United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Jerry Slivka
October 22 & 23, 1998
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Jerry Slivka, conducted by Arwin Donohue on October 22 & 23, 1998 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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Interview with Jerry Slivka
October 22-23, 1998

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jeff and Toby Herr collection. This is an interview with Jerry Slivka, conducted on October 22nd, 1998, by Arwin Donohue. This is a post Holocaust, follow up interview, to a videotaped interview that was conducted by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum with Mr. Slivka on June 16th, 1990. This is tape number one, side A. Before we go on and talk about -- even though this is a post Holocaust interview, just say for the record that we're going to talk about some pre-war and wartime things that weren't covered in the first interview. And one of the things that I wanted to know from you has to do with just your very early years, your -- I wanted the names of your family and something about the relationships within the family. I know you -- you mentioned in the first interview you had two brothers and two sisters.

Answer: Yes.

Q: And their names and their ages relative to you and -- and then also your parents names, and you didn't say anything about your -- your mother.

A: Well, our family consists of father and mother and two sisters and two brothers and myself, of course. My father's name, Hebrew name was Eliakim. In Polish, he was Yakob, which is Jacob, but it's no -- no connection to the Hebrew name. My mother's name was Rosa -- Raisil in Yiddish, but the Polish name was Rosa.

Q: And her maiden name?

A: Her maiden name was Kirzner. And my brother next to me was Chaim and was born in 1917, then we have a sa -- I have the sister, Miriam, who was born 1920. And next came my brother Reuben, who survived the war, still lives in Boston now. And he was born 1922. And had a little sister who was born in 1927. She -- I was 12 years old when she was born.

Q: And her name?

A: And her name was Hannah.

Q: Were you -- and -- were you particularly close with any of your brothers or sisters?

A: We were very close, we were very close, but my problem was that I did not live at -- with all of them all the time, because since I lived in a small village and my father wanted me to get some kind of education, which started about three years old. I was shipped off to the next town, which was about 12 mile -- 12 kilometers from our town, where there was a teacher. As a matter of fact, my father worked there one year as a teacher, after he lost his job, which I talked about in the -- on the videotape. And I used to be away from them for awhile. And later on, I was sent to a high school in Koven, which is the big city not far from where we lived. And again, I -- I missed my family. I was there only one year. This was my formal education. And then when I was 16, I left town also, to go in search of a -- learning a professional job in the city of Lodz. And sin -- fr-from then on, I was away for quite a few years, returned about a year or two before the war came. Then a year before the war, I came -- I -- I got married. A son was born. His -- My wife’s name

was Rifka. This was in 1938. I omitted it from my videotape. And my son's name was Benjamin -- Benjamin. He -- He -- He lived only three years. He was born in ni -- you know, we were married in 1938, he was born in 1939 and in 1942, in September, a week before Rosh Hashanah, the 23 days in the month of Ell, Hebrew month, they were all taken out and shot, including my little boy. That's [indecipherable] was my family.

Q: Where was this?

A: This was in that -- in a village called Povorsk, which we visited two years ago. I think my wife told you about a visit to -- the trip there.

Q: She talked about the trip to Vilno, but didn't talk about your trip to Povorsk.

A: Yeah, well, it started with Povorsk. A -- I -- I was not there when the tragedy happened. I was in the Soviet Union, working a coal mine. And I found out about -- I knew -- I -- I -- the Soviet -- I -- I read the Soviet press, even though I worked for a slave labor camp, we had a cultural life. There were -- there was a library with papers and books which you could read. As a matter of fact, I ha -- even had the privilege of subscribing for -- to -- to the Pravda, one of the Soviet papers, for a short while, for a few months, because the librarian, who was also a internee like myself, had about half a dozen papers he could give, to give us a semblance of kind of freedom and culture. So, he gave me the privilege of sur-surpri -- which was dirt cheap, it was pennies. But, to me it had a big value besides reading it, I could read it in the library. But I could sell it afterward for the purpose of rolling cigarettes. I, myself, was smoking. And we used to have a kind of -- there was some commerce in the camp. Womens used to come out from

outside and had a little -- put like a -- a kiosk in the camp. And if you had money, you could buy things. They used to bring in milk, he used to bring in tobacco, which was sold by the glass. Actually, that was not even tobacco, it was tobacco roots, which were chopped up with an ax and you rolled it in newspaper. Now, once a mon -- once a week, I used to sell my bread ration in this commerce in -- intercamp commerce -- intracamp commerce, and buy tobacco. But I had to buy a newspaper. A newspaper cost 10 rubles. So, when I had five newspapers or six newspapers a week, I could sell five of them and one use for my own needs and with others I used to get the 50 rubles and use it to buy the tobacco roots, see? So, while I had it, I was in very good shape, financially. I didn't have to sell my bread ration. So -- and in the press, there wasn't much about the Final Solution. The Soviet press didn't write much about it, they wrote about atrocities committed against the Soviet people, none that mentioned Jews. Of course the particular Jews [indecipherable] designed to be exterminated. But -- And they knew about it, of course, but they didn't -- I remember when the revolt broke out in the Warsaw ghetto, there was a little column, one column, but about four or five inches tall, about a revolt in the Warsaw ghetto, which was liquidated by -- the Warsaw ghetto was liquidated by the German -- the German occupiers. Not mentioning much about just one word to the Jews. The ghetto, of course, they had to mention the ghetto, because there's only one kind of a ghetto, a Jewish ghetto. So they mentioned it. So there wasn't much about it. But one day, when the forces -- the Soviet forces approached not far from where my town was located, I wrote a letter from camp to the -- somebody in the ci -- town council, asking if

there's any information about my family. It so happened that the town was not liberated yet. It was still -- there was still the -- the -- the front was there in the -- the next city. For quite awhile, places changed hands back and forth, but I -- another town close to it, was already liberated. And a friend of mine, who was a former partisan, where my brother was also a partisan of the sa -- the same place, the same time. He was already liberated and he was working in the post office. And when they saw my name -- my return address, with my name on it, he opened the letter and he sent it to my brother. He read it, sent to my brother and my brother answered it. And he -- he just wrote me that he is -- he knows that he -- he is -- he is alive, everything is -- all is well. He works now as -- doing -- as a guard in an NKVD, secret -- secret police farm. And he sent me -- he would sent me some money. Course, they used to speculate theirselves by [indecipherable] and he knew that I was in bad shape, so he send me some money. A few days later, I got a letter from one of my friend -- a former brother-in-law of mine, as a matter of fact, and then his brother, describing what happened and how it happened and who survived and did not survive. So I knew -- then I find out what happened. And I had in mind that my wi -- in 1945, after the war, the Poles and the Soviets conclude an agreement to let -- this ha -- by the way, this information is in the videotape, but I'm telling you so you understand what I am talking about -- had an agreement to let all of those who were former Polish citizens, til '39, coo -- provided they are Jews or Poles, not Ukrainians or Russians, could get out, back to Poland. And after a year, they find -- this is a long story, but doesn't make any sense, it repeats again. I left the Soviet Union, you know, and then came to Poland. But, I

ha -- I thought I'll be able to go by this town and see what -- you know, where the place was, at least, fo-found out what happened. But luckily, luckily, I could not stop there, because th-they routed me through a different way, through Belarus, through Minsk and -- but I always dreamed about coming back to Povorsk and putting up a monument, which was impossible during Soviet days. First of all, they didn't allow any monuments which specifically said Jews perished there. Soviet citizens, yes, but not Jews. So, i-in -- in -- and at that time, this -- this was a very dangerous place to be, because Ukrainian nationalists already harassed the Soviet army and killed the Jews, just like the Poles did after the war, yeah. So, is good that they did not go through. But I -- I -- It was a kind of -- became an obsession for me to come and put up a monument. Now, when you co -- then they st -- they started allowing already do -- before Gorbachov's time already, they start allowing put up with and even in Yiddish or in Hebrew, what happened -- descriptions on these monuments, and they allowed to have Jews. I don't know if you know about that pol -- a Soviet write up of the name of Viefter Schenko, who wrote a poem about, "There's no monument in Babier," which is Kiev -- probably heard about it. And he wrote he's ashamed being a Russian, that they did not allow to put up m-monuments in these places, so they did allow, finally they did allow. And then, in the beg -- middle of this decade, since '95, I think, Ukraine became independent and they allowed, already. And there was a fellow in our -- in -- in the -- in the province there, who, as a matter of fact, he's -- he -- he was the -- the -- the secretary of the Communist party in the -- in the -- yeah, he was half Jewish, too, but he didn't -- he said himself Ukrainian. And he

started putting up this monument with government help, first Soviet and then the independent Ukraine. I got in touch with him, I found out there is in Israel a organization, it's called the House of Waleen. Waleen is the name of the province which has records of many. There's probably, in that part, hundreds of thousands of Jews perished. They didn't send them to -- to concentration camps, they killed them right then and there. In our town, it was exploded dump, oil dump that the Soviets built and they exploded it and then they used it for when they killed th-the German [indecipherable] they dump the Jews in there, you know. And this is the place -- so it was a military zone, belonged to the army. And you could not go into any place in army during Soviet days. They agreed they'll let us put up the monument. We -- We -- We a-agreed on a price with -- how much it'll cost. But it came the day when they're supposed -- already the monument is ready and they decided nyet, they're not allowed to on the mili-military. So, I -- finally it was ready, we are ready to go in 19 -- in 19 -- this was what, 60, now is 90 -- 98 and 96. 95, we had a date and I had a group, the -- a woman from the local -- well, W -- WMG -- GME, I think it is. That used to be WGAM. This is affiliate of CBS. No, wait a minute, was NBC. NBC, ABC, what's it, the other one?

Q: CBS.

A: CBS, yeah, CBS, with a cameraman and a reporter. Reluctantly the station agreed to pay her expenses, she wanted to go very badly, but you couldn't go, because they said they wouldn't allow to -- later on I found out they did allow it, make a long story short, and we -- we scheduled a trip for the next year, 1960 -- 96, yeah. I had a group of about

12 people. There was myself, my wife and my daughter from Louisiana. The one from Israel couldn't make it, she couldn't get vacation at that time, which I hope by next year to take her and some of my grandchildren, [indecipherable]. And we f -- and two women, one -- both of them lived in New York, one now is in Boston and the other one works in New York, daughters of survivors. And then there was another son of survivors, whose father was a partisan with my brother. My brother and his wife and his three children, made a group of 12 people. And a friend of mine who lives in Warsaw came with us and Rochelle, of course. And we came -- we visited Warsaw. We went to Povorsk, this town. We -- I have some pictures, I'll show you, of this. I also have a tape from that time, to all -- put this all in. We were met by the officials of the local government -- the head of the local council and by the officials, the hea -- the head of the -- deputy chairman of the regional council, which probably that's about 20 to 30 village -- like a county, approximately, here. Went with us with -- they -- we rented a bus and we stayed at a hotel, without cold water. My wife probably told you about the toilets [indecipherable] tell you. And we stayed there two days. We visited this town, we put up the monument. We made -- you know, dedicated -- dedicated the monu -- the monument was standing already. It was -- had the description of Hebrew, Ukrainian and -- and English, not in Yiddish. And we started talking among ourselves, my friend from Poland, this -- remarked it should be in Yiddish also, even though nobody can understand, nobody can read it, we are here, you know, the few of us old ones to understand, will be gone soon. So we commissioned him, developer there, to put -- and we gave a few hundred more

dollars, to put up the -- I had my -- the inscription in Yiddish, I had prepared all the -- all of them, all the descriptions. So I gave him a copy of it and he sent me a photo that it's already there, it's put on. They also decided to -- we decided it needs a wider, more -- under the -- what do you call it?

Q: Base?

A: The base, but --

Q: Pedestal?

A: No, well you put under the house, what's under the house?

Q: Foundation?

A: Foundation. A wider foundation because it might topple. It looks good. It was a beautiful [indecipherable]. So, we visited there one day and the same day we went to -- to more neighboring towns. One, the town where I was born, and --

Q: Which was? What was the name?

A: Which was called Threeanoffka, Threeanoffka. And the -- there is a monument they put up themselves, place it is sa -- they say 345 Jews were buried there. I don't know who counted them, but that's what they did. It's in Hebrew and in Ukrainian. But in this town, there is a Jewish cemetery, par-part of which survived, ironically, a -- a cemetery that survives here, because the -- most cemeteries didn't. But, after the day, I was so -- we as -- we have to go to another town, we had relatives there and the -- one of the participants, [indecipherable] his parents lived there. So, there was already late and he talked me in, th-the fellow that put up the [indecipherable] talked me into go. Not -- It was only a few

minutes away, I realized afterward. So, hopefully I'll go there again next year. And there, I know, there's a -- there's some stones still standing, one -- including I know one from my grandmother, my paternal grandmother is buried there. And all -- all my relatives are buried there that died naturally, you know, the -- over generations. I don't know how much of it is left though, but I can't wait to see it. And we went to another town, where there about -- over 3,000 people buried. And we came back to the big city, city where I went to high school, we came to the hotel and we lied down there fo -- to have a nap, to have supper late -- oh, yeah, th -- I didn't tell you about this story. They invited us to dinner.

Q: Who did?

A: The -- The officials invite us to dinner and there might have been about 20 people there. The commandant of the base and his little girl and a few other people, th-the driver, the photographer. We had -- We had the video photographer, yeah. Whom -- For whom, you know, we paid, but it -- pennies, you know, si -- their -- their currency was so -- it was 280,000 rubles. Ukrainian rubles, not Russian rubles, because [indecipherable] at that time, forpa dollars, stack like this. And -- And the vodka flow -- flowed like water, you know, and we had borsht and we had pilmani, which is Jewish, kreplach, you know. Familiar dishes. And -- And pork. This was [indecipherable] bread, great br-bread was good. And steak, it was kind of a cook steak and a -- it was good, was a good meal. And they made speeches and of course, whoever spoke. I spoke, during the dedication of the monument. I'll show you, if you have -- if you'll have time, I'll show you part of it. You

might get the -- the feeling what -- how it was there. And we said some prayers, and the Kaddish. So, when we came back to the hotel -- the hotel was a beautiful building with -- nice and clean, nice bed, but there's no cold wa -- no hot water, cold water, so you couldn't take a shower. So we lied down, we think it'll be later on -- this was already what, six, seven o'clock, have to have a nap, because it's so em-emotionally charged you know, and then -- and then the -- physically tired and exhausted. So we lied down for -- figure for about an hour and figure then we'll go out and have dinner or supper, whatever [indecipherable]. We woke up eight o'clock in the morning, without -- and dress [indecipherable]. That's how we -- tired we were. So then we went to Warsaw and from Warsaw, we split, my brother and his family -- and his family went to Lodz, where my sister-in-law was born, with their kids. His name was Reuben, her name was -- is Bella and the three kids was Ruth and Allen and -- and Audrey. And the two girls went to France, to have a good time, to Paris. And we went to Vilna with Rochelle, she told you about this trip, very, very emotional. So that's how we -- then we came back to Warsaw, because there's no direct flights from Vilna, or -- so they had to go through Warsaw and my -- my friend, who was -- who prepared dinner for us, it happened to be our anniversary. This was June 22nd. We went on the 17th, th-this was June 22nd, which is -- turned to -- our wedding anniversary, it's also the anniversary of the beginning of the war between Germany and Russia -- Soviet Union, 19 -- 1942. And from Vilna, we came back to Warsaw, stayed a couple of days. Warsaw, of course, is a beautiful city. I knew Warsaw from before the war. It looks exactly the way it did look and -- and sa --

improved. They have nice set of -- of cross the busy sections, you had underground shopping centers like, underground. And if you cross, you know Mashallkosco is the main street, you go under -- you cannot cross the street. And the -- the -- the traffic is unbelievable, it looked beautiful. And the situation, my sister-in-law told me Lodz was not as good. Warsaw's fine, but the -- the countryside is not -- not good. Economic situation not good. But through, of course we were interest -- we went -- I went to look at the ghetto and I had an uncle and an aunt and cousins living there. And there's nothing. Empty, but signs -- signs of streets that don't exist and signs of bunkers where the -- the Warsaw ghetto fighters came out or went into the sewers. Lamila, aiteen and some other places. Of course, it's -- it affected us very badly. The rest of the city is beautiful, except the ghetto, nothing there.

Q: Who was it in your family who was killed in Povorsk? Per -- From your wife and son and your parents?

A: My -- My parents, my two sisters and then one brother was killed in the partisan group.

Q: Which brother was that?

A: This was Chaim, the second oldest, after me. H-He was, you know, there was a group that came out -- I'm repeating the same thing you have already, on the videotapes, a group of Jewish boys and girls came out just days before, they're prepared already, weeks before, to leave the town, because Poles didn't have a ghetto. There were -- There used -- The -- The -- There was one -- one German in town, Usunderfuerer. He was a

good man, helped a lot of Jews. But the -- his official thing was to -- to collect whatever he could, you know, the furs, gold, anything of -- of value from the Jews. And then he had the Jews working in this exploded oil dump, to squeeze out the oil that seeped through into the sand. Cause this is pra -- what was high -- high octane fuel -- aviation fuel, yeah, when the Soviets exploded it. An-And they had to turn it in, but at the same time, they used to steal some of it, in bottles, in su -- having the coat and put it under the coat. And they -- For a year, they lived from that. They used to exchange it with the peasants, which used it for -- for lightning fuel, you know, for kerosene. They found a way, because this was very dangerous, they have to put some salt in it. And salt was very, very expensive. Salt is -- was a -- you know, ver -- at a higher value than gold, salt. Th-Their -- Their diets require a lot of sa -- well, everybody, Europeans need a lot of salt. So for the preserving pork you had to need sa -- you need salt. And to -- for cooking, for anything, you need salt. So salt was very expen -- but still, they put in some salt and they could use kerosene lamps. There was no electricity in that region. So that's what they did. So, for a year, they were not molested. Well, they were, but not to -- to such an extent as in other cities. The Ukrainian police was the worst, of course. There was no Germans in town, they were at the front. Only this one German. A friend of mine was his orderly. Used to do the -- in the day when they killed the Jews, he -- he t-told them, "Take this horse out to the field, this horse." In -- In other words, he gave him opportunity to run away and he did survive this way. So -- And the rest of the towns, and my wife's parents -- the brothers escaped -- three brothers escaped, one -- and the fourth one is -- oh -- there

-- she had four brothers and three of them escaped. One of them escaped with the -- he worked for the Soviet railroad. Later on, he was accused that he let the one train run with the other -- Soviet -- the Soviet law is very strict and they put him in jail and he died in jail. You know that. And many friends -- we didn't have any more relatives in this town, my relatives lived in the next town, which I told you about, Rhiannoffka. And everywhere there was my relatives there.

Q: Can you describe what it was like to be back in Povorsk after all those years, emotionally.

A: It's -- It's -- It's very difficult to describe it, but I'll try. We were -- I didn't recognize th-the -- the village. This changed entirely, the roads are different. They are paved roads, they weren't in those days. And we came -- we lived near the railroad station, about a hundred meter or a hundred yards from the railroad, right across. And there was a water tower. Railroad -- Belonged to the railroads, was for the purpose of filling the locomotives with water. It was, in that time, all locomotives were all coal -- coal and steam. So it needs lots of water. There was a pipeline from -- from the -- from a lake, about three kilometers away, about two miles approximately, to this water tower. And from u -- the water towers was between the railroad and us, which is as close as from here to Wayside Road. And there's nothing there. Our houses were -- a matter of fact, they have a picture of our house. It's -- Somebody found it and I don't know where they got it, sent it to -- to a friend of mine in Israel.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: Tape one, side B, of an interview with Jerry Slivka. So y-you just repeat about -- about your house?

A: Yeah, well, half of the house is on this picture. And then the three neighbor's houses -- four neighbor's houses, five -- five or six neighbor's house in same row. And then there was a flour mill, which is -- this -- it's not there. Nothing there now. Behind that, about 20 yards away, there's a whole new section built of new homes. And I have the suspicion they were built from the materials of these houses. They didn't want to live in these houses, you know, in case somebody claims them or what. E-Even though they thought everybody died anyway. But, it would better, you know, to pull them apart and build new houses. So, I have -- I will show you that picture. In the front there, in this picture, the front of the houses, there's military vehicles. I don't know was tanks or half tracks or something like that. And I don't -- maybe they are Polish or they are Soviet. It looked like it's a wide -- wide picture. It looked like sake -- taken by -- either by the military or by some other coun -- I don't know, it's -- it's not the amateur or a regular photographer picture. It looked like the scroll, it was rolled up into a storn, what it is fixed and I cou -- I recognized the houses. And we were standing there and nothing there. Th-The -- The whole -- The whole -- The whole trip was very emotional. We got on a train in Warsaw and I knew I -- many times I was traveling this, from Warsaw to -- from -- not so from Warsaw, ulefell from Lodz, travel mi -- and I knew every station, I knew every town. And every one of them had Jewish people there. They -- Probably 70 - 80 - 90 percent,

some of them were Jewish, the -- the peasants lived in the villages. Jews lived in the small towns, so called shtetla, see, and some bigger cities. In the city, you were -- Koven, where I went to school, which is not far from Povorsk, had a population of about 30,000 - 22 to 25,000 were Jewish. And this -- Now, it's a cit-city of 60,000, and there isn't a single Jew. And the city was completely destroyed in the war and rebuilt by the Soviets, you know, in these drab, long multi-story buildings, which fall a -- which started to fall apart the minute they were built, and they' re still -- so it wa -- this was very emotional. In time, you come to the station, I knew that station. The station was rebuilt exactly the way it was before the war. Looks -- This was a beautiful station and it still looks beautiful, til you come into it. You see there -- Rochelle had to go to the bathroom in the hole in the floor, she -- with a half partition in between the men and the women. Luckily, our daughter went in with her, so she could help her to get up. She has problem with her back. Otherwise, I know what would happen there. And there -- the -- the -- there's the bazaar, you can buy anything you want, there's no -- nothing in the store, there is no stores. One or two stores in the whole city. Used to be a lively, you know, commercial center, nothing. I don't know, there might be a few Jews. Somebody said there might be two or three Jews in town, but I -- I never -- the -- nobody came. None of the population came to this dedication, except the officials. And they make speeches about, you know, their former citizens and former, you know, survivors of the -- the -- and talking about peace and love among the nations and so forth and so on. I thanked them for putting up the monument, I thanked them for -- I -- I carried with me a oak seedling, grown from an

acorn in my backyard, right here. And when I opened it up, they couldn't -- I -- I wrapped it in soil, you know, potting -- like potting soil, that's wh -- potting soil, what they use, you know, for growing flowers, and they couldn't -- admired th-the -- the beauty of the soil, you know, such -- looks like rich, fertile soil, because they have sandy soil. Even the Ukraine has beautiful soil. And I planted it there and it is not growing so good, because I got a picture from it -- a friend of -- somebody, a friend of mine in Israel, knows a -- non-Jewish, who used to be a neighbor of ours, and they took a picture. And my brother sends them a check every so often and this fellow there sent them packages. So they take care of it. The head of the local council promised that he'll assign a high school class to take care of it. So, every year I send them a hundred dollars, which is there a fortune. And he wouldn't answer me, so I -- last year I cal -- finally got his telephone number. I couldn't reach him at his pla -- place o -- office. So I got from somebody else in his home, I call him, oh, he was very happy that -- but he didn't write [indecipherable] he -- maybe he doesn't know how to write, I don't know. But he said oh, they are taking care of it. I don't see what they do there, but I can see there's a -- kind of to protect it, like a little cage. But it didn't grow. The soil is not so good, least probably some fertilizer. We'll be there next year, be -- I hope. I hope, but with me, it was -- I -- th -- th -- this is my -- if I ever accomplished anything in my life, this would be at the -- at the top of it. Most important thing I did. I feel I did something my -- they will approve -- would have approved -- th-th-the victims. So, there are some others aware of that and want to hear about it. Some contributed to it. I didn't want -- it was not decide -- of

course, I would pay for it with myself, see? But I wanted them to participate and to have a stake in it, see? And whoever I asked, they contributed some. I didn't ask, I wrote them a letter them, if you can and want, contribute. If not, we'll do it anyway, see? So, sa -- he ask him, of course, to come visit. Most of them did not want to. Most of -- there's not too many, there's only a handful. So this was our trip. She told you about her -- she stood in the middle of the -- middle of the street and cried. Vilna -- I don't know if she told you, Vilna was the culture capital -- the -- the cul -- the Jewish -- Jewish culture. This was the only place where there was teacher seminars for Hebrew teachers, Yiddish teachers and Polish Yiddish teachers for Vilna -- for high schools. It had a beautiful library called a streshun library. And it had a very active, dynamic, Jewish population from -- from the extreme left to the extreme right and the Hasidim -- there were no Hasidim, no, cause Vil-Vilna is just the opposite. Op -- They opposed Hasidism, see? So, there was a -- the gowan of Vilna is -- was a rabbi from the 18th century, 18th or 19th. Yeah, they -- they s-still two streets, they are -- streets of the gowan's name. Gowan means a genius in Hebrew, yeah. And there's the Jewish street. Street of the Jews. Still named so, but there's no gowan, and no -- the cemetery where her mother was buried is not there, there's a park there now. But they're building in this place at -- some -- some broken monuments and they're trying to build a little monument composed of all these -- that -- the pieces that they found.

Q: Will you tell a little bit more about the years before you had gone back and actually erected this monument? Had you been -- Had it been a dream of yours for a long time to do this?

A: It has been -- no-not a -- it was an obsession. I -- I was waiting for the day that it could be -- I had a feeling one days we'll do it. I had a feeling. It is it -- I never expected that the Soviet Union will collapse this way. I knew them, I -- they kept everything so strong and it would be -- never believed it, but it did happen. And I saw that time that I ca -- I can realize my -- my -- my dream. I wanted very badly to do that, you see. I -- I -- I could hear -- you know, to this day, when I'm on my lawn, I hear their cries. Th-The noise of the -- of the lawnmower -- I -- I -- I -- when I was sitting in the mine -- when I found out what happened, I hear their cries. And I -- I -- At that time, I couldn't even cry myself. Now, I can, very easily. But at that time, I couldn't and I wonder what happened to me, wh-wh-where is my human emotions? There were none. I -- There was nobody to talk to about it. It is very difficult to describe the feeling, very difficult. But I hoped to do it. And we did. I hope to be again -- I want all my grandchildren to see it, to remember.

Q: Did your ability to talk about your first wife and child have anything to do with the erection of the monument?

A: No. No, no, no. I -- I felt to everybody the [indecipherable] you know, it was my family, my friend, my grandmother. My grandmother, in the next town, escaped when they started shooting the -- tha -- surrounding the town, th-the Ukrainian police. This was a town th-the -- the -- a lot of s-small agriculture. Every house had a garden and my

grandmother had a beanstalks, you know, which made it like a maze of -- place you c -- you could run away. Not far, bu -- a-and around town, there was a lot of forests. A lot of them escaped to the forest. And my grandmother ran away with two of her grandchildren, one my namesake. M-My aunts -- cousin of mine. And another cousin of mine who survived the war was in the partisans, he was a bricklayer. So, they needed in the partisans, you know, to build stoves in the -- in these trenches like, see? Those little buildings in a -- in a hole under ground and he used to build these things. And he escaped also to the forest, he found my grandmother na -- the next day, dead, with two kids, holding hands. So, I felt obligation to all of them, not -- not just my wife.

Q: Will you talk a little more about the process then, of how you actually made it happen? The monument.

A: Well, I -- I told you before, it wa --

Q: I meant --

A: I tried, I got in touch with these people with the -- ma -- build these monuments. You -- They made a business out of it, not just monuments for the Holocau -- in general, they put in the import. Import -- they bring the stone. It is -- It is black granite. And they started selling, you know, for -- for local needs. With this, I guess this created a new industry there for them. So, when I got in touch with them already, I -- I spoke to them quite often on the telephone, tried to write them. But when they said no -- when the military said no, then I got in touch with Senator Cohen's office here, ask him what to do, how to -- I wrote to the -- to -- to the Ukrainian embassy and I told them, you know, U-

Ukraine now is the largest country in Europe. And I wrote them, “You are this largest country, can’t you as -- allow a piece of land f-for your former citizens?” They didn’t answer. Then, Cohen’s office told me to write -- there’s a -- in Washington an agency -- American Commission for the Preservation of Historic si -- US historic sites abroad, which includes Holocaust sites. And they wrote to the embassy. And Senator Cohen wrote to the embassy, no answer. When we came back in 19 -- in 1995, when I ca -- we went to Israel. We had planned to go to Israel and from Israel to go to -- to the -- to -- to -- to Ukraine. But since we couldn’t make it, you know, we went a year later, we went to Israel anyway, to see our daughter, kids. And when I came back, there was a letter to the commission, that they understand I’m going to Povorsk to sup -- put up a monument to my -- for my parents. I don’t know where they got this idea. The monument was already there, it was standing already. And they promise that the local authorities will cooperate with me to make it possible, which was great. But there was no civilians, not ci -- nobody came from the local population. If we go now, I’ll -- my brother, we decided, if we go, we go for a few days, we walk around among -- among the civilians of the village and find out -- I -- I am sure there are some people my age or a little younger, even, that will remember our family. I know what ha -- you know what happened, there is nothing to find out, see? They’re there and is the right place, because I have a picture of this place. A friend of mine sent somebody there while he’s in the Ukraine, he say -- gave him a -- filled up his car with -- a Ukrainian -- with gas and he gave him a camera with film, take pictures of this place. He did and there was a lot of bones lying on the ground, cause he’s

holding one bone that looks like a human. As a matter of fact, one of us -- one of this -- from Boston fellow, found a little bone and I gis -- gave it to the local police to send the -- to FBI l-lab to -- it turned out was not human. I don't know, it was -- I don't know if they parted with it, but anyway, he told me, it's not human, that's just -- so, it was -- it took -- took -- it didn't take this long, it took several years, but the dream was there, th-the obsession was there -- the -- th-the -- it was very important. So this is, if I accomplished anything in my life, this is the thing, the most important thing I did.

Q: What was it then that made -- I mean, yo-you mentioned before we started the tapes that when you did your interview with the Holocaust museum -- your video interview eight years ago, that you hadn't told the story about your first wife and your son. What happened that made you feel really --

A: I don't know, just too -- too painful about my son and the -- the marriage was a misalliance. I -- I cannot talk about it.

Q: Will you say -- I -- It sounds as if your family had a long history in the town where you were born. Just for the record, will you say something about you family's history in that area?

A: Well, it's -- was a town, you know, which, like most small towns that size, was mixed Ukrainian and Jewish. It was -- I -- I can still picture the way it looked. There was a big marketplace, like in a square, in the middle of town. And right in the center was the u -- the Ukrainian church, which is the same, the provis -- they called it provis lauw -- the Russian Orthodox church used to be there. And ri-right next to it, almost, in the square --

not in the middle of the square, but among the houses, was the Jewish synagogue. And ar -- and all the center was occupied by Jewish homes. A little out further, there were peasants, Ukrainian peasants, who had their parcels of land on them, and they were now basically agricultural people, you know, they grew -- grew stuff. The Jews in this town were all artisans. Blacksmiths, carpenters, who built furniture and houses and all kinds of carpentry. Tailors, who work for the local non-Jewish population mostly, but they were the majority. They used to go to villages where -- for six months, to build a house or to sew clothes for a couple who got married, you know, stayed there. They were all very pious. Used to go, when they were in town, they used to go three times a day to the synagogue. Lately, not so much. Most of them had grown beards, the majority, except after the s-second World War, there were some that did shave their -- their faces. They were strong believers in a rab -- Hasidic rabe, which exists now in New York. It was called a stollena chasidim. It was a typical, what we called -- we lived in the next town, it was only 12 kilometers away, the same kind of people, we called them backward, cause they were very observant. But there was no railroad sta -- the railroad station was six kilometers away. So you had to, if you're going to go by tra -- by train, you had to walk to the railroad station or take a horse and wagon. I -- And this was the kind of -- and there was ha -- at least half of the -- half of the town were Kirzners, my mother's maiden name. And they were -- And I don't know even how they were related, but the one I knew were very close, cousins, uncles, aunts. There must have been at least 70 to a hundred people perished of my relatives. I had two grandmother that -- wa -- one died a natural death

many years ago and the other one I told you, was found, was running away with two grandchildren. I had the cousins by the dozens. This was the kind of a town it was. In th -- As I told you before, we -- we -- I lived in a town that was new. This one had a tradition way back, it was for generations -- during the war, the first World War, it was occupied by the Germans and they evacuated us. I was born during the first World War and we were evacuated into the hinterland -- German, by Austro-Hungarians, which operated this sector of the front. I remember mother used to tell me I was probably s-six months old, it was January, I was born in July. So, I was about five, six months old and they evacuate us in -- in cattle cars. Later Hitler used this for -- for sending -- but it was not -- these were not evacuated for -- to -- to -- to die, they were evacu -- to -- to save their lives, s-so they can move the front, you know, they we -- without hindrance by [indecipherable] civilian population. And when I ca -- When you came to the destination, which was only about 50 to 60 miles away, I was half frozen. So the Hungarian soldiers who operated that sector of the front, threw me -- they stood -- to -- stood in a line and threw me from hand to hand til they revived me. Later in, the same Hungarians sent Jews to Auschwitz. See the difference? That's why a lot of people did not escape, because we knew the Germans from the first World War. My father spoke Germans perfe -- German perfectly, and he worked for the Germans the first World War, as an interpreter. And who would expect that the most civilized country in Europe -- nobody believed -- just the Germans who didn't believe it -- that last long, so that we, who lived under the Germans in the first World War, we were waiting for them. Because the Czarist -- th-the -- the enemy was the

Czarist army, the Cossacks. See, there was no Jewish officers in the -- in the Czarist army, but there were Jewish officers in the German army. Or in the Hungarian -- Hungaria -- the Austro-Hungarian army. So nobody expected it. A lot of them could have been saved, a lot of them could have been evacuated. My parents could have. But how do you leave? You have a home, you have a cow, you have a -- a barn, you have -- you know, everything there. Not -- Not much, but a place to live.

Q: Will you say something about your mother? I don't think we've heard anything about her.

A: M-M-My mom, she's an housewi -- housewife, worked very hard. She was a excellent cook and baker. She used to bake whe -- even though there were several bakers, she used to bake bread and we used to sell it at a little store. And we also kept -- she has a few -- one, two boarders, used to come for dinner in our house and sometimes -- there was no hotel in this village, so she used to also ser -- have a room prepared in case somebody came and decided to stay overnight, to stay over there. Hard working, good mother, wonderful lady. And had a tough life. So we -- did we all. My fa-father was the -- the learned Jew in town. He used to -- He used to write -- if they had to petition the court -- which was in the big city used to come to my father to write petition, it was to be in Polish, very few people knew Polish. Very few people knew Russian before that. He spoke both of them. Three of them were German, Russian and ba -- and Hebrew of course. But I think I inherited his ability to languages.

Q: Do you still have a -- a strong interest in languages?

A: Oh, very much so. I -- Now I don't so mu -- I used to -- I used to teach Hebrew and Yiddish. I taught a course here in Portland High School, evening classes, in Yiddish. I had some student, non-Jewish, took Yiddish. And then I had a course in the temple for Hebrew. I had one in Florida, where we lived now, a Hebrew class, but it dwindled. It's a very few. I was the official interpreter here for many years and for the Maine Medical Center, the county jail and police station and Diocese Refugee Resettlement Center and the Jewish Federation Settlement Center. All the Jews that came in from Russia all went through me. I was their first -- I met them at the plane, somebody else brought the flowers. I greeted them in their own language. We took them over to the apartment which we'd prepared, with a refrigerator full of groceries for at least a week. Take their kid to schools, every new immigrant had to be taken to the hospital for a tuberculosis test, that was my job. I -- I had to translate -- the women had to be examined and I had to find the words for mun -- the -- the monthly period and so many things I had to look up in the dictionary.

Q: How did you become involved in that?

A: Because I was the only one here that knew these languages. Nobody knew them. Later on, some of them -- a few years later, some of them did do it. But the -- the diocese, which took care, you know, of the non-Jewish immigrants, for the state resettlement center, needed Polish interpreters. So, they had some of their own, but ga -- you -- you know, you never can find -- when you need -- all of a sudden you need somebody, it's --

it's -- I was on call. The -- The immigration department has an office here in Portland and they caught some Poles who bought Social Security numbers -- cards in New York, at 50 dollars apiece and they worked in a fancy hotel in Kennebunk. They got -- are illegal immigrants -- to read them their rights. Called me up in the middle of the night, little girl got sick, Polish and they don't speak English and they don't know how to explain to the doctor when they -- they won't do anything until they know what -- what they can and can not do. Three in the morning, two in the morning, come over there and we -- it has it's rewards, though, you see -- you come there and within minutes, you explain to them what the girls might be allergic to something, or they give her a shot or something and the girl starts smiling. Great. An-And I had a prejudice, you know, I had to fight my prejudice against Poles, cause I knew how they treated us. But it's not their fault. Not their fault, so -- so you had to -- it -- it isn't always easy. You -- Sometimes you -- Derogatory remarks about Jews from the same people you are trying to help, see? You're not -- you know, unwillingly, i-i-it sticks through, you know, sticks through. I had one fellow that I work with, he was -- he -- he had an accident, he worked in the construction and he couldn't work. He lifted something and disc came out and they operated on him, probably they shouldn't have operated. And he -- But he knew how to collect workmen's compensation for several years. And he comes to -- he's not employed and he says he -- but he went to Florida, you try a place where there are no Blacks. I'm sure he'll look where there are not Jews either. He even -- I says, "What do you got against Black?" He says, "I have nothing against them, but I don't want to l-live near." Yo-You -- You know,

you -- there's a -- subtle ways of -- to show your, you know, discrimination and hatred and all that.

Q: D-Does everybody you work with know that you're Jewish in these cases?

A: Oh yeah. Well th-the Jewish, of course, immigrants knew and they also knew, they knew they were -- I'm Jewish. I never made any secret of it. And never made any secret of when it was dangerous. I lived in Russia with the Russian people in the coal mines [indecipherable], they wonder how come you are -- you are the only one working here and the -- the director of the mine is a Jew. Little did they know I -- he is another [indecipherable] kind of a Jew.

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is tape two, side A, of an interview with Jerry Slivka. So, even -- I -- I was curious about that, when you mentioned about your time in the coal mines and you were talk -- you just said that you didn't make any secret of -- of being a Jew, I was wondering di -- how -- how people knew that you were Jewish. Did you -- Did you tell them or did they just know --

A: Oh yeah, yeah [indecipherable] they -- they -- they couldn't tell, because my Russian was perfect, I spoke only Russian there, I lived there for several years with them. I -- I adopted their -- their mannerism, adopted their way. But ma -- every so often, we talked about this and I was -- I was not -- made no secret of it. I told them that there are good Jews and there are bad Jews as [indecipherable] good Russians and bad Russians and good Ukrainians and bad Ukrainians. And I remember one fellow who was -- he was talking about -- I know this -- he was anti-Semitic, no question about and he was talking out about me and talk about the -- the director of the -- the -- the mine, and so -- and I say -- and I told him -- his name was Vanya, which is short for Ivan, I says -- I say, "Look, every Russianality has it's bad and -- and good people, every national -- every nationality has bad traits as a nationality, you know, get bad ones and good one," I says, "but in you," I says, "all the bad ones. Jewish, Ukrainian, Russian, are concentrated in you." Shut him up right away. Didn't know what to say. So I was -- I was not afraid. That time especially, th -- it was a crime to -- to show national intolerance -- with Stalin, for calling

somebody a dirty Jew or a kike or that -- any -- any kind of nationality, that's 15 years in jail. Later on, it became official policy, anti-Semitism, but not in that time.

Q: Can you talk more about your relationship with Communism? I mean, back then you were -- you were somewhat -- I -- I -- I'm interested in your perspective on Communism back in the 19 -- I guess it was 1941 when you were working with the Communist Youth League, and --

A: [inaudible] I like we start a little earlier?

Q: Okay.

A: When I was young, my teenagers -- teenaged years, youngsters in Poland were very busy in politics. We have nothing else to do. There was no work, there wa -- we had to find the enemy and who the enemy was, who knows? The Poles were course, hated -- hated us. We didn't see any future for ourselves as Jews -- y-young -- Jewish youngsters. So we -- first of all, I wer -- I was probably 14 -15, is I joined the group Socialist Zionists, the Shamara Zaheer and then the -- they're the one that pioneered in Israel, in the kibbutzim, way to the left. The atheist Socialist Nationalist Jews. Then the -- I -- I didn't like this kind of Socialism, so I became a Rightist youngster, you know for the -- was -- with -- they called it that time, the Revisionist Zionist again, Zionist again. And I was disappointed then and because it was somewhat semi-Fascist, the -- the uniforms were brown like -- like German SS. That what -- they had it before the German SS, you know, but I mean, there was fights between the left and the right and I was basically Zionist, but not -- I -- I don't know what the solution would be, to -- I -- a Jewish

homeland and Palestine or not the Jewish homeland and Palestine. So if you're born here, we should have the rights here. So I joined the group, which was anti-Fascist. Little did I know the anti-Fascist group was a -- the poli -- this Communist party was illegal in Poland. This was a way for them to -- from within, to come into the -- some kind of legal way and this was the anti-Fascist, they preached Socialist unity among the Je -- Je-Jewish Socialist parties -- so cal -- so called progressive, Polish so called progressive and they f- formed this, but later on I realized this was a Communist front. So I quit this party. But I -- I loved the Hebrew language, you know, I -- I was educated in it and the Communist forbid -- forbade Zionism and the language -- not just Zionism, but the language. Yiddish was the language. I says, "Why can't we have two languages? It's a language that we -- you know, it's -- is a l -- you know, come -- is already several thousand years in our history, why should we abandon? It's a beautiful language, I like it." So, I could not fit in into a frame. I could not fi -- I -- I couldn't be a Communist. I was a Zionist -- a partial Zionist. I had my own ideas. The same with religion, I was not -- I could not conform to the official religion. I had atheistic or agnostic -- I don't know -- feelings, see? But like -- like many others, I didn't know what -- I couldn't make -- I -- I -- til this day I don't know what I want, and I'm sure that many other people don't either. Then came the Communists, in 1939. Even though what I didn't know what's going on in the Soviet Union, I saw right away something is wrong there. First of all, they arrested Communists, who was -- one jail -- spent in jail, idealists, people idealist with -- spent in Polish jail five, 10 years, for nothing. For raising a red flag, for speaking out against the

government, they were sent away. Th-They'd say -- when they came in, the ri -- the first victims were these people, they sent them away. I got a -- I -- I worked -- during the beginning, I tried to organize a school that will t-teach Yiddish, because since we didn't have enough population to -- to introduce the Yiddish language, Yiddish history, Jewish history, into the curriculum [indecipherable] my 20's, [indecipherable] are married, a-a-and -- and then to the Ukrainian school, because the -- the majority were the Ukrainian, and they rebuffed me. It all -- It all -- They almost accused me of being Nationalist and this was a big -- oh, either Nationalist or Cosmopolitan, both of them were non-kosher. So I gave up, I couldn't do anything. I got a job, because I was doing a good job for th -- I was -- you know, I ha -- I worked with the -- at that time there were Yiddish papers that came from Kiev and in the beginning were the honeymoon. So, the local pol -- di -- g-ga-gave me the job of managing the local store. There wasn't much in it, but whatever was, I was the first one that I could use for myself, see? And my family. And my father got the job because he spoke Russian perfectly. I didn't speak Russian, but I -- I knew Ukrainian. Never learned it, but from the -- we lived among the Ukrainians, I knew Ukrainian. Then, the war started and I left. I was in the army and when I came there, they -- they -- because -- I -- I -- I -- I fell into -- it's a long story, I don't -- not trying to tell the whole thing. I was in -- in -- in German encirclement and I risked my life to get out of there and they took and they put me on the front and then they took me off the front, because I was -- I am unreliable, because I was -- lived in Poland before '39. Thousands and thousands and thousands of people, they took out the front. They didn't take off local Ukrainians, who

deserted every day from the place where I was. I did not desert, because I know desertion mean death. Th-The Germans capture me, that's -- that's it, it'll be the end. So -- and then they put me on -- on the build-building a railroad. It's already the second year of the war and -- near Stalingrad, on the other side of the Volga, because there was none there to put on this side -- on the east -- west side -- you never know which [indecipherable] it was. And we build this railroad and it was built by the NKVD. This is the -- the secret police, th-the -- the prison authorities. And they took us as work battalions -- military work battalions, and treated just like the -- these con -- co -- con -- convicts, see? And these were also mostly for political crimes. Those who had a lot of si -- land, you know, the Kulaks and so forth. Some were there for next to nothing. They stole something from the place of work. Five years, 10 years, 15 years, you know, Stalin -- Stalin's pogrom. Then I realized -- I saw the -- th-the real face of Communism, because I remember them and I wo-work in the coal mine and I figured if I only knew -- if Stalin only knew -- see how blind I was -- what -- what they do to us. Little did I know this was Stalin's orders. And we build a railroad before we went in the mine, there used to be a -- a NKVD official by the name of Brienin. Brienin I know was a Hebrew writer and I think it must be the same family, it's not -- it's very unusual name. Because I met a girl in Portland here, she's not a local. And when I told her that I remember from the Hebrew literature, we studied -- a fellow by the name Reuben Brienin, she said that's -- was her uncle. She lived in -- I don't know, Pennsylvania or somewhere. She knew who it was. He stayed in the Soviet Union and this must be a -- from this same family and he was wearing elegant white shirt

-- clean, white shirt and shiny boots, with military, navy pants and he used to walk -- see - - and now we had to -- it was in the Steppests, you know, the flat land. We had to dig the soil out and we had to do so many cubic meters. An-And -- And we -- with -- and wheelbarrows, all by hand, without any machinery, go up, you know, like second floor high to put the trestle -- on the trestle and then somebody will stand there -- not one, in the hundreds, and -- and the temperature, it'll be hard so we can put the rails on it. And he used to come and go with this -- check out this. And he was -- he looked very well fed a-and we were -- we were -- if you did the norm, that's a five cubic yards of soil, you get a certain soup. There were three kinds of soup. Was millet -- millet, it's -- was thicker or thinner. Some was from water, all the way, you know to a little thick se -- or more bread. An-And it was like a vicious circle, if you couldn't make your norm, you got less to eat. You had less to eat, you had less strength to -- to -- to do any. So you were doomed. Luckily, this -- after four months, th-th-this was finished and I survived it. I went from -- probably from 150 pounds to about 100 pounds in -- in no time. Then I realized the real - - what the real Soviet order is, what Communism is. But I was supported before and I was happy because in the beginning, you know, there were Jews in high -- high officials. Not too many too high. There was one Awon Kakanovich that survived, it was -- he was Stalin's brother-in-law, a Jew. The rest of them were killed afterward. Especially 1948, but I was out at that time. But it -- it was a great letdown.

Q: What about when you came to America and you're here in the 1950's and you're in the midst of the American response to Communism during the -- the Cold War? Did you

-- What was -- Did -- What was your understanding? Did you -- could you relate to American policy?

A: Oh yeah, I did relate to [indecipherable] more so -- more so, because this was a thousand percent improvement on what we had. I never lived in a free country. I came and I got a job in Woonsocket, Rhode Island. And Woonsocket Rhode Island's a small town and I saw -- I -- I already started reading -- knew enough English to read a paper. And I saw in the paper -- this was Hanukah holiday. And in the local paper, there an article about Hanukah. The -- With a picture of a Menorah. The Hebrew school and so -- I couldn't understand it, see? To me, this was -- no -- no American paid -- paid attention to it, it's -- it's normal, right? To me, it was not normal, it was -- it made me idealize America, even though there were many things later on I found out that I knew it was not so great. But compared to what we had, this was paradise. I made my first wages, a dollar five an hour, union wages, that's a help on a truck. I was a Hebrew teacher, the gets -- first I got a job as a Hebrew teacher. This was 1948, there was some -- a lot of unemployment. Truman was just elected and they -- they thought the country's go-going on to the dogs, economically, see? It was very difficult. So I stayed -- it was in Boston. So when I came, they gave me a job in a Hebrew school. They knew I knew Hebrew. Some of my relatives -- relative's relatives in Chelsea, in Massachusetts and I came there. I did not -- my English was zero. And their Hebrew was zero -- and they gave me first a fifth grade with their teacher supervising me. Well, I didn't do badly because they understood some Hebrew. I have a natural knack of teaching, even though I have no

academic preparation for it. But I -- I could convey, you know, whatever I know to others. And I did all right, he says, “You have promise.” So then, there was -- th-the-then the school year ended and there was a teacher, a young lady in the first grade and her contract called for the school year, she quit. They decided to keep the school open another two months -- do -- two weeks or three weeks, I don’t remember what. The parents, they are paying tuition for the year, they wanted to have -- you know, let them have the kids another two years in scho -- two weeks in school, not to be at their backs. Was a small, poor town, Chelsea. So, they gave me this first grade. I am by myself with a classroom about 30 kids, don’t understand a word of Hebrew. They can’t read already, hardly and I don’t understand a word of Eng -- they smelled a rat right away and this was the worst time of my life. So, anyway, wi -- it lasted only a couple of weeks and the principal said, “Maybe start the new year, I’ll send for you.” Meantime I went to Woonsocket, I got this job in the -- dollar five an hour, union wages. Hebrew school used to pay 75 dollars a week for about three hours a day, few days a week, which was great. And the -- also, he ga -- they send me to the -- Boston has it -- used to have a Hebrew teacher’s college. Now it’s called the Hebrew college, which awards degrees, you know, the undergraduate and -- and the masters. They wanted to accept me in the third year -- it was a four year school, third year, nights. And I -- when I thought -- w-we’re -- with the kids -- September came, he sent for me, he wanted me to come and I said, “Nothing doing, I don’t want it, it’s enough.” So, I -- I went to -- later on, I lost the job. So, over the summer, I came back to Boston, I got another job and there I went to Hebrew college

and they told me they'll let me into a third -- I -- I had to take a-an exam in a few -- I -- a few subjects I did not know. Talmud, I think it was and some other -- Hebrew, I -- the la-language and I didn't have problems. But I didn't decide -- but I had a cousin -- my cousin's wife, who's to me like a sister and that -- she died already, and she says, "Working in this place is not for you." It was a [indecipherable], I was a foreman there. It was 20 women. It was not easy either, but I managed. They pay me -- what -- came from 42 dollars a week union wages, I got 32 dollars as a supervisor, you know. Foreman, 32 dollars a week. The girl that worked there made -- the -- the -- the minimum wage went up to 75 cents an hour. Was 30 dol -- they -- they made more -- more than I did, almost. So, she says, "You have to go to school, you have to learn. So it's either Hebrew college, or --" she sa -- I says, "My father was an accountant, self taught." He is got some correspondence course. So I knew a little bit about bookkeeping. So I went to Bentley's -- Bentley College, which is now a big school. At that [indecipherable], it was a little -- little school in Boylston Street and I took accounting. So, I worked for three -- three years in Boston, then we got married -- I got married, had a daughter, we came to Portland. So -- What were they talking about -- we talked abou-about something else, we were talking about America, America. I -- America I thought, to me -- to me it was the greatest country in the world. So, of course, I knew the Soviet Union, I knew it already. I kn -- I -- it was an evil empire, no question about it. I couldn't see how can American defend the system they don't know -- think about, which a lot of American did. There are many bad things, you know, the Nixon and this and -- McCarthy. But these were things that did not

apply to me. I knew I can go anyplace -- I knew -- none -- it wasn't easy at that time, either, Brandeis was built, because it was hard for Jewish student to go to college, they had a -- they had the certain number they would accept. But they were a certain number, not zero. Poland it was, well, not zero. Point point something, see? And we were 10 percent the population in Poland. And then the Soviet Union, so this, to me, is ideal, to -- I didn't miss an election. I took my Americanism very, very seriously.

Q: When did you become a citizen?

A: I had -- usually, it takes five years. So, I came in '48, I was entitled to be in '53. But, in '53, we moved to Portland and you have to be a citizen of the state for at least a year. So I have to wait in -- one more year. And Rochelle became a citizen the year after and she was the first one to be on television.

Q: She didn't tell me about that.

A: Yeah, she was on television, on the -- it was on November 11. November 11 she became a citizen in the supreme co -- federal court, right here. I became active in the Jewish organization [indecipherable]. I became one time friend -- a neighbor said, "I would like you to come to see a group. We are meeting every week, you might find it interesting." I was, you know, very much aware of my accent. I got a job here as an office manager, but still -- my accent's still heavy, the way it is now. This was, you know, 1953. So, he took me in an-and they used to meet in the Congregational church, Woodfras Congregational Church, in the basement. And I come in there and the -- the group didn't tell me what is -- what they do and what is -- it's, "Come in, you -- you'll

like it." Boucher was his name, Frenchman. So I come in there and it is a group of Toastmasters International, a group that learns public speaking, yeah. And this exactly what I needed, because I was -- I'm -- I am by nature very bashful. Sometimes doesn't show so much, but I am. And -- And I am very much aware of my accent, which I lost -- this I lost afterward. Not the accent, but being -- being, you know, considering an impediment, yeah. It is not. I -- I learned that if you have to say something, people listen, even if you speak with an accent. So, I belong to this group and all of a sudden, when I made my first -- you have to, after a few weeks, you make your so called icebreaker speech and I told them what my story, I came to this country -- I still have it. And they -- they applauded, so it was great. And then I became active in the many other Jewish organizations. Jewish federation, Jewish Home for the Aged. I became, after -- at age 50, I quit my job and I started -- open my own office for the practice of public accounting. And I developed a very nice practice, people liked me, I did well. A few years ago, well, it's long -- le -- it's the nin -- 90 -- 1990, Rochelle and I and Senator Mitchell and Senator Cohen were honored. She told you -- I think she showed you this, this thing there.

Q: No, she didn't.

A: No. There is three of these in the state of Maine. One, Senator C -- Mitchell and one Senator Cohen and Rochelle and roch -- and Jerry Slivka.

Q: And this is a -- this trophy in the middle?

A: From the Jewish community, yeah, Jewish community for work with immigrants -- work with immi -- so, this was the largest gathering of Jews in the sta -- in the history of Portland, over 600 people there. [indecipherable] an evening. So, this is another achievement I think which we are very proud of.

Q: And this was something you -- the immigrant work was something that you happened into because of your language ability?

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: And -- But it took ha -- ha -- that -- then it evolved from there, I imagine to where you were very --

A: Oh, well there a lot of work there. I knew what it means to be an immigrant. I felt for them, I knew and I understood them. I -- I know what they are talking about, see? And not only my -- Rochelle did a lot of work. We had -- We organized once a marriage for three couples, a mass marriage in the Temple. The rabbi, everything. Three couples. I made a Bar Mitzvah for a boy. Organized a dinner for a hundred, 125 people, lunch. I taught them to read Hebrew, then I send them to the girl to teach them to chant. It didn't wor -- they -- they have nothing to do with -- with the Portland -- Jewish institutions here. The same people. I even had a funeral -- had to get -- you know, talk to the professionals in charge. There was no money to buy the gr -- for the grave, for the ceremony, for the casket and -- so there was a lot of work. I am -- Now I am an honorary member of the -- life honorary member of the Jewish Federation. I am life honorary member of the Jewish

-- used to be the Jewish home for the aged, now it's called Cedar's. And now -- now I work mostly with the Holocaust Human Rights Center of Maine.

Q: Which you helped --

A: Found.

Q: To found. Will you say something about that? How is your --

A: It is a very interesting organization. You know, it's a state that has not too many Jews. I remember when we came in the beginning, and th-the Yom HaShoah, Day of Remembrance came and we used to sit like mourners, real mourners. Nobody paid any attention. You didn't read about it, you didn't hear about it. Some congregations in Boston used to have a -- a memorial, you know. But Portland, nothing. Not in the synagogue, even to this day, nothing. A-And I figured, we have to do something about it. Gerda called me up, Gerda Haas. First of all, we went to Bangor, there was a theological seminary in there, non-Jewish, that wanted to have some kind -- it didn't work out. So then one day she calls me, we having the -- Bates co -- Walden College had the seminar on the Holocaust, which she organized with some other professors from Walden and other colleges, and --

Q: Wha -- Arou-Around when is this?

A: Hm?

Q: Around when is this?

A: This was a four -- about 14 years ago. We are celebrating Bar Mitzvah last -- last year, it's almost 14 years. And there are some non-Jewish people and some Jewish people and

we all going to dif -- no budget. There was no money. We operate for about two years, we run out of money and we needed -- we had an executive director, she paid very little, but we didn't have a -- so we borrowed from a bank and we gave our per-personal signatures. You know, th-then we started raising more money. We have now budget -- not much, but for a state like Maine, 100,000 dollars, we pay 40,000 for a executive director, who does all the work. And we have our annual meeting, to which we bring a speaker. I established a little fund. Rochelle used to speak in schools and I used to speak and -- and the honorarium we get goes to this fund. And [indecipherable] 10,00 dollars, now the income from it pays for speakers once a year. We have a trip to Poland every two years, for teachers. We have two teachers seminars every year and Bates college used to have one upstate. This year was the first year we had only one, cause there were not enough. And we're [indecipherable]. We designed curriculum for kindergarten to fifth grade -- through fourth grade, I think. And then to eighth grade. And now they're ta -- eight to 12. We're talking about -- curriculum for eight to 12, which includes -- it's literature based curriculum. Also includes Maine specific problems like the French minority in Maine and now other minority, we participate in fighting prejudice and the same time we tried to rid ourselves of prejudice. A few weeks ago, they dabbed the swastikas on the synagogue, Presque Isle, where there's probably 10 Jews. And just the day before Yom Kippur. Swastika with a -- said, "Burn Jews." They didn't -- still didn't catch. Then there was, in another church, another town not far upstate, no Jews there. And they're -- And this -- and they -- this vandalant, they caught two kids that

vandalized, you know, the piano and chairs and equipment in a church, mind you. An- And --

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: Tape two, side B of an interview with Jerry Slivka.

A: What was I talking about, the --

Q: Just -- Just mentioning the -- the church that was vandalized in Presque Isle.

A: Yeah, in -- just a few weeks ago.

Q: Yeah.

A: We did a lot of work against -- we had a ca -- a law -- we had a law, you know, the ho-homosexuals and the -- discrimination against homosexuals and lesbians, which when th-the -- the main religious right ga -- organized the -- a what do you call it? Referendum, and they voided that law. Trying some other way to get it, maybe a federal law or something. But we did a lot of good work. We meet once a month. I'm the treasurer of it as of now. We're going away next -- in a few weeks, I'll -- but we -- I have a fax and I have a telephone, I have a e-mail now, so we -- I can do the work from there. We have an assist-assistant so she'll sign the checks here, if necessary, and I think we are doing great work.

Q: Can you tell me about when you first came to Maine, the atmosphere and the general level of understanding that you encountered in the Jewish community and outside, as far

as understanding the Holocaust and how that has changed or not changed since the establishment of Human Rights Center and since your work here?

A: Well, the Human Rights Center is a great influence in -- in Portland. Not so much among the Jewish population, I -- yeah -- it did -- we have a lot of Jewish members, no -- we -- membership is part of our budget. And we have a lot of -- and especially when we have the annual meeting. We pur -- we have about 150 - 200 people come and quite a few Jews. But the interest among the schools, young people mostly, is the non-Jewish schools. Rochelle goes to quite a few schools to speak, I go with her. Sometimes, when I see she is tired, I will try to answer some questions, cause sometime they'll ask questions which she doesn't know and I will do. Sometimes I speak on subjects of resistance, which I know from second hand, but still I know it, cause my brother was there. So I know quite a b-bit about it. Th-They -- Our presence is felt. Our presence is felt now in the state of Maine. As far as Maine, how did we integrate into Maine life when we came to Maine, I think sh --Rochelle told you, sh-she -- she had a hard time, very difficult time. I worked -- I was busy and I worked many hours. My job was seven days and -- and -- and two evenings. Six days. Six days and two evenings I used to work. And then I started building my own practice, doing some tax returns and the other -- the other five evenings, and Sundays. So, it was difficult. But I was too busy. She had a child, we didn't have a car, we didn't have a television. We used to sit and listen to the radio, Fibber Magee, Molly, probably not aware what it is. Was a very popular, you know, sitcom without TV, radio. A year later we got the radio and we got a car, we made some friends. Portland --

not just Portland, all of Maine, Jewish and non-Jewish societies, they were closed, kind of, you know. If you were from away, you were not born here, regardless how long you lived, you were -- you were a stranger, yeah. What do they know? Now, the thing has changed, because there a lot of people -- there a lot of newcomers and the Jewish community -- the leadership of the Jewish community are newcomers. At that time, when I was a director of the federation board, I was probably the only away fa -- persons. Now there are a lot of people, away. So, it doesn't -- you don't need the local, you know, little niche, you know, with the -- they had to join. You can find some people, you know, in your situation, which is -- which is mu-much, much better. But this was, you know, it was -- it was a provincial town. It isn't now.

Q: Did you experience any discrimination?

A: As a Jew? No, not at all. It ne -- It never ca -- came t -- I never -- never had to put to -- needed to. I -- Pro-Probably existed. It existed -- I know it existed in the clubs. We lived across the street from Woodfras Club, our first place. And Woodfras Club didn't have any Jewish members til the 60's, when they started, you know, fighting discrimination. What helped? They to -- They didn't give them -- for discrimin -- the state passed a law -- the organization that discriminate cannot get a liquor license. And this was a great deal -- without a liquor license. The same happened w-with Woodfras Club, the same a -- ha -- with the Elks Club, the same act with Cumberland Club, va -- ga -- Cumberland -- Cumberland Country Club, you know, with the golf course. Now there are -- people are fighting for Jewish membership, to get Jewish members in there. Jews

are good to -- fundraisers, you know, Jews can -- can contribute a lot, see? So now there are Jewish regis -- and the -- in the Portl -- Portland cun -- Cumberland Country Club, which is in Portland. Things that never expected. There was a -- a -- that town here, Poland Springs, beautiful town on a hill, and this will be the -- beautiful hotels there and -- and the sign was no dukes -- dogs or Jews welcome. So what happened, a bos -- Boston Jew ca -- bought it. Of course it -- it wa -- out -- it's out of business now, the motel down there. But, they start accept -- there's no problem now.

Q: When you started to make friends in the Portland area, who did you make friends with and how did that [indecipherable]

A: Well, the fir -- the first one was newcomers. We had some friends, survivors. Not all of them were likable. Not all -- Not all of them were favorite friends, but we had something in common, at least. But then we kind of drifted apart. We found people on our level. Doesn't mean that their level was lower than ours, but you found many -- th- the -- the good thing was about it, that people were seeking us out, you know, to -- as friends, which was great, much better than when you -- you are asked to be a -- not -- you're asked, you don't have to be a gi -- you know, people -- by the language, you know, determines, shows that somebody wants you as a friend. So, most of our friends are not -- well, there -- there aren't many left. There aren't any, practically, survivors. There's one or two survivors that we know, we keep in touch, but that's about it.

Q: Are -- Do you find friendships with survivors to be different in -- in [indecipherable]

A: No, now it -- it's in deft, they all changed. They all changed, some for the worse, some for the better. But we don't have to choose friend because of our common past. There plenty people we find -- we -- we have a friend now that doesn't understand what it means to be a survivor. Sh-She's look -- she ca -- sits right here and she looks at this and we know -- sh-she knows Rochelle is talking to her about the Holocaust and she says, "Th-This crystal, that's your mother leave you." It's not so funny, but it's [indecipherable]. Your mother left. We da -- we don't know what to give it to. Nobody wants to get that one. But we made -- we made our mark here on this town.

Q: Did you talk a-about your past? Have you always talked and have you always been able to remember?

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Have to. If there were listeners, we were ready to talk. Not for t -- not for our satisfaction, to teach, only. Just -- Just to let -- we are trying to make people aware what can happen if there is hatred, what can happen when there is intolerance. And that's where it's not easy, not easy. I can see how -- she talk -- she can be very tough. She wa -- I start talking and all of a sudden I break down, because see now, where -- even when I tas -- it comes through, certain things, certain happenings, I -- I have to control myself, very -- it's very difficult to control, not to -- stop the com -- breakdown. She doesn't have this problem. Sh-She used to -- She used to smoke, so when she used to speak before a school and get out afterwards, first thing, she'll take a cigarette. Now she doesn't. She had an angina attack and I convinced her not to smoke. It wasn't easy, cause she thought she cannot go to the bathroom without the cigarette. That's a necessities. I --

I says, “Try this time, try this time.” Slowly, gradually, she stopped smo -- she doesn’t smoke much anyway. I used to smoke a lot, but I gave it up. I -- I -- I also loved to take a drink, too, you know, in the Soviet Union, everybody drinks. And if you were -- if I were in the Soviet Union, I wouldn’t be alive by now, I’m sure, from the cigarettes and the drinking, I would be kaput. But I knew -- I needed a drink to -- being to express myself. Not much, just a little. I don’t need it now, I can do it. I needed a cigarette to calm my nerves. At that time, it had another purpose, i-it helped not to feel the hunger pains. You take a deep puff and you feel it right here, almost in the stomach. But now, I don’t need it. There were many mistakes we made. She had problems when we came and all of a sudden she finds herself in a strange town, without friends, with a little girl, confined. She was young. So she got depression, you know, from the past and all this. And the doctor made a mistake, he did not involve me. He did agree -- he treated her with, you know, a general practitioner, he treated her with pills to keep her, but we -- we should have -- as -- talked to me and talk us together and try to solve the problems we had. We didn’t. That’s a mistake we made. She never learned to talk to me. She can talk to an audience, but not to me, about herself. Talks about what happened to her during the Holocaust, but problems that we have, which hu-human beings do, regardless how much you might love or not love, it’s -- is -- they have problems and he -- that didn’t -- I didn’t realize -- she takes pills, it’s -- it’s all. We didn’t know how to relate our kids. We didn’t do badly. I think we brought up good kids. But, I wish I would known 40 years ago what I know now. We could have done better. But, there’s no limit.

Q: What did -- What do you know now, that you didn't know then, that would have been --

A: Well, re-relationships. Relationship between husband and wife or a father and -- and daughter. We have a daughter who is overweight and we didn't know how to stop her. Something was bothering, you know, you know, and we didn't know what. She's -- grew up to be a wonderful human being. She's a teacher. She has her Master's in education. Parents used to come when she used to teach class -- now, she does teach reading, you know, she has sev-several school -- used to come with -- they had once -- one kid, the sibling grew up to -- they came to the school, ask her to put her i-in Harriet's class. Is excellent teacher. Perhaps I could have done something about it. Perhaps I did something wrong, which I shouldn't have done. I have my doubts. I don't know, I don't know. People think she's the greatest person in the world. She weighs probably 200 pounds, which is unhealthy. And every time we see her, I -- we don't talk about it. I wrote her a letter a couple years ago, explaining to her how I feel. I cannot -- I can better express myself when I write. And I just asked her, "Do you -- Did you see my letter?" "Yes," she said. "Are you going to answer?" "Someday." Now, of course, she's a woman in her 40's. She's not -- she's not a kid I can tell what to do. But, we could have made our lifes a little easier, perhaps, I don't know. But oh, there's so much [indecipherable]

Q: Okay. All right. It's now October the 23rd, 1998, and we are continuing the interview with Jerry Slivka. And if -- I was thinking we could go back a little. We didn't discuss so much yesterday about the period right after you had arrived in the United States and your

-- and your journey to the US, and we discussed it only very briefly in your videotaped interview. So why don't we start with your journey here, and talk about --

A: [indecipherable] arrived in the United States --

Q: Yes, and -- and your trip from. Where did you leave from, what was the -- what was the atmosphere on the ship?

A: Well, I was in the -- I came here directly from Italy, where I stayed in a DP camp. From 1946, about -- the fall of 1946. I told you about my brother, my brother was there right before, couple years. And I came to Austria, by the underground -- it was called the Bricha -- on the way to Israel [indecipherable] with my kibbutz. And when I came to Italy, there was a telegram waiting for me at the Joint Distribution Committee, the Jewish relief organization, which had my name with that telegram from my brother, with -- and his address where he is, in which camp. So I -- he -- I got it right away, I was very much amazed, this was very efficient of them to do that. And I got in touch right away with my brother and then some of his friends, we used to do some business, traveling all over Italy, you know, buying sa -- u-used clothing, mostly, and selling it on the open air markets and they took me with them -- with me -- they took me with them. And I came to a town called Santa Maria deBarny in the Necce -- Lecce province, near Bari. It was in south -- south -- on the -- I forgot the name of -- of which one is the Adriatic and which one is the -- the other sea.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: No.

Q: [indecipherable] on the east, on the west coast is the Adriatic.

A: Adriatic. This is the -- This is the west coast. The east coast is -- The east coast is Rome. Naples, the east coast is the -- and this is the west coast, is right there. And we stayed there in villas, these were villas -- the rich people, they used to have, you know, recreation homes, there was summer homes and winter homes, probably winter homes. And -- But they were very bad shape now, for several years, nothing was done there, but it was still beautiful villas. And so we stayed there for a few months and then the owners of the villas wanted to get their villas back, so they moved us to a place near Bari, a camp that was used -- it was a -- this was a Italian military camp before the war and during the war, the ge -- the Fascists kept their internees -- Jews from Germany and from Yugoslavia, were interned there. Luckily, they didn't get to them and quite a few of them survived, see? So a long barracks, without ceilings in the rooms, just the -- like a -- a roof and the -- with cubicles where you lived, you know, two, three families in a -- in a little cubicle about the size of this room here. We lived with -- in a house, like the administration was before, which was a similar kind of a room and there were again, four families. There was a couple, friend of mine, with his wife, lived in one. The partitions were with blankets, there were no -- no permanent walls there. They were in one corner, my brother and wife was another corner and there was a third couple in the third corner and a fourth couple in the fourth corner. The -- One of the couples was a Yugoslavian rabbi, which was a [indecipherable] not the kind of rabbis I knew that, you know, spoke Yiddish and -- they spoke Ladino, which is a Jewish language of Sephardic Jews. But we

realized all of a sudden, there are some common words there and this was the Hebrew th-that was mixed in with Yiddish and with this Ladino, very interest -- very interesting couple. And we stayed there. This camp was for people mostly who wanted to go to America. They had -- most of them had relatives in America. They were get in touch with them and they already -- some of them in possession of affidavits from their relatives in -- but it was impossible to come, b-because most of us were Polish born, the Polish quota was -- even though I was cha -- as I was born, it was Russia, the Russia quota wa-was empty, so the -- I finally got in in the Russian quota, but my brother couldn't, they changed it to a German quota. Anyway, a lot of people changed their place of birth in Europe, just to get in. But still, I waited from 1946, until 1948, two years. We did nothing there. I did not go back to my kibbutz, I -- I -- I -- I had in my mind to take my brother, join back -- rejoin my kibbutz with him and then go to Israel. But within a few months, they left on illegal boat. You probably heard about the illegal Alliasa [indecipherable] you know, people who -- the -- the -- the Jewish agency and other Jewish organizations bought some boats that were not really seaworthy, but loaded them with -- tried to get past the -- the British pra -- blo-Blockade, to get them into Palestine. Well, I didn't go, my brother go -- already had papers from relatives. We found our relatives in America, Boston. And he -- he -- As a matter of fact, he put an ad to the paper, to the Jewish organizations and the -- there wa -- in the Jewish paper, in New York, Yiddish, looking for his uncle, whose name was Decter. Decter -- the C is pronounced in Polish like a Z, so it sounded Dezter. His name was Deecter, actually, but they changed it here to Decter,

a complicated affair. But he put it in the -- in the New York -- the Jewish Forwards, which still being published now, it's a weekly, that Rupert and so, so and so's [indecipherable] Slivka is looking for his relatives in the name of David Decter. And he assumed that mo -- that most of the Jews lived in Brooklyn, see, who lived in Brooklyn, Ne-New York. Course, he didn't know, it so happened he lives in Rhode Island. But my an -- aunt used to read the Yiddish paper and she found this name and through another, got in touch, It was -- It was this -- It was this -- Our uncle in Rhode Island, who [indecipherable], and that's how he got in touch with her. And then we had some relatives in Worcester, we had some relatives in Boston, and in Brighton. So he got already papers. I didn't, but the minute I came, he tried to convince me that we should go to America, not to Israel, because it's -- he had enough war, so did I. He had -- He was in the partisan all through the war. So, he says, "Let American Jew go fight, for I have enough fighting." And we decided not to part and I gave in and we decided we will go to America. But, we waited about two years. Finally, 1948, in June 19, I arrived in this country.

Q: Before you go onto that, what di -- what were you doing during those two years? You were staying in the camp [indecipherable]

A: I think -- I -- My brother had a job in the local -- they call it a canteen, it was like a co-op store that used to sell some groceries, fruits, you know for the inhabitants of the camp. And some had some, but not too much. They used to get the [indecipherable]. Then I did the bookkeeping for them [indecipherable] a little that -- knew a little bit about

bookkeeping, so prepared statements for them every month and -- and we -- and then other -- we used to go every week to buy stuff, we used to go to the -- Taranto, it's at the -- the -- the tip -- the -- of the boot, of the boot, you know, the ma -- imagine [indecipherable] boot about here, [indecipherable] peninsula, right near Sicily. Used to go buy their fruit and vegetables and some other things that people might buy. And a lot of people --they used to have a truck to their disposal, you know, to bring the stuff and a lot of people used to do business, used to sneak into the truck, it's a big, white there -- th- they didn't have room to -- to load their stuff, because people had their merchandise an- and how do you accuse people -- not let -- they make a living this way. But, we were not great businessmen, so he and I did not do any -- any business. So, it was black market things, you know, just to try to get along somehow. It was -- we -- it took some lessons, some less -- the -- in Italian or in English. I didn't take right away, I wasted time. It was not -- I don't know, the mood was not to study, it was kind of subdued. We didn't know we'll be -- we'll be able to get out, what we going to know, so the time flew by. We were fed twice a day [indecipherable]. No, once a day we used to get lunch and then they gave us produce products to prepare for ourselves a breakfast, you know, coffee and what else and bread. We used to stand in line and get -- we didn't have the utilities, we didn't have the -- any cutlery. So we used -- we used cans from margarine, which was just enough to get some soup in it, and was unbelievable life.

Q: Who was running the camp?

A: This was the UNRRA, United Nations Rehabilitation. Lasted during distribution. The Jewish camps were around during -- during distribution, subsidized by the UNRRA.

Q: So was this an all Jewish camp?

A: No, this one was not. This was Jewish and there were a lot of Yugoslav non-Jews. Serbs -- mostly Serbs, they fought among themselves, Serbs and Croats and -- and Greeks, all -- all stateless, all refugees who were waiting to get to some new country [indecipherable]

Q: Were these groups mixed? Did you mix at all with the other --

A: Very little, very little. We didn't speak each other's language, but we tried to get along somehow. Sometimes there was, I mean, friction. There was more friction among the Croats and the -- and the Serbs than among Jews and Yugoslavs. So, but we got along somehow. We got the sh -- same rations. Of course we -- we used to get more rations from the Joint Distribution Committee, which took care of the Jewish refugees and then they had some other church groups that did help support them. It was a community -- a funny community, all different languages, different nationalities. Everybody waiting for that piece paper -- visa to go to -- to America mostly. And some went to Australia with [indecipherable]. Some went to Canada. But for Jews it was very difficult. [indecipherable] Canada [indecipherable] Jews and so did the United States, but finally there was a -- Truman introduced a law into Congress and they -- to let in all refugees of the second war. So, finally everybody who wanted to come, did come, unless they could prove that they're Nazi. The question were -- we -- we had to go to CIA and they ask

you, “Were you a prostitute, were you a Communist, were you a -- a Nazi, were you a Fascist?” N-Nobody, of course would sa -- tell that he was, but -- and then we had to go through a medical examination, if you’re healthy. And they checked your documents out, genuine or not. But two years was a very miserable life there. But we -- we organized -- tried to organize wha -- there were -- there were some children, very few, but there was some children and there was a school, a Jewish school. [indecipherable] didn’t have it. Was a Jewish school. We had a library, Jewish and English -- not Jewi -- Yiddish and Hebrew books and some English books were located in it. I learned a little -- little bit -- very, very, little English, some Italian, you know, to get along when I went to town. We were -- I remember once going to the opera in -- in Bari, which was quite an event. And -- But, was a miserable life. Not enough food, there was food, but nothing like -- too good. So, then I came in 1948, June 19th. It was a Saturday. It was a cloudy day, but I could see the Statue of Liberty. I -- I also -- I told you before that I enjoyed the -- the cro --

End of Tape Two, Side B

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: Tape number three, side A, of an interview with Jerry Slivka. So, you were saying about the Toastmasters?

A: Yeah, when I made my speech, the so-called icebreaking speech, is bi -- fi-first speech you make is to introduce yourself to the group. I -- I entitled it the -- "I'm an American by Choice," and I spoke about my arrival to this -- to the United States here. I stood there on the deck bec -- i-it was a ship, I think it was called the Marine Perch. It was a converted troop ship, so we slept -- there were no -- i-i-in the -- the bowels of the ship in -- on hammocks, like the sailors used to sleep. We were women separately, men separately. And I came with a cousin of mine, from Naples, who was -- he came from Thriamaca, the town where I was born, I told you about, he died later, in Washington, DC. And the -- the minute we came on this ship, they served supper, and I was amazed at the -- the co -- quantity of food. And -- And most, of course, the ship were Italians. This was before the -- the law -- the law was already passed about mat -- matbegin, but I came as a regular immigrant, for which I paid. It was paid passen -- you had to pay for -- my -- my aunt sent me the money and the boat -- I don't remember what it cost -- it cost about 300 dollars that time. Was -- Was a lot of money. And the -- the Italian people stood on the deck in Naples and you know, it was a three -- three story, three decks. Not a big ship, but there was a quite a few people there and they were throwing slices of bread to their relatives, so th-they -- th-the situation -- the [indecipherable] situation apparently was very bad after the war. This was already two years after the war, was still -- was still

occupied. So -- And I -- We had tables for 10, we were assigned a table and after a few days, [indecipherable], we got to the Mediterranean, it cuts across from the Gibraltar, becomes stormy and people got sick. But I -- I -- There were days when I was all alone at the table. I used to take some oranges to take to my friend and we made a few more other friends, a few more that came from the camps, we met on the ship there, half a dozen people. Yo-You know, we had something in common to talk about, we spoke the same language. But there were there days when I was all by myself, and the waiter says -- urged me to eat. He told me to [indecipherable], and I did. I was always hungry, I could eat a lot at that time. And I --

Q: Did you get sick?

A: Not at -- Not today, I -- the last few days, I got a little bit dizzy-like, you know, when we -- the -- the -- it was not too la-large a ship, it didn't have stabilize-stabilizers in, like we have now. So, it went up and down, up and down and ma -- so [indecipherable] my hat, you know, but I did not throw up, I did -- and I did not lose my appetite. I could eat all the time. When I came, we stood and we went through Halifax, it took about two weeks, a long time. We stopped at Halifax and then we came in to New York. My cousin came to pick me up, but it took some time before the -- we had to go to Custom, but the Custom didn't take long, we -- I didn't have much, a little suitcase with a change of underwear, that's all. And I was standing there, I was thinking about the Statue of Liberty. I -- I knew about it and I knew about the inscription, which was by a Jewish girl, Emma -- Emma -- Emma Lazarus. Give me your tired, you know, your poor and that -- I

-- I still get a little bit emotional about it and I was thinking, “Wh-What’ll happen to me?” I don’t -- I -- I -- I didn’t have any trade or profession. I didn’t know the language except for a few -- a few sentences, probably. And I wondered what -- what -- what’s going to happen. And then I came down and I met my cousin, he was holding a picture and he thought [indecipherable] pictures, well, see, I didn’t look like my picture, because the picture would look too beautiful. I was not as hand -- handsome as he thought I was from the picture. And he took me to a friend of his, because he -- he had the -- his father-in-law lived with them, his wife’s father, who was a observant Jew. They were observant also, but not as -- as strict. And we didn’t -- couldn’t come in and it was Saturday, Shabbat, cannot -- [indecipherable] travel. So we waited til sundown and we took a train to Boston, and came in and when we came to Boston, we -- Back Bays -- it was Back Bay station. And we came Commonwealth Avenue, it’s a major thoroughfare in Boston and I saw a lot of cars and I thought was a -- it was a demonstration or a -- what do you call it, a -- well, like a -- like a holiday, you know? There were, you know, a lot of cars, I’ve never seen this many cars in my life, even, in Naples or Rome, were no-not this many. They lived just off Brighton Ave. We took -- We took a cab. And we came in there and there was their family, my -- my cousin’s wife’s family. They have a large family. My cousin didn’t have such a bi-big -- only my aunt and he had two sisters. They lived in -- one lived in Worcester, one in Woonsocket, Rhode Island. They lived around Boston area and they all came to meet me. Th-They were somewhat disappointed. They were very observant, religious Jews and they expected somebody with a beard, you

know, ear locks, and this was not it. And they knew -- they knew my parents. They were about the age of my parents, some of them. They may -- And they knew us from home, so -- then I got, I told you, I got the -- through them, I got the jo -- some of them lived in Chelsea and I got the job in the Hebrew school. That la-lasted a couple of weeks. Then I went to Woonsocket and got the job in the Woolweist company, helper on a truck. This was -- I work -- I made union wages. I joined the union right away, a dollar five an hour. And they took me into a store and bought a suit, you know, on installments, paid 50 cents a week or a dollar a week. Life was good, I stayed with my aunt. She lived with her daughter. Her name was Decter -- Anna Decter. My uncle was dead already. She died a few years later from cancer. She was my -- my father's sister.

Q: Where was your brother?

A: My brother was still in Italy. E-Even though he got his papers before, I got the visa first. So I came in June, and the minute I start working, I se-sent him money. And -- And he came in December, same year. And we both were -- h-he joined me. I -- I went to pick him up at the -- he also came by boat, but this was a luxury ship, a Italian luxury ship, and -- forgot the name of it. And again, we went to school, there was Americanization classes in Woonsocket, Rhode Island. I was this teacher's star pupil. Name of MacIntosh, a -- a Scotsman -- Scotsman. And we had -- I already had enough vocabulary so that I could talk to him and most of the class were Ukrainian women who lived -- who came before the war, but they never learned English. Now, they have to become citizen of the -- Social Security started and they had to become citizens, so they had to take the same

Americanization classes. But they -- they didn't know the language. They spoke Ukrainian, which I understood. There was a Pole, one Pole who had difficult, very difficult -- it's very difficult to [indecipherable] the English language. I -- I got it very easily, so did my brother. He was -- Later, they had a show, you know, to celebrate the -- I think it was Armistice Day [inaudible] -- the melting pot. A co-concept that's not used now any more. No more melting pot. The [indecipherable] in style now. So, but I stayed up til February -- February 20 -- I never forget this day, it was later, on February 22nd. It was a -- not a -- it was the -- what holiday is February 22nd? Washington? February 22nd is a holiday, which was -- and Rhode Island was not -- it was [indecipherable] the -- I -- was a holiday in Massachusetts, but not in Rhode Island. What -- I can't -- can't think of the [inaudible]. So, I -- I -- I was stunned, I wa -- this was the greater disappointment I ever had. I already was settled and I want to go to -- I wanted to go to school, you know, take more courses there. And all of a sudden, I got a slip, I'm laid off. And -- And my brother got another job, also, another factory, very low, low paying jobs, and we lived with -- with our relatives. They have a big house. My aunt gave us her room. She used to -- the house where she lived, later on she gave it to her daughter, she was with her. But she had her own room and then this cousin had two dau -- two little girls. So my aunt slept in their room and they gave us her room, two of us slept there. And she cooked for us. She made sure, in the morning [indecipherable] I leave for work, that I have hot cereal. Very nice, this lady.

Q: Does your family talk together about the war? Di-Did you talk to your family about that?

A: Yes, she told them a-about. And at that time, when I started talking, I -- just like now, I -- I break down, co -- even more so. I just st-started crying. In -- In Russia, when I heard abou -- I -- I couldn't cry. I didn't cry til I come and I didn't -- no, til I met my brother mi -- when we met together, here. But he did not, I did. Now, he cries and -- you just mention and he -- he cannot control his emotions. But at that time, my aunt, who used to go -- she was a sick woman, she had hay fever -- fever. So, in the summer, at the end of the summer, she used to go to the White Mountains to spend a few weeks, to ease the pain of the pollen. But she stayed with us. My cousins went to a few weeks vacation. They went to Narragansett, Narragansett Beach. But she stayed with me and my brother. Oh, my brother came [inaudible]. She stayed with me, she cook -- and she used to put a plate of meat, with this -- and a loaf of bread and I used to clean it up in no time. I probably gained 30 pounds with her, within a few weeks. But I worked hard, so I would [indecipherable] some. But I did not observe any diet. loved to eat. It was many years in which I didn't have any decent, you know. So, then, when I lost my job fa -- in February, there was a -- a group -- and every town had a group, too, just -- the work that I did later on, i-in Portland -- there were some people who did it before, they used to help refugees find jobs, find unemployment, find apartments and so forth, because there were some had families and children. So, one took me over. H-He had an appointment to find a job for my brother, but my brother was already working on the job, so he took me. I needed a job

very badly. And so he took me to Boston, and I got the job in the suburb of Boston. From the da -- da -- da -- 42 dollars a week, in ra -- I got to 30 -- 30 -- 35 dollars, and I became a foreman already, I kn-knew enough English and I knew a little bit about the Woolweist business, you know, textile, cause I used to work textile before the war also, in Poland. So I became foreman. And then the Korean war started. So, this business started booming, textile. They had -- need uniforms for the army and so forth [indecipherable] did. We re-re-reprocess waste into new stuff. And in the meantime, the fellow that I worked for, who was -- he was the chairman of the Republican party in Rhode Island. And when Truman was elected [indecipherable], no sense in being in business, this is -- the -- the country is going to the dogs. He made enough money during the war, so he slodi -- sold out. But this fellow in Massachusetts just opened, he started buying stuff and sure enough, the Korean war started, he had warehouse full of stuff and the prices went up and price controls and -- and wage controls. He says he couldn't give me a raise, cause there's wage controls. But the higher pr-priced -- the higher paid employees, he could find, but he didn't. Anyway, I worked there for about three years, but I was -- in the meantime when I enrolled into Bentley College, which was called that time Bentley School of Accounting and Finance. And that all they taught us, accounting. So, it worked out all right. We get a little apartment, with my brother. And then my brother, who didn't want to go to fight for, you know, for independent Israel, came to United States and he was draft age -- it wasn't e-even his real age. They -- They used to think that if you're young as kids, easier to get in, so he changed his age. When he came he was drafted,

Korean war started. And they drafted and took him down. He spent a year in Korea. So, he did not avoid this -- this war. But the only good thing about it, he had, under the bill of rights, GI Bill of Rights, he could go to school and they paid the tuition. So he got the degree in -- a degree -- Associate degree in Engineering and a degree in Business Administration and when he graduated, he got a job in engineering. But then Boston, which is, you know, the scientific capital of, you know, state, all of a sudden there was no one with the -- war ended, the Korean war ended. It was elaborate -- called elaborate electronics [indecipherable] and he lost his job. So, they wanted to give him a job, transfer him, you know, to California or some -- midwest or -- and he -- he -- my sister-in-law, he meet um -- met a girl and he married her. So, she didn't want to leave Boston. She went to Hebrew college, just for the fun of it, she didn't [indecipherable] her here, she had a little kid and another one. So, she didn't want to leave Boston, so he decided run business of his own. He op -- ap -- opened a little sandwich shop, which is only -- two degrees, had a little sandwich -- but he made a good living, did all right. Took time. And I worked in this place for three years and then I met Rochelle and we got married. This is the boiler.

Q: Will you talk about how you met Rochelle?

A: Well, my sister-in-law and her aunt, both Auschwitz survivors, and they were in Germany, my brother's wife and her aunt who just died lately. I -- When I tell the story, I kid about and say she's never -- til this day she is mad at her stepm -- with her aunt

because she introduced us. [indecipherable] So, she invited us for dinner and it clicked, we had something in common. Lots in common. We decided to get married.

Q: What did you have in common?

A: Well, we have the same background, we both attended the same te -- kind of schools and we both speak Hebrew. And our education was similar and we both speak Yiddish and we both survivors. Of course she -- she survived in Nazi concentration camps and I was in Soviet camps. But we both lost our families, so we have a lot in common.

Q: Were you interested in getting married at that time?

A: Yeah, I was. I was ready to. I wasn't economically ready, but figure well, some way we'll sa -- get along. She worked. I was making about 65 dollars a week and she was making 30 dollars a week. But s-she -- I -- kidding, I -- I told her -- she got herself pregnant, see? She says, yeah, she got herself preg -- an-and she fell, she would go by the streetcar to work and she fell off, injured herself. But she went to doctors, she's pregnant, so she quit her job, she worked only a few weeks. But somehow we survived on -- on my salary. She never worked since. We -- We lived there for a year, in Boston. We had my bachelor apartment, one room studio apartment, a highrise, like. The bed that doubles into a -- so-sofa that doubles into a bed. And we had this table there [indecipherable] a gate-like table, it opens up to seat 12. We had party, had 12 people for dinner. There was a kitchenette and a bathroom, and we managed somehow. After a year, we took -- I graduated and I looked for a job and again, it was very difficult to get -- they used to start a junior in accounting at that time for half what I was getting my job. So finally, we -- we

went -- she had an uncle in Pittsfield, we went to visit them. He wa -- H-He died, but his widow and the kids were -- the son was there, his business, he wanted to go partner and I was not cut out to be this kind of business. But I was looking for an office job. So, nothing came of it. It was -- the [indecipherable], then we stopped in Portland, we went by train. We stopped in Portland, because she had an aunt here also. And her husband -- she was very lonely, she was a sick woman. Her husband was a doctor and he was overprotective. She didn't go out, she was sitting in the house, and -- and she was very -- she just fell in love with our little girl. We had a little girl, three months old. She said, "Why don't you move to Portland?" So jokingly, I say, "All right. Find me a job and we move to Portland." Came home and in two days she calls me, couple interviews. I came and I worked -- I got on this job of office manager for a large furniture store that had -- small chain, they had three stores. Did the bookkeeping and took care of the shipping and everything, except selling. Selling I never could do, never knew how. So, I worked for them for 13 years. And then same time, I built up -- I took in some tax work, it was evenings, I was working sec -- six days and two evenings, the store was open. And finally I said, I want to work only 40 hours. Because I got enough to do besides that. And then I gave them notice and I am trying to open my own office. So, luckily, the auditor -- our auditor died -- luckily, I feel -- it so happened, it was [indecipherable] feel bad, he was a nice man. And this -- this was my first substantial account, I took it over. Was, you know, tack -- it was -- he died just before he got to do audit -- to prepare the tax returns for the -- for the year. So, at age 50, I left a job, which paid a decent salary, to go on my

own. I didn't get along with the manager, the manager thought that I am after his job, which I never -- never intended to. Afterward, we became very good friends -- after I quit. And he died also and the -- the fellow I worked for was a very rich man by standards of 40 years ago --yeah, almost 40 -- and he -- he didn't have any children. So all his money that he left, went into a foundation -- a charitable foundation, he was a very charitable man. And I was appointed the trustee to this foundation. So until this day, I [indecipherable] enough, and it was a little less than a million now, so about a million and a half dollars. And we give away in between 80 and 100,000 dollars a year to charities, to local [indecipherable] of all, religious synagogue he belonged to -- he built a synagogue and a Hebrew day school. And then the Maine Medical Center, which used to be that time, the [inaudible] they used that -- wait a minute, now it's Maine Medical Center. And he [indecipherable] fund all the Jewish and non-Jewish. [indecipherable] be having a meeting next week, to meet with the supervisory board that has to approve our grants. We have no -- no -- we cannot -- all we can do, approve or not approve, but I mean, the power of the [indecipherable] is ours, myself and one more trustee, which I appointed. There was a -- a relative of his before, and he died, so I appoint another in the back of three trustees. Until this day, we give away a lot of money. Built the -- Now, they are fixing the cemetery where he is buried. We pledged them 50,000 dollars. And the Hebrew school, which was -- they're trying to revive, it doesn't work. Not enough parents, [indecipherable] but now this year, there's a lot of young people who want their ki-kids to have a Hebrew education, trying to revive this Hebrew day school, a school

which gives secular end religious education. And we gave them 45,000 dollars, too. A matching grant, they have to -- can raise another 45 to get the an educator and an organizer to try to get the school. So, this is another thing I'm busy with.

Q: Has --

A: What -- What I'm busy now is with the Holocaust Center.

Q: Ha-Has your work been, and your career been an important part of your life?

A: Very much so, certainly. I -- I always -- since I -- we came to Portland [indecipherable] couple of years when I -- before I settled -- after I settled, became known and I started working, I was appointed to the [indecipherable] board. So I have been active in every Jewish organization in town. And the one -- for a few years I was in the Toastmaster's International. I was treasurer -- always treasurer, never president. And -- So I was busy. The -- Then the immigrants start coming and the city need -- needed interpreters for several -- I -- I was registered, I told you yesterday, f-for -- I was interpreter of five languages. There's Hebrew, Yiddish, there's Russian, Ukrainian and Polish. I worked in all of them. I even -- I wo-worked with Czechs, I don't know Czech, but is similar to Polish, so -- and they didn't have anybody. Then I worked to some Bulgarians, was like Russian. Very similar to Russian. And then I worked with the group -- with the -- our sister city is Ar-Archangel, so we used -- exchanged immigrations every year and I used to work with them to go visit, to translate for them. They were very happy with me, they liked it, because they had -- I came in once and they had one -- one group, they were, I told you, tourist group. I worked with them. We have no problem. But

there's another group, I think it's fisheries. [indecipherable] the fishing industry. And there was a fellow sitting there -- he -- their interpreter, with two big dictionaries and he wanted to transfer some -- translate something, started looking up. So I very seldom had to look up a word. Now I -- I can -- can't remember, but 10 years ago, five years ago, I still could remember. And then I heard them say, "We were lucky, we got a very good interpreter [indecipherable]." So, the other group came over to me and asked me to try to do something, I says, "I -- I cannot mix in, you know. They -- You have your -- it wouldn't -- wouldn't be nice to, you know, try to mix in to somebody else's business," I says. Th-They had one Russian who spoke some English, so somehow they got along all right.

Q: And was this all volunteer work, your interpreting?

A: All volunteer, all volunteer. No pay -- used to do some quite often [indecipherable] pick you up [indecipherable] hospital or jail, police, immigration department. A lot of work. And got busy and Rochelle busy now, speaking with the schools, and I go with her. Sometimes I participate in her -- when they ask -- start asking questions. I'm a little older, so I remember what happened. How life was in Poland they want to know, she does not remember. [indecipherable]

Q: Do you speak about your experience?

A: Yeah. I -- I talk also about -- about resistance, because my brother told me a lot about -- it's a subject that's not known too well. Very -- Lately, they write something about. Was quite a few b -- few books written lately that are -- that seems --

End of Tape Three, Side A

Beginning Tape Three, Side B

Q: Tape three, side B, of an interview with Jerry Slivka.

A: And th-there were times when survivors did not want to speak. Now everybody writes books. Some are good, some are not so good. It's a -- It's a good thing. It's a -- So, to be on the -- it -- it will be a short time before all of us are gone, you know. I am 83. Some are a little younger and some a little older. So -- And every so often you hear -- some of our friends are gone, died. So, if there's nothing left, might be forgotten. And it shouldn't be forgotten. Because it's still happening, you know, th-the ethnic cleansing, what's going on in the former Yugoslavia and all over the world, not just there. And if we don't teach it to the future generations, this might repeat itself. But there's not compare -- it never happened, such a tragedy, you know, i-in Jewish history or in an-any oth -- any other history, where the -- a -- a -- pr -- people developed a -- designed a program to destroy another people, using all means available to them. For -- For using their technique, they're using their sophistication just to kill people. So it never happened before, and it ha -- we -- so -- so it -- it's incumbent upon us to see to it that it -- it doesn't happen again, to anybody. We try to do all we can to prevent it. So, I'm thinking maybe I'm doing a very good job, the Maine Holocaust [indecipherable]. But, by the way, we are on the internet. We have a page you can look it up.

Q: Will you say a little bit about your relationship with your brother, that's been an important --

A: Oh yes, w-we are friends -- the ca -- I wish all brothers would be so close, we're very close. I have a little problem with him, he's very generous. We come t -- go out to eat and we fight, who -- who going to pay -- pick up the check, th -- sa -- sa -- somehow I gave in with him. I have a problem now with him. I used to do his tax return. His and his kids. Of course, I never charged him for it, never dream of charging him. And now I got a co -- I got a computer. Last year, I did my -- my tax re -- did theirs by hand, an-and a friend of mine who had a computer did mine on computer. An-And it was a -- came out exactly -- so, I ga -- I do th -- there's also my -- my sister-in-law's aunt, who died a few months ago, and I did hers. And his daughter, ma -- my niece, has a computer. She -- She's a lawyer now, as a matter of fact, she works -- she has a job, she didn't want this, you know, rat race law profession, you work 24 hours a day, [indecipherable]. She wants a job where she can take her time, she can work out, you know, she's -- she's single, she's in her 30's, and she wants to enjoy life, and go on vacation. So, she got a job now with -- she jus -- she graduated -- you know, she -- for a few years she worked and then she went to law school, after college. So she just got -- a few years ago, she got her Maine -- New Hampshire, sh -- well, she clerked for a co -- for a judge in New Hampshire. So she got the New Hampshire -- she passed the New Hampshire Bar, Maine Bar and Massachusetts Bar. And she works now for a investment firm, Fidelity -- Fidelity Investment, you know, it's one of the largest in the world and she worked there, you know, in the law department. She was -- it was legal [indecipherable] legal. So she -- when I got the program, the program like this, cost me about 30 dollars. I -- I was -- I -- I was the first

accountant in Maine to use a -- to use a computer for tax returns, 30 years ago. I paid for a computer, 25,000 dollars. Now you buy it for 2,000. Besides the 25,000, I had to pay 5,000 for maintenance of the software, changing the tax -- enhancing the programs and so on. And five for the hardware. Something goes wrong, which it went a lot, now it -- now it's already no problem, but it was as big as -- twice the size of this table. And it made a noise like it was, you know, it had a -- the first printer was like the ball printer, the IBM typewriters had. Now, of course, you buy a computer for -- for 2,000 dollars, it has everything. And you buy a program, a tax program, which has 29 states beside the federal, for 30 dollars. And you don't even need forms, they -- it prints on plain paper. Rochelle used to come and to help me, she used to collate the forms and they were with -- with carbon. You'd get -- all of a sudden, you start mixing up, you know, [indecipherable] paper over the carbon, or the printout are wrong. So, anyway, she -- so, sh-she took her -- her aunts, you know, my -- my sister-in-law's aunt, she put her through -- from my handwritten, and put it through their computer. So I told them I'll get a computer myself, you know, not just [indecipherable] don't do much, just my family. Says I -- I'll get a computer and so, this coming year, I will print you out a computer on my computer, you won't have to -- so, he sends me a check for 3,000 dollars, to -- to pay for the computer. I said, "What do you have? I -- I don't want you to pay for my com --" We-Well, she died, the son died, she says, she would want you to have some of her money. I says, "I don't think it's [indecipherable] to leave it for your children." So I -- I couldn't -- couldn't help it, so I took the check, you know, I -- but I didn't deposit it. I

came home, I tore out the signature and I have it to keep. He calls me up, “I got my statement, didn’t get my check,” he says. “I’m going to write you a letter, the minute I can learn how to type.” I’m teaching my computer to read my dic -- you know, type my dictation, cause I -- I don’t -- I type [indecipherable] finger here. It’s very, very slow. I -- I use it for e-mail, you know, I still type. But I have to wait. Wh-When we go to Florida, we’ll have time to train the computer to recognize my voice and -- and type. So I have a difficult time with he -- with him. He’s very generous. And he -- I can -- I cannot fight with him. [indecipherable] is not a fighter, actually, but -- so I -- I have to write him a letter. Explain to him I don’t want any -- any money matters between us. W-We are very devoted to each other as we -- we -- we -- as much as we see -- we can see each other. We have problem [indecipherable] so -- so, when he comes here, because Rochelle makes -- usually she makes dinner and sometimes when we go out of course, I have a good excuse. You are my guest, so I pay. But he come there [indecipherable], he was in Florida and came to us for a week the first time, because her aunt used to be sick, she too- took care of her mo -- better than a daughter. Was very, very sick, she wa -- survived Auschwitz and Rochelle -- that’s how Rochelle met her. She went to see a friend of hers in the hospital and she met her own -- my -- my sister-in-law’s aunt. We became friends. So you can imagine, after the war, she was so sick that they carried her. She weighed about 50 pounds. Nobody expected she survived. But she survived, she married, couldn’t have any children. And he died, she’s -- was my age. She just died a few months ago. So, we are getting along fine.

Q: Where does he live? Where does your brother --

A: He lives in Boston, he's retired now. And so, he went to Israel in 1973, just couldn't acclimate himself there, couldn't get a job. Came back to -- the kids didn't like it.

Q: Did you continue to have interest in -- in going to Israel?

A: Who?

Q: You.

A: Well, I -- I thought to -- about it, but at that time I was 50 years old already and it was -- I'm glad I didn't, because [indecipherable] a hard time to get [indecipherable]. If I would have come there originally, just like anybody else, I would have adapted myself to this life. Now I couldn't. My daughter did, though. She -- I am amazed. When she left for Israel, we gave her six months. We thought, six months, she'll come back, because she lived very well, she had -- the first year in college, she was in a dorm, and then she got an apartment, with a few other girls. She come from a -- junior year, she had a car and then -- and the car was -- and when she used to call up and she says -- says to my wife, she said, "Let me talk to daddy," she knew what -- she need some money. So, after she graduated, she didn't know what -- so she wanted to go to a graduate school. She was considering either law or journalism. And then she decided she will go to Israel and see what's going on. They were looking for teachers and social workers -- English teachers. And she had a teaching certificate from Brandeis. That's all she had. And she went there, started teaching and she hated. For a year, she was in absorption center, learning the language. And she went to Brandeis, which is a Jewish college, which had the best

Judaica courses in the -- in the United States, and she didn't take a single one. Not the language, Hebrew, not a -- no Bible, no anything, nothing. And then she comes there and she gets a job and she says, "I wish I would listen to my father." Too late. But she speaks Hebrew now, fluently. She works with immigrants -- English speaking immigrants, mostly. And Israelis, with the -- she's a representative to the Ministry of the Interior in the town, in the city hall. So some maybe say a -- a passport, that's her job. Someone has a problem, you know, with the Ministry of the Interior, or immigrants, especially, especially, so-called Anglo-Saxon, you know, English speaking, which have a difficult time to learn Hebrew.

Q: So she took after you in the work that she does.

A: Yeah, yeah, she [inaudible]. A low salary, but she's [indecipherable] and she married a man who's Iranian, entirely different backgrounds, different -- but the family -- his family th-think that she is God, she -- that she -- she knows everything. They're very plain people, hardly speak Hebrew, but they have to get -- get along.

Q: Is he an Iranian Jew, or is he non-Jewish?

A: Iranian Jew.

Q: How have your feelings about religion changed over the years? Did you have a strong sense of faith before the Holocaust and did it change after the Holocaust?

A: I had -- Well, I was never religious, but I had religious background, I knew about religion, I knew the Bible backward and forward. And I learned it since I was three years old, I knew it. I always had a kind of a -- I don't know how to describe my relationship

with religion. It's -- It's -- Rochelle has a hate - love, mostly hate. We -- We have problem when I discuss it with her, I say, "All right, G-God, if he did do the Holocaust, you know, if G-God did the Holocaust, all right, I can understand your hating him. But at the same time, you agree that He exists. He or She or whatever It is. Because you cannot be -- be mad at something that doesn't exist, can you?" I partic -- I -- I was active here in every facet of Jewish life in Portland except religious institutions. I belonged to a Temple, but I was several times elected to the board, I did not accept it. I did not -- I was of the opinion, if you are a leader in a religious organization, you have to at least have set some example of -- of religious practice. And I could not do that. I consider religion -- Jewish religion as part of Jewish culture. It is in our past. Is there a God or isn't a God? I cannot determine. I -- I think by my philosophy, I'm agnostic. But I cannot deny -- that means I cannot deny there isn't one, nor can there is one. But, the-these tr -- the trappings of religion do exist in our culture. This ha -- This is part of our inheritance. We do go on high holidays. I go, when I have chance, practically every Saturday here, when I'm in Portland. And in Florida, there is a big synagogue and you don't just -- there -- you're not welcome, as a -- as a snowbird, w-we are snowbirds. That's people that stay for the season. They accept membership, you know, for a low fee. Membership are very high there, but for a low fee, for the few months you are there, but they -- you never get -- you-you're a second class member. So we -- I don't -- didn't join. Once in awhile we go, they had cultural events in the synagogue, shows and concerts, we go there. But that's about it. Again, to put it in a nutshell, religion is part of our inheritance. I don't think we

are ready to give it up yet. The idea would be, if there was one religion, one world religion, where they recognize one force, call it God, call it whatever you want to, a non-sectarian. Will it ever be? I don't know. The Soviet Union tried to suppress religion for 70 years and they did not succeed. It is strong, it's alive and people need it in their lives. I never prayed. If I do pray, I pray for national or global salvation. Peace. Very important to me. Never -- I never prayed God for myself, help me get a good job, or -- I don't think this power, which we call God, is designed for individual concern. I envy people that can have a personal religion. This is my God, I pray, you know, and He answers me. If they have it, more power to them. I cannot do that. I see, when I did the prayers, you know, that we say on the high holidays, it's poetry. The adulation of a power which we call God, see? I can't understand why do we have to bless God? This a power -- a omnipotent power that blesses us, right? So what -- what does my little blessing -- you know, we say a blessing, in Jewish life, there are lots of blessings, you know, that -- that 613, it's what? Commandments. We have -- whatever you do, you make a blessing. Blessed are thou, you know [indecipherable] brought forth from the soil. But you have to bring it yourself from the soil. Gives you th-the -- the tools of doing it, see? So, i-if it's a blessing, I have to ask for a blessing. So I don't think I'm more important a creature, as a ment, or any other creature. So, I have -- I -- I think I'm in that class by myself. I don't think anybody has the same -- everybody has his own -- his own belief, his own bi -- philosophy. I don't think -- I'm sure that others have their own, other kinds of philosophies or -- or beliefs, or whatever and they think that theirs is right. But I -- I would like to see if there's a

relationship -- if there has -- a religion has to exist, let there be one. We -- We consider ourselves the chosen people. Of course, they say we -- we were chosen to teach other peoples, but we taught enough -- yeah, we can taught enough. We -- Everybody knows the Christian Right knows the Bible backward and forward, you know, and they use it just for their needs, just what they want. They, you know, they quote. But the other thing, the good things are there, which they do not. So, until -- now, you see, you take the Muslim world. Religion is upswing in the Muslim, Jewish and Christian. The same even with India, which was a very tolerant -- you know, the Hindu, mostly Hindu, we'll talk about the -- what do you call it? Eastern religions --

Q: Buddhists?

A: Buddim -- Buddhism and the -- the Hindu I think was th-the most liberal one. They tolerated other religions. But they -- Now they -- they -- they developed atomic bomb into the Hindu bomb. The -- Pak-Pakistan developed a atomic bomb and it is the Muslim, Islamic bomb. So Israel will have a Jewish bomb and Russia has a Russian bomb and we start bringing in religion into politics. The greatest -- The greatest danger to the world is when we come on behalf, we c -- we represent God. [indecipherable] my God, you know. The Germans had on their buckles of the -- the belts, God metoons, God is with us. The Czars had the same thing in Russian, see? So, th-this is the -- the greatest danger is when religion -- when somebody thinks that he represents the right religion and the others -- oth-others do not. So, unless it is a -- a global religion, one that recognizes the right of man, human beings, man [indecipherable]. We have now a rabbi, a woman rabbi and they

go and hire a woman cantor. And some women don't like two women on the pulpit -- on the, you know, stage there. Women. What's the difference it make if you -- if you have the same rights, why not? They are -- They're more than 50 percent of population now are women. The most important people in my life are women. I have a wife. I have two daughters, I have three granddaughters and three grandsons. So I hope I -- I hope I -- y- you get the gist of what I am talking about, because I myself don't get it too clear.

Q: I have just one more question I think, and then if you want to add anything, but it -- do you think you can sum up, or explain something about how the -- your experiences living through the Holocaust in the wartime years ha-has affected your outlook on life?

A: Oh, it affected me greatly. I -- I -- I lived through unusual times, unusual periods of history. I lived -- Don't forget, I was born in a -- during the first World War, that's 83 years ago. There was no electricity in the town I lived, til the day I left it. There was one for -- in the flour mill, it had electricity just for the -- for the -- for one house in the -- the -- in the mill. And I came fr-from -- from the wagon, you know, horse and wagon -- horse and buggy, from the railroad -- from the -- the invention of electricity to space travel. They were all during my lifetime. Telephone, which I don't understand eve -- still, how it works, see -- was invented by the time why I was born. I am operating a computer and I can get into a network which has -- I'm trying to find one -- one subject, Yiddish, a language of a people which is gone, almost a dead language. It's trying to be revived by non-Jews studying it. And -- And there's 590 pages on the computer about Yiddish. There's thousands of thousands and thousands of pages about science an-and then things

which in my little laptop -- so, I am a product of a -- probably that covered a civilization which did not change from the fifte -- 1500's to the 2,000's. In the span of my lifetime, these things happened. I used to go from -- with the wagon of bu -- a horse and buggy from Povorsk, from my -- the town where they lived, to Koven, to buy merchandise, which is three -- 33 kilometers. Seven -- 16 miles, all night. Course, there were no paved roads, it was sand, it was very difficult to get there. I go now to Israel, 6,000 miles, in the same time, by plane. So, and -- and I still cannot digest it, I cannot understand it. And I find that the -- the human race is way ahead in it's technology, but way behind in it's conception of life, all together. I think, if you made this much progress, i-if you could have made this much progress in -- in our lifes with each other, the people's, countries, the systems, religions, if you could find a way to regulate our lifes to the same measuring stick as the technology went, we should be wonderful and be -- be able to get along fine. And it's getting worse. That's what bothers me. I am worried that my grandchildren will run out of food by the time they're grown up. And I know what it means being hungry. I wouldn't wish it on anybody. An-And the same time, you think -- yo-you don't see them, so you don't think of them, but the way I do think of it. There are millions of peop -- children every day, die from hunger -- starvation. Every day in the world. Some are worried that they got too many people being born. And the same time, the same people are dying every day. And -- And I -- I am worried about what -- what will happen, you know, with the developed countries and undeveloped countries. You can see now people coming into the United States, you cannot stop that. You know, from other cultures. But

not so much culture, they come from the next door, from Mexico, who cannot --no living there. And th-the world is getting so small. And -- And the -- the means of destruction are getting so awesome, that who knows what will happen? I am worried, worried. And I think something should be done. Course I [indecipherable] one person cannot do much. I wish I had the -- the gift of writing -- perhaps write a book about it, what -- what bothers me. But I don't -- This doesn't answer you question actually, does it? Your questions of what did I --

Q: It starts to. [indecipherable] H-How --

A: I -- I cannot give you an answer and I ca -- I -- I can -- I can raise a lot of questions on your question. But how to solve it, I don't know. There is sitting now a group of people in -- in -- in Washington, the same race, believers of one God. They have wa -- wa -- one prophet more than we have, see, and -- and they cannot get along. Similar [indecipherable], similar languages. Same race. Same race. And we can't find the way to -- to settle their differences. And again, is it because it's my God is -- is the true God and I -- the -- the -- there's a -- there's a -- a little mountain and -- and a hill in Jerusalem, where the Jewish Temple stood. And there are Jews that want to build another Temple. But we have been away from there a thousand years -- 2,000 years, and they built another sanctuary there. Why can't people live side by side? It -- It worries me a great deal. Now, of course, I have no -- I have no worries about making a living, even though I have nightmares. I have very strange nightmares. I -- I -- I -- I don't have -- I don't know where my next meal is coming from. I'm hungry and I haven't got a few dollars to buy

myself a loaf of bread. Which -- It happened during my lifetime. And I -- And I get up, you know, it wakes me up and I really thank God that I ha -- I have -- the refrigerator's full. And I have, you know, what to live on. And so that the -- the -- the -- the threat is gone. But I fall asleep and the same -- the same would continue.

End of Tape Three, Side B

Beginning of Tape Four, Side A

A: [indecipherable] convey [indecipherable] my feelings.

Q: Yeah, yeah, I understand.

A: [inaudible] Maybe I'm incoherent, but I am trying to -- to tell you what worries me about the world.

Q: It -- It makes -- It makes sense. I mean it's -- it's not anything that it -- that really makes -- that you can make sense of, but I think you're --

A: It's getting even more complicated.

Q: Do you have anything else you want to say?

A: Well, I think it was a good idea to interview us, or -- or other survivors, about the time from liberation, or our arrival in this country. It's very important, what you could make of yourself. Most of us did well, even though we had to pick up pieces and start from the beginning. New country, new language, new customs, new modes of behavior, everything's new. We stepped into it and somehow we did it. I think what the driving force behind it, it was kind of a rev-revenge. Revenge of Hitler. And -- And when I -- when I see my grandchildren, I feel it. It's -- I have two groups of grandchildren, growing up in different cultures. I'm trying to keep them together, I'm trying to -- to have them see each other as often as they can and to retain the relationship, even though they're different backgrounds and different ideas, trying to accomplish it. I hope they remember me for it. Now for my sake, it doesn't matter, when I am gone, that's it. But, I might be the common denominator for them. So --

Q: That's interesting to hear you say you think that a lot of the success of the survivors in the United States has been motivated by that.

A: Consciously or subconsciously, but it was a part of it. Could -- a lot -- we accomplished a lot -- some born Americans did -- could not accomplish, who had all the advantages of language and upbringing and education and we -- we did it. We did it, so -- well, the majority. There are a lot of people that are sick and poor among survivors. I hope they get the money from -- from sw -- from Switzerland now, so they can live their few -- their last few years in comfort. But there are some. But the majority I think did all right, economically. Some countries, [indecipherable] that. We didn't. We -- We worried about our children, we wanted them to be -- grow up as good human beings. I think, in a way, we succeeded. They -- Many think they couldn't understand us, see? They couldn't, but the older they get, the smarter we look to them. They finally realized that the-there was -- there was not wasted. Was not wasted, they know. And this is the most important -- the most important things in our lives are -- are the children and grandchildren. We hope they retain being Jewish, not because we are better than other people, but we are -- we are the endangered species. I would like it to survive. We contributed a lot to the world as Jews. So, let us exist as Jews. Again, not because we are better, I hope ev-every -- every people have -- can contribute something. That's why they got rid of, you know, this melting pot, it didn't work, even though, up to an extent it did work. But I think it's -- they -- it is a -- diversity is very important. Everybody can contribute something to life in the -- the -- America -- America itself is a concept that did not exist til -- til -- til

America. A country of immigrants. A country where everybody contributed something, good or bad, both. A country where th-the patriotism is not just religious like in theocracies which exist in this world. A country where you can love just for -- for being America. What -- For the freedom, for the opportunity. A lot to be done. A lot yet to be done. It worries me that the -- the Black belligerence, Farrakhan, the Muslim. Not -- Not because the -- ma -- Islam -- the nation of Islam, the Muslim religion. Fine, if they want to believe -- whatever they want to believe, but not to be the -- there's still a big problem for them to be integrated into this society, into the econ-conomy. Though, a lot of them did already. I hope they succeed more. Otherwise -- Otherwise, there will be a race war here. This'll be very dangerous.

Q: Were you following the -- that -- those issues closely, in the 60's, when the Civil Rights movement was happening and -- and the controversies --

A: Oh, sure.

Q: -- about segregation and integration?

A: Sure.

Q: What were your feelings about it?

A: Well, I -- I -- I -- I'm all for it. I'm all for it. I was -- I -- Many times I could not understand. Like, for instance, the Vietnamese war. The Vietnamese war. I was for victory in Vietnam, because of Communism. But this was entirely different, cause it's not Soviet Communism. It is a nationalism. They fought for -- They fought for the Vietnam, not for Communist [indecipherable], it was Vietnam they wanted. Their own -- Their

own tradition, their own -- th-the fact that -- what was his name, the leader of -- my memory's getting bad -- the founder of Vietnamese -- the North Vietnam [indecipherable] name. You know, the President of North Vietnam, he adopted Communism. But -- But the Communism, the -- the co -- Soviet Communism collapsed.-- such a strong dictatorship, it collapsed. So you see, you cannot rule by force alone. It's impossible. People have to love their country and to love the -- and this regime, that was not loved and it had to collapse. So, I had many, you know, misconceptions, but as far as Blacks are concerned or integration [indecipherable], this has to be -- has to be achieved. Has to be achieved.

Q: [inaudible]

A: No, I think -- I think I gave you my -- I -- I believe in America. I believe in the -- I think this is a society which will -- it is still being developed, not -- there are many, many bad things, which have to be straightened out. I hope we understand [indecipherable] because our leaders understand it. I hope all the generations younger than I am, you know, could -- we -- I think we on the right track. I think it ta-take some time. Hopefully it will be a -- it will be a -- some example -- exemplary society, America. We have the resources and we have the -- the -- the conditions. We have the historical conditions and we have the human condition, the k-kind of people we have now. And we have a great future, provided we don't spoil it ourselves. The most important thing is to integrate the Black population, which is 10 percent, that's a large percentage. Try to inter -- into the economy first. Later on, in the way of thinking, in the philosophy of this country, country

of minorities, cause there's no majority left. There's no single group in the United States that is a majority, except by religion, maybe. Chr-Christian, the Christian religion, because they will dominate -- but I mean, the split -- the split, you know, there's Catholics and Protestant. Many, many different kinds of [indecipherable]. An-And if they -- they succeed in think-thinking this is a Christian country or a Protestant country or a Catholic country, it'll be a big mistake. We are -- We have to create a new kind of patriotism. Patriotism for America, for -- for -- for human -- human beings, for human rights. And first of all, we have to fix our -- our own -- our own place here, our own country.

Q: Thank you very much. This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Jerry Slivka.

End of Tape Four, Side A

Conclusion of Interview