United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Fritzie Fritzshall
September 22, 1998
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Fritzie Fritzshall, conducted by Gary Covino on September 22, 1998 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Buffalo Grove, Illinois 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 Fritzie Fritzshall
September 22, 1998

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jeff and Toby Herr collection. This is an interview with Fritzie Fritzshall, conducted by Gary Covino, on September 22nd, 1998, in Buffalo Grove, Illinois. This is a follow up interview to a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum videotaped interview, conducted with Fritzie Fritzshall. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum gratefully acknowledges Jeff and Toby Herr for making this interview possible. This is tape number one, side A. You were saying?

Answer: We can talk about my broken oven and stove and the repairman or we can talk about the man that's coming to fix my faucet. Which do you want to hear about first?

Q: Well, it's your interview, so it's up to you.

A: Okay.

Q: Well, I want to thank you for taking time out from all your domestic disasters to --

A: It's just one of those days. I mean, you can use the bathroom, but you can't use the sink.

Q: Okay. Well, let me just ask you to say your name and you know, where we are today.

A: Is this part of the interview now?

Q: Yeah, we're starting now.

A: [indecipherable] now? We're starting? Okay. My name is Fritzie Fritzshall. You're in my home at ***[1].

Q: Okay. And once again, thanks for taking time out to do this interview today. You have already done a video interview with the museum in Washington about your early experiences and your experiences during the war, and really the purpose of this interview, is sort of to pick up that story from where you left off and take it up to the present. So I would like to ask you, though, if we could go back maybe a step and if you could describe what your circumstances were right around the time leading up to when you were liberated. What it -- where you were, what happened and then how liberation took place.

A: Liberation from the camps or once we've gotten out of the camps? I mean, which part do you want to hear about?

Q: Well, I was thinking sort of when the Russians picked you up. But if you want, you -- wherever you would -- wherever you would like to start from, actually, would be fine.

A: Okay, we can start --

Q: It -- do you want to talk about how you got away from the camps?

A: Well, actually, we were on the Death March and my particular group was liberated by the Russian army. After we were liberated, we were put into a holding camp, which was a

[1] Although the policy of the USHMM is never to edit or alter oral history interviews in any way, the interview with Fritzie Fritshall does contain a 5 second black out at the beginning of the interview. The interviewer asked Ms. Fritshall to state her name and where the interview was being conducted. In responding to the question, Ms. Fritshall inadvertently stated her address. At the request of the interviewee, her statement of her address has been blacked out on the user copy and removed from the transcript to protect her privacy. However, the master copy and protection copies have not been altered. The three asterisks in the body of the transcript indicate the removed address spoken by Ms. Fritshall.

DP camp. And, of course they had to delouse us. They had to give us medical attention and they feed us and try and sort of organize. I mean, we were a -- a -- a very displaced group, a very sick group at that point. And once they took our names and asked us if we had a home to go to, or whatever -- some of us chose to go back to our original homes and some of us stayed behind and stayed in the DP camps for a long time. I was in a DP camp for quite awhile and then I chose to go back home to my hometown, hoping that possibly my brothers or someone that had survived, had come back home and that we could reunite. But I truly was mistaken, because no one came back. One aunt, who survived Auschwitz concentration camp, went to Budapest rather than coming to our hometown in Czechoslovakia, thinking that I hadn't survived, although sh -- she did see me in Auschwitz camp, so she knew I was there. But she thought that I, too had gone to the gas chambers, as millions of others had. And when she heard that I had survived, she too came back home. So actually it was just the two of us. We came back home and found our home -- my mother's home that we lived in, destroyed. Our home was used for a lookout post. It was like on a little hill and the soldiers had used that and it was destroyed. My grandmother's home -- which was my aunt's home who came back, stood. The home was totally stripped of everything inside. There were nothing but walls and windows left. And w-we moved into this home. Actually, I was the very first one to come home in our community and I was the first one to move into my grandmother's home. And I would go and meet a train that passed through our little town once a day, hoping that someone survived and people would come back. And little by little, some young

people did trickle back. And -- including my aunt and we all lived in my grandmother's home. When we came back we had no money, we had no food and we just had the clothes on our backs. Our neighbors had stripped our homes, our furniture was used by neighbors. We recognized some of our clothes that was worn by some of our neighbors. But no one came, no one offered and no one asked. What we had to do was go and dig for potatoes in the field. Gather some potatoes and whatever we could from the harvest. And this is what we lived on for quite awhile. And I knew my father was in the United States, but I did not know where. And I could have never found him, except that he found me. My dad had -- after the war, my dad had contacted some of the neighbors that he remembered and he wrote to the Post Office in our town, looking for his family, looking for survivors. And I had gotten a letter through the Post Office, from my dad and gotten his address and was able to get in touch with him. And he was able to send me American dollars through the letters that came. A five dollar bill, a 10 dollar bill -- which we were selling on the Black Market. At that time an American money, we were getting a lot for it, because the money in Europe was really devalued at that particular time, so we were able to buy food after awhile. We were also getting clothes through -- I believe it's the United Restitutio -- I don -- I don't know, it was called Unrah. I don't know what it stands for, actually.

Q: Right.

A: And we were getting clothes from them and I remember getting packages and opening the packages and getting clothes that was actually used already and getting shoes that

didn't fit and looking for the candy that was inside and we were getting gum. And we would open the package of gum and didn't know that we were supposed to chew this gum and chew it, you know, we just ate it like candy, thinking, "Gee, this is kind of funny candy," you know?

Q: You'd never seen gum before?

A: I had never seen gum before. And we stayed in my grandmother's home until some of the organiza -- some of the young people were able to get it -- in touch with some of the organizations and some of them were getting help in other ways. And I was able to get in touch with my dad. And then the borders closed. And I had gotten caught on the side of Communism. Both my aunt and I had gotten caught on the side of Communism and we were not able to leave. And I was not able to come to this country at that point, or get in touch with my dad any longer.

Q: Can I s-stop you here one second? You said the borders closed, do you remember what year that was?

A: No, I don't. Actually, I don't remember the year -- the exact year.

Q: Why don't we leave your story where it is at the moment, the borders have closed. I -- if you wouldn't mind, I'd like to go back a couple steps and ask you about a -- a couple things you've -- you've mentioned already.

A: Okay.

Q: And bring out a little more detail. First of all, could you just tell us th-this aunt that your -- you've mentioned, could you tell us her name?

A: Yes. She was my dad's sister and she's the only one that survived on my dad's side, actually, and her name was Freida Weiss. And eventually, she was also able to make her way to this country. My aunt had my dad, who was a brother and she had two other brothers living in this country and through them she was able to make her way to this country.

Q: And in your video interview, you talk about her and she was in the camp with you and you tell that story. I'd like to go back to -- oh, sorry --

A: No, the -- my aunt that I speak of in the video was my mother's sister. The aunt that I'm speaking of now was my father's sister.

Q: Oh.

A: The aunt that I spoke of in the video had not survived the camps. We were separated in the camp and she was taken to another camp and I had found out years later, through someone that knew her and was in a camp with her, that she lived to see liberation. The day she -- the day her camp was liberated, she was still alive and died that day, the day the camp was liberated. But, I think of her often, because she was my inspiration all through the camp. She was the one that kept telling me every single day, "We will make it and tomorrow will be better." I made it, she did not. But I couldn't have done it without her.

Q: What was her name?

A: Her name was Bella Davidovitch.

Q: And which camp did she --

A: She -- we were separated. We were in Auschwitz together and then we were separated. I was taken to -- actually, what happened was that our -- our barracks was emptied and we were put into a holding barrack and our barrack was to go into the gas chambers and we knew it. My -- they had a separation, my aunt was chosen to go onto a truck to be taken somewhere's else and the last she saw of me was walking towards the gas chambers. And when she left me, she did not think that I had survived, she thought that we had all gone to the gas chambers, her entire family and she really did not fight for her life at that point. So, possibly, if she had known some of us had survived, she maybe too, could have survived.

Q: And you -- what you tell in your video, it's a remarkable story, you actually were in the doorway, I believe, of the gas chamber?

A: They -- people that were in Auschwitz, after they were in the camp for, I believe, probably an hour, they knew about the gas chambers. You know, one separation had taken place and once we were taken into the barracks and once we started to ask about our families, what had happened to our families, the people that had been in the barracks prior to us coming there, the prisoners, would point to the gas chambers. This is how we found out what had happened to millions of others, to the children that we were separated from, to our parents, to the rest of our family, by just -- they would just raise their hand and they would tell us to look at the smoke. And of course, this is how we found out about the gas chambers. We lived with it day in and day out we lived with the gas chambers. We watched the trains coming in, we watched the separations, we watched

people marching to the gas chambers, but there was no way we could help them or do anything. So, we learned -- we learned every single day, twice a day, there was a thing called a pell, where we all had to line up to be counted. When they called a pell in the morning and at night, nobody wanted to be in the beginning of the line, or at the end of the line, cause there was always punishment. People were always pulled from the beginning of the line or the end of the line. Sometimes from the center, but basically, it was easier to pull from the beginning or the end. So everybody fought to be in the center of the lines and there were only so many middles, somebody had to be in the beginning. Because my aunt was on this particular truck, leaving, I had -- was hoping I could go with her and so I was at the very end of the line and she watched all of us marching into the gas chambers. And in the very last moment, six of us were pulled out and put onto another truck to do s -- go to a factory to do slave labor. But her truck had pulled away already and she did not see me not walking into the gas chamber, so she assumed that I too had gone into the gas chambers with the rest.

Q: Yeah. And do you know if she ever knew whether you had survived? Did word ever reach her somehow? Do you have any way of knowing?

A: I have no way of knowing, but I believe she did not know, because the people that were with her, that told us that they knew her and she had died, remember her speaking about everyone being killed one way or another or going to the gas chamber. So I -- I am assuming she did not know.

Q: And do you know the day she died, which was the day when her camp was liberated?

A: I don’t know the dates.

Q: Yeah, no, no, not the date, but it was the day the camp was liberated that she died. Was that because of just, you know, illness or that she was in a run down condition, or --

A: She was ill. She had gotten an infection in an -- in a leg -- is -- from what we had heard, and blood poisoning had set in her leg and at that point she really didn’t care. She -- you know, when -- when we were in the camps, there -- there came a point, during a low moment maybe or when hope was lost, where people didn’t care whether they lived or died, especially if they knew no one else survived, they just didn’t care. And at that point, I believe that she didn’t care. I don't know how else to express this, except that I -- I believe that she felt she was the last one of the family and -- and she too gave up.

Q: Sorry to bring this up, but something just came on, is that the air conditioning, or --

A: Maybe. I don’t know. Could be the refrigerator. I don’t know how to shut it.

Q: Oh. You never turn that off, huh? Okay. Occasional noises you might hear in the background, they’re household appliances that can’t be shut off.

A: Well, it must be the air conditioner.

Q: Okay.

A: I don’t know. But it’s hot in here and we need the air conditioner, guys.

Q: Okay. All right, we’ll just go -- we’ll go along with that. So -- do you -- you were -- do you remember -- did you even have time much, to have much of a reaction when they suddenly pulled you away from the gas chamber and sent you in another direction? Can you remember what you felt or was it just so hectic that --

A: Do you know, things were happening in the camp where one didn't have the normal feelings. We were, for the lack of a better word, dehumanized, maybe? We learned to accept life as it was on that particular moment and when you are with people in a barrack for a le -- any length of time and you see them marching into a gas chamber, you don't think, "Well gee, I am the lucky one, I walked away." Maybe I'm not the lucky one, maybe they are the lucky ones, because I don't know where they're going to be taking me and it might be worse than where I am now. So, the reaction was a -- was not, "Gee, I'm really glad because I'm still alive." It just -- you accept it as it comes, that particular moment. The fear is always there, that you don't know where you're being taken, that you're going to get less food than you had that particular moment. That you might be -- feel hunger more than you do that particular moment, because you're already hungry, you're already abused, you're already skinny, you're already sick. And the moment comes when you just say, "Okay, this is another thing that's happening to me today." And so you just flow with it.

Q: Did you know w -- that -- where -- while you were still in the camp, did you know where your aunt was or where she'd been taken, or did you not find out what happened to her until the war was over?

A: I did not know where she was being taken to. As far as I was concerned, she could have been taken to another camp and put to death in a -- in a gas chamber in another camp. I didn't know what she did or -- or even if she was alive, until after the war. Actually, we found out -- you know, it's -- it's a big world, but it's a small world. You

know, you talk to people and one will say, “Well, I was in this camp,” or “I was in that camp.” And when you give a family name or when you start asking, people remember and people know and you get a little information.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And this is how I found out.

Q: In your video, you describe it, maybe just very briefly here you could say, you -- you did get out of the camp and then you got into the forest, basically, towards the end of the war. Where -- where’d you -- can you tell us the name of the forest, where it was?

A: No. We were -- what -- what they did is, I don’t know if you saw any other videos, but -- but -- or if you’ve read anything about the Holocaust, but towards the end of the war, when Hitler started to lose the war, he started -- I use the word he because of Hitler, but basically it’s -- he didn’t do it alone, obviously, he had his machinery that worked for him, all the people that ran the camps and gathered the Jews and drove the Jews to the death camps and drove the trains and so forth. I -- I will refer to them as his mach- machinery, because this is what it was. They -- the Germans started to empty the factories where slave labor -- labor was being done. They started to bring the people in from all over, wherever they did slave labor and they brought them together with the people in concentration camps and they created a group at that point, a huge, huge group. Men and women together at that point. And it is known today as a Death March. It was -- they brought us all together, we were in rags. I recall that I had -- my -- my shoes didn’t fit, my clogs. I could hardly walk in them because I had outgrown them, obviously. And it

was very cold and I -- I recall taking rags and wrapping rags around my feet as I was walking. And they really walked us in circles, at least it seemed to us as if we were walking in circles. They walked us through the towns, they walked us through fields. They -- we slept in -- around haystacks. I mean they -- then -- and whatever. Most of us were very sick, some people had gotten dysentery and they had to stop, of course and they were being shot on the spot. They would walk us into -- through forest areas and I recall at one point sleeping on the fields and just watching the planes -- the planes, I mean, American planes coming down low, passing us and we were hoping that they would bomb us. We were sick, we were tired, we were hungry, we were thirsty and we didn't care. At one point they started to walk us through a forest. We were on the road actually, but -- but the road was through the forests. And a friend and I realized that some of the people were trying to escape at that point. And it was also towards the very end of the war and the Germans were also tired, taking us through the fields, you know, and all of this. And when -- we were watching people escape and they were shooting at these people and -- and they were -- they were being horrible to us, even at that point. I recall, as we were walking through towns -- they would walk us through towns -- the people in town knew and saw and heard, we were like -- like a herd of cattles taking over this town and walking through the town. I recall shades being pulled down, windows being closed, doors being locked so that they wouldn't -- they pretended they didn't see and they didn't hear. But yes, occasionally, a window would open and a piece of bread would come out, a potato would come out. Something would fly out a window. We all pounced on this

because we were terribly hungry, they weren't feeding us. And we would pounce on this food and th-the SS men -- the soldiers would shoot at us in groups. We didn't care, we wanted that piece of bread, we wanted that food. When we came to this forest, my aunt and I -- my -- my girlfriend and I took our hands and looked at each other and said we're going to try to escape. If they shoot us, they shoot us, but we cannot take this any longer, we will try to escape. And we picked a time where they -- other people also tried to escape on both sides and the soldiers were busy shooting at other people and we escaped and they did try to shoot at us at that point, then we came into a forest. If I tell you that every time I think of this escape, I can count my heartbeat even today. I mean, our hearts were -- we -- we took each other's hands after we hid behind -- behind some bushes and trees, and we took each other's hands and we were feeling each other's hearts as our hearts were beating. It was like it was going to come out, pop out. And we stayed in that forest all night long. We stayed hidden and we watched people walking by -- the prisoners walking by. The next day, we stayed in the forest and when it started to get dark, we decided that we're going to try and see if we can find a home, a farm, steal food somewhere, steal clothes somewheres. You need to remember, our heads were shaved, we were very skinny, we were in striped uniforms. I mean, you could -- you could spot us a mile away, we couldn't lie about who or what we were, okay? We came to this farm, and we were two dumb kids. We were totally dumb children. We knocked on the door and I recall a man opening the door and staring at us and all we said is that we're very hungry. And we spoke German, we lived in Germany. And he looked at us and he said,

well, he couldn't give us food, but he will take us into the barn. Well, he took us into the barn and he let us stay in the barn and he did bring us food, he brought us pieces of bread and he brought us some hot soup. And he let us stay in the barn and we were supposedly hidden in this barn. The next morning he came to us and he said he has to go into town and he has to get food stamps for us. Now here are two -- two Jewish kids that are hiding in a German barn, dumb, believing this man is going to go and get food stamps for us, because he has to had food stamps or whatever story he told us, in order to feed us, and we believed. We're two stupid kids and we believed. And we stood there and we looked at each other and he left. And all of a sudden it dawned on us, this man is going to turn us in. I mean, what is he going to do, go and tell people he's getting food ti -- food stamps for two Jewish kids? So we stayed there and we watched him leave. And his wife stayed in the house. And we left the barn and we went into the forest area again and we hid in the forest. And we were trying to pick, we picked snails. Today, it's called escargot and it's a delicacy. Do you know what snails look like when they come out of dirt and dirty snails? We absolutely had no water to wash them with. We dug for whatever food we could in the forest and we stayed in the forest and eventually we saw the Russian army come in and take over, and we went out. And the Russians took us and they put us on -- on a truck and they took us to an area where they already had -- had freed some prisoners, and --

Q: If I could just --

A: -- we joined this -- this group.

Q: I wanted to ask you -- you -- how did you -- how did you see the Russians? You -- you could just see --

A: We could see them through -- as they -- we saw their trucks. We saw their trucks coming and we saw their insignia and we knew it was -- we didn't care who it was as long as it wasn't the Germans. I mean, it could have been Pakistani for all we knew. I mean, it happened to have been the Russians, but at that point we didn't know it was the Russian lead -- we just knew an army came and we were going to be freed. But it was the Russian army that came.

Q: Do you remember exactly how you met them when you walked up to them? What -- if you could tell me what happened, what -- you know --

A: I just recall walking out. My -- my friend and I, the two of us just walked out of the forest and they saw us and they knew -- they knew who we were. They gave us food. I remember one man, in fact, one of the soldiers, a Russian soldier, pulled up his sleeve and he had watches. He had an arm full of watches on his -- and he looked at me, he said, "Do you want to pick a watch?" I mean, the last thing in the world I ever wanted at that point was a watch and I said, "No." And he had a man's ring and he took off a man's ring and he gave it to me. To this day I don't know what I did with the ring, cause I don't have it and I must have lost it somewheres, cause it didn't fit me. He handed me this ring. He just wanted -- he wanted to be nice. He -- he -- he saw that we were these two hungry kids and he tried to be nice to us and he was. And they brought us into this -- which they established, a DP camp and there were people there already and they had given us a

shower and they gave us -- they deloused us and they gave us clean clothes and they gave us food and they -- medical attention for those that needed medical attention and I remember them telling us, eat slowly, just a little bit of soup, just -- and -- and I just wanted to take all of that in at one point, you know, but I must say at that point, they were good to us, they were nice. You know, so --

Q: Did you -- you know, you -- you mentioned the guy offering you a watch, did you even know what the date was?

A: No and I don't know to this day. I have no recollection. I have a bad memory for dates anyhow. I mean, I had to ask what today's date was.

Q: Right. I mean, I -- I wa -- my -- the -- the point -- my question is -- is -- given the circumstances you were in, at the time did you even know what the date was?

A: No.

Q: Did you even know what month it was?

A: No.

Q: Did you know what year it was?

A: No, I didn't -- I didn't even know what day it was. I mean you lose -- totally lose track. I -- if you've ever been in a hospital and they give you drugs or -- or whatever and you're there three days, you think you've been there a month. You just lose track of time and it didn't matter. I didn't care. You know, there are -- certain people have certain priorities. I didn't care. I just wanted to get out of -- of the clothes that -- that was biting

me, that I wanted -- needed to be deloused and I needed to know that there was a taste of freedom.

Q: Where was this camp, roughly? What country?

A: It was -- I -- I believe it was in Germany -- a area of Germany they -- they took over, you know, and it was in Germany, but I don't know. It was -- they had -- the particular camp was -- there were houses that I was put into, it was -- they had taken over like an apartment building. You know, like several -- actually several apartment buildings they had taken over. And I recall that they had put like -- like wires on the windows so that the soldiers -- the Russian soldiers couldn't get at the women. They weren't protecting us from their soldiers, they were protecting their soldiers from us, cause we were carriers of disease at that point and they were sure -- wanted to make sure that their soldiers wouldn't get at any of the women. So --

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview, with Fritzie Fritzshall. This is tape number one, side B.

A: -- wires on the windows so that the soldiers -- the Russian soldiers couldn't get at the women. They weren't protecting us from their soldiers, they were protecting their soldiers from us, cause we were carriers of disease at that point and they were sure -- wanted to make sure that their soldiers wouldn't get at any of the women. So we were really being guarded at that point, you know. But, it was --

A: But it was -- it was to protect you, or to protect them?

Q: To protect them. We still didn't have medical attention, we were still not deloused at that point and you know, when you come out of a camp, who knows what kind of a disease you have? And these were soldiers and they were afraid of -- you know, that they would come and rape us, or whatever. And they were protecting their soldiers from us. So we were getting protection in the same way, actually, but it wasn't for our protection, it was for theirs, you know?

Q: And what happens next?

A: Well, I was there for awhile, until they gave me medical attention and they fed me and they deloused me and there was a lot of talk amongst ourselves, amongst the people that were freed. Amongst the Jews who -- where are we going to go? What are we going to do? Do we have a home to go to? Who has survived? Do we want to go back to our hometowns? These are the people that didn't want us. We were afraid to go back to our hometowns. So there were a lot of discussions of what to do, but how long can you stay in a DP camp and how long are they going to keep you in a DP camp? Although today I know that many people stayed for many months in DP camps, but I didn't know this at the time. I was anxious to get out of there and I chose to go back to my hometown. And the Russians did give me passage to go to my hometown. Didn't give me extra money, did not give me any extra clothes, but did give me passage to go back to my hometown. And when I -- of course when I came home, I found nothing and no one.

Q: Let me just ask couple things. One is, the friend that you escaped with into the forest, what was her --

A: We lost each other. I don't -- I don't even -- we knew each other by first names, but we never even knew each other's last names. And sometimes that was done on purpose. When you were in a barrack with someone, you didn't want to know their last name because today they were your friend and tomorrow they were in a gas chambers or they were laying in a ditch somewheres and we couldn't -- we couldn't handle it and it was much easier to handle if I just knew your first name.

Q: Mm.

A: So, oftentimes we didn't ask for last names. And after we were liberated, we just lost touch with each other.

Q: Do you remember her first name?

A: Her first name was Sima.

Q: Sima? Could you spell that? Do you know?

A: I -- I think it's S-i-m-a, I think.

Q: Okay. And you decided to go back to your town. If you could tell us the name of your town and where it was.

A: The name of the town was Klucharky and it is better known by -- there was a -- like a big city, which even today, it's called Mooncartch or Mooncartchavo in the Czech language. Kluchark -- Mooncartchavo at that point was known for it's Jewish culture, it was known for it's -- the Yeshivas, which are Jewish universities and it's even today a

very well-known city. And we lived like -- it was like a suburb, like maybe Evanston to Chicago kind of a suburb and we used to walk to the big city all the time. And so I chose to go back home. And after I was in touch with my dad, I wanted to come to this country and of course he tried to get me to this country, but then Communism took over and the borders were closed. And --

Q: I -- If I -- again, I'm sorry to stop you here, but this is sort of where we left off before and you said that when you got back to the town that the people of the town -- if you could describe again what it was like to go back there, how they saw you returning. You said that you saw people wearing clothes, living in your houses. Tell us a little more about that.

A: How does one describe of -- seeing someone or not seeing someone, okay? We were the people -- we were the Jews that came back, that our neighbors gave up, okay? One way or another they gave us up. They turned in our names when the Germans first came in. They may not have pointed all of us out on the street, but they did have to turn in our names. When we were being gathered -- when we were being taken to the train, while we were in the ghetto, in our hometown, these neighbors never came to ask if we needed anything, if they could help us, if we were hungry, if we were thirsty. We were in this ghetto as prisoners. When we came back, after the war, we were the people that didn't exist. They looked through us. They didn't speak to us, they didn't acknowledge us. They didn't ask us if we needed anything. They didn't offer to give back my mother's clothes or my mother's furniture. They didn't offer to make us a meal. We were just the invisible

people, so to speak. So, we came back, but as far as they were concerned, they didn't accept us back. And, when you go to a place where you're not accepted, you in turn get this attitude of, well, they didn't really want me, so I don't want them either, okay? And we did the best we could without associating with neighbors. Which is very strange because, if you've been to Europe, the houses are close together. It's -- you live as a community. Prior to the war, we lived as a -- as a community, we were part of the community. We went to school together, we lived together, we -- we played together. And here I come back home -- this was my home, I came back home. But there was nobody waiting for me and nobody to accept me back into this community. So, it was a very strange feeling and I have to tell you that I couldn't wait to get away from there. I couldn't wait to get out of there. I was afraid to go to sleep at night. I don't know if you can understand this today, but there was -- we -- we lived with the fear of bei -- being turned in again. There -- there was no freedom when we came back. We had to leave.

Q: Did you ever have any encounters with any of your former neighbors or acquaintances? Any -- any conversations, encounters in the street, anything you remember? Or you stayed in these sort of sep -- they were in their separate world and you were in your separate world at that point?

A: It was a totally separate world. It was strange because when my dad -- after I had contacted my dad and he had gotten my first letter, he called me long distance, of course, to -- to Europe, from the United States. We had one telephone in town and that was in the post office. So the postman came to tell me that I was going to get a long distance call

tomorrow at three o'clock, from America. I mean America was this -- this big country, you know, the -- the symbol of freedom. When I came to the post office, the next day at three o'clock, to wait for my call, the entire town was out there listening and looking, but nobody acknowledged me, but the ears were all there. And, so it was kind of interesting, because obviously they knew. Everybody listened in and of course, when you are not used to speaking on a telephone, you shout. You think that you need to shout cause, you know, the ocean and -- and it's going to get across the ocean, you know? And, so obviously they did hear my end of the conversation. I'm sure they heard it across the ocean, you know, cause I was shouting, but didn't hear the other end of the conversation. But they were curious enough to leave their homes and to come to this. But no offer of any help. And, I think to this day, I live in a sense of amazement, shock, maybe wonder, that people could be that way -- that people could act that way. That if people see a hungry child, not to offer food. That, of people to see someone hurting, not to ask why. It was an amazing world and amazing people and to this day I don't understand it. I don't understand it. And probably, if I were to go back there today and speak to them about this, they would see it in a different way and they would remember it in a different way than I do. But I have a very clear hurt -- hurt memory of this, that even after the war -- I think I would have respected them more if they had come to us after the war and if they had said, "This was a mad world, we didn't know what we were doing." Or, "We did know what we were doing, but we misjudged." Or, "How can we help you today, to overcome this?" Or, "We're really sorry for what happened." I would look at these

people and I would say, “I can understand.” But I can not understand indifference. Indifference hurts. Indifference causes wars. Indifference causes children to be killed and causes hunger and I think we all need to care. And maybe we’ve learned from this. But right after the war, the lesson wasn’t there.

Q: I take it from what you’re saying that you’ve never gone back to the area?

A: I’ve been back to Europe and I was not far and I was going to cross the border and I was going to go back there, out of curiosity. You need to know that there is a place that I was born in, I have wonderful memories of. And also very sad and very bitter memories. The draw is there to go back and relive some of my good memories, but the other part is that there’s no one I know there. Do I really want to see what my house looks like today? Do I really want to go back? And there’s this -- this constant fight, there’s this -- yes, part of me wants to go back and see and the other part of me says, “But you weren’t wanted there. You left there cause you weren’t wanted there, why do you want to go back?” But I’m also going to Europe in three weeks, through the Washington Holocaust Museum and this thought plays in my mind even today, am I going to go back, am I not? Cause I’m not going to be that far. So, I don’t know. I don’t know.

Q: The other time, you decided not to go?

A: I decided not to go. The hurt was -- I couldn’t face it. I chose not to face it. The memories are too fresh. When I -- many people -- most of us were liberated from the camps 50 some years ago. I was liberated when I started to speak about my experiences and the memories are still too fresh. And I -- I can’t face the hurt just now.

Q: Do you remember -- you s -- you were talking about -- talking to your father on the phone, now that was the first time in years you'd heard his voice, I've -- I guess, right? Cause he was in America while -- while all this happened to the rest of your family. Other than the people all being there and listening to you, can you re -- you remember much of that conversation or what it felt like to -- to finally be able to -- to speak with him again?

A: I -- th-the one memory that I really have of is him crying at one end on the phone and me crying at the other end of the phone. And him asking of do I know if anybody else had survived and -- and telling me that he was going to try and bring me to this country, that he wanted me to come here. And my end was mostly, "Oh, yes," you know. And -- and I remember the tears, just a lot of -- a-at that point they were tears of sadness and of happiness and -- and the first conversation was -- was a very sad conversation for both of us.

Q: How old were you at that point?

A: I think I was 15.

Q: Mm-hm. So then I guess the next step is to get to America, huh?

A: Well, it's not so easy to get to America when you live in Europe right after the war and you're caught under Communism. So there are steps to be taken from there. Some o -- some of the Jews had left that part of the country and had gone to -- the -- the areas had become divided and part of Germany had become the Su -- the Sudatenlands. And my mother's one brother had lived and gone to the Sudatenlands and he knew that I had

survived and he was in touch with me. And he paid a man money to have me smuggled over the border from where I lived, under Communism, into the Sudatenlands. So, he paid this man money and this man was a professional smuggler of people. And there were several of us in this group, several women. And he collected the money ahead of time and he took us in the group. It was in the winter, in snow up to our knees, in the middle of the night. We all gathered and had our little knapsacks on our backs and he is going to help us cross the border. So now, he takes us at night and he takes us into the forest and we're going to cross the border, okay? We came into the forest in the middle of the night and he -- we walked -- after walking hours and hours and hours in snow in -- in -- in the forest and slipping and being cold and being hungry and he brings us into a little bit of a shack, some sort of a shack. And in this shack, there are beds and there's hot soup waiting for us. And it was nice and warm and he told us that we are to spend the night in this shack and we're to have the hot soup and get a good night's rest. And he is going to come back the next day and he is going to lead us the rest of the way. And he leaves us and he forgets to come back. He never came back. So, we stayed in this little shack -- cottage -- whatever it was, for two days and three days and four days and we didn't know whether we had crossed the border or hadn't crossed the border. We didn't know which way the border was and we didn't know what to do. And we finally realized that this man is not going to come back. So, we decided we're going to take a chance and just pick a direction and we're going to go in a particular direction, which we did. And we made our way through the forest at night and when daybreak came, we came to a little

town and we came near a river. And there were small boats near the river that were turned over -- like dinghies, I guess they call them, they were turned over because it was winter. And so we did -- in the -- in the day, we all climbed underneath these boats. You know, two or three of us would take one little boat and we climbed underneath the boat and we spend the day there and when evening came, we came out of the boats. At this point we're hungry and we came out and we started to walk into town, three of us at one point. And we came into the town and when I looked up at the town -- I don't even recall now, I remembered my grandmother had family living in this town. So, I started to ask questions and their name was Weissburger, so I stopped someone on the street and I asked, "Do you know where the Weissburgers live and did any of them come back?" And the person said, "Oh, yes," he said, "there are two brothers that survived the war and came back,"-- excuse me -- and showed us where to go. So the three of us came to my cousin, who opened the door and when I -- they didn't known me and I told them who I was and what we -- what had happened. They took us in and they went and brought the rest of the group to come to their home. At that point, when we crossed the bor -- when the man was going to bring us across the border, we all had families or friends waiting for us with falsified papers, so we could stay in the Sudatenlands, okay? My uncle was waiting for me with falsified papers and I also had one cousin that crossed the border with me and she was going to be met by someone else with falsified papers. Well, we stayed with my family there for several days and their friends and families were notified and they all came to get them with their papers, as did my uncle. My cousin couldn't get

in touch with whoever it was who was bringing her papers and she walked out one day and she was caught and sent back over the border. I had learned since that she stayed there and had married someone and had raised a family, but stayed under Communism. I, on the other hand, went to where my uncle lived and stayed with him. My uncle had a little grocery store and I helped him in this grocery store. After a while, he also smuggled my aunt, who came to stay with me in Europe. He had her smuggled out with someone else and she also lived with us in this little grocery store and we helped my uncle. I was able to get in touch with my father through there -- through letters, and he was able to send me papers. He also -- every time he wrote me a le-letter, there was either a dollar bill or a five dollar bill or a ten dollar bill in there. What I didn't know was that my mail was being censored, okay? But it was handed to me. The day I was leaving on the train, with my feet on the train, with my passport in hand, the police came to ask me what happened to the money that my father had sent me, because that meant that I was selling at black market, right? My aunt is standing at the train, my uncle is standing at the train, my friends came to see me off, there are motorcycles all over the place that friends came to see me off cause I was leaving the Sudatenlands and going to Sweden. I am standing on the steps of this train as the police are looking at me and asking me what happened to the money. And I held up my passport and visa and I said, "Oh, I had to pay for my passport and my visa with that money. I had to go and pay." And the train started and I left. It was like, I can't believe I was thinking this fast. What made me give this answer? You know, so it was quite a -- quite an escape at that point.

Q: Hm. You had mentioned before getting the -- you all were getting the packages from the UN with -- was that in this place, was that in the -- in your old hometown? Where were you --

A: It was in my old -- in my hometown we were getting it, when we first came home, they were -- the Unrah packages were coming, you know. And I remember getting what we called the high button shoes, which -- you know, the shoes that were lacing up. You know, you're a young girl, you come out of a camp and you gain a little bit of weight and -- and you think the world is all yours and here I'm -- I may not have had much, but I don't really want to wear those ugly shoes. I mean, couldn't they have sent -- I'm sure that in America, they have nicer shoes, I mean. But we didn't care about the clothes, we wanted the food. We kept opening the packages and we wou -- there would be cookies in there. There would be candy bars in there, cigarettes, gum and also clothes and some canned -- canned goods were in there and so we -- we appreciated the food. We may have looked down on the shoes, but we did appreciate the food, because we were hungry even there and we needed -- everything was being rationed still. And we truly thanked -- every time a package came, we said thank you. We -- we did appreciate it.

Q: Did you ever catch on that the gum was for chewing?

A: Not until I came here. Not until I came to this country did I catch on that gum is to be chewed. No, it was very sweet and it was -- it tasted like candy and probably still growing in my stomach.

Q: So you get on the train and your next stop is Sweden?

A: Came to Sweden and we came to Sweden and stayed in Sweden several days and Sweden to me, at that time, was the land of plenty. It was Guttenburg, Sweden. And we were given all the chocolate we wanted, we were given food, we were given fruit. I remember I was given a banana and I hated -- I -- the smell of banana and -- and could never eat the banana, but there you could have had all the bananas you wanted. And from there I was -- I took a ship called the Grippsholm, which I believe is still in service today, it's a Swedish liner. And I came over with many of our young people, many Jewish people that were lucky enough to get their passports and visas. Immigration was very, very tight right after the war, to come into this country. This country didn't open it's doors freely to us immigrants. And at that point, one had to show that one had family here or friends that could vouch for them, that th -- they wouldn't be a burden on the government. The government did not want to support us in any way, so we had to prove that there was someone we were coming to. It took a long time to get the passports and the visas. I was one of the lucky people, because I was still what was considered under age. And so I was able to get my passport and my visa and came over on a child's -- still on a child's passport and visa, so I -- my -- the quota -- I did not have to wait for the long quota numbers at that particular time. And so when we boarded the ship, the Grippsholm, we tried to stay together. We did not have first class passage, let me tell you. And I remember my cabinmate -- is that what they call them? The person that shared the cabin with me was an American young woman. And -- a very pretty young woman and she had a birthmark on her face -- a dark birthmark on her face. We could not communicate in

any way. She was a little older than I was and she ignored me very much at that point. And we couldn't communicate anyhow, so it didn't matter. But I remember sitting up on my bunk bed and -- cause we had the -- up, and watching her put on make-up and I didn't know anything about make-up at that point, but I remember watching her, how she was covering up that birthmark. And when she covered it up with make-up, one couldn't see it and she was absolutely beautiful and really had this beautiful smile. But we would stay by ourselves. The young people -- the young Jewish people would stay by ourselves. And I need to tell you that I really wanted to come and see my dad and wanted to come to this country as freedom, but my first choice was Israel. I wanted to go to Israel, cause most of my friends, at that point, were going to Israel. I didn't care that I was being smuggled into Israel, I didn't care that I had to fight for the freedom there. I felt that was going to be my country and I wanted to go to Israel, but because my dad was here and the need to see him, I came to this country.

Q: Did you ever -- either on the telephone or in writing to your father while he was trying to get you over here, bring that up with him?

A: No. No, I never did. I didn't want to hurt him in any way and I was just happy to be reunited with him. But my ultimate goal was to go to Israel. I mean, I was going to come here and then go to Israel. And I remember going into -- we left Sweden and we came to England and then we came to New York. And I had my dad's brother and sister-in-law -- my uncle, whom I remembered from Europe, he left. He was one of the lucky ones, he was able to leave. He was like almost the last person able to leave Europe and come to

this country. And I remembered skipping school. We still lived in freedom at that point and, skipping school and going to the train to watch him leave. Cause I love him, he was -- my dad was here and he sort of became like my dad. And I remember being punished for skipping school. So, when I came to this country, he was the one that met me in New York and he and his wife, who was American born, and -- took me to New Jersey. And at that point it was East Orange, New Jersey and I didn't see my dad til the next day. But I remember my mother also had a sister living in Brooklyn and when my aunt and uncle came to meet me in New York, my aunt's sister -- my -- my mother's sister also came. Now this was -- one was my father's brother and sister-in-law and one was my mother's sister. My father and my aunt didn't get along and -- and -- so one was pulling me to go to their house and one was pulling me to go to her house, cause I was her sister's daughter and she wanted me to go there. But I wound up going with my uncle, whom I knew, because I did not know my aunt on the other side. I mean I knew -- didn't even know she existed until I came into this country. And I stayed with my aunt and uncle and went to bed that night and I remember waking up the very next morning and someone was sitting on the edge of my bed, looking down at me. This man is sitting at the edge of the bed, staring at me as I am sleeping. And you know, you get that feeling and I opened my eyes and it was my dad. He -- he was -- that's the first I had seen him in many, many years. In fact, I didn't even remember him. So, it was a very strange feeling.

Q: You didn't know he was going to be there, huh?

A: Well, I knew he was coming the next day, but he must have either come in during the night or must have come very early that morning, and --

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Fritzie Fritzshall. This is tape number two, side A.

A: -- have come very early that morning, and -- to see me, you know. Cause he was working and couldn't meet me the day I came in, but he was there the very next morning. So, it was very strange.

Q: What happened?

A: Well, what happened? We were -- in -- in the very beginning --

Q: I was -- I was thinking, right then, do you remember any more of tha-that scene right there? I mean, quite a scene.

A: The scene is -- it's very hard to describe. How does one describe a father seeing his child for the first time in many years? Or -- or a child seeing her father for the first time, in freedom? It was a lot of emotion. I don't know, I can't even describe it. And especially on my dad's part, because I believe that all his life, he lived with the guilt that he left and he lost his family there. He lost his two sons, he lost his wife. He didn't leave us by choice, he didn't desert us. He left us to make a better living for himself and for us, so it isn't that he walked away from us; he always supported us. But his feelings were always that maybe if he had stayed, he could have done something more. Or maybe if he -- maybe he could have sent papers sooner -- which he couldn't. We had all our papers to come to this country. We just got caught in the madness of it. And he never should have

felt guilt and he never should have blamed himself, because he did whatever he needed to do and the best he knew how. So, I honestly believe that all his life, he lived with -- with the guilts of that. But as far as I was concerned, he nee -- he -- he didn't need to, because he couldn't have done more. And he certainly did everything he could for me, once I came here. I was one of the lucky ones. Many survivors that came to this country didn't have it easy when they first came here. Many tell the stories of being brought here, but families were sending them to work the next day and they had to live in -- in -- in the basement and they weren't really welcome and they had very hard times. My dad was not a wealthy man, but he certainly provided for me when I first came. He gave me love. I never lived with him when I first came here, cause he lived in a small apartment and I lived with his brother and sister-in-law, who -- my aunt and uncle and my aunt, to this day -- she's 82 years old and if she was my mother I couldn't love her more and she couldn't have been better to me. I came to a loving family. I came to a family that opened their arms to me and did the best they knew how. So I really was one of the lucky ones.

Q: Where was your father living at this time?

A: My father lived here in Chicago, on Armitage Avenue.

Q: Okay, so he -- he met you in New York, but --

A: Brought me back here.

Q: Brought you here?

A: Brought me here and I lived here all the time.

Q: And your aunt and the other people you're talking about were also here?

A: Lived here -- yes, lived here in Chicago and to this day my aunt is the most loving, most wonderful lady. Had three children of her own and raised me as her own. Taught me how to speak English. Taught me -- sent me to school. Made sure I learned how, when and where, the ways of this country and was just wonderful. So, I was one of the lucky people that came to a loving family.

Q: You talked about the -- the guilt your father felt. Is -- that whole situation. Did you and he ever discuss that or is what you just described basic -- comes from your understanding of him? Did you ever talk about it or was just something you -- you knew and felt?

A: My father was a man of few words. You could be in the same room with my dad all day long and maybe you would hear five words out of him. I don't know where I got the gift of gab, but certainly not from him. He was a very quiet individual. My dad talked to me once, actually -- deep talk, once. Do I know what happened to my mother and am I sure my mother died? Am I sure my brothers died? No, I wasn't sure my brothers died at that point, cause I saw them alive once in Auschwitz. My dad and I tried to trace them through organizations, but obviously couldn't. He wanted to find his family. We talked about the war once and then we didn't talk about it any longer. He didn't talk to me because he felt that he was opening wounds. I didn't discuss it with him because I felt the same way, but by his looks and by his actions -- he did remarry many years later -- many years later. In fact, I was married already and -- and -- excuse me -- I believe I was pregnant with my son when my dad remarried. So, it took him all of these many years to

remarry. But I believe that he lived with his guilts all his life, cause he loved his family. He wanted his family.

Q: What was his name?

A: Herman Weiss. When I went back to -- to Auschwitz several years ago, back then -- '93, I believe, there's a room in Auschwitz where it has all luggage, suitcases. I walked into this room and the first suitcase that stares at me is Weiss, W-e-i-s-s. That was my maiden name. Do I know if it was ours? No. Would I recognize it? No. Could it have been? Yes. Do you know what that does to one's insides? Standing there, looking at that?

Q: When you did come over, what year was that?

A: I came over in '45, I believe.

Q: It was '45 and you're -- are you still --

A: '45 -- 40 s -- '46.

Q: '46. So you're still, what, 15 - 16, somewhere -- somewhere in there. Was it hard to -- you know, it sounds like in many ways you were in a really good situation with your family. Was it hard to adjust to this country? Was this a very strange place? Did you like it, did it kind of put you o -- how did you feel about that?

A: When I first came -- when I first got off the sh -- the ship in New York and I'm in this car with my aunt and uncle and they take me into a Walgreen's for a soda -- ice cream, okay? Now, here I am, in this Walgreen's that is big and that has everything. Here it is selling medicine on one corner and you can buy a pair of shoes in the other corner. Now, in Europe, it's an -- if it's a drugstore, it only sells medicine, you know. Dat -- apotocare

-- I can't even pronounce it -- where it's -- medicine is sold. And I remember sitting there and just sitting on this stool that would turn. What do they call those stools, where you could turn them and you could turn in all directions? By the counter, the counter stools. And I remember holding the soda in -- in my hand and just turning in this chair in amazement and looking around in this drugstore where you can just walk and take something off a shelf and just pay for it. There's everything here in this drugstore and I'm saying to myself, "My God," you know, "where am I, what is it?" And of course, New York City, do I need to tell you about the taxi cabs? I mean, it wasn't as bad as it is today. In Europe, yes, we had cars and trucks and all of that, but I remember riding a motorcycle with my uncle cause we didn't have a car and I remember getting a flat tire every other block, cause we didn't have the good tires, you know, right after the war. And here is all the buses and the trucks and the streetcars and the -- and the confusion and the people in all directions. And it was like it was mind boggling that first day. Absolutely mind boggling. When I came to Chicago, I -- I had stayed with my aunt and uncle in New York for a few weeks. And when I came to Chicago, it -- it became now -- in New York, I lived in New Jersey, which is more of a small community. When I came to Chicago, I came into the city, okay? Now I'm living in this big city. I came from a little town in Europe, I did not come from this big city. So it was very different and very strange and I remember the clothes that I came -- that I brought from Europe was the wrong clothes. I came with all the wrong clothes, you know, so when I was in New Jersey, my aunt took that clothes away from me and she got rid of it and bought me new

clothes. When I came to Chicago, to my aunt here, my aunt decided -- my aunt in Chicago decided that my aunt in New -- New Jersey bought me all the wrong clothes. So now she emptied out this -- this suitcase and she took me shopping for different clothes. So now I had to learn how to do this. My aunt was a young woman at the time also and she had three children. Now, I spoke German when I came here. I spoke Hungarian, I spoke Yiddish, okay? I spoke Czech, but did not speak English. My aunt spoke a little bit of German. So, between her little bit of German that she had and my German, we were able to communicate. And of course, with my dad, I s -- could speak Yiddish or I could speak, you know, in Hungarian. And it didn't matter, you know, cause my dad's -- when my dad came to this country, he didn't have time to go to school and -- and he -- his English was with a very heavy accent, as we all have, but his, you know, he never really learned how to speak proper English, so to speak. My aunt decided that I was going to learn how to speak with her children, with her three children. And every time I would say something that wasn't so, as I was learning, she would correct me. And to this day there's a family joke where her little boy must have been two or two and a half years old at the time and she -- his name was Jimmy and she called Jimmy and he -- his answer was, "Here I are, Mommy, here I are." And now, my aunt did not correct her two year old or two and a half year old, but she looked at me and she, with her finger goes, "Fritzie, you don't say here I are. You never say here I are." You know, so she made sure that I learned how to speak. And send me to school and -- and I think it's due to her that I speak a little better English than some of us that came over here. And -- but I was always

unhappy, I always wanted to go to Israel. Always, all the time and now I am starting to speak out loud and now I am telling my dad, “I really don’t want to stay here, it’s very hard, I don’t know the language. I don’t know, I don't dress properly, I don’t do anything, I’m -- I -- I want to go to Israel.” And he always said, “No, you’ll learn, you’ll learn.” And I guess one day he decided he is going to call my bluff and he looked at me one day and he said, “Okay. If that’s what you really want, if that’s what will make you happy, I will send you to Israel. When do you want to leave?” And at this point I go, “Well, maybe I really don’t want to go to Israel. Maybe I really like it here,” you know. And I have to tell you that I love this country. Yes, I am a flag waver, with it’s politics and with all that’s going on, I feel it is my country and -- and I treat it as such. I love it.

Q: Did you go to public schools?

A: I went to a special school originally, it was called Adante School. And I remember taking the streetcar from where we lived to -- and it was quite a way to go, it was about 35 minutes by streetcar. And I remember coming there once and ha -- needing to get off, because the streetcar wasn’t stopping and I’m standing at the back door and I’m hollering, “Up, up, up,” instead of saying that I need to get out. I didn’t know how to speak and everybody is standing there laughing at me because I am hollering, “Up,” instead of that I need to get off this -- this streetcar. And eventually somebody caught on and said, “I guess she needs to get off,” you know and they pulled that bell or whatever it was. And then -- so I would go to school and then my dad worked for Vienna sausage company where -- which was like maybe a block away and I remember after school every

day, I would walk to Vienna sausage company and have a sandwich there and wait for my dad to finish work and then I would -- he would drive me back home. So this -- this was going on for quite awhile. And I hated to -- I -- I -- I learned to hate corned beef sandwiches, cause I had one every day. Today we find out it's cholesterol heaven, you know.

Q: Right. What -- what neighborhood were you in?

A: We lived -- originally, when I came here, we lived in East Rogersburg. 1348 and a half Esther Street. I li -- we lived in a four room apartment with three little children, my aunt, my uncle and Fritzie. And originally I slept on -- they had those chairs that converted into beds at that time. That was my bed, because we were really cramped until we moved into bigger -- a bigger apartment. But, it was very hard in the beginning. It was -- this is not an easy country to come to. You need to remember that during the time we came here, right after the war, the Americans were not the travelers they have become today. The Americans, at that time, were not as tolerant of an accent as they are today. Because today they travel and they've become the foreigners in the foreign lands and they -- they know what it means to learn a different language. They were not tolerant of us; we were called the greena in -- in Jewish. We were called the refugees. We were told not to speak our -- about our past, we should forget about it. Nobody wants to listen to us, nobody wants to hear it. Some of us could not speak about our past, but some of us needed to speak about our past and nobody would listen to us and nobody wanted to hear it. We were told to keep quiet. We were just -- people did not tolerate us and were not

always nice to us when we first came here and was very difficult. This is a very difficult language to learn. One word can have different meanings and especially to spell, my God, I mean, I'll never learn how to spell. I still don't know why there is a k in front of a knife, you know, but -- the word knife. But it was very difficult. Most of us found it very difficult when we first came here.

Q: You were saying that you were told to forget about what had happened to you, that -- that people didn't want to hear wh -- who was -- who was telling you this?

A: The families. The j -- the other Jewish people, the people that -- that one needed to talk to, our neighbors, everybody. Nobody wanted to listen, nobody wanted to hear about what happened in the past. Whether it was from guilt, that nobody did anything here or what it was from. I remember when I got married and -- and -- and my husband and I went to the movies, the Chicago theater, downtown. And in those days they used to show a newsreel before the movie started. I recall a newsreel coming on while we were sitting in the theater and it showed openings of camps and -- and the atrocities of some of it, during that time. And I couldn't face up to it and I walked out. And my husband followed me and we came to -- we were in the lobby of the Chicago theater and as we're standing there, people are saying, "I don't understand while -- why they are showing those atrocities. We know that didn't happen. Those things could have never happened the way they are showing them." And I'm standing there, me, who has just come out of one of those places and not answering, because of ignorance of people. So, they didn't want to know. How many of us close our eyes and close our ears to things that are going on in the

world today? We don't want to know. And maybe we could help and maybe we can't, but we don't.

Q: You mentioned in your video interview that your way of dealing with the Holocaust and your experiences was that for many years, I think the phrase you used was you put them on the shelf and you sort of kept them to yourself. Why -- is that what happened and why -- why did that happen? Was it because of these messages you felt like you were getting, or --

A: We were getting very mixed messages and we were also -- each one of us needs to handle a death or an atrocity or a tragedy in our own ways. We -- we can't predict how we're going to react and we should never judge the next person of their -- of how they are handling it. I have learned this. My aunt and uncle that I lived with in Chicago -- I'm just going to use this then, as an example, were -- were going on vacation. My uncle had just sold his business and they were going to take their first vacation and they were driving to California and they got into a terrible accident. It was a head on collision and my uncle was killed instantly. And I remember getting this call that my uncle was killed and that the rest of them were all hurt and -- in this automobile accident. Now, I loved my uncle as much as I loved my father or anyone in the family, cause I lived with him, he became my father image. And I recall getting this call and going hysterical laughing. Laughing and crying, tears, but -- but -- like I was in -- in a hysterical -- now that was my way of accepting it at that time. The concentration camps were similar, but a different story. The shock of the camps, the things we saw, the things we lived through. And you might sit

here for two weeks listening to some of the things that we had gone through in one day and listen to two different people from the same place, experiencing the same thing, but seeing it and experiencing it in a different way and both reacting in a different way. When I got out of the camps and when I came here, I -- I couldn't live with those thoughts. I couldn't handle them. I just -- I would have been -- they would have put me in an institution if I had lived with it day in and day out. So, I guess my way was to pretend. I pretended. All of those people were in a camp, my family and all the other Jewish families, they were all in Auschwitz. All those babies were killed in Auschwitz. The gas chambers were going day in and day out. I saw them in a movie, it never happened to me. I was not there. This was a nightmare. I needed to walk away from it. I couldn't think about it, I couldn't live with myself. I couldn't watch my dad's sad eyes. So, I went into a pretend world. I needed to be a young girl. If I am going to be this young girl, I am going to be this normal young girl and live a normal life, right? So you put yourself in this pretend world and you live your days this way and it works. For the most part, it works. Then come the nights. You don't have control over your mind at night when you're sleeping. You don't have control over your dreams and your nightmares. So, yes, you do pretend in the daytime, but the reality sets in through your dreams and through your nightmares, every single night. Every single night, somebody had to wake me and tell me it was -- "it's a dream, it's okay. You're okay now, you're free." To this day, when I speak about it, my husband still has to wake me and tell me, "It's okay -- you're okay." So, for many years, I needed to live a different kind of a life and deny the fact that I was

there. And I did this for many years. When our son was old enough to go to school, they didn't teach anything about the Holocaust. I don't know if they did when you went to school, but there was very little in those days. It isn't like today. We didn't have a Washington Holocaust Museum to tell us. He learned about the Holocaust in Sunday school and he'd come home and ask questions. And I couldn't answer them. I pretended that it didn't happen to me, but I didn't say this to him, I just said, "I don't want to talk about it, we're not going to talk about it." Yes, my me -- my family knew I was a survivor. My in-laws knew, my husband knew. I didn't pretend in front of them. I never hid it from anyone, I couldn't. I have this accent, I'm Jewish. I came from Europe, how do I hide it? But, in our home -- immediate home, we couldn't speak about it. It was not a subject that was brought up. When our son went to high school, he would come home and ask questions and I would give very little information. I couldn't. When he got married and our first grandson was born, he needed to know more. For his own sake, he needed to know more. And those were the days when they were beginning to find some of the Germans that had lied about what they did during the times of the war and lied about taking parts in concentration camps and came to this country and they were finding some of them. And those were the days when there was a janitor that lived in Hyde Park, I believe, I'm not quite sure where, and they found out that he was a Nazi in one of the concentration camps and they wanted to prosecute him and all his neighbors stood up and said, "Well, how can you do this? He's such a good man, he's such a good neighbor, he's such a good janitor." The fact that he committed murder the times before -- God only

knows of how many, didn't count, okay? But maybe if he had killed their sister or their brother or their mother, he wouldn't have been this wonderful person. And I'm saying to myself, "They don't know. These people don't know. They weren't there. He didn't kill their family. He, like the rest, needs to pay for his crime." This is a country where we need to account for our -- for ourselves, for what we've done. Then my son came to me and said that he saw this article that was put in through the Holocaust foundation in Skokie, about asking for survivors to come forth and have their stories recorded. And yes, I saw it many times. But those were still the days when I did not speak out. So all this was beginning to come to a head. My son needed to know. The janitor needed -- the people needed to know what happened in concentration camps. And I started to think about this and I said, "Maybe some of us do need to speak out. Maybe it's going to hurt, but maybe we can set the world straight." And when my son called and said, "Mom, you need to do this because I need to know and your grandchildren will need to know." And this is where a grandma and a mother gets caught. And his words were, "Don't ask for anything. Sign whatever they want you to sign. Take a blank tape and ask for a copy of a tape." Which is what I did. And I went and I was interviewed. And I remember sitting in this room for the very first time, coming to this home to be interviewed and I was interviewed by Dr. Leon Stein, who is head of the history department, I believe, at Roosevelt University, who has since become a friend, but this is the first time I've met him. I remember he came there with cameras and as we started this interview, the camera broke down. And I said, "See, I'm not supposed to be doing this." Okay, so they asked

me would I come back the next day -- and I had a friend go with me the first day and the next day. And I said, “I don’t know, you know, I don’t know that I can go through this.” But I did go back. And we still have a tape of that first interview, which was terrible, because I couldn’t speak and it was a very bad interview. The -- the questions didn’t come the way they should. And I remember was a short interview and my friend that came with me and I went back into my car and we sat down and when I got into the car, the floodgates opened. And I went hysterical, crying on her shoulder. This is the first time I have given this interview and I -- it just -- it just opened this gate. And then I said, “They didn’t ask me anything. This is what I could have told them, that’s what I could have told them, this is what I should have said. But they didn’t ask and I didn’t think of saying anything and I’m never giving another interview, this is too painful. I cannot do this and -- and I’m never doing another interview.” The next day I get a call from this professor and he says to me, “You know, there’s going to be a panel discussion at the university, would you come and go on this?” And I go, “No, I’m not a public speaker, I don’t know how to do this. I am not going.” He said, “I live in your neighborhood. I will pick you up, I will bring you home and let’s do this.” Well, this is how it started, where I beca-gun to speak out. One thing led to another and I started to go into schools and I started to go into universities, started to go into synagogues and I started to work --

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Fritzie Fritzshall. This is tape number two, side B.

A: -- do this." Well, this is how it started, where I beca-gun to speak out. One thing led to another and I started to go into schools and I started to go into universities, started to go into synagogues and I started to work with Mayor Daly, our mayor in Chicago. When Mayor Daly came into office, he had a Day of Remembrance. He was the first mayor that ever had a Day of Remembrance. And I started to work with him in the schools and when he had a Day of Remembrance, I was his first keynote speaker at the Daly Center and I spoke out at the Daly Center. And then I started to work -- Mayor Daly every year has a Day of Remembrance, but prior to everybody going, what most people don't know is that he holds a breakfast and invites two students from every Chicago school -- the high school and they have a breakfast first -- beautiful breakfast and then there's a speaker that speaks to these students first and I have been his speaker for many years. This last year was the first time that I did not speak, cause I said, "Enough is enough." And little by little, I have started to speak out and have realized the importance of a survivor to speak out. I have realized that only through survivors can the rest of the world learn, cause we were the ones that had the experience. I realize that as we're getting older, there are not going to be many that can stand up and speak out and the revisionists are doing their work now. I realize that there are hundreds of books that the revisionists are writing, calling us survivors liars, that it never happened. They're on the internet today, with programs, teaching children that the Holocaust did not happen. So, I have realized the

importance of all of this. When Washington was first in the talking stages, before there was a hole in the ground, I was asked to appear on Milt Rosenberg's show and speak about the Holocaust and speak about the importance of the Washington Holocaust Museum. I was one of the very first to jump onto this bandwagon and have been speaking out for the Washington Holocaust Museum and about it's importance, it's teachings, where it brings children in from all over the country, to teach about the Holocaust. And now that I have gotten older, my grandchildren need to know. Their grandchildren will need to know, as will yours and as will sti -- as will the generation that will be here after us. And this is one of the big reasons that I speak out today.

Q: I'm curious about when you first went to that first interview, the thing that sort of set you off on this road that yo -- that you're on now, of ta -- of talking about it, was because of your son and him wanting to know what had happened to you. And you got a tape of that first interview made, but you said it wasn't a very good interview. Have -- did you go on to have discussions or talk to him directly about what happened, or did you -- did you leave it to the tapes, you know, I mean, especially since that first one wasn't very satisfactory.

A: This is very interesting. When I was the keynote speaker the first time with Mayor Daly, my daughter-in-law came to listen as did some friends and family. My son did not. I think it's too painful for him. That was recorded, as was the first tape. I've been on television, I've been in newspapers. And the tape from Washington, of course. My son has never come to listen to me speak in person. But he has saved every little print,

everything that has been written, every tape that's been made. And I expect a copy of this and he also wants it and he saves everything. Last year, our synagogue, where my grandchildren go to Hebrew school and Sunday school had asked me to come and speak to the class. This is the first that my son came to listen. It was like -- they gave me maybe a half hour and you speak to children and you speak different than you speak to adults, because you don't want to send them home crying that this lady scared them and Mommy calling me the next day. So you speak different, but my son came with his video camera, to listen to me. My oldest grandson chose to sit in and listen to me. My youngest grandchu-son -- chose not to. He chose to go to his class, which he had -- which we allowed him to do. I was very conscious through this entire speaking time, that my son was standing there with the camera and listen to his mother relate this story. And we've talked about it. We've talked about different aspects of it. He's read about it. He's read Michael Beerenbaum's book where I've been quoted and they've also sent it to my grandson for his -- for his Bar Mitzvah. And of course my grandchildren -- my oldest one now is in high school and he has written about the Holocaust and he has been to Washington. So we do speak about it, but very little, very little. We don't -- he's watched every tape and he wants everything. And he puts everything away. "Mom, I need a copy." You know? But, we speak about it very little.

Q: So y -- so you and your son have never sat across a table or sat in the living room or whatever, an-and --

A: He will ask questions and I will answer them, but we've never had this kind of a discussion, this serious kind of a discussion, you know. An-And it's interesting, because when I was a -- first time I was on television and I came back and I said to him, "Well, what do you think?" And he says, "When did you start speaking with an accent?" I mean, this is what he -- you know, but we don't go into the deep end of it. Like, I'm going back to Europe now and his question to me is, "Why do you want to put yourself through this? Why do you need to put yourself through this?" You know? And he hurts for me and he's afraid for me. So, you know, it's -- it's hard.

Q: Once you did start speaking about it more, did the nightmares decrease in number? Did it have any affect on that part of your life?

A: You know, it's interesting, cause oftentimes I speak at group meetings and I -- for fundraising for the Washington Holocaust Museum and we get different groups of people in and they -- people analyze survivors and they'll sit there and they'll stare at you and they try and analyze you. And this particular evening, we had a group of doctors from one of the hospitals and I know I'm being analyzed. I mean, I just -- I can feel it. You don't -- you know? So we were all done and we had this small discussion afterwards and -- and I don't know one of the doctors. And he was asking me different questions and whatever, I don't know how we came to it and -- and I've often said that probably I do need to be analyzed, cause there are many things that I -- that I cannot remember, and -- things that -- during the times of the camps. And I looked at him and I said, "So, you analyzed me," I said, "so what do you think?" He says, "Well, I think that you live with a

lot of guilts." And I said, "Oh? Well, what kind of guilts do I live with?" And he said, "Well, survivors guilts." He says, "You -- you feel guilty that you survived and a lot of people didn't." And when I hear that I -- I -- I get angry. And I said, "You know," I said, "you are reading the wrong books." I said, "I don't have any -- I may have lots of guilts that I live with, but that is not one of them. I did not survive at anyone's expense. I did not steal with anyone -- from anyone. I did not steal their food. I did not kill anyone. I was one of the lucky ones. If there's one thing that I don't live with, is the fact that I survived and others didn't." I said, "So you've been reading the wrong books." And I've heard this from many people, that survivors live with the guilts that they survived and others didn't, and maybe some of us do. I don't. I -- that -- that's one thing I don't. I -- I -- that's one thing that's n -- I don't have, is the -- the guilt that I survived.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: I question it. I question why my brothers didn't survive. I ques-question that other people didn't survive. I live with the guilt of sending my mother into the wrong line. I do not live with the guilt that I survived and others did not. So, you know.

Q: What about the nightmares, did they go down or not?

A: The nightmares, that was the question. Okay.

Q: It was a good answer, but --

A: That was the question. I got sidetracked. When I first started to speak, people told me that once I speak out, that the nightmares would go away. The answer is no. The nightmares have always been there and I believe the nightmares will always be there. Not

just for me, but for all of us that have gone this horrible route. My husband always knows when I have had to speak. When I did a fund-raiser when I was in a school, it just brings it all back and the pictures all there. The screen is showing it all and you know, it doesn't make it easier. It doesn't make it easier. It open -- this is -- this is a wound that does not close. Just because we speak about it, doesn't make it go away, it makes it deeper. But we speak about it, because we realize the importance of speaking out. We know the wound is there. We don't need to open it. Survivors don't need to open it. But what we're trying to do, is prevent this from happening again. And I do believe the old saying, what goes around, comes around. Yesterday it was Jews. Today, they're fighting over other things, religion, in other parts of the world. Tomorrow it might be blue eyed people, or a different ethnic group. But it does -- the wheel turns, it does go around. And if we don't speak out and if we don't teach and if we don't show a -- what a gun can do and if we don't show what hatred can do, what bigotry can do, what racism can do -- then we need to live with -- with fear, with hate, all our lives. We need to teach our children. Our children are not born with hatred, we teach hatred. I don't like you because you're blue eyed or because you're black or because you're Jewish or because you're Christian. I teach you, my child, to hate instead of si -- teaching them nice things, do I need to teach them to hate? When I go into a school -- when I go into a school, I ask these children, how many of you are guilty of tormenting someone because they're too fat or too skinny or too blonde or they don't meet some of your quali-qualifications? They don't speak the way you think they should speak? What makes you the judge? What makes you

different? Why do you think that you can sit in judgment of me? How many of you children have been guilty of this? Of tormenting another child? You'd be surprised how many sit there and shake their hands. They know. They know. But maybe I can touch a nerve.

Q: How do you feel about -- I know that in -- you said you've gone back to Europe, how do you feel about Germany and Germans?

A: When I go back to Germany, my skin crawls. When I look at the old Germans, I wonder where they were and what they did during that particular time. But that doesn't mean that I hate the young Germans or the young people. They are not the guilty ones, they didn't do it. But I think that every one of them and the Polish people and all the other people in the world that didn't help -- we need to remember that there were 12 million people killed during that time. A million and a half babies. Babies, okay? Somebody did it. Somebody's father did it, somebody's grandfather did it. And I want to question the young people, "Do you know what your father or your grandfather did during the time of the war?" But that doesn't mean that the young person of today is guilty of what their father or their grandfather did. But the country itself, or Poland itself, just because it is Germany and just because it is Poland and just because this is where all the horrible atrocities were taking place, make my skin crawl.

Q: When -- on trips back, you -- so you have been in Germany? [indecipherable] ever been for any length of time or just for a day or two, or --

A: Have to tell you one story. Several years ago, very first time I went back to Germany and Austria, I went back on business. And I traveled with a young woman who was very blonde and very bu -- blue eyed and very Christian. She -- I am the Jew and she was the Christian person that I was working with at the time and we went back to Germany. And, when we flew into Germany -- we were taking a train -- we decided to take a train from Munich to wherever we were going. And we got on the train and we came into this compartment and it was winter and pe -- we put down our luggage -- we were the only two people in the compartment, and we closed the door. And we -- it was cold and we walked into this -- to this warm compartment and both of us started to doze. Next thing we knew, the door opened and it was the conductor asking for passports, in German. And Kay, who was my friend that I traveled with, took out her passport and handed her passport and I froze. I totally froze. I am this Jewish girl that is back on this train, seeing this conductor coming at me, in German, asking for my passport. And he kept going, "Passport, fraulein," and I kept staring at him. Finally, Kay, went with her elbow at me, "Fritzie, show him your passport." And I got there -- that far, I have to have one, right? She finally realized what happened and she reached into my purse and she took out my passport and if I tell you this conductor studied me and studied this passport for a good three minutes, cause I don't think he understood what happened. He left. Kay handed me back the passport and I started to cry. And she looked at me and she said, "Well, why?" And I said, "I don't know. But took me back to another time, in another place, on another train. And it just totally took me back." And I been back since, and I've been back to

Poland since, and I feel very uncomfortable. But I want to tell you that that pwa -- passport is going to stay with me, because that was our lifeline during the time when we needed it and couldn't get it, that would have been our lifeline. And I feel very uncomfortable being in those countries, cause I'm not sure I'm loved, as a Jew. But I'll never forget that first time going back.

Q: Is that when this incident on the train happened?

A: The first time I went back. When the Washington Museum opened -- I don't know if you've been there, but they have a boxcar that took children to a concentration camp, that the Polish people sent to Washington and one needs to walk through the boxcar to go through the museum. You can walk around it, but one really should walk into this boxcar and walk through it. And the very first time, after the museum opened, I couldn't walk into it. I could not walk into this boxcar. And Maggie Daly, Mayor Daly's wife, walked with me and held my hand and took me through this boxcar. And I often tell students that go to Washington, that when they stand in that boxcar, if they stand very quietly, they will hear voices. Voices of children that were taken to their death in that boxcar. I think the turning of the wheels and the trains will always have a certain fear, a certain reminder to all of us.

Q: Let's change sub-subjects a bit. I wanted to ask you how you met your husband. Let's talk about something more pleasant for awhile.

A: Okay. I have to tell you about my husband, first of all. How well do you know your World War Two history?

Q: Oh, it's -- for somebody my age, it's okay.

A: My husband is American born, was a Marine on Wake Island during the war. My husband was taken prisoner on Wake Island and was a Japanese prisoner of war. So he had his own horror stories to tell. My husband's a decorated soldier and -- and he's very proud of this, as he well should be. But he always -- he was always able to speak about his experiences and he always told our son about the horrors and what -- and -- and we went back to reunions with his group and there are just really a handful of them left, that fought on Wake Island and they're a very brave, wonderful group of people that defended Wake Island. When I first came to this country, after I lived with my aunt for awhile, I shared an apartment with a friend of mine who had friends that were Hungarian people. They came here prior to the war, Hungarian Jewish people. And she took me -- these friends of hers owned a small grocery store and she took me to visit them, her friends, and -- in the grocery store. And, while I was in the grocery store, my husband, who at that time -- whom I didn't know at the time, and his mother, walked in. They -- they were next door neighbors and they walked into the grocery store. And we started to talk and my mother-in-law, who became my mother-in-law later on, looked at me and said, "You're going to be my daughter-in-law." It was like a premonition, but I -- I met him in a grocery store. You know, so it's a funny story.

Q: What's his name?

A: Norman.

Q: Norman?

A: Fritzshall.

Q: Okay. And when -- what year was it you met him, do you remember?

A: I met him in -- in ‘48.

Q: So you had been here maybe two years, I guess, when you met?

A: Mm-hm, mm-hm. Right. But he always had his own story. And I honestly think that the fact that he was a prisoner and he had the hard life that he had, he knew how to cope with me and my life and my nightmares. And I must say that he has supported me from day one. With the Washington Holocaust Museum, with my going with the fundraising, with the Skokie Holocaust Museum, where I’m also active and with the schools and he helps me and supports me in everything I do, so it’s been -- it’s been -- made life easier.

Q: When -- when you and he first got -- when you met and when you got married, was -- were you already in the period where you were no longer -- basically, you were no longer speaking about what had happened to you?

A: Right. I did not speak about it at all, during that time. Actually, we did -- we didn’t discuss it until -- well, he and I did, you know, but not publicly, I didn’t, or with anyone else. I mean, I never denied it to him. But, as far as speaking out publicly, I didn’t, until actually our first grandson was born.

Q: But -- but you -- I’m j -- I’m just -- want to know, did you speak much about it -- talk about what had happened to you with him much, or it was just, he knew you were a survivor, you’ve had it -- you sort of had this understanding that that was true, but you didn’t talk about it much?

A: Exactly. We did not -- we did not go into a deep discussions. He did know I was a survivor. He did know I was in Auschwitz camp. If he would ask me a question, I would answer it, but we did not go in -- into any deep discussions about it.

Q: And what about his own wartime experiences? Was it -- was it the same way with him? Did he not speak much about what happened to him?

A: His wartime experiences, he always spoke about.

Q: He did.

A: And his wartime experiences should be recorded and one day they should -- there -- there's a book written, but they should record these experiences, cause they really just -- there are just a handful of survivors and they had their own horror stories. They were the ones that worked in the coal mines and they are the ones that built the River Kwai and -- and -- that you saw in the -- and had their own bloodshed and had their own hardships. So, their stories are hard stories and they're history and they should be recorded.

Q: You mentioned that you have a son, is that your only child?

A: Yes.

Q: And his name is?

A: Steven.

Q: And then hi -- your grandchildren? Their names, ages --

A: We have two.

Q: -- all that.

A: We have two grandchildren. Our older one is Scott. And Scott is 15, he's second year high school and our younger one is Andrew and Andrew is 11 and he's in sixth grade. So, it's kind of neat. They're neat kids and I love them much. And they're -- they're just wonderful. These are -- these are the dividends and the pleasures and I often look at them and I often wonder -- I look at them often, and I say -- especially when they were younger, the innocence of children and here Hitler went and killed all of this innocence and -- and -- and killed all of these children that had so much to live for and so much to give and so much to teach. And -- and God only knows what they would have been and he took these lives, these -- these innocent lives. And I often look at my grandson of 15 and I say, "God -- I hope to God the test never comes, but -- could he, would he have survived?" America teaches different than Europe did, we had a different kind of life, although I too, came from a pampered home, so you can't judge it that way. But the strength -- one doesn't know until one is tested. I really believe that one needs to be tested to find one's strength, cause we don't know what we're capable of.

Q: Have you been to Israel?

A: No. One day. My dream. One day. We were going to go last year, but my husband wasn't well enough to travel. But we will.

Q: That time that your father said to you, "Okay, when do you want to go to Israel?" And then you said, "Well, maybe I'll stick around here for awhile." Was that -- did that end your feeling?

A: What it -- what it ended was -- no, what I discovered at that time was that I really did want to stay here, that I love this country. This is my country and I love it. But Israel is home to the Jews, as you well know and someday I really do want to go there and -- and -- and feel the freedom of Israel, feel the freedom of what it's like to walk down the street where -- where your people are and you don't have to watch your back because of your religion. And I need to do this and I will do this. But there's a different feeling for Israel than there is for this country. This is my country, with it's faults. Israel is my home as a Jew. Does that make sense?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: As a Jew, I -- I feel Israel is my home, but this is my country, where I live, that I love. And yes I am a flag waver, but -- but Israel is, to all Jews I think, home. I -- I honestly believe and -- if we had an Israel during that time -- during the time of the Holocaust, this would not have happened. Millions of people would have been saved, if we had an Israel. But we didn't. We had to fight for it and we have to fight to keep it.

Q: Was your family in Europe very political in any way?

A: I don't remember them as being political. I don't remember any politics being discussed. I remember the whispers when Hitler was going to occupy us. I remember the fear of Hitler, because we'd begun to know that a lot of Jews were being taken away from their homes. We didn't know where they were being taken to, but we knew they were -- a lot of homes were already being taken from them and they were put into ghettos. We know about the -- the Jews that were sent ba -- o -- back over to Poland.

When Hitler came into power, the Jews that came -- that immigrated to Germany from Poland, to make a better life for themselves. They fought for Germany, they became Germans. They -- they considered themselves German first, Jews second. Everything was taken away from them and sent over the border, and we knew this. But, politically, as far as fear, yes. But I don't remember as a child, any politics being discussed in our home.

Q: I was wondering if maybe, you know, yo -- cause you -- you came out of the war with such a strong feeling about going to Israel and about Israel, I was wondering perhaps if, you know, there was any --

A: [indecipherable]

Q: -- you know, the Zionist trend.

A: Well -- well, you need to remember one thing that we didn't discuss, so you can't remember it. I came -- I was raised as an Orthodox child, I came from an Orthodox home. I remember my grandfather saying his prayers twice a day. I remember -- there's a Jewish word, it's -- it's -- I don't know what they call tefillimin and it's a parchment that the Jews use for --

Q: Tefillin?

A: Tefillin -- in -- in saying their prayers. I remember all of this. We kept a kosher home, we went to synagogue. The synagogue I went to, the women had to sit upstairs, separated from their men, so I was raised in a strict, Orthodox home. And it was always someday Israel, you know? It wasn't called Israel at the time, but -- but it -- this wa --

End of Tape Two, Side B

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Fritzie Fritzshall. This is tape number three, side A.

A: -- saying their prayers. I remember all of this. We kept a kosher home, we went to synagogue. The synagogue I went to, the women had to sit upstairs, separated from their men, so I was raised in a strict, Orthodox home. And it was always someday Israel, you know? It wasn't called Israel at the time, but -- but it -- this was always that someday -- this is how the prayer ends, that -- or maybe it begins, I real-really don't know, but it's -- was always with someday, next year in Israel or next year in Palestine. So, we knew. I was raised with this, okay? And especially after the war, especially after the war, when the Jews were being persecuted. Where was I going to go to have this freedom if not Israel, if not Palestine? So it was always there. Plus, I -- I was this young person and I knew that it was hard to get into Israel, we'd have to fight our way in and I -- I wanted to fight for it. This was going to be my home and this -- I wanted this freedom. I wanted to fight for their freedom. I would go fight for it today if I weren't too old. But -- so Israel was always part of my Jewish upbringing and part of my religion. You know, and my strong feelings are still there for Israel. I mean, I may be an American, but I am a Jew. An American Jew.

Q: Did -- after you got married, did you -- did you work? Have you -- you know, have you had a -- a career? Did you stay home and raise a child? How did -- what'd you do?

A: I worked prior to being married. I worked after I was married. I worked til I was in my seventh month for my son. Then I stayed home til he was almost nine years old. I was a home Mommy and then I went back to work and I work to this day. I need to work for my brain, for myself, for -- and I also consider my volunteer work that I do as part of my work. I work in a soup kitchen in Evanston. On Tuesdays I serve lunch at a church, it's a black church. And I go and do that on Tuesdays. I help with the fundraising and -- for the Holocaust Museum in Washington. I am on the board in the Skokie Holocaust Museum. I go into the schools and this is part of my giving back. This is my way of saying, "Thank you, God," and I am giving back.

Q: I'm -- I'm wondering, if it's possible to say, how mu -- I mean just as you, you know, go through your life now -- you know, this is -- what happened to you, happened 50 years ago -- if there's any way to -- to know it or figure it out, just as you go through your normal routine of the day, with nothing special happening. No special reminders, you know, in the air or the newspaper or in a conversation or whatever, about the Holocaust or any of that. When none of that is just in the atmosphere, I'm wondering how often you might think of it? Whether on just a regular day, any thoughts of that pass through your mind, or are there long stretches where you don't think of it any more?

A: Every single day and I believe for as long as I will live, it will be every single day, I miss not having a family -- extended family. I miss when the holidays come, not having my extended family with me. I miss not having a brother. I am an only child. If you're an only child when you're born an only child, I think it's different than when you had

siblings and they're not there. They tell us that one misses their mother more as they get older and I'm here to tell you it's so. I miss not having a mother. I am very sorry that she's not here to see her grandchild or her great-grandchildren. I think she would have been very proud of all of them, cause they're wonderful human beings. I think my father missed his family terribly. I sometimes look at a family, a whole family, with generations and I envy them. I on -- don't envy their wealth, I don't envy anything that other people have, but I envy their extended family. I miss going to a doctor and not having history to tell. I miss for my grandchildren, not knowing a grandparent. I miss a life I had and I often dream that I really have it. These are things that we will never have. These are things that have been taken away from us, that other people have and have had. And why was it taken away from us? Simply because we were born a Jew. Not because we committed a crime. We don't look any different from other people. We don't feel any different from other people. Yes, I go to a synagogue and you go to a church, but am I so different from you? I miss the same things that you have and that you have had and I don't have. And I miss them every day and I think about them every day.

Q: Well, I'm sort of out of questions. Is there anything that you'd like to add, that we haven't talked about?

A: I don't know. I can't think now. Probably when you walk away, I will. But I don't know. I don't know, it's --

Q: You know, I've done several of these interviews with people and there's -- I always come away from them, you know, that it's -- it's impossible to talk to anybody who --

who lived through any part of this, you know, and I've ju -- some of the people I've talked to were never in concentration camps, managed to escape getting put in them or whatever. But it's impossible to have any of these conversations without feeling how much -- you know, what a depth of emotion is inside, you know, is constantly with the people who -- who live through this. That's -- that's what I always walk away, sort of -- you know, whatever the specifics are, that's the -- that's the thing that sort of sticks with me the longest.

A: I think -- there are also several reasons for this. When one loses a parent -- it is normal for a child to lose a parent, one has a cemetery. I know I have comfort, because my father is buried in a cemetery here and I can go and I can visit. Those of us that watched our families killed in Europe, we don't know -- we don't have -- we can't visit. They're scattered. When you watch babies walking towards a gas chamber, when you watch religious people walking towards a gas chamber as they are praying still to God when they're walking towards the gas chamber, when you watch someone dig a grave and then you see them shot and fall into the grave they have dug for themselves, when you watch innocent blood spilled, there's a hole that there's no cover on. The cover will not fit, the hole doesn't close. You live with it. It's like an ulcer that eats away at you. Some of us handle it better. Some of us live with it easier, but the wound is always there. Maybe if we had seen a normal death, which, we expect a normal death, we would get over it. But this was -- there was nothing normal about his war. There was nothing normal about the Holocaust. We cannot forget. We cannot forgive for those people that have done it and

we must never forget of what has been done to the Jews, to the Gypsies, to the innocent people that got caught during the time of the war. But we must re -- also remember, that maybe a lot of people would have been put in danger, had they helped. They could have helped. We must honor the people that helped. We must honor the righteous. They were the ones that stood up and said, “This is wrong, we will help.” We must always remember those people that did stand up and did help. Unfortunately, there are not many of them. Israel has honored them, Israel has planted trees for them. The forests are not overgrowing with trees. We have an Avenue of the Righteous in Evanston. It’s not overgrowing with trees, but there were the few, there were the Schindlers, but not enough. And so I honor those people and I teach about those people. But we can never forgive and we can never forget, for the ones that did not help, that ni -- that did not stand up, that turned in the Jews, when they didn’t need to. They didn’t benefit by it, other than taking our possessions. Is it worth to give a life for possessions? I hope that the ones that are still living, that committed the crimes, I hope that they think about what they did. I hope they live with it every single day, in their minds. I hope they can see the bloodshed that was done and not forget. And I hope we can all learn from the past. Thank you.

Q: Actually, I had one more question, if you don’t mind me asking. That was a great place to end, but there was something. You triggered something in my mind, which was, in your video interview, you mentioned every day having to run, in front of Dr. Mengele or Dr. Mengele’s lieutenants. And -- you know, off and on, through the years, there were stories, possible sightings of him, you know, people searching for Mengele. It was maybe

-- what was it, maybe 10 years ago or 15 years ago, where supposedly they found these bones in -- where was it, Paraguay, I think, and --

A: Paraguay.

Q: Yeah, and some of that was happening, I believe, during the period where you were being silent about your experiences in the Holocaust and when that -- when -- when you would -- did you ever encounter these stories in the news or whatever and I'm ju -- I just was curious --

A: About Dr. Mengele?

Q: Yeah, about him.

A: About the death of Dr. Mengele or what --

Q: Or before that, you know, it was like, where is he? There were -- you know, every once in awhile there'd be a story that oh, he was seen in Brazil or he was possibly in this place, there were people hunting for him. I mean, I was just curious whether --

A: People hunting for him and people hiding him.

Q: Yeah.

A: And there are many others that are being hidden in Paraguay and other places. And it's amazing, because they are le -- still living in freedom. I mean, some of them might be older now, but I -- I do believe that they need to pay for their crimes. Dr. Mengele, I believe -- I'm not sure that there has been proof that those were -- that he died and all of that. I would have loved to have seen him taken alive. It would have been a great day if they had taken him alive and if he could have paid a little bit for some of the crimes that

he committed, some of the experiments that he did, some of the atrocities that -- that have come out that he has done. But, unfortunately he died without -- without -- okay, so he dow -- died in drowning, but big deal, you know? He should have felt some of -- of the pain that he caused for so many, many hundreds of pe -- of people, you know? But yeah, he -- he -- Dr. Mengele was one of the doctors that did the selection and -- in Auschwitz. And he did the experiments on pregnant women and -- and he did a lot of the experiments without drugs and -- and so forth. He was one of the doctors and -- with his entourage that would -- would have selections in the morning. We would have to get undressed and not walk, but run in front of him. But we knew there was going to be a selection and oftentimes when our hair started to grow back and -- and then somebody's hair would be gray, we would take dirt and rub it into that person's head and hair -- to try and cover the gray hair so they looked younger. We would try and pinch cheeks to show that they -- we still had a little color in our face, that we didn't look so pale and dead, even though we were hungry and hardly had any strength. But let me tell you, strength came from somewheres when there were selections, because not -- we did not walk, we ran in front of them -- Dr. Mengele, as he stood there with his entourage, with his stick and -- and pointing one way or another. And some went into one line and some into another. One never knew which was the good line. One -- one line went directly to the gas chambers, while the other line walked back into the barracks. But he was one of the -- one of the big players in -- in Auschwitz and -- and I'm really sorry that he didn't stand trial and didn't pay for his crime.

Q: I'm curious about -- about you, though and whether these stories or mentions of him in the news or whatever, would --

A: Well, every time -- actually, every time we did hear about him and -- and it brought back memories. Just the name itself, you know, Dr. Mengele, my God, you know, you can visualize this man standing there with his gloves and his -- and his stick in his hand. I mean, I can just see him in front of me. And the prayer was always there, please catch him, please get him. And I know they've gotten close to getting him [indecipherable] but you know -- and then, it hurt when -- when I heard and read afterwards -- read afterwards that his son visited him. He had a son who -- who knew where he was and his son visited him and -- and all of that. And I kept saying, "Sure, he," you know, "he's -- he's still living a good life and look what he did to all the other people." But there are many of them that are still living, you know, and denying, and -- [knocking] It's open.

Q: Well, we were sort of at the end of our interview anyway, so now that the plumber is here to -- which sink is it that he's looking at?

A: Bathroom.

Q: Oh, okay. So he's here to fix the sink in the bathroom. Life goes on, so --

A: Life goes on. Luckily, I have two bathrooms, so --

Q: Well listen, thanks for taking -- taking this time out to do this interview with us, it's very nice of you to do that. This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Fritzie Fritzshall.

End of Tape Three, Side A

Conclusion of Interview