mercy of the people I am with.” That just wasn’t something I felt comfortable.

Q: Mm-hm. It seems like it must have been so difficult to -- I mean when you describe yourself before the war, and you describe yourself as being Polish and thinking of yourself as Polish and I’m just trying --

A: Jewish - Polish.

Q: But I’m trying to -- to grasp how that shattered because, it -- did it shatter so -- so completely after the German occupation that you realized that -- that you -- that you really -- that there was such a -- an irreconcilable distance between you and the Poles?

A: Yes, I did realize that. I realized how much the Poles hated the Jews. I mean, they’re was always anti-Semitism in Poland. But it was blatant, it wasn’t obvious. And I was always accepted by my Polish friends, without giving it a thought, whether they Polish or Jewish or whatever. I was never concentrating on those issues. And then, when the Germans came in and I saw that all of a sudden, there is such a difference, it no longer became ble -- it was quite obvious they hated the Jews, for many reasons. First of all, the church was instilling in the Poles -- and that was a Catholic country, the Jews are the killers of Christ. Well, that’s a unforgiven sin committed by the Jews. They killed Jesus, their most believed in person, so there is no love for the Jews. Then there was a certain amount of envy. Not all Jews were rich, but they were comfortable, most of them. And the ones who weren’t were taken care of by the Jews who were more comfortable. Getting rid of the Jews is a big opened field of taking over their possessions, taking over their business. I guess the Jews presented the

Poles of giving them a feeling of superiority. And that wasn't very pleasing to the Poles. I don't know whether they did or they didn't. I didn't -- couldn't judge. But the Jews lived pretty much their own life. They were -- they had their clubs, they had their cafés. They had their shows. They were very intellectual, much more than the Poles were. And I'm not giving statistics, I don't know. But the majority of the Poles were just working people, farmers, whatever. So I think the Jews felt a little superior. Sort of standed off attitude towards other people. They felt they were more righteous, they were more -- but they were separate from the Poles. There was never a togetherness. They maybe worked hand in hand on working places, but there was no special bond of relationships. I never felt it, but then I was a young girl. And I wasn't that intellectual to dwell in those political things going on. I know that Peelshinsky, who was a leader of Poland, hey, I loved him. He was like -- we called him our daddy. When he died, we stood, saluted the flag, saluted his portrait. Tears were running down our cheeks. But that was a skol -- school attitude. And I really wasn't that interested of what happens in the adults minds.

Q: So did you really stop thinking of yourself as being a Pole and -- and just think of yourself of being a Jew after the war began?

A: No, I didn't stop thinking wh -- of anything of that kind. I know that I was Jewish. I don't know, th-there is a difference between being Jewish and being a Jew. But I knew that I am being rejected by the rest of the country.

Q: I wanted to skip ahead then, to when you were in Oashmiani and you were making the decision that you wanted to get out and go to-towards Vilna. I -- how did you -- what made

you decide that Vilna was where you wanted to go or what made you even consider Vilna as the pla -- as the destination?

A: Had it -- here again, it wasn't quite from Oashmiani. Oashmiani was liquidated. The ghetto of Oashmiani was liquidated and then --

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of an interview with Bella Mischkinsky. This is tape number one, side B.

A: When we got to Melagarni, we were put into a building -- very clean, without any knowledge what we going to be doing -- doing there or not. But I found it confinding. In Vilna was a big place, a big ghetto. So I decided to leave Melagarni and go to Vilna. I only based it on those terms.

Q: You thought there would be more freedom?

A: Freedom of move -- freedom of movement, whatever I thought. I'm not sure what I thought, I just thought it's not going to be that confinded that -- you cannot be surrounded in one building or any such thing. So that's what I decided to do and that's what I did.

Q: Mm-hm. And then, from Vilna, you were -- you went to Kaiserwald [indecipherable]

A: Yes.

Q: And I wanted you to describe -- you met your -- your husband at Kaiserwald and I'm interested in hearing how it was that you met him and then how it was that you -- that you came to marrying him and more -- and did -- how did that happen?

A: Well, I can understand that you have difficulties with that concept. Because, if you read about concentration camps and if you read about how the Jews were treated -- to me, Kaiserwald was a little different. How did I meet my husband? My husband had a lot of freedom in the camp. He really wa -- he really build that camp. And he had freedom of movement. So, how does boy meet girl in those circumstances? I can't explain it, but there is a way. Young people always will seek out young people. So, since I was not working outside the camp, but I was working in camp and he was moving freely in camp, he spotted that cute little girl and somehow, some way, we started talking, holding hands. Nothing else but. We still were separate -- I mean, equal or not equal. We decided to get married, just not too long before Kaiserwald was liquidated.

Q: How long had you known him by then?

A: For about a year.

Q: And what was his name?

A: He was called Booby. I found out it's kind of a silly nickname, but that's what he was called by everyone. His name was Isaac Mischkinsky and when he got wind of the idea that Kaiserwald is going to be liquidated, we both decided we didn't have a better chance staying together whatever happens, as a married couple, than just [indecipherable] ghetto and whatnot.

Q: Had you -- but, at some point it had become clear, during that year that you were getting to know -- know each other, that it was very serious, that you were -- that you were in love, yeah?

A: Well, I guess so. It wasn't just, "Hey, would you marry me, because it might be better for both of --" No -- no, we cared for each other. So that's where we decided to get married. And that's when I changed my mi -- my name, from Bella Berger to Bella Mischkinsky. It didn't really save my life.

Q: Would you describe Booby a little bit. What -- what -- what interested you in him and what -- what kind -- [indecipherable] what kind of discussions did you have?

A: First of all, he was the most handsome man in camp. He was tall, well built, very well educated. He was older. He already had a degree from a co -- from [indecipherable] college in Germany. He comes from a higher up family, very well [indecipherable] in Riga, before the war. It all was a snob appeal to me. Hey, a guy like that is [indecipherable] me, what do I know? I don't even have high school. So that was kind of tried. And he was a wonderful human being.

Q: Did he share -- did he have any particular strong beliefs? I mean, you mentioned that you were not a -- you know, a -- a joiner, but was he religious or was he -- did he have political beliefs or --

A: No, he was not religious. I was not aware of any political inklings. He was not involved in any political underground fights or anything like that. It is -- suited my temperament.

Q: Do you remember what you would talk about together?

A: Oh God. No. Well, first of all you talk a little about your family, about what happened here and what happened then. What was your life before, what -- you know, the usual, get-acquainted talk. Don't forget, we didn't have dates, that you come to my house and let's

spend five hours talking and I take you out to dinner or any -- it was a concentration camp. And we broke quite a few rules of the concentration camp. But we always were in a position that we could afford to do it. He was very well liked by the commandant of the concentration camp. I don't know that the commandant, no matter how much he liked him, would let him get away with lots of things, but there was a certain feeling of respect towards him.

Q: Did that make it easier when he wanted to marry you? To -- to actually [indecipherable]

A: No, the commandant had nothing to do with it, that was none of his damn business. Pardon my language. But no, he had nothing to do with it. The Germans did not have to know about everything what was going on and they didn't.

Q: So there was a rabbi in camp?

A: Well, she was -- she was a rabbi from before, but -- I would call it a civil ceremony rather than religious ceremony. Oh, we had witnesses, we signed papers. It really had not special meaning for the Jews who were considered in the eyes of Germans as nothing. But it had a meaning to us. So we had some witnesses. I remember one of the girls name was Hilda Shpalter. And I think Maya Mensh-Menshenfront. I'm not sure. And it was a 10 minute affair and we said yeah, I declare you husband and wife and we changed papers and names and I imagine people don't visualize weddings of that kind of -- that way, but that's way you got married. That's how we got married.

Q: Were there others in the camp who got -- who got married that way too?

A: I think so, but I don't know.

Q: How long before you were the -- Kaiserwald was to be --

A: Liquidated?

Q: Liquidated. Was that -- you got married --

A: I think about a month or something like that. Just enough to get all the papers in order and make it legal for the German records.

Q: Were you able to -- did you -- did anything change after you got married, were you --

A: No.

Q: No.

A: We just felt more concerned about each other. What happened here, what happened then, you know, but now, nothing changed.

Q: So you weren't really able to find much time to be alone together or anything like that?

A: No. Didn't pick a honeymoon place, what can I tell you?

Q: Did you ever take a honeymoon, much later in life with him?

A: All our life was one big honeymoon.

Q: Well, then it's worth it… You mentioned that you had close friendships in Kaiserwald that lasted for so many years later.

A: They still exist.

Q: Why Kaiserwald -- how did -- what -- what a -- was it about Kaiserwald that made that possible?

A: Well, I had no way of comparing concentration camp, Kaiserwald to other concentration camps. That was my first concentration camp. But I found that I personally had a lot of

freedom. I don't mean freedom of going into town and doing all this things, but I had free time. I had a very good job. I met my girlfriend, Trudy Schloss, who too was all alone at that time, separated from her family. And Trudy Schloss -- at that time Omand, was a girl my age. She came from Germany and we just took long walks around and round and round the per-perimeter of ours barracks, and talked our heads off. I had a sister, "Oh, my sister Irena --" She had a sister, "Oh, my sister --" And we talked about parents, about how we got here, what we did. And we be-became very, very, very close friends and are very close friends til today.

Q: Where does she live?

A: She lives in Jersey. She is married to a man she met in the camp. They got married after the war. She has two children and grandchildren. And we were always together. If we weren't together, we were always in touch with each other and still are. That's my extended family. She is not the only one, I have other friends, which became extended families. And that's -- we are as close to each other as a family could be. It was a family by choice.

Q: Were there other people -- were there people from Oashmiani who you stayed in touch with after the war, or -- I mean --

A: I did meet two people from Oashmiani after the war, but it was a very short-lived contact.

Q: Was that during one of your visits?

A: No, no. It was when I lived in New York.

Q: Was it accidental that you bumped into them or did you intentionally --

A: Neither or. When we got a lawyer who was working with the German government after the war, to reward some compensation for the people who were in camp and are survivors. And you had to find someone who knew you -- who didn't -- and he had the whole list and you had to find someone who knew you, that you were in camp. And he was the one who had the name of the people from Oashmiani. So that's how I got in touch with them.

Q: Okay, well [inaudible] I didn't know that you had done -- had gone through the restitution process. So, we should talk about that later, but let's -- let's stay in --

A: Oh, you can talk about it now. It's -- it's a very simple thing. It's up to you.

Q: Okay. Well, go ahead, then and tell me a little.

A: Well, after the war, long after, a organization was formed and said, we were slave labor. We were labors in camp and we should get some restitution. So somebody had the name of somebody had the name of somebody and it was a guy in New York who used to take care of it. So we got in touch with that man, his name is Waxberg [indecipherable]. And you submitted papers saying from there to there, I was here to here and he was providing you with names of people who applied too, so he could match. And that was presented to the -- I think German consulate or German organization and you had to go through a examination, mental examination. What did the concentration camp do to you and how much damage was done to you? And he had a list of names of doctors who were signing papers. So I eventually was awarded 25 percent of whatever the figure was, I don't know. My husband got 65 percent, because he got in touch with the lawyer who worked in Germany, who was from Riga and knew their family, and he signed the paper [indecipherable] Mr. Ike

Mischkinsky came from a very high class of Jews in Riga and was used to a very high standard of living. So he got 65 percent and I got 25 percent. That's equality.

Q: Did that -- I mean, did -- did it make you angry in any way that -- that you had to go through a mental test in order to have any kind of restitution? And that -- and that there wa -- and that you -- he was being paid based on how wealthy he was before the war, or -- what did you think of that?

Q: Well, I don't get angry very easy. I can understand injustices of laws and regulations. They weren't built for me. It's a way of doing things. So -- and those pensions stopped with the life of the survivor. So his 65 percent went tsshoop when he died. I still get my 25 percent. Hank never got anything. Partially it was his doing. He was working for the intelligence of the American government and he did not feel that he can give them all the facts of where he was, what he did. So that he did forego the application. I supported him with my 25 percent. I'm only joking.

Q: When you were in Kaiserwald, at some point you and Ike were separated. And it sounds like Ike was -- Ike left Kaiserwald before you, right?

A: No.

Q: No?

A: No. I don't think I ever said that. We were let out of Kaiserwald at the same time. It was September '43, I think -- '44? 44. That's when Kaiserwald was liquidated.

Q: And you went to Magdeburg from there?

A: No.

Q: No?

A: We went to Stutthof.

Q: Stutthof. Okay. I'm sorry, I've got -- I've got my chronology wrong. And -- but it was at Stutthof that -- that Ike had -- and you -- there was a point when Ike and you were separated and he had --

A: Well, we were separated in Stutthof period, there were women's camps and men camps, separated by just distances and there were no contact. Official contact. Unofficially the Jews always found a way. And we did kind of send each other letters. And he knew that there is a transport to Magdeburg plant. And he said to me, "Get on that transport." And my answer to him was, "No way can I do it." So he fixed it up. So we did, eventually leave Magde -- Stutthof together.

Q: You were on the same transport?

A: Yeah. There was only one.

Q: And you were actually together during the -- during --

A: During the transport.

Q: Transport.

A: To -- yeah.

Q: All right. Did you have a sense at that point that you were -- that you going to be able to stick together, for --

A: No, but I had a sense that if he would not get me out of Stutthof, I could not survive it much longer.

Q: When did you meet Hank?

A: I met Hank in Kaiserwald for a short while. And then we went to Magdeburg together, eventually, from -- we got to Stutthof together, we got to Magdeburg together.

Q: And Ike m -- played some role in -- in Hank being together with you and -- and him too, yeah?

A: No.

Q: No?

A: Well, we were always friends. Hank was an adorable youngster. Ike was a man with distinction. Hank would shoot his [indecipherable]. But Hank did not stay in Kaiserwald very long. He was sent on an outside commando, whereas Ike and I stayed in Kaiserwald all the time.

Q: And when -- when was it that you really started spending time with Hank or getting to know him?

A: Ike and I always were spending some times with Hank. He was our favorite person. And we were in Germany together and Nungvede. We spend six weeks together. He was like a member of the family. And Nungvede was in a French zone. And it was so pretty there that we s -- figured hey, why not find -- why not stay here for awhile? And it was under the French occupation. So we went to the French consulate and they gave us orders and brilliant Hank figured out he is going to register as a Frenchman. Which he did. And we spent six weeks in Nungvede until Hank was told, “Hey, Frenchman, what are you doing here? Get

back to France." And Hank said, "No way." So we all picked up and left together for Frankfort.

Q: Had you split up -- when did you split up with your friends from Kaiserwald? Like Trudy?

A: Well, Trudy went to her hometown in Germany.

Q: When -- when was that?

A: After the war.

Q: From Kaiserwald?

A: No. No, she too went to Stutthof at the different time. And then she was -- she was working on a different place. And after the war she and Louis, her husband, went back to Germany, where they got married. And then we all met again in Salzheim, because that was a zone which took care of the immigration to the United States.

Q: So, when you went to -- Sa-Salzheim, did you just meet up with a lot of people that you had been with before?

A: Oh yeah, yeah.

Q: Did you all know -- had you talked during the war that you would want to go to America once the war ended?

A: [indecipherable] the war, we didn't talk about what we will do when we -- because we really didn't believe that we could survive the war. On the other hand, I guess in the back of our mind was, but if. Well, but if would be a struggle to become a decent human being again, after the experiences of concentration camp. Anyway, I made myself a promise that if

I ever, by any chance get out of the concentration camp, I am not going to carry my education from concentration camp to the outside world. And even then I was aware of the fact -- or I thought I was aware of the fact there's a outside world is not going to adjust to my experiences of concentration camp. I didn't think they owe me something. Cause the only way I can make it, if I ever survive, is through my own strengths and belief what a human being should be.

Q: Was it hard to live up to that ideal after the war ended?

A: No, because it never stopped being my understanding of it. I never believed of anything else. I did not ever believe that if I ever come out, the world is going to open their arms and say, "Ah, you are the survivor. We owe you so much." I never had that delusion. So it wasn't hard to get rid of it.

Q: And what about feeling the desire for revenge or anger at the perpetrators or something [indecipherable]

A: Well, I guess it's against my nature, so -- I knew what it was. I knew that the world knew it. I knew that I am helpless in punishing them, the laws were not something I controlled or had an input. So I just felt that I have to make a new life within my own strengths and not the help of the outside world.

Q: And did that -- you mentioned -- in the first interview, you were asked about whether you were involved in resistance and you said that you weren't, because your concern was more just with survival and -- and in surviving without harming others, as much as possible. And -- so that --

A: I -- I just told you, whether I was scared, or whether I just wasn't a joiner, but I never fought for anything, so I did not join it, I did not join the resistance.

Q: What I was trying to get at was that -- that same -- that same feeling it sounds like motivated you after the war of just not -- not -- not taking on responsibility in -- for something bigger than -- than what was within your sphere of control, in a way. Does that make sense?

A: No, I don't think it's a matter of responsibility. It was just a matter of believe in all those existing organizations. And that's why I -- I guess I never joined any. But it was never the fear of responsibilities. And it wasn't quite selfishness that I have to take care of myself, to protect my life, because there really wasn't much protection. Because your life wasn't worth much and you had no assurance that if you don't take care -- if you don't take apart the resistance, you're going to be saved. As a matter of fact, I sensed that the chances of being saved belonging to the resistance was greater than being a loner. I might be wrong. I don't know, I never tested it.

Q: You were just following what?

A: My instinct.

Q: What felt right to you.

A: Yeah, just --

Q: You -- how did you -- how did you know that you wanted to come to America or why did you choose this country?

A: Well, I was never a Zionist. I certainly did not want to go to Israel and build a country and live in a kibbutz and have that -- again -- pattern of life -- barracks and follow the crowd. I just wanted to be an individual. So I figured well, I let the other people do the fighting for me, but I did not think I would be a good material --

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of an interview with Bella Mischkinsky. This is tape number two, side A.

A: First of all, I was not a Zionist. I did not think I am a type of a person Israel needs to build their country. I did not want to live in a kibbutz in a joint kind of communal living. I wanted my individual life. And I think that the United States could give it to me. That's why I picked United States.

Q: And you didn't have any interest at all in going back to Poland and looking for relatives or [indecipherable]

A: No, I had no interest to go back into Poland. As far as I was concerned, the life I lived in Poland was dead. So there was no reason for me to go to Poland.

Q: Did you -- were you searching for members of your family at that point?

A: No, because I was reunited with Irene and with mother and we -- were no other members of the family left.

Q: We -- tell me about how -- I -- I know how you were reunited with Irene, because you talked about it a little bit in the -- in the first interview, but I was curious to know whether -- how Irene knew where you were.

A: She didn't. She went to a few DP camps to search for me. That's how she found me.

Q: Was she -- and she wasn't with your mother at that point?

A: Well, she left mother in Poland. Mother had a boyfriend in Poland and Irene figure out she is going to go to the DP camps, find her sister, go back to Poland and educate the Poles

how to be better human beings. I'm not being funny. Those were my sister's ideas. Took me a long time to change her views.

Q: So she wanted to stay in Poland.

A: Oh, she had to educate the Poles.

Q: So she thought she was going to be bringing you back to Poland and that you would all live there.

A: No. She is going to go back -- whatever she thought, but she -- she's going to educate the Poles.

Q: Will -- will you describe that moment that you saw Irene again?

A: Well, I didn't quite see her. She was pointed out to me. After all, she was a little girl when I last saw her. And it was so far away from my mind that I am going to just meet her on the grounds of Salzheim camp and silly as it sounds, I went to camp -- we had a [indecipherable], my husband and I, but I went to camp to get some hot water to have my hair done. You used to bring your own hot water to the beauty parlor. So I was stopped by some people and we were talking for awhile and I say, "Hey fellas, I have to go, I have an appointment." And then one guy says, "Well, would you mind to say hello to your sister before you go?" And if I didn't drop dead then, then I probably never will. I will die of different causes. And here was a little four by four young girl standing far away and he says, "That's Irene." So I took a step towards her and she took a step towards me until we met and we embraced and said, "Oh, Irene, Irene." "Bella." And that was the end of my beauty parlor and a wonderful life mixed with Irene's since then.

Q: Did you -- how di-did you spend the rest of the day talking about what had --

A: No, because I had to bring her home and introduce her to my husband, who knew a lot about Irene, because I was yak, yak, yak about her all the time. But I had no idea where she was or what she was and he was [indecipherable]. So I just walk into the room and I say, "Oh, by the way honey, here is my sister, Irene. You thought you married a girl without a family? Here she is." And it was love at first sight between the two of them. So, that --

Q: How long after that did you -- when did you see your mother again after that and how did that happen?

A: Well, we had a lot of connections, my husband and I. Depending where you work and whom you know and so on. Now, we knew where mother lives and we said now we have to bring mother from Poland to the United States. So we tried to get in touch with her and she didn't answer and make a long story short, we finally succeeded getting -- telling her that she is coming to be united with her daughters. And made arrangements for her to get to Berlin, which was a collection point of people who were coming to the States from Poland. Now we worked for the highest -- at that time, for the unrah, I don't remember. So we had American uniforms. Both Ike and I were -- were wearing American uniforms. We also had a young French soldier who fell in love with his girlfriend, a Russian girl, who had to be in the American zone in order to be able to immigrate to the United States. He came from the United States. So he happened to be visiting. He was visiting her, she lived with us. And I said to him, "Hey, Booby is going to Berlin, to bring his secretary -- our boss was away, in France, I think. I said, "Would you mind just writing us an affidavit that Ike Mischkinsky's

bringing his secretary from Berlin to --", so he just sit down, typed, put the stamp, made it official. Everybody was very conscious of official letters and stamps. So, my husband took one of my uniforms and went to Berlin. He now had official papers that he's bringing his secretary from Berlin. Now, he didn't know mother, but he knew what people read, that's what he [indecipherable] pass and he told her, "Look, don't open your mouth, period." Puts an uniform -- well, my mother was heavier than I -- just put the scarf around it and the boss, Ike Mischkinsky and his secretary went through the -- all post checks and finally got through.

Q: So Ike was pretty gutsy, too.

A: Oh, yeah. It was funny when he went there, she had to go through the posts of Russians and French and English, you know, to enter. So the English guy said, "Oh, you're going to bring some of ours." He says, "Yes." He says, "Remember, don't speak German -- er, Russian, when you go through the Russian post." So since -- after all, we had experience for five years how to fib and do certain things. So he did bring her back to Salzheim and she stayed with us three weeks and I hear a repetition of Irene's song, "I am going back to Poland, because Saul is there." Her boyfriend. I say, "Oh, God." Anyway, make a long story short, we brought Saul back to Salzheim from Lódz.

Q: Was it hard to convince Irene and your mother that they should leave home?

A: Well, [indecipherable] she is going to have her Saul, she doesn't care what it could be. Irene was different. And they got married in Frankfort. Yeah, I mean my mother and her boyfriend and her name became Mrs. Rothberger.

Q: Was that difficult for you, Bella, that -- to meet up with your mother again and to have her have this boyfriend and your father just had disappeared?

A: No. Not at all.

Q: Was there any effort made to find out what had happened to --

A: Oh, I know my father was killed in one of the little towns in -- I would say ‘42, when the Germans liquidated small towns. Am I sure? Did I witness it? Do I have papers? No, but I know th-that whole area was killed. Oh, I had the visions. My father all of a sudden appearing in the United States. My mother would drop dead.

Q: You did have --

A: That’s not kind, sorry.

Q: You did have visions of your father [indecipherable]

A: Well, you know, your mind sometimes say you never know. After all, there were some people who -- who crawled out of the mass graves and appeared. So [indecipherable] this possible. Not probable, but possible.

Q: Well, you really weren’t very attached to your father, personally, and --

A: Well, I was more attached to my father than to my mother. Said, well, she found someone else, you find somebody else. Maybe he did, I don’t know. Doesn’t matter to me. Or didn’t matter to me.

Q: Were you grieving for him or did you?

A: I don’t know, it’s very hard to say whether you’re grieving for the [indecipherable] at that time. After the war, you mean? Too long a time passed to -- you accept it. I -- I saw too

much of it. Thousands and thousands of people being sent to death. I saw children being knocked in the walls. It's -- you just get some -- kind of hardened to the whole -- because they --

Q: Did you ever reach a point when -- when you felt a personal loss -- felt a particular loss of your father, as [indecipherable]

A: As a father?

Q: Yeah.

A: Not as a father, as a person. As someone who was my father. We were never close, but hey, he was my father, he was kind, he was nice, he was bright, intelligent. Was probably selfish -- you know, [indecipherable]. It wasn't that loving -- loving union of father, mother, child.

Q: And was Irene -- did Irene have a different kind of relationship with your parents than you did, or was the [indecipherable]

A: Well, she was so much younger. My father adored her. My mother adored me, so -- adored -- she really liked me. You see, my mother was a very beautiful woman and when she looked at me and I was younger, she says, "I looked just like my Bella." That was her pride. [indecipherable] you know. I wouldn't take time to analyze this, it doesn't matter. She was what she was and that's the best she knew how to do it. I couldn't fix her life just like she couldn't fix my life, so --

Q: You described how you were working with the -- the unrah and hiya and helping with -- with the immigration process. Did you get a sense through that work of the overarching

policy issues involved with -- with Jewish immigration and some of the -- I mean some of the things that were going on on national levels, like this, the United States having very strict quotas and having a lot of [indecipherable]

A: Oh yeah, I was aware of that -- by the way Ike and I got the job, through Henry.

Q: Henry? Hank?

A: Hank. Henry - Hank.

Q: Yeah. Right.

A: Our Hank.

Q: You told that story in the --

A: Yes.

Q: In the first interview, yeah.

A: He was funny.

Q: Yeah.

A: Funny guy. Well, we were fully aware that the United States has a quota system and the largest quota was for the German Jews. The smallest quota -- or one of the small quotas was for the Poles and the Russians. But then, with the Truman's doctrine of letting people in, we knew that that wasn't that strict any more. They still would let in a certain amount of Jews and the guy they send from hiyas to take care of the immigration, came here before the immigration was opened. And he was very well versed in the laws of immigration. That's when he paired off with Hank and he said, "I need some help." So we were elected to help him. And he wanted to have papers ready when the immigration starts. And he knew there is

going to be just a very short time before the year ends -- I don't know, just a month or two, whatever, time. So he worked very hard and he worked us very hard to try to get some documents ready, so when the consul -- and his name was Hoffman -- who came from the States, when he opened his office here, we had stacks of applicants ready. But it was hard work, because Germany had nothing. No documents, no paper, no pencils, no photographs, no -- we had to [indecipherable] so we really worked, day and night. And since we worked for the hiyas, we had access to the PX. So we were getting cigarettes and that was a value which people respected, not money. Couldn't buy anything. But with our cigarettes, we used to get the photographer, we used to get papers, pencils, whatever was needed. And we would transport these people back and forth, to have the papers ready. So when the immigration opened, hiyas had 90 -- oh, I don't remember what the percentage, but the largest percen-percentage of refugees were going to the States. Joint came after them and they -- there were other organizations, but we had it all ready.

Q: Did you have any connection with hiyas when you were heading over to the States? You mentioned that you were still --

A: Well, we were in -- we escorted the immigrants or the refugees, so -- the survivors -- whatever you want to call. We were [indecipherable] on the boat.

Q: You and Ike and Hank?

A: Yeah. No, Hank wasn't on it. It was a small [indecipherable].

Q: So you were really -- that gave you -- that basically gave you your ticket to come here, the fact that you worked with them?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: We worked for them and we're getting paid, but we did not collect the money. We collected the money when he -- we got to the States, from the hiyas. And theoretically -- excuse me -- people were supposed to pay eventually, for the voyage. Well, nobody did. But we felt, anyway, Ike and I felt, we make the money, so we pay the voyage. For myself, for Ike and for Irene. See, that's what our salary for working in Germany went to. We probably one of the few ones who ever paid for the voyage. I don't know, I didn't check the statistics, but I would assume so.

Q: What about your mother and Saul?

A: Oh, they came later.

Q: How did that come about?

A: I don't remember.

Q: But all -- were all of you able to come because of --

A: Through my --

Q: -- sponsorship through s-someone in Ike's family?

A: Well, no, I think that the first ones were through affidavits of relatives who were sending the people to the States. And Ike had a sister here. I think she sponsored us. Or, he had an uncle. Well, sponsoring did not cost you any money, you know. And then lots of people came, I think, later -- or even that time. I don't quite remember, because the Truman's declaration, that he's letting in that many survivors into the States.

Q: There was a mention in -- in the first interview also, of just -- of knowing that you didn't want to be in an area that was going to be under Soviet control.

A: Oh, that was in Germany. That's when we got to Mande -- to Frankfort.

Q: And was that -- did you have any sense of -- how did you know that -- that there was a -- that you didn't want that, that you wanted to be [indecipherable]

A: Well, we knew what the Russians stood for, from before the war. We know what the Communist regime was all about. And we certainly didn't want to be under their jurisdiction. [indecipherable]

Q: Let's go back a little bit. I -- I wanted to ask you about how you reali -- when you realized that the war was over and that you were free and how that -- how that knowledge came to you and what your feelings were.

A: Well, when -- when we were in Magdeburg, one day an SS woman came to the gates of the Magdeburg camp and said the Americans are in town. And all of a sudden, the SS disappeared, the guards disappeared. And the survivors were standing there, realizing that they free. Well, it's a very hard concept, after five years, saying, "You free." You free what? You free where? You free -- we were in a strange city. We never ventured out. We didn't know what to do with ourselves. So the majority went back home, to camp, without the supervisement of the Germans. And they had a ball, they stormed the food supplies, they had a party, they were free. My husband and my girlfriend, her boyfriend [indecipherable] said, "I didn't see the Americans. I am not going back to camp." So we left the camp and we wandered around a little bit. And the Germans had those huts or homes they didn't live in.

Because they heard the -- the Germans are going back, we occupied one of those homes. We went down to the basement and we're waiting to see what happens. My girlfriends says the next morning, "I want to go to camp. Hey, that's where all the life is." So Bessie and her boyfriend went to camp and came back within 10 minutes saying that the camp was surrounded during the night, because the Americans did not appear. And the people were sent out of camp on a march towards Berlin. So we stayed there for about two weeks, hidden in the basement, until one day we hear the Germans civilians coming into the house and chasing us all out. So my husband, who again, had a lot of freedom in Magdeburg and the camp, knew some Russian women who were working in polter too. And they said, "He's not Jewish." And they pulled him out of the column the Germans surrounded. Well, he wouldn't go without me, so he pulled me out. So I was with him and all of a sudden one of the meisters, for whom I was working, pointed at me, he says, "She works for me, she's Jewish." So I had to go back. And he wouldn't go without me, no matter how much I pleaded. So he came back too. And we were on the march towards Berlin. So we crossed the river and found ourselves on the other town -- part of town -- of Magdeburg. Elba was the dividing part -- divided the part in two things, so we found ourselves on the other part. There was a lot of shooting, all night long. It was a miserable night and every time the shooting started, the guards which were sending -- leading us out, made us lie down on the ground and wait until the shooting went over. At one point my husband said, "Next time when they tell us to get out, it's so dark, we stay put." Which we did. So the column continued, we stayed behind. We went in the other direction, we didn't know where we

going. We all spoke perving -- perfect German. So we did see some German soldiers, motorcycles and they were ep -- talking to us in German, just complaining about the weather, the shooting and we answered in German like we one of them. And we finally found a place in a house where we hid. We were there for about three days, but we always hid in the basement, just to be sure that we not spotted immediately. Comfort of life was not our priority. And then we hear some people coming upstairs and saying. “I know there are Jews here. We going to come and we going to find them.” Didn’t occur to them to get down to the basement. So we decided it’s time to leave. So, during the day, early in the morning, we, the four of us left. We didn’t know where to go, so we saw a name of a street, passa -- Pashall was the name. So we [indecipherable], that’s in the direction of Pashall, now we know where we going, we going to Pashall. So that’s what he did and there were lots of other people who were walking the streets. We get to a certain part and all of a sudden we see a German installation. But it was too late to turn back without saying, hey, why are they running away -- so we just continued. And a guy from that installation approached us and said, “Where are you going?” Now, we had a name, so that’s where we are going and he says, “Why you going there?” And we says, “Well, we have our place there, we used to work there and we going back to our position.” And he says, “Well, I have a problem. The Germans left the installation at night and I came over and there is a beautiful desk I like to take home. But my [indecipherable] broke down. If you not in a hurry, if you can help me bring that home, I would appreciate it.” So we said, “Hey, we have no place to go anyway.” So we offered --

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: This is tape number two, side B, of an interview with Bella Mischkinsky.

A: So we went to his house. He was living in a basement with his girlfriend and her niece and two little boys and some chickens and whatnot. So we stayed with him for awhile, started talking to him and we said to him, “Hey, there are such beautiful things in that installation. Why don’t you bring some more to your house? We help you. We don’t mind staying.” So, make a long story short, we stayed there for two weeks. In the meantime, his girlfriend’s niece was dating German soldiers. So they were coming for a visit at -- in the evening. So we all socialized.

Q: But this is before the war ended?

A: That was before the war ended. Just shortly before the war ended.

Q: So we’re in maybe April --

A: A day.

Q: -- May, early May.

A: Yeah it was Ap -- end of --

Q: ‘45.

A: April. As a matter of fact, when we were brought over the other side of the Elba, we -- all of a sudden, here’s Americans. Loudspeakers -- American loudspeakers. They did enter that part of Magdeburg which we just left. But we were on the other side. So anyway, we stayed there for two weeks. She was bringing her German boyfriends and we started talking and

they say, “Hey.” They didn’t know who we are. We didn’t tell them that we’re Jews. And he said, “Hey, why don’t you come to our quarters, we have so much food left. You can take it home with you.” Say, “Oh, my God.” But his girlfriend was very insisting. So I made two trips there and I brought some food and she introduced me to the leader of the town and said, it’s my cousin, we should get food rations.

Q: Go ahead.

A: So we stayed there for two weeks. And one day, the German soldiers who were coming to visit her -- her niece, said that they got orders to march out and they are furious. The country is abandoning them. They are not going to go to the Russians. They want to go to the amies -- which was a term for the Americans. So we had an offer for them. We want to go there, too. At that point, we all found German uniforms in that bunker -- that installation. So we all were dressed in German uniforms. So we said, “We want to go there, too.” So we made a date with them for the next day to meet. They going to desert their unit, they going to come with us and we all going to go to the Americans. Sounds ridiculous. My husband and the owner of the place where we stayed with, went for a walk, and they found a boat. It didn’t have oars, but it was a boat. So my husband went back, he was very handy. They made oars and they were all ready to go to the amies. So sure enough, next day, we met with the German soldiers, we had a white flag and we all marched to the boat to go over on the other side. As we were doing all that, some civilians come over and he said they use the boat a day before. They went over to the Americans, but they were wearing civilian clothes, so the Americans send them back. They were only taking prisoners of war. So at that point,

we had the uniforms, we were seven German soldiers. Two women in German uniforms. We took the boat, a white flag and they were all -- the German soldiers had all their guns ready, if the Hitler yugen will stops them, they going to shoot. We got to the other side of the Elba, we pushed the boat into the water so they couldn't send us back. And now we were waiti -- wait -- waiting for the Americans. It took quite awhile until we saw any patrol. But finally a patrol comes and stop and search for ammunition. We didn't have any and they were taking us to the headquarters.

Q: Let's pause that. Okay.

A: Well, by May first, we found ourselves under the American -- I don't know what to say.

Q: Juris --

A: American zone or American jurisdiction and to us the war was over, also officially the war did not end until May seventh or eighth I think. But we felt free.

Q: Did you start getting news at that point, that you hadn't had before, about what was going on in the w --

A: Not really. We had no radio, but we just were in touch with the American soldiers. They used to come and visit us and so we knew that the war is coming to an end. But they were still the fighting troops. And [indecipherable] the war ended May seventh or eighth, officially.

Q: Do you remember finding out about the -- the official end of the war, and --

A: It was just one of those transi-transitions. Not only are we free, but Germany was defeated.

Q: Were you seeking out news of -- of what was going on?

A: There was no way of seeking out. From whom?

Q: The American soldiers, they --

A: Well, the American soldiers were telling us what they knew and they just said the war ended.

Q: How did -- how did -- was that a -- an ex -- an exhilarating moment, an exciting --

A: Oh, it certainly was, because hey, the Germans are defeated, and we are not under the Russian jurisdiction. Both of those things was thrills.

Q: And so we -- we went back a little bit to that, and then you -- you were telling me before we talked about that -- about your boat trip over to the -- to the States and being an escort and you mentioned that -- that you had been very ill on the boat --

A: Yes.

Q: -- ride. What was your role as an escort? Were you just -- were you supposed to do -- just ride along --

A: [indecipherable]

Q: And did you have any idea what you would be doing when you arrived in the States? Would you -- di -- were you going to be --

A: No, I had no idea. I was still a young girl with no profession, no education, no -- no, I had no idea what we will be doing, or -- we just knew that we will have to build some kind of a life. We did know that eventually we will have to go to Peoria, Illinois, where my

husband's sister lived. So we stayed in New York for about two weeks and then we headed to Peoria, Illinois.

Q: Was there a sense that hiyas was going to help you in some way once you got to --

A: No, we were finished with hiyas. We were finished, we were on our own.

Q: Do you remember arriving, the moment -- the moment that you -- that you saw the shore, or did you see --

A: Oh, the Statue of Liberty and it was just, hey, we made it. We not only free from the Germans, we free from Europe and now we are in the United States. But we had no plans of whatever life is going to be. One thing at a time, that was enough -- feeling of, great, we here.

Q: Where did you stay in New York?

A: Where? We stayed with my husband's cousins in their house.

Q: And how did you get to Illinois?

A: By train.

Q: Do you remember seeing -- your first images of the -- of the countryside, looking out the window?

A: Oh, it was great. Not any special, memorable thing except New York City. I mean that view at night in Central Park and having all the tall buildings and lights in the buildings and knowing that they are families and life and whatnot, that was terrific. It's the first time I met my sister-in-law. Peoria was a small town, with very pretty -- with a very affluent Jewish population. We were the first survivors they ever met and were very nice to us, offered us

money and this and that. Well, we really weren't interested in getting money, we were interested in establishing a life, which was very difficult, because we didn't speak English. My husband was a civil engineer. Couldn't get very far without English. I had no trade, no profession, so things were difficult. My sister-in-law was not the most pleasant person. She just lost her husband, she was very jealous of Irene, because she had a son pretty much Irene's age and we showered Irene with our love. She was a part of our life. So things were not easy. I finally got a job at Princess Peggy. They were making casual housedresses. But I didn't know anything about the sewing machine, couldn't communicate with the girls -- they were very nice to me, so they put me with a bunch of fabric to put together. I never accomplished anything, so towards the end of the day, the supervisor came over, ripped what I did, took her five minutes, she put it together. It was not a pleasant way of life. And then we got letter that my mother and her boyfriend are arriving to New York. So my husband said, "Fine. I am going to pick them up and you stay with Irene here." So that's what we did. He got to New York, he writes me a letter saying, "I want you to meet me in New York." And the responsibility of telling to my sister-in-law that we are leaving her was up to me. It wasn't very pleasant. She was very unpleasant. So Irene and I just bordered the train and left for New York. He had no intentions of coming back to Peoria. So now we are in New York --

Q: Before you go on, I was interested in hearing whether any of his family asked you about what had ha -- whether she asked you about what had happened or any of his family asked you about what had happened during the war?

A: No, we did not have too much conversation. We didn't communicate too well. She was one of those princesses from Riga and I was just a girl from Poland, which she kind of resented that her brother married below his level, whatever.

Q: So she had been -- had she emigrated from Riga?

A: They immigrated from Riga in '41. They left the last -- he was a correspondence for a London newspaper. And they left Riga with the last boat, which was carrying the gold of Latvia. So they made it through and they came to the States, before. So anyway, we got to New York and a cousin of my husband's had a beauty parlor. So he offered me a job as a receptionist. I was as miserable as could be. Every time I heard the phone ringing and me having to answer the prima donna's asking about the beauty parlor, appointments. My English was so poor, that it really was tough. And one day a girlfriend of Irene's, whom I also kno -- knew from Salzheim said, "Bella, I work for my uncle. I am going to get you a job." So that was great for me. And I took a job with -- in her uncle's factory and I stayed there for 30 some years. I got promoted from doing manual work, to becoming a supervisor and -- so I stayed with them for 31 years.

Q: What was the work?

A: Well, they manufactured watchbands. The mo -- the only one in the States of very specialized watchbands. So the girls like me and Bella -- that was her name -- brought a lot of her friends to that and we were sitting and wrapping the watchbands in packages to be shipped out. But then the boss pulled me out of there and he gave me a job in the office -- as -- in a supervisory job and -- so that was pretty good. My husband had it much tougher. He

was a civil engineer. And there was no job for civil engineers in the United States -- for Jewish civil engineers. He got a job, they were delighted with his work. He build their office in Manhattan and he's direct -- the boss said, "I am going to try to get you as a permanent member of our company." But there was a lot of opposition because he was Jewish and he did not get the job. So he finally found work as a carpenter in a factory.

Q: Was that explicitly stated, that he couldn't -- that the opposition was because he was Jewish?

A: You mean did he get a letter stating so? No, but he was given to understand that unfortunately, there was a lot of opposition on the board, to hire a Jewish civil engineer. And at that point we didn't have laws, discrimination and whatnot, so they were free to do as they choose.

Q: Was that shocking to you, that -- that in America --

A: A little bit, yes, it was. So anyway, he worked as a carpenter in the factory for many years. And life was pretty hard. I was making little money, he was making little money. We had a furnished apartment. Irene was living with us. I insisted on sending her to school. So that was that.

Q: Did you -- did you meet up with any of your friends at this point from -- from -- during the war, who you'd been with?

A: Yes, I did. We -- you know, they all congregated in New York and we were getting together. The problem was that my husband was older. When he got to camp, he already was used to certain recognition and respect. He had that education, he had a degree.

Whereas -- the rest of our friends, who were so much younger, got out of concentration camps still being very young, with no education, very ambitious. My husband was not ambitious. So he kind of felt, I guess, sorry for himself or whatever. He did attempt -- he enrolled to college, but dropped out. It was just something he wasn't used to. And he really was not that ambitious to do something about it. Life was not unhappy, but it was very hard.

Q: When did that change?

A: I'm trying to think. We eventually, from that one room apartment -- and it -- housing was very hard to come by at that time, we got an apartment through my girlfriend Trudy, who was working in a hospital, we got -- we -- her patient was moving out and we got an apartment in Astoria and that's where our son was born. And we lived there for one year and then we bought a house. And I figured out, hey, that's going to be my palace. We stayed there for about maybe a year -- a year and a half and one of the people we knew from Germany came to the States and his cousin came from Uruguay to visit him. That guy, Mr. Kussman, was living in Schenectedy, New York. And he was a builder. But he needed someone to build a plan for water supply. Well, my husband had that qualification and he said, "I give you a job in Schenectedy. It's going to be your field, but you have to make up your mind." So over the weekend, my husband approached me and he says, "What do you think if we move to Schenectedy?" Well, that was the last thing I wanted to do in my life. "What's Schenectedy? I don't know a living soul, my friends are in New York, we have a house, my sister is here." She was already married, you know. And then I thought it over. He is working as a laborer in a factory. That gives him an opportunity to go -- get back to

his trade, so I said okay. So within two weeks he quit his job, he went to Schenectedy. I stayed with Jeff, trying to sell our house here. Took about three months and then I moved to Schenectedy.

Q: What year was it -- what year was it that you moved?

A: Oh, it must have been ‘56. Jeff was about four years old.

Q: He was born in ‘52?

A: ‘50 - ‘51, so -- some-something like that.

Q: And a few questions about your -- your very first years there. You had -- you had reunited with some of your friends from -- from the war. Did you have other friendships too that you were able to form during that time?

A: Some, but not very close ones. There was a language barrier. There was a different of upbringing and culture. So we mostly associated with people we knew from during the war.

Q: Did you feel that your Holocaust experiences in some way distanced you from people who had not been through that and not known.

A: No, because the Holocaust was not spoken about at that time.

Q: Even among your friends who were survivors?

A: Oh, among our friends, yes, but we always said, remember this, remember that. And always try to go back to the funny parts of our life in camp and not the horrors or distractions or whatnot.

Q: So you weren’t dwelling on what happened?

A: No, no.

Q: You were moving on.

A: Just trying to fit in to the society. I knew society is not going to change for me. So I have to fit in to society.

Q: Were there any peculiarities about American culture -- society, that -- that surprised you or things that you noticed that you thought were distinctly American?

A: Well they didn't surprise me, but there were a lot of things which were distinctly American. European lived differently than the Americans. Their interests were different, the -- but then, I belonged to the European society, I didn't quite belong to the American society, not at that time. But it didn't bother me. I made friends with the baker, with the meat supplier, whatever. It never bothered me.

Q: Was there a point at which you felt you did belong to American society [indecipherable]

A: Eventually, but many years later.

Q: Was it -- is there anything that you can identify that -- that sort of was a moment that you -- that you recognized, yes, I belong here?

A: Well, it wasn't a moment, but the things I got involved with, things I was doing, I wasn't necessary seeking out Jews from concentration camp or Jews period. So that we kind of fitted in -- made our feese -- when I got to Schenectedy, there was entirely different story. In the beginning I hated it. It was lonely, it was dreary , it was unpleasant. I didn't know anyone. But then I made very good friends with my neighbors and after that many years, we still are friends. It seems that when I do finally make friends, they for life.

Q: Was there a Jewish community there?

A: If there was, I was not involved in it. But some of my neighbors were not Jewish, but I still correspond with them, we still talk to each other. And that's -- my God, 40 years ago.

Q: Was anyone interested in your experiences, or asked you --

A: I didn't talk about them, so they didn't even know. I did not have a single out -- I am a survivor. So they didn't know and if they did know they would be hesitant to approach me, thinking that it would be painful. So we really didn't touch on it.

Q: Did you want to touch on it?

A: I didn't care.

Q: Did it -- did you feel that there was any importance to -- in -- on a grander scale, the American public understanding what had happened --

A: Not at that point. Because there really was no communication for about 10 years between the survivors and the American public. They didn't want to talk about it. We didn't want to talk about it, there was just no common ground or no reason. Their -- Holocaust was not something you spoke about. So yes, that was not a part of conversations. But I have to tell you that the friends I made in Schenectedy, they weren't all Jewish. As a matter of fact, the majority was not Jewish. But Schenectedy was a transitoim -- it was a GE town, so a lot of young, upcoming engineers were located in Schenectedy for their training. So they were always out their home base, so it was easy to make friends and their children were the same age my son was. The unfortunates thing, after we were about a year and a half in Schenectedy, my husband comes home one evening and said, on a Friday night, "I no longer have a job." The guy who offered him the job -- it was someone -- we were very

instrumental of bringing him to the States, because first of all, there was a lot of hatred towards him among Jews in camp. So we --

Q: Hatred towards whom?

A: Towards that guy. You know, he was a capo, all that bit. So we fixed an affidavit for him and we were instrumental in bringing him over to the States. So he -- oh, in the beginning he was offering us gold and diamonds and -- as a token of appreciation what we did for him. Which we didn't take from him because I didn't think it was right. He doesn't have to pay us for a job we supposed to do. Anyway, he comes home one -- my husband comes home one Friday night and he says, "Darling, I no longer have a job." The plant was finished. That was the purpose of bringing him to Schenectedy and once the job was finish, he did not feel obliged that he should give him another position. So we sold our house in Bayside, we moved to Schenectedy. My husband gave a --

End of Tape Two, Side B

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: This is tape number three, side A, of an interview with Bella Mischkinsky.

A: Sold the house in Bayside, we parted from our friends. We moved to Schenectedy, we bought a house there and after a year -- or shortly after that, my husband was out of a job. There were no other jobs available in Schenectedy, it was a GE town. Also the economic situation in the States was not very hot -- hot. He could not get a job for about eight weeks. Trying all cities, whoever we had friends. Boston, other places, until finally he got a job -- read in the paper that someone needs a supervisor of construction, he got a job. He moved in with Carl and Irene in New York and I stayed with Jeff in Schenectedy until I was ready to sell the house there. In the meantime, Andy was born, Irene and Carl's son. They came to visit often. So my husband was in New York, I was in Schenectedy and after Andy was about eight months old, Carl and Irene said, "You know, it's time for us to look for better quarters for our son." They had a furnished apartment in Astoria. So they went on a search for a house. We had very little money. Irene and Carl had very little money. Carl was going to law school. Irene was working a little bit until Andy was born. Anyway, to make a long story short, we found a house in Beachhurst. It was a old house which needed an awful lot of work. But the price was good. We took a 3000 dollar mortgage from my parents. We bought the house and we moved in. And we spent five years of fixing it, because we didn't have enough money to fix all of it and my husband was the only one who could do things. So we spent five long years, weekend and weekend out, building walls, tearing up ceilings

and so on. And we lived in that house. Well, I just sold it two months ago. So it was not occupied for the past 10 years, because Carl got promoted, he went to bigger things. The house was no longer presentable enough for a big executive of Pete Mullerg. They moved to Cleveland, we stayed in New York. And my husband literally did not have a permanent job. He could not get a permanent job. He was promised a partnership with a boss who was building houses in Brooklyn and he did build a few houses. And the Sunday, they were meeting, his boss dropped dead. That was the end of that.

Q: You mean he -- he had a heart attack, or something like that?

A: I -- I think he did have a heart attack.

Q: Yeah.

A: So that was the end of that.

Q: So this is when you -- when your husband lost his job in Schenectedy, this is late 50's, yeah?

A: Yeah.

Q: And he's -- when he's getting -- he's looking for another job and -- and -- you had mentioned that he had had -- originally had trouble finding work as a civil engineer because he was Jewish. Did you start to feel like that had -- was changing? I mean the -- the country is going through starting to look at civil rights issues and discrimination --

A: Not at that point. They didn't. It was just a fact of life here. There are certain professions which are closed to Jews, what else is new? Jews are not welcome everywhere.

Q: When did you see that start to change?

A: Oh, much, much later, but I really didn't care.

Q: How long do you think it took? I mean when -- when did -- when did you really --

A: Well, that was 60's -- when did it change? I don't know, late 70's? At that point it didn't matter, because my husband got very sick with cancer. He was sick for seven years. I was working. Jeff, at that time was out of the house, he went to college. Was very important to both of us that he get the best possible education available. So he went to -- he was very bright, he went to Dartmouth and I remember when we enrolled him to Dartmouth, my husband, who was much more practical than I was, he says, "How you going to pay for his college?" I say, "Look, we have enough money to pay one year of college. I worry about it when the year is up." Well, we made it. He did graduate Dartmouth. But Booby got sick. He was sick for seven years. The job he had, as all his jobs, were a fly by night things. His boss, a religious Jew, was building nursing homes and was cutting corners everywhere he could. And my husband comes home, thi says, "Look hon, I know we don't have money. I won't have a job. I am not going to be part of that scheme." So he quits that job, he got another job, but then he got sick. He had no health insurance, he had no benefits, he had nothing. But I had insurance through my plant and that's how we lived. Was I unhappy? No. Was I bitter? No. All our friends were progressing, became richer and richer, bought business, got education. He who had the most ability just took it -- I don't know, maybe I was a wrong wife for him. Maybe I should have been more pushy. Maybe I should be more demanding, but that wasn't my style.

Q: Did he resent -- did he resent this -- this country and the --

A: No, he did not resent his country. He was just unhappy with his position. Our friends became richer -- richer and richer and -- but that was okay with me. So it was rather me who was easily satisfied with what I had.

Q: Were there other ways that you personally ran into anti-Semitism after the war?

A: No.

Q: You didn't -- did you feel that it -- that it was a particular problem in --

A: I didn't, but then I never paid attention to that issue. So, after seven years, Booby died. He was bedridden for seven years. Excuse me.

Q: Do you want some water?

A: And I was -- no -- I was working and kind of kept -- Jeff was a very independent kind of guy. My son, Jeff. He finished college, he wanted to go to graduate school and I say, "Jeff, I'll pay for it, pick a good school. You have enta -- your marks are -- you know, Phi Beta Kappa and all that. Unfortunately, he pick -- he picked Santa Cruz, California. It was not my choice. Eventually he realized it was a mistake, after two years. He came back to the Boston University, what's the name? I forgot it [inaudible]. He never did get the Ph.D. He was that much from Ph.D. At that time he was living with a girl and she was very ambitious and she was going to be just every bit as good as Jeff. So they left for California, for Davis, where she got enrolled to her favorite subjects and that [indecipherable]. They stayed there. They eventually married and after 10 years got divorced. But she got her Ph.D. But Jeff, I guess he's -- he has his father's trend of not being terribly ambitious. He loves to work, he loves to do what he is doing. He does not like to be a supervisor of people.

Q: In his jo --

A: But he's doing great. She's doing okay.

Q: In his childhood, did he -- did you make any effort to teach him about what your experiences had been or to tell him about the Holocaust?

A: Well, he claims no. I claim yes, because when he was much younger, we used to get together with people who were in camp. And in-inevitably we were talking about camp. It bored him. I mean, he heard the stories [indecipherable] you know. Now he says, "You didn't tell me." I said, "Jeff, you weren't listening."

Q: Did you feel willing to tell him anything? Would you be willing?

A: Certainly.

Q: Anything he wanted to know?

A: Anything he wanted to know. I never suppressed the Holocaust experience. So I didn't have to dig it out. So it was not terribly hard for me to talk about it. Most of my friends just suppressed it. Hank was one of them. But I had nothing to suppress, because it was always there.

Q: Did you rem-remember everything clearly?

A: Oh, yeah. Like my ghetto friend Trudy says, "I forgot most of the things, but you want to know? Ask Bella."

Q: Was there a point where people in general started really being interested in -- in what had happened and started asking you? Or that you felt the need to talk about it?

A: I think so. Like one of my friends from Schenectedy, they Catholics. And she says, "Bella, you never told us." I say, "You never asked." You know. I was not on a educational tour of enlightening people about the Hol-Holocaust. That was not the trend of the country. You have to remember that the Holocaust became a big issue, what -- how many years ago? 10? 12? That's about [indecipherable]

Q: Were -- were you thinking about it a lot?

A: Whether I was thinking? Well, you have nightmares. You can't help it. [indecipherable] they just come there. The nightmares I don't think are brought up by you dwelling or thinking about, they just there. Those are things you can never forget, except if you make a conscious effort to suppress it, which I did not. Once my husband passed away, I had a job and then I enrolled to Queens College. I had to take a equivalency test because I had no papers and then I enrolled to Queens College and I eventually got a degree.

Q: In what?

A: Political Science. So I think that we became -- when I say we, I mean the survivors, a good -- good citizens of the United States, with a lot of contribution. We became doctors, lawyers and professionals and whatnot, you know. We did not say, hey, give me welfare. Every one of my friends got a excellent education and most of them became professional or businessmen. Quite affluent.

Q: When you were getting your education in political science, was -- were there any courses being taught about --

A: Holocaust?

Q: -- Holocaust, that were available to you?

A: No, not at that time. I mean, if they would be, I wouldn't be taking that.

Q: Right.

A: I was w-working towards a degree. I was going -- took me 10 years to get my degree. I went at night. It wasn't easy after a day's work, get to college, get your courses, get homework, papers and -- but I did it.

Q: What year was it that you started?

A: '77. I got my degree in '88. Slow learner.

Q: Why did you choose political science?

A: It interested me. I mean, I really did not enroll to get a degree, because I felt at that stage of my life, I don't need a degree. It was just -- I guess, knowledge for the sake of knowledge and also to fill my time, because I was living all alone. So I picked and choose courses which interest me. They mostly were political science courses. And until one day one of my professors calls me and he says, "Bella, how long you going to go to college? Forever? To what extent? You going to apply for a degree?" I said, "No, Professor Ludane, I have no intentions." I say, "Well I have intentions." And he really kind of took me by my hand and directed me of getting a degree. So yes, a professor or a teacher can make a difference in your life.

Q: Did you -- what were -- what was it that you were learning, was it -- was -- and were you --

A: Oh, politics, all that kind of stuff. Oh, I took a course of Islam. This interested me, so I was the only white face in the classroom. Very interesting.

Q: You talked a little earlier about having the ideal before you came here of American -- America possibly being able to nurture that -- your independent spirit more than any place else. Did you find that that was true?

A: Yes, I did. I think it's the greatest country. I don't know everything about every country, but from whatever I know, I wouldn't like to live in any other country but the United States. I get very upset when I hear the Americans knocking the country. I think they really don't appreciate what they have. You don't have to agree with everything, but you do not have to mock it.

Q: So even though you have been critical of how they --

A: Oh --

Q: -- how they received the refugee -- or didn't re -- open their arms to refugees [indecipherable] during the Holocaust, you felt -- you felt --

A: It's -- so, I was widow for seven years. We were on -- always in touch with Hank. He used to come and visit Booby, he used to come and visit me. We're on -- always friends. Hank was married, he lived in Cincinnati. Then his wife died of cancer. She died, I think after Booby died. And anyway, she was dead five years and my husband was dead close to 10 years before we married -- against my wishes. He said, "Hey Bella, let's get married." I said, "Come on, don't bother me. Why do you want to get married? What [indecipherable] marriage at that stage of the game?" But I can't put my finger on it and describe it --

whether it makes a difference. Whether you married or you just live together. If you live together and you really care about each other, you have a commitment. You don't need a judge or a rabbi or a priest or whoever to reinforce it. And that was my feeling. I mean what do I need that piece of paper from [indecipherable] in eyes of God? Who cares. But I must say, it does make a difference and I am not quite sure how. There is more freedom of interacting with your spouse. It's not live together separate but equal, but live together. And I think marriage will do that. I don't think you have to mold your spouse. I don't think you should demand of him. But there is just something which is -- I -- I can't explain it, but I do know it makes a difference.

Q: When was it that you started to form the kind of relationship with Hank that -- that you could feel that there was some -- a possibility of that kind of relationship?

A: He was a pain in the neck. He bothered me.

Q: He pursued you?

A: That's -- yeah. Well, he used to come and visit, I used to come and visit him in Washington. We can -- always had something to talk about. He introduced me to his friends, I introduced him to my friends. But it was like a weekend relationship. Not every weekend, but -- but he was always kind, he was always nice. I liked the way he approached life and humanity. I had no difficulties with that. I wasn't going to educate him any different than what he was. And I liked what he was. I always liked what he was.

Q: Had Hank and Booby been friends since --

A: Since camp.

Q: -- befor -- oh, since camp?

A: Yeah. Hank knew Booby's mother, because she was a very charitable person, involved in all the Jewish organizations and he once meet -- met her on one of those occa -- at one of those occasions. I never [inaudible]

Q: Did you experience any -- during the -- during the 50's, there -- there was a -- there was a lot of paranoia about the -- the Soviets, going on, of course, with McCarthy-ism and I wonder, being from Poland and being from some country that had associations as being now a Communist country, did you -- was there a feeling of being sh --

A: I hated it. I hated it. I felt that really does not represent the whole country, but how can people of that little volume, get so much power? It was unfair, it was unjust, it was all of the above and I -- since I wasn't working at that time, Jeff was small, I was glued to the television set. And that was an awful time for the United States, politically, I think. That anything like that was permitted to take place and so many lives ruined because of some bigot.

Q: Did you feel it particularly strongly because of your experiences of being from the area?

A: No, I felt strongly as a human being with some decency. It had nothing to do with my Holocaust experiences.

Q: Or being from Poland?

A: Or being from Poland. But as a decent human feeling -- being, I felt strongly that that should not be allowed, just like I feel strongly about lot of things which should not be allowed today -- without mentioning them.

Q: And what about -- were you -- were you aware and following issues during the civil rights era of --

A: I certainly was. I told you, politics and events and what was going on always interested me. I became an American. I did not consider myself a European any longer. I was much too young to -- at that time, when I was in Europe to think of anything that great or that big. But I was an intelligent human being and I was certainly following politics of the United States.

Q: What was your -- what was your view on what was going on with the civil rights movement and sit ins and --

A: It's a way to fight to get what you want, I guess. And if there is a in-injustice done, there are very few other ways of as -- achieving it. And I not always approved of it, but --

Q: Did it remind you in any way -- I mean the kind of persecution that blacks were experiencing in America, did that remind you [indecipherable]

A: No, I never compared it. I don't think the issues are the same. I think the United States was a different country, brought up on their own values or events or whatever. I never compared it to Europe. Maybe I should -- maybe I'm not that bright, but I never did.

Q: What about the general idea of someone judging someone else for their race or religion or you know, the -- did -- yo-you weren't necessarily thinking about how -- that was what -- that was what the Nazis were doing with the Jews?

A: No. I wasn't comparing the Nazis to whatever happened here. It's just -- should not be -- prejudiced and persecution are just not the right ways. Not because they led to the Holocaust

of the Jews, but they should not be a part of a country. [indecipherable]do you want every human being to feel the same way? I feel you're entitled to your ideas and your principals, but you are not entitled to look down on any other human being. Just like you should not go overboard admiring and catering to someone you think is so wonderful. He's wonderful because that's his mindset. That's the way he conducts himself. So you admire people who are -- in your mind, have a proper mindset and you dislike people who don't. But it's all on a personal basis.

Q: Were there any political issues that you were particularly fascinated with?

A: Almost everything what was taking place. Except the financial market and I wasn't very well versed in that. But politically almost every issue is an exciting issue. And some of them are -- have a everlasting result.

Q: Was it --

A: Now, I don't know whether you realize and that's neither a plus or a minus to my personality as far as I'm concerned, but I'm not fighting for the issues. And maybe that's not the proper approach if you want some issues to come to being, but I'm just not. I guess I'm too cynical to do that. So I can only fight it in my own way, with my own action and my own attitude. If everybody would be like me, we would have no progress or regress. But that's my personality.

Q: If you could -- if you -- do you think that it's possible to just -- let me see if I can formulate this question. Before the -- before the war, you -- you were saying you didn't have -- you didn't have any par --

End of Tape Three, Side A

Beginning Tape Three, Side B

Q: This is tape number three, side B of an interview with Bella Mischkinsky. And I was just going to ask -- so, before the war, you -- there was no -- there was no particularly strong interest or one thing that -- that really got you going or that grabbed you or that you can say, this is what I believe in?

A: Oh, I can see what I believed in, but there was no special issue I was involved in.

Q: What -- what -- wh-wh -- what -- what's -- what do you believe in?

A: This sounds corny. I want people to get along with each other, without pushing their ideas. Without saying, "If you don't feel like I do, you're wrong." And since I am not a part of any political organization or civic organization, I can only do what I can do as an individual and that's how I conduct myself. Towards my friends, towards my neighbors, towards my associates. Towards everyone I know. Hank and I did not always see eye to eye. He had certain ideas about issues and people and I had certain ideas about issues and people. But we could always discuss it without getting angry, without trying to convince each other that's different. But we could always, always express it. There was just such a unbelievable harmony between the two of us. I am usually not a person -- I wasn't -- to really express my deep feelings to anybody. Hank probably was the only person I could do it. There was nothing I felt I should hold back and not say it because it might not sound good or nice or he might agree or disagree. It was just such a open relationship that I wish it on every married couple and I think people would be much happier, instead of always fighting each other for

some stupid principle. Express your principle and let it go -- if it's not harmful. If your spouse wants to do something harmful, that's a different story. But it -- just a matter of feeling or attitude towards issues. Everyone has it's freedom to feel the way they feel.

Q: What year did you get married?

A: '85. '86? '85? We were married 10 years. But it was just such a unbelievable bliss of two people living together. From really quite different backgrounds and different upbringing. But he was just such a wonderful guy that no matter whom he would be married to would feel the same way, I think. No prejudice in me, right?

Q: You're supposed to be prejudiced with -- with your husband. You --

A: But that's true, he was a wonderful human being. It's not very hard to love someone, a person, I think, but it's hard to love mankind and he did. It didn't deprive me of anything. I'd kill -- I would kill him. But -- but he didn't. He was just the kindest person. Many times he would say, "Do you think I'm gullible?" [indecipherable]. And I said, "No, you're not gullible. You just don't look at things in the proper light."

Q: The two of you traveled a lot together.

A: Yes. Well, we traveled a lot because of his job. And when we were sent to Europe, made up our mind within 15 minutes. He did a lot of traveling and he wouldn't dream of going without me. It was great to be so wanted and needed. And I was always game, no matter what. I remember I was in New York, I get a phone call from Hank, "How would you feel going to Russia?" I said, "When?" "Two days from now." You know. I said, "Fine, I'm

ready." We did travel a lot. It was wonderful. It was educational. It was just great. Some trips were more exciting than others, for different reasons, but all of it was great.

Q: What was his job?

A: He was a nuclear engineer. So he was involved with nuclear development and the plans and whatnot. So we traveled a lot in the States together and then we traveled a lot in Europe.

Q: I -- I should say for the record that -- about Hank's papers that are in the archives at the Holocaust museum, which you donated a couple of years ago and he's written a few sort of memoirs of your travels overseas and I think they're just so wonderful to read. He's -- he's got a beautiful, playful writing style.

A: Way, yes.

Q: And -- and very evocative and full of detail.

A: I used to love his writings, but I must say, I had a tough time with him, because at one point I said to him, "I think you owe your daughter Betty. Tell her what your life was before she was born. Tell her about her grandparents. Tell her about what life was for you, your background, your all -- and what you did [indecipherable] through camp." So, I finally convinced him to do it and he let me read it. And I remember the first time he showed me what he wrote and I said, "It's a wonderful paper. It's so scientific. It should be in a science department. Did you have any feelings? Did you have any impressions? You're not writing to your boss [indecipherable] pager, that you give him facts. How did you feel about your mother? How did you feel about your father? Don't you think it's important for Betty to know? How did they feel about you? It's not a scientific paper. Should be an emotional

paper." And he did rework it. I was never criticizing what he wrote, I just said hey, you know.

Q: And then he says -- and, in the version that's in the archives -- maybe I should just read a little. I'm going to read the first paragraph of hi -- of the letter that he writes to his daughter because it -- it fits in so well with what you were just saying. He opens the letter, it's dated in August of 1992 and he says, "My Darling Betty, I told you that I would do this to -- for yo -- to da -- to slash for you someday and here it is, here I am. I really started to write a bunch of short vignettes for you. I called them anecdotes from hell and I began them in 1983 in Washington. But I wrote in longhand and the images of old crashed in on me so hard that I sought support from my exercise, in booze. When I next picked up my notes, I broke up laughing. I would start an episode nice and level and within a couple of pages, they became illegible and fell off the pages. Then I began to see Bella and under her influence, I started to face my devils, to confront them. To see them rationally, soberly. To be able to speak about the war years, unforced. Don't get me wrong, my soul is between these pages. What is new is that I could handle it." So you really had quite an -- an impact on Hank's being able to speak about his experiences.

Q: Yeah, Hank never spoke about his experiences. He felt that Wilma, his first wife, could not understand it. I didn't know her, though, I just met her. I don't know whether he is right or not. She probably would have made an effort to understand it. I think to shut her out of it was unfair for Hank -- the way I see it -- but then, I don't know Wilma too well. She must have felt segregated from him. And I think he could have taken the time and I felt -- to

explain it to her. To make her a part of his life, instead of saying, “Oh, well. She wouldn’t understand it, I better bury it.” To me, that’s not a nice approach. Now, he might have been right. I don’t know the woman.

Q: Wh -- I would love to hear some details from you about your trips with Hank, like your trip to Vilnias and your revisiting -- your revisiting Vilna, your -- the place where you had spent some time in the ghetto.

A: The -- I spent the time in Vilna in ghetto. And I was very exposed to the trips to Ponary. It wasn’t a part of Hank’s life. But Hank was too glad to go to Vilna and see those things. So we got to Vilna and there was no sign of the ghetto. It’s completely like it never existed.

Q: What year is this?

A: Must have been ‘92, something like that. And then I said I would like to go to Ponary. So we hired a cab driver, who happened to be familiar with that. And it was a unbelievable experience for me, seeking out the road I tried to avoid during my whole stay in Vilna. Seeking out the road to Ponary. That was a unbelievable experience. And when we got there, is very nicely kept, again, very quiet and very peaceful. There are a few monuments built by survivors and families of people. It was just strange, because I said, “My God. All those people you knew who are buried here something -- someplace.” So that was very touching, but it was just such a wonderful feeling -- of Mrs. Mischkinsky having her private driver driving the roads to Ponary like a big shot. You know, wearing a fur coat or whatever -- dressed, looking around. What a strange feeling. It just -- a feeling of hey, your whole system of destroying the Jews wasn’t fully, completely accomplished. Here I am, like Mrs.

Big Deal, visiting that place. It was different when we went to Riga. See, Riga was not my hometown. The Latvian Jews, I only met some of them in camp. Hank was brought up there. His family lived there. It was his hometown. So it was different. And we went to Salaspils in Torumbally, where his mother, his sister, who were killed. It's a different feeling for him, like it was for me in Vilna. But then, I knew a lot of people who eventually were shot and killed in Riga, too. And it's a peaceful looking place, with nice, full bloom trees and underneath are hundreds of thousands of Jews, killed cold-blooded. Taken in the middle of the night and just shot. Crime? You're Jewish. That was hard. And then we made a trip to Minsk, which is a different story. And we went to a place, Katyn. It's a place designated for people who were shot by the Russians. Whole villages of people shot by the Russians. By the white and -- it's White Russia, all right? So they were White Russians were being shot by the Russians because of partisans and -- and they took village after village after village, destroyed it. And it's a beautiful monument. I mean, you have each city, each town has a little mount of earth and a cross and the eternal life and all that and bells. And every half a minute, the bells are chiming in unison, to remember that. And it was very touching. I could not quite get rid of the feeling, I am so touched, it's so horrible, but those were White Russians. How many of them participated in killing the Jews and what kind of monuments do you have to memorize the Jews? Well, when I expressed it to Hank, he wasn't very happy with me. But I felt that way. Yes, and I am not substituting one to another -- one murder doesn't justify another. But I just couldn't get rid of the feeling that those were White Russians and how many of them had their hands soiled with Jewish blood,

just because of hatred of unknown people, that the Nazis allowed them, get rid of your Jews. So that was a mixture of feelings.

Q: Hank pointed out in his -- in his memoir about that, that just the distinction between Kat --

A: Katyn

Q: -- tyn -- Katyn, K-a-t-y-n, which is where the -- the off -- Russian officers were.

A: That was Katcheen.

Q: So this is a different place, it's --

A: That's a different --

Q: It's K-h-a-t-y-n, right?

A: Yeah.

Q: So it's a di -- whole difference.

A: Right.

Q: I just wanted to point that out.

A: No, it's a different --

Q: In case somebody is listening to it and gets confused.

A: No, it's not -- that had nothing to do with the Russians killing the soldiers. And did they kill the Polish soldier, or -- no, that's different.

Q: Right, right [inaudible] Polish soldier.

A: But Katyn is so impressive. And you hear -- it's very quiet and you hear the bells every -- I think every minute or every half a minute, just -- I think, what would they do for the

Jews, to remember them? Stutthof had beautiful green grass and nicely kept barracks. Big deal.

Q: And you --

A: When I was there, I was looking for my friend Iangard, for my friend So -- I -- I just almost expected to see them. But is very peaceful and very quiet.

Q: Did you go to Kaiserwald?

A: Yes, I did go to Kaiserwald. There is no more Kaiserwald the way I remember it. There is a -- there was, at that time, a Russian installation. And I took a picture of Kaiserwald and then a Russian soldier came over and he took me to the commandanture. You're not allowed to picture installations -- take pictures of -- and I -- now wait a minute, that was my home. I wasn't taking pictures of installations. But they were really ready to lock me up.

Q: I assume they took the film away from you?

A: I -- I think so. But that was funny, being pulled in.

Q: When -- I -- I was struck by -- by reading Hanks dispatches and y-you were really on very diplomatic sort of excursions --

A: Oh, yes.

Q: I mean, he's really doing -- doing sensitive business deals --

A: I felt like a such bigshot. Here are all those scientists, having all the slides on picture and talking about this and I am the only woman just being present at it. I didn't know what they talking about, but just the idea that I was there made me feel like such an important person.

Q: But meanwhile, did they have any clue of what this visit meant to you? I mean you're -- you're going back to these places where you're -- you're families were.

A: Well, I was never in -- in that surrounding of those scientific conversations, you know. They could talk to me from doomsday -- from today til doomsday, I wouldn't understand a word they were saying, but just that I was there, made me feel very important.

Q: But, I -- I mean, even from Hank's point of view, he was revisiting Riga, but also on business, yeah?

A: Yeah. But that was a different part of -- I was talking about Minsk.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah, he was -- we were entertained by the bigshot's oaf -- government.

Q: Was that hard, to be revisiting this place and have all of these memories, which are obviously very overpowering, but to -- to -- to also be doing this sort of diplomatic business and it's such a split between them. It seems like it would be --

A: No, I think it was very interesting and very satisfactory. I say, almost, "Hitler eat your heart out. Here I am."

Q: Was there any acknowledgment between the people who Hank was working with and you that --

A: We are survivors? No. We took a trip around -- was it Vilna? I think it was in Vilna, through -- the ambassador gave us his escorts and they were telling us what happened when the Russians took over the station and they killed there seven people and they have the

crosses and the monuments and the flowers. Was my life -- was my heart bleeding for them? No. You're talking about seven people. I talk about hundred and thousands.

Q: Did you tell them that?

A: No. I don't think it would make any -- why would I tell it to them? They are two people who are taking us on a tour. They were not people who were responsible. That's the way they felt about it. So am I going to compare my twozig is bigger than your twozig? I did not think it will serve a purpose.

Q: And he --

A: Do you agree with me?

Q: I -- I think it would have been di-difficult to bring it up, but -- you know, I -- I don't want to -- I wouldn't -- I would -- I'm just interested in knowing how it -- how it happened, more than anything.

A: No, I know. I just ask, off the record, I ask whether you think it was a proper approach? You are not going to create battles -- fist battles on every step, when you are visiting and you are somebody's guest. Would we be invited to a political discussion, that's one thing. But we weren't.

Q: There's one point at which -- I'm -- I'm not sure what trip it was on, but -- but Hank in his writings, mentions the issue of -- there's a round table discussion and the -- the -- it's sort of -- I guess it was when you were in Minsk. And -- and --

A: Right. We went to the territory which was affected by the Chernobyl fallout. So it wasn't in Minsk, but it was further down and yeah. Oh, I remembered that very clearly.

Q: Tell me [inaudible]

A: Well, we were a group of eight, nine people. Very friendly, very cordial, very loving, very attentive and we having dinner. And the leader of the group brings up the question of -- around the table -- what's your religion, how do you feel about it? And then it came to me, what's your religion? I say, "I'm Jewish." And like a blanket of silence fell over the whole group. There were no more questions, except Hank was able to say, "And by the way, I am Jewish, too." That was the end of the discussion, but it -- the whole atmosphere changed. There was no more talks, there was no more -- nothing, just -- so Hank, after we finished dinner, Hank went to Ralph and said, "Look, if that interferes with the mission, because I am Jewish, I will be too glad to resign. So you can continue and whatever." And Ralph says, "Well, so far nobody approached me about anything. So why -- why don't you just let it rest?" Next morning, it was like nothing ever, ever happened. So yes, is there an underlying anti-Semitism everywhere? Yes, it is.

Q: Do you think that still exists --

A: Yes.

Q: -- in the United States --

A: Yes, ma'am.

Q: In New York City, in --

A: Yes, ma'am. Everywhere. I think so. But then it's the other side of the coin, the Jews are very prejudiced too.

Q: Do you have any examples of that?

A: [indecipherable] my mother. The schvartza.

Q: I mean what about -- what about -- what about your mother?

A: She was very prejudiced. A schvartza is not an equal. A schvartza's a Negro. [indecipherable] my mother was much more superior, she was Jewish. And you can go on and on and on.

Q: Have your feelings about Zionism changed and what -- I mean, what are your feelings about Israel nowadays?

A: I don't know much about it. I wouldn't like to live there. Since I am not well informed, I really cannot express any opinion. I think they probably dislike everybody who's not Jewish. I don't necessarily mean just Arabs, but I think they probably -- and that's just an assumption -- feel that whoever is not Jewish, is some --

End of Tape Three, Side B

Beginning Tape Four, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of an interview with Bella Mischkinsky, this is tape number four, side A. Is there anything else you want to say about your -- your trips? Yo -- did you ever visit Lódz?

A: Yes, I did. The biggest disappointment. I never wanted to go there, but I promised Professor Goldenberg to go, because Hank promised her and he no longer is here, so I just took his place. And we went to Lódz. I found Lódz oppressive, dirty, smaller, unfriendly -- nothing like the city I grew up in. I don't think it's my imagination, I think the city changed and it -- under the Russian occupation, it did change. I think there is a big hatred of the Jews -- Jews there and the reason I am saying it, because there was just a very small plaque, indicating -- just honoring the Jews and a woman pass -- we were -- looked at it and took a picture and a woman passed by and spit. So, that does not indicate love and kindness. We had hard time getting directions to where the ghetto was -- people didn't know. So -- the house I lived in looked like the biggest slum. So that was not a pleasant visit.

Q: Was the -- any of the original house still there?

A: A part of the house I lived was there, I wish it wouldn't. It's dilapidated, the stairs are broken, the railing is broken. I tried to visit my grandparents house and I rang the doorbell and I got the door slammed in my face. So it was not a good visit.

Q: You got the door slammed in your face after you had told them who you were and why you were visiting, or --

A: Well, I said -- yeah, my grandmother was -- so, that was my experience with Lódz.

Q: What happened to your grandparents, by the way?

A: Well, my grandfather died before the war. My grandmother was taken out of the Loder ghetto, with the transport.

Q: To Auschwitz?

A: No. She was killed before. Irene was with her, I was not in the Loder ghetto. But Irene was.

Q: Did you see anybody you had known?

A: No.

Q: Were you avoiding looking for people that you had known?

A: No, I didn't avoid anything. It just was not a good visit.

Q: How long did you stay?

A: One day. One day too many.

Q: And you really hadn't wanted to even return?

A: No, I did not. But Myrna wanted to go to the places I was and you start with the place you lived in. We could not go to Riga, it was too complicated. You needed visas, you needed just -- so we didn't go to Riga, we just went to Warsaw. We went to Kraków and when -- we went to the sites of concentration camps. To Stutthof, to Majdanek, to Treblinka. Where else? Auschwitz.

Q: What was your impression of a -- of these places?

A: Well, as I told you before about my impression of Stutthof, it wasn't the place I remembered. It was all nice and green and grassy and whatnot. But I was never in Majdanek

or Treblinka. I only heard about those camps later. Excuse me. I only heard about those camps later, after the war. Those were devastating, devastating places. Because they were different than -- from what I knew as a concentration camp. There were no barracks. People weren't kept there, they were unloaded on the platform and sent to the gas chambers. So that was different than my experiences were. So you saw stones and stones and stones. And they all presented human beings at one point. That was terrible. Auschwitz was not that terrible, because I read about it a lot. I had an idea what it is, I know what the barrack represents, I know what the gas chamber represents. And the reason I was -- I wanted to go to Birkenau-Auschwitz, because Irene was there. So I wanted trace back what her life looked like. But, I mean every camp is shocking, but it wasn't such a novelty that I could not visualize it, whereas Majdanek was different.

Q: So you -- what -- what year was this that you -- that you went with -- with the circle of friends?

A: I think last year, I -- I'm not quite -- I think last year or --

Q: A couple of years?

A: No, just a year and a half, maybe.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: And now, as a affluent citizen and survivor of camps, I'm going to cruise to the Scandinavian countries.

Q: You're going to visit the re -- Holocaust sites in Finland. Tell me about your -- I -- I noticed, fishing through the -- your file and Hank's files that you had made an effort to

volunteer for the Holocaust Museum early on, before Hank started volunteering at the Holocaust Museum. And you had been frustrated by not getting a response. And then eventually Hank started volunteering. Did that --

A: Did I make that comment? I don't recall it.

Q: Just something I found in your files.

A: I don't know. Hank volunteered and I didn't want to volunteer at the same, together. Stupid, but I didn't want to. But then when Hank passed away -- yeah, I think it was difficult to -- had to make appointment and na dada, whatever. But when Hank passed away, I had no problem talking to Arwin and saying I would like to volunteer. And she did it immediately. She was a great influence for me to volunteer in the Holocaust Museum -- for the Holocaust Museum. I loved her approach, her attitude, her calm efficient way of doing things. I felt very comfortable, almost like I have a protector who is taking Hank's place. And I was very -- not sorry, but sad when she left, because I just felt -- she's still going to be my friend or I am going to be her friend, let's put it that way, but it's a distance away and things have a way of slipping by. But I found the people at the museum very friendly. The young man who's responsible for my directions, what's his name? Dillon. The young man who is taking care of my work in the archives, Dillon is very helpful, very understanding. I just love to work -- I almost feel I work for him, because he represents the person I respond to, and he taught me a lot of things. I just love him. It's too bad he is so young or too bad I am so old. But I love that guy. And he's -- I think a -- a big asset to the museum. But so are other people. I work a half a day at the museum on the floor and it gives me a chance to

interact with the public and other volunteers and that's a great experience. I think the museum -- or the people I work with are trying to make the museum a very interesting place for the visitors and a very comfortable place. I think they all obliging, they all courteous and it's good to see so much people coming -- so many people coming and visiting. And what's also good to see, that they not necessarily Jewish. So it's good to see an interest among other people, but just Jews who have the impression that the Holocaust museum is just his m -- their museum. It isn't. It's a educational institution for everyone and I hope it's going to stay that way. I just don't want the Holocaust to be put together in a bag with any other killings of other countries, because the Holocaust was a unique experience, different than the killings and murdering of people which took place in other countries. It doesn't mean that it's -- I advocate it, I am just saying that I feel the Jewish Holocaust was strictly a Jewish issue. What one country, with so much education, was so susceptible to murder of hundreds of thousands of other people, only because they were Jewish. They weren't fighting for anything. They didn't defend anything. They had no weapons to fight back. They were just led -- the term is the Jews went like sheep. Well, they were led like sheep. I do resent the criticisms that Jews did not fight back and they went like sheep. Well, every survivor fought back, because he is alive. And lots of them -- thousands of them who wanted a life, fought back too. To survive a concentration camp run by the Nazis, the White Russians, by the Latvians, was a fight. It was a struggle to survive. And I felt a little bit resentful when in the beginning the question was, "Why didn't you fight?" Who is asking the question? People who have their dignity? Who are not hungry? Who are not being

separated? Who are not being treated like vermin? They are asking why didn't you fight back? My question is, "Why didn't you fight for us, with all the things you had available, if you just choose to use them?" And saying we didn't know is not an answer, because it's not a fact. So, I did resent that. I think every survivor is a hero. I think every inmate of a concentration camp was a hero. Yes, and we survivors are heroes because we proved that they were not as efficient as they wanted to be and they did leave so many Jews still alive. Jews who became human beings who are assets to every country they live in. That's, to me, a hero.

Q: Do you remember when -- we were talking a little earlier about -- about the receptivity of people in this country to listening to -- to -- to really being interested in the experiences of survivors and to wanting to know. Can you -- can you talk more about ho -- when you started really talking about it and started feeling like people were wanting to know what had happened to you and how -- how -- how the -- that came about, how that influenced --

A: I am not sure who started the trend. I think it was schools who started or maybe synagogues. I don't know when it started.

Q: Even in -- just in your own life, in your own personal life.

A: But in my personal life we always talked about it among my friends who were also survivors. And strangers or people who became my friends, but were not survivors and did not share my life, I was not going to sit down and talk to them about my experience. And if they already were aware of the Holocaust, they had the sensitivity of saying, "We cannot ask her, because it's too painful." So I don't quite know when it started and how it started.

But what I do remember is that I was extremely resentful when I was asked, “Why didn’t you fight back?” And I said to myself, “Are the remaining Jews embarrassed and ashamed? They need heroes to say, hey look what we did?”

Q: Wh-Who asked you that?

A: Oh, many a people. That was a very -- “What I don’t understand -- why didn’t you fight back?” Was a very common question. And I really did not feel to an-answering that, because to me it was, would you like to be proud of your Jews, so you proud of the people in Warsaw ghetto who resisted? Is that’s what you need or do you want to talk about the survivors?

Q: The Holocaust Museum, working on the floor and meeting various people who are coming through, many of them non-Jews, most of them non-Jews. Have you gotten into discussions with them? Do they discover that you’re a survivor? Do they --

A: Sometimes.

Q: Tell me -- tell me a story about that.

A: Oh, well there are no big stories, but we say, “Oh, there’s that --” And I say, “Yes.” She’s -- and I say, “Oh, by the way,” I might volunteer that information, “and I am a survivor.” I think I am a human face, with a nice personality, so hey, I’m a survivor, I’m a part of society, I am here. And I always get that smile of sympathy and almost the outstretched hand, “Oh, I’m so glad you’re here.”

Q: And there’s a feeling of -- is there a feeling of --

A: It -- it never fail -- almost a feeling of admiration. “You went through all that, what we saw today?”

Q: How does that feel, to be -- to be on the receiving end --

A: Great. Great. Not quite, but there is not shy away or there is no -- there just a very warm feeling that we so glad they are survivors. I never heard -- and I don’t know that doesn’t exist, anybody who would say, “Oh God, he didn’t do a good job, that Hitler. He left too many Jews alive.” I never had that feeling. I’m sure it exists among some people, but I never experienced it.

Q: Is -- a --

A: By the way, I was approached by many -- not many -- a few teachers of the Holocaust in public schools, would I talk to the kids about my experience? Which -- I said yes, because it’s my way -- I can enlighten the young kids what hatred and bigotry can do. And every time I addressed a school, whether it was -- a school with Jewish children or a majority of non-Jewish children, I always got the most magnificent response from the kids and I have letters from every one of them, writing me how they appreciate my coming and talking to them, that the Holocaust has now a human face. That it’s not six million -- oh, that’s the spiel I gave them, so they giving it back to me. But they were fascinated and the letters I got from them are so precious. I have every one of them just saved -- I don’t know for what, but -- so that’s a rewarding experience.

Q: Seems like it took a long time to -- for it to get to that point where people were really acknowledging what you had been through.

A: Yeah.

Q: Is there anything else you want to say, Bella?

A: I love you.

Q: I love you, too. Thank you. This concludes the United States Holocaust Memor-

Memorial Museum interview with Bella Mischkinsky.

End of Tape Four, Side A

Conclusion of Interview