United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Lonia Mosak
June 11, 1999
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Lonia Mosak, conducted by Gary Covino on June 11, 1999 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Skokie, Illinois and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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

Interview with Lonia Mosak
June 11, 1999

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jeff and Toby Herr collection. This is an interview with Lonia Mosak, conducted by Gary Covino, on June 11th, 1999, in Skokie, Illinois. This is a follow up interview to a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum videotaped interview conducted with Lonia Mosak on July third, 1996. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum gratefully acknowledges Jeff and Toby Herr for making this interview possible. This is tape number one, side A. All right, let's just start -- let me just start by asking you to -- to say your name and where we are today.

Answer: Where we are today? We are here in Skokie. You want the address?

Q: Or just say that we're in your apartment, or --

A: Yes.

Q: And say your name.

A: Yes, my name is Lonia Mosak, and the address too, 4840 -- 4840 Foster, 60077. That's my address.

Q: Okay. And, well, thanks for talking with us. You've done an interview, a video interview for the museum in Washington, and you've also done some other interviews for other --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- projects of the museum, so some of what we're going to talk about today will overlap with that. But the main subject we want to talk about is sort of what your life was like from the time of liberation, all the way up until today.

A: Okay.

Q: So, including, if you went to the store yesterday, what did you buy?

A: Okay, so I should start to talk, yes?

Q: Yeah, well, you know, we'll go back to the end of the war, I mean, the f --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- first thing just to cover was, I understand from your history that you were actually in several camps during the war.

A: During the war, yeah, yeah.

Q: Which --

A: From Auschwitz we went to Gross-Rosen, to Ravenbreek, and to the end in Neustadt -- Neustadt-Mechlenborg, we lived a couple months til the war finished, yeah.

Q: And when the war was ending, right at that period --

A: When the war was ending, when we were liberated, we tried to head back to Poland. There was a lot, how you call it? Mins, explosive, underground. One of my friend died from that. She pulled a pia to make a piece of bread, and she right away with a shrapnel. So, we decided to leave Germany, we went back to Poland. That was a mistake, because in Poland were very bad.

Q: Let me ask you first --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- at the end of the war, which camp were you in?

A: Which camp I was? Beside the ghetto, in the camp, I was in Birkenau, in Auschwitz since 1942, til 1945. But in the Dead March, when the Russian was behind, we have to run together with the Germans.

Q: And when the Russians were coming, which camp were you in at that point?

A: No, that was the Russians and the American came in the same day. That's in Neustadt-Mechlenborg, the same day. They both came in the same day, yes. And then we tried to head back to Poland.

Q: What -- What had the conditions been like in that camp? What was going on in the weeks that was leading up to liberation?

A: You mean in Birkenau?

Q: Yeah.

A: Mm. When we came, we have to start to build the camp, because was just the electric wiring all around half. We haven't got no water, no nothing. It was like a lot of malaria, a lot of camp -- a lot of sickness, because was -- they make the camp from a farm, so we hardly could work, it was still [indecipherable], the ground. And I was there til 1945, in the same camp, very close to the crematorium, just a couple steps away.

Q: Did you -- did you have much of a sense of how the war was going, that things had turned against the Germans?

A: No, we didn't know nothing about it. If they find a pencil, or a piece of paper on somebody, right away they hang the person. So, we didn't know nothing wi -- but we saw the planes running above, but we didn't know nothing of what's going on. That -- that's the way it was, until we came to Germany, we realized that the war was coming to an end. It's going to take -- but every day, people were dying anyway, from hunger. Every minute, actually.

Q: What was it that -- that made you realize the war was ending soon? What did you see?

A: What did we see? Because the German starts to go away from Poland, from the camps, and come closer to Germany, over there, in the other camp. There was no place anyway, to run anyway, because all the camp was fu -- filled. So we was tha -- we didn't even know when the war finished, because I tell you how we find out. Near us was [indecipherable] from pilots, where the Germans shot down. French pilot, English pilot. We didn't speak English, but they cut the wires, and they told us we are free, because the German ran away from the camp, they locked up, and we didn't know the war was over, either, but we understood what's happened. They went out, and we went out, and we started to run to the houses to get some food. But all the houses was empty, not with food, with people, because they were sure when we came out in the camp, they going to kill them. So they just -- they left all the -- in the whole city was empty houses, th-the Germans run away.

Q: What -- when -- when they cut the wires --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- and they said, you know, you're free --

A: Yeah. Over there was not electric wires.

Q: Right.

A: Not in this -- in Auschwitz was electric wires, not over there. They told us that we start to run for food, that's the first thing, whatever we saw, sugar on a wagon, any -- anything what we could eat, we started to eat, because for six years we were starving to death, really.

Q: But at the -- at the moment that that happened, and you realized --

A: Yeah. We --

Q: -- the war's over, we're free, do you remember -- did -- anything people said to each other, or how did -- do you remember your own emotions at that time?

A: Yes, we -- we was -- we was happy the war -- the war was an end, but we wasn't happy, we lost everybody. But we didn't know what to do, actually. It -- it wasn't organized, nothing was organized, we just was running from one city to the other, and we wouldn't know what we going to do, where we going to end up. It wasn't yet order -- we made a mistake, we went back to Poland, that was all. We couldn't go back to Germany later. So a lot of people who stayed in Germany, they organized them, and they got help. We didn't have any help in Poland. I came back to my city, and I went up to the government to ask for help, we were 10 girls. So he gave us the key from the school, where we was finishing school, that building belonged to a Jewish family, but they -- they got killed. So I told them, "How about food?" He said, "Nothing else. Just stay." So

we were sleeping on the floor, and we were starving, actually. We didn't have what to eat. It was horrible. So, after a couple weeks, some people from my town came back to the city, and he told us that we shouldn't stay there, because they already killed four girls that went in -- in a hiding place there. The Armia kryova went in, they killed them, and one was hiding under the bedsheet in Israel, they tried to kill them. So the -- the life was very danger in Poland. So he says, "Don't stay in that city, you're going to be caught -- killed. You better come to Lódz, to a big city there are kibbutzim there, they'll take you in." So we were happy to have [indecipherable] had, and a piece of bread. You could only stay six months. We have to smuggle ourselves to Israel. So I -- I knew I had a brother in Russia, I was already in contact with him, so I didn't want to go, I want to wait. So they send me to another kibbutz, in Bialystok, to stay another six month. We stood there a couple months, in this -- and these, the Polish people was very angry, they didn't want the Jews back. So one night they came in, the police, and they give us ammunition, they going to attack us, going to be a pogrom, you have to defend yourself, we can do nothing about it. So five people went to [indecipherable] on the train. We tried to pull out from Bialystok. Four of them got killed, they took them down from the train, 18 - 19 year old. What -- Hitler let them live, but the Polish wouldn't let them live. One was hiding under a pleated skirt by a lady in the train, so he survived. So he crawled back, and he told us to pick up the bodies. So, when I saw that, in time my brother came in, so I pick up my brother, and I says, "I'm not staying here. I'm going to [indecipherable] right here the Bricha taking out the people," because they says it's a

graveyard in Poland.. When we went out on the street, and we saw dead people, dead Jews, they wasn't missed by nobody, their families was killed a couple years ago in the camps, and they came back from Russia. So they got killed in Poland. So I took my brother, and I went on the train. We sitting on the train, and a Polish woman says to me, "You know, they took down yesterday, Jews, and they killed them." Like she gave me the idea that I'm going to be killed too, in a couple hours. So I almost fainted. Finally, we reach Vulsa -- we came into Vulsa, I fainted. I couldn't take it any longer. So I find out that the Bricha organized people -- actually, they organized people who came back from Russia. Russia let in a half a million Jews. So the older people -- so I got together with them, and we start to go -- the Jewish agency made up with American government that Czechoslovaki should let us in, out from Poland. It was like a couple thousand people. I was the only one with a number, actually. So, we went to Czechoslovakia. In Czechoslovakia we stood overnight, and we have to go to Austria, and they prepare camps for us. We came to Austria, a few thousand people. The people who should provide us with bread, sold the flour, and we didn't have nothing to eat, we have to run in the field to dig out a potato -- a pickle, to eat. That was after the war, in 1946. In time, I met my husband, because he had a couple brothers in Russia, in the army. So he told the Russian people coming back from Russia, maybe one of his brothers will survive. None of them survived, they all got killed. So I met my husband, so he says to me, "How comes a number? It's mostly people with the Russian." So I told him I was waiting for my brother, he'll -- til he came back from Russia, and together I decided to leave Poland.

We have our chance, the Bricha -- thanks to the Bricha. So my husband told me that he got papers to go to the United States in a month, a cousin sent him papers. But if I marry, two people can go on the same certificate. I didn't even know my husband, to be honest with you. I decided, what do I got to leave? Israel is closed the doors, you couldn't go to Israel anyway, we have to smuggle ourselves. The people who went there, went to Cyprus, you know. I didn't have where to go, I was hungry. My husband, when he was liberated, he didn't live this town. So the UNRRA gave him -- put him in a hotel, and they gave him three meals a day. So when I came in, I see this [indecipherable] table, with white tablecloth, and eating. I couldn't believe it, that's a dream. So I decided I got married, only the condition my brother should stay with us. So that's what's happened. From that month, turn into two years. They didn't let into the United State, they're going to elect a president, it took two year. So, a very hard time in Austria. We couldn't work, we have to live on a ration, [indecipherable] gave us. A herring, a piece of bread, and that's how we lived for two year. Finally, we find out, in order to go to America, we have to go to Vienna. Vienna was occupied by the Russian. So we got ourselves on that train, and we start to go. The Russian soldier came out, and he says, "No, you can't go there." So he took us down from the train. So we was waiting for another train, and we came to Vienna, on the boat, on Vienna. Now, we have to go out from Vienna to Germany, with our paper. Rush -- Vienna was occupied by the Russian, so we couldn't go. So we were standing, they tore us down from the other train, and they told us, "You got to live here, you got to vote here, and die here. You can never go out from here." We were like 10

people. So, we standing at night, and thinking what we going to do, til a -- a German guy, a young guy came over to us, and he says to us, like that, “You know, my father takes people over the border. If you want to go, you give me a few dollars, til -- I’ll take you, show how to go over the mountain.” If I see the mountain during the day, I wouldn’t climb up. So we took -- I said, “What’s going to be if he catch you?” The Russian is out -- downstairs, you could see they working with the car. He says, “Well, I tell him my cow got lost, and I went to look for the cow.” He got us over the mountain, we stay overnight, but how we got down from the mountain, the very high mountain, I figured maybe I lay down [indecipherable] they had a hard time to get down. We came down, finally, from the mountain, we didn’t carry anything. We came down from the mountain, we already on the other side, in Germany. In Germany, you can’t go in a hotel at night, everything is closed. And it’s raining, we don’t have a place where to go. While we was walking, I walk over -- a man was walking with a lady, and I says to him, “What -- we just came from the other side, and it’s raining. Where can we go?” So he says to us, “Come on, I’ll take you to a hotel, maybe they’ll let you in.” So we thank him, we came in the hotel, and the guy said, “I’m sorry, no room.” I says to him, “Listen, I don’t care what you see, I’m going to sit here in the lobby, I’m not going out in the rain. No way I’m going out. We don’t -- we just came in, and we have no place else to go.” So he gave us a room, and we stood there. Once we got there, we went to Bremen, in Germany, and we have to wait like five weeks til we can go to America. The problem is, people who came to the Joint, got it good. They greet them by the plane. They gave them -- they pay six months rent,

they gave them a job. We didn't came through the Joint. My husband's cousin was a religious man, he wants to show in the shul he do something, so he borrowed the paper for somebody else, so they was not responsible for us. So, we came he -- we came to Boston. From Boston we have to take a train to Chicago. Nobody waits for us, we didn't know any langu -- English, nothing. So we sitting in the Union Station, and in the morning -- a whole night -- in the morning, I hear Polish women, speaks Polish to each other. They come to clean -- and I finished school in Poland. So I walked up and tell them the story there. Nobody waits for us, where should we go, what should we do? So they pick up a telephone book, I gave them the address and the telephone, and they called the people, and they picked us up. They picked us up, then we came to Chicago. I came to the HIAS, and told them the story, they said, "We're not responsible for you, you can't -- we don't want to do nothing, not even a job." Luckily, I find here a friend, he took me into the factory to work. I was two days in this country, I went to work. And I didn't even have money for the car fare, a dime, so he paid the car fare. And I went there, I got a job. My husband didn't get a job right away. We went through a very hard time in Chicago, we couldn't get a -- a place there to live. We stayed with them three, four weeks, so finally they rented a room for us. The lady put in, in a closet, she put in a bed, in a walk-in closet. There was no heat, where to put a chair. That's wasn't a -- that wasn't the worst thing. She got three teenage girls, we couldn't use a washroom in the morning, and I have to run downtown to punch a card. So I washed my face in the kitchen, and I ran for work. I worked a couple of years downtown, til -- til finally we got another apartment, you

know, just rented. If you was lucky, just rented an apartment, by somebody, not on our own. So finally, my husband couldn't get a job, so somebody recommended the [indecipherable] work he does, a lot of Jewish and Polish people open up a cleaning store. For that you don't need money. You take an empty store, you buy an old sewing machine. I still didn't give up my job. So I worked there, we open up the cleaning store, my husband was in the cleaning store, and that's the work, I came to work in the store, and I worked til 12 at night to keep up the thing. Next couple years, and I already have a little money in the bank saved up, and I have the children. You know, it was very hard, the beginning, we don't have help from nobody. Mostly refugees come, they have a lot of help. The Joint pay the rent, they -- they get them a job, they watch over them. I didn't have that luck, so the same thing after the war, people stay in Germany, the -- right away there was organized camp, they got what to eat. We was on the bad side, we was in Poland, we couldn't go back, the Russian didn't let us go to the border. So, we live hard times.

Q: Let me ask you a couple things. I just need to --

A: Yeah.

Q: Move this slightly.

A: Yeah.

Q: Let me ask you this -- let's -- let's leave your story right there --

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: -- where you're -- you're now in this country, but I'd like to go back actually --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- to where you started, and pick up on a -- a couple things --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- that you said. I'm -- I'm still a little curious about that first day, when you realized you were free. I mean, how long do you -- was it after you heard you were free that everybody started to run into the town and look for food? Was it just a couple minutes, was it a couple hours?

A: The first minute, we thum to run for food, nothing else existed, just food. I ran up and I -- I went up on a wagon, started to eat a lot of sugar. Anything what we saw, we started to eat, we were so hungry. Most people got sick from it, because the stomach was so shrink, we couldn't even eat, but -- but people were so hungry, they though they'll eat the whole world, would be enough food. That's how they started to eat. And the German got plenty of food in the house, mind you. For 10 years, they storing food for 10 years. So each time we went in a different house, and -- and we ate there, you know.

Q: And you said that the houses were empty?

A: Yeah. They all left, they run away. Near our camp, you couldn't find a house that Germans should be occupied there. They were sure that we going to kill them when we go out.

Q: What if when you had gone to --

A: Yeah?

Q: -- any of these houses, what if you had found some of the Germans in there? Did you want to kill them?

A: No, there wasn't, they wasn't there.

Q: But I'm saying, what if they were? Did you -- did you want to kill them?

A: Well, I would like to, but I -- I couldn't do it, no. I tell you what's happened. There was, near [indecipherable] time, was a lot of soldiers, and there was -- and when -- and a lot of raping going on, too. So when we went into the house, came in a Russian officer, I'll never forget, a very intelligent man. And he says, "They let out from the jails, the worst thing, and they rape the woman. I'm going to sit the whole night and watch you. [indecipherable] I can do nothing about it," he told us. So that's what -- he was sitting a whole night, and they start to knock in the door, and then, when they saw him, they run away. Then we went a little further, and the same thing happened. So we made up -- the girls, we were 10 girls, we made up, if they knock on the door, we run out in the back door, and there was a lot of broken trains, so every girl was laying under a train the whole night, cause train didn't move, they was broken. And we was laying a whole night, and there was [indecipherable] got in the house. A whole night that we were laying there til it's got light, then we -- we came out from the -- under the trains, and we start to look to go any further. There was a big struggle after the war, a big struggle. Was no government, was no nothing.

Q: Did you -- right after the liberation, where were you for the next few days or weeks after that?

A: All by ourself.

Q: Did you go back into the camp, or once you left the camp did you never go back in there?

A: No, we didn't go back, we didn't -- we didn't go back. You know, in a room like that, half the size, was maybe a hundred girls. We was laying down, there was no room to turn over, that's how it was. We didn't go back. We went in the houses, we took some clothes. So then, we went on a train, the train was standing [indecipherable] going. We took some clothes for ourself, we went on the train. The train was standing all night. So a Russian fella came in, and he says, "Oh, girls are here, okay, we going to bring my friend." So we ran out from the train, and we wait there, the train left with all our stuff, we have to go look for other stuff. We didn't want to go back to that train. Was a big struggle after the war, with no government, no [indecipherable]

Q: So from the -- from the moment of liberation --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- you were -- you were totally on your own?

A: On our own. Nobody could help us. As a matter of fact, we saw our -- our German guard with a wagon, with horses. So we walked over, he should give us the wagon. He says no. So we went to a Russian fellow, and officer, we told him we want the wagon to go away from the camp. So he took the German by the head, and threw him in the -- in the ground, he says, "You take whatever you want, you're entitled, and go ahead." One of my girls knew how to operate a wagon with [indecipherable]. See, we tried to go any

forwarder and forwarder, til we got to Poland, and then we have to leave everything behind, because they -- they -- they checked us up. We didn't have any money anyway, but was free -- traveling was free, people didn't have anything. I mean, Poland was our graveyard, it was impossible to be there, they killed 50 people in Kelts. That's the people who lived through the war, they came from Russia with children, they killed them all. Whatever they find a Jew, they killed him.

Q: Did you know that this was happening in Poland before you went back there, or not?

A: We didn't know -- we didn't -- that we should go. We just didn't want to be in Germany, so we tried to go back in Poland. It was a mistake. We didn't know they going to organize. We didn't know what to do actually, where to go. Finally I went to -- back to Poland, and some people took back property, you know -- that we went back. There was no way to go back without an organization to take care of you.

Q: You mentioned -- you mentioned earlier, and I think you mentioned in one of your video interviews, that Jews were being killed by the -- how do you say it, the armia --

A: Armia kryova, yes.

Q: And what -- what kind of group was that? Who were they?

A: That was -- that were like a underground Polish army. They was for one thing, just to kill the Jews, that was their idea. They killed four girls right near our town, in a little town.

Q: Mm-hm. Had they been fighting the Germans, as -- were they like the underground, or what -- what were they?

A: No, I don't know if they was fighting, but that was the -- after the war, that was after the war.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Maybe they was, but I don't think so -- that they did. Only the Poles would fight after the -- the German -- [indecipherable] the Russian, they organized themself, but not the other, not the others. But Jewish people was fighting in the ghettos all over, a lot of people don't even know about that. In Bialystok, 70 people -- I went -- went there -- came there to find a grave, 70 people were fighting, girls and boys was fighting against the German.

Q: And I think while you were in one of the camps, there was an uprising in one of the camps, wasn't there?

A: That was in Birkenau, yes. One of my girlfriends, she -- they hanged the four girl. See, the woman [indecipherable] ammunition, and when the men came into work in the camp, they gave him the ammunition, you know, little. Well, when the uprising was there, I thought when they -- they killed a couple Germans, they put them in the oven, they did whatever they could. But, in a few minutes later, you couldn't see the sky, that's how many airplanes [indecipherable] German. And the German wants to find out how did the people organize themselve, and to kill so many Germans, and all this thing. Well, they ran across one girl, but she broke down -- not mine girlfriend, from my town, she broke down and told them on three others. They arrested the girls, they kept them in a bunker. One of my friend, she was typing whatever they say. They took her -- I don't know how

you call it, the strip? What inside with steel, you know, strip, like it's -- how you call it? A strip. When you going to beat up something, you have a --

Q: When you're going to --

A: The thing, yeah.

Q: Oh, you mean, like a whip?

A: A whip, yes, and they put in steel, and they beat them on the body, on the naked body, and a doctor was there to revive them, so they can get out of them. Mine girlfriend never told anyone, and the four girls was hanged, right in the -- we have to stay and watch. This was only four weeks before they evacuated from Auschwitz. Like in January, that's [indecipherable] they killed four girls, you know.

Q: Do you have any idea, during that uprising, how many Germans were killed?

A: No, I don't know. They couldn't kill that many, because some of them started to run, you know, away, and they shot them down anyway. They kill mostly the Germans, but the -- but the Sondercommando were working, you know. They -- they -- they killed them, they put them in the oven, they did a lot of things, you know. But they didn't survive, these people, either.

Q: Did you see any of that happen?

A: No, I couldn't see, there was -- no, that you couldn't see. But I saw the sky was right away with airplanes, and -- and they start to shoot down whoever starts to run. So I don't think everybody make it, you know, out.

Q: Let's go back to after the war, when the -- this Polish group --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- was killing Jews.

A: Yeah.

Q: The -- the English translation is -- I think it's called the Polish Home Army, in English.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Were you sure that it was members of that group that were doing these killings?

A: Yes. That was their name, that was their main thing, to kill all the Jews. Jews lived there 400 years, they have some property, and for them, the war was a plus, because they got in in a minute -- lot of people was poor Polish, too. And they got in, they got everything. They didn't want a Jew -- if a Jew got in in a house, he didn't get out alive any more. So we don't even know how many was killed. They didn't want the Jews there any more, so they could have everything.

Q: When you were, you know, leaving Germany, and you decided at first to go to Poland --

A: Yeah, we did --

Q: -- and you said well that --

A: -- we didn't realize the reaction, we didn't realize the --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- we ca --

Q: Well that's -- that's what I wan -- I wanted to ask you about.

A: Yeah.

Q: Because, you had lived in Poland, I mean --

A: Yeah.

Q: Did -- wi --

A: [inaudible]

Q: -- did you -- from your past life, you hadn't --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- you didn't feel that the Poles were hostile to Jews?

A: Yeah --

Q: Or that they were?

A: -- they were very hostile, but we thought after the war, maybe it's changing. We couldn't believe they're going to -- ready to kill the Jews. We didn't -- we didn't think of it. In po -- was very bad in Poland lately, after the war, you know what's happened in Poland. First of all, when we went [indecipherable] they told us the Polish, in the same age where we were, "Go to Palestine, you don't belong in here. That's not your place." That was one thing. We got up in the morning, we saw all kind of signs on th -- on the -- on the building, the J -- the Jews are Communists, the Jews are that and that. Then, after that, they put down the -- they organized them in the churches. Every Pole who came in for the village, have to wear a green band, and stay by the Jewish store, so when the other people come in, they wouldn't let them in. You know, that's a Jewish store, you're not supposed to go to the Jewish store. That was a open boycott in Poland. Even in the

[indecipherable] asking what you going to do with the Jews, with three and a half million Jews, which to build up Poland, 400 years, they say, beating up make no sense, but boycott them with the business, that's yes. That was written all over, in the papers. So the government was hostile, and the people was 10 times more hostile.

Q: So when you went back to Poland and found all this going on --

A: We knew about it.

Q: Did it make you angry? How did you feel?

A: We was angry, see, we had -- we have a house, I want to take back the house from the government. Mine girlfriends the same thing, they have houses. Then they figure, maybe we'll find somebody from family. Maybe they was in different camp, and they survive. That was the reason we went back. I wouldn't want to stay in Poland, but bec -- be -- there was no way out. If not the Bricha, everybody will be killed there, they wouldn't leave anybody else. They took care on them. They knew -- they knew, because the Bricha, some of them was born in Poland, and they knew. That's the only way to get out the Jewish people from there.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Lonia Mosak. This is tape number one, side B. You went back to Poland, and found all this going on --

A: We knew, but --

Q: Did it make you angry? How did you feel?

A: We was angry, see, we had -- we have a house, I want to take back the house from the government. Mine girlfriends the same thing, they have houses. Then they figure, maybe we'll find somebody from family. Maybe they was in different camp, and they survive. That was the reason we went back. I wouldn't want to stay in Poland, but bec -- we -- there was no way out. If not the Bricha, everybody will be killed there, they wouldn't leave anybody else. They took care on them. They knew -- they knew, because the Bricha, some of them was born in Poland, and they knew. That's the only way to get out the Jewish people from there. So they took [indecipherable] a half a million, when they came back from Russia.

Q: The -- you mentioned I think that nine or -- nine or 10 girls that y-you --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- you were together.

A: We were together all the time.

Q: Who were they? How did you -- how did you get together, and how did you --

A: Well --

Q: -- form your group, and --

A: -- I tell you something. In Auschwitz, we're like that, when you stay in a group, some speak French, some speak Yugoslavian, some speak Greece, so everybody stick to their own town, to their own friends, what we went to school together. So, I was with mine group. Everybody got their own clique, like they say, because we couldn't -- we couldn't

communicate. The others speak Greek, they speak French, they speak Italian. We couldn't -- we couldn't understand. So they did the same thing, they grouped themself with their own people, with the same language. That's the way it was.

Q: So was your group -- were they from your town, or --

A: From mine town, mine -- we went to school together, town. The thing is, but I didn't mention it, they always made selections in Auschwitz. The selections were like that. Because they couldn't bring a townsbut on the outside, like they got a note, 3,000 people got to be killed. So, they took from the place that we were standing -- people only survive in the wa -- the last in the line. I came back to the barrack one Hanukah, 1943, yeah, I came back, we were thousand in the -- in the barrack, only three came back. They count up, if they have enough, they they'll let the last go. Only three came back from thousand. And that -- each time there are selection, somebody ask you how you survive, I always said the same thing, I was the last in the line. That's the only way, not because we were smart, or we was healthy, didn't matter. They have to burn so many people. And that was even worse, because the people when they came from a transport, they didn't know what's going on, it was the night. But when they took the people from the camp, and we know where they're going, that wasn't -- that was very sad. There -- there was crying, there was hollering, they were singing the Haptikvah. But they knew where they going, they saw every -- and you know how when they put the people on the truck, they didn't took him down gentle, they open up, and just like potatoes, they roll down on the -- on the ground. That's the way they treated people.

Q: I've talked to, in some of the other interviews --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- I've done with people who were in the camps --

A: Yeah.

Q: They --

A: Were in Auschwitz?

Q: Various camps.

A: Yeah, it's --

Q: Various ones, several. But th -- one thing that some of the people, not all of them, but some have said to me that by sort of the day of liberation, or the time of liberation, the end of the war --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- they -- they had almost given up, or were almost ready to die, that they didn't care any more.

A: Yeah, it's happens to me, too.

Q: I'm wondering how you felt? That happened to you?

A: I really wanted to commit suicide, to be honest with you. We were starving in Poland, there was nobody to -- I started to sew a little bit to make a few cents. We -- we bought a few potatoes, that's where -- we didn't have an-any nothing, the Polish government wouldn't help you. So, I really wanted to commit suicide, there was no way out. So, in time, came a guy from mine town, what he was going to the Yeshiva, by a -- by a

[indecipherable] next to the Yeshiva. So he knews me. So he said, “Listen, don’t stay here, the life’s danger. I’ll take you to Lódz.” There was kibbutzim there. We didn’t know where to go. How can you go when you don’t know where to go, to whom to go? Was very sad. So, he took a few of us, we went in there, he took us in a kibbutz. So, to me it was a haven, you got a roof over the head, and you got a piece of bread. And then I have to go to Bialystok, and was very sad of a day.

Q: So, did I understand this right? You were saying that you wanted -- you felt like committing suicide, even wa --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- when the war was over?

A: Yeah, that’s was in 1945. There was no way out, we couldn’t go back to Germany, we didn’t have anybody. Even you’re starving, you -- you kind of don’t feel like to live any more. Luckily, that guy came in, to one -- he was born in our town, too. And he looked around, and he said, “Listen, let’s go from [indecipherable] they already killed four girls in that little village. Let’s go out, stay in a big city, in a kibbutz, ther -- at least they’re organized.” So we were happy. He was like an angel coming from the sky. You know, we were happy that somebody show us the way where to go. The big ci -- the big -- in our city, they wasn’t organized, you couldn’t talk to nobody. Like I told you, the government gave me the key from this school, where I finished school, laid down on the floor, no clothes, no beds, no food, no nothing. It was -- it was horrible. It was very bad.

Q: The -- just go back for a second, the gr -- the group of --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- girls from your town.

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you remember any of their names? Do you know if any of them are still alive?

A: Oh yeah, tell you all the names, yeah. One just died last year, she was in -- in New York. One just died. Some of them are in Israel. I hear a few already died too, over there. Some of them end up in a institution, they lost their mind, you know? A lot of them went up in an institution there. And one of my ne -- closest friend, [indecipherable] in the underground, she lived in Canada, and she got killed. A car went up -- she went out from a wedding, and going to go home, and a car went on the sidewalk, and he killed her. That was my closest friend, from mine town, we went to school together. So here, we have to make new friends. The others, I don't have any. I only have one friend in Detroit which -- she came here in 1939 -- 1937, with a grap -- a group of youngsters. That's the only friend from mine childhood I have. All the other -- yes, I meet them in Florida. They went in Russia, where they survive, in Russia. Some -- a few was in the camps, so we get together all the time, and we go out for dinner, and we keep together, the group. Some lives in Detroit, some lives in Philadelphia, some lives in New Jersey. A few of them, yeah.

Q: So that -- that -- that group of you all --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- can you say for the record what some of their names were?

A: Yes, I'll tell you the name. Which I meet in Florida, yeah?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: These people? Becau --

Q: Yeah, but also the -- the original group that you --

A: -- the others went -- the original went to Israel, and some of them died over there [indecipherable] institution. One died in New York. I really don't have any -- the original, they're not here any more. The one there, what I meet in Florida, they went to Russia, that's how they got saved, yeah.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So we meet then.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah.

Q: But again, I was just wondering, just for the record --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- if you could just say their names?

A: Yeah, I can tell you. One -- only one is there, Dinka Blanke -- well now, she got married, she got a different name. One is named Dinka, and one is named Kirsch. Those two was in Auschwitz, but they got married, you know, so they change their name. All the others didn't survive, no. I hear they wa -- they die in Israel, one was [indecipherable] institution, yes. No, I had -- my friends now, it's not the original friend. None of them.

I'll show you the picture here when I finish school, and I graduate. Only one was what -- she was in the underground, in -- in -- in Auschwitz, she's on that picture, too.

Q: Mm-hm. Let's -- let's pick up the story where you went to the kibbutz.

A: Yeah.

Q: And then how long were you there? What happened after that?

A: I wa -- we could only stay the six months in one kibbutz, we have to smuggle ourself to Israel. Because I was waiting for my brother, so they sent me to Bialystok.

Q: How did you know that your brother was still alive?

A: Oh, some people smuggled themself out from Russia, on the boat there. My brother was waiting til they give him a legal -- legal to go out. So, when I talk to them, so I told them, oh, I was with him in Siberia together, so I already got a name. And I start to write letters there, and it took a couple months til he came back, in a legal way. So that's when we was together nows, we have live together. He couldn't come to the United State, I was on the papers for my husband. He was -- not 1945. They got two categories, 1945 - 1946. 1946 couldn't go to America. They came from Russia, no, not these people, only the 1945. So he was there in -- living in Vienna, and I got some papers for him in here -- to bring him over here, but he got -- unfortunately he got killed a couple of years later in a car accident. He got run over, yeah. That's was -- I -- I'm the only one from my family, from my father's side. From my mother's side, nobody ever survived, none of them.

Q: Did you -- and, right after the war --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- did you know that, that no one was left but your brother?

A: I-I-I knew, I knew, but anybody who survived, there was offices where you put on your name, if somebody else come. Now, I knew that nobody survive, and I didn't see any name. Sometime when my brother was still in Russia, and I announced on the radio, and I wrote postcard -- Kirshenbaum is my maiden name, so a lot of people came from other town, but it wasn't my brother, they just got the same name, but wasn't that.

Q: And then, after the kibbutz, where did you go?

A: No, like I told you, the Bricha took us out from Poland, we went to Austria -- to Czechoslovakia first, then to Austria. In Austria, I remained there, because I got married. So, I took my brother and t-took us two years to come to the United State.

Q: How did you meet your husband?

A: He came to look for his brothers. He got four brothers in the Russian army, so he thought maybe somebody, because those really -- a transport with the people came, but none of them survived. And he was surprised to see [indecipherable] because I was the only one, but mostly people from Russia, when they came back. So that's how I met him. So, took me out, and show me the hotel, and got papers, and that was like a miracle. So I decided to get married.

Q: Did you -- this is a little bit of a funny question --

A: Yes, yeah.

Q: -- but, I mean, did you get married because he had papers, and he could get you to America, or did you get married because you were in love?

A: N-No, n-no, no, no, no, no. I tell you something. He was very nice, was a nice person, he was the -- he was not far from out of town, you know, junhanfrum. He's from Ben-Gurions -- he treat me nice, he was a very nice man. So I figure, what do I got to lose? I have -- everybody got married like that after the war. You met somebody, you get married, that's the only way to do, not to be alone. That's was the only way. No, if I wouldn't like him a little bit, no I wouldn't marry, no. That's for sure not.

Q: Were you madly in love with him, or kind of in love with him, or --

A: We tried to be in love, you know, but we really didn't know each other, to be honest true. We have to do it in a couple days, because that transport was in Austria, have to go foraday. I kind of sneak out from the barracks, and came to the little city. And you couldn't stay in the little city until you got papers. We have to pay up in the government to paper, that I should stay here. I couldn't go back there, those people go forward already. So I kind of sneak out from that camp, you know?

Q: So you said you -- you tried to be in love. Do you think that he felt the same way? That --

A: Yeah, yeah, yes. We -- we got along nice. He got a brother, too, we all lived together, mine brother, his brother, we all lived together, and I kind of took care on everybody.

Q: Sounds like you were almost like creating -- like kind of creating instant families?

A: Yeah, we did, we did, yeah. We did. He got a brother came over from Germany to Austria. I got the brother from Russia. And I said, whatever I do, I don't go away from my brother, and got to be with us together. So we all lived together, yeah, that's true. His

brother couldn't come because to America, he come later. My brother come later, maybe two years later. But when he came already, I had an apartment, because I make money, I prepare everything [indecipherable]. Now, when my brother came, I already had a child, yeah. Was two years later, yeah.

Q: Mm-hm. So then -- then you went over the mountains, right? That was -- that's when we came out to Austria, to go out to the German border, in -- and Russia occupied Vienna, you couldn't go out from Vienna, you have to sneak out, was very hard. Was a very hard thing go -- it's really hard to believe it, how people manage like that.

Q: Yes, yeah, I'm --

A: To climb on mountain, then to go down it [indecipherable] yeah. But we did it on the night, that -- that's what we have to do, a lot of things which sometime we think it's impossible, but we have to do it.

Q: When you think about these things now --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- I mean, so many years have gone by, and you re -- you remember some of these things --

A: Yeah, sure.

Q: -- does it seem kind of unbelievable to you?

A: Yeah, it's unbelievable to other people, not for me. Luckily, I had a profession, I went on the second day to a nice job to make money. I was fast, I was working piecework. And we were on our own, with no help of anybody. I was lucky I found this man, you

know, from my town, and he took me in on the job, in the factory, was a big factory. I worked there a couple of years, yeah.

Q: When you did come over to the United States --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- did you come on a boat?

A: We come out on a boat, you know. Not on a regular boat, a boat where they bring animals, everybody was sick, like little sack, you was laying a little sack. And voo -- a lot of people said, “Throw me in the ocean, I don’t want to live any more.” They were throwing up, was horrible. And it was a big storm, it was even in the papers, written down, they didn’t thought that that boat will make it. It was on a little boat [indecipherable]

Q: Where did you leave from? Do you remember the name of the boat, or any of that?

A: No. The boat I don’t remember, but the -- that -- but I remember we came with an airplane, we came -- no, I don’t remember the name of the boat, no. It was a -- a miserable boat.

Q: What -- where did it leave from?

A: Oh, they -- they brought us to Boston. In Boston we stay overnight, and we took a train to come back to Chicago. And the HIAS paid, but I paid them back, because they told me that I -- you come to a sponsor. So the first check I got, I paid them back 70 dollars, in that time was a lot of money, but I paid them right away back, you know.

Q: So the first place you landed in the United States was Boston --

A: Boston, yeah, overnight --

Q: -- but you were just there for the night, right?

A: -- overnight, that's all.

Q: Do you remember when you pulled into the harbor what it looked like, what it was like to finally be in the United States, do you remember any of that?

A: No, we didn't know nothing. I think a Jewish organization was waiting for the people to come down from the boat. There was Gentile people there on the boat, too. They were -- took us out, I don't know what, a certain place, and we stay overnight. They gave us a [indecipherable] he said we got to go on a train next day. So, we didn't even see Boston, we didn't see those things.

Q: And then you had a train ride, that -- was that a couple days?

A: No, next morning we have to go, we have to go next morning, they was back in Chicago, and I come to Chicago, nobody waits for us. We didn't know the English language. So, luckily, when Polish women came to work in the -- whole night we were sitting on a bench, and I see they're speaking Polish, I said, "You help me out? Because I don't know who to call, and what -- what to do." So they said, "Just give us the telephone number, we'll take the telephone book," and to call him [indecipherable] come pick us up. They was very Orthodox people, very religious people. So we stood there for a week, til we got a bedroom someplace, then we moved out.

Q: Do you know which group the -- the people who came and met you at the train station, do you know what group they were connected with?

A: No, with nobody, that was a second cousin of my husband's, they carried the same name Mosak, the same name. So they came, and they want to show in the shul they do something, but that wasn't good for us. It didn't work out good for us, because we was on our own, we have to look for work and all this thing, we don't know the language. You come to a country, if you have a profession, it's half the battle, you know what I mean? You work, you learn the language. I went to night school here. But at least I make a few dollars, you know? Because in the beginning, I was really was starving here, too. I asked the woman where we were, and to borrow me a dime for a roll, til I get a check. We didn't have anything.

Q: When you were taking that train ride, and when you got here, and all, I'm wondering, how did things look to you? Here you were in this totally different country, very different from where you'd been.

A: Yeah, yes, that's right.

Q: Did it seem like a very strange place?

A: It was very strange. When I looked out, when I was on the station, and I saw the cars are running all night, I says, "How I'm going to mingle into this place?" Looks to me like impossible. How we going to live here? How we -- especially you don't know the language. I only knew a few word. It was hard, it was very hard, very hard. But if you have a profession, whatever you go, you can make a dollar for -- it was half the battle right away. I started to make nice money that time, yeah.

Q: Were you happy to be in the United States?

A: I was very happy. I was very happy. I took every advantage. We were 40 on the table, I was the only work overtime, I didn't go home. Saturday you got a double check, double. In the summer, I didn't took the vacation, I got another check. I was the only one for 40 woman, to come into work. I figure I'll do anything not to be poor any more. I'll make as much money as I can. And that's what I did. Soon, I got the money, I start to run out, buy a television, buy a radio, everything. And the people said, "It's not Europe, you get it next day." I thought if I don't grab it right away, I wouldn't have it. Every chance I got, I buy -- I bought for the house, yeah. There we got an apartment, yeah.

Q: And you -- you started to have children, when was that?

A: A couple of years later. We came end of '48, my daughter was born 1950, in Thanksgiving. Until I had money, the bank, until I have an apartment, then I had the children, yeah. Because we didn't have help from nobody, nothing.

Q: And how many children all together?

A: Two, two daughters I have, yeah.

Q: And tell us again the years, and what their names are -- that they were born.

A: Yeah, Esther is the older one, Dorothy the younger one, and I consider myself very lucky to have tho -- those two daughters.

Q: Mm-hm. I'm wondering, this is a -- this is again a little bit of a strange question --

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: -- but, you know, you talked about the way you and your husband --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- got together, and --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- the unusual circumstance.

A: Yeah.

Q: I can -- I can imagine some people doing that, who would --

A: Ever.

Q: -- do that, get over here --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- and say, okay, now we're here, now we're safe, you know, we should -- we should break up now, and then go find other people.

A: Well, I want to tell you something. My husband was a sick man. Later on I find out he was sick. Wasn't sick when I was married, six months later I find out that he had bleeding ulcer. I would never do it to nobody. Even I could make myself better, and I had a chance, and I didn't took the chance. But for me, I [indecipherable] the world, I would not do it to nobody. I'd rather suffer than to make myself better. [indecipherable]

Q: I'm -- I'm not following exactly what you're saying.

A: Yeah, I could have have a better life if I want to change, in that time when I come here. It was a lot of men, and only a few girls came to the United State, but I didn't -- I wouldn't do that to nobody, not to my husband, not to nobody. But me, I work as a [indecipherable] and what I make up is for good and for bad, you know. I wouldn't do it. Some people do it, a lot of them break up right away.

Q: You saw that?

A: Yeah. They live in New York. They want to come to this country, and they want to have the paper, and they broke up right away, they came a couple weeks later, and they marry somebody else. A lot of them, yeah. But not everybody had the heart to do it, no. Even you can make some -- so -- better, no, I wouldn't do it, no.

Q: When you came here, and started establishing your life --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- were you in contact with lots of other survivors who had come to the area, or not --

A: No, was I -- it was only the only one in 1948, and I didn't see -- then, when we open up a cleaning store, they come in, most of them Hungarians Jews, Czechoslovakia, not from mine town. And so we got acquainted with them, you know, we tried to keep to -- to our own. And then they start up an organization, you know, that we got together all the time. But none of my past friends I have, none of them, no.

Q: Mm-hm. Where was the cleaning store?

A: On Division. On Division Street. You familiar with Chicago?

Q: Well, I lived here, so --

A: Yeah, on Division, on -- first we have on Spaulding and Potomac, and then we moved up to the main street, on Division Street.

Q: Where at on Division, do you remember?

A: On Potomac -- yes, within -- corner Potomac and Spaulding. Was a -- was a hardware store, a butcher store, and that was our store, a cleaning store, we were there a couple of

years. Then we moved up there, then we moved again, because the neighborhood changed. We moved on Jarveese, wasn't good over there, either. So, we still -- you have our lease, you have to stay. And then I start to take in work in my own house, and I still do it.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Yeah.

Q: So Jarvis -- so you lived in Roger's Park for a while?

A: No, no. Yeah, that time we live already in -- in West Roger's Park. Yeah [indecipherable] we moved [indecipherable] we live on Division Street, then we moved to Albany Park, from Albany Park, we moved to -- we moved to West Roger's Park, and I stayed there 33 years. Here I live six years, going to be next month. So we keep on moving all the time. [indecipherable] cames to my door, that she make me to move, which I'm happy here, very happy. Yes, but here lives a lot of refugees, around other buildings here. So we get together, we play cards a little bit, we go out together. We got like a social life here. Where I live, everybody moved away to Florida, to Las Vegas, Arizona, so I lost the friends over there, too.

Q: Mm-hm. When -- when you, you know, in those early years when you were here, and getting established and all that, did you think much, or talk about much with your husband or other people what had happened during the war, or not?

A: No, no, no. First of all, we were ver -- very busy making a living, working all the time. No, we never talked about it, no. Just recently, when they start to interview people. A lot

of people of my friend don't want to even talk about it, it's too painful, they can't take it. But I went to Washington a few times, where they, you know.

Q: But it sounds like from what you're saying is that, you know, most of your life since, you've not talked about it.

A: No, no, no.

Q: If someone asked you about it, would you --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- refuse to answer, or would you say I don't want to talk about this, or --

A: Well, I tell you, most people, even the people who brought us here, they brought another family. So, she always talked about it, I says, "Stop talking about it." I never talked about it, no. I never say nothing. But she start [indecipherable], "Oh Sonja, stop talking, it makes me sick, I don't want to hear about it." They didn't have to tell it to me. I didn't save somebody [indecipherable] tell them about not -- pa -- on my own, no. No, I didn't tell her nothing.

Q: The museum would like you to just tell us what the number -- what your number was.

A: The number.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yes. 25702.

Q: Right, which is right there on your arm.

A: Yes, right here, yeah.

Q: What -- when you got over here, and actually it's --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- up to this day, you have this number tattooed on your arm.

A: Yeah, all the time.

Q: When you go out, do you --

A: Yes.

Q: -- let it show, or --

A: No, it show --

Q: -- do you try to cover it up?

A: -- I tell you, when I came to this country in this -- and in the summer, and I went on the train, people moved away, they thought I coming from Sing-Sing, they never saw that. So, I have a number, I must be a criminal, so they just moved away, they didn't want to see. Even now whe -- if I go in the hospital on -- "What is that? You was in a camp, you got a good time?" They didn't know it was a concentration camp. They never saw that.

Q: Really?

A: Never saw that, no.

Q: Do you -- and -- so, you were going around, it was visible, people were reacting to it?

A: Yeah, yeah, people, yeah, no.

Q: You didn't cover it up?

A: No, no, never. I never cover up, no, never. You can't cover up if you wear short sleeve. No, I never cover up. One of my friends doctor take out, and it was a botched up

job, and she looks worse. So I -- it doesn't bother me. You get used to things, you know. If my granddaughter were little, she asks me, I told her it's a telephone number. Like, she was two, three years old, what you going -- I said mine telephone number. What are you so -- tell a kid, you know, in that age? No, it didn't -- I got used to it.

Q: What -- as your children were growing up, wa -- did you talk with them much about what happened?

A: No, no, never, never. It was too painful. You don't want to upset kids [indecipherable] older, when they're young, no. They find out on their own, they find out on their own. As a matter of fact, I came to visit me, a lady from Milwaukee, and she was in camp -- no, she was hidden, I think. In how -- those days, a young person, maybe 42 - 43, she said, "Oh, I never saw the number." I said, "Didn't you read in the books, in the paper, in the movie?" She says, "No, I see the first time." So some people doesn't know, even Jewish people, a lot of them doesn't know about it.

Q: Mm-hm. But at some point, did your children ever start to ask you questions?

A: Yes. I told them I was in the camp, and that's it, you know? I never talked about it to ma -- it's too painful, and for children, they would never understand it either, it's impossible. To tell things like that, that's is -- impossible.

Q: What about when they got to be older, like when they were teenagers, or even --

A: Yeah, well, they find out, but on their own. They go to the library here, and there they find out. But I never talked about that, the way it was -- things was, no.

Q: So you wanted them to find out about it the way any young person in this country would find out, in history class --

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: -- or by reading, or by seeing a movie?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: But you know, that's kind of distant. I mean, you pick up a book and read, it's a little bit abstract.

A: Yes, but at least they have a knowledge now, they teach them in the schools, it's a little bit knowledge, more knowledge. I went a couple years ago downtown, it was a lady from Austria, and she's supposed to tell the people what's happened. So, a Gentile guy came in, a young man maybe 38, and she told him she was a child, she's supposed to be in the movies, and then she was sitting on the street, and the German -- the Austri was spitting on her, you are a Jew, and that then. And they show the pictures, she is now married, she have kid. So the guy says, "I'm so happy that I came to the museum to find out, because I would never believe it. Now I see it in person. Now I can see it." The guy, a young guy, he said. Some are interested, and some are not interested. I went into a restaurant last year, and a couple boys come in -- I think they're from Mexico, and they told me they have Arab friend, and the Arabs say bad things about Israel, and all this thing, the Jews do this. So I said, "Listen, you don't have to listen to that. If you want to know, I'll tell you the story. First of all, Jewish people doesn't go and attack cars, buses the children ardi to school. Jewish people doesn't do this thing, the Arabs do this thing."

If one guy got crazy, he went in one time, got [indecipherable] killed people, that doesn't mean the Jewish people do. The Jewish people take him to the hospital to help him. They don't attack people like they do, with buses, with cars, whatever they do. So I -- they have -- says, "Well, it's good to know." 16 - 17 years old. So I tell them, oh, be happy to, because they ask you what the number is. They was interested. They learn in the schools, and we explain it to them, those things.

Q: Mm-hm. If -- let's say one of your daughters, when she was like 20 or something --

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: -- had come to you --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- and said, "You know, I really would like to know what happened to you during the war," would you have told her --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- or would you say no, I don't want to.

A: No, no, yes I told them, yes. Mine daughter knows, yes. I happens to have pictures. One of my friends, whi -- she got killed in kare -- Canada, she took a lot of pictures. I belonged to a Zionist organization before the war, so sh-she took the pictures to our neighbor, a Polish. She says, "If somebody comes back, a Jew, please give the picture." So she came back -- my girlfriend came back, she got the picture, she made copies, she gave it to me. So then I show it to my daughter. Then, after the war, when I came to the United State, they told us [indecipherable] open up a book with picture. So I says, "I have

some pictures." How do I have pictures? I have an aunt in Pennsylvania, which I didn't know I had, and her children was born here, so I decided soon I came to this country, I get in touch with my aunt. I remembered the address, not exactly, but it came the letters to her, what I remember by heart. And I told her, I says, "I would like to have the pictures from mine family, from mine uncle." She says, "It's too far to give it to you, you better come here, we want to see you." That time --

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

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

A: -- have some pictures." How do I have pictures? I have an aunt in Pennsylvania, which I didn't know I had, and her children was born here, so I decided soon I came to this country, I get in touch with my aunt. I remembered the address, not exactly, but it came the letters to her, what I remember by heart. And I told her, I says, "I would like to have the pictures from mine family, from mine uncle." She says, "It's too far to give it to you, you better come here, we want to see you." That time planes didn't run in 1949, you have to take a train. So we made up they're going to meet us on the station. They didn't find us on the station, I didn't find them, but a lot of people -- what I got a address, I walked over to them, and I met them, my aunt, she was a elderly lady, very religious, too. And she get -- took out all the pictures for mine parents, for my uncle, for my other uncle. My turov -- my uncle was Hank, in na -- mine town -- not mine town, a different town. So I -- I got all the pictures, and then I went to the museum a -- two times, three times, and I present all the pictures, and the book from Israel what came out, I sent away a picture from mine family, of a [indecipherable] in the book. So I have a few documents, at least, yeah.

Q: Mm-hm. Could you just -- actually, the museum asked me to ask you --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- if you could just say the name of -- names of your family members, and --

A: Oh yeah, of course, you mean from my uncles, too?

Q: Yeah.

A: Or j -- or just from mine parents?

Q: Well, your parents, your uncles --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- you know, whatever you remember.

A: The names?

Q: Yeah.

A: Co -- my father's names was Mandel, my mother's name was Esther. My younger brother was Shya, and he was taken away by a selection in Auschwitz, he was 15 years old. So that was it. Then for my uncle, tr --

Q: Before you go on -- and then -- but their last name was what, now?

A: Kirschenbaum, yeah. Then I can give you the name for my uncle. My uncle ran away from the ghetto. We already was in a ghetto that -- they decided in mine town, should be a mustard -- they connected to Klein-Berlin. They called it Klein-Berlin. So they didn't make a ghetto, they took out the people to -- to each, to other ghettos -- I was in the ghetto in Novidburg in that time. So I found out that my uncle ran back. The city wasn't too far, so decided they're going to hang him. And there was another brother, my father's brother, they arrested him t -- cause you are a brother, you got to be hanged, too, because there were prominent people in the city. So the Gestapo paid them off, they shouldn't make the execution in i -- in our town, because when they hang people, the son have to hang a father, because he took the [indecipherable] around the Jewish cemetery, and tried

to hide it. So the son have to hang the father, otherwise all Jewish people will be killed. So they decided, a committee, they paid off the Gestapo, the execution should be in another town, not -- not the family should [indecipherable]. So they took him to Novidburg, where I was born, but I didn't live there, only one year. After the war, I went there, to Novidburg, and I digged out those graves. I find out [indecipherable] the Polish people, they told me exactly how many people, they're saying seven people. Two of mine uncles, and then [indecipherable] the daughter-in-law's father, and then -- then a boy, maybe 19 years old, they told him he threw away the [indecipherable], and a couple from Plodz. In order to dig that out, I find a few people in the city, I went to the city and they helped me. We have to have a permanen -- a permit. So, the governor told us, only they give us a permit if the -- all of them going to put in one casket, because they was laying in a shallow grave, you know, like that. So I decided, yes, whatever they do, it's all right. So we put them in one casket. I didn't see the faces, because you couldn't rec-recognize the faces from 1942 til 1945. And they put them on the Jewish cemetery there, and I put a -- a [indecipherable]. But my daughter went in there, and she said it's no more there. You know what the Polish people did to the cemeteries. They make fields to -- to grow food up at the -- the -- liquidate the cemetery over there. That's what I did after the war for mine uncles, you know. And they have families -- I have the pictures from them, which I present at the -- Washington They have two daughters and two son. One daughter I saw in Auschwitz only one day, then I didn't see her any more. And so they all got killed. My other uncle, [indecipherable] was killed, got three daughters. They all was killed, too.

Q: What were the names of the -- your uncles that were killed? Their names?

A: Binjamin Kirschenbaum, and Aaron Kirschenbaum. Then was Linden Birkdeboy, but he was killed, and then was mine cousin, she was like 19 years old, she didn't want to go to the shadar. So she took a pin, and marked on the bricks, that here lay in the Kirschenbaum. When I came after the war, I couldn't go to that brick, they build a garage. I tried to get in to get out that brick, but I couldn't, it was already build a garage, and I couldn't get to that. But that what I tried to do after the war.

Q: Have you gone back to Europe since --

A: No. My daughter went, but no, I can't look at the faces any more, no. I wouldn't go back there for no money in the world. I wouldn't -- I know the Polish people, they very unconsi -- they were worse than the German. If th -- if a Jewish -- if a Jewish man, he had a business, you know, he put [indecipherable] to hide the cloth, they report it to the Germans right away. Everything [indecipherable] they told them who was rich, and who was that, who was educated. You know, they got the -- it was surrounded with enemies all around, even after the war, but no liberation for the Jewish people. Nobody will ever know how many Jews was killed in Poland.

Q: You were -- you know, all this time, you're living in the Chicago area, lot of Polish people here.

A: I hate them.

Q: Really?

A: I hate them. I tell you why. There is a shul, a Reform shul near Tuye, so the Polish people maybe d -- the third generation, what they were born here, they put in a letter, the Jews are kikes, the Jews are miserable. My mother told me when I was a little girl I shouldn't go near. They was born here. We took the letter, and we went to Puchinsky, he's a Polish man, he was a older man. They didn't sign a name who did that. No matter the fifth generation they born here, the Polish people are miserable, and terrible, and anti-Semitic. That's how they're born. That's what the Bricha said. In the milk, they got in the milk when they was born, from the mother, to be anti-Semitic. That's the way they are. That's the way they are. I wouldn't go near him. And mine daughter went there when they interview some college professor, they said they're going to teach in the school, go and make a remark how they treat them after the war, they got red in the face, and they start, "Oh, Poles was killed, too, the Russian killed, too." They wouldn't say -- apologize even, no. That's the way they are. They talk nice, gentle, but you don't know what they really are.

Q: So just in town, do you avoid Polish neighborhoods, or --

A: Yes, yeah, yeah, yeah. I avoid them, yes, I avoid them. I don't want to have nothing to do with them. I try not to. Now, you know, they come to -- they come here, they clean houses. One lady went there to exchange some money with them, and they didn't know she's -- she's a Jew. So she says to -- to them, "There's -- the -- the -- the Jewish people they should only drop dead, and they have such a nice home." They come here to clean.

They get money for it, pa -- clo -- that's the way they are. I wouldn't let them into my house.

Q: Did you ever think about going to Israel, moving to Israel? Cause you said you were in a Zionist organization when you were young.

A: Yes, I went there three times already. The first time I went because somebody told me for asthma it's good in Israel, so I went for a month to dry out, and somebody told me no, somebody seek whatever you go. I went there three times already, yes, in Israel. But when I got married, in the paper it was for the United State, and we came here, and we start to make a living, and then you have a family, then you can't pick yourself up and go. But I was there three times for mine granddaughter's Bas Mitzvah, mine grandson's Bar Mitzvah, we went there back, the last couple of years, yeah.

Q: When you were younger, and you were in the Zionist organization --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- did you have any sort of dream of one day going to Israel, and living Israel?

A: Yeah, that -- that was our goal, but how many could go? One -- maybe one -- one from each town. That was our goal to go to Israel, that was we were dreaming about it. We was real organized in that time. But I wasn't the youngest grou, and were older people wi -- that did emigrate to Israel. So they make like two people can go on one certificate if they got married, and they come to Israel, and they dissolve it. So, older people did go, yeah, from mine town. But we didn't have a chance yet, you know. People

wanted to go to Israel, but they wouldn't let us in. Remember Vivian from England? He didn't want to upset the Arabs, to let in Jewish people to Israel.

Q: Mm-hm. Do you ever -- did you ever feel any regret that you didn't wind up in Israel instead of here, or --

A: No, I don't feel a regret, I tell you. I don't think I could take the climate there, it's very hot. When I was there about 25 years ago, I got very sick. I didn't know the climate, I went in the summer. And I didn't thought I'll make it home alive, that's how sick. I could not breathe. I -- I could not take the -- if -- in Jerusalem a little better, but in Tel Aviv, impossible. An-An-And I tell my friends that -- they were saying I lay on the floor, I couldn't breathe, I -- they says to me, " We here a couple years already." I says, "You got adjusted, but I didn't." I was very sick, but I went back for the kid's Bar Mitzvah, and the Bas Mitzvah, we went back.

Q: When you were -- one question the museum had was, when you were in the ghetto, before you were sent to Auschwitz --

A: Yeah, yeah?

Q: How long were you in the ghetto, do you remember?

A: A year. I live with horses in a stable, because they put in from each town there, and there was no way to go in. Like in one room lived [indecipherable] 10 families. So we were the last ones. When the German brought us over there -- should I tell you how we got on the -- on the boat? We have a -- a castle in our town, with kings used to live there, now it's for -- then it was for recreation. So they took all the Jews into that castle, and

locked the door. Then they start to [indecipherable] the people, if everybody's dead. If a baby fell down, and somebody picked up, they both got show. Got to be quiet. Then, by going out from the door [indecipherable] door, was standing in the black uniform, with the rifles, beating up everybody. Blood was running like water. Then they put us on top. Between us was a doctor, he came from Germany, I think he got one artificial leg. They throw him on the ground, and they step on his face with the boots. That doctor came to Auschwitz. We do -- we would do the same thing, he got the pills. He, his wife, his child, commit suicide right away, when he came into Auschwitz. We didn't have that, he have it.

Q: You didn't have what?

A: Pills to commit suicide. They took us in the ghetto -- so they watched for 20 minutes, they going to beat up people, they have to find a place. But there was no place where to go, so we run in a stable, and we live in a stable almost a year. Nothing to eat, people were dying from typhus. The only thing is they open up a kitchen, the Jewish people open up a kitchen, give a little bit soup, everybody. We was begging the German, why don't you kill us? He says, "No, we need the bullets on the front. You going to die ever -- anyway." That was in the ghetto. And then, from the ghetto, took us to [indecipherable] overnight, and right on the -- on the trains, on those closed trains, there were people you -- women used to give urine to drink, the babies was crying for water. No water, keep us like that, locked up for three days. Dark, no bathroom, no nothing. Half of them die anyway. And then the -- everything they did at night. They put on the train at night, we

come to os -- we didn't know where we were, we didn't know what's going on. And right away was selection. Let's say we come up 3,000 people in a train. They only pick up a hundred women, a hundred men. The rest have to go to the gas chamber. So we didn't know -- I wa -- right away, didn't see my parents, nothing, was dark. We have to put down our suitcases, whatever somebody got, and they only picked up 200, and the rest have to go. You could be young, you could be strong, it didn't matter. That's how it was. And then we find out when we came there, that's the -- the gas chamber is working day and night, for 24 hours. Day and night. You know, people were standing in the line, they begged to go in already. No washrooms, winter, it's cold, children are crying, they beat you up. They want to get over with it, already. They sing the Haptikvah, they know where they going, they see the flames, and a few minutes later, it will happen to them. So people don't understand all these things. People who wasn't there could never visualize. Now, everything is p -- fixed up, [indecipherable] taken. Can't -- they can't visualize those things. Day and night, were six crematoriums working. But when the war comes to an end, they took apart five, so nobody should know there was six. They only left one. They didn't manage to liquidate the one.

Q: Mm-hm. Today, or -- you know, let's say the last few years, or whatever, do you -- just in your day to day life --

A: Yeah?

Q: Do you think of this very often?

A: Yeah. You dream at night all the time. I -- sometime I scream at night. I -- I feel like I'm going to hide, I want to run. It's all the time with that. It never goes out. [indecipherable] to my daughter when I sleep [indecipherable] come in and wake me up, I'm happy, because when you dream, it looks like real. And she waked me up, I said, "Thank you. It's good you woke me up. I sleep ala -- alone here, alw -- always ba -- it never goes away from your mind. Like you're running, you [indecipherable] selection, you here and there. Never goes away, those things, never.

Q: How often do you have these nightmares?

A: A lot of ha -- of the times. All the time I dream that I'm with the camp, we going to hide it, we going to run. We -- we go out from the ghetto, maybe -- maybe we'll run here, maybe we'll run here, and they -- running after the -- always the -- the scary thing.

Q: Mm-hm. You know, now, in this -- in this country now --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- especially, you know, lately --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- when traumatic things have happened to people --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- there's a disaster, or -- you know --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- school shootings, or --

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: -- you know, terrible things that happen.

A: [indecipherable]

Q: They -- instantly they send counselors in.

A: Yeah.

Q: Psychologists, and therapists.

A: We haven't got none of the -- and a lot of -- and a lot of people were very depressed, and nobody knew about it. We didn't know even [indecipherable] thing. No, we didn't have any help, nothing. Not when we came, no, nothing like that.

Q: Have you ever thought, in years since, about maybe seeing a counselor, talking about this sort of thing, or not?

A: No, no.

Q: That's -- that's too different?

A: Beca -- no, because we don't believe really, in that, you know. It's all behind, you know, and a lot of people kind of pull out, which is a miracle. A lot of my friends -- I had a friend from Alsia. She said, "I can't believe it, what you went through, that you -- you got that guts to go to work, and make money, raise a family." But when you depend on yourself, then you do it. When you drowning, you try to pick yourself up, no help from nobody. So, it's a miracle [indecipherable] people, but not everybody did it. A lot of -- end up institution, a lot of my friend end up insti -- one of my friend which she help me, when I dig out mine uncles at the -- and I want to send her to Israel, send her a present. She was a nice -- she took me to the house. They took away a girl from [indecipherable]

and she -- when they took her away. In the camps, the only thing wanting they have a piece of bread to eat, but after the war, when she came to Israel, she went up in institution. Beautiful, young woman. And I don't think if she is still alive -- as a matter of fact, the husband survived, too. They both survived. And he was a very religious man. They went up in Israel. But a lot of people that was in the institution in Israel, a lot of them.

Q: Why do you think that you didn't wind up in an institution, or go crazy from all this?

A: Well, I tell you why. I have one thing in mind, is to work, and to make money, and not to be poor any more. I concentrate on this, you know. That was it, you know?

Q: So you put all your energy into that?

A: Yeah, yeah, I worked all the time. I didn't want to think about nothing else, only to work, and to make money, because if you have money, you can live a betli -- a better life, you know, and that's what I try. My kids went to college, the piano lessons. I tried to give them everything what I didn't have.

Q: Mm-hm. You talked about the nightmares you have.

A: Yeah, all the time.

Q: But what about -- what about when you're awake, and just, you know, doing things around the apartment, or whatever, do you --

A: No, only when I lay down to sleep. You know, I am working, so I am busy, so occupied with my work, so I can think of something else. I got to concentrate what I do. But when I lay down and sleep, all the time I have dreams. I -- I am amazed, myself. And

-- and sometime, I almost cry. I -- I'm in such a bad situation, I start to run, here's a selection, here's this, and it always comes back, it's so real, it's so real when it comes back. So when I get up, I says, "Oy, thanks God I'm out of it," you know?

Q: In these dreams, are they -- are the -- are the dreams made up of things you actually saw, or it's just sort of -- it puts you in the place, and --

A: No, it puts me in the place where I was standing for selection. We have to stay naked, winter, in the coldest day. If you have a little pimple on the body, you was gone. That was -- one time they told -- I work in ausch -- in Birkenau, I work by bricks, with the tuchkas you know, schlep brick? I work by that. One time they announced they need 50 girls. So I said maybe I'll have luck to go to work [indecipherable]. I stand there, and I find out, one of my friends from Czechoslovakia come over, she said, "Run away. They need 50 girls to sterilize them." So when it's 20,000 people on the one ground, you can get lost. So I kind of turned out away, and I run away from there. A lot of from mine town, many women got sterilized, yeah.

Q: What about when there are documentaries on TV about the Holocaust, or this movie, like "Schindler's List," or other --

A: Yes, I went there, yeah. I we -- I saw " Schindler's List." I'm very happy that they showed the list, but I tell you, it's actually a piece of cake compared to Auschwitz and Birkenau. At least they didn't stay by selection. They didn't watch me -- people get burned all the time. They suffered too, they have to live on rationing. They went to work. They wasn't beaten up like we were beaten up. One time, I j -- I don't know. We get a

piece of bread, we didn't know should we eat it up, or take each time a crumb. Maybe I took a crumb t -- he noticed that, I don't know. I was sitting, he gave me with the rifle, maybe 10 times over the head. I lost mine conscious, he was sure that I am dead already. Then he walked away. And I see black rings on mine face. Then mine girls came over, and says, "Oh, you still alive, come over." The whole face was bloody, the whole head was bloody. I didn't even know, we didn't have a mirror, we didn't know. So when I came back to the camps, "Oh, you probably were beaten up today. Look at what," -- I says, "Yes, I was beaten up. I don't know why, but I was." They always had to catch somebody. It's a miracle. I -- I used to suffer on headaches for many years, on terrible headaches, because it -- it is injure you eventually, not only emotionally, but physically, too.

Q: Yeah. If you just sit down and turn on the TV, or something --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- or if you're going around the channels, and there happens to be some program on about the war --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- the Holocaust, or whatever --

A: I'll never miss it.

Q: So you watch them?

A: Never miss it. I think it's a crime to miss it. You know, it's [indecipherable] people, and they tell them, "How can you watch that? I can't watch it." I says, "If you don't

watch it, you commit a crime. How would the people who was in those closed up train, and give the kids urine to drink, we was starving, they went through it, you can't even watch it? And you sit on a comfortable couch, and you're not hungry?" I never missed anything, I always watch, and call right away my friends to watch it, too. I think if I don't watch it, I commit a crime. That's the way I feel.

Q: Did you always feel that way? I mean y-you know, years ago you said you never talked about this, or you hardly ever talked about --

A: No, I didn't talk, but I'm glad now they show on television certain things, that I'm glad they show -- one time, only one time they show on television, how the people, when they put them in the crematorium. They didn't show how they fall out, the bodies. That's one time they show. I think they don't want to show, because people don't want to watch this thing. So they didn't show it any time, that's the only time when -- I never witched -- I never miss it, I always watch it. Those people suffer, and the other people can't even watch it? I think that's a crime. That's the -- why I tell everybody, but the American people tell me, "You shouldn't watch it, you shouldn't watch it. I couldn't do that. I -- I don't want to see that." I was in Florida, a -- a people come in to see -- it was a film -- I forgot, a certain film. They saw the film, they like [indecipherable] then they talk to each other, then they start to co -- show from the camp. If I knew that, I wouldn't even go there. That's how I was talking.

Q: Wait, I -- I didn't follow that.

A: In Florida last year, they show nice thing, all of a sudden they start to show from the camp. Who wants to see them? We don't want to see that. I walk over to her, I said, "You very lucky. You didn't have to feel it, not only see it. You were see it. You don't want to see how other people -- that's not nice." I told them right away. Oh, we can't take it, what can I tell, we can't take it. People don't like to see sad things, you know? But I never miss it, if they show a few m -- anything on television, I never miss it, never.

Q: Did you, in -- in the years you've been living here, and --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- all the years since the war, did you ever have the feeling, or did you ever worry that something like that could happen again?

A: Of course. You remember a couple years ago, Skokie here, builded a -- he was a Jewish guy, he come from a Jewish family, the guy, what he orgaz -- what was his name? I don't remember. He organized the Nazis, they're going to come. Well most [indecipherable] lives in Skokie, maybe 20 percent live there, 80 wa -- they decided that's not Europe, here we're going to fight back. But the police surrounded them, you know, they want to talk. So we organized ourself, everybody come with stones, in the [indecipherable] and we start to throw stones. They ran away, they didn't have a chance [indecipherable]

Q: You're talking about -- I think this was about what, 20 years or so ago, when --

A: Fifteen.

Q: -- a local group of Nazis --

A: About fifteen years, I think --

Q: -- right, was marching in -- in Skokie.

A: -- yeah, so -- yeah, yeah, no, they couldn't come in here. Yeah, they couldn't come in here, because here lives refugee, and they says here we live in a free country, we not -- we not going to let them do it. And they did it.

Q: So, did you throw stones?

A: Yeah. I came with all my friends. Whole packets of them. They ran away, the police ran away. They was afraid they're going to be killed here, yeah. In Europe you couldn't do that, but here we could do it. That's the difference.

Q: Did you -- did you yell at them?

A: No, it -- we threw stone -- they was far away, you know, they put up a pla -- they got so many stones, they ran away with the light. They would be killed if they stand up to throw, that was sure. He was arrested, that guy, later on, because he was a gay man, or something. So he was arrested, I -- I think he's still in jail.

Q: How many stones did you throw?

A: A lot. A lot. We took -- filled pocket. All my neighbors came. I don't think one refugee remain in the house in that time. I didn't live here in that time, I live in [indecipherable] Park. But we all came here, and we was waiting for them. And wis -- we organized ourself in -- you know, in the shuls, and here and there, they're not going to take -- let them take care of us here. That's it.

Q: After s -- and then they ran away?

A: Oh, they ran away. They didn't come back any more. They knew they going to be killed if they come here, that's it.

Q: So when you were heaving rocks at them or whatever --

A: Yeah, a lot of rocks.

Q: Did it feel good?

A: Yes, it makes me feel good. Here you could speak up, and we do something. In Poland we couldn't do nothing. With the Germans, we couldn't do nothing. They have the ammunition, we have nothing. But a lot of Jewish people fought in there, in the woods, and all over, they fought.

Q: Do you follow things in the news? Like, for instance, now, in the last few months, there's been the war in Serbia, and Kosovo, and all that, and --

A: Yes. Yeah. I follow all the time the news. I want to tell you something. I am really surprised that even one Jew remains in Europe. They had a chance to go to Israel, to South America, here. Not one Jew -- because always wars over there, especially against the Jews. If the economy du -- is not good, it's the Jew's fault. Like in Russia now. If the economy, the Jews -- the Jews, all the Jews, it's all their fault. They shouldn't remain there. They have no business. I know they di -- the JUF tried to help him -- take him, whatever they do, but they had [indecipherable] they had no business to be in Europe. After the second war, nobody should remain in Europe, that's it.

Q: So, the United States, and the NATO countries, they intervened in Kosovo.

A: Yeah.

Q: And one of the reasons that people like President Clinton have said --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- that they have done it is that they --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- you know, cannot permit this kind of atrocity to happen.

A: Yeah.

Q: When you -- when you see this happen today --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- does it make you think about --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- all those years ago, and why nothing happened then?

A: Yeah, no -- nobody, no. Nobody, no, nobody. Roosevelt was a big anti-Semite, he didn't let the Jews come to talk to him. They knew what's going on very well, but they didn't -- because they only killed Jews, it's all right. The government didn't do -- they turned back a boat, and the people commit suicide. That's -- that's how they help. Now, it's like that. After the second World War, they fought against the Germans, the other side. He's a bad guy, but he fought against the German. The others cooperate with hi -- with Hitler. But I don't like to see people be killed by -- like one lady says her father was a teacher, they took him out -- I don't like to see people to go in and go out from the house, otherwise you get killed, the young people get killed. I don't care about the war, but I don't like to see it. And I'm glad that the world wake up. Came an Englishman on

television, he -- he's not even 30 years old, he said, the politicians have plenty on their -- on their conscience what they didn't do on the second World War, now they woke up, finally, and a lot of people slaughter. At least they gave them a help. Us, we just went to the gas chambers, nobody raise a finger, nothing. The trains was going day and night, nobody helped us. If they ran to the woods, they was killed by the Polish people, too. So I'm glad when I see that, I'm glad what I see that, yes. They rise up and -- and -- and they do something about it.

Q: Do you think that -- especially I think in the last 10 or 15 years, there's been a lot more talk, a lot more -- more films, documentaries, books, whatever, about the Holocaust?

A: Yeah.

Q: More people talking about it, do you think that that has had any affect on things like, you know, them intervening Kosovo now, that it's a result of -- of that?

A: Yeah, I thi -- yeah, people speak up now, which they didn't speak for many years, and I'm gl -- I am glad, because lot -- how long we going to be on this earth? People are 75 - 76. People are dying every -- here, just in Skokie, three of the people -- three of the refugees die already. I went to a meeting. People are dying, wouldn't be nobody to tell the stories. I'm glad that they -- I went to Washington with -- was thinking about building a museum, in that time the beginning, and I was very happy that the -- the result is good. I'm very happy to see that. But a future generation, they should stand up, and not let a --

something like that happen, because never, never in the history happen what's happened in the Jews, in the second World War. Something like that never happened before.

Q: Have you ever gotten -- some of the people I interview, they get calls from schools or whatever --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- to come -- come and talk to our class --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- about what happened, whatev -- do you ever get any of those calls, or --

A: No, I'm not really a speaker, you know. I don't think I'd ma -- I think I -- I -- I n -- I can't do that, I don't think so.

Q: Well, you're doing okay here.

A: Yeah. Maybe are people more qualified, you know, to do those things.

Q: But you haven't been -- no one's ever asked you?

A: No, no, no.

Q: If some teacher did call you, and say, why d -- I heard about you somehow, would you come and talk to my class, would you go?

A: Yeah, yeah, if they ask me, I probably will. Yes, if they ask me, I probably. I tell you, I went to a lecture after the war, I don't remember the name of the guy, and he says like that, there isn't enough paper yink -- paper and ink, to put down what's happened in the second World War. No matter how many book, that's impossible. It's just impossible.

Q: We --

A: The people have to dig their own graves, you know, near Russia, where the -- the people have to dig their own graves, and jump in, and they -- and they shot them. They enjoy it, they're very sadistic people. They used to take babies, and throw in the air, and shot them like birds. They very sadistic people, the German. And I still think they still are. I don't believe them.

Q: You don't think they've changed?

A: I wasn't -- I was mad when they took away the wall from --

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Lonia Mosak. This is tape number two, side B. We --

A: The people have to dig their own graves, you know, near Russia, where the -- the people have to dig their own graves, and jump in, and they -- and they shot them. They enjoy it, they're very sadistic people. They used to take babies, and throw in the air, and shot them like birds. They very sadistic people, the German. And I still think they still are. I don't believe them.

Q: You don't think they've changed?

A: I wasn't -- I was mad when they took away the wall from Germany, you know, they have a dividing wall with the Russian, put up a wall, East Germany. They should never take away the wall. I saw a woman came on television from England, and she said that was -- that wall should never be taken away, it was a protection for certain -- for other

walls. A security, like they say, a security blanket. They should never take away the wall, made the Germans strong again. Because the -- Germany is the richest country in the world. They took away everybody from the people. If you have a gold teeth in your mouth, they took out. If you have a watch, if you have a ring, di -- everything took away. They're going to have for generation, generation, what they have. They robbed the whole yeero, the bank, everything, they took over everything.

Q: Mm-hm. So you don't like the notion of Germany getting stronger?

A: No, no. They should never ta -- I was always against -- they took away -- and a lot of people come on television, English people, fame -- that said no, that was a big mistake. They should be never strong, because they start two World Wars already. And you never know the future. You know how anti-Semitic they are now? When they ga -- they organized themselve? They admire Hitler, and everything. They didn't have a lesson. This -- and a lot of them got big government jobs, but they were in -- in the Gestapo, and they change their name, they got bi-big jobs there. How can you trust these people? I would never trust them. They -- they came in, a German, to my house, we weren't rich. He told me to open up the drawers, he want to take away everything. I says, here is, take this, take this, take -- he says, "No. Where did you -- where did you stack your better stuff?" I said we were not rich, we didn't have any better stuff. So he says, "You know, I was here in the first World War. They chased us out in this country, but this time we staying here forever." That's how -- they was sure of themself. They occupied whole Europe. That's how [indecipherable] that was a man maybe 60 years old. He was in the

first World War, they were sure, they were so hypnotized they were going to -- they going to counter the whole world.

Q: Let's just -- before we -- I'm --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- I'm running out of questions, but before we --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- leave off, I just want to make sure -- we talked about how you got over here --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- and how you were working --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- and that you had children and all --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- and then we started talking about other things. I mean, there's a lot of years went by.

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah, that's for sure.

Q: Any interesting things in there that you want to -- that you want to talk about, or mention?

A: Well, I'm glad I'm in this country, and I could build a life, and live a better life. I'm -- I'm happy for that, that I could do it, you know? Most of the people did it. [indecipherable] they know they can't depend on nobody, and they have to pick themself

up, on straps like they say, and do it on their own, and this country give you an opportunity for that. So I'm very grateful for that, yeah.

Q: When you came over here, did you become a citizen right away?

A: No, it takes five years. I didn't know the language then. We have to -- we went to night school, we went to school, we learned the language. Five years later we became citizens, yeah.

Q: What -- did you have different activities, or hobbies, or what would you do for fun, you know?

A: Oh. Oh yes, we -- we organized ourself. We got organizations in the newcomers. Yeah, I was -- last week -- I'm going next week to the -- how you call it, the new citizen -- we call it the new citizen, B'nai Brith, the -- all this, have meeting once a month, if you -- I always attend those meetings, we always go there. We organized themselves, yeah, all the time. We stay together, like the refugees stay together all the time, yeah.

Q: Mm-hm. Were you -- before the war, were you very religious?

A: Well, my parents was very religious, I was more progressive. I belonged to a Zionist organization, they called the Shemiratsier. They was not that religious. Traditional, but not religious, not like that. Like, you couldn't take a pencil, write on Saturday, or do things like that, ride a bike. We did it, we did those things, yeah. But in they -- in the same time, the older peoples in the organization was well educated, so they teach us, we got courses, all kind of courses, book reviews. Was very interesting, yeah.

Q: Did that cause any problems with your parents, that you were in this sort of progressive group --

A: No, I di -- I --

Q: -- and they were more religious?

A: They didn't like it, they didn't like it, but we did our own way, yeah. They didn't like it, but in the house we were religious, I didn't do nothing t -- against them. But when we went out with the group, or we ride a bike, they didn't know about it.

Q: With all you, you know, lived through during the war --

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: -- and everything you saw, did that change the way you thought about God, or --

A: Yeah, it did change, but I want to tell you something. We didn't believe in God when we was in Auschwitz, when we saw what's going on, but when I come to this country, and I have children, you sti -- you have to hang up the little tradition. It gives you a little, you know, there a lot of things what's going bad in life. There are sickness, all -- you have to hang up with something. So I decided we should hang up to something, and believe in God. It's a little bit easier, the life is easier. But you get very sick, oy God should I get bet -- should I get better, maybe I'll get out of it. So you always mention that. But deep in hearts, people didn't believe it, no.

Q: In Auschwitz, you say, people didn't believe --

A: No, no.

Q: -- did you believe before you went to the camp?

A: Yeah, before yeah, but not after that, when I saw, no. No, nobody believed in there.

Q: Why did you feel that way?

A: Because we couldn't see the young [indecipherable] the young kids, and crying, and people go to the gas chamber. That's wasn't -- there is something could control that, you know what I mean? The Germans used to tease us, "You see what we have on our buckle? God is with us, not with you." That's what they told us. And when the airplanes start to circle in Auschwitz, and we was looking, they said, "What are you looking for? 12 -- 12 -- 12 o'clock, the world will be -- all be -- you'll be killed 15 minute before 12. That was their intention to do. If the world wouldn't come to an end, another year or two, nobody would survive, no way. How long can you starve like that?

Q: So in the camp you decided there's no God.

A: No, that's something --

Q: Then when you have kids, you feel like well --

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: -- you know, you should hang onto some tradition.

A: Yeah, that's was mine idea.

Q: -- but does that mean -- does that mean you started to believe in God again?

A: Well, yes. Maybe, maybe yes. I wanted the kids to have a traditions. I f -- I felt the holidays and everything, just like my parents did, yeah.

Q: Mm-hm, but is it just, you know, you want the tradition, or you -- I'm -- I'm just trying to get, did --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- do you believe there is a God now?

A: Now I believe it, yes, now I believe it, even though in that time I didn't. When you see bad things happen, you don't believe. Then you change your mind, maybe there is something, yeah.

Q: But then, where was he?

A: Yeah, that's what we ask, our questions, all the time. Even the religious people in the camp, women, they were very religious. But now, when I come to Florida, and I sit on the bench near the ocean, and I see a lot of men with long beards, with numbers, they very religious, and they suffered during the war, but they very religious now. They said, "Thanks God I wasn't a German, I didn't have too good a job." That's what they tell me. Because I talk to -- when I see a number, I go over, talk to them. [indecipherable] this thing. Yeah.

Q: Do you -- you have to actually --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- press that button.

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you think that there is any answer that can explain the Holocaust?

A: No, no, I don't think so. Did -- people didn't foresee that. There was a lot of young men, if they knew what's coming, they would do something, they would go in the woods, and run. Nobody forseed it, because the Germans was lying to us. They told us we just

going to take -- take another place for war. They was lying. Then they open up atellager in Auschwitz, or they took in kids like in a kindergarten, and all the thing -- they promise them all in the world, you see, if the Red Cross come, we have kids here, we have good -- everything was covered up, like in Theresienstadt, too. And then they took the people to -- to -- the -- the people was fighting [indecipherable] bare naked. They says, "You promised us, we [indecipherable] why you do it to us?" So they was beaten up over the head. They didn't have it what to fight. That was before the Russians came in, took away those people.

Q: So, do you think it was just this tremendous evil, and there was --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- there's no other explanation, or --

A: Yeah, yeah. A lot of people I know, from mine town, intelligent people, they belong to a Socialist organization before the war, they came to Auschwitz, and they went to the electric wire. They said, "In a world like that, we don't have to live. It's no use. Doesn't pay to live in a world like that, we all going to be killed anyway." And they were big organizers, bele -- believe in Socialism and all these things. Very intelligent people, and that's what they did.

Q: Could you tell us again about when you were in Bialystok?

A: Yeah, that -- I was in Bialystok, yeah. That's where the police brought us, and ammunition, I have to learn how to use a gun to defend ourself, because he told us it's going to be a pogrom there. And you know why, they told us. A lot of women put their

babies to Polish families. Let's say a brother, a nephew, survived the war in Russia, they came back for the child, the child was already five, six years old, the child didn't want to go. So they steal the kids out. They came in the uniform, and they took them by force, to the German border, into Israel. So they decided the people killed their kids, to have blood for matzos at Passover. They right away have an excuse, you know. And that's when they brought in ammunition, we should defend -- we can do nothing, it's going to be a pogrom here. That's when I took my brother, went to Warsaw, and I know that the Bricha is waiting for the people, to take them across the border.

Q: Mm-hm. So you -- you left Bialystok at that point?

A: Yeah, then they come after us, too. Little by little, they all left. There was no place to stay there now, any more.

Q: Yeah.

A: The life was in danger.

Q: While you've been living in this country, d -- have you -- do you travel much, just even on vacations go overseas, or what?

A: Well, I used to go with my daughter together, and I go to Florida with my friends. That's how far it's going.

Q: Right. Did you ever make any trips to any part of Europe?

A: No, I wouldn't go back there, no.

Q: Not any part?

A: No. I hate those people, I don't want to see those faces.

Q: Mm-hm. I think that's about it for any of my questions.

A: Yeah.

Q: Is there anything that we didn't talk about, or that you want to add?

A: What can I add? I told you the whole story. I'm -- I'm happy that I'm here. I got a chance to make money, and build up a -- to have a nice place to live. I'm still work, I like to work. I'm very lucky to have two daughters, two children, you know? And grandchildren, that's -- I'm very lucky, which I never dream of that. We never dreamed that we going to ever live freely. Every day I get up, and I says to myself, "I can't believe it, I'm free, that I can do whatever I want, I got what to eat." We always think about that, never goes away.

Q: You know one thing I was wondering about is --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- your story, and in fact, every other person I've talked to --

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: -- they talk so much about the food, and how there wasn't food, and if you got a potato, or an extra piece of bread, or something like that --

A: Yeah, yeah, that was the life.

Q: -- does that -- do you still have sort of a special --

A: Yeah, I -- I --

Q: -- feeling about food?

A: Yeah, I can't see people throw away food. That wi -- that hurts me terrible. Because there's still people in the world what is starving now, still. No, I can never throw away food. No, I -- I think I commit a crime if I throw out food, because I remember how hungry we was. We was only -- when we was in Auschwitz, we only have one pray in our life, to have a whole bread, and cut as much as we want. We didn't think about a -- a bed clean, our clothes, nothing exists in your head, only if to have a bread, and to cut as much as you wanted. Before the war finished, the German used to di-divided our bread for four. Later, they didn't do that, they gave us small pumpernickel for 10, you got to divide it for yourself. So a lot of groups fight over that, there was -- not mine group, mine group was very generous, and we made it every day somebody else will take the end of the bread. But we got along, everybody took a little slice over 24 hour. But other people was fighting, and killing each other. They making little scale, and try to weigh the bread, and this and that. We didn't do that. I was with my own people, with my own friends, so we didn't do this.

Q: So now you can eat as much as you want --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- anything you want.

A: Now we're afraid to eat. You got cholesterol, you got this. Yeah, but I -- I can't see throwing away food, no.

Q: Mm. When you're --

A: I always think about it, some people are still hungry in this world.

Q: When you go to the grocery store, do you think about this?

A: Yes, I buy -- I don't buy too much, because I don't want to throw away. I only buy a little, because it hurts me if I have to throw away food. I -- I couldn't do it. For six years, you know, starving. Six years. Even one hour when a person is hungry is bad. When we were standing by our selection, if you were skinny, you have no chance to live, the German hate skinny people. But the women got an idea to drink a lot of water, as a -- have a big stomach. So we fooled the Germans, oh you got a big stomach, you -- you still be able to work. So we fooled them, we make our cheeks red, to look better, you know. We tried to fool them this way.

Q: Now, all the -- all the young people today, everybody wants to be skinny, everyone wants to be thin.

A: Yeah, oh, yeah. Over there if you're skinny, even a man, in the man's camp, a skinny person have no chance to survive, they hate skinny people. They gave them a name, musselman, that's a -- musselman, the -- you're skinny, you have no right to live. And I was chubby, that saved my life, too. I was always chubby. You know, Europe, you give the kids to eat. If you're skinny they thought you are handicapped. So every mother pushed the food to her kids.

Q: I believe you said earlier -- you mentioned having grandchildren?

A: Yeah, I have four grandchildren. Each girl --

Q: How -- how old are they, what are their names?

A: Oh, oh. My oldest is Jennifer, she one more year at college to finish. The boy going to be 16 the 27th of June, he's a high school. My other daughter have a girl, she's going 16, and 13, going to have a Bar Mitzvah in October. I've got four grandchildren, yeah.

Q: And their names?

A: Their name? Jennifer from this daughter, and Bradley the other name, and Alila, and Cammy. Yeah, they're the four grandchildren, yeah.

Q: Mm-hm. Well, I think that's about it for my questions, if [indecipherable] any --

A: Yeah, I went to Israel for the Bar Mitzvah -- for the Bas Mitzvah, twice.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: We went with my daughter to Israel for that, yeah. Yeah, I'm very devoted to Israel. I would do anything for Israel.

Q: Okay, well if there's nothing else you want to add --

A: No.

Q: -- then I guess that's it.

A: One of my cousins, she die here -- on the way to Japan, you know. But she die here in the war. So he left me 2,000 dollars. So I gave thousand dollars for Israel for scholarship, and thousand dollars for the museum. They need it more than I do.

Q: Well, listen, thanks for taking all this time this afternoon.

A: Yes, thank you for interviewing me, yeah.

Q: My pleasure.

A: I -- I not too many time talk about these things.

Q: Oh.

A: No, never, I never really talk about it. Sometime w-we get together with my friends, we talk a little bit about it, and sometimes some of them don't want to even hear about it, "Oy, you make me sick, please don't talk about it."

Q: So, well we've been talking about it for almost two hours.

A: Yeah.

Q: So how's that make you feel now, do you feel better somehow, or --

A: No, I feel better that it's going to be on paper, and it's going to be a document for the future generation. So that's how it makes me feel good. I don't mind how many times I get interviewed, really. That doesn't bother me. You know, a lot of people -- of my friend can't talk, they get very sick, they don't want to hear about it. They have heart trouble here, they have high blood pressure, they didn't want to be interview at all. I couldn't convince them, but most of them I did convince, yeah. It's very hard for some people to talk, you know, it's very hard. Maybe I am strong in my nature, you know? But --

Q: Well, you're not talking into the microphone.

A: Yeah, yeah. So I'm mar -- I talk about it, you know, if I have a chance, but my friends, a lot of them get sick, they don't want to hear about it. So if I see a film, they show something, I'm very happy. I went to see a film last year, "In Our Hands," how the -- the Israeli society and the English army, you know, but not on the Israeli [indecipherable] that they shouldn't tell, but to the end, they raise up, and they says, "We going to fight our own flag." And then they mentioned how they took out the people from Poland, that

group, but I was glad to see that, you know, a lot of people don't know about it. Some of them don't know about it.

Q: Which group are you talking about now?

A: The Bricha, from Israel.

Q: Oh.

A: A couple of my friends were the survivor Auschwitz, they brought them uniforms, and they smuggled them into Israel after the war. They still there in Israel, yeah. They did a lot, whatever they could, you know? Actually, we very proud to have our own country in Israel, and we should always support them. We see what's happened when we don't have a country. Now Israel go to every corner of the world where Jewish are in trouble, they take them out, they help them. We didn't have it bef -- before, in the second World War. Nobody could help us.

Q: Well listen, thanks again for doing the interview.

A: That you for interviewing me.

Q: It's a hot day, so now you can turn your air conditioner back on.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay, great. Thank you.

A: I hope it came out all right.

Q: Oh yeah, no, it's great. This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Lonia Mosak.

End of Tape Two, Side B

Conclusion of Interview