Every Day a Gift

The Holocaust Memoir of Leah Goltzman

as told to Janis Haswell

Dedication

**To my children and grandchildren,
in memory of my parents**

Preface

The following pages are not meant to be my autobiography. They are, in a sense, autobiographical only of the early part of my life and my survival. I'm writing this with a dear friend, mentor, and guide who is helping me. My earnest hope is that my children, my friends, and whoever else studies this will read with care and attention, and benefit from it in some way, because the lessons learned in that part of my life have stood me in good stead, and I'm now in my seventies.

Chapters

Chapter 1: The War Years

Around the time of the middle ages, the decree was that all Jews had to take on surnames because previously they went by their Hebrew lineage. Many people got their name from the region where they lived, or the name of a town, or their profession, and so forth. My mother's name was Hannah Hochstien, meaning a high rock or mountain. My father's name was Simon Szklasz.

My mother's village was called Dubenka (I'm spelling it phonetically). The only place where I found it spelled out was on etched glass on a wall at the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC. It was such a small village—it was never important enough for a regular map. But on that etched wall in Washington it exists. Dubenka. It was a small village in the province of Lublin, which was a major city in Poland. This is where our family traced back its generations for hundreds of years.

My paternal grandparents lived in Chelm, about thirty miles from Dubenka. It's also in the Lublin province but it was considered the big city. In both of those places—the entire region—either you were Jewish or you were Roman Catholic. They were the two basic religions.

I read once in the census of 1938, the population of Chelm was 30,000 people. Fifty percent were Jews. So that gave me some understanding why Hitler chose to build most of the death camps in Poland because most of his victims were already in place, already in the region.

My people were country people, particularly on my mother's side. My maternal grandfather, as his father before him, was a cobbler. As a cobbler in Europe in those days he fixed shoes, saddles, and anything with leather that farms needed, or estates. In my grandfather's case, he had a route of estates. He would travel each day to a different estate where they knew him. He would work on whatever repairs were needed.

He was kosher so he never ate in their houses. They would boil him hard-boiled eggs and he would have his own bread. And he generally ate somewhere outdoors. But this was done for religious reasons, and frankly in my opinion it was carrying religion too far, but this is how they were—very orthodox.

Left to right: Gershon Hochstein, baby Bluma, Rachel and Hannah (my mother). Family photographs were given to me by an aunt who lived in America for many years. She got this from my parents before the war. On the back side is Yiddish writing. They sent these photographs to Houston and wrote greetings on the back.

Toward Friday his route would take him back to Dubenka where he would be home in time for *Shabbat*.

By Friday afternoon, of course, all practical work stopped. Everything—what had to be in order—was done. And even though he was a humble man and a humble worker, once he came home he would dress in his finery and he would be like the king of the house and my grandmother would be the queen, *Shabbat* was considered such an important holiday. In fact, in Judaism *Shabbat* is considered *the* most important holiday, more important than Passover, than Yom Kippur, than any of the other feasts, because *Shabbat* is the only holiday mentioned in the Ten Commandments. The day of rest.

My grandfather on my father's side was a cabinet maker. He made home-made furniture. People didn't have built-in closets in those days in Europe so my grandfather would make wardrobes for them, tables and chairs, fine work. In fact, his big wedding gift to my parents when they married was such a cabinet for their clothing. That was their pride and joy. It was their only nice piece of furniture.

My grandmother on my father's side was named Naomi. She was a bit of a business woman. She had a little kiosk with candy and shoelaces and other things. Many many orthodox women helped to support their families this way. All of them were good seamstresses because they had to make their own clothing, very much in the mode of the early pioneer women in America in the west. Naomi's complexion was dark—people called her "the gypsy"—and she was prematurely grey.

I only know the precise manner of death of my grandmother Rachel on my mother's side, and my grandfather David on my father's side. Grandmother Rachel was being hidden by a Christian family in a hayloft with the youngest child, Mira. That's all she had left by then. They were hiding her, and of course they were in danger, too. The Nazis used to offer a bounty, so someone betrayed the hiding place, and my grandmother and this little girl were dragged out from the hayloft some distance from the farm and shot. The owner of the farm, the young man, survived. And he told my mother—because after they walked her away to the side of the road in a ditch, they heard shots. And that's all that was ever seen of her. She was simply shot and thrown into a ditch, as if of no consequence. Not human.

The Hochstein family: Bluma (standing): left to right: Rachel, Mira, Gershon, and Moise.

The other death verified that I am know, of how and when they died, was my paternal grandfather, David. When we were hiding in the Ukraine—this must have been '40, '41, around that time—people from our district were still running away and hiding in the forest. And naturally they looked for people from their own towns.

This man found us, with a group of other people from the same district. Everyone was eager to hear news. Somehow that was a turning point for my psyche, I think. He came in and everybody surrounded him, and wanted to know news of their relatives or their friends. And Mama was there, my father wasn't. And she said. Did you know David Szklasz? That was my grandfather's name. The man said, yes—he knew him. He's dead, like that.

My mother said, 'How? Where?' 'He died of hunger,' and he went on with the conversation to tell other people other things. My mother started to cry and he got angry with her and said, 'Stop your crying. There are worse ways to die than hunger.' In hunger you just sort of lay down and expire from malnutrition. So from that standpoint this man felt—he was already so hardened by what he had seen—that dying of malnutrition was considered benign, was considered OK. And I heard this. Children were definitely not heard but seen in that generation. My mother started to cry. I stood there but it registered in my mind, that if I should ever die—dying of hunger—at least I won't hurt. That was something that you sort of put away in your brain.

Those were my formative years. That's how it was. And I was one of the lucky ones because very very few children of my generation survived. The killing machine was designed that anybody under fourteen, who was not fit and husky and strong, would not be a burden to the occupation. So it is really a miracle that I survived.

This, believe it or not, is me. Nothing elegant. My parents were a young couple, my father was a tailor, and you can see they posed me on his work table because behind me are the pictures he would show customers of what he could do for them. But this was me.

Those were the early years when we were still in hiding in the Ukraine. It is a highly agricultural area, even today, aside from one or two big cities like Kiev and Odessa, but otherwise it is very agricultural. So my father's skill with these big scissors helped save our lives—they weigh about six pounds.

In fact, those that could survive were usually the ones who had a practical skill. Being a carpenter, being a tailor, being a shoemaker. My father was a tailor. In a cold climate, everybody needed something: a garment made or an older garment remade. People didn't have Wal-mart to go to, to buy. So consequently, if you were useful, you had a better chance.

My father was engaged as an apprentice after his bar mitzvah. Poor people had no other choices—he had no choice to get a higher education. He was placed as an apprentice with a master tailor and he became sort of a servant and resident in the household. And this is how he learned the tailoring trade. Then when Papa was old enough and the agreement with the tailor had expired, like an indentured servitude, Papa went to Warsaw, and this is where he learned the actual finer points of tailoring. So he studied in Warsaw and then he went to a city called Lodz. Lodz in Poland at that time was the textile capital of eastern Europe.

He learned about fabrics and weaves and the finer points because it is not enough to know how to sew, you have to sew with the way the grain of the fabric is woven and all those finer details. So Papa studied his craft since he was a bar mitzvah boy. All his life, that's all he did.

Those were my people. We were ordinary, very much like everyone else, country people from small towns. Everybody tried to learn a trade or something practical because it was necessary. Education was not only limited for economic reasons but it was limited because if you were a Jew, even if you started to go to school, you were harassed and bullied to the point where if you reached the third or fourth grade, you'd have to drop out. It was impossible to stay there or you were beaten up every day. People in larger cities and in more western countries in Europe had a better chance for an education than people in Poland and Russia. The assimilation process had already begun and many Jews did everything they could to fit in so that they could go to school, to gymnasium, and get an education and so on.

These were my parents at the time they were married. They were very nice-looking people, very good-looking people and very much in love.

For my parents, their formal education was very limited. And yet, I can remember from my earliest years, whenever we were together, if we had some sort of table to sit at and eat perhaps a meal or something, my parents and I always talked politics. They were extremely interested in politics. They were very well informed about everything that was going on around them.

There was no radio, there were no newspapers, there was no television, no internet—nothing like we have now. Big cities, of course, had newspapers. However, in my time it was the Occupation. So the newspapers were the propaganda sheets issued by the Nazis. But my parents kept informed by always getting in touch with people as I described. Whenever someone would come from the other areas, they would make sure that they would get all the information. It was a network, and I must say it saved many many lives, because at least we knew a little bit of what was going on. A little bit. Later on, in fact, the news of the death trains—the transports to the death camps—was also known. The secrets were let out by people who escaped occasionally from them, or by people who saw the trains being loaded up with people. My parents were always very interested and attentive.

Our sources of information during the horror years were extremely limited, mainly by word of mouth, or after seeing an action. An *actione* was where you might be somewhere minding your own business and suddenly there was a sweep. There were whistles and soldiers would come around and suddenly scoop up all the people that were walking

around. And this is how they would scoop up Jews—if you didn't have the right papers, or if you looked Jewish, or if you were bearded as an orthodox Jew might be. With men, they had an especially humiliating way of identifying Jewish men. They would make them undo their pants and check if they were circumcised, mainly a quick practical look, but it was also done in the most humiliating open way, right on the street. I saw some of that. I didn't always fully understand what I saw, but I saw. I can't explain what it does to you. Maybe it depends on the person. I was angry. I knew I was Jewish and I knew there was something dangerous about being Jewish, but I didn't know why. We were people, we were human beings. But that's how it was.

All Jews were literate in the sense that they always learned Hebrew from a very young age. My parents spoke and read Polish because they did go to primary grades until they were old enough to be ousted from there. So they could read and they were always among other Jewish people who were perhaps more educated.

The leaders in communities, the rabbis, were always the first ones to be taken away. Because once you remove people that you look up to, the ordinary person feels more confused, more disturbed, more 'what do I do, I don't have anyone to ask for advice.' So the important people were immediately disposed of, whisked away, who knows where. But those that were left had to have good survival skills.

All Jews, in the sense of knowing a language, were literate. They read and understood (particularly in the liturgy) Hebrew, and they spoke Yiddish. Yiddish was the *lingua franca* in the European world. It is a Germanic language, with Hebrew and Slavic words thrown in. But it is basically German. In fact, quite recently I read a little article that the German government, now, the present government in Germany, is subsidizing schools that want to begin Yiddish classes because it considers Yiddish a sibling of German. So when you think of such ironies, it makes my head spin. Hitler is turning in his grave.

When my parents married, they lived in Chelm, that was the big city. So I remember that there was a hill and we lived in the business district because downstairs is where people had shops. And upstairs is where they had apartments or lofts. And my parents lived in such a district so that my father could have his customers. It was downhill and when I started walking and running, I knew no bounds. So I would run down the hill. There were no vehicles to speak of in that town except horses and carriages, occasionally wagons. Police officers and Polish army officers always wore capes, so I would invariably get under somebody's cape, and my mother had to retrieve me. But those are fleeting memories that come to mind of normalcy. That was my childhood. That was the fun. Running away and running under somebody's cape for a second or two.

These are my parents as young married people with a little girl. Here I must have been perhaps two. This was taken before the war. As you see they are in normal clothing and quite serene and well fed and well groomed. And again this was a picture that was sent to our American relatives because they wrote in Yiddish what they were all about. When we came to America my relatives who sponsored us gave us these pictures. Otherwise we wouldn't have had any.

But beyond that, all I remember is really that I was told to be quiet. If my mother made a signal to her lips, that means don't utter a word, don't breathe, if you can help it. When we were at times close to being discovered in hiding, my mother taught me that if you put a fist in your mouth, you can't scream. So my fist in those days was very little.

And I learned to do that. To this day I instinctively do that. Years ago my husband and I were driving from Corpus to Victoria and we hydroplaned because it had been raining. And my children were asleep in the back seat. My husband tried to get the car under control, and it was a close call. I knew we were in danger. And the first thing I did was put my fist in my mouth because that's how I learned to be quiet.

Obedience from children was the absolute for survival. It wasn't just a fetish. That's why many people formed groups. You couldn't survive just husband and wife and child—you had to have a group, a nucleus of people—everybody lent their talent to what they could do so it helped the group. We became an extended family. But I must say, even though they were my own fellow Jews, many groups did not want anyone with young children. Children were always more of a danger of giving your hiding place away. But because of my father's skill with tailoring, which would bring us sometimes food, sometimes some vitamins or a bar of soap that we would need. That's why I was usually the only child in the group. I had no friends until later because people didn't want to be with little children. Children met danger. I was somewhat luckier because of my father's skill. That was the canopy of protection.

My mother always gave my birth year as 1938. I don't know why but I've always suspected because of my memories that my mother fudged about age; I think I was born in 1936. I know she always fudged about her own age, always to be younger. But I think in the war years she would tell officials that I was younger, hoping that perhaps I'd get extra rations or attention. What she didn't know was that she put me in more danger because infants—the younger the child—the more of a nuisance it was for the killing machine. So she had no way of knowing it, but over the years from my memories, I've always suspected that I am a year of two older than I exist on my records. I was small, and she bundled me up when it was cold, so perhaps I could pass for younger. But she

couldn't hide the fact that I was a toddler. And because there was no privacy for adults, I heard everything. I understood everything. So, again, there was this danger of children being around if you were talking about some strategy to escape, to hide somewhere.

That's why, after liberation in 1945, when we started getting out and getting with fellow survivors, I was always the oldest one in the group. The others were always younger than I, or born in the Displaced Persons camps. In the DP camps, everyone married so they could became pregnant, because they wanted to start families again and have normal lives. But I was an oddity because I survived the actual war period.

My earliest years of awareness were always focused on safety, on necessity, on food and hygiene. Many many people died for lack of hygiene, more even than perhaps were killed by bullets. And the reason is, if you don't have normal facilities for basic hygiene, and you are depressed anyway, and you're hungry, and you're being hunted, hygiene becomes the lowest priority. The thing I remember the most is my mother used to wash me, sometimes in cold water, but she'd wash me because hygiene was so important—we were in many situations with diseases and all kinds of uncomfortable situations.

One thing my parents taught me was not to be eager to own things. I have a lot of artwork on my walls but it is all posters or reproductions framed—cheap stuff. The reason for it is I have never seen any reason to invest in bulky investments like paintings. The cabinet that my grandfather David made for my parents as a wedding gift. When they were preparing to disappear, to hide, their landlord, who was Jewish, felt t that things couldn't get that bad. He said, 'Look, you're a young guy. You have to feed your child, your wife. You can't schlep this piece of furniture. Why don't you sell this to me?' And my father said, 'It's a deal.' So the landlord bought the nice cabinet that was made as a wedding gift.

We escaped. I survived, My parents survived. The landlord did not, because he was a man who acquired. He acquired furniture, possessions, and then he was too busy sitting and trying to protect them. It's kind of like when a hurricane hits here. If you live in a low-lying area you must get out no matter what, because your life is more important then your furniture, your possessions. Like in any other catastrophe, and this nobody foresaw, this horrendous world war—nobody wanted to go far from home. Nobody. So it was only the people that were poor, young couples that had nothing much to lose except their lives. It was almost a little bit of an adventure. They were the first ones to run away, to run into hiding, to bride someone to hide them. It was survival, without us even knowing it.

Fate. We attribute to everything to God. When I make plans for tomorrow, the Jewish way of saying is, well, I'll go tomorrow, God willing. Or I'm flying to Toronto, God willing. We are afraid to put out fate in our own hands. We know we must have a higher power. I'm not particularly religious or very orthodox, but I'm very spiritual in that

way because that's how we were brought up. And frankly it saved many people who had a spiritual base because those that were free thinkers and less religious and no roots at home, suddenly found themselves in these dangerous times and they didn't have a spiritual foundation. And that made survival harder.

Even believers were challenged in their faith, like Elie Wiesel. I saw him, one time. I was invited to SMU in Dallas where he spoke. As a survivor, I'm on lists and I was invited to hear him speak. I was very eager to hear him speak because I go to so many schools and speak to so many students in the course of a year, I wanted to know, am I saying the right thing? It's very important as an educator. And Elie Wiesel, who just turned 80 recently, he is very much (from seeing him close up and hearing him speak) he's very much a man as my father was, as we all were. We're spiritual, we hung on to our heritage, but we were not particularly observant of every little thing. We are not like the hasidim who are in New York, with the peyote. We're not like that, and that's why, my grandmother, because they were so ultraorthodox, immediately upon being married, would wear a wig. Both of my grandmothers, in that older generation—that was the thing to do. You would be disgraced in the community as a young bride if you didn't, so that was part of conforming to that society.

We became less observant but we held on to our spiritual base. This was handed down. My children grew up in Corpus Christi, Texas, which is hardly a bastion of Jewish culture and Jewish practice. However, in my home they always knew you better be home Friday afternoon by 3:00 or 4:00,, wash up, be presentable, come to the table with clean hands, because it is *Shabbat* dinner. And we lighted candles. My husband and I were not regular temple goers because he would be tired, or I would want to watch 20/20 on television. Always with the news. So we were not particularly observant in that sense. But the spirituality of Judaism for us has always been very real and very important. As I grow older I find I'm becoming even more so. Now I have the time, I don't have small children depending on me. And I have the means by how I can help someone else.

I didn't get to speak to Elie Wiesel. I didn't get to meet him except in a receiving line. We said hello and nice to meet you. He mentioned in his remarks that he came from a small town in Hungary. It was called Geset, I think. I can't remember now the exact town. But as we passed by in the receiving line I introduced myself and I said, 'I also came from a small town called Chelm.' And he started laughing, and I knew why.

The writer, Shalom Alechem, the great Jewish writer, made my town famous for being sort of like the fools. We were foolish. If we went to the market to buy feathers for the bedding, and we didn't want to have to carry these bags of feathers home. So we would say, we'll go in the wagon and get home sooner and we'll let the feathers drift in the wind and they'll come to us. So Shalom Alechem made our town famous and there are many many stories about the wise men of Chelm. In fact, whenever I speak to someone

from eastern Europe and they are my age, I say, 'You're going to laugh, when you know where I come from,' and they invariably do. Our town was famous for that.

But it was a spiritual community. My father was bar mitzvahed in a synagogue that wasn't particularly grand or anything, but it was seven hundred years old. That's how far our roots in eastern Europe went back. And we thought nothing of it. We belonged there. Yes, we were Jews, we were a persecuted minority, we knew why. Sort of. And we knew that certain hardships were natural for Jews. But we still belonged. We were part of the culture because of our skills. Jews made up the middle class of that culture. There were the peasants, who worked the land, and the landed aristocrats; many times they were absentee landlords. And then there were the Jews who made up the middle class of society.

All of that has now been destroyed forever. There are only remnants in Poland of a few elderly Jews who live there because they have no place else to go and they live on the charity of American Jewish help. I belong to several organizations that have annual dues that go to old-age homes and older citizens not only in Poland but what used to be the Soviet Union. We make sure they have matzo for Passover and things like that. The world that I come from, the world my parents were born into, it's gone. Some buildings exist, but they are museums. They are totally abandoned; they are curiosities. The whole society is gone.

The young people in Europe, the young generation, unless they are from a very academic family, unless they go into higher education, don't even know that there was once a vital Jewish community in their cities. They don't even know. In fact, there have been incidences where some Jews who have gone back for restitution to claim their properties and have encountered a lot of hostility because these young people don't know them—'who the hell are you. My father gave it to me.' The fact that the father may have gotten it by betraying a Jewish family and making sure they were taken away is beside the point.

And that's why, right now in America, I've begun to feel somewhat uncomfortable. Because religion has crept into our daily psyche, especially Muslims vis-à-vis the rest of us, the Judeo-Christian people. What is still happening with the mosque at the site in New York, is making me very uncomfortable. Granted, people may be sensitive about having a mosque in the neighborhood of such an event as 9/11. However, as I told my fellow Jews recently at a meeting, what if when we announced breaking ground on Saratoga that we were going to build a synagogue there twenty years ago, suddenly the people in the neighborhood said, 'Stop, we don't want the Jews here, we don't want you to build a synagogue.' It goes against being American. It goes against the Constitution.

As much as we fear Muslim extremists and deplore what they do, if we ever dismantle the Constitution, we're all lost. That's how I feel. I'm frankly somewhat in the minority

among my own community here, because the emotions run deeper than the reasoning. The Constitution is something abstract, it's a paper in Washington; it lies under glass. But it is our safety every day of our lives, the minute we wake up in the morning till we go to bed at night. The fact that we don't have to open our doors to some authority in the middle of the night because someone says, 'Open your doors, we have to search your place.' This is the Constitution. And a lot of people find that very very hard to reconcile because of the emotions.

I'm very uncomfortable with the way many people, maybe most, feel about Muslims. They are not distinguishing between extremists and the ordinary Muslims who live among us. Islam has taken the best elements from Judaism and from Christianity and incorporated them; it respects and admires the prophets from the Old Testament.

My mother and I, after liberation, lived in a city that in Polish is known as Szczenin. It's on the Baltic Sea. It is very close to Gdánsk, which is another big port on the Baltic. Originally, that city was German. It was called Stattin. Stattin has a history. Catherine the Great, who became empress of Russia, happened to be the daughter of the duke that ruled that area, so she was called the Princess of Stattin. It's just something I remember from history. But it was a German city; it is now a Polish city and has been since 1945.

We know, we hear, of Palestinians who were never born in what is now modern Israel, but their parents and their grandparents have given them keys and locks, and they go around and they say, this is the key to my property, and when the Jews will be vanquished or thrown into the sea, then I'm going to go back and this will be my property. They've never seen it. They were not born there. I can't go back to Poland and bring a key to where I was born or claim anything. That's it. It's a dilemma. I can both sides.

Americans don't always study history. But we have to think back after Pearl Harbor, when Japanese Americans, born and bred in California and the west coast, were also uprooted and put in internment camps. When I first heard the story of the Japanese internment (to show you how misery qualifies) because I'm always comparing the Holocaust with other problems, I thought: It's not so bad. There were no gas chambers there, there were no ovens there. I'm sure American MPs were as benign as they could be. So all they did was uproot them from their homes and intern them in these compounds. Of course, the more I studied the Constitution, and as I became older, I realized that the difference is not so black and white. America has its own problems. It's that way and it's discouraging.

The horror years as I remember them are based mostly on events, because we didn't have calendars or dates. I remember events, and that' why I started

questioning my own age, and my mother would never own up to it. But I felt that she registered me as younger, but I remember so many things that a little child would not have been able to. The horror years began when the Germans invaded any town. They immediately cordoned off the Jewish neighborhoods or a Jewish street, or they'd pick at random some area so that Jews who didn't live there had to move in there. That was the ghetto. Every Jewish person conquered by Germany was immediately herded into a ghetto, a compound. I remember everybody was whispering. It was like everybody felt that if they made themselves almost invisible, that they would be in less danger. So people whispered.

And then I remember when Papa came to Mama—and of course no one consulted me, I was the little one—they whispered something about a farmer, and I didn't hear all the specifics. But as it turned out, this farmer had to cross the ghetto from one gate to another to get to his own place because the city was so cut up by the ghetto.

He crossed this area every single day with a wagon of hay. He became a fixture. Everybody saw him and nobody saw him. Nobody paid attention. Papa knew how to deal with the Polish peasants, the ordinary people, the farmers. Many times they would come to him, sometimes with a blanket and say, make me a coat. So he knew how to talk to them. Apparently my father had some *zlotys*, some Polish currency at the time. And of course it didn't help us to have money because we couldn't buy anything, and it was too dangerous to try to approach a German soldier to bribe. We didn't know how to act. But Papa knew that the polish farmer would understand currency. They arranged some kind of a deal….none of us were big people. My father was 5'6" or 5'7" at the most, and in those days he was a young man so very thin. My mother was petite, and I was a small girl. So the arrangement was that we'd get under the hay when the farmer was in an area where we could dart out. We would be like a sandwich, like in the middle. I'm still allergic to hay!

We never owned a suitcase because I remember all those years of wandering, of being uprooted, we always had bundles. Mama would take like a pillow case and stuff it with whatever we had. Sometimes it would be a shawl, because most east European women had shawls, sometimes for decoration, sometimes just to keep warm. So we always had bundles. I wasn't given anything to carry. My parents had their bundles, and we got into the hay, and the farmer sort of straightened the hay, covered us up so it would look normal. And we just went past the gate and the soldiers waved to him. We heard quiet talking and banter. The Germans were trying to speak Polish and the Poles were trying to accommodate them in German. We were lucky. They would have put bayonets through that hay to check what contraband he had. But he was a fixture, and

that's what my father counted on. My father was not a highly educated man in the formal sense, but he was very bright, and he was very good at sizing up a situation. Since this farmer—they were so used to seeing him—why bother, let him go by. And that was our good luck.

Once we were out of the ghetto, the few *zlotys* my father was able gave him didn't cover very much. And they were afraid to help Jews because they put themselves in danger. The area was very wooded, a heavily wooded forest. To this day that region is a very major source of lumber. My parents had started to hear of some young people—daredevils—who had run into the forest and were hiding. They'd dig into bunkers and hide out, and if the weather was OK then you could manage to sleep in the outdoors. Like the film *Defiance*. Some of the scenes reminded me very much of how we lived. The problem for us was, our group—we had become like an extended family—we were not a paramilitary group like in the film. We were just people trying to survive. But the reason it helped us survive in a group was because everybody added their particular skill or knowledge or way of handling things helped the group. So my father's tailoring helped even then, because there is a very short summer there; it's cold weather so you are always worrying about having enough clothing for the cold. Papa was very good at repairing anything that needed repair. And if anyone could steal a blanket from somewhere, blankets were heavy, he would make them a jacket. It wasn't a fashion plate but it served the purpose.

The reason why they accepted my father and me and my mother, but primarily me. They wouldn't have been so quick to accept us because being a child was a handicap. A child can scream out. A child can give you away. All of it depended on silence and on just disappearing. But since my father was useful, and he knew many of these young men from the area—many of them had been bar mitzvahed together or went to the same religious school, so they knew each other—that's how we started on our saga of hiding and escaping.

Whenever possible we would look for normal shelter, and that would mean a farm with a barn or some kind of a shed. Sometimes if the house was big enough, they would hide us in the house. If it was a big enough farm the group could scatter, but we always tried to stay together. There were about a dozen in our group, always back and forth. Sometimes somebody would just never come back, if they had gone out to forage for food or something. Many times they just never came back. People didn't even talk about it because the results were obvious. They must have been captured or killed. And sometimes a new person would drift in. So there were about a dozen people.

Most of the time it was the elements that were our major enemy. The weather was cold and very wet and because the forests were thick, even if there was

sunshine, it barely penetrated to us. And of course food. Food was the fuel that made you survive. Food was the hardest thing to find..

My mother had blue eyes, as I have. She was fair, so she could more easily pass as a non-Jewish person. So sometimes it became my mother's assignment if there was a farm nearby and somebody had clothing or an object to trade—everything became like a currency. Mama would go. I was the prop. The rationale was that if the farmer opened the door and saw a woman with a child—they were all devout Catholics—that he would have some pity and want to sell her food. Nothing was given, it was strictly a commercial transaction, but he might be willing to trade.

Mama was very careful. She could pass—her Polish was excellent, her eyes were blue with her light hair and she a very pretty girl—she could pass as a non-Jew. But I looked very Semitic. I have my father's features, the high cheek bones, the straight nose. And so since the weather was always cold, wet, depending on where my mother approached, she always covered my face up…up to the eyes. You talk about a burka. Mama would hide my features except for my eyes. And she would come to the door and say, 'I need food' and 'Do you have some bread, do you have some eggs, can you sell me a piece of butter.' This is how it went on. It was a great risk, but sometimes when she saw that the farmer had enough compassion, when he was relaxed and willing to trade, then Mama would uncover my face. I had very black hair…exactly what you would call the Semitic look. You can see it in my father's features. Of course he couldn't show his face in situations like that because it was a give-away.

That's how we would forage for food and always try to stay ahead. We had reports through contact with farmers of how quickly the Germans were advancing. The Polish army tried to fight tanks on horseback. It was a non-starter. When we found out how close the Germans were at a given time, we would move on, we would find another area to huddle in. I don't ever remember a camp fire. They must have used some kind of shelter for it or something, but I don't remember it because, again, it spelled danger. If you have a camp fire there are certain smells from the wood or if you warm up a piece of food or something….I never remember a camp fire.

How we kept going, I don't know. We had no compass. We had no map. We were just trying to stay ahead of the Germans. So the Germans were our compass, in a sense, because as they spread out through the Ukraine, we kept going eastward. At that time, Russia and Germany had a non-aggression pact. So we fell into the hands of Russian authorities. They found us, and they were very paranoid about spies. So they took us in hand and immediately identified

us as Jews—*Yev'rey* or *Zid*—and those words were spit out with such contempt, like the "N" word is perhaps by bigots here. Suddenly we were under Stalinist control. And they were very harsh. They made us wait in places until there were more people. It was like gathering fish in a net. When there was enough of us….by then we had come to a railroad track, and as soon as a freight car was available (in Yiddish it is *vagon*) we were made to get into those. They are quite high off the track. I remember the men had quite a time climbing in and the women had to be literally lifted up and put in.

Where? It must have been near Kiev. By the time we were at the Kiev railroad station, I remember there was no food for some time and there was a woman walking around with a big pot and a ladle. And she was selling like a cup worth of soup. It was the only hot beverage of any kind that we had had in days. So Mama bought some and made me drink it. It had cabbage but it was mostly liquid. It was from that time on that we were transported by the Russians, under their control. We were schlepped here, there, but we were never told where. We were never told why, but we knew why—because we were Jews. We were never where we were being taken. At some point when they had enough of these wagon-loads of people, they pulled out of this major area, and then we started a long, long trip. And we ended up in what turned out to be Siberia.

There was no furniture of any kind in those freight cars. If you found yourself a wall or a piece of a wall, or a corner, that was the ideal place. That way, your back was protected, and your possessions, because in time of stress, people can steal from each other. If we found ourselves a corner we were quite happy. It was dark in those wagons. There were slits or narrow openings on the very top, but you wouldn't call them windows. And a normal person would have to stand on somebody's shoulders to see out.

We traveled for a long time. The farmers came to the train and try to sell us some stuff) somebody would say, this could become a *shiddach*, a match. People were thrown together for such long periods of time that they would pair up and become a couple. I remember those conversations. But nobody explained anything to me. I was going where I was told and I did what I was told. That was from day one. That's how my parents instructed me to be. So whatever I was told, I did.

I heard in the distance—sometimes I may have heard thunder, but sometimes I may have heard artillery, who knows—when I heard those sounds, there was fear. There was fear on the adults' faces, too. Sometimes we would hear shots that were very close to the train. I don't know if there were sentries or if somebody was just executed. Life was so cheap. Life didn't matter. Here when somebody has a bad accident you call 911 and an ambulance comes and

suddenly you are surrounded by people who want to help you. In our circumstances, life was cheap. You would hear shots; nobody would say much of anything. It was just obvious. We were prisoners of the Russians.

This is something I've never really quite accepted. My mother, who was born just before or into the First World War, and my father, too—practically all the people that were around us were of that generation—they were not so afraid of the Germans. They were more afraid of the Russians, because during the First World War—the last war that didn't make total war on civilians—my parents and others like them remembered that war and thought it won't be so bad. The Germans are very cultured people. They will help us. They will understand. It was incredible because we didn't know what else was happening. And my parents and others like them went by the fact that when they were children and the First World War was raging, the Germans were very civilized and very polite to women and children. The Second World War was the first time in recorded history of *total war*, and that meant it didn't matter if you were a civilian. It didn't matter if you were two years-old or five years-old or if you were ninety-five years-old. Everybody was a potential enemy, disposed of. Ironically, the people around us all felt that if we could just hear some German, be around German soldiers, it would be easier for us. My parents and others like them grew up on stories about the Russian Cossacks who would make pogroms. That was the boogey-man, that was the big danger.

When we finally got to Siberia, we were dropped off the train at a little village. Very primitive, very humble, very poor. Siberians have always been the underdog in Russia. They would say, 'If you go to the house and the people want to take you in, maybe you will get some shelter from them. Or maybe you can live in their shed.' There was no other way to survive. In our particular case, there was my mother and I, my father, and my young aunt, my aunt Bluma—she was an older teenager—seventeen or eighteen when the war broke out. She had been visiting my parents in the bigger city, in Chelm, from Dubenka. She didn't want to be in Dubenka. So when the war broke out, she was trapped and she was the one who fled and went everywhere we went. We would go to the door and knock. Siberians, in their own way…they kind of knew about Jews but in a very primitive way. Communism had wiped out religion and they weren't used to all that stuff. They took us just as people who were victims.

I remember one farmer who had a cabin. The total size couldn't have been bigger than my dining room. In that cabin he and his old wife slept, and they had a granddaughter (because the young people, daughters and sons, were all at the front fighting) and they had a cow in their barn. In fact, that first winter the cow had a calf, and the farmer brought it in. We're city people—what is

this? My mother was terrible. She said, 'Oh, it smells' (she was covering her nose. My mother was a bit of a princess). The farmer felt that the calf wouldn't survive the cold so the calf stayed for the winter months in this small cabin, where there was the couple who took us in, their granddaughter, my aunt Bluma, and my parents and I. We somehow managed. Sense of privacy—there was no privacy.

We had to make ourselves useful to pay our way. There was no such thing as paying rent. We had to be useful. By "useful" they meant any kind of chores that came along. This may be disgusting. Hygiene for everybody, it was always a problem, living under those conditions. Lice were a way of life; they were a fact of life. The farmer had short hair—he didn't have much of a problem. But the woman had longish hair, which she wore in a knot. Our way of paying our rent—either my mother, or Bluma, or I—were supposed to sit down on a stool, twice a week like a ritual, and the woman would sit on the floor. She had a comb and she would part her hair. With something like a flat knife, we had to squeeze the lice. And then she would wash her hair, and I remember I saw these things floating in the water. But that was our way of paying our rent. She couldn't do this by herself; it was a disgusting thing to have to do. Mama did it once, and she complained about it bitterly and cried over it. So then my aunt Bluma did it for awhile, but then she became sick. The old lady (she wasn't really old; she looked old to me) said, well, the girl can do it. So I took up this chore and she liked very much the way I was doing it. I had lighter hands, and I was more timid about it, so I wasn't hurting her. That's how we spent our first winter in Siberia for the privilege of having some shelter.

They would bake their own bread; they did everything themselves. But occasionally, if there was something they could share with us, if they had a larger quantity, they could add more water to the soup, they'd share it. Papa was always there with his needle and thread, and he would mend everything and would be useful that way. Papa was not an outdoorsman. He was an indoor worker. That was our first winter in Siberia.

My mother never never talked about it afterwards. One time I made the mistake of starting to tell something to an American friend. If looks could kill. My mother was so ashamed of how we had to live that it was absolutely taboo. When I come to classes, to schools—I don't mention things like that because I know, to the average American, such things sound so disgusting. And they were. But that was the way of life, and that was the way of survival. That was what we had to do. It was like being raped and the victim feeling ashamed instead of the person who did it to you. We were, in a sense, raped every day of our existence during those years. We ended up being ashamed of how we had to live or how we had to make compromises. Traditional Jews are very

hygiene-conscious. A Jew cannot come to the table and eat unless the hands are washed. To this day, the first thing I do when I walk into the apartment is put my purse down, go to the sink, and wash my hands. It is ingrained, an old habit. But it was the part of that hygiene that went with our religion that saved many of us because we were more careful.

Once or twice, the farmer had a *banya*, a bath house. It was a little cabin away from the main house. It was very small. He explained to us that he would build a little fire pit in that cabin. Nothing else except a bench. But he would put in some rocks and get them good and hot. Sometimes he did it the night before. And then there was some kind of a plant—it was like a little broom. So there was the steam. In order to get your circulation going and in order to really feel clean and invigorated, once you were sweating, we'd each hit each other with this little broom. We didn't have brushes or *luffa*, not any of these lovely things we have now. This is how we stayed clean. And I remember those baths because—the old man was very civilized—he would arrange the heat just right. Then he would say, the women go first. For a change we had a sense of privacy. My aunt, my mother and I, the lady of the house and her granddaughter would all go in there, take off our clothes, and use the steam and the plant to clean ourselves.

I have since found out that in many Slavic countries they use what I called a little broom. There is a plant that has thin little branches that was always used. In some Scandinavian countries, when people want to take a steam bath and really get their circulation going, this is what they would use. In a perverted sort of way, we were treated to a spa, but we didn't know it. It didn't feel like a spa. When we got ourselves covered up, dried off as best we could, then the farmer and my father and a couple of other men—maybe neighbors—would come in and do that. That was not done every week, that would have been a luxury. It was done only now and then throughout the winter. Hygiene was very hard to maintain but very important. And that was how we lived.

Authorities knew we were there. There was a little truck—the only motorized vehicle that I ever saw in that village—and they would bring bread. I guess there was a certain allotment of bread for us and for the farmer and his wife. They were to get a little extra bread because they had taken us in. That was their reward.

The cow was milked. In late afternoon, when he would milk the cow, they were waiting for the same little truck to come by with milk cans. The government took away all the milk that he produced. Everything was geared to the war effort and the government effort. That's collectivism, that's Communism. So even the milk that the farmer was able to get from his one cow was not even

his own. So he got smart. He would take his granddaughter and me, call us into the barn—nobody thought much of germs. He had this tin mug and he would have it filled up with milk. It was still warm. Real milk, before it is pasteurized, has a certain sweet smell to it. He would give a mug full of milk that the little girl and I shared. That had to be done in the barn so that nobody would see it because he had to fill up these metal milk cans, two of them, and that was milk that didn't belong to him and he could have no share of.

Life was very primitive for these people also, not just for the Jews. At some point when the weather changed, and it became warmer—what could pass for a summer in Siberia—we were told to pack our bags, that we were being taken to a permanent place. We were taken by wagons to a city—compared to the village—called Stalinsk. That was a take off on the name of Stalin. In those days everything that you could imagine was named for the heroes of their Communist revolution. So this town was called Stalinsk. I don't know how big it was, but compared to the village, it was much bigger. It was a regular town. It even had a trolley. It had a big oriental market. You go there, you barter, you trade, you sell, you buy. That helped us to survive.

We were in Stalinsk. Papa was immediately given a workroom—perhaps the size of my living room—there were sewing machines and other equipment. And of course my father's scissors. They couldn't build, they were so under stress from the war, they couldn't afford to stop and built new factories. They had little factories wherever they could find space. So Papa was a foreman in such a little factory. The Russian women in the factory called him Simon Davidovich, because they went by the patrimony, meaning the son of David (my grandfather's name was David).

And they made Russian uniforms. Everything, again, for the Russian front. I remember because that's where those scissors became so fixed in my mind. My father had to cut several layers of material and it was fairly heavy material, for cutting out the pattern for the uniforms. In modern factories there are machines so once you have a pattern, you guide the machine—it can cut through anything. We didn't have that. Papa had to cut, and sometimes he would try to cut as many as five or six layers. That's all he could accommodate. And how do I remember those scissors? Because at the end of the working day, my father's hand would be so swollen and so stiff and in pain, truly in pain, and Mama would heat up some water, and I would help him soak his hand. That eased up some of the pain, and of course the next day it was back

to the same old thing. That was my father's tenure as a foreman in a uniform factory.

On a warm day in the summer of 1942, my mother left me off there to play. She would go to this big bazaar to see what she could buy or sell—everything was of value. I was with my father. Papa used to give me pieces of fabric and I would play in a corner and not get in anybody's way. I had my back to the working area in my own little corner. And suddenly it got very very quiet. I mean, quiet. When I realized it, I turned around. There were two men in civilian clothing. They didn't wear the hats like a homburg. They wore caps, with a sort of visor. But for some reason, they had a certain way of being official-looking, and they were not afraid of anybody. The reason it got so quiet is because they were immediately recognized. They were the NKVD, now known as KGB. During Stalin's time the secret police was the NKVD. And these people had the same power as the SS in Germany. They came in. We didn't know that my father was in any trouble. That's why this was such a shock. They came in. The Russians who worked in the shop recognized that they were thugs of the NKVD. They went to my father, and they said something quietly to him. And I remember his face turned grey. It wasn't even white; it turned grey. This was the fear. He had a lady there who was a very good seamstress. I guess she was his helper, his second in command. He told her to do whatever it was she had to do, because, he said, 'I have to go.' He got his coat. They had a vehicle outside that reminds me of those old fashioned black taxis in London. That's why the people in the shop recognized that they were the real McCoy. They took my father away, and that was all. Nothing else was said. The shop started humming again and working. When my mother came back to fetch me, they told her.

They don't tell you where they're taking you, whether it is this jail or this precinct. So what it amounted to, my father was taken away. I tried to run after him. That's when I saw him enter this vehicle. I chased it a little but all I got in my face was some dust. I couldn't outrun a vehicle. I did not see my father until 1948, when he came to the camp in Austria where we where.

My father was in the Gulag camps for six years, mainly as a tailor. At one point, he was forced to work in the coal mines. We got this information by way of people who told us because from time to time if they released a prisoner, Papa would always give them our name and see if they could look up his wife and his little girl. I don't know how, but these people really did. And they weren't necessarily Jewish. The coal mines in the region where we lived didn't have enough laborers. At one point they emptied out the camp…the cooks, the tailors, everyone, including my father. He was a tailor, he was not a laborer for a mine. So they sent them down and there was an accident. Some people were

hurt badly. My father came out with a wounded left leg, starting at the ankle going almost up to his knee. It was six or seven months after the event that we found out about it. His leg healed miraculously but it was just the skin. When you touched the leg you touched bone. It was always very dangerous for my father to bump into anything with that leg—God knows what could happen. In fact, once we came to America, Papa didn't want to hear about surgery or anything like that, so one orthopedic doctor recommended a "sleeve" on his leg to protect it from the usual bumps or scrapes. That is why I was so caught up with the Chilian miners rescue broadcast by CNN. These miners in Chili, they were like my father. I was mesmerized. I could relate to this, I could understand. Misery has no geography, it has no language barrier. I could feel what those women and children felt as they were waiting for something to happen.

The prison was a day's walk from Stalinsk. My mother would go to try and see him; she would call them visits. You try to pick out your person among hundreds of prisoners who were being marched for exercise. All of them were wearing grey, cotton clothing. All of them had shaved heads. Everybody looked the same. The reason all of them were wearing this same grey clothing is that my father helped make it. The jacket of that suit was called a *kofika*. It was padded with cotton so that there was fabric on the outside, then the padding of the cotton, and then a lining of sorts. That would be the garment that these men had to keep them warm in arctic weather. Later my father told me that sometimes he had a bit of material left over and he was able to improvise and make caps.

My father was put in charge. He was really instrumental in saving people's lives. If he would see someone who was just physically down, he'd ask, can you sew anything? Then he would say, 'This guy, I want this guy, because he can help me.' He had to teach him to sew something so that the game wouldn't be given away. And he did it a few times. He told me that it made him feel good because he had saved these people's lives. They were not all Jews. The camps in the Gulag were mixed. Most of the people there had been common criminals, guilty of some crime. Many, probably most, were political prisoners.

When my father's case was finally adjudicated, my mother was told that the reason he was kept and would be kept was because they found out he was a counter-revolutionary and he spoke against Stalin and he hated Communism and that's why he was taken away. And many many other people with him in these camps were in the same category. So there were common criminals and then there were people who were caught up in this insanity like my father.

His trade—I cannot say it enough—my father's skill was the thing that saved him. He was able to keep a primitive kind of fireplace in the workroom. You had it for warmth or to boil up some *kipitok* or hot water. There was no tea or coffee available, but even if they had hot water to drink, it took away the chill. He would keep it going and they'd always provide him with a few pieces of coal or maybe wood. He asked for, and got permission, to sleep in the shop. He and a couple of his helpers had the luxury of sleeping on those work tables, which were just platforms. But at night they'd have their blanket and they would stretch out on these work tables and that way they didn't have to sleep with fifty other people in a barrack. They could keep little bit warmer and felt in a little bit more in control of their own lives.

That was my father's life for six years. We had no communication from him, so we did not know any details of this. We only found out after he was liberated and joined us. During these years, though, my mother kept writing. I used to be so angry with her. We were starving, and she'd always sell of something to try and buy us a piece of bread, or whatever. But she would be convinced that if she would just mail this letter to camp number so-and-so, whatever it was (the camps didn't have a name, they had a number), that he would get her letter. So she wrote in Yiddish, which is a Germanic language but it uses the Hebrew alphabet, which makes is sort of unique. She would write in Yiddish. She would write her heart out. How hard it was, how much she missed him, and so forth. My mother was busy writing letters that probably went nowhere because the Russians couldn't read Yiddish and they censored everything in those days. She would put out any extra money she had for that postage and send letters to Siberia. She was convinced that he would get these letters, but we found out later that he never did.

I realize now, that's what she needed to do. She was so in love with my father, and it was not one of those arranged marriages like the olden days. They were really a loving couple, and the family was torn apart. My mother was always very sentimental. And of course she and my father were such a pair that after the war. They arranged for a sort of nanny for me in the Displaced Persons camp in Austria, to school me (I was a barbarian, having never been in school). That was the main reason why they used her. But they also wanted some time for themselves. They wanted to get to know each other again. Of course they were a young couple, and they were suddenly torn apart by this horrendous war and never thought they would see each other again. I was just there.

At the time, however—when I'd go to the post office with her and saw her give out these last few *zlotys* for this mail—I would be so angry because that meant we couldn't buy food, frankly. This is one of the most important lessons of my childhood. Something didn't seem right about this, something didn't fit. When I

saw other people, the husband and the wife and the children, I saw how the adults would first and foremost take care of their children. This was not the case with us. I felt that I couldn't depend on my mother, that even though she was the grown up, I could not depend on her for simple things like food.

From that point, my mother and I developed a relationship that lasted really for the rest of our lives. I think maybe it happened to many families but people don't always talk about it. Many of the survivor families, because of various circumstances, even after liberation and after normalcy, even in America when we immigrated, we couldn't have the typical nuclear family. Some women who had the same experience as my mother, totally abandoned any thought of the husband. If he came back, he came back. If he didn't, too bad. Their primary responsibility if they had a child was the child, and then sometimes they would remarry.

In my mother's case it was the opposite way. She had a fixation about my father and I was always second. She didn't mean it in a bad way. My mother was not an educated woman in the formal sense. Their generation didn't know about psychology and the effects things have on people. I think she felt, I'm her child and I'm her daughter and will always be so. That's a given. She did not understand that as I was maturing and I was very observant. I still am. But I was observing how other families were after liberation. I didn't know if my father would ever come back. But I knew as far as my mother was concerned, I have to learn to take care of myself. She would not make the compromises that were necessary, even for my sake. She also suffered, of course. I was only eight years old, but you'd be surprised how old you can feel when you have to make do. My mother didn't beat me; she didn't abuse me. She just didn't realize how this changed my character.

I still think, as a mother and a grandmother—it may sound very harsh—but if I had maybe a husband who was maybe alive, maybe dead, but I had this child right here, who needed food—no, I would not write to my husband and spend the money on postage. I'm not like that, I never have been. That's one of the legacies of my history. We became a little bit hard, not always sentimental about some things.

Surviving without my father was probably one of the hardest times in our lives aside from the original hiding and scurrying from the Nazis. In Stalinist Russia, you were better off being a family member of a murderer. My father was a political prisoner because of what he was accused of, a counter revolutionary and speaking out against communism and so forth. Suddenly people who knew us, his fellow workers, were afraid to be associated with us even though they liked us and felt sorry for us. So you become, in Stalinist Russia, you

become a pariah, an untouchable, if anyone in your family was accused of crimes against the state and taken into camps.

My mother was told that we would be allowed to live in the room that we had been assigned to us. My young aunt was with us. In Stalinist Russia, you didn't go out and look for a job and have an interview. They assigned you a job. And everything was geared to the war effort, and there were factories and shops, depending on how useful you would be to the state. My mother absolutely refused to go into a factory. She wasn't used to that; she couldn't work; and besides, she had a small child. I'm afraid my mother used that excuse whenever she was faced with a crisis. I was small, but the point was that had she agreed to go to a factory or some designated job, I would have been allowed to go to a state school, like nursery school or kindergarten. The curriculum there was like everything else; writing, reading, certain amount of music, very patriotic singing. I would have been structured into a life that would be suitable with other children. It was not like living in a boarding school; I would be able to go home. But the important thing was that they would feed you.

Mama absolutely refused to work. Once again, I couldn't depend on my mother. I believe, still, that an adult has no right to put herself ahead of a child's needs. The consequences of her refusal were severe. They took all our ration cards away, and suddenly we had no source of eating or the basics. Never mind shopping, but just getting enough rubles to buy something in the way of food.

So how did we live? Mama knew a lot of people who had lived in Siberia for generations. They were Russian Jews but Russian citizens. Many of them had very important positions in the local hierarchy of government. There is a bazaar in every major Russian city, especially where we lived because it was so close to Asia. So they would give my mother items to sell. It could be clothing, it could be lipstick, it could be bars of soap. Then she would get a commission for whatever she would sell for them. They had some sort of formula and understanding, and it worked. At least it worked for my mother.

I could only be taken out when the weather was relatively mild or before the real frosts came. It is hard to estimate now, but I think four or five months out of the year the weather would be mild. That left most of the year when I could not go out. My mother would come home and many times she was able to find food items from the bazaar from her earnings. My aunt was working in a factory cafeteria. She was conscripted like a soldier. So that left me alone.

We had a small room with a big window. My mother would make sure I had some food. Because of the cold, every room in Russia had a brick corner,

which would be your oven. You could put in pieces of wood, pieces of coal. You had warmth for the room, and if you improvised something on top, you could put a kettle to cook whatever. So that was our stove. Mama always had on the side a little cupboard area to try to make sure the coal didn't get on everything. These things I would need to keep that fire going. It was up to me to do that through all the hours of the day.

Mama would get all her stuff ready. I remember she had a lock. It was not like the locks you have in America; you have a lock and you turn the key. It was a big lock that she had, and when she would leave the room and me, she hung that lock on the outside of the door. I had no way of leaving that room. It wasn't that Mama didn't trust me, but where was I to go. It was cold and it was alien to me. Everybody was at work. So I was in that room about five months out of the year for three years, between 1942 and 1945. That's how my mother and I managed.

My aunt would come home every thirty-six hours because she had a shift of twenty-four hours, and then she would come home to sleep. Looking back on it now, my family used to tease me about it, and my aunt used to tell these stories on me. I was lonely. There was no way to say, I don't want this and I'll throw a tantrum and I won't behave. You just accept what is there. My loneliness was so profound, when my aunt was home, trying to sleep because she had to go back to work the next day for twenty-four hours, I used to go and touch her eye lids and force her eyes open. She was a good sport about it, when I think back, now as an adult. When you're sleepy, and here is this child forcing your eyes open so you can talk to her.

It was not a good situation. No radio, no television, none of the things we now know in the world. I couldn't read yet. I didn't have any books. So I would sit in the window. If I'd see a bird or a dog running by, I would think, I wonder where that dog is going. Isn't he cold? Has he had food to eat today—just sort of make up stories in my mind. I lived in my mind. When I came to America and I had to learn English, our radio was on all the time when I was home. I did in Russia as a child what the radio did for me later, except the radio gave me the material. I was living in my own mind then. I didn't like it; I was very lonely. But I remember I was always very resigned to my situation.

I would look out the big window. The house was on a little hill, so I could see when my mother would get off the little trolley that would be the last station for the area, and I could see her coming. And it was like joy—the joy that my mother was finally coming home. And of course she was tired, she was cold. But it was somebody there. This is how we managed.

The warm weather was lovely because my mother would take me with her to the big bazaar. Even so, it was still the middle of the war. Russia suffered many casualties and there were soldiers who had been maimed—amputees. They didn't get much help from the government. Once they were healed, they were on their own. At the bazaar, many times, if soldiers knew how to play the *garmoshka*, a little accordion, or a mandolin, a *balalaika*, they would sit with their cap on the ground. The understanding was that they would sing all kinds of folk songs, patriotic songs, love songs, and passers by would sometimes stop and listen and toss in a coin. That's how these poor men would make their living.

The three or four months when the weather was acceptable for me to be out (I was still heavily dressed) my mother would bring me to the bazaar and she would say, 'Stay right here,' because this man was singing. That was his station, his spot. And I would stay. Hours passed. I was so enthralled. I used to learn all these Russian melodies and songs, and then when I'd be home I would repeat them to my mother and she was very entertained. But this was my entertainment. And it was lovely.

Something funny happened. Mama would leave me there with always something in my pocket to eat. But no money. As people gathered, they were bigger than I was, and pretty soon I'd find myself toward the back. And I wanted to be up front as close to the singer as I could be, so I could hear everything and see him. I told Mama, 'I have to have some kopeks in my pocket because I want to be in the front, and I can't stand there for hours and listen to him sing and not put something in the cap.' She was cooperative about that and gave me some coins, so I felt I paid my way. I had an orchestra seat, so to speak. When I say this now, it is humorous. But this was normal for us. This was normal life. If the weather was good and if it wasn't especially cold and if it wasn't snowing, I had a chance to be at the bazaar. That was especially good.

We did not know any dates. We did not know any events. There was no such thing as a newspaper. The newspaper of record in Stalinist days was called *Pravda*, which means "Truth." But it was the biggest lie. There were headlines in *Pravda* but I didn't read Russian. Neither did my mother. We didn't know anything. On one of these warm days, with a little sun coming through, my mother took me with her to spend the day at the market. As the trolley drove into the business center of the town, we started seeing many people—the further we went the more people we saw—and then we suddenly saw them hugging and kissing and singing and smiling—it was very different from anything else I had ever seen. Finally, when some people got off the trolley, and other people came on, we found out that the war in Europe was over. That's why these Russians were so overjoyed and happy. Total strangers

kissed and hugged, men and women—it didn't matter. It was just the joy that finally, the killing would end.

We did not know that the world war also had a Pacific theatre. We had no knowledge of that at all. We didn't really know who was fighting whom; we only knew Russia was fighting the Germans. But we didn't know that it had involved all other nations or that there was a Pacific war as well. In any case, we found out the war was over, and somehow you had a spring in your step and you felt better about things. That day we spent the day in the market as usual; of course there was more excitement. Mama really splurged. There was a man who sold clay cups full of baked milk. Untreated milk has cream in it, and he would bake soup dishes full of milk and the cream would rise to the top and get brown. As a treat for that day, Mama bought me one of these cups of milk and it was wonderful.

Chapter 2: Displaced

Soon after this event—perhaps a week or two at the most—we got an order that was delivered something like Western Union—from the Russian authorities that since we were stateless people and we were Jews, we had to report to a certain railroad station and take our bundles with us. A train was waiting, and we were being expelled from Russia to go back to our various homelands. The Russians didn't want to have foreigners there.

It still left us in limbo, because mother knew my father was still in a Gulag camp. He was not being repatriated; he was staying there. For how long we didn't know. The news that everyone received with joy was not necessarily received with joy by us. I remember my mother crying, because as soon as we got that order, she didn't know what she should do because my father was in the camp. Mama considered staying put; staying and taking whatever consequences. Luckily, prisons have a certain network. Papa knew my mother very well. There was an amnesty when the war ended, and lot of people were released from many of the camps. And since the town we lived in was more or less a crossroads, many of them ended up in that town. Papa sent out a message, 'Leave, leave, leave, because later you may not be able to.' Once my mother got that message, there was no question about our staying in Siberia.

We reported to the train, and that was our exit from mother Russia. This was summer of 1945—the weather was nice. We were six weeks on that train. Our train was full of homeless refugees that were shipped out to their homelands. Coming back into Russia, the opposite direction, were trains bringing back injured soldiers, and they took priority. Even now it probably takes the better part of a week to travel by train from Siberia into what is European Russia. For us, the reason it took six weeks was because every time, when there was a train going back into Russia with these injured soldiers, our train was put to the side so that these people could get by. Sometimes we stood for a few hours, sometimes for several days. There was no control of your life. You were always at the mercy of whoever gave the orders.

We were on the train for six weeks. There was one event that I'll remember as long as I live. As we traveled into Poland, people started to get off if they were close to their own town. We were somewhere in the Krakow area. Several young men wanted to go exploring because they knew the area, they had lived there. They were going to find fresh food to buy from farmers or see if anyone was alive from their families. Off they went, and one was the son of a family who lived with us in this cattle car. They were gone for many many hours. Everybody was waiting for the news they would bring back. They returned—it

was almost dusk—I remember the boy that was from our own car. He was young and happy and looking forward to an adventure. He came back looking like an old man. They had come across huts that were the gas chambers of Auschwitz. They found on the walls, in some cases, scratched in from whatever people had—names, some names in Hebrew—also message like: 'We are dying, we are being killed off,' something to that effect. That's when suddenly people like us, who had been driven deep into Siberia, found out that our people were killed here by the thousands.

They brought back potatoes, and right away we improvised with a bonfire. You take a stick and you push it through the potato and roast it over the coals. I was a girl scout long before I came to America! We roasted the potatoes and there were a few children younger than I—but no adult, even though we were all hungry, no adult touched those potatoes. They did give them to us, the children. In the distance (it was a long train) I saw a circle of people, men gathered around. And that was the first time in my life I heard words of the *Kaddish*, the prayer for the dead. These men had brought back the news that apparently there was a lot of killing of Jews. Nobody knew who was who. It was just out of respect. That's why they didn't eat. The mourning period has some prohibition about eating right away. This was out of respect to these totally unknown victims, whose only sign was a scratch of a name on a wall. We had a minion, a quorum. There have to be a minimum of ten men for Jews to pray. There ended up being many more than ten. It was the first time I had ever heard *Kaddish*, and it was alien—Hebrew and Jewish tradition was unknown to me. And I heard people crying as well. Later in the night when things settled down and we closed the doors because it was cold, everybody was very subdued. We had some candles so that we could have some lighting. I said, 'Mama, why were they praying.?' She was crying and she said, 'They discovered that some Jews had been killed.' That's really all we knew.

As we entered more and more into European areas, the Ukraine and into Poland, people got off, so the train got emptier and emptier. My aunt, by then, from the time we had started on the transport out of Siberia, had hooked up with a group of young people her own age, and she stayed in another cattle car. So it was just Mama and I. But we saw her every time we would stop; she would come over. Mama said, she was afraid to stop anywhere in Poland because here she is a woman with a small girl and a young lady (Bluma was about eighteen, nineteen at the time). She said, we are all females and it is dangerous. I'm afraid. She said, I want to stay on the train until the end of the line.

The end of the line came at a city on the Baltic which had been renamed by then. It was now part of Poland because the borders had been redrawn at the

end of the war. It had been the German port city of Stattin. We knew is as Szczecin. And there we had to get off the train.

We started walking because we wanted to find a place, a room, where we could live, sleep. Street after street, it was like being in a moon-scape. Everything was bombed out…everything. Sometimes you'd see a wall at the front of a building and you'd think, wonderful, this might be it. And then you'd go into a courtyard and it was demolished, mountains of brick and mortar and concrete and that was it. Because it was a port it was heavily bombed.

We finally found a room that we shared, Mama and I were in one room and the lady who took us in was in the other room. She had a little boy about my age, and coincidentally, her husband was also in the Gulag camps. And she had no idea when or if she would ever see him again. She was resigned that he was dead. I remember because Mama was a little resentful and judgmental because the woman said that she was already looking for a husband. Perhaps she was. The other woman had resigned herself that her husband was dead.

We lived in this arrangement. The agencies to help were just beginning to set up their clinics. There was an infirmary, there was a little post office, and people were still coming out and finding each other and discovering who survived. So it was like a center. There was dining room at the center, like a soup kitchen. It should have been the end of our hunger. But my mother was too proud to stand in line with the hundreds of perfectly able-bodied people. People stood in line and were not too proud to get in line and have a bowl and get some stew….nourishment. If she didn't stand in line, I couldn't. It was for her sake as well; she was just as hungry as I. But it effected me more because I was a kid, I was hungry. These were bad days. Mama would go to the market place, like a flea market, and try to sell some item of clothing so she get some money to buy food. It didn't always work and she didn't have anything to sell any more. It was bad.

It was at that point, because I was older and I began to understand more, that this gulf between my mother and I deepened. Adults have to put pride aside if you have a young child who is depending on you. You have to be careful how you handle the situation. You have no way of knowing how a child—a child is a person, only smaller—you have no way of knowing how a child is going to react. I resented it. Mama would not put her pride aside even for my sake. She would not ask for help. The help was there but she would not ask for it.

This was another learning experience for me. My mother was a loner in a communal situation. To get along it wasn't enough to be pleasant, not to appear territorial. You had to be part of things. But she refused. She insisted on *her* way. Very often this alienated us from the group.

My reaction was: *Fine. I have no one to depend on*, so I will do whatever I can to help myself. Then there was a time they were recruiting orphans to get on ships from Antwerp, from Genoa, to get on illegal ships and try to break the blockage that the British had already set up around Palestine limiting Jewish immigration. A lady came in and asked the teacher, how many of the kids are orphans. The teacher said, 'You'll have to ask them.' I don't know if there were many like me. He said, 'You'll get on a train. You'll be given food, and we'll go to a port where you will board a ship for the land of Israel. How many of you want to sign up?' And my hand went up. I signed up as an orphan. I was ready to go. That evening I told Mama, "I signed up to go somewhere and they'll give us food.' Right away she was a little bit suspicious because you have to be very careful. The next day she found out what I had signed up for: an orphan train, transport, to go first to Holland, Belgium—these orphans were picked up all over Europe and then transported to a holding place—when there were enough of us they would board the ship.

My mother was very angry with me, very upset. How could I do that to her. How could I shame her so. And I said, 'Mama, I didn't want to do anything bad. I just wanted the food that they promised. And they said our parents could join us later.' I tried to make every excuse in the book but she very hurt. She was very angry. She talked to the people in charge and my name was taken off that list. And I felt cheated, because I was already counting on it.

Mama was a nice person. She was in some ways, politically and militarily, certainly naïve. She was a young woman from a little village. The war broke out. It was a big shock to her, too. And she was not the aggressive kind that uses her elbows to get something. She was very Victorian, lady-like. To this day, virtue like that doesn't mean a thing to me because I think the world is a battle. And I think people do have to fight for what they want in many ways. Mama was not like that. She waited until it would be brought to her. Nothing gets brought to us.

This also was a turning point. We got over that bump in the road, but this is how our relationship began to evolve as I was old enough to understand and to take care of myself. I never felt that I could depend on my mother. It was unfortunate, it wasn't her fault. She just didn't realize what she was doing. That's how it was. Those were the 'formative years' of my life.

My value system, my table of priorities, is basically still the same. In a different way, perhaps, but still the same. I cannot be so altruistic that I give everything away. My children, at times, wanted this and that. My way of dealing with it was, 'Look, you want this because you want this. It's not because you have to have it.' So it's not as if I was depriving them of food. But I am getting older. They live far away from here. Even with the best of intentions, they can't be here for me. I said to my daughter this last time when I was visiting, 'You know, if I get sick I have to call the agency and hire someone to go to HEB and shop for me.' You can just impose on friends so much, and then it gets old. I think that my attitude came from that period of when I was very young. I am not proud of that, but it is the truth about me.

I know it doesn't sound nice but it's not so awful. The reason is because you don't feel like a victim all the time. You don't feel dependent all the time. When my husband became ill with Parkinson's, I must tell you that I was a widow long before he actually passed away because of his illness. I took care of him here in the apartment for all the years that he was ill. But the last six months, I felt that if I could not get a good night's sleep without worrying that he might fall when he goes to the bathroom, or whatever, that I would collapse. So it was a matter of deciding. I didn't like my decision. I'm sure he didn't like it either. He'd been in the hospital this last time; he had pneumonia, he had other things wrong, heart failure, and Parkinson's. He said, 'Maybe I'll feel better when I get home.' As the day drew nearer when he would have to leave the hospital, I said, 'Danny, we're not going to go home. There is a very good place that will have professionals taking care of you with professional equipment.' He didn't have as many falls because they could lower the bed for him, way low, so he wouldn't fall. And I said, "I just cannot do it,' because I was just running out of steam. It wasn't that I wanted to have a social life. Not at all. And he knew it. He felt sad, but he understood. He was very understanding that way. So the last six months of his illness….he had Parkinson's that was like Lou Gehrig's disease. It immobilized his esophagus and his vocal cords, the whole thing. and it was very debilitating. He couldn't go out anywhere, he couldn't eat. He had to stay on liquids, mainly. At the end he could not speak.

I remember thinking, at the time, OK, you've done the best you could. The year he died, it was a few months short of our 43rd wedding anniversary. And I felt in my heart that I had done the best I could and I had done it for him. I had put everything aside. I didn't see people. I didn't do volunteer work. But the last six months, the survivor instinct kicked in. I'm always aware when it kicks in. I will go along and help and be helpful. But then something kicks in that says, Hold it. You are at risk. I will hurt myself. And what good would it do? It wouldn't have made his Parkinson's go away.

Those values, prioritizing things, started about that period. Sometimes it has made me a nice person. Sometimes, perhaps, people don't think I'm so nice. I don't even know. To be honest, it doesn't bother me if I know I've done the best I could

I have this fixation about food. I was in Toronto recently and Naomi and I ran into a special deli to get something. And she parked someplace near the entrance where the deli displays were. This place caters to weddings, and in the cases on display were these cakes and pies, decorated with fruit, and they were so artistic and they were so beautiful. To me, it was like walking into Tiffany's and seeing diamonds. I saw this beautiful food. And of course I can't touch it because I have diabetes and I don't want to gain any more weight. And it's silly; I wasn't even hungry. But these thoughts keep surfacing. When I walk into HEB, it's a flash. I never thought that I would ever be in a situation where I not only would have enough food but could offer someone food.

Sometimes when I look around at all this stuff. It is very pleasant to live well and in nice surroundings with a beautiful view. But it all seems so—how on earth did I get here? I never thought that we would really make it. People like us, we try to make up for the things we lost or for the things we didn't have a chance to get during those horror years. This desire to make up goes even to the third generation.

I don't know how to explain it. I think that this kind of attitude about family and about life is what kept the Jews going. I'm sure other people have their own sense of how to cope.

When I was in Poland five years ago, I didn't go to my home town because I would have had to leave the group and I didn't choose to go. But of course I was in Warsaw and in Krakow. Someone in the bus asked, 'What would you do that you could really enjoy if you went to your home town.' And I said, 'I would knock on every door, and I would say, "You don't know me. But I'm a Jew. I survived. And I live in America. And I have a wonderful life.'" I think most of the group understood. That's what I felt like doing. I would want them to know, yes, I'm a Jew, a *Zid*, but I survived.

And that's why when I go to groups at various schools, my presentations are, in one sense, different from what other survivors say. I refuse to say, 'Look at poor little me.' I am thankful I survived. I feel grateful for the life I've had and the opportunities since and the nice things. But I'm not a victim. I'm the hero of this story.

This is very important to us. It is a matter of one's pride. These miners in Chili will go through a period of adjustment. When they are finally out of the

spotlight, and when they have time to understand how close it was for them between life and death, they will want to make the most of life now. They will want to enjoy their lives. The little things are not going to be so important anymore. I think they'll also have a better sense of giving to other people, of sharing. Because I know that whatever my circumstances are, I support all kinds of situations and agencies. Many of them are out of town and nobody knows and nobody has given me a banquet and said, 'Oh you wonderful person, you.' But that's not what it is meant to be. It makes me feel good that once I had to be on the receiving end and didn't always receive. And I feel good when I can help. It's a strange feeling but it's a good feeling. It is another way of saying, thank God. Thank God. Without that, there's nothing.

I've always felt close to Catholic people because of my early exposure. I was taught to blend in with Catholic when we were in hiding. To this day I've always told my Jewish friends that I feel as at home in any Catholic Church as I do in my own synagogue. I know the rituals, I understand them. I always had Catholic friends. In fact, the people who are fundamentalists are a different story. I went to school with two sisters who were my best friends at the time. I came to school one Monday morning with a bad headache. I had been to a Jewish wedding the night before and we'd had lots of champagne and wine and you name it. When one of them asked me, what's the matter (I must have looked green). And I said, 'Well, I was at a wedding last night and I must have had too much wine.' She said, 'Oh Leah, we're going to pray for you. We're going to save you.' And I thought, what from? My orientation is more with Catholicism. Among the Christian sects, Catholicism is the closest in its rituals and attitudes and sacraments to Judaism. I learned about Catholicism before I learned anything about Judaism, so it's just natural. I feel a kinship with Catholic people.

All these things that shaped my life happened at a fairly young age. I can't explain it. I've never worked with children that come from difficult families. But I'm willing to bet that those children have a more mature way of looking at life than the child who has the birthday party and the Easter egg rolls. Because they've already seen a slice of life that isn't so happy, that had to be endured and they had to cope. Human nature is not that different.

In the long run, if I had to really sum up my views, it made me strong, and thank God for that. When you lose out on a lot of other things, you have to find something that compensates you for it. Because of the way I've had to live, because my husband was ill for about ten years and now I've been alone for seven, it made me strong enough to cope with all that. You'd be surprised, when you have Parkinson's, the friends are not so quick to come and visit; they feel uncomfortable because you look so gnarled and twisted. We didn't

socialize with anyone the last years or see anybody. There were times I felt sorry for myself, but fleetingly, very seldom, but I felt, look where you started.

And that's always on my mind, always. When I go to take a bath, do you know what a luxury it is to have running water, hot and cold running water. Many people don't realize it. Last night the security person downstairs call me. He said, 'Mrs. Goltzman, I just wanted to let everybody now that the utility people called to say they might shut off our water in the building for a few hours during the night because they were fixing something.' I immediately went to make sure I had cold water in my frig, which I always keep. Fine, no big deal. The reason such things are no big deal is because I can do without it. Air conditioning, I cannot give up. I'd die. Otherwise, for all the negative stuff that happened, it made us strong.

I think Israel is, in a sense, a composite picture of those survivors, because it's made up of survivors. They are now perhaps already deceased or they are very old or they are grandparents. But their grandsons and daughters are now the ones who guard the borders and who go into the military. But Israel is, in a sense, that symbol of what it takes and how you cope with it.

In the DP camp, we heard about Aliyah Bet—the movement to go to Israel. "Bet or "B" was the second letter of the alphabet; it meant that it was a secret movement. They contacted people like us but also whole families with husbands, and said, 'Would you be willing to leave Poland forever and possibly end up in Palestine?' My mother agreed. This was all very clandestine, very quietly done. We were told what to take and how to go about it. Take only a small bundle, which is all we had anyway. We put on a couple of layers of clothes because we had the extra clothes and we needed them later. We met other people in a sort of school who were in the same situation. And then we were taken in trucks, lories covered up. We were taken on the road. It was long long hours of being shaken up. There were two benches in the truck and the rest of the space was floor space, but most of the time you weren't so lucky so you had to sit on the floor of the truck.

It was long long overnight trip. I slept a lot—dozed and then the sun comes up. I was very disoriented. The only reason I know it was very long was because the grown ups were talking about it. We ended up in a city called Poznan. By the time we were in Poznan, things were looking up, as far as I was concerned, because we were getting regular meals. I was getting food. We were put in a building like a school. There were a lot of people there, all Jewish, all in the same predicament we were in. Then they said, 'We don't know exactly when, at a certain point—it could be a few days, it could be a week from now—you will be taken across the frontier into Czechoslovakia.'

Of course I have always suspected that the Palestinian Jews were doing all this for us, had their contacts. They had bribed guards on the border. But they didn't tell us that. In order to maintain control so that people didn't get noisy, they made us feel that this is very secret. And since we were all so used to being quiet and invisible, we took their word for it, of course. And it was for the best, when you cross a frontier. So we crossed into Czechoslovakia. It was dawn, I was so sleepy. The grass had dew on it. We were told there was a train coming and this train would take us into the city of Prague. And there we would be transferred to Vienna.

The first time I ate an apple I was struck by its fragrance. It is the same about colors. In Siberia all I had seen for years were drab grey, brown, black, nondescript clothing. Anything people could cover up with and keep warm. There were no colors. When we were put in the train for several hours and they said, you're in Prague, which meant we are as far away from the Russians as we could be, and I'll never forget. They opened the big door—the sliding door on the freight train—there were people standing there on the platform. I saw them like flowers. They were wearing colors. There was yellow, there was green, there was red. And in my eyes, these were not people, they were flowers because all I could see were the colors. Maybe that's why I still like colorful clothing.

That was Prague. From Prague we went again on a train and ended up in Vienna. Once we were in Vienna, in summer of 1946, we knew that we were now under American control and everybody breathed a sigh of relief. Austria and Germany after the war was divided into four zones: the French, the British, the Russians, and the Americans. My mother always wanted to be as close to the Americans as possible. They brought us to Vienna.

By that time, the people who guided us and took care of us, knew that not all the Jewish refugees would be going to what was then British-mandated Palestine. Vienna was like a holding place for many many refugees from all over Europe. Incidentally I can say that I had the honor of living once in a Rothschild mansion. In a suburb of Vienna that was used for this holding camp for refugees was one of the estates that the Rothschild family had owned for many years. We were using the grounds, in tents under the trees. The building was very large and ornate on the outside. But inside it was filled with filing cabinets and there was a medical clinic and desks where people would come to give them information, to try to get visas. It was sort of a clearing house.

I got very sick there. It was warm weather, so we were in tents. But I developed a very high fever. The one thing they did very well was take care of the

survivors medically. They immediately diagnosed that I had scarlet fever and x-rays were taken to show that I also had tuberculosis. We were always living in such closed-in quarters. Sanitation was at its best limited. It's not surprising we caught everything. Many people did not survive it. If you were lucky and blessed, you built up a strong immunity and made it. In this Rothschild clinic, my mother got a paper directing us to such-and-such hospital in Vienna. It was for children and it handled only communicable diseases. So the hospital cut them off, quarantined them from anybody else.

We walked some distance. The hospital was surrounded by a garden, sort of a little park with benches. At that time in Austria the Catholic nuns were very much a part of the hospital. They wore their long habits and white headdresses; it gave a special feeling of quiet and peace. In any case, by the time my mother took me to this area, it was late afternoon. We had to sit on this bench and wait until mother superior called us; there were other people ahead of us. Suddenly I started hearing very soothing melodies. I thought, I must already be dying. This is how the angels must sound. It turned out that the nuns were singing vespers. That's what I was hearing. I thought it was very heavenly. It was a nice coincidence because I was a kid and anxious about going to the hospital and having to be separated from my mom. The soothing music helped a great deal.

I was taken into this hospital. As soon as they signed me up in the front entryway, my mother and I couldn't even touch hands. She was sent away. It was like a total quarantine area. I was in that hospital for six weeks. I always marvel at the care. It made up a little bit for what we had been through. Between the American army and the local authorities, the care provided to survivors was really top notch. Many people with TB were sent to Switzerland for recovery because of fresh air there, the sanitariums. All in all I got excellent care. I was in a ward with many other children. It was co-ed because we were young; nobody cared about that. I remember my bed was like a large crib. I guess it was so you don't fall out at night. It was larger than a baby's crib but it had four walls around it that were only put up at night, when we went to sleep.

It was a very regimented schedule. One doctor, especially, I remember him so well because you could hear him coming down the hall. He was wearing *lederhosen*. *Lederhosen* are very popular in the Tirol, in Bavaria, and in Austria. They are literally men's shorts, made out of leather, with straps, quite distinctive. Sometimes they were inherited from one family member to another, and were very comfortable. This doctor's way of dressing was a shirt and *lederhosen*, and then he had a gown. The reason why we knew he wore shorts was because when he turned around, we could see his bare legs. But he also wore something like wooden shoes. I don't know why. It was like the Dutch

wear—clogs. So you could hear him. Whenever we were up in the morning to be checked, our temperature, etc., we could hear our doctor coming. He was very nice. There were many children there. I'm sure he didn't have much time to spend with each child. But the fact of his *lederhosen* and his wooden shoes clanging away on those tile floors—I remember that. He was very kind.

I was given foods of all kinds. I had to take orders like in the army. With nuns of the old school, and in Austria, you do not say, 'I want this' or 'I don't want this.' You do it, and that was that. I was hungry because some of these foods were new to me, and they were good so they built me up. My mother's last words as we were separated at the door were, 'You be a good girl and do everything they tell you.' And that's what I did for six weeks.

The parents used to come and not be allowed to visit. The hospital had big windows and the parents were allowed in the garden. I was perhaps on the second floor. If you got a place in front of the window and waited long enough, you could see your parents. A few times I could see my mother and knew she was around, and she knew I was OK.

It was nice to be with other children because I had not had a chance to be in a normal environment where you have give-and-take and you have certain hours of the day when you are with others. The separation of six weeks in Vienna was the first time that I had been overnight without my mother. It was very nice because you always made friends with the bed next to you. I remember that some children died. Some did not survive the illnesses that they had. I had made friends with a boy in a bunk next to mine. We were roughly the same age. He spoke German only, so we got along fine because my German was coming along and Yiddish is German, anyway. So we were communicating beautifully. We became buddies. I remember one night there was some commotion next to me. There was activity, and then I dropped off to sleep again. When I woke up, his mattress was rolled up. The crib was bare. When I asked about him, they told me that he had died during the night. He didn't make it; the fever was too much. Those intrusions of reality were all too common. They served to remind me that yeah, you are a kid and you are being taken care of, but you still aren't safe.

But at least I had the satisfaction because I never heard anyone cry out in pain, like punishment or anything. So I knew—remembering the commotion around me at night (at first I thought it was a dream but it must have been when they were tending to him)—I didn't hear any cruelty. It was reassuring in that sense. But I missed him. And that was already toward the end of my six-week stay there. A few days later I was examined, I was x-rayed, and apparently given a clean bill of health. My mother was waiting for me.

These camps were temporary, like holding places. From there we were sent by American military trucks to a regular Displaced Persons camp. From Vienna we entered the DP system.

I don't know how this picture got into my mother's files. The original was a very small picture, which I had enlarged. There is a stamp on the original; it is approved by the U. S. army , the U. S. censor. It is a picture when one of the camps where we had to live was liberated. When we were liberated from Siberia, we came into Austria and the only places to live were the former camps. So they had to first clear out corpses and the bodies and those who had TB, communicable diseases. And so this picture happened to be with my parents effects.

It was in a little village near Linz. I think it was called Abelsberg. If you walked into the village you could take an electronic trolley and go into Linz. It is a considerable larger city, one of the major cities in Austria. That DP camp became, for me, at least, my first sense of some normalcy. My mother was allowed a room. The showers and toilets were down the hall—one communal one—but each family unit had a regular door and it locked. The entire area looked like it might have been a campus. I don't quite know. Housing was at a premium. Some of the camps weren't as comfortable but I remember that Abelsberg was not bad at all. We stayed there (this was the end of 1946-1947). In cold weather I never really got to go out because Mama was afraid I would get sick and I didn't have clothes for it. Austria is milder than Siberia, of course. The reason we were in the DP camps—there were quite a few of them, sort of a spider network of camps—they had been work camps for people originally assigned to Mauthausen, a major work center and also an extermination center. The reason we lived in proximity to Mauthausen was because that's where the housing was—for slave laborers who were useful and who could contribute to the war machine.

My mother, through the HAIS (Hebrew Aid International Society) was able to get in touch with her aunts in Houston, Texas. And they started sending us care packages. There is such a thing as a care package, even though people think it was a joke. Depending on how much the sender wanted to spend state-side determined what the recipient would get on the other end. Apparently

Mama had written to them that as far as food and such, we were being take care of. But there were some things that were in short supply. Also, everything was useful on the black market. So if my mother couldn't use something that was in the package, she would always be able to sell it or trade it for something more useful.

The first care package was very memorable in my mind not just for the package but what was in it. Mama was not with me at the time when somebody from downstairs brought the so-called mail to people. It was a package 8 x 20 or 11 x 14. And it said 'care' and my mother's name. I saw USA so I ripped it open. Mama had not said anything about it, so I didn't know we were getting a care package. I remember it had a tube of toothpaste and a tube of hair cream. It had a bottle of aspirin. It had a bottle of vitamin C. And it had a giant bar of chocolate—Hershey chocolate wrapped distinctively in a rich maroon colored paper with silver writing. You could smell it through the wrapping. Chocolate is something I'm still in love with. I ignored the other things in the package and I opened the bar of chocolate…a pound of chocolate. Mama didn't tell me to look for it, to expect it, nothing. I still feel innocent of any crime. I broke off a piece, and I ate it. It tasted so good. Through the afternoon, I ate it and ate it, and I finished the bar of chocolate. All that was left was the wrappings, which I was too cowardly to destroy. I wouldn't have been caught—I wasn't a very good thief.

Mama came home—she was happy to get the package. And then she saw the empty wrapper from the Hershey bar. She was so angry with me. That was one of the few times she whacked me across my bottom really hard. The reason was that there were bakers in the village or in Linz that wanted to start baking those good Austrian/Viennese pastries and they needed chocolate. So they made deals with survivors like us, that if we got chocolate from the Americans we'd trade for a little butter or a piece of cheese or a few eggs. So Mama had very practical plans for that chocolate. But I did not know about it. Had I known, I would have been more careful. She punished me for that. And after that, when packages, came, I didn't dare open them. The Austrians were anxious to start baking again, they had been without good chocolate for a long time, and there was trade back and forth.

As far as regular eating, the Americans provided a regular dining room and two shifts for each meal since they couldn't accommodate everyone at once. So we always went to the first shift because I was very hungry. They served us on metal trays and the trays had little compartments. And each tray had stamped on it 'U.S.' because it was part of the military equipment. The spoons were regular soup spoons. At the end of the handle was a little hole that you could put a chain through it and hang it around your neck. It also had stamped on it:

‘U. S.’ Those were our utensils. We ended up stealing a few of the spoons because we could use them for other things. But when we were served food in these makeshift cafeterias it was on those trays.

I developed a very bad habit during that time. Again, it couldn’t be helped because food had been such an issue and such a problem. Everybody kind of went crazy. I ate very fast because if you ate fast you could go up and ask for another portion, any amount. We ate in the morning and around noon time, and then in the evening. Noon time was the best meal. I learned to eat very fast and it was a habit that for years plagued me. It’s not good to eat fast. It may not even be healthy. I had to get out of that habit. It was an embarrassing habit. But in the mornings for breakfast there were eggs that turned a slight shade of green. They were in large aluminum containers that you scooped out like in a cafeteria. But if you stood long enough in line the very top layer of the egg turned slightly green. And then the soldiers dishing it up would scoop it out and the inside was yellow. The reason, we found out later, was because these were powdered eggs and they had been treated a certain way and dehydrated and that was why they turned green. We had eggs and plenty of bread (sometimes still hot from the bakery). To me everything tasted delicious because it was fresh and it was good and there was plenty of it.

At noontime we would have some sort of meat and beans, which we had to get accustomed to eating because in Europe, beans were used as feed for cattle and we were not used to seeing it on a plate for human beings. But we learned. The same was true of corn. They fed us an American diet. But the meat was interesting. It smelled divine. When we walked up, there were large slices, sort of brown, and they put it on your tray. A lot of religious people decided not to eat it, and I started hearing that it was not kosher. They knew it was meat; they needed the nourishment but it was not kosher because they didn’t know what it was. It turned out to be Spam. The first time I mentioned this story about spam, I spoke at a traveling club at the Pope Pius X—and they invited me to speak to them. There were quite of few men in the audience, older gentleman who had been in the army. And I said, ‘I don’t care how many jokes you have, but I want you to know that I lived on Spam and I loved it.’ And they thought it was very funny. But I did love it. It was protein. It was tasty. It was a little bit more salty then I was used to, but it was OK.

At night they would give us sandwiches or stuff that was kind of dry. There were times when they didn’t have the personnel to cook or something went array, and they would bring in packets that soldiers would get at the front, the rations. The cans would be sort of dull, not shiny cans with labels but sort of a dull green. I later learned that these were called C-rations that the army used in the field. You could guess what was in them—you never knew. But it was food.

Those things were not often served, but once in awhile until the authorities got organized.

This was taken in the DB camps. This is me. This would have been 1947, '48. I was wearing braids, long long braids, as any school girl. I remember we had to take pictures to send to my relatives because they needed to see what shape we were in order to see if they really wanted to sponsor us because if we were physically ill, we would not be able to come. So I remember my mother borrowed this blouse for me so that we could look presentable.

We were very shabby, even months after liberation. People from America, Jewish people, would send clothing—cast-off stuff. By the time it reached us it was wrinkled or ruined. So the women and the girls especially started to trade clothes back and forth. There would be one room in each camp that was like a store room. A person, one of the survivors, would be appointed as the store keeper. His function was to see that whoever came would get a winter coat, get some winter clothing, get some shoes. Underclothing was always a problem. When it came to pictures, we kind of understood the system. We had to be sponsored. Nobody wanted to sponsor someone who looked crippled, perhaps, or unable to work, unfit. So we made our-selves up to look presentable.

We lived in Abelsberg. The one event I remember—and that tied me to my heritage because I knew nothing of Judaism—I thought it was late summer but it must have been early fall because everyone started talking about *Rosh Hashanah*, the Jewish New Year. The women were washing their hair and trying to curl it. The men would take their suits and try to air them out—refresh their clothing for the holiday. It was important. So it came and there was one room that was set up like a chapel, like a synagogue. I don't know where they found a Torah but there was a Torah. There were many people in the group who could read the Torah. We didn't need a rabbi. So holidays were observed. It was fine, in fact they were even observed in what I later found out was the most orthodox custom. The room was set up like theater-style, with the chairs and in front of you was the *bimah* where the Torah would be. In the middle of the room they hung a rope with blankets hanging. My mother and I were directed to one side and on the other side of the blanket were the men. And I didn't get it. I knew nothing about it. Later it was explained to me. That separation is called *machitza.* It is Hebrew for the separation of the sexes. In the orthodox tradition,

women prayed upstairs if a synagogue had a balcony. But in our case it was simply a blanket that would hang in the middle. The women and girls would be on one side and the men and boys would be on other. The adults were so used to this custom so they made no issue of it. I found it strange.

So that was my introduction to openly organized Judaism and the high holy days. Soon after that, within a week, I started to hear about *Yom Kippur*, *Yom Kippur* (those who spoke Yiddish say Yom *Kíppur*. In Hebrew it is *Yom Kippúr*). Some people were saying, 'I want to be able to fast,' because it was their first year of freedom. And some of the doctors were alerting pregnant women that they never had to fast. Others who were sick and frail shouldn't fast. But everyone wanted to try and fast. It didn't concern me, I was always hungry. Even when there was food I was always gobbling up. I knew about *Yom Kippur* and food was very much a part of the formula, the preparation of the food. Late in the afternoon (Jewish holidays begin at sundown the day before) people began to get very nervous because they had been waiting for the trucks to come in and bring that hot food, and there was no food coming. You're supposed to eat a good meal so that you can fast the next day. No preparations were being made so people started to worry.

Then we were told by an American officer (he spoke a little Yiddish but he must have been from Brooklyn) that there was no food coming; there had been some difficulty. They brought us army food—those little square packets filled with dark green cans. All of a sudden from this conglomeration of people who were helpless and frail and beaten, and very sad for the most part, came a committee. And the committee started going to every cluster of people and we went on a strike. I say 'we,' but I was told. I had no part in that decision; I was told what to do. But we went on a strike. They said, no matter what they bring, if they do not bring us hot food to begin *Yom Kippur*, we will not touch anything. Everyone was bound by it. Being so regimented from the camps and the war years, everybody went along with it. But this time it was for a principle. It was the fact that we needed to have that respect for our holidays. We needed to celebrate them in a nice manner. Of all the days not to get a hot meal where you sit down and eat at leisure…so we went on this strike. Pretty soon we started seeing more jeeps coming into the courtyard and officers were coming. There was a lot of talking back and forth but we didn't understand any of it.

The only thing we understood was when this Brooklyn Jewish officer came with his very fractured Yiddish to say, 'We have to wait and we'll get some food and just be patient.' People sat down where they were in the middle of the courtyard and they were not going to move. I don't know how long this went on. It was late afternoon, almost sundown. Before we knew it, the barrier at the gate came up (we were not free to come and go in these camps without a pass)

and about three trucks pulled in. Everyone scurried away; these trucks were huge. Lo-and-behold, only America could do this, on these trucks were metal pots and containers—regular hot food brought in from somewhere, steaming away. We had our trays. Then the older men who were perhaps rabbis said, 'OK, don't rush.' The instinct was to rush over—we were hungry and it was almost sundown. They were very strict about this. 'Don't go near this until you wash your hands.' This Jewish officer with this broken Yiddish was told that we required another thing: basins of water so people would have a chance to wash their hands. He got the point. Water was produced and we were ceremonially able to wash our hands.Then the rabbi said, 'You can line up and get your food. But we must show these Americans that yes, we're hungry, but we are not animals.'

As a kid I knew I was Jewish and I knew it had always been a terror because there was always something dangerous about being Jewish. I somehow had to reconcile with the fact that Jews were normal people who had certain standards. We had to wash our hands before we went anywhere near the line to get the food from the trucks. That was my first organized *Yom Kippur* season; it is etched in mind. It was after that that I became curious about Jewish customs and Jewish melodies. In fact, I remember after *Yom Kippur* I went to Mama and I asked, why did the rabbi say, 'Oi oi oi oi oi?' in the prayer. The prayer is a lamentation for *Yom Kippur* is very sad in some ways because you are asking for forgiveness. This is all I heard, the oi oi oi. Mama tried to explain to me. I learned my Judiasm at that time on the run. A little bit at a time. Here, there a custom. And that's how I learned. It was only later when I had access to books that I began to study what is all this Judaism about and I began to learn.

That *Yom Kippur* I will never forget. To this day, when I go shopping away from home, the first place I go is to the kitchen sink and wash my hands. And then I begin putting things away. This is such an ingrained habit. I have since learned that that was the quality, the custom in our heritage, that saved many people. If you were observant of the hygienic laws—kosher isn't just about food, it is about your personal hygiene as well—these good personal hygienic habits helped many people survive. Whereas people who didn't have a religious background and were in despair, they were hungry—they were the first to die of epidemics, of bad food, because they didn't take the care that the more observant Jews did. That was another way in my mind that I realized: this is a good custom, this is a nice thing that people do if they are Jewish. This is the way I slowly learned about my heritage. Otherwise I was a total barbarian.

This is the same period in Austria. This is how they used to pose people, very artificially. I remember my mother borrowed this dress for herself to send to her aunts in Houston. She wanted them to see that we were healthy and we were kept and we were not disabled. They had heard such awful stories and they didn't know how we survived.

We lived in these camps a total of five years, between 1945 and 1950. We were moved from Abelsberg to another camp in the same area, except that as the camps emptied when people started to Palestine, go to Australia, go to South Africa—wherever they got sponsored—the camps became smaller so they would move us to another camp for the space. In the second camp, Mama and I had a room. Everything was OK. We waited and we waited. Mama wouldn't go any place or move anywhere or entertain any suggestions to emigrate until her husband would come home. Everybody said, 'Well, you know, if the Russians took him away in 1942, you are probably a widow and you might as well make arrangements.' But Mama wouldn't hear of it.

One day in late afternoon Mama and I went to the village, because in the village was a little cinema. And I loved films. I couldn't understand them. They were American films with the horses running. I couldn't understand them but I loved the music. So we went to the films. And when we came back it was pretty dark in that hallway. We felt safe because they were all the same refugees as we were, but still you had to be a little careful. As we got up the steps to the second floor, Mama and I saw a kind of shadow of a man standing by our door. I pulled back, I was afraid. Mama was startled, but she instantly recognized that it was my father.

What can you say about a reunion like that?

I was afraid to go near my father. I had not seen him in six years. And his head was shaved; his hair was just beginning to grow back. His face was thin, malnourished, so he had a very scary look. I didn't recognize him at first. My memory was very sketchy of him. I was really a daddy's girl before they took him away. But I was sort of taken aback.

This is a picture my father when he came back from a Russian prison camp, a slave labor camp. His head was almost totally shaved so he was very self-conscious about it, and that's why he's wearing a hat. But he was a very good looking man, and the Semitic feature are very pronounced.

He looked OK as far as clothing and he seemed clean and all. But that shaved head scared me until finally when he spoke to me. My nickname in Russian was Leda, Leditchka, which means little Leda. Papa called me that, and that's when the memories came back; that was his voice, indeed.

In 1948 our family came together again. As long as Papa was away, we were just sort of drifting, no resemblance to any kind to family life. After Papa joined us, it was good. The authorities of the camp wrote him up in the morning because he had to report to get his ration card. When we started to make inquiries about immigrating to the U. S.—my mother had already started but everything was in limbo while she waited for her husband—they started to work on that.

Suddenly, everything came to a screeching halt. We didn't know this at the time and learned only much later on, but by 1948 the Cold War between Russia and America was on full force. The Russians used to kidnap people to drag them back to the Russian sector. So everybody who had any east European connections were afraid to go near them. The office that handled us was known as OSS—later the CIA—these were people that were trained to be on the lookout because they didn't want spies or saboteurs or war criminals to enter the United. States. So here is this man, yes, his wife is a bone fide refugee, and his little girl, but he has no papers. No identity. Nothing to tell them that he is who he says he is. When the Russians finally released my father, they didn't provide him with any sort of documentation. It took constant talking and doing everything we could—taking numerous trips into Linz where we could see somebody official—no progress. We didn't know about a Cold War. We only knew that suddenly we weren't quite welcome with the Americans. They felt that we might have ulterior motives.

One of the aunts in Houston that helped sponsor my parents had a son who had been drafted and ended up as a GI in Germany. I remember that when Mama got a letter from Houston written in Yiddish from this aunt, she said, 'Oh, good. The son is stationed in Germany and he's going to make every effort when he has some time off to come and visit us in the camp. Because he speaks English and he's a soldier, he will be ale to straighten out and make everyone understand who we are.'

The cousins name was Charles. In Yiddish he was called Sudic. We didn't know him but we knew his name. He came and all of our neighbors around were so impressed because here was a soldier with all the American insignia. It was like the messiah had come, or at least a helper to the messiah. So for several days, Charles (much to his credit) would go with my parents. One time he went without my parents because he had to talk with somebody and he was told to come by himself and to bring everything that he had as far as our papers. He went there and he spoke to whoever, and then he came back.

When we saw him coming back we thought, we're on our way to America. He sat down and again…language is so important. He spoke some Yiddish but not enough to be coherent to any of us. My parents understood. Poor thing, he's an America; he doesn't speak other languages. We managed. He knew why he had gone there, and my parents wanted to know when we were getting on a ship. Charles started to tell them in Yiddish as best he could that this is why and that's why and this is missing and that's missing and we have to get this paper and that document and so forth. He kept referring to our case, the caseload that the officers had, and don't forget that yours is only one of thousands of cases like yours. Your case is going to come up on such and such a day. At the end of his soliloquy, my father (who had a sense of humor that was funny but sort of gallows humor) says to my mother in Yiddish, 'What is this idiot talking about? I send him to get me to America. He comes back and talks to me about food.' We were all confused. Why? Because the word 'case' in English means what we all know. But in German and in Yiddish it means 'cheese.' So every time cousin Charles would say, 'Your case came up for this, your case came up in front of so-and-so, your case is one of many,' all my father heard was 'cheese.' It was very frustrating.

After a few days, Charles left to go back to his duties in Germany. We were still glad to see him, he left us a lot of chewing gum, but that was again for me a sort of side lesson. Again, all this conversation took place around me. Charles didn't report to me; he didn't talk to me about it. But I observed everything. The language—our understanding hinged on one word. Papa would not have been so aggravated and so disappointed if Charles had known to use another word, or had we understood English. It was sort of like another flower was planted in my garden. Language is very important. I made a vow to myself that when I come to America—we still believed we were going—I have to master the language. My cousin was talking about a case and my father thought he was talking about cheese.

Now when I think about it, it's laughable. It was very frustrating at that time. My father said, 'I was in a Russian slave labor camp. They don't give you identity papers; they give you a number.' The American officers themselves were at a

disadvantage. They were young, perhaps experiencing their first time abroad. They weren't used to what was going on. Not until the aftermath of the second world war, no one had seen so many civilians, ordinary people who were refugees that were homeless and stateless. The conversation had hung on one word.

By the summer of 1950 we were given the green light and went through a series of other holding camps. We were in Salzburg for a few weeks, and then another camp, and finally we were sent by train to Bremen. Bremen was the big port city in Germany where all the ships went to America. We were in Bremen for two or three months during most of the warm weather, because when we got on the ship (remember we had no calendar) it was already cool; it was November. We were on board a military ship used to transport GIs who were finishing their tour of duty. These ships would be arranged so that one deck would be given over to refugees. The rest of the ship was for us off limits and given to American sailors and personnel who were going home and changing their duties. We had very little contact with them, and maybe under orders; they were removed from us.

After weeks in Bremen, we finally got on the ship, and I remember it was cold. The women and girls were sent to one side and men to the other side, reminiscent of Germany. We were OK as long as we were with Americans. It turned out that they had set up a sort of dormitory. If you got by a wall, you had a bunk. But if you were in the middle of the room you had a hammock. My mother had a bunk and I had a hammock. For hours there was only silence. But eventually we heard the engines start up and we pulled away from the dock. It was a bitter sweet moment. For many of the refugees, especially German Jews, they were leaving their home forever, everything they knew.

It took several hours to make it out to open sea. And I remember in the middle of the night there was some kind of commotion. My mother started throwing up and then I did. Everyone in the room was sea sick, really pitching. I don't know if the sailors had anticipated this, but we had never been on the sea, never even seen the sea. I was sea sick for three days, my mother for much longer. My father, too, was sick.

After a few days the sea quieted and we were allowed on deck to get some fresh air. We had several days of calm. Then we ran into a storm with very rough water. Waves crashing over the deck. They announced in several languages that we were to go below, so we all headed down to our room. There was one man who was totally alone. He spoke to no one. No one knew his name or where he was from. Perhaps he didn't hear the announcement. Perhaps he didn't understand it. But there was no one there to make sure he

came down. And tragically he was killed, thrown by a wave against one of the metal pipes on deck. He was found the next day.

I will never forget that man. Because of him I have a sort of eleventh commandment. You cannot survive alone. No one can. We need a network of family and friends. We need a community to survive. I had learned that lesson earlier, though not as graphically. My mother had been so focused on my father, she withdrew physically and emotionally from the people around her—fellow survivors, fellow Jews, fellow mothers. She exhibited symptoms of depression. I would overhear other women talking to her: 'Hannah, you cannot give into this. You must think of the child.' But she erected this wall, even between the two of us. That wall never really came down. I had to hide my problems from her, keep them inside.

If someone had known the man, if he had just one other person who looked after him, then he would not have died. What a sad, lonely, tragic death after surviving the war. I went to the man's funeral because I wanted to see the flag. I thought that when someone is buried at sea, the coffin and the flag would go into the sea together, and I thought that I would see the flag floating on the waves. But of course the coffin slides from under the flag into the sea. An elderly Jewish man took on the role of rabbi. Perhaps he was a rabbi, I don't know. But he chanted the prayer for the dead, the *Kaddish*. And again, it became part of my understanding of my Jewish heritage. I began to understand that being Jewish more than just being born from certain parents. There was a culture, a religion, a set of rituals.

Gradually the air felt warmer. In fact we had not docked in New York so didn't see the Statue of Liberty. Instead we sailed into the Gulf of Mexico. We docked in New Orleans, since the passengers on the ship had been sponsored by Americans in the south of the U. S. . We had been on the ship for fifteen days. When we disembarked there were volunteers, perhaps from the local synagogue or Jewish relief services, handing out turkey sandwiches. That night we were again served turkey, and when we got on the bus for Houston the next day, they gave us packages of turkey sandwiches to take with us. My father, in his ironic humor, said: 'Don't these Americans eat anything but turkey?' We had arrived on Thanksgiving Day, and of course they would serve us turkey that day and the next. And you know, to this day, I always make sure I cook at least a turkey breast at Thanksgiving time, even though I don't have family here. It is a way of celebrating arriving in this country on Thanksgiving, 1950.

Chapter 3: In America

Being an immigrant is a very lonely experience. Most American don't realize that. Even if you are lucky enough to live in a city where there is another large group of immigrants with a similar background, still there is the complete cutting off from your own culture, your own customs, your language. Everything must be learned anew. Basic manners, how to speak on the telephone. My parents and I rented our first flat. We had three rooms (a bedroom, living room, kitchen), and a bathroom that we had to share with another tenant next door, a young couple. Whenever we would go to bathe, we always took a can of ajax cleaner with us because the tub had to be scrubbed out, in our opinion, so that it would be hygienic.

When I was in school no one could pronounce Szklasz; the teacher couldn't and the kids started to laugh. I realized I had better shorten it in some way, so I changed it to Sklar, and that made it more pronounceable for Americans. Every immigrant has to change if you want to acculturate. America is much more open now. But in 1950 in Houston, it was like, we've done it this way all the time and we're going to do it again. So on top of having to learn English English, I discovered in short order that I had to learn Texan English. Of course, I could never master it. To this day I am still learning.

Sunday was always a lonely day for my parents and me in the early fifties. Sometimes on Sunday mornings we would have someone that would run by and have a cup of coffee because we lived by a synagogue. These were fellow immigrants who had children; they would drop their child off for Sunday school, then they came by and visited us for coffee. But it was not a regular thing so we couldn't always have guests. When we did it was like a mini-United Nations—a little Hungarian, a little Russian, Yiddish, German.

But most of the time the Sundays were lonely because we only had each other. If you get on well, fine. If you have a good discussion and a good day and nobody is angry, fine. If something is not pleasing and your parents are unhappy with you or you are unhappy with your parents, you are stuck with the three of you. My parents and I did not have a vehicle for the first five years we lived in this country. We couldn't afford it, and my father felt it was an unnecessary luxury even if we had been able to save, and he wanted us to save money to buy furniture and buy eventually his own house.

So Sundays we were stuck. We would go sometimes for long walks. My father loved to walk, and very early on he made an observation that even on main thoroughfares, where there were plenty of cars going and coming, that a person could get killed and nobody would stop. As I got to know American

society more and more, I realized that to some extent that's true. People do get mugged and things happen, and not everyone stops to be a good Samaritan. My father was very observant early on of the American way of life.

Sometimes the relatives that had sponsored us would come to visit us Sunday evening, after they would do all their other stuff over the weekend. They would drop by to see how we were. Being that Sunday night was a school night, we would retire fairly early, I especially. My bedroom was not a bedroom; I slept in the living room where a sofa unfolded. With the hot climate of Texas and with no air conditioning in the early 1950s, naturally my night gown was very thin, and I was already a young girl. So when these relatives would come, my parents (in gratitude for being sponsored to come to America, for the sake of comradeship, and because they were lonely) they turned on the lights and welcomed them. I had to jump up from bed and get a covering and fold the bed up so there would be room to sit. At first we took it as a sign of affection that they came to visit us, but after while what amazed us is that they didn't come a little earlier. Why didn't they realize that we are so limited on what we could do on weekends? Why don't they ever come and take us for a ride? But this was not the case. They were not evil; they were just human, and that's how it was.

These were the early years as an immigrant. As I got my sea legs in American society, my main concentration was being a student. My parents, of course, immediately worked—my father from day one, my mother as soon as she could speak English. She sold clothing in shops. Everything in Houston in those days was on Main Street. There were no shopping malls so it was easy for a foreigner to get a job. You took a bus downtown and then you went from shop to shop until you found employment. My father worked downtown at Sakowitz—the show place of retail in Houston; it was *the* Neiman Markus of Houston. Sakowitz was his only employer in the United States; they were very fond of him and he worked for them all of his working life in the United States.

My job was school. My family and I saw our education, particularly my education, as important—just as important as my parents earning a living. They had no illusions about their own lives, that they would be to some extent limited language-wise, education-wise, and in many ways. But they certainly wanted me to benefit from coming to America. My parents were probably in their mid- to late thirties. They were young people. They didn't feel young. They didn't seem young to me. But when I look at a portrait of my parents of their 25th wedding anniversary, I realize they were young people. They were in the peak of their lives but had to concentrate on working and making sure that I had every opportunity to get an education.

By opportunity I don't mean that there were outside benefits or help. But I knew I could stay in school as long as I needed to. I would graduate and not have to drop out as soon as I learned the language in order to work. When I was a senior in high school, many of my friends were signing up for university; they were all going out of town. My going out of town was out of the question. There was no money for it. Luckily there was the University of Houston, Rice University, St. Thomas University.

When I entered my senior year, Papa and I had a dialogue, a conference about my plans. What was I going to do after I graduated? My parents were not exactly pushing me toward a college education because of the traditional outlook of Europeans—I was of marriageable age, I had plenty of boyfriends, dates and such that I would be eligible. So they felt that I could marry. I said I definitely wanted to go to college. They said, OK, what's the opportunity? When I found all the data on what was involved, I came to my father (he took that interest…Mama would sit by and listen) and he said, 'Here is the deal. If you want to go to the University of Houston, go. We'll try and make it as comfortable for you as we can. We'll help with the tuition but you still have to work part time so that you can help finance this education. You have a roof over your head by living at home, and whatever is in the refrigerator you can eat so you won't go hungry. That's as much as I can help you.' That seemed fine to me.

After my first year of high school, which included P.E. and study hall, I realized that I didn't need all that. My father had gotten me a Saturday job at Sakowitz. Then I found out that by requesting from the school that I be excused from P.E. and study hall, that I could leave school at 1:00 instead of 3:00, I could get on a bus and go to town and work practically half a day. So this is what I did after my first year of high school and then into the university years.

Once I was in college I also discovered that being a college woman and working downtown in a very fine store, I needed a wardrobe. Beth Yeshurun synagogue, which is now in a very different part of Houston, was at that time fairly close to where we lived. They needed Sunday-school teachers who knew some history, knew Hebrew, and so forth. So I went and applied and was accepted. Beth Yeshuran paid young teachers like me $30 per month. And the month could have four Sundays or five Sundays, it didn't matter. But from 9:00 to 12:30, half a day, you had to be at the synagogue with a classroom full of children and teach them something. So I had a job for Sundays, part of the day. That $30 was sacrosanct; it was holy because I used that money solely for a revolving charge account at Sakowitz, where I worked and got a discount on my wardrobe. I bought myself the kind of clothes that would be presentable at school and on the floor where I worked. I was fine with it; I was thrilled with it.

Those years were the most productive of my life. When I look back on them, they were hard, they were long hours, they were fatiguing. But you felt alive because you were accomplishing so much. That's how I felt. My parents were glad of that because I didn't complain or tire of it or say, 'No, I want to go to football games or be able to visit a girlfriend now and then, or go swimming at a pool.' I was fine with work.

The University of Houston at that time was a private school; it was not affiliated with the state system of colleges. By living at home, my tuition ran $450 per semester. This was in 1955. If you calculate the value of money, it was an expensive education. My books were extra. If I was lucky I could get a used book; if not, I had to buy them new. I graduated from high school in the summer of 1958—I immediately registered for summer school at the university. By attending each summer, I graduated in three years in the summer of 1961. I majored in political science and history. I minored in English. That was my college life.

I didn't realize how much I was accomplishing until recent years when I heard about the drop-out rate of American students from high school and the failure rate of college students whose parents work hard to finance their education or who take on loans. I looked on every expense of my semester as an investment. When I went to class, I knew I had to study to absorb the information. I had to understand it to pass the test because that was my dividend from my investment. That's how I thought of it.

I graduated from college the end of summer of 1961. I was married in August. When I came back from my honeymoon I attended commencement. We drove into Houston from Corpus Christi and my husband and parents saw me go up in my cap and gown, and I felt I had accomplished something.

When I joined my parents and my new bridegroom after I had returned my gown (I kept the tassel) it was time to leave. My husband Danny said, 'OK, now it's time to go home and start cooking.' I was fine with that. I didn't make an issue of it. I felt, 'You're going to be disappointed because I don't know how to cook.' For my husband, who was a very traditional man, brought up in a very traditional home as well, and who was a little older than I, that was the way of married life in those days. Unless (God forbid) you needed the paycheck to help your husband pay rent or buy food, a woman would go in and become a full-time homemaker in every sense, building a family and social life, and so on.

That is how my education evolved and ended when I came to Corpus Christi after my wedding in August of 1961 and the beginning of married life. When I

was in school, I had only time for required reading. Some of it was good, some of it was dull, some of it was totally unnecessary, but I did it. I realized after I was free, now I can read for enjoyment, just pure pleasure. I became addicted to books. I have a wonderful library. I invest a lot of money in buying my own books. Some books are reference books in the way of histories or biographies, so I want to keep them for my own collection and some day I plan to give them to some institution. I became an avid reader. Sometimes it made my husband a little bit lonesome; I was about reading like some men are about football games. He understood it; he was in a way very proud of me.

Even my mother-in-law was very proud of me. She was a simple person; she came here as a young women. She learned to read English. Her education was the newspaper. Every morning, when people left for work, she would read the paper from cover to cover. When I came into the picture, she was many times embarrassed or felt awkward about not really understanding deeper issues because her education was limited. But she was a bright lady. We had coffee every morning for the first year of my married life. I'd drop off my husband (he would ride to the family business with his father to leave me the car) and I would stay for coffee. She would cut out articles. Sometimes she knew certain articles were important but she didn't fully understand them. They might be political or historical. She was too embarrassed to ask her own children; they didn't understand that when you didn't have a formal education you didn't understand every nuance, and language, and so on. She and I had this little secret pact that she would save articles and over coffee in the morning she would say, 'Now Leah, this is about Israel, or this is about what Congress is doing, or this is about the president, but what does it really mean?' Then I would read it and we would converse in Yiddish and I would explain to her the inner workings of what was going on.

For the first ten years of my married life, my in-laws had all of us over for Friday night *Shabbat* dinner. There would be conversation at the dinner table. My mother-in-law was so proud of herself because she was able to take part in the conversation. Sometimes she would argue with my father-in-law because he would say, 'This is how it is going to be like' or 'This is who we should vote for.' She would say, "No, no, no, that's not it.' And my father-in-law would sit with eyes wide open and would be amused or surprised that she knew this. She knew it because she and I sort of helped each other.

It was a reciprocal thing. I helped her understand some issues in depth, and she by example taught me to become a home maker because I knew nothing of cooking. The first two or three months of our married life, my hands looked like I was a veteran of a war. My hands were cut and they were burned and they were skinned. If you don't know your way around the kitchen you are accident-

prone. My mother-in-law taught me these skills and I, in turn, would help her understand the deeper meanings of certain issues in English that she couldn't quite grasp. We had a good relationship. My husband worked for his family, and it is a given that mother-in-laws and daughter-in-laws don't get on. But we did. There were times I had to make sure there were certain boundaries that they understood, but all-in-all my in-laws and I got along very well.

Life went on. I had two children, a son and daughter. I have five grandchildren now. I'm a matriarch. Isn't that crazy? Throughout my high-school days, my college days—from the time I was here and I was growing into an adult and I had responsibilities, the responsibilities were not only to myself. This is very common among all survivor families—we don't always realize it. We tended to be very protective of our parents. And we tended to be very involved not only in building our own lives but helping them get pleasure from our lives. There is a certain word in Yiddish—*nakhes. Nakhes.* I've heard it translated as the pleasure you feel when you see your first grandchild take his first step. That special pleasure. We survivors, especially those who were young enough and survived with our families, we tended to want to give them this—I don't think there was a movement or an organization—it was simply a trend that many of us felt. It was not discouraged by the older generation. Whenever I reached a landmark in my education, graduating from high school, entering college, and so forth, my parents always said, 'We're so proud of you because we feel that God has been special to us. It isn't just that we survived but we have this pleasure of seeing you flourish.'

So many of us—and I've talked to people with my background from Toronto, Canada to Australia—we realized we had the same values concerning our families. Very protective of our parents. When you see your parents abused, threatened, brutalized, and you are a child, you can't do anything about it. You can't help them. You can't protect them. Giving them back something, repaying them for that terror, that was up to us when we grew up.

This is a picture of my son's bar mitzvah with my father, my father-in-law, and my husband.

In most Holocaust families, children who managed also to survive, and even those who were born right after the war, I think many of us had this attitude. When I had my children, it was a big deal. Not just in the usual sense but even more so. When I see the generations who are in this picture, with the new generation being my son—that was the bonus of my survival. When they finally saw my children (they didn't live to see my grandchildren)….we made a trip to Houston every month for a weekend. My husband was very nice about it; I wanted my parents to know the grandchildren as well as did the grandparents in Corpus.

We planned a trip to Israel when Gary was six and Naomi was nine. We were due to leave late September of 1973. We were here for Yom Kippur when the temple was on Craig Street—Temple Emmanuel. It is now a Texas landmark. But when we went to services, the Rabbi announced the Yom Kippur War from the pulpit. Sitting in services, I remember just being so enraged and I whispered to Danny, 'They may have ruined *Simchat Torah*, because we were going there for the rest of the high holy day celebrations. But they are not going to ruin my birthday. I'm going to re-book us for January of '74.' And I did. And we went in January of 1974 when they were still fighting over the Golan Heights.

This is our passport photo for the trip to Israel. In those days you could take a group photo instead of individual ones.

Life was fulfilling. Life is fulfilling. My main volunteer effort since I've lived in Corpus Christi has been confined to being involved and helping the Jewish community. That gives me a lot of satisfaction. That's life to me. Life to me, to my parents and people like us—life has been a gift. Is a gift. I don't know how to explain it. I've had my ups and downs, illness, losses of family members and friends. But on the whole, I still feel very very lucky. I have been allowed (and my parents were thankfully allowed) to live out our lives in a normal way. When I reached my fiftieth birthday, I woke up—usually women think, I'm getting older, how awful. I didn't feel that way. The first thing that struck me was: I have already outlived the life-span of both my grandmothers. They were under

fifty when they were murdered by the Nazis. To have longevity in that sense, to live out your normal life span of whatever God gives you, is very special.

We didn't talk about our experience when we first came. Everybody said, don't talk about it, don't think about it. It will only depress you. One time my family was invited to one of the uncle's homes. He had come to this country at the turn of the century when he was seventeen years-old, so he was a Texan and had lived here during the Second World War. It was a special *Shabbat*; they had invited other people. And someone asked my mother, 'Was it really so bad, the stories of starvation?' Before my mother could even respond, her uncle, the host, across the table, said, 'Hannah, don't complain. We also suffered in America. We couldn't get any beef. We didn't have any roasts or steaks and had to eat chicken. We could not go on vacations because petrol was rationed and we couldn't buy tires for the cars, so we couldn't take any trips.' We were sitting there, and the three of us were suddenly very quiet. And we realized, even I, there's no point in talking. These people don't understand. They can't imagine it. So we didn't talk about it. The general climate throughout the early years was don't talk about it, it is unpleasant, it will depress you and other people. You'd be better off if you don't think about it.

The times were already changing by our bicentennial—1976. Everyone in those days was eager to add to the tree of America their own branch of where they had come from—how they added to the tree of America. The television program *Roots* was about the black slave experience; it was very moving. The Jewish Community Council got a call from Ray High School that they needed somebody to come and speak to the students about the Jewish community in Corpus Christi and, if possible, the Jewish immigrant experience in America. Nobody else was available and the director said, 'Take this. I haven't the energy to start calling and giving people a script. Go to the school and talk to them.' Driving to the school, I started thinking, What do I do? I didn't get off the Mayflower. How do I try to make American teenagers understand how I am a part of the American tree, because my roots were not as deep as the others. I didn't know what else to do, so I told them my story. It was like a flood. Corpus Christi is a small community; word got around. Teachers and church groups and Kiwanis and Rotarians heard about me.

I've been doing this kind of work every since 1976. That year was so full of celebration, and everyone suddenly realized that the United States didn't just plunk down from the planet Mars. It took so many people and their sacrifices and all peoples of the world to make this country. The word got around about me, and ever since then I have been invited to many group, not only to speak on Holocaust information. One time I gave a seminar for four or five Sundays at the United Methodist Church on Jewish History going back to Biblical times.

The reason I remember that particular assignment was because the last Sunday that I was finishing up, that was the weekend Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated. Of course it was very much on everyone's mind. It brought all of us back to when John Kennedy was assassinated. And when I came, the people were very gracious and said, 'You know, we would have understood if you had chosen not to come.' And I said 'No, this is something I wanted to finish and I need to speak to you about it and it's fine.' So I finished that assignment and we spoke of Israel and the dream of safety for Jews—that's what Israel represents. It was the same Sunday that their beautiful Statue on Shoreline was dedicated. This is the kind of exposure Corpus has given me and I to Corpus Christi.

It has been beneficial on both sides. It did allow me to finally be able to talk about the past without crying. Before that time, whenever something came up, it was difficult because you choked up and you can't give information when you get so emotional. Teachers tell me that of all the courses of study—there is so much more information now, films, books, television—students relate to the Holocaust more than they can relate to the Civil War, which was a very horrendous catastrophe for the United States. But it's far removed in years. They can't relate to a soldier at the battle front unless they have someone there.

But you show them evidence and you can say, I was there. I was one of these herded individuals that was pushed and driven and taken without any control of my own life to any camp. I always lived in camps. Until I got on the ship at the age of fourteen in Bremen, Germany in 1950, we always lived in some kind of compound. It was always some kind of communal living. It was not by choice but by necessity. And it was always under control, first the German control, then the Russian control. In Siberia we weren't behind barbed wire but we were certainly under Stalinist control. And then in the DP camps in Austria and southern Germany where we lived, there were separate camps for Jewish refugees versus other nationals. The reason why the Jewish camps were separate was because many other people who considered themselves victims of the Nazis, and certainly they had lost their homelands and were homeless, many of them had collaborated with the Nazis in the concentration camps. The authorities were afraid to put other groups and Jews in the same camps. So Jewish camps were separate.

Until the age of fourteen, I lived in some sort of communal, separate, controlled housing situation. What that does to you, it gives you a lot of self control. You live in very limited space. You have to make sure your things are not stolen or drift away. You have to make sure you are not imposing on other people because that will make you a nuisance. You have to be able to stand up for

your rights so nobody imposes on your turf, so to speak. It molded, in sense, who I am, and that's the effect it had.

This is what American students understand best when they study the story of the Holocaust. When they see a film like *The Bridge on the River Kwai*—I loved the film, I love the acting, I love the music especially. But the entire film was terribly resented in Britain and in Australia and the Commonwealth countries. The camp life for prisoners of war depicted in the Pacific theater was accurate. But the entire story of that bridge and the fact that someone made it extra strong to show how special British prisoners and soldiers could be, and the fact that someone risked their lives and blew up the bridge, that is a fabrication—the bridge is there. The soldiers, the slaves that were working on it, in constructing it, went through great suffering, and died on every yard of that bridge that was built on the River Kwai. I don't remember if there were any protests in this country about the authenticity of the story. But in Britain and in Canada, in Australia, in many Commonwealth countries where the British came from who were in the Pacific theater and were prisoners of war, people very much resented this film. It's like a fairy tale.

That's another reason why I do what I do. History can too easily be changed. If it's done in a dramatic way, if it's written in a very powerful way, it becomes believable. *Schindler's List* is another example. *Schindler's List* is true, it happened. Perhaps toward the end Mr. Schindler was touched and realized what he had helped do—he saved people. But he started out as a profiteer, as a speculator. He only became human at the very end, when suddenly he was on the wrong side because he was German and his credentials were questionable. He was very grateful that many of the Jews he helped save came forward and testified to that fact. He counted on an annual vacation to Israel to be among friends. Yes, history can sometimes be invented as it was in *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, or it can be changed. I think that the film *Schindler's List* tries to stay as true to life as possible because he's not pictured as a angel with wings. He's pictured as an opportunist in fact, and this is what he was.

This is what American young people, and maybe older people as well, can relate to. My mission, if you will—it is a mission because my going to visit schools and churches and wherever else I'm invited to speak—has become a moral imperative. I don't do it as a job. I don't get paid for this. I do get flowers occasionally from the schools I visit and sometimes beautiful thank-you notes which I've saved over the years. Beyond that, it is a moral imperative for me. I live in a small community and there were very few survivor families who settled here. Of those that did settle, many left because they couldn't make a living here, or they wanted a more Jewish environment. Those that stayed became old and are now frail and not healthy and cannot go out. All of them, including

myself, have always been self-conscious about standing in front of a group and speaking because of their limited English. It cannot be helped, it's the truth.

Here I am living in a community like Corpus Christi and I have this unusual background, and I'm alive and kicking. I was lucky enough to get an American education and become conversant in English. Wouldn't it be a shame if I sat back and said, 'I don't have time for this,' or 'It's not convenient today' or 'I'd rather not, it's too private, it's too personal.' I don't want people to look at me as a victim. That's very important. It would morally be very irresponsible of me, as a Jewish person, given my luck, my benefits, my survival, if I didn't do what I'm doing. And that's why I'm doing it. On top of that, it's like fate. If you go to Houston, if you go to Toronto, if you go to New York, Boston—cities that have a larger Jewish community, then there are other people, or sometimes the second general, the children of survivors, who go out to speak to schools. But in Corpus Christi, I'm it. I'm not burdened by it. I'm honored by it. I've never turned down an assignment except an invitation from Hondo, Texas, when I didn't have anyone to drive me. But I've had small groups of students from smaller communities who get on their school buses and they come to the Jewish Community Center. We welcome them, give them cookies and punch and give them a history lesson. This is what I do.

Sometimes it is personally inconvenient. But I make it my business to be available and to go. My visits to every school and every group and every church I've visited, without exception, I have been well received. People are so gracious and interested in a broader view because I speak not only of the Holocaust history of my own life but I can speak about why Jews support Israel , why it is so important for an Israel to be there. I can speak to biblical history and how Judaism started, the beginnings of anti-Semitism. These are all very inter-related subjects. Why did Hitler find it so easy to brainwash countries, not only Germany but Austria was an accomplice and other fascist countries. Why was it so easy? You take two thousand years of Christians who went to church and by and large would hear the teaching that Jews were Christ killers. I'm sad to say that in some churches, that view still goes on.

The Christian community, in a sense—I'm talking of the beginning of Christianity—by building a following, they had to separate themselves from anything Jewish. My parents told me, every Sunday after church in their towns, sometimes people were afraid to leave the house. Many priests were very much of the old school. They taught their flocks what they were taught as children. And this went on for generations. Sunday was not always a comfortable day for Jewish people. Easter time was a dangerous time in every small town in Europe, not just in Poland, for obvious reasons. Just like a politician can be

truthful and honest and forthright, so can padres. But sometimes they put their own spin on it.

The religious history of Christians prepared the world for the Holocaust. In the past fifty years, thank God, Christian leaders and theologians have realized this and are now revising their own history. The separation of Jew and Christian happened a long time after the time of Christ. But they didn't bother to say that. I read a book about Jesus as a person at the time of the Roman Empire—written by a minister. He said that he understands where anti-Semitism came from. He once opened a Sunday-school book that said: 'And Jesus was a good Christian boy, because he'd go to church every Sunday.' And of course, any educator, any historian who has read bible history, would know that Jesus was a Jew. He lived as a Jew. He objected to the system of his day as a Jew. He died as a Jew. It was only much later generations that his followers changed the tone—mainly Paul. What passes now for Christianity is not the word, but it's more the word of Paul, who preached vehemently because he wanted to build up a following. And he succeeded. That is why, after two thousand years, a civilized country like Germany was ready and willing to kill the Jews.

November 8th and 9th are the anniversary days of *Kristallnacht,* the date when the Holocaust began. That happened in 1938. This was when Nazi party people went in a very coordinated fashion and looted and burned synagogues and Jewish businesses. The police, the normal German police that patrolled streets, stood by with their arms folded and looked on. In a normal situation when there are vandals, a policeman steps in to try to stop it. But *Kristallnacht* was so coordinated that your ordinary German policeman knew, and probably his sympathies were with the crowd, so hands off. This is why I studied history because so much had happened to us and we didn't have dates, we didn't have books, we didn't have information. We were totally in the dark. And it was only after some sense of normalcy that I became aware of a calendar of time, of where I was when. And then it's like backtracking to find out where you came from and why did this happen to you, and how it could happen.

My most important travel happened five years ago. I had sworn to my family, and had felt it myself, for fifty years almost, I would never never go back to Europe. I would never stand on European soil because to me it is soaked with Jewish blood. But at a point in my life—my husband had died two years before, my children were grown—and someone started to talk about travel and where would you go. I have no desire to Vegas or Disneyland or any place like that. I've been to Israel. Where to go? And I suddenly felt that since I left Europe under such circumstances, at this stage in my life (as I was becoming a senior citizen) I needed to complete my circle. I signed up with a group out of Houston from a synagogue led by Rabbi David Rose. He and his wife took this group on

what was called the Jewish Heritage tour. We were landing in Warsaw and we would be in Poland, Czechoslovakia, we would be in Hungary, we would be in Austria—eastern Europe—because this is where the huge Jewish communities were located. It was a small group. I called up some people that I knew and asked, 'Do you think I would be welcome to tag along,' because I was the only one from here. And they said, 'Sure, as long as you have the money, you go!' So I signed up and I went. I met the group in Houston—they all knew each other—we had mutual acquaintances but I didn't know the individuals I was going with. They were middle-aged people, senior people; there were two couples who had been academics and were retired. It was a small enough group and we became like a family.

All arrangements were made through a Houston travel agent, so I had nothing else to do but go. We boarded the plane operated by Lufthansa airlines. As in all overseas flights, when you are going to Europe you leave late in the afternoon. That way you land in Europe early in the morning. We got comfortable. We were all scattered throughout the plane. After we reached a certain altitude, we were approached by our flight attendant, a very beautiful young lady, blond, tall, Germanic. She was taking our orders for dinner. She had a clipboard and came down the aisle. She said, 'Mrs. Goltzman, I have you down for a kosher dinner.' I said, 'Fine.' My seat-mate next to me was an elderly lady who was going to Rome to visit all the Catholic shrines, also on a religious tour. When she heard that I was getting kosher, she said, 'I want kosher.' The attendant said, 'We don't have you down for kosher and we only ordered a certain number of plates.' My food comes, my seat-mate's food comes. We compare; she loves my dinner. And I'm sorry. I felt almost guilty because she was so envious of my plate. It was a good meal—the transatlantic meals are good.

I ate, finished up, then the attendants came and took away the trays. And in fact the attendant specifically asked me if my meal was satisfactory and was it tasty. I said, 'Yes it is. It's very good. Kosher food is generally very good.' She said, 'Yes, I know, but this is the first time we have used this particular vendor for their kosher meals, and we want to make sure we're giving our Jewish passengers the best that is available.' And that's why she was checking whether my meal was satisfactory.

We started to get comfortable for the night. And I sat there and I thought to myself: When I was a kid I had feelings of rage. I wanted revenge. I wanted somebody to pay for what we had gone through. I was angry. But I never heard from any rabbi or any teacher, from any person I considered a leader in Jewish life, say, 'Strap on a bomb and kill your enemy and kill yourself.' This is not the kind of revenge I wanted. I suddenly realized that having a kosher meal on

Lufthansa airlines was my revenge. And it was sweet. For the rest of the night I drifted in and out of sleep. I'm not a good sleeper when I travel. I'm too curious and want to see everything—the view and the clouds. Throughout the night I thought to myself, 'These people around me. They don't know who I am. They don't know my history. Here I am, this older lady, this mature lady, a grandmother, who is an American citizen, who didn't make these flight arrangements. I have this history and now I am being served respectfully, graciously, on the Lufthansa airline a kosher dinner.' It never ceases to amaze me.

I think that's why people should always live with hope. It's not that I ever hoped or knew that the moment would come. But I do remember that in the worst of times, my parents kept saying, 'It will get better. It has to get better. The war will end. Things will change. Wait and see. Don't give up. They said it to themselves, they said it to other people, they said it to me. And I was raised on that kind of thinking. And I had my kosher meal on Lufthansa. Coming back (it was a two-week trip) it was the same. Again it was a kosher meal. No one raised an eyebrow.

That was my focal point. The trip itself had sad moments. I visited cities that I was familiar with—Budapest was the only city I had never been to. They are beautiful cities and they have much in architecture and much in history. But the fact that all of these cities had huge Jewish populations and now do not—it was remarkable. I was in one or two synagogues that are still functioning as synagogues for a few elderly people like the one in Budapest. But most synagogues that have survived are buildings used for other purposes or are being displayed as museums for the tourists—museums of a by-gone culture of people like the ancient Mayans, a culture that is no more.

Today the largest Jewish community is in Germany. Many Soviet Jews who were allowed to leave the U. S. S. R. chose to stay in Europe, especially in Germany, because many speak Yiddish so they are comfortable with German, so the transition is not that great. In every Jewish periodical—the *B'nai B'rith*, the *Hadassah* magazine, any kind of publication—Germany runs big adds: please return to your homeland, because they are inviting back Jews that were Germans, or their descendents, to come and claim their German citizenship. That's how things have changed. This is now a standard campaign. They want the Jewish community to come back. In recent years a Holocaust museum was opened in Berlin. In fact the same architect that had been involved in the Ground Zero Memorial in New York—Daniel Libeskind—was the architect for the Berlin Holocaust Memorial. Life is indeed a circle. It comes back.

It's ironic—I'm not saying this lightly, but it is the truth—most European countries, Germany, France, Italy, who had huge Jewish communities and destroyed them—now have huge Muslim communities that they find very troubling because Muslim groups tend to not assimilate or acculturate into the various countries where they have become citizens. The Turks have a large population in Germany because they were invited workers in the 70s. The German economy needed them. Now they have children who grew up there, who speak German, who are German in every way. But still and all, they do not acculturate as Germany would like. It is a social problem, it is a political problem, because it's like when we have groups of people in the United States, who choose not to learn English, who demand that they be able to conduct their daily lives in their own mother language, who wear a veil. The headdress is a particular issue. If some people only show their eyes, then normal identification in a busy, populated society, is impossible. Wherever you go, for the sake of security, you have to have a picture identification. It's a security issue.

Jewish people are taught in the Talmud that not only do you observe Jewish traditions and laws, but you must be a good citizen, to pay your taxes, to not commit crimes, to not do anything against the society you live in. Not every group has part of that built-in understanding. Part of Judaism is that no matter where we live—and Jews are a very international people—we tend to rise because we always make sure our children get an education. We try to better ourselves economically. We try to help in the community that we live in. You take Corpus Christi. We have now only 300 families, more or less, and some of our families are not that involved in the Jewish community. If you go to the police blotters, if you go to any legal entity, check tax records, Jewish people by and large have always been law-biding citizens and have been contributing members of society.

I'm rather proud of being Jewish. The evidence is there. It can't be refuted. It can't be watered down. This is why I do what I do because history can get distorted and watered down. And it is. And knowledge can be skewed one way or another. I heard an interesting talk on public radio the other day. They were playing Gustav Mahler who was an Austrian Jew, a very fine composer. The commentator was saying that in his music, Mahler was moved by Christianity. Right there, I would have screamed at that man, 'Know your history!' Mahler was an assimilated Jew. He was not involved in religious community affairs. But when he wanted to become the director of the Vienna Symphony, he had to convert to Christianity and get a baptismal certificate before he got his job. This is a matter of history. But here on the radio, someone who expounds on Gustav Mahler is telling me a lie. Call me crazy, but I tend to remember history. And this person is just talking, but many people are listening. They will say,

‘You know it’s true. Listen to Gustav Mahler. His lofty music was moved by his connection to Christianity.’

This is what Judaic studies are all about. This is what Holocaust studies are all about. It’s all about being an educated person. Thankfully, Christian theologians and scholars now are coming to terms with the history of Christianity and its origins. This is what my life is all about. It feels good to be part of a community in Corpus and of the Jewish community, it feels great to be able to help. I’ve only been able to do it because I was young enough when I came to America to get my education. Deep down, I still have many European habits, I know this. Otherwise, I’m an American. Certainly when I travel and I show my American passport, I feel so special. There are so many people, Americans, who should know better. They slam America. They criticize. They are contemptuous of what is American. I can’t even begin to understand why. I guess you can’t learn about another kind of life by being a tourist. You don’t live in a country or want to absorb what goes on.

I think that every person, every young person, has to understand that without an education, they will go nowhere. Their outlook and their potential will always be limited. The more industrial we become, the more the world changes, the more these limitations appear. It used to be sufficient to get a high school diploma, and you could get employment for life. It used to be sufficient to have a college degree and have some sort of position in life. That is not enough anymore. I’m not talking about just formal education. In your own life, every person needs to be more informed, more educated, more curious about the world.

For Americans, obviously the standard of living that has been enjoyed by a former generation is now shifting. For the next few years, maybe for a whole generation, the standard of living for the average American will not be as high as it was in the last 30 or 40 years. Work has changed and compensation has changed. Notwithstanding all that, people still have to have an outlook—a spiritual posture. People celebrate Christmas without stopping to think what the meaning of Christmas is. If somebody is unemployed, are they going to be appreciated if they cannot give the gifts that they normally would have given? Can they still see the world as a good place? I’m not being a Pollyanna. There is a deeper, spiritual satisfaction that I sense that many people don’t have. They pay a lot of attention of *things* but are unaware of the world. People like that are poor in their own ways. Whatever they have, they can’t enjoy.

In addition to striving for a better education, for betting themselves, people need a spiritual center for themselves. Whatever it be. I’m not pinpointing any religion. I’m not even pinpointing organized religion. But people need a

spiritual center. It helped my family to get through a lot and all the people that were in our lives that we knew as fellow survivors. I hope my children will have that spiritual center. They are not orthodox but they certainly know they are Jews and are proud of it. That's all that matters to me. It gives me piece of mind.

All the time I've spent with young people, telling them of Holocaust history and my own history, I have never had the opportunity to sit down and tell my grandchildren about it. Still they know my history; it's no secret. One of my granddaughter is named Shimona. She is not called that in school because it is too exotic. But Shimona is the female version of Shimon, my father's name, Simon in English—her great grandfather. The reason I named her after my father was because no one in his family survived. So the only people who can honor his name is through me. I've shown her pictures and said, 'You may not use this name all the time, but this man was a wonderful man. He lived a good, moral life, and even in the worst of times he helped people as he could. He went through a great deal of suffering so in his own way, he was a hero.' To me, that's heroism—it is standing up and surviving without a gun to defend yourself. I'm hoping some of my history will filter down that way.

I'm very grateful. I am still having a satisfactory life. How many years God will give me on this earth is up to him. I visit my children, my grandchildren. Occasionally I travel as a tourist. The fact that my husband shared his Corpus Christi town with me because I never felt I had a home town with my background. This helps me, too. If people complain—life isn't perfect and they're getting older—that is such nonsense. Life is good. Life is worthwhile.

But it can be very serious. It is the greatest undertaking that happens to a human being. When we are little and when we are children, we certainly don't have any control over it. Other people make our life, color our life. Once you become an adult, the tone of your life, the outlook of your life, that's up to the individual. I've talked to younger people who find out about my background and are curious; I hope I give them that sense of optimism about the world that I have. Like Anne Frank, I still have faith in human beings. I've lived long enough to see a lot of bad things happen in the world. But I continue to live and see a lot of good things happen.