

**Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001**

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Regina Gelb(A): The gypsies, right. Here is your gypsy, you see, with the violin?

Yeah, that's the one. He was sort of small, remember, he was like the --

A2: I think he was a cripple

A: A cripple or a midget.

A2: The a-amazing thing about it, he was playing the vio --

A: Yeah, but hold it, hold it, hold it, this -- we going to say into the record, right?

Q: Say -- any time you're -- actu -- actu --

A: What do you want me -- I -- I just took out my album from our trip to **Europe**, specifically to **Poland** in 1980, and I'm looking at the pictures that were taken on our visit to **Frederic Chopin's** birthplace, **Zelazowa Wola**, which is slightly north, I think -- near **Warsaw**, very near **Warsaw**. And it's amazing how vivid the memories of the lovely, lovely music that was played at the -- at the cottage. This actually is an old cottage rather than a house, a 19th century cottage, with all the furnishings, and of course, a piano, which is played every now and then. Remember, she said no -- the guide said absolutely no -- nobody is allowed to play the piano except a famous pianist, remember? At which time they take the piano out to the patio. So I'd -- later on, of course, after **Zelazowa Wola**, we went -- you remember this, to the concert?

A2: Yes.

A: In the **Wazcenki** Palace.

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

A2: What was the name of that park?

A: **Wazcenki** Palace, that's an old palace.

A2: Oh, the same name as the palace.

A: Right.

A2: Yeah, I remember when we sat there, and -- and we were enjoying a concert.

A: Yeah. The piano was placed upo --

A2: Piano recital.

A: Yes, and the piano was placed with -- on this.

A2: At the -- at -- beneath the statue --

A: The statue.

A2: -- and the statue is of **Chopin**.

A: Right, right.

A2: Right.

A: And there was sort of like an artificial lake, wasn't it?

A2: Mm-hm.

A: Yeah, it was --

A2: Well, it was a pond.

A: Yeah. Of course, we don't have the -- we don't have the pic -- any pictures from the **Ostrovsky** Palace. Remember that? We sat there for a col -- concert in a very small concert hall?

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

A2: Mm-hm.

A: That was lovely too. And this was part of our -- my -- our infatuation with -- with **Chopin's** music. So we were just so thrilled that we were able to go there.

A2: Right. I wanted to move ahead to when we were in **Kraków**, and th-ther- there's a photograph over here of a -- a -- a group of gypsies who were entertaining, and there's one amazing --

A: Musician.

A2: -- musician there, he was a -- a midget cripple who played the violin, but he held the violin like a cello. And he was a l -- he bowed with his left hand. And he played the most difficult music. I know, because I used to play the violin myself and he did it with such perfection, it was just a -- and I was just amazed to see -- to see it being done. And the others, I -- well, the others I don't know about because I'm no -- I never played the other --

A: No -- instruments.

A2: -- the other instruments.

A: No, but this was -- this was I think a -- a -- this was in the market square in **Kraków**, and I think they were what you call permanent musicians for the summer, or whatever. But this -- and they were gypsies, and they said so. But this -- the violinist was -- wa -- he took your breath away, I remember that. We just couldn't get over it.

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

And we were quite impressed. And of course from **Kraków** -- this you remember, too, we went to **Wilanow** Palace, that was outside of **Warsaw**, that's with **Grazshina**.

A2: With **Grazshina**.

A: Yes. And here is the -- remember this one?

A2: I don't remember.

A: An organ grinder, that was --

A2: The orga --

A: -- yes --

A2: -- yeah, uh-huh.

A: -- in -- in -- and he had a parrot. This was in -- in **Warsaw**. But another thing that impressed you, I want to bring that out that -- which was in **Warsaw**.

A2: Yes, what was that?

A: Which was this.

A2: Oh yes.

A: Yes. That was the -- remember? The tomb of the unknown soldier --

A2: Yes, yes.

A: -- and the --

A2: Right, the changing of the guard. I remember seeing that.

A: Out of the window from the [**indecipherable**] remember?

A2: Right, right.

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

A: So that was -- and even the day -- the morning that we are leaving there was changing of the guards and we saw it from the window.

A2: Mm-hm.

A: It's very nice. And this was the **Warsaw** ghetto memorial, of course, which we visited. And after that was **Auschwitz**, so that was --

Q: Okay, if you could now just let us -- that's -- that's fine. If you could now just maybe sort of le -- not say anything and just lean forward a little bit.

A: To make the noise.

Q: Just to make the noise a little, yeah. Not specially, just the way it is.

A: Here's a visit to my hometown. Yes. I remember this was on the square where --

A2: Yes.

A: -- Jews were rounded up. Oh here is the locomotive.

A2: **Starchowice**, yes.

A: Yeah. This is the locomotive that you liked so well, 19th century locomotive.

A2: Yeah, you don't see them any more.

A: Yeah. And this is the Christian family that was of such help to us in **Poland**, helped us survive. We visited them, remember?

A2: Mm-hm, sure.

Q: Now, no talk and just -- just go through it. That's -- that's great.

A: Okay.

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

Q: This is one little scene of -- **[tape break]**

A: -- **Poland [indecipherable]**

Q: Well, maybe -- maybe we can do, since I'm having the stir --

A: It's **[indecipherable]**

A2: But you don't need me here now, I'm going to go back **[indecipherable]**

Q: No, no, no, you can go, yeah.

A: So maybe you close the -- **[tape break] [music]**. What do you want me to say?

Q: Where are the loudspeakers?

A: Oh, you want it louder?

Q: Yeah, that would be good. If you could. Where are the loudspeakers? In here? I just want about -- **[music]**. Even a little louder. A-And don't move your head too much, just kind of like talk into the microphone, or to me.

A: Yeah. Well, I -- you know, I -- I do like classical music a lot, and always have, and I love the human voice, this is why I love opera. But I adore **Chopin**, and if you ask me to make a list of composers that I adore, from the top my first is **Chopin** -- not **Victor's**, he l -- he likes him, too, but he prefers **Tchaikovsky**, but **Chopin** to me is everything. There's such delicacy in his piano playing, and there's such soul, plus the fact that a lot of his music was set to -- was made into songs in **Poland**. In fact, I have a record here, it says **[indecipherable]** that's complete works of **Chopin** as they were set to music. There are some baritone male voices, and sopranos. And actually -- this is

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

a record I bought while I was in **Poland**, but actually, I know about 80 percent of these songs, because as a child I learned them. You know, when you learn -- when you go to school and you have -- in those days, children were taught to sing. Well, you were taught also quite often, some of these songs, which at that time I didn't know they were **Chopin**, they were just beautiful songs.

Q: You can just start any time you want to.

A: You asked me about the pictures of my family from before the war. Of course I have them, and it isn't because I -- I took them out of **Poland**, no. They were sent to us from **Israel** because my mother was quite involved with training the pioneers for pi -- and for pioneering in **Palestine** and subsequently these people settled in the old **Palestine** and my parents used to send them pictures. Well, after the war, we were very, very lucky that some of these people whom we located, gave us some of the pictures of -- from my childhood, which I would otherwise never have. So what I do have in my album, and of course I also have it as a painting, which I had done out of these pictures, a picture of my parents as mature people, and a picture of my parents as -- as an engaged couple. And you could see how charming that looks, it's a sort of an old fashioned kind of thing. Mother has a big bow in the back, and they both wear a **pince-nez**. And my father has one of these stand-up collars, sort of like a 19th century fashion. Very charming and I'm delighted to have those. Then we have a picture of my father, one of them is -- he's sort of posing, you could see, obviously this was posed in

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

the studio against a little table. And it's very official, and rather proper. And then there's one more relaxed, sort of like a -- well, basic portrait type of a picture. And then I have this group picture of my grandmother on my mother's side, whose name was **Sarah Tanenbloom**. And I think I mentioned somewhere in the rec --

Q: I don't recall.

A: This group picture is with my mother's side of the family. Basically, my grandmother is in the middle. Since she was religious, you could see she's wearing a wig. To her left is my mother, holding my oldest sister, **Anna -- Hanya**. Of course, I wasn't around yet for a long time. On the other side of Grandma is my Aunt **Anja** and above in second line you have my father's sister. This is, I think, **Lodja**. Then is my mother's youngest sister, **Ruja**, my father, my Aunt **Regina**, my father's sister, I think this is **Frania**, and this completes the picture. And that was taken somewhere in the 20's and -- ni -- 1920's. And I'm so happy to have this picture, of course, I made copies for my sisters and my kids. So we're very lucky to have that. And here is my mother as a very young girl, with my -- with -- with her brother. And it also has to be taken somewhere in a -- in a studio, and it makes me laugh when I look at those poses, but this is also charming, lovely. I also have a very interesting picture of myself here with my mother. And I -- I sort of have a severe look on my face, and -- and I am sitting there with a little cane. The reason is that this is a picture of my fa -- of my mother in one of the -- she used to go to the spa for -- for her arthritis, and she had to

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

have a cane, obviously she was suffering. So apparently she bought me a little cane. And I'm sitting on the -- on the -- on a bench, and my mother is standing next to me, and of course I look the way I always did, with the big, thick hair, and a bow in the head -- hair, holding a cane. And next to it I also have a picture of my sister **Chris, Chrisha**, with my mother, also at that -- at that spa, which was the -- the -- the spa -- the -- the sulphur baths were actually located inside a park. And this is outside the gate of the park. The -- the place was called **Buskos Druey**, it was in central **Poland**. Mother used to go there annually for her arthritis. Let -- let me make sure I know who is who. This is **Regina**, this is **Ruja**, this is **Anja**, this is **Moish**, those are the two sons. Yes, okay, just a second. Oh, I've got it written down, all the sisters were standing there, sister **Regina**, this is **Regina**, this one. Brother **Moish**, sister **Anja**, brother **Nokrun** in there. Sister **Ruja**, that's -- I had it the opposite way, I'm looking at it li -- and the **Kronenburg** boys, **Bernard** and **Henrick**, okay. Here is another picture which I have, which shows my mother's side of the family, which was quite extensive, because there were nine children, and when they grew up, of course they all had children, so the family was very large. In this picture I have my mother's oldest sister, **Fela Kronenberg** with her husband. My mother's sister, **Anja, Regina** and **Ruja**. My mother's brother **Moish**, and the **Kronenberg's** two sons, whose name was **Bernard** and **Henrick**. And of course, except for my Uncle **Moish**, who emigrated to **America**, this -- everybody in this picture went -- was annihilated in -- in the Holocaust, plus

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

-- and this is only one daughter, now just multiply it by nine, and you will get the idea of how many people in that family perished in the Holocaust. My father's brother, who survived the war, this was right after the war. So let me see, and after this is **Berlin**. Well, here is one more picture, we call it the classic, quote unquote, because we are lined up, posed again as all those pictures were in those years, the three sisters. The oldest sister **Anna -- Hanya**, the middle sister **Chrisha, Chris**, and myself, **Renia, Regina**. We lined up and our kids always laugh at this picture, and they make us -- we -- of course, we are a very close family, we always have been extremely close, and -- and because we survived the war together, and -- and the fact that we were never separated during the war, which is almost incredible. It just absolutely was a miraculous thing that we were never separated. We were very close then, and we are very close now, and so are our kids. So our kids always laugh when they remember this picture, because this is the family classic. And throughout the years, whenever we have big of -- family occasions, weddings, **Bar Mitzvahs**, Seders, they make us line up. And I can show you though the years, I have pictures of the three of us lined up in the exact position. We have to stand, and we have to stand there like the steps, except now we are not steps. In those days one was biggest, one was middle, one was small. Now we're sort of varied in size, and we, of course, gotten so much older, too. But the point is that I have pictures through the years, in the same arrangement as this classic picture, so that this is just for the joke of it, and every album that you look through, as

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

I have them all lined up, you will always find a picture of the three sisters lined up in that fashion. You know, I look at these albums now, and I remember [**indecipherable**] them in **Berlin**, which was a part of our -- that's where our outings were -- took place, because we lived in the **DP** camp in **Schlactensee**. And as I look at these pictures with my friends, one of it has the bombed out church in the background. Gives you an idea that this was only one year after the war ended. But we look like real schoolgirls out for a good time. And we had a very -- I always talk about the experience in the **DP** camp as one of the nicest, because I was really still a child, and there was every effort made to have all the children who were at the camp at that time, to have those children come back to the life of a child. Of course, there was a school established, and -- because children were coming in at all ages, and with all educational backgrounds, we were sorted out, so to say, by age, because this was primarily a Hebrew school, even though the subjects were -- the curriculum was like any other school, except it was all in Hebrew. And basically the kids who went to that school really, truly identified with the group, even though some of the children were orphans and came to the **DP** camp with cousins or others. Some were children with parents who came out of **Russia**, for example. I had one friend, **Tunia**, who came from **Russia**, and she was my age, and she was in that class. Now we had, in addition -- in -- in addition to having courses, we were also given a special dining room where we would go -- we all attended, we all had special lunches, and of course we always had chocolate. And in the evenings we went

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

for dances. I don't think it was every evening, it was probably about once or twice a week. And over there we could already mix with the what you call grown-up group, because after all, we were -- I ha -- I was among the group that was the oldest, and we weren't even what you call grown people yet. But over there the boys were lovely, and they were a little older, but they didn't mind dancing with girls who are younger but knew how to dance, and there was an orchestra. And the music played -- I now realize, when I hear some of it in **America** -- not now, but years ago when they used to play that, that the music that was very popular in **America** in the 30's was what was played by these dancing -- dancing -- dance bands for us in **Schlactensee**. And lo and behold, when I came to **America**, I heard those songs again, except they said, oh, these songs are old, and **Nat King Cole** will sing it, or other popular entertainer singers of the time. And of course, to this day, every time somebody plays very old records, and they play one of those, I never associate it with **America**, because I really learned it in **Berlin**. So --

Q: Do you remember one? Sing -- sing one, or s -- hum it a little bit.

A: Oh yes, of course, my voice isn't there, but I remember this one song, "Kiss me once, and kiss me twice, and kiss me once again. It's been a long, long, time." I'm sorry, I can't sing cause I just had a cold, so I have a scratchy voice. Anyhow, I have here these different boys that I used to dance with, and of course group pictures with others, and it's -- it's really just wonderful with -- we seem to be having a very great,

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

wonderful time, which we did. Because I really remember all this with great affection, and how -- what a nice relationships we all established with the boys. I mean, each one of us, the group of girls that I was close to, and there were four of us that were very close at that time, and we had a relationship with boys that was really lovely, it was friendly, and it -- it was really -- it was just -- just -- just -- just nice. I have a few pictures of the four of us here, and three of us remain very close. Actually, all four except unfortunately two of us are gone -- we're gone now. And in fact, I have a picture much later on, that I might show you, when we took a -- the four of us got together, and we have a picture like that.

Q: Can you describe a little bit more the -- I mean s -- a lot of people have not so pleasant memories of -- of -- of **DP** camps. Could you describe a little bit what it looked like, what -- what the camp itself was -- sort of looked like and -- and what your memories are of it, that are very different.

A: Well, i -- actually, what I remember is that we lived in barracks, I have the pictures of the barracks. The barracks were any -- not much to -- to brag about, they were, I think, some old, leftover army barracks over there. But when you're young, and you come back to -- to living a life of a young girl, who cares if you live in a barrack or if you live in a palace. Because, as you could see from the album, we were celebrating different holidays. For example, **Lach Baroma**, as you could see, we are all dressed in school uniforms, which is a white blouse and a navy blue skirt. We went to the --

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

somewhere out -- it was an outing, like a picnic type. And we used to go to -- this is a very interesting picture, we used to go marching on -- on holiday with -- carrying a Jew -- a -- an Israeli flag. As you could see, we here lined up for a march. Now, I can't quite tell you where we were going, but this is inside the **DP** camp, because you see the barrack in the back. However, I know we went outside. This could have been one of those **Lach Baroma** parades of sorts. And here you have another picture of another picnic, specifically with my class and some of these people are still around and they're very -- we're very good friends. This is a picture in the classroom, and here is a picture of the four of us, what I told you.

Q: Okay, let's go to the certificate, tell me a little bit more about the certificate. You were a good student, I bet.

A: Yes, I was a very good student, and it makes me laugh that I came up with all excellents, and it didn't really do me any good, because this was from a Hebrew school, and I came to **America**. However, I kept it sort of as a souvenir, and as a matter of fact, this is only a copy because I donated the original the Holocaust Museum in **Washington**. This was issued to me in January of 1947, when I was leaving **DP** camp for the **United States**. And of course, knowing that I -- I -- I would be going to school somewhere in **America**, but not knowing exactly what it is that I will need to present myself as a student, this was a handwritten kind of a report card, and it reads Hebrew public school, **Herzl**, [indecipherable] center, **Berlin schlact** --

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

Schlactensee. And of course it has my birth date and where I was born and then all the subjects that were covered, and a --

Q: Could you say that again? All the subjects -- could you read some of those things?

A: Oh sure. Behavior was number one, and it says excellent. Now there -- there's something very academic. Bible, yes, Hebrew language, Hebrew literature, English language -- of which there was absolutely the most minimal amount because the professor -- the teacher was a -- a -- a British -- he was from **England**, and the phrases that he taught us were laughable. One of those phrases to this day is -- his favorite phrase we have -- had to memorize it. The house was situated on the cliff. And I never forgot it because whenever I wanted to use a phrase in **America**, that was exactly the phrase I would need, obviously, to survive in **America**. So to this day I have it ingrained in my brain. It's -- it's -- and I use it as an anecdotal joke, because that's really what it amounts to. Well, anyhow, the other is Hebrew history, **Palestine** geography, geography -- general geography. Mathematics, algebra, geometry, physics, botanics -- which was botany. Drawing, music, and physical training. Now the music wasn't much in the school itself, but what we did was we used to go -- you know, we were in -- th-the German theater was brought back right after the war, in **East Germany**. We were on -- in the American sector, however, somehow or other we had -- th-the older kids in the school were able to go as a class, to go to, let's say, we saw **Schiller**, the [indecipherable], I saw that in -- in **Berlin** theater. We were able to go to

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

opera so that -- apparently I really don't remember, but I do think that after a musical event, after mu -- an event -- cultural event that involved music, we probably discussed it in the class, because there was no musical instruction as such. But this was all terribly worthwhile, because really, that was basically connecting e -- connecting us to real -- th-the real world. And I -- I surely am thrilled that I was able to do it. And now the school grew in size, because when I first came, the -- the group was rather small, and I have a picture of that. So was a very small group, but by the time I was ready to leave, which was early 1947, the -- I have another picture, as you could see, this is the -- the -- the group grew, because as I mentioned before, people were coming out of the **Soviet Union** and trying to go westward. And a lot of them, including my friend **Tunia**, stopped in the **Schlactensee** camp so that these were -- not all of these kids that you see in the picture are not all camp survivors. Some of them are children who came out of **Russia**, which to an extent was also very bad, but that's another story. And of course, you know, there were weddings. People were getting married. I have a picture of somebody's wedding. I don't know whose wedding, but I can s -- I could see that I'm here, and I could see there are flowers, and I could see that two big --

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

A: -- And of course, you know, there were weddings. People were getting married. I have a picture of somebody's wedding. I don't know whose wedding, but I can s -- I

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

could see that I'm here, and I could see there are flowers, and I could see that two big lo -- two long tables with a lot of people, and I si -- distinctly remember that somebody in camp was getting married and I wa -- am in it, and don't ask me why. But I do see my school friends, so perhaps -- you see, these are all my school friends. Perhaps we were invited for whatever reason, but I can't tell you. But I was there. Well, moving along in the album, you could see this is our picture on the boat, coming over to **America**. We arrived in **New York** on February 11th, 1947, and I traveled with my sister and brother-in-law, **Miles Lerman** and **Chris Lerman**, and because one of my school friends, **George Schwab** was also going to **America** with his mother, **Clara Schwab**, wis -- we stayed together. The boat was called **Marine Perch**, it was an old transport tran -- converted transport ship. And it was primitive by any standard, but to us it was luxury. The only thing is because it was February, we had a really terrific storm, and what happened was that everybody was very sick. Of course, women were separated from the men. **Chrisha**, **Chris**, and Mrs. **Schwab**, **Clara Schwab** had to sleep with the women in the bowels of the boat. I was privileged because I was a child, so I was put up with the children in the cabins up on top, which is sort of like first class, but it wasn't, there was a -- two bunks, two tier bunks so I shared the room with three other girls. Well, what happened was that both **Chrisha** and Mrs. **Schwab** were sick throughout the ship because they absolutely lived down in the bowels of the ship, without the air. I had the good fortune of not getting sick, so I was running around the

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

boat and of course there was food above and beyond the need of anybody, because nobody else was eating. So I was eating, and I was running around the boat, and I don't think **George** was sick either, and there were a few of us youngsters running around. I got such a terrific -- not a cold, but I -- I -- I developed laryngitis on that boat f -- I guess of being -- running around or whatever, it was that when I came to **America** it took me about two months to get rid of it. It's true, I now just remembered. But the voyage itself was, as I said, was eventful because we were stuck in the -- in the -- in the storm, and it took us 13 days to cross the **Atlantic**. Now you could practically make two trips, but we were very lucky and knew it, and we were very happy to arrive here.

Q: Did you mingle with other passengers? Did you get to know anybody else? Was there something strange on the boat that you didn't know -- I mean, sort of anything that comes to mind?

A: No, basically, a-as I told you, most of the people that -- that were on that boat were sick, including my sister and Mrs. **Schwab**. The youngsters, those of us who were around, just roamed the boat and went to eat, and went to eat again, and then went for snacks, because the -- the dining room was open all the time, and we were asked to please come, there is so much food and nobody is eating. So this is what we did, we ate our way through the boat, and the rest we did was run around and have a good time. So that's about all I can remember. I just know that finally when **Chrisha**

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

emerged from -- from the -- from her seasickness, she -- she absolutely -- was about a day before we got to **New York**, was in the nick of time, and of course she recovered quickly, but she -- she was not one of those to -- to run around, she was laid up. And here is my ship card.

Q: Hang on [**indecipherable**] s-say that again here.

A: And here is my ship card, which I also kept. Actually, I don't know that I kept it or did I just write for it? I could have just requested it and have it sent to me. So it has all this family name and middle name and age and marital status -- status, nationality.

And then of course, it has an address, because we were sponsored by my brother-in-law's family. So, you had to have a sponsor in those days and the sponsor's address had to be put on -- on -- on your **I.D.** papers so that you would not be a burden to the -- to the state. And as I mentioned before, we did not go through **Ellis Island**.

Q: Okay, I think --

A: But -- yearbook, this is my yearbook. You see it's signed by my -- this English teacher who was the head of the department. She signed it and everybody else signed it. So where am I? Here. Here I am. You see this -- you had to say what you were planning to do, and I said I was planning to be a social worker, so this is what I was really planning, but it didn't work out that way. And here is a -- well, I see I even have a clip in here from the **Brooklyn Eagle**, my God, this paper doesn't exist any more. Dated February third, 1949, where it says at the end that I also got a scholarship.

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

I was a scholarship winner upon graduating from **Thomas Jefferson** High School. I forgot that I have this clipping in my yearbook. And this was a lovely group. There were a group of us, of refugee children in that school, and they were all -- I'm -- I am very proud to say that mo -- all of these kids who came out of that refugee class went onto bigger things in life, and really -- really went -- are accomplished people, so it's good to say.

Q: What is -- what is soccer and football? What does that do? That's --

A: Oh, well --

Q: -- that's for the boys, probably.

A: Yeah, that was all -- this was sports, you know, as every high school had sports. I was not in sports, because I had my own things to attend to. I had part time jobs to go to after school, and I worked very hard to be a good student, but as I look through the pictures, I remember how many friends I had here. I love those little inscriptions here and there, I just love that. And I'm sorry to say that some signatures here mean nothing to me. **Edna Gordon**, now who was she? I don't know. But others were very b-best friends, so -- **Madeline Gross**.

Q: Li -- like ha -- like who?

A: Well, my very, very, very best friend from **Poland**, who is no longer alive, was **S-Sonia Labeener**. And she's the one I mentioned before, she was quite accomplished, and committed suicide at age 39, had -- she is here. **Shirley Labeener** she was called,

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

right. And this is **Sonia**. We graduated together. I met her in **Jefferson**. And then I met also **Toby**, and she, I think, graduated -- it's **Toby Weinstroff**. No, **Toby's** not here. You know, I haven't looked at this book for a long time, and obviously I've forgotten a lot of faces. But I bet if I went through it, I would remember some of the names. But that has to be put off for another time -- day.

Q: Now let's do it.

A: While we're on the subject of **Thomas Jefferson High School**, I have to show you something which is really ridiculous and laughable, but I -- I -- I mean, it's -- it's one of these peculiarities. I happen to have here, a whole bunch of election buttons and my kid's buttons as they grew up and all kinds of boxes and -- and -- and God knows what else, and among them I have my senior graduating button. And I really must describe it because it is so funny 50 years hence. It says, senior 1949, **TJHS, Thomas Jefferson High School**. It has a boy and a girl looking at each other inside a circle, sort of a smiley kind of faith -- face. The button is orange and the writing is blue because this was the -- those were the colors of my high school. Well anyhow, every senior was to wear this, and I did proudly, right through the year. And I kept that button. Now I'm sure that this probably sounds awfully childish and all that, but I think this is the most precious thing, and I keep it and I am not going to part with it. So back it goes, into the box with the buttons. If you allow me, I'll just look through this bunch of buttons, I have this whole bag here, you know? I don't even really know what is here,

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

except that I dumped them all in one place so that they wouldn't be scattered. Now, let's see what I have. I have my senior button from **Thomas Jefferson** High School, 1949, orange and blue, the ca -- colors of the school, with two faces, boy and girl looking at each other, really charming. Next I have the possessions of my kids. One of them is -- let me see, this is **Bronx** science senior, that would be 1973, that would be **Harry**. Then I have a junior high school -- **Eleanor Roosevelt** Junior High School, senior '73, that would be **Paul's**. Then I have two buttons, and ov -- obviously they're not mine, but they belong to some -- one of my kids. One is **Mohammed Ali**, it says heavyweight championship, **Ali** versus **Wepner**. And then I have a big button of **Chuck Wepner** with a **W - I - N**, an acronym, but it says whatever it -- it's supposed to spell win. So that's cute. Then I have a Lieutenant school safety patrol, that was **Paul's** si -- insignia when he carried the flag to the -- in his elementary school for assembly. And then of course I have a button of solidarity, a Polish button, says **Solidarnosht** with the flag, that became a very famous sign. I think I received it -- no, no, not in **Poland**, even though I was in **Poland** at that time. I got it in **New York**, but I keep it, too, I don't know why. But anyhow, so this is the story of the buttons and there is my **Thomas Jefferson** button right in the middle of it all. Say the party [inaudible]. The interesting thing in **Jefferson** that happened that really moved me was that my Hebrew teacher, who was Dr. **Horowitz, Edward Horowitz**, who was also the head of the Hebrew department, decided to make a surprise party for me in his

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

house, and to invite that whole Hebrew class -- this was a language class, basically. And -- and that was to celebrate my birthday and that was in December. I was not told about it, but I just said that Dr. **Horowitz** invited the class to -- just for the evening, and of course I went, and lo and behold, there was this whole class, there was a party, there was cake. We -- we cut the birth -- I cut the birthday cake and of course I had to make a speech, and I was very embarrassed, embarrassed beyond words. And pictures were taken and -- and then Dr. **Horowitz** invited reporters to report. And one of the reporters from the **New York Post** interviewed me and said, I understand that you have a number, a concentration camp number -- because this party was -- was my 18th birthday and was supposed to be making up for what is called sweet 16 in **America**, which I didn't have because I was in camp. This reporter -- specifically this reporter from the **Post** came and said, "I understand that you have a number on your arm from the camp. Could you please show us -- show it to us?" And I did and he said, "While you're sitting here, could you kindly point with your other hand to your -- with your finger to the hand that bears the number so we have it in the picture?" And I really thought this was stupid, but I -- you know, I was too embarrassed to say it because here I was and -- and I didn't think it was proper of me to -- to -- to say no when Dr. **Horowitz** arranged for the interviews. So I have a picture in my album as you could see, the article with the picture where I'm sitting, pointing to the number on my arm. And that appeared in the **New York Post**, which was the old **New York Post**, which

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

was one -- sort of a liberal paper. Aside from which I have here clippings from the **Brooklyn Eagle**, and I have two of those, one announcing the party and one after the party. I have a -- an article from the Jewish paper, written in Yiddish, which I am ashamed to admit I cannot read. And it's from the **Morning Journal**, the yid -- Jewish paper. Then there is one here from the **Jewish Examiner**, and another clipping from the **Jefferson High School** school paper, which says, "Surprise party for Jeffersonian," and they all deal with the party that Dr. **Horowitz** gave for me.

Q: Could -- could you read a little bit of this, and then also could you say why -- sort of why -- why had you thought it was stupid? Elaborate on this.

A: Yes, well, it's the -- the pictures has me sitting there pointing to my number. And the -- the little bit of an article underneath says, "**Regina Laks** was in **Auschwitz** concentration camp when she became 16. And sweet 16 parties weren't held in **Auschwitz**. Now she's 18, but as her fellow students said, there is no one in particular who could arrange a party for her. So tonight her classmates in Dr. **Edward Horowitz's** Hebrew course at **Thomas Jefferson High School, Brooklyn**, will meet at Dr. **Horowitz's** home at 1334 **Carrow Street, Brooklyn**, to toast her in soft drinks and to wish her enough happiness to erase the memory of years of suffering." Now this was most touching and -- and I didn't quite see the point of -- of pointing to my number. I wasn't embarrassed about it, I just didn't think it was necessary because I was really living a new life and that was an old story and I -- at that time people didn't

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

talk about the Holocaust in any way. Basically it was a -- it was a war that was over and finished and -- and -- and I felt the same way about it. So anyhow I did it, and here it is to prove that I did. He -- he thought it was important, so maybe it was. I don't know.

Q: Okay.

A: You know, I just remembered something while we are talking about schools. In 1983 I took a course at **Columbia** University that was given by **Kashimirs Brandis**, he's a very famous Polish writer who left **Poland** a-and he was a persona non grata, and was given a fellowship, or whatever and came to **America** and lectured at -- h-he gave a course in Polish literature. I loved it. The class was small, was twen -- 12 people or so. I enjoyed every bit of it because the reading assigned was the kind of literature which I was not acquainted with. Most works that were written during the war, or directly after the war, I would -- did not know the authors and I did not know the books, so that was a wonderful experience for me. Anyhow, we got to feel so close to each other in that class, that when he was ready to leave -- to leave **America** and the course was over, I proposed to the class that we ought to give Mr. **Brandis** a gift, a going away gift. And what struck me about him was that he lived in **New York** while he lectured at **Columbia**, he lived in **Columbia** housing and he would come to **Columbia** carrying books in a shopping bag, paper shopping bag. So I always thought about that, but I never remarked, because I knew that people who ran away from

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

Poland during communism weren't exactly well-to-do -- well off. So I said to the people in the class that it will be very nice if we bought him a -- if we put -- got some money together and bought him a leather briefcase, so that that would really show that -- for the person -- the kind of person that deserves it. I went out and I priced it -- I think **Crouch** and **Fitzgerald**, one of these fine leather stores. And I came back, I said, "You know, I have the a -- I know where to buy it and it's beautiful, and we'll do that." And I said, "You know, but before we do it, let me just call a friend in the Polish Institute who -- **Kristen Auwisher**, who is very friendly," -- excuse me -- "with the wife, and just double check that this is the gift that he could really use." Well, I called my friend and she called Mr. **Brandis's** wife, and she called me back and she said, "**Renia**, under no circumstances should you buy this gift. It will be offensive. He's going to look like an **apparatchick**. He needs to look like an academician who is being persecuted. A professor who is down on his luck because the communists are making life hard for him. Don't ever buy him a bri -- a leather briefcase, because he'll dump it." Well, I took it back to class, we laughed ourselves silly, and then I told this **Kristen Auwisher**, I said, "Listen, you already told me what not to buy, now at least tell me what to buy, because I do have the money available for," -- she says, "Well, you notice he wears one of those metal watches, Russian style, the horrible looking wrist watches." I said, "Great, I already have the idea." So I went to **Tiffany's** and bought a beautiful gift, and here I have a picture. We had a party. It happened to be

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

May third, which is a Polish -- Polish holiday. So what happened is that we had a party in -- at **Columbia**, we requested a room, and here I am handing him the gift, which was -- as you could see, there's a Polish flag with the -- with the flowers, because this was third of May. And here is where I'm handing -- handing him the gift, and he was absolutely thrilled with it, you could see he's holding it. There was somebody's child, one of the students brought their child to the party. So this is Professor **Brandis** here - - holding the watch. And I understand -- he lived in **Paris** after that, I understand that he still wore the watch. In fact, he just died about this year or maybe at the beg -- end of last year. So that's another one of those funny anecdotes.

Q: Good.

A: [**indecipherable**]. So, before we go. After **Thomas Jefferson** High School, with the wonderful experience I had there, I went the -- to **Brooklyn** College -- [**phone rings**] -- I went to **Brooklyn** College and a lot of the refugee children from **Jefferson** were -- went with me at the same time because we graduated together and that was a wonderful experience, but while I was at **Brooklyn** College the first year, I was offered a teaching job at **Indiana** University. So I transferred to **Indiana**, to continue my college education, but at the same time to teach Polish to an -- program of linguistics -- within the linguistics department that was organized for Air Force officers. Those were classes that were taught --

Q: Okay.

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

A: The course that I was teaching was a course in Polish, the language, and some of the customs, Polish customs. Class was small, and all of the students were Air Force officers. There, I think were -- I really don't remember, four or six -- no, six or eight, rather, and they were basically trained to be assigned to **Poland** as attachés and such. Anyhow, it was a wonderful experience because it allowed me also to study while I taught. I took a -- I continued my own academic program while I was teaching and I was so well received by the linguistics department that when I was ready to leave for -- to graduate, I received a very nice letter from Mr. **Seebeac** who was the head of the linguistics department and it said here, "I'm extremely sorry that your association with the Air Force language training program is coming to an end on November 13th, 1952. This is to express my appreciation of your work, and to assure you that I know you have done a fine job. Sincerely yours, **Thomas A. Seebeac.**" And -- and of course I graduated from **Indiana** soon after, which was February, 1953. And of course I only have most wonderful memories of **Indiana**, so that's a whole chapter, but I was thrilled when I graduated. **Victor** came to the graduation, we were already engaged. So that was nice. And I went back to **New York** after that.

Q: Mm-hm?

A: Since we're rummaging through the albums, I just came across this old album where I have some of **Victor's** old pictures from home. Here is -- here he is in his uniform. He went to a private military school up in **Ossinee, New York**. Doesn't he

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

look spiffy here? Wow. All these buttons up and down. Isn't that cute? And this I think is of his picture from junior high school. Very sweet boy, he always was sweet guy. I think this is his high school picture -- graduation picture, and this is his college graduation picture.

Q: Say something about --

A: And he --

Q: -- how -- how -- how he -- why you liked him [**indecipherable**]

A: Oh, I always liked him because he -- he -- first of all, he always had manners, and he's very considerate and -- and very -- he's quiet by nature, but very profound and very devoted, and of course he made only the best father on earth and the best husband, so I'm very lucky. That's absolute fact. And we've had a very good life together, because we -- we are very compatible, very compatible. We -- we differ by temperament quite a bit, because I am sort of fast, and -- and s -- you know, more impetuous. **Victor** is slower and more deliberate, so it's a very good balance. And I think he's had an excellent influence on me because he -- he really knew always how to calm -- how to calm me down. How to -- how to make me sort of, you know, slow down a bit. And here it is, some of his pictures -- look, there were girlfriends here, I b - - I bet he was all of 14 here. This is a cute picture. That's one of these girlfriends that he had, let me see. This is **Victor** with whatever little dog or cat. These are cute. This is **Victor's** family. That's his oldest sister, **Ruth**, she's passed on. And that's his

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

younger sister, **Clara**, she's gone, just died last year. Here is **Victor** upon graduating from college. He was -- this was -- no maybe -- that was just about -- before he went to the army, right. So that's a very good portrait picture of him. That's his parents. Oh, here he -- here is very interesting picture, he was in the army as you know, during the Korean war, and he was a company clerk, so here he is in uniform, and doing a very good job. Here he is giving blood. I kept the picture. And here he is at his post headquarters in a picture with the barracks in the background. I guess that was his office somewhere there, and this is at the desk. He was always so reliable, he is always the most dependable person in the world. Always has been. I mean, you can build a house on what he says. I guess this is why he had such an easy time of it in the -- i-in the army job, because you know, when he was asked to do something, he did it, and it was to perfection. So, he's still that way, and tha-that's all -- all the best for me.

Q: Okay, and you --

A: To bring you up to date about the Jewish cemetery in **Starachowice**, you recall that we talked about saving the cemetery, preserving at least part of it, and we were successful, first in registering it in **New York**, and then took a number of years, and it's a whole story which I already told, we gathered the money together and the project was completed. Now, I wanted to show you in my album, I have the pictures before and after. Now, as it is, the project is now complete, the book about the cemetery is coming out. In fact, I just mailed in an forward. I wrote a little introduction to the book

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

in English, which was sent to **Israel** because they are coordinating it. So as you could see here, these were the pictures that **Victor**, my husband **Victor** took while we were in **Poland** to see what was happening there. It was a completely neglected area, and the houses were built on the cemetery itself, because some of the tombstones were removed by the Germans for -- for sidewalks and otherwise they were destroyed, so that this was the situation where the cemetery was going to be obliterated completely. Finally, after **Paula Funk** and I were able to register the cemetery, it was declared as a -- as a historic landmark and could not have any more buildings encroaching.

End of Tape One, Side B

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

A: Finally, after **Paula Funk** and I were able to register the cemetery, it was declared as a -- as a historic landmark and could not have any more buildings encroaching. Eve -- subsequently, the money that was given to the people who worked on it, accomplished the final job. So as you could see, I -- these pictures were sent to me from **Israel**. Here are the workers working on the cemetery. Here is what it looks like. Apparently the -- the fence -- metal fence is beautiful, it was designed by an architect, and apparently it also has a fantastic, wonderful gate. And inside -- this is the picture inside, where those tombstones which were beyond repair were collected, and were put together in -- in wa -- sort of like an artistic pile. And this final picture shows that the houses in the background are where they are, but no more houses will be on the cemetery and the fact is that we are paying for perpetual care, which not only preserved the si -- th-the location, but also preserves the esthetics, and the -- the grass will be cut, and everything will be kept up to date. And here is my friend **Janek Sneer** from **Israel**, who was instrumental in arranging all this. He's -- here he is in **Poland**. He had it all officially designated and -- and finalized with the mayor's office and so on. So, he send me these pictures and I am just so very, very pleased that we accomplished it. As you could see, it's very attractive looking, and you could see there is a Polish sign, it says, Jewish cemetery in **Starachowice**. And I can't quite make out everything else, but there -- something in they -- I -- I can't make out because the sign

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

is sort of covered a little on the bottom, but this is the official designation. And this is a historic landmark, so I am very pleased about that. I'm looking forward to getting the book which **Janek** said th -- I -- everybody who contributed money will get when the book is ready. Just to bring you up to date to events that happened that might be of interest between the last time I saw you and now. Quite a number of years ago I translated, "**The Shoemakers**," a play by **Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz**, which was supposed to be pre-presented at **LaMama**, they ran out of funds, so they only ended up with a reading. But the play has been around for a while, and it was presented at **Wesleyan** University last spring. In fact, it was April 28th, at **Wesleyan** in my -- my translation of -- of the **Witkiewicz** -- **Witkiewicz** play, and **Victor** and I were invited, and it was just very nice. We were introduced to the actors and they asked me about the background of **Witkiewicz**, the -- the -- the playwrights background, and of course, this is an avant-garde play, so it can be produced in different ways, but it really must be understood for what it is, because it was written i -- during the interwar period. And witki -- **Witkiewicz** was an avant-garde playwright who didn't quite fit the times yet, but he became the rage after the war. And I don't mean in communist **Poland**, but in **France**, for example, and wherever else -- he was translated into other languages. And he committed suicide by the way, in 1939, as the Russians were approaching. He was running east when the Germans entered **Poland**, and when he saw the Russians coming his way, he committed suicide on -- on road east. But anyhow, his place -- of

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

course, he was considered the lunatic type, but he was the most educated man and a great playwright, and great, fantastic painter of -- of modern art. I have a number of -- of his books of -- of paintings. Of course, he took every conceivable drug, peyote, and cocaine and all that, and he wrote and painted under the influence. Aside from which, he was not in tune with anything that went on in the 30's, during his productive years, so that he was an oddball, and everybody said he was crazy, of course. But now, not only are his -- his paintings most valuable, but his work has come into its own, because now you can really see he -- for example, this play "**Szewcy**," which is "**Shoemakers**," really discusses the end of the world, sort of, you know, when the -- when the -- the -- the world is going to be taken over by the automatons, but of course this is supposed to be a comedy, but it isn't. But it is really, truly a great piece of work, so I was very pleased when we were invited. And it was so well produced, you know, I must tell you that I only think that professional, big professional company could do justice to **Witkiewicz**, because you must understand what he was talking about. Well, I was so impressed by the **Wesleyan** production, I truly cannot begin to tell you, not just the -- the way it was produced, and the way it was presented -- and these were actually students, they were -- they do have a -- a drama department, so these were students from the drama department. But how it was presented for what it is, in other words, it wasn't cut, it wasn't altered, it wasn't anything, it was just pure **Witkiewicz**. It was fantastic and I loved it, so I was very happy to see that -- to see it, and -- and that was

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

just a year ago. Also for the -- onto the projects which I completed between the time I saw you last and now, I have translated in -- completed in 1998, a book translated from Polish into English, "**Kraków Ghetto Diaries and Poems.**" [recited title in Polish] written by **Helena Melkin**. That was one project and I -- of course I have it copyrighted, so I'm showing you the copyright form. And second one was a book called, "**Recollections of My Life as a Diplomat,**" [recites title of book in Polish], written by **Yandro Hoyofski**, he was a Polish diplomat with an extremely complicated life because he was sort of politically involved from the time before the first war and through the 30's and into the war years, and he was mixed in with the Polish government in exile in **London**, while at the same time he was more or less free to travel to **Poland** and -- and become a part of the later government, communist government, and ended up as an ambassador in **Mexico**, which of course was a plum job to -- given to people who deserve it. So there is much controversy over that person. But I did it on consignment, and I -- I really learned quite a lot. I loved doing it because I learned all those interesting things in it, and that project was completed in '99, December of '99. I think I mentioned to you that I worked on the **Lódz** ghetto book. Actually it's a book and a film that followed. This book contains many translations because it's a -- it was compiled -- it was put together from different -- from writings by different people in different languages. Namely, it was written in Polish, Yiddish, German, I think some French, and some material for the book was in

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

Europe but it was brought to **New York**, but other material was in **Israel**. So that you have some Polish that was done in **Israel**, but most of the Polish for this book was done by me. And of course the index by authors -- authors meaning the original authors of the writing, is at the end of the book on page 525. And I have underlined here all these authors that I translated. **Ludwig Ashe**, and I have all the num -- the -- the -- he was a poet. I have all the poems that I translated, and **Poznanski, Jakov Poznanski**, now his work -- as you could see, I have a Xeroxed copy of the book, and he was a lawyer, a grown man of -- of some experience, life experience, and his is a very detailed, and very analytical description of the events in the **Lódz** ghetto, whereas the **Sierakowiak, David Sierakowiak** was a youngster of 16, a budding poet, and his work is all emotion, and all vibrant longing and of course pos -- **Poznanski**, the older man survived, but **Sierakowiak** died of hunger in the **Lódz** ghetto, but his diary was saved. Anyhow, I translated **Sierakowiak's** diary, and **Poznanski's** work, which those two books comprise the biggest part of the Polish translation and that's my work, plus I -- you must have heard the name **Rumkowski**? Yes, well **Rumkowski's** speeches were given in Yiddish. You know, he was to -- h-he was one of these men who always gave speeches because he -- he had to lecture people on what you do and what you don't do, and you can't rebel because I do everything for your own good, and you're going to do what I tell you. Well, anyhow, those speeches were written in engl -- in y - - in Yiddish, and they were transcribed into Polish. So, I did the translations from the

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

Polish -- the Polish transcripts, and did quite a number of those. So in this book when you find **Poznanski** and **Sierakowiak**, that's my work. That's the major work. Quite a number of **Rumkowski** and the poems of **Ashe**. And I'm very proud of it, and of course there was a l -- a -- a film based on the same book. And -- oh, I just wanted to show you this play that I translated a number of years ago, probably about 10 years ago. It's called "**Assassination**," by **Johanna Beeler Brudick**. And this was -- the original title was "**Zamac**." And -- and it's a sort of small kind of a play. The author lives in **Chicago**, she never had it produced because she doesn't have the means to pursue it, but it was done on the radio a few times, and some readings of it were done, and I'm in contact with her, so she was very pleased about that. But that was among my early projects, and this was -- of course it's a small play, it really didn't involve as much time as for example, the **Lódz** ghetto project, or the books which I did. And so I was done with it, and I have other projects here too, that since I was do -- I do freelance work, so you know I have -- I see I have a chapter here on the gypsies, or three chapters on gypsies, it was send in f -- to me to translate by this Polish writer **Fitzowski**, who is an expert on gypsy life in **Poland**. And all this commercial work, and frankly I'll tell you, legally I have to keep official translations for no more than five years, so -- I mean, I can't live with all that paper. I probably would have to move out and just use the house for storing paper. So I only save the very important projects,

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

and the other, smaller projects just -- after five, six years, I have a very good excuse to go through it and dump it.

Q: Okay.

A: Well, we can't finish the interview without my bragging about the kids. So I just turned to a album here. Here are the two boys, I think this was taken in **Canada** at my sister's summer home in **Muskoka**. And here they are showing off the fish they just caught. Of course they were always very outdoorsy kids because they belonged to the boy scouts and they both are Eagle Scouts, so this is the great trophy, as you could see in the picture, the -- the -- the fish is the greatest trophy of all. And I do have some very lovely pictures somewhere else here, which were taken during the kid's code of honor, Eagle Scout events. Oh, here is one, here is one, I just found it. Here is **Harry** becoming an Eagle Scout, and an article in the local paper. And here you are with us, **Victor**, myself and the two boys in the boy scout uniforms with all the insignia, and the -- the -- the merit badges. And of course I gave a big party in the house, right here, with a big sign, congratulations. Had a very lovely, big group of people in the house, very nice. And I did the same for **Paul**, obviously, I have it somewhere else here, too. And you could see -- I don't quite know where, but we did exactly -- whatever we did for **Harry**, the older son, we always did for **Paul**. So if it was one Eagle Scout party, it was a second Eagle Scout party. In two weeks. Having shown off the young -- young boy -- girl, boys, I have to show the bi -- the big ones. A-A-As I mentioned, they're

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

grown men now, and **Harry**, the older one has two children. One of them is **Max**, and I have a picture here of him, with -- in the hockey uniform. Of course he -- he belongs to a team, what else, and he plays in **Chelsea Pierce**, and -- and absolutely this is his -- his biggest thing in life is hockey. He has all the equipment, obviously. And he also, I think, plays football, I think, or basketball. I don't really know, but I know that they take him to these -- to these -- in the Central Park teams, and whatever. I really am not part of that because I can't stand in the cold and watch them, or go to **Chelsea Pierce** at six o'clock in the mornings. That's where they go, believe it or not. They get up at five to be in **Chelsea Pierce** at six, because that's where the team plays. Six a.m. on a Sunday. Poor **Harry**. Anyhow, this is the younger -- the younger of the two boys, and his name is **Joseph**, and he is sweetheart, you could see the lovely -- he speaks very well. He has such lovely vocabulary and grammatically correct at age three. Long sentences, and very, very interesting boy, and full of cheer. You know, one of these children who are very, very sunny. Sunny, warm type. Well, that's this child. Now, as I told you -- when you came in I had to show off the picture, we have a new picture of **Paul** with his bride, **Paul** got married, and he married the **Jan Jay**, and **Jan** has a little girl from a previous marriage, her name is **Caitlyn**. And now they have their own child. So here is **Caitlyn** in a big picture which she send me not long ago, and here is the new baby that they have. And a baby boy, and his name is **David**. Middle initial -- middle name **Victor**. And of course we haven't seen him yet, because you know, I

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

broke my shoulder. I fell and broke my shoulder, so we couldn't go to the **bris**, but they're coming for the Passover holidays with the baby, so we're looking forward to that.

Q: A lot of -- a lot of people, especially Holocaust survivors actually had a very strong response to what happened in the 50's in the so called **McCarthy** era. Could you just say a little bit -- something about your impressions from that time?

A: Well, I was more or less getting used to the idea that American democracy was really based on different opinions and different actions of people, that nothing was getting resolved in **America** the way things were resolved in the political system that I grew up in, where you went to jail for this, and -- and you did some other political misdeed, and -- and you -- you had to pay for that, because you had to toe the -- the -- the government approach to -- to -- to -- to -- to ruling, so to say. Now, having been a child in the interwar period, I wasn't quite aware of all the things that did go on, and I know a lot did, because I do know that there was a famous prison in **Poland** called **Bereza Kartuska**, where people who were communists were being sent, because apparently there was some ferment in the Polish society in the interwar periods -- period. Well, I -- I knew **Bereza Kartuska** and I knew people were sent there, but I never made the connection. When I finally lived in **America** and realized what a fantastic system of government democracy is, allowing for freedom of expression and freedom of the press, and -- and -- and total freedom that you didn't have to account to

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

anybody for where you going or what you are doing. That all of a sudden -- and now I was already after college, and I -- having studied political science and such, I had the idea of what American democracy was about. But I really never saw the other side of the coin, where certain excesses that are committed in the society cannot be solved the way they were solved in **Europe**, the way I understood it, by simply acting on it right then and there, because this is a country of law, and everything has to percolate through the legal system. **McCarthy's** excesses were so obvious to everybody, even to people who did not think that there was a communist under every bed, spying, and that every liberal in **America** was a communist. There were people who had leftist leanings and didn't act on them, but that was just their philosophy of life. There were -- I'm sure there were spies, as there always are, and I'm sure there were people who were organizing in leftist groups. But when the **McCarthy** era came and I realized that it had to take its course, to go through the leg -- legal system. And to me it was entirely too long, and it really got me very upset. Eventually, of course, it was solved and I was very happy to see that.

Q: Now, there was another era when you got a little upset, or even a little more upset, and that was in the -- in the 60's, there was the -- the counter-culture movement, or the 60's revolution, or whatever you want to call it. Speak a little bit about that.

A: Well, I was upset about it on -- actually on two counts. But they are quite -- the -- the -- the issue really is a single issue. The 60's counter-culture, in my eyes then, and

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

in my eyes now, and this is 40 years later, were an inexcusable outburst that was allowed to permeate the cultural fabric in **America**. Revolution of young people is quite fine, but once it -- once it is accepted into the culture, without the analysis of what consequences that might bring, was terribly upsetting to me, and of course my chil -- the children were by then young, and I was very much afraid that they would be growing into an -- a society that was culturally in anarchy. This government is a government of law, and we have a Constitution to preserve our legal rights. But culture is something that is not legislated, and once you tear it apart, you might not be able to put the genie back in the bottle. And of course, I had growing -- children that were young at that time, whatever, they were in elementary school and junior high school, very impressionable age, and I really didn't like this whole idea of **Woodstock**, for example. Of **Woodstock** becoming so prominent and so written up and photographed, and -- and televised, and repeated. I mean, that was excess beyond excess. This was a bunch of young kids who went completely wild. That guy -- they got rid of their parents at home, and everybody went to **Woodstock**. People could afford now to disregard the parents, because after all, I mean, you didn't have to work so hard for a living any more, this was a year of -- of -- of prosperity in **America**. This could not have happened in the 30's in **America**, during the depression. That absolutely could not have happened. So this to it -- it had to take its course. And it took a long time because it couldn't be legislated away, and it could not be waved away as -- as if it

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

didn't exist, because it did exist. But of course, all these kids who eventually decided to get done with what is called the American culture, and the American form of government ended up in communes, or they ended up in -- in the biggest corporations in **America**.

Q: D-Do you think that your feelings about that had in any way, something, also to do with where you came from, with your experiences?

A: Oh, it certainly did. No, because you see, I -- I ha -- I am always of the opinion, have always been, as a child, as a grown-up, that there have to be -- there has to be a certain framework for society to operate within. All the excesses that do nothing to enhance people's life, to me do not -- do not do anything to either elevate the spirit or to elevate the mind, or to improve somebody's economic conditions. I mean, if you have a -- an idea, at least the idea should benefit somebody or something, or should build something, but to destroy it and leave it destroyed, is totally against my -- my understanding of life, because I have seen what happens when you are simply allowing something to happen, and everything in the process gets destroyed. Of course, the Holocaust is a much bigger issue, mi -- a million times over bigger. But the fact is that if you allow books to be burned, and the next step you allow people to be burned, i-i-i-i -- it almost -- it almost makes you think that if such excesses, that grow out of not any specific need, but the desire to rebel for rebellion's sake is totally wrong because it does nothing to improve anything. And of course now it's -- it's quite obvious that this

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

was what the -- the -- this was one period in American life that as the years go on, will show to be not such a happy chapter. It really was not a happy chapter. I -- I felt terribly disturbed in those days. I've calmed down about it now, because I've seen some of these -- these rebellious kids grow into very decent people, but I know that the aftermath of the 60's is still with us. I mean, absolutely, all this permissiveness, and all that -- that followed from it still is around us.

Q: If you could try to say it as shortly as you can -- as briefly -- sort of, in a capsule as you can, you did not become a social worker --

A: No.

Q: -- although that was on your -- well, and that had to do with a certain prevailing understanding at the time of what social work was supposed to be, and your being against it. Could you kind of sum that up a little bit, please?

A: Yes, yes. Well, you know, originally I really wanted to do social work. I really, truly did. For many reasons. One of the -- one of them being the fact that I did go through the Holocaust and had I not been helped as a child, I really wouldn't have survived. And I really felt I owed this goodness to other people, and I ought to reciprocate. However, by the time I came out of college, with an idea of going to -- to graduate school for social work, the system changed, and I did not like the way the system was oriented, toward taking away the responsibility of the people to -- to -- to shift for themselves. Rather than helping them be on their own feet, this was a system

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

now that was going to provide and provide and provide. And it ended up that they brought up -- this system brought up two or three generations of dependents who lived off the state, that their lives are ruined because they have no responsibility. They have absolutely no skill to be in the real world. So, basically what I feared had to -- came true, and -- and -- and now I think the lesson has been learned and -- and things are quite different. But in the -- at the time, at the very time when I was ready for social work, I realized that I -- that was not the field for me any more. I think I -- now I could go back. I think I could. Of course I am too old now to go looking for a job, nobody would want me. But the thing is that at the present stage, I think I could fit better into the new framework than in the 50's and 60's -- especially in the 60's.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: Let's see, there was one question that just came to mind [**indecipherable**]

A: You know, when the children started attending elementary school, which happens to be right next door to our building, I became very involved in the school system, because I was what you call a stay at home mother. And I did see the need for parental involvement in the schools, and our children went to public school. The -- the -- not every school in those days -- this is in the 60's, had that good library with a good -- there just weren't enough funds to run good libraries in school. Well, this school established the library and the librarian, but they did not have the manpower. So the

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

parent's association, of which I was the vice president for all those years, which is oh, a good 11 years. Never a president, I never took presidency, and I'm very proud of it to this day. Not ever anywhere; I wouldn't take presidency. Well, anyhow, I was vice president, and I was also chairperson of the volunteers for the library. So we run a very fine library program. The children had an assignment, I think once or twice a week, every class in that school came to the library for a whole period, for reading, for touching books. And of course, I -- I -- I know -- I have a little secret about enticing people to read, so we had two round tables where the new books would be put out, you know, and -- and so we arrange them and when the children came around, and then they found out they could ask me what is -- are there any new books? Of course there are new books. Well, the library was really, really a -- a -- a star for -- for -- for the times, and I was chairperson and in charge of all the library women. I kept the schedule who came when, and of course I myself was in the library quite often, and also as a vice president, I was involved in a lot of projects and programs that the parent's association in those days participated in. We had a music program, and we had, for example, we had what they call assembly, and everybody knew somebody who could do something. **Maya Angelou** the poet, was a friend of somebody in the neighborhood, I think he was her -- he was her agent, literary agent and his child was in school. Well, we got her one time for assembly and she read her own poetry. You see, so this was all that the parent's association did. We ran a fair once a year, was

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

called county fair, in the gym, collected money and -- and we had a -- a group of th -- all these kids -- the sixth grade used to go to the opera for -- we -- we had an in there, we had -- they went to dress rehearsals. So that there was a very fine music program here in this school, and a very fine library program. And I was, of course, on the beck and call because I was next door, figuratively and literally. So that whenever there was a pro -- a problem, or there had to be a parent immediately for some inspector, whoever, they would give me a call and I was there in two minutes. So that was in the elementary school. Then I was very active in the **Bronx** High School of Science. And that was also -- because **Harry** is four years younger than -- older than **Paul**, so that **Harry** finished **Bronx** High School and **Paul** just came in, so that they were there for 10 - 11 - 12, three years, so that's six years. I was very active there, I was also vice president, and **Victor** was finance, whatever you call it, finance --

Q: Treasurer?

A: Treasurer, he was treasurer, and I was chairperson of the executive board. And we did a lot of good, in fact, you know, I found as I was looking through these -- through these papers, that you asked me if I could prepare papers of all kinds, I have it somewhere, a letter from th -- **Rockefeller's** office, in govern -- he was governor, **Nelson Rockefeller** was governor. You know, we petitioned to save **Bronx** Science, and we had a -- we had a -- **Bronx** Science was instrumental in saving the school as a specialized high school, and not having it turned into a neighborhood school, which

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

some people were trying to do. That was also during the rev -- revolution. The 60's - 70's revolution. Well anyhow, not only did we -- did the **Bronx** Science parents write the law, because two parents were lawyers who wrote the -- the bill that was submitted in **Albany**, we went to **Albany** with -- we -- and of course we petitioned, and I wrote to **Rockefeller**, and I wrote to everybody. I have a copy of the letter from **Rockefeller's** office, thanking hi -- me for the letter because the law has now been passed where **Bronx** Science and all this -- and I have that. So I am really proud of that. And this was stressful time, because this was -- you know, in the 60's there was a st -- school -- teacher school strike. And much as -- as we all sympathized with the teacher's point of view, there were elements in the -- in our area, there were people who did not see that way and they wanted to tear down the system like the hippies tore down everything else. And our -- our neighborhood especially, had one person who was the leader of that. I -- I shouldn't be naming names, but everybody knew -- she's gone now, so you can't -- you can't name her. But she wrote a book on how to tear down schools. And she started with **George Washington** High School. That was -- her thesis was based on that. And anyhow, her children -- she had a number of children that went into the school, so she introduce a program that could do without the teachers. So she had hippies come in with guitars playing and that was supposed to be education? Well, she was hated with such passion, and I -- I -- I can't say very much. There is much more to it, but tha -- those were very stressful times. This is why I was

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 23, 2001

very happy to be an active parent in every parent's association in every school that I -- my children ever went to. Of course, this doesn't happen now that much, because most women work, so it's very hard. But in those days, we really did something most valuable. So you see, my social work didn't go wi -- my non-participation in social work didn't go out of the window, you see? It -- it showed up somewhere else.

Q: Okay. I think we quit right here, and we'll just take a little bit of the wind when it -- now it probably won't wind.

A: No, it's plenty, just open. I'll tell you what, you want to hear the wind?

Q: [indecipherable]. Well actually no, I need -- I need it, first of all, the same way it was, but --

A: Listen, if you want the wind, I'll go up and --

End of Tape Two, Side B

Conclusion of Interview