

**INTERVIEW WITH RUTH ACKERMAN**

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**Transcending Trauma Project  
Council for Relationships  
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## INTERVIEW WITH RUTH ACKERMAN

**INT:** Ruth Ackerman in Springfield, Massachusetts, that is being conducted on Thursday, August 18.

**RUTH:** My name is Ruth Ackerman. My maiden name is Sokol. I come from Poland and I was born in a small town near Warsaw by the name of Vishkov.

**INT:** Vishkov.

**RUTH:** I was born in 1925, November, 1925. I am sixty-eight years old. I was the youngest in line for my parents, the youngest child. I had a brother, a married brother with three children that did not survive the war. Another sister with a child that did not survive the war. And through a miracle, I am here. I was thirteen years old when the war broke out and I was riding my bicycle every day to school. We moved from the small town to Warsaw, to the outskirts of Warsaw, because my father got a job working for his brother in a lumber yard and we lived there. I was going every day to school, but in school you felt the anti-Semitism to Jews. Then one day in 1938, September, the war broke out. We have to leave. We leave our home to go into the city, to Warsaw. When Germans came in they moved into our house. And all our belongings they gave away to the Poles. They told them to line up and take whatever you want, the lumber, all the material for building, and our neighbors' and ours, everything went. They didn't leave a stitch of anything. Everything went to the Poles. So there was no use coming back to our home, there was no home anymore. We remained in Warsaw.

**INT:** At that time you were living with your parents? And there were two other siblings?

**RUTH:** Yeah. My sister's husband, he was drafted into the army in 1939 and he was killed about a week before the war. In 1939, when the Germans were coming into Warsaw, he fought the Germans and he got killed. My sister was left alone with a little child. We lived in Warsaw until the ghetto in 1940, when we had to move into the ghetto. We moved into the ghetto. We were starving. We were all swollen from hunger. My father died from typhus. I caught the typhus from him. I was on my death bed already before they took me to the hospital. Like a miracle, I came out from it. My sister's child, you know, who caught the typhus from me, she died. A little girl, the most beautiful thing. And I came out from the typhus, I said to my mother, "Mama, we are all going to die here. What is there to do?" she says, "I don't know what to do." I was fifteen years old. I had to tell my mother what to do. "Mama, let's get out of here." "Where are we going to go?" I said, "You have a sister who lives in a small town. We'll go to your sister. In a small town there's a better chance to survive than in a ghetto." Well, she listened to me. And me and her, at night the trolley cars were going through the ghetto. So I gave a little money to the conductor to slow down the trolley car and I pushed my mother on the trolley car and I went after her. It was at night. We took another trolley, whatever. We got to the city where my mother's sister lived.

**INT:** Where was that?

**RUTH:** Miedzyszetz. Poolaskinas was the name of the city. We got there, but my sister was still left in Warsaw. What's going to happen to her? I went back. I didn't look... I looked Polish. I was young. I went back to the ghetto, I got my sister. I brought her to the little city where my aunt lived. We were there in that little city and it was easier with food. We weren't starving anymore. But nobody was working. There was no money, there was nothing. So me, as a young girl looking Polish, speaking this good Polish, the language was good by me. I decided and Jews were not allowed to go out to the farms. I went to the farm and a family there needed a maid. So I said, "Fine, I'll be a maid." She says, "I haven't got much money." I said, "Fine, just give me some food so I can bring for my mother." she said, "Good." And that was going on for the whole summer of 1942. Every Sunday she would give me some food. I would bring it to my mother. My mother lived with her sister. Then one morning, I'm getting up in the morning and I see Jews are running to the woods. I don't know what happened. I talked to one of the Gentile woman and I said, "What's happening?" why are these Jews running like this?" she says, "They're killing them in the city." My boss had been in the city and he came home and he tells me. "Listen," he says. He didn't say they are killing the people, he just said they are transferring them to another city. I said, "What? To another city? I want to be with my mother. I want to be with my sister. I'm going to the city." And I take my belongings. I come to the city. I shouldn't see anything like this. The streets were dead Jews. The whole street was dead Jews, and I'm going towards the train. Nobody knew anything, that was the first they were taking them on the train, at the train station. And I'm running as fast as I can to go to the train station to be with my mother. When I got to the train station, the train had left. I don't know what to do. I don't know where to go. I don't know what to do. They took my mother, the train, the this. And you could feel it in the air that it's no good. They are not taking them to another city. They took them to Treblinka, to the death camp. I'm standing in the train station, I don't know where to go. I'll go to another farm. I went to another farm. I knock on the door to a Polish woman. She's alone with two children. They killed her husband because he was keeping one of the Russians. You weren't supposed to keep a Jew. You weren't supposed to keep a Russian. They killed her husband. She was left alone with two children. She asked me if I'm Polish. I said, "Yes, I'm Polish. I'm not Jewish." I know I cannot tell that I'm Jewish. I have to hide my identity. This woman said again she hasn't got much money. I said that's fine, just give me room and board. I'm there with her for two months. A woman comes by to see that knew that I was Jewish. She tells the woman, "What are you doing, you are keeping a Jewish girl? They'll kill you, they'll kill her. What are you doing? You are a mother of two children." she says to me, "I'm sorry, you've got to go." Fine, I'll go. Where I'm going I don't know. It's wintertime, December, cold. Snow high up. I wasn't dressed properly. She says to me, "Give me the shoes." (I must have told your mother about this.) I said, "How can I give you the shoes? What will I wear? I'll go around barefooted in this snow?" She says, "You don't need these shoes. When you come to the city they'll kill you." I said, "Fine, they'll kill me, so I'll be nice and warm in my grave." She says, "You think they'll give you the shoes to your grave? They'll take it off of you." I said, "That's fine," and I left. I left. There was still a ghetto with very few people left, you know.

**INT:** This is still in the town where your mother's sister lived?

**RUTH:** Yeah, yeah. I come there. I look around. There's no life. I see no life. I see death. I see death. The people are frightened. The people are nervous. They think every minute they're going to be sent away to Treblinka. Every minute. If a night you sleep over, that's a big deal. You slept

over a night. You're still here. I don't know what to do. I don't know what to do. I go out from the ghetto and I go visit a friend of mine, a Christian friend of mine, you know, my age. And I come into their house. They were nice, they fed me, they felt sorry for me. And there was my friend's brother that was older, he was already about thirty, a single fellow. He said to me, "Why don't you go to Germany?" I said, "Germany? I have no passport. I have nothing. What if they'll catch me, you know?"

**INT:** And they'll stop you.

**RUTH:** "And they'll stop me, they'll recognize me that I'm Jewish?" He says to me, "You have nothing to lose." He says, "Go and sign up, and go to Germany." And this went through my head. That same day, that same day I went into the Arbetsamt. That means that working place where they are taking the Polish girls and boys. They were taking them off the street. They were taking them out of their beds and sending them to Germany for work.

**INT:** So it's like you would go to sign up.

**RUTH:** For sign up. So I come in there, all Germans, all Volksdeutsch are sitting there in that office. And I come in and I say, "I want to go to Germany to work." Oh, they were so happy that I am such a German lover.

**INT:** A volunteer.

**RUTH:** I'm volunteering. They don't have to drag me off the street. I'm volunteering to go to work for them. That's wonderful. They were very happy. He's asking me my name. I gave him a name of a friend of mine.

**INT:** A non-Jewish.

**RUTH:** A non-Jewish, Semenjuk. Your age? I was sixteen. I said I'm fifteen. I was skinny. I was nothing to look at. You know, I looked fourteen. I looked twelve, you know. He didn't even ask me if I have a birth certificate or if I have a passport or if I have anything. Because at that age you didn't need a passport, at fifteen. At sixteen you did. So I was smart enough to say, "I am fifteen." And where are you from? From where that friend was.

**INT:** Was that from Warsaw?

**RUTH:** No, from Miedzyszetz, you know, where my mother stayed with her sister. And they tell me that four o'clock I should be at the train station, four o'clock. That's what I did. I did not go back to the ghetto. I went right to the train station. I come to the train station, lots of Polish boys and girls, they're crying, carrying on. They were dragged out from their homes. They were dragged off the streets and they're being sent to Germany for work, you know. And I am between all of them.

**INT:** Do you remember how you felt there at that moment? Can you think about that?

**RUTH:** I felt scared. My heart was pounding constantly. I was afraid that maybe somebody will recognize me, somebody will know me. But G-d was with me. Nobody knew me. Nobody recognized me and nobody could tell that I'm Jewish. I had my blue eyes with my blonde hair and I wore clothes that the Pollacks gave me from the farms. You know, the farmers, they made their own materials. So when she gave me a piece of material, this is the dress I wore. And handmade. Everything was handmade. Handmade stockings with my shoes, with my Batah shoes. And four o'clock. They put us on beautiful trains, you know, regular trains.

**INT:** Not cattle trains.

**RUTH:** Not cattle trains like the Jews, no. They give us bread. They give us marmalade. For three days and three nights I'm on that train going to Germany. I come to Germany. I come to Augsburg.

**INT:** Yes.

**RUTH:** We come to Augsburg, it was night. We slept over there, sitting down. In the morning I look out of the door, Germans from the farms, you know. They came to buy the slaves. They came to buy the slaves. And I was told to go with this German, with this German from a farm. A farmer. I was told to go with this farmer.

**INT:** So they actually were giving these young people to Germans to work?

**RUTH:** To work for them.

**INT:** It wasn't like you were going to a German factory or a labor camp?

**RUTH:** No, no. Factories, yes. Some people they took to factories to the city, you know. Because I told them that I come from a farm, so that meant that I knew farmer's work.

**INT:** You could do that.

**RUTH:** So I went with this German. And we are riding on a train again for hours, for hours. I don't open my mouth. He talks to me in German. I understand every word he is saying but I make believe I don't understand. I don't know how to talk German. That all I know is how to talk Polish and he takes me to his home. I come into this home. I open my eyes, I couldn't believe it. The most gorgeous home. He has a restaurant. He has a wife and three daughters. One is older than me, one is younger than me and a little girl. They show me the room. I haven't seen a bed... maybe in five years I hadn't slept in a bed. Here is a bed with a pillow, with a blanket. Clean, immaculate, immaculate clean. And I'm there. I'm there for two and a half years. I work from five o'clock in the morning until eight, in summertime until ten at night. The first summer I lost a lot of weight. I couldn't take the hard work and the heat all together. I couldn't eat, and there was food. There was food because he was a butcher and he had a restaurant and there was plenty of everything. I couldn't swallow a thing. I lost a lot of weight. I felt sick. I couldn't work. I was out. They thought and I thought so too, that any day I'm going to die. I'm going to die. I can't take this hard work.

**INT:** What kinds of things did they ask you to do for them?

**RUTH:** In the morning you got up at five o'clock in the morning, you went to the barn to milk the cows, to feed the cows, to take out garbage from the cows. This was in the morning for two hours. Then you had breakfast, you know. You went to the field, to the field. Then you came home from the field. Then you went to the field, you came back for lunch. After lunch you went to the fields again, you know. When it was potato time we had to dig the potatoes. When it was corn time, we had to pick up the corn. When it was grass time we had to, you know. It was season, season work.

**INT:** And here you were, a young girl from the city.

**RUTH:** From a city, yeah.

**INT:** During those years, when you were in Germany with that farmer and with his family, was there any way to know anything about your family?

**RUTH:** Nothing. Nothing.

**INT:** It must have been very hard.

**RUTH:** Nothing. I knew that my family is gone. I knew for sure there is nobody there. I am coming to them telling them that I have a family. I didn't tell them that my family was killed, you know. Why would my family be killed if I'm not Jewish? If I'm Polish, they expected letters that I should get from my family, you know. They told me to write letters to my family, to expect letters back.

**INT:** So what did you do?

**RUTH:** I told them that my family is mad at me. My family is mad at me because I left for Germany. They did not want me to go to Germany. I told them a story, you know, what else could I do? So every time the daughters would get mad at me, they would call me a momzer. That nobody thinks of you, nobody needs you, nobody wants you. You are a momzer. I did not care what they said. It didn't bother me a bit, you know, whatever they said. They were so mean. They were so mean. They hated me for being Polish, never mind being Jewish. They hated me for being Polish. "Du Polische shrine." That's all I heard a whole day. "Du hure, du mats." That means, you whore, you know, whore. I was the most innocent kid you've ever seen, fifteen years old. "You whore." This went on constantly. And he was so mean, yelling and screaming from morning 'till night, that's all I heard is this screaming. One day I was working in the field and he says to me I should do faster. I'm not working fast enough. So I said to him, "I'm not a machine." So he slapped me. The blood was gushing out of my mouth, you know, and my nose. My face had swollen up like anything. I cried and I cried, and I couldn't help myself. I couldn't do anything. And that went on for two and a half years. That first summer I wasn't good at all. I thought I'm going to die any minute. But then when winter came and the heat wasn't that bad and that work wasn't that hard anymore in the wintertime I put on weight and I felt already better. So the following summer, I was already good.

**INT:** Better.

**RUTH:** I was feeling better. That went on for two and a half years. And the people that I stayed with, they were Nazis.

**INT:** That family?

**RUTH:** That family were Nazis, you know, 'Cause the blanket they gave me to cover myself was full of hakn-kveutz (Swastikas).

**INT:** Oh, boy.

**RUTH:** Full of hakn-kveutz. This is the blanket I covered myself, you know. That's all I heard was "Unzarere fuhrer" and the "Heil Hitler". But two days before the American Army is coming in, my blanket is gone.

**INT:** Not there.

**RUTH:** Not there. I take a look, they cut up the blanket in pieces and they made things to wash the floor. How do you call it?

**INT:** Rags.

**RUTH:** Rags. They made rags out of it to wash the floors. So I already felt a little better because I knew the American Army is going to be any day. So I said to her, "What are you doing, with that hank-kveutz, you're wiping the floor with a hank-kveutz?" I heard no answer, but I felt good. I felt very good. The American Army is coming in. They cried. They carry on. They go down in the basement and lay there in the basement. They want me to be with them in the basement. And I said, "No, I don't want to be in the basement. I'm not going to be in the basement. I have nothing to hide." In my room was going out to the street, to the street. I was sneaking through the window. I wanted to see the American Army coming in, and I did.

**INT:** You did.

**RUTH:** I did. I saw everything what was going on. I saw maybe ten Nazis, the SS running, they were running. They were the army, the SS. They did not give up. I saw them running and one says to the other, "You come here." And the other one says, "You come here. Come out here. Come out here." They were running like mice. They were running and they ran into the church. And it looks like the priest hid them in the church. Now, I would be smart enough to squeal on them that they are there. But then I was a kid, I didn't know. And the American Army comes into the city, you know. I walk out from my room and the American Army is here. I walk through the street. I'm looking to see somebody Jewish.

**INT:** From the American Army.

**RUTH:** From the Army. They must have thought that I am a prostitute. I'm going around between the soldiers myself and I'm looking like this, like this, to see maybe I see a Jewish face. No. I found a Pollack, he spoke Polish.

**INT:** A Polish man in the American Army.

**RUTH:** A Polish man in the American Army. The other girls and boys from Poland that worked also on the farm, I was afraid of them. I was afraid of them. I did not want to open my mouth to say that I am Jewish, you know. They knew that I am Christian and sometimes they would say that I'm a funny girl, a funny girl, because I maybe I didn't say the right thing in church or something.

**INT:** You went to church?

**RUTH:** Every, every Sunday. (End of tape 1, side 1)

**INT:** You went to church every Sunday?

**RUTH:** What religion are you? I said, "I am a Catholic." "Oh, you are a Catholic? You have to go to church every Sunday." I said, "I like to go to a Polish church, not a German church. You know, I like to go to a Polish church." He says, "A church is a church. It does not matter if it's Polish or German. It's a church." The first Sunday I went into that church, for some reason I started crying, crying. The whole church heard me. Everybody heard me. I couldn't help myself.

**INT:** What do you think that was?

**RUTH:** It all came out. It all came out in that church. It came out of me. And I'm crying and crying, but nobody comes over to ask why I'm crying or anything. Then when I came home, the family was there and they say, "Why did you cry so much?" Well, I miss my family. I'm in a strange country. I'm all alone. I have nobody here, you know. That's why I cried. And that went on, and then was Christmas and Easter and then again in the church, and again in the church. For two and a half years. When the army came in, they said, "You are not slaves anymore." There were more, there were more Polish boys and girls working for them.

**INT:** For this family.

**RUTH:** Not just for this family, for other families. It was a big farm, a big farm place, how you call it.

**INT:** What's the word they use in Polish to call it, or what was it called in German?

**RUTH:** What?

**INT:** The farm. Did they have a name for it?

**RUTH:** Ortshaft.



**INT:** An ortschaft.

**RUTH:** An ortschaft. There were a lot. I don't know how many families. There were lots of families and most of the families had a maid from Poland, from the Ukraine. They all had maids. We were told that we are not slaves anymore. We can go wherever we want. We can do whatever we want. And I and the other Polish boys and girls, we went to a camp, to a DP camp in Oxburg. Again, I am in this camp, I don't see a Jewish person. I feel I'm the only Jewish person left alive, you know. I don't see anybody. All Pollacks. In Munchen, which wasn't far from where I was, there were plenty of Jewish people that came out from the concentration camps or like me. After the war I met a lot of girls like me. But at that time, I didn't know anybody. And I'm there, very little food. We sleep on wood, no blankets, no nothing. And the trains start going to Poland. They are going to Poland. I say, what's the use sitting here? I'm going to go back to Poland. I'm going to look for my family. Maybe somebody survived. A cousin, maybe. Maybe one of the children from my brother.

**INT:** Where had he been? He didn't go with you.

**RUTH:** No. He stayed in another city, in another city. As a matter of fact, there was another story about him. It's such a horrible story what happened to him and his family. This is a terrible thing what happened to him. They were all wiped out, three children, and his wife and him. They were wiped out. Wiped out.

**INT:** You knew about this?

**RUTH:** Yes, I knew because I came to visit once. I came to visit and my brother wasn't there and his oldest son, what had happened to them. They went back to the city from where they were born to see a friend of theirs. And this friend was Volksdeutsch. They went to see this friend that maybe he could help him with some food. That's all they wanted is food. So this friend squealed on them that they are Jews, you know, and the Jews were not supposed to come into the city. The SS came and they tortured them, tortured them, you know, the whole city was watching. Everybody knew my brother in that city. They tied them up to a horse, you know, and they were dragging him around all over the city, and all the Pollacks stood and watched. Him and his son, his son was my age, a month younger. And they tortured them and all kinds of terrible things they did to him, and then they put him in jail. And I went... I went to see him. I went to see him but I... I couldn't go in there. I was afraid myself they are going to catch me, they are going to do the same thing to me. And I lost contact with him. And what had happened? I know, I know what happened to them. You know, they were sent to Warsaw to the ghetto and from the ghetto they went to Treblinka. That's what happened to them. The whole family was wiped out.

**INT:** And that you knew before you went back.

**RUTH:** Oh yeah. I knew. I knew, I knew that there was no chance for anybody to survive. There was no chance. My sister had black hair and brown eyes, you know. And she could never go. She looked Jewish, very Jewish. I was the lucky one. I didn't look Jewish. And so again, I went on that train, go back to Poland. I come back to Poland. I was that Warsaw is wiped out. There is

nobody. I went to Warsaw and I saw what's doing there. So I went to Lodz. In Lodz, there were more Jewish people. I went to the Gemina.

**INT:** The Jewish community.

**RUTH:** And I said to them, "What is a girl like me supposed to do? What are you supposed to do? Where are you supposed to go? What are you supposed to do?" He gives me a bread. He gives me some canned food from America that came, two cans of meat, and he gives me a bread and he says to me he doesn't know what to do. No, he tells me where to go to sleep over. Where does he send me to sleep over? To a homeless shelter or something, you know. We are laying on the floor. We are laying on the floor... that's already after the war.

**INT:** After the war.

**RUTH:** That's after the war.

**INT:** Jews were in this place where he sent you?

**RUTH:** No, they were all Polaks. They were all homeless Polish people and I'm in there with them, you know.

**INT:** So that seems to be a pattern.

**RUTH:** Oh, that was terrible. That was even worse than anything else, you know. That was terrible. Here the war is over. I am homeless. I don't have food, I don't have where to sleep. What am I going to do?

**INT:** And you're all alone.

**RUTH:** All alone. I don't know anybody and nobody knows me. All alone. In that Gemina was a sign that a Jewish family is looking for a maid. I said, that's fine with me. A maid has food, she has a bed to sleep in and that will be fine for me. I'll see what's happening. So I went up to this Jewish family. They survived. It was a mother and two sisters, and they took over from the Germans. I mean when the Germans left, they were the first ones who took it over. And I was with them for a month or so. A month or two, and then I met a lot of Jewish people that came in there.

**INT:** Came into Lodz.

**RUTH:** Yeah, met a lot of Jewish people. They say, "A girl like this, what are you doing here? What are you doing here? This is your life? You survived a war like this and this is the life you have?" I said, "What am I going to do? What have I got to do?" "Go to a kibbutz. There's a kibbutz already in Lodz, you know. You will stay in the kibbutz for a couple of months." I'm sorry I came to Poland. I'm sorry I came to Poland. I should have stayed in Germany.

**INT:** That's how you felt.

**RUTH:** That's how I felt. Why did I come to Poland? I didn't find anybody. I went to Warsaw, went to the Gemina in Warsaw looking for names, looking maybe for my cousin where I had a big family. My father had brothers and sisters and my mother did. We had lots of cousins. And I'm looking for names, and looking and looking. A waste of time. There's nobody.

**INT:** Nobody.

**RUTH:** I wished I had a cousin left, you know. Never mind a brother or sister, a cousin, just somebody that knows I was a person at one time. And that's what I did. I went into that kibbutz/

**INT:** That means a kibbutz-

**RUTH:** There were young boys and girls my age and none of them had nobody. We were all orphans. It was more like an orphanage because none of them had anybody. There were girls from concentration camps, from the Partisans, from Russia, from all over. You know, we were gathered together. And the Zionist movement was already working for us. They did not want us to be in Poland.

**INT:** Do you think before the war you had ever thought about doing anything like this, a kibbutz or Israel?

**RUTH:** No, not at all. I was not a Zionist before the war. I was a kid. I was a child. I was just a little girl. In my family, nobody was a Zionist.

**INT:** Were they orthodox Jews?

**RUTH:** Yeah. Yeah.

**INT:** I mean were they religious?

**RUTH:** Religious. Religious. Very, very orthodox. My father wore the Jewish chalatl with the Jewish hat and they prayed every morning. And kosher, a kosher home. And we were real orthodox people.

**INT:** Before, when you were describing the moment when you decided to go to Germany.

**RUTH:** Yeah.

**INT:** And I asked you, "How did you know to do that?" And you said something about G-d must have been with you.

**RUTH:** No, I did not have G-d in my heart at all. For when I saw what happened, I lost faith in G-d. I lost faith completely. I said if G-d could see the torture of Jewish people, what's happening to them, there is no G-d. (Tearful) I went that time all in my mind. I had nobody to talk to, nobody to ask, nobody to tell me what to do. It was all in my mind, and when you have tzorus and you are young, you become an adult. You are not a child anymore. You are an adult and I said to myself, "What is this? Death... if not today, it's tomorrow. Here I'm taking a

chance. If it's going to be good I'm going to survive. If not, I don't want to live anymore." I got tired of living, sleeping in the woods myself, sleeping by the goyim in their attics, in the basements. I didn't want to live. I wanted to die today. I didn't want to suffer anymore. There was enough of suffering, you can't take it anymore. I felt to a point where I can't take it anymore and I don't care. Let them catch me, let them kill me today, I'll be very happy. My family is dead. I'll be dead with them. That's it. (In background, husband asks her to stop)

**INT:** Do you feel like you want to stop, because we can do whatever you want.

**RUTH:** Well, then it goes with when I met Abe in that kibbutz/

**INT:** Is that where you met him? I didn't know that.

**RUTH:** Yeah. Yeah.

**INT:** He was there in Lodz?

**RUTH:** He was there in Lodz in that kibbutz. See how G-d takes your hand and takes you around and then to the right place to the right time. It's just... it's just a miracle. It's just a miracle.

**INT:** Did you feel like it was a miracle? Was that the feeling you had?

**RUTH:** Now... now I have that feeling.

**INT:** When you think about it.

**RUTH:** Now I think. Then I was an empty person. There was nothing in me. There was no faith, there was no G-d, even after the war. Like I said, it just went out of my system. Everything went out of my system. I was just an empty person. An empty person.

**INT:** How did you-

**RUTH:** But still I wanted to be Jewish. I wanted to be Jewish. You know, I met so many girls after the war, they were having the cross on. And I talked to them and I said, "Why do you do this? You are a Jewish girl. Why are you wearing the cross?" You know what their answer was? "That cross saved my life." I was begging them, "You know how many girls married gentiles?"

**INT:** Now what about you was different that you didn't do that and you didn't feel that way?

**RUTH:** No, the Jewishness was in me. I could never be a Pollack. I went to church during the war and I observed all their holidays and everything just because to survive. But to be for the rest of my life a Pollack, no. That wasn't in me. I was always looking for Jewish people. If I would have met one Jewish person, I would have hugged and kissed him and I wouldn't know what to do. If I would have met just one Jewish person.

**INT:** It must have been so lonely.

**RUTH:** Lonely.

**INT:** So lonely.

**RUTH:** You lived like an animal, I would say. Just like an animal. You worked, you ate, you slept, you worked, you ate, you slept. And you pushed the days closer, closer, closer, you know, to survive. And none of my family survived in Poland, none of them. Lots and lots of family. I went looking for them. I went looking here and there in Poland. I didn't... I couldn't find anybody. Nobody survived there. (Heavy sigh)

**INT:** But there was one sister who had come here before?

**RUTH:** Yeah, my sister left. My sister's husband had parents here in America and three sisters. And they left, not even about ten days before the war, the last boat that went to America from Poland. She always talks about it, how she was waiting to get on the boat and there was no room for her and she was supposed to take another boat and the last minute...And people were going at that time to the World's Fair. They were going from Poland, yeah. She says most of the people were going to see the World's Fair in America. And then one couple canceled. They couldn't make it. So they called them and they went on and that's how she came to America.

**INT:** Could we just go back for a moment to your family before the war. I wanted to just understand. So there were these two siblings.

**RUTH:** Yeah.

**INT:** Your sister, your brother, yourself, and then your sister who came here.

**RUTH:** Yeah, yeah. And I had three sisters and two brothers in Argentina. They left from Poland in 1935, '36, you know.

**INT:** By themselves?

**RUTH:** My father had a sister there in Argentina, so first went my older brother, then he brought over another brother and then the three girls went together. They were lucky too, to escape all this. To escape and... and that is what made me fight. That's what made me fight.

**INT:** What? What is that?

**RUTH:** That I want to live. I want to see my sisters. I want to see my family. I'm not going to be alone. I'm not going to be alone. If I have to be alone, I don't want to live. In me, no matter how bad it was, I used to say, "I'm going to fight. I'm going to fight, you know. I'm going to fight. I want to be with my sisters, with my brothers. I'm not going to be alone." I even told them, when they came the first time to see me to America, I told them, I said, "Thanks to you, I'm alive."

**INT:** So it was really the attachment to your family.

**RUTH:** Yeah.

**INT:** The hope that you are going to see them.

**RUTH:** Because I knew they are alive. They are there and they are alive and I have to fight to stay alive, to be reunited with them. This is what kept me. (Tearful)

**INT:** That was it, really.

**RUTH:** Inside in me, no matter how bad it was, there were nights I had to sleep in the woods and I said, “Ah, what’s the use? What do I have to live for? What is this, is this life? It’s better to be dead.” No, and then right away my mind says, “No, don’t give in. Don’t give in. Fight. Fight to stay alive.” One minute I want to be dead, and the next minute I say, “No, no, stay alive. Fight.” And I fought and I fought.

**INT:** That’s an incredible spirit, you know.

**RUTH:** Is it because I was so young?

**INT:** I don’t know. What do you think when you think about it?

**RUTH:** It’s because I was young. That’s why they send young people to war. ’Cause young people, they go. They don’t think that much as an older person. That’s the only thing, the only thing.

**INT:** Do you think it was only because you were young?

**RUTH:** I don’t know.

**INT:** Because there were other young people-

**RUTH:** They gave in, just lost interest in life. They didn’t want to live like this. This was life? I used to always say to myself, “It’s better to be dead. My family is better off than me. I want to die, I want to die where I’m going to go to my family out yener velt. I’m going to go. I want to go. I want to die.” But the next minute something came to me and said, “Don’t give in. Keep fighting. Keep fighting. You have a reason to fight for.”

**INT:** And that reason was?

**RUTH:** My family. The reason was my family. If I didn’t have anybody, you know, I wouldn’t fight. I would just go to Treblinka like everybody else went. I wanted to go. I wanted to go, but the train left me. If I would have come five minutes before, I would have been on that train. The train left me. They didn’t want me. Five minutes earlier, you know, I would have been on that train because I wanted to be with my mother. I wanted to be with my family. I didn’t want to stay behind. I said wherever they’re going, I want to go there too.

**INT:** And have there been times in your life since then when you've had that same kind of fighting?

**RUTH:** Fighter, yeah.

**INT:** You're a fighter.

**RUTH:** Yeah, I am a fighter. I am a survivor. I am a fighter. Look what I lived through, and what about here with my sickness. I told my doctor, I am a survivor, Doctor. I am a fighter. I will outlive this terrible, horrible sickness that I have. And here I am, it's thirteen years that I had lung cancer. How many people survive lung cancer? I did.

**INT:** And you attribute that to?

**RUTH:** Yeah, I told my doctor. I said, "I'll be all right." I said, "I am a fighter. I am a survivor. I outlived Hitler. I'll outlive cancer too." That's what I told him. I will and I did. It's thirteen years and I'm doing fine. I don't know what's in me. A little woman like me. Well, you know, I don't have to tell you. Your mother has stories to tell too. She's also a survivor. (Husband comes in to say it's enough)

**INT:** Do you think it's enough for today, Avrum?

**RUTH:** Do you want to come again?

**INT:** I'd love to come again. Would that be all right with you?

**RUTH:** Well then I have the story, the journey to Israel.

**INT:** Should we save that for another time?

**RUTH:** The journey, then it's after the war and the journey to Israel and then you want to know about America.

**INT:** So I'll come back.

**RUTH:** You'll come again if you want to.

**INT:** How has this been for you, Rivka?

**RUTH:** What do you mean?

**INT:** Doing this, do you feel all right?

**RUTH:** Oh, I got a headache. I got a headache and I want to cry. I want to cry. (Tearful)

**INT:** Thank you. I'll shut this off. (End of tape 1, side 2)

**INT:** Interview with Ruth Ackerman. This is our second interview. Last time when we met we spoke about your family and your siblings, and those who did survive in Argentina, those who didn't. And I thought maybe we could begin by just talking a bit about some of them and also about yourself a little bit. You told us last time your name and your age and your place of birth. We know that you're married to Abraham Ackerman.

**RUTH:** Yeah.

**INT:** Ackerman. And as far as yourself, I remember you told me that when the war broke out you were in eighth grade.

**RUTH:** No, I was in sixth. I finished sixth grade.

**INT:** Finished sixth grade.

**RUTH:** Yeah, yeah.

**INT:** So as far as you were concerned, that was when your education ended.

**RUTH:** That's all.

**INT:** Ended in Poland.

**RUTH:** Poland, yeah.

**INT:** And what about Abram's education before the war? Do you know what?

**RUTH:** Yeah, also very little, very little. He started being a tailor. I think at fifteen he was a tailor already. He was making money and sort of helping out his family. They were just working people. His father was a carpenter too. His sisters, they were working, they were dressmakers and working family.

**INT:** In your family too, your father worked in a lumber yard.

**RUTH:** Lumber yard, for my uncle. His brother owned the lumber yard and he was working there. And we lived there until the war broke out and we left just for temporary, you know, until the bombing would pass because we lived right near the airport, behind Warsaw, Kelncze. So we left, we were afraid for the bombing, you know. We couldn't return anymore. The Germans had moved in. They threw everything out what they didn't want. The Polish people came with their horse and buggies, loaded up their horse and buggies with all our belongings, with the lumber and all from the lumber yard and in no time everything was gone and we could never return there. The house is still there.

**INT:** Is that right?

**RUTH:** The house is still there. I went by this house after the war with the trolley car, went by. I was afraid to stop or look even, you know. I couldn't but a glimpse I had of the house that



nobody lived there. The windows were taken out. The doors were taken out. The stoves were taken out, just a shack they left of the house. That's what was there is, a shack. But I didn't. I just didn't do anything. I didn't want to stop. I didn't want to talk to the neighbors. I was heartbroken. I just went by to visit a neighbor of ours, a good friend that lived further down. She was the only person that I met that knew me, that I knew her. So she lived further down, so I went by with the trolley car and just glanced to see what's with the house, and this is what I saw. It was demolished, practically demolished.

**INT:** How did you feel then?

**RUTH:** How I felt? It's a terrible feeling. I didn't want to. I didn't want to talk to the neighbors. I was stunned. I was heartbroken and this is all I saw. The property, the property, there was so much property there and everything. It belonged to my uncle, but nobody survived from that family. They were very wealthy people, very well to do.

**INT:** This is your father's brother.

**RUTH:** My father's brother and his family, none of them survived.

**INT:** You had said that in your own family, you were an orthodox family.

**RUTH:** Yeah, sure. My mother wore a sheitel. My father wore the Yiddishe kapote. We were very orthodox, very orthodox people. My siblings, you know, I have a sister here. You know my sister.

**INT:** I've never met her.

**RUTH:** Yeah. Yes, you did, once in Holyoke. In Holyoke, I was there with her. I asked that girl, "Do you know Hannale Kliger?" She says, "She's right here." (Laughs)

**INT:** Oh, in 1985, a long time ago.

**RUTH:** (Laughing) I ask her if she knows you. But I should think that you are right here. (Laughing) "She's right here."

**INT:** That was several years ago.

**RUTH:** Well, you know, her husband's family lived in America. So not even two weeks, maybe a week before the war, she left for America with her husband and child. But I did not know her address, and they had changed their name from Shelunchik to Solomon. And I kept on sending letters through the Red Cross to look for my sister, Shelunchik. You look and look. No way could they find her, because she had changed her name. And I knew only New York, that she lives in New York.

**INT:** She was in New York

**RUTH:** Yeah, she was in New York then. Yeah, she lived in the Bronx then. She only moved to Springfield about two years before I came, because her husband bought a business here. And I couldn't find her and I kept on sending to the Red Cross letters to look for my sister. I couldn't find her. Then one day in Germany I go into the Joint. They were interested in finding family. So again, I tell her about my sister Shelunchik, you know. Then she says to me, "Do you have more? Do you have aunts, you know?" Oh, I have an aunt in Mexico, my mother's sister and her name... her husband's name is Abraham Marcus Hammer and they live in Monterey. I remember that because I was writing the letters. And they live in Monterey, Mexico. She says, "Here is a paper and pen and write a letter to your aunt in Mexico." And I did. I said, "Libe mime, ich bein dayn shvester's tochter, Ruth. Ich gefin aich du. Vee is mayn family? Vee is mayn shvester?" And she received the letter. (Tearful) She received the letter and she sent it right away to my sister here in the United States, and the first letter I got from my sister from the U.S. And then started coming letters from Mexico and from Argentina. I'll never forget that. So quite a few years ago, I was in Mexico but I said, "I want to go to Monterey. I want to see the city where my uncle and aunt live," because this had a lot in my heart that this letter they received. I remember the name of the city, Monterey, and it's a small city. But everybody knew my uncle. Right away they found him.

**INT:** He was alive?

**RUTH:** Yeah, oh yeah. Now they gone. But yeah, he was alive. My aunt was alive.

**INT:** What was that like to see them?

**RUTH:** Oh, my G-d. You know, I had met them before. As soon as I came to the United States, my aunt came to see me and there was another aunt too. Yeah, there was another aunt, and she started writing letters to me in Germany thinking that I'm still a little girl and I'm still single. I was married already. She had no children. She wanted me to come to Mexico, you know, sort of to be her daughter. So I wrote her back. I said, "I'm not a little girl anymore. (Laughs) I'm married. I have a husband and we are planning to go to Israel." I told her right away. We're not going anyplace.

**INT:** And your sister looked for you? Did she try to look for you here?

**RUTH:** She did, but I went to Warsaw there, to the Jewish Gemina. Again names, names, names, but I used to get so nervous and uptight that nothing clicked in, in your head, you know, with all the names. And I kept on saying to the man, "Please read it again. Please read it again. Maybe I missed." (Voice quivering) But I didn't. There were many names like mind, Sokol, but I couldn't find anybody. And that went on for a whole year. A whole year from 1945, from the liberation, 'till... 'till 1946, Pesach, April. Exactly a year until I found my family.

**INT:** Did you believe that you would find somebody?

**RUTH:** Oh yes, those in the United States, in Mexico, in Argentina, I knew them. They had no war, they have to be there and they were all there. It's just my family in Poland, you know I had a large family in Poland with uncles and aunts and cousins and my sister. I knew my brother is not alive. This I knew and his family, I knew for sure. But I was looking for cousins. After the

war, if you found distant relatives, you know, it was like you found a brother. Like a sister. As long as it was a relative, you were in heaven to have somebody. Especially like me, you were so all alone, you know. So all alone.

**INT:** You father had-

**RUTH:** Yeah, my father had died in the ghetto. (Sigh) Uh, it was hunger, it was typhus, it was... it was terrible. We lived in such cramped quarters. We were... how many? Three, five, six, seven people in one little room.

**INT:** With another family.

**RUTH:** Another family. You know, we lived with another family; took us in. And there was no.. no work and there was no income and we were just starving. We were starving. It was terrible. Oh, (sigh) we all had swollen feet from the hunger and then my father died. And I and my mother and my sister were left, the three women to struggle.

**INT:** You know, when I was thinking about what you had told me last time, it made me wonder about whether there were ways in your family, before these terrible things that happened, whether there were ways that you had seen or you had learned about how to deal with issues in the world. Was there a kind of philosophy in your family, even if people didn't say it? Was there a way you handled problems that came up in the family that you could think of?

**RUTH:** I don't know. I just don't know. I had no problems. I was young. I was a child. I loved school. I rode my bicycle every day to school. I went to a school where everybody, all the children, were Polish, except me. I was the only one in the whole class that was Jewish. There you could feel the anti-Semitism grow and grow, and from day to day, you know. They had pogroms. One Sunday, they knocked all the windows out from the Jewish stores. The churches were telling the people, "Don't buy from Jews. Don't buy from Jews." And in my mind then was I couldn't wait to get old enough to leave Poland. I couldn't wait to live old enough. That's all I kept asking my mother, "Mama, how old do I have to be so I can leave Poland?"

**INT:** You were thinking about-

**RUTH:** Argentina. How old do I have to be to leave Poland? That's all I kept asking.

**INT:** America you weren't thinking about.

**RUTH:** No, no, because I had nobody in America. I had nobody in Israel either. So I wasn't thinking about America. I wasn't thinking about Israel. I was thinking only about Argentina. As I said, Poland is not a place to live. It's not a place for Jewish people to be, as a child. As soon as I'll get older I'll leave. I'll leave. That was always in my mind.

**INT:** But did you have Jewish friends even though in the school there were Poles only?

**RUTH:** I had one Jewish friend, that's all. Where we lived, it was mostly a Polish neighborhood. There were very few Jews and the Jews that lived there, they had little babies. And in my age,

you know, there were hardly anybody. Just one girl, one girl was my age. I met her at school. I didn't like it there. I was very unhappy. I was very unhappy. I didn't like it. I wanted to leave, leave, to get out of there. I wish more people would think like I did as a child, you know, that this is not a place for Jews. This is not a place for Jews, but my uncle was a very wealthy man. He could have gone all over the world, wherever he wanted to go he could go. He was a very wealthy man, so he said that Poland is the best country to live in. He's not going to start a life all over again. So what happened? First they took his money, his wealth. First they took that, and then they took their lives. There was nothing left and they were holding on to their wealth and to their money. Who would think that something horrible like this would happen? Who would imagine? Who would imagine anything like this? Nobody did.

**INT:** Even though there were feelings of anti-Semitism, there was no thought that anything like this would happen.

**RUTH:** No, no, no. My cousin, you know, my uncle's daughter said, "Poland is the best country." Of course, for her it was the best. To live in the most gorgeous home in Warsaw and a steady maid was there with a luxury life, a luxury life. They are not to leave that life, you know, and to start all over a life again, so none of them survived. And my cousin, my cousin was such a handsome body. Oh, he was like a movie star. He was a college graduate, you know, in Poland. A college gymnasium, he graduated from that. Intelligent, handsome, and if a boy like this couldn't survive, it's unbelievable. Sometimes I think if that Benyik didn't survive, it's just unbelievable. (Voice is shaky, sighs)

**INT:** Rutka, how long have you been in this country?

**RUTH:** Forty-one.

**INT:** Forty-one.

**RUTH:** I came in '53. In August, was forty-one years. Yeah, it's a lifetime.

**INT:** Let's just, for the record, talk about... you have two children.

**RUTH:** Yeah.

**INT:** Where were they-

**RUTH:** Born in Israel.

**INT:** And that one's name is?

**RUTH:** Michael.

**INT:** Michael was born in Israel.

**RUTH:** Israel, yeah. Daniel was born in the United States.

**INT:** And how old are they?

**RUTH:** Michael is forty-seven and Danny is thirty-eight.

**INT:** And they were raised in Springfield?

**RUTH:** Yeah.

**INT:** Went to school?

**RUTH:** Went to school here, yeah.

**INT:** I'll ask you these questions before we go onto the story about the war in Israel. Here in Springfield, did you belong or do you now belong to organizations?

**RUTH:** Oh yes, yes.

**INT:** And what are they?

**RUTH:** I am a member of the Jewish Community Center. I'm a member of the Congregation Kadima. I'm a member of the Amit Women. I'm a member of the sisterhood. I'm a member of the Jewish War Veterans.

**INT:** Are there Holocaust-related organizations that you were active in or belong to now?

**RUTH:** No, we don't have anything now. When I first came to Springfield, we had a club, Hatikva, of all the refugees that came after the war. It was a large group of people, and it was lovely because there you met people that you could relate to, that you had a lot in common with. And we had New Years parties and we had Hanukkah parties and Purim parties. And if there was Bar Mitzvah, the whole club of Hatikva was invited, you know. When you and your parents came to Michael's Bar Mitzvah, Beila says - Beila was there too. She says, "Where am I? I think I'm in Europe. Everybody talks Yiddish. What's going on?" (Laughs) She says, "Where am I?" You know, everybody spoke Yiddish. We all spoke Yiddish. It was great. But as the years went by, you know, most of the people are gone. A few families moved to Florida. A few families moved to California. And there's a very, very small handful of the people here in Springfield. Most of them died out. Family after family. It's terrible. A terrible, terrible thing what is happening, you know. All my best friends, you know, all my best friends are gone. All the people that I used to play cards with, that we used to be so close, are gone. So that club Hatikva, for some reason, it fell apart. But it was a wonderful thing. It was wonderful while it lasted, but now we have nothing. They are in the process of building a Holocaust memorial by the Jewish Community Center. When this is going to be ready I don't know. They've been talking about it for years, but nothing is doing.

**INT:** But these people in this group were really important for you. They were your friends.

**RUTH:** Yeah, oh they were such close friends. My best friend died of cancer. I was at her bed till the last minute of her life. I stayed by her bed. I didn't leave that bed. I loved her. She was

from Vilna and she died at fifty-five, no, fifty-three. She died at fifty-three. Terrible, terrible. She left three children and her husband had died way before. He was forty-seven. What happened to that beautiful family? Then there's three children that survived and none of the children married Jews. They are all intermarried, you know, moved away. One son lives here in Springfield, and the two girls, one lives in Las Vegas. I write to them. When they come to Springfield they come running to see me here. So that's many, many people. Just a handful. You know, we had a meeting the other day. We had a meeting of all the Holocaust. There were twelve people. Twelve people from hundreds of people. Twelve people. That's all that was left. Another few years, there won't be anybody.

**INT:** Well, that's why this is important.

**RUTH:** Yeah.

**INT:** That's why this is important.

**RUTH:** Yeah, gone, gone.

**INT:** It seems like you have such special relationships with friends that you care about, that means a lot to you.

**RUTH:** It sure does. Yeah.

**INT:** The family relationships, they mean so much to you. Do you think that's special because of your experience, because of the losses that you suffered? Do you think that would have been anyway the case?

**RUTH:** No, I don't know. This is from home. My parents were very... my father was a very giving person. He felt for everybody, you know. He helped everybody. I guess this is left in me.

**INT:** A feeling for people?

**RUTH:** Yeah, a feeling for people. That was my father, my mother. They always helped other, you know, felt for others.

**INT:** Because I think that's also what you talked about in keeping you going in the moments when you thought, "I don't want to live anymore."

**RUTH:** No, I don't want to live anymore.

**INT:** And you thought that, "No, maybe I will find someone. Maybe there will be family."

**RUTH:** That thought, you know, kept me going that I will, that the war will end. I will be reunited with my family. I won't be alone. I don't want to live being alone. I don't want to live being alone. It's no life being alone, and what's the use of struggling? What's the use of going on. It isn't worth living. It's not worth living. It isn't worth it.

**INT:** So relationships are important.

**RUTH:** Yeah, so then my mind went “The war won’t last forever. I will be reunited with my family. I won’t be alone.” And I fought again. I fought again. This past Saturday we were out to a dinner dance, and I met a man there from Hartford, also one that came after the war. I don’t know where, I think he was in a concentration camp or something. The first question was, where did you survive? How did you survive? So I said, “Well, as a Polish girl I went to Germany to work for the Germans.” He says, “That was a smart move.” And we had so much in common with this man. We talked a whole evening with this man. He was telling us something. He survived, he was all alone, and he remember that he had grandparents in America and uncles and aunts. So he met a soldier, an American soldier, a Jewish American soldier and he said to the soldier, “You know, I have grandparents and I have uncles and aunts in America, Hartford, Hartford, Hartford.” he didn’t know how to pronounce it. He said, “Hartford? I am from Springfield.” And right away this man wrote to his parents to find his family. Grandparents are still alive and the uncle, of course, everybody was alive and that’s how he came to Hartford. And people have stories. It was very interesting. Oh, we had so much in common, like I knew him from I don’t know. It’s funny how (sigh) I don’t know there is so much, we have so much in common with people that come from Europe and they’ve been through. We have so much to talk about and so much in common, you know, then with American-born people.

**INT:** Even now, after forty-one years.

**RUTH:** Yeah, I have friends. I have neighbors and friends.

**INT:** But in terms of feelings.

**RUTH:** Oh, that’s something, you know, that’s not there. It’s not there. I never tell them my story. I never tell them anything ’cause for some reason they don’t... it upsets them. They don’t want to listen. They just don’t want to listen. They don’t want to hear about bad things. They want to hear good things, good times and good things. So I don’t. I never open my mouth. They know, of course, but I don’t talk about it.

**INT:** How has that been all these years to have the people that are neighbors and friends and have a sense that they really don’t want to hear? What do you do with that?

**RUTH:** If somebody doesn’t want to hear, he just doesn’t want to hear. Elie Weisel was here a couple of years ago and he said we should tell and talk and tell and talk. So I got up and I said, “Who should I tell it to when nobody wants to listen? When nobody wants to listen, who should I tell it to?” It’s the truth. (End of tape 2, side 1)

**INT:** When you were liberated, you told the story about the American soldiers.

**RUTH:** Yeah, that came in.

**INT:** Looking there to make a connection to a Jewish face.

**RUTH:** Yeah, a Jewish face, looking for Jews, for a Jewish face between the soldiers.

**INT:** That was one of the main feelings you had. You wanted to find other Jews. I remember you said that.

**RUTH:** Yeah, yeah.

**INT:** And... and then you came to this kibbutz in Lodz. What was that like? And was that the first time you felt like you could be Jewish?

**RUTH:** Yeah, I loved... I loved it.

**INT:** You loved it.

**RUTH:** I just loved it. I loved it there. I was between all Jewish boys and girls my age, you know. This was a great thing that they did have for boys, girls, my age. What would they do? Where would they go? They would turn out to be bums on the street. We had an education, we had meetings, we studied Hebrew, we had aseyfot (assemblies). There were Shaliachs came from Israel to talk to us and from Poland. And with these people we became... we became like a family. We were just like a family, all of us together. Because everybody was in the same boat as I. None of them had family. There were only one survivor from a family, one survivor from a family. There were young people and boys came from the concentration camp. They came from Russia. They came from the Partisans. They came from all over. We were all united like together, and this was a wonderful thing that this.

**INT:** Did people share their stories there? Was it a time when people felt like talking about what had happened to them?

**RUTH:** Nobody talked.

**INT:** Really?

**RUTH:** Nobody talked. You know, once in a while you would ask, there was a question, where did you survive? I survived as a Christian. I wasn't in a concentration camp. But the real from inside, you know, everybody kept it inside. Everybody kept it inside.

**INT:** What was that like to keep that all inside? Where did it go? What do you think?

**RUTH:** Went to your health. (Laughs) It went on your health, what else? When I got sick, my doctor said, it just came from what you've been through, you know, that's what it came from.

**INT:** You mean when you got sick with the lung cancer?

**RUTH:** Yeah, that's what he said.

**INT:** Do you think that also about your friend, for example, that you told me about her illness?



**RUTH:** I don't know. She died so young. She lived through in a concentration camp. We used to sit and talk. She would tell this story how she was separated from her parents, from her sister. What she's been through in a concentration camp. She weighed only eighty pounds when she was liberated. She was already half dead. And yeah, we talked. And I used to tell her my story.

**INT:** Was that one of the first times you told the story? I mean how long did it take, or who did you tell?

**RUTH:** Oh no. I told my husband. You know, we talked, we talked all the time about it. He would tell me his. I talked to my husband. Yeah, I talked to him.

**INT:** So you met him on that kibbutz.

**RUTH:** That kibbutz, yeah, yeah. He was there also, all alone. He had nobody. He was very down at the time. He was very down. Not to find anybody from his family and he was all alone and he was very down and we had a lot in common. We just had an awful lot in common. We talked a lot about Warsaw, about before the war, about the streets, about the homes, about life. We had a lot in common, yeah. And then, after two or three months in that kibbutz in Lodz, we smuggled the border to go to Germany because from Germany was an easier way to escape. Poland... I did not want to stay in Poland. I knew the borders will be closed soon, you know, there won't be no way to get out and I am not to stay. I didn't want to stay in Poland before the war, never mind after the war. I did not want to stay in Poland. So the Bricha, the Bricha from Israel, they were all working how to get the people out, how to get them out. So they tried to get us from Poland to Germany and then from Germany further, you know. So we smuggled the border. We were dressed as Greeks. None of us knew one word of Polish. We are not to talk Polish. We only know how to talk Greek. We came to the border, so the Polish soldier says to one of the people that was in charge, they must have been bribed this, whatever. And we heard one soldier said to the other soldier, you know, in Polish. "Let these Greeks go to hell," and that's how we went through the border from Poland to Czechoslovakia. I stayed in Czechoslovakia about two weeks. Then we had to smuggle the border from Czechoslovakia to Germany, you know. That was the worst.

**INT:** Why?

**RUTH:** It was wintertime. It was snow up to your knees. We were not dressed properly, you know. I hardly had any clothes. I had little shoes for the snow. It was New Years Eve. New Years Eve when we went through that border, walking in that snow, middle of the night, walking through that border the hills. We didn't see anything until we came to the German side. There were already buses waiting for us and they took us... they took us to Munchen, to Germany. But we couldn't stay in Munchen because Munchen was already too crowded. So we went to Leipheim. This was an airport, an airport with barracks, you know, and that's where we lived, in those barracks. Very little food. The food we had came from America, you know, very little.

**INT:** You were living there, waiting for something, waiting to be able to go?

**RUTH:** To get out again, you know. We didn't want to stay in Germany either. We just stayed there for a month, two, three, whatever it took to go to get out from there. And there we got married. We got married in Germany, in that camp, in that DP.

**INT:** What does DP mean?

**RUTH:** Displaced persons.

**INT:** Displaced persons.

**RUTH:** Yeah, that's what it was, a DP.

**INT:** It was displaced persons for Jews only?

**RUTH:** Jews only. Jews only. The whole camp were all Jews.

**INT:** What was your wedding like?

**RUTH:** Oh G-d. It was, you know, there was a Hungarian rabbi. A Hungarian rabbi gave us the chupah, us and another couple. We had like a... like two couples were married.

**INT:** A double wedding.

**RUTH:** A double... a double wedding. And I remember lots of people, a lot of people. We had wine and sort of like not even cake. It was made out of water and flour. It must have been more like a challah, like challah rolls or something. (Laughs) That's right. Now that I remember, they were challah rolls. The big girls... the girls baked the challah rolls. We had wine from Israel. And that was the wedding. It was nothing. It was nothing.

**INT:** How did you feel on that day, can you remember?

**RUTH:** I felt happy. I had somebody that I loved, somebody that loved me and that meant the world to me. I did not want anything. That's all I wanted from is to have somebody that cares for me, that thinks of me. That was the most important thing, you know. When you are alone, nobody cares. Nobody cares if you are alive or dead or you ate or you are starving. Nobody cares. You're just alone and it's a terrible thing to be alone, a terrible thing to be alone. I was very happy then when I met Abram and got married. And then, there was no place to stay in Germany. There was no life, again. I wanted to go to America to my sister or to Argentina. Abram said he's not going to America. He's not going to Argentina. He had enough of goyim, he had enough of anti-Semitism. He's going to Israel to be with Jews, a Jewish country. So, he was my husband, I have to go with him wherever he wants to go. When we were assigned to leave to Israel, to leave for Israel, Aliyah Bet.

**INT:** Before the State?

**RUTH:** Before, way before, way before the State. This was in 1946 in July.

**INT:** That's when you were married?

**RUTH:** No, I got married in March.

**INT:** In March of '46.

**RUTH:** Yeah. And we are on our way to Israel. We don't know how the trip will be, what's going to be. We pack our few belongings and we are on our way. So we went from Germany, we went to France. In France, we are again in such a, like a, it was not a camp, it was like a mansion. A mansion that used to belong to the Germans. The most gorgeous place you've ever seen on a lake with boats. The most luxurious place I've ever seen in my life. Beautiful place. And we stayed there about two weeks, I think. Then in the middle of the night we are awoken, got to get ready. In the middle of the night we are loaded on the busses, how you call this, trucks. On trucks.

**INT:** Trucks.

**RUTH:** On trucks. We are loaded up on trucks. We are taken in the middle of the night. Nobody should know. Nobody should listen. We were smuggled. We were smuggled. We were taken to the boat. We are taken to the boat in Marseille. The mansion was in Marseille. I take a look at that boat. I said, "Oh my G-d. Oh my G-d. How we survive that trip?" It was inhuman. Inhuman. The boat was as tiny as can be. As tiny as can be. People, one on top of the other. You... you were sitting there, you couldn't stretch your legs because otherwise you would hit the other person. That's how we were sitting on that boat. People are sick. I am sick. There's no food whatsoever. No food. Water, you get only one glass of water a day. It was July. The heat was burning unbelievable, with no hats, with no kerchiefs on your head, you know. That's all you wanted is a little bit of water. Just water. There's no water. Just a glass of water a day to wet your lips, and you are sitting on that boat for two weeks without food and without water. Finally, finally, we come to Israel, to Haifa, to the dock. They don't let us off the boat.

**INT:** The British.

**RUTH:** British. Don't let us off the boat. A big, big military boat arrives, and they tell us to get off of this little boat. It was not a boat. I can't begin to tell you what it looked like, you know, like a round...they used to carry coal and wood on that boat. Like a yacht. They tell us to get off this yacht to go into their boat. We still think, you know, if you looked at somebody else you thought that this person is crazy. You didn't see yourself because you had no mirror. You had no comb. You didn't bathe or wash yourself in two weeks in this heat. What did you look like, you know? We all looked like crazy people. We did. We were normal. We were all crazy people to look at. They tell us to go up on that other boat. We don't want to go on the other boat. We want to go into Israel, you know. No, they didn't hit us but they were spraying water at us, spraying with the...

**INT:** With a hose?

**RUTH:** With a hose. We were all muddy and with the water. We were all in mud. We were all muddy people, all muddy people, real muddy people. We had no choice. We went on that boat.

That boat was a military prisoner's boat. Prisoners for military. There's no cots. We're laying there on that asphalt floor. We're laying there. Laying there half dead, half dead people are laying there. How we survived I don't know.

**INT:** You were hundreds of people, weren't you?

**RUTH:** Hundreds of people. Hundreds of people, we laying there. Where we going? What are they going to do with us? One says they're taking us to England. The other one said they're taking us back to Germany. We don't know what they're going to do with us. We don't know the language. We can't talk with anybody. Nobody talks with us. We're laying there. And the boat starts going, that boat. Starts going 'till we get to Cypress. We were the first boat that came into Cypress. Never mind hunger, thirst is the worst thing for a human being. It's worse than hunger, thirst. We're longing for water, water we want. They don't give us nothing. They don't give us water. They don't give us anything. We come to Cypress, they let us out from that boat. You see sky and you see sand. Sand and sky. Again, we are sitting there in the sand. Finally a British soldier comes down with a barrel of water. But the people were already crazy. They were not normal, anybody. They threw themselves on that barrel of water and they spilled all the water and nobody got any water. And remember, this British soldier, like he would say the hell with me, and he picked himself up and he left. I don't remember when we got water. I don't remember, but we must have gotten water, otherwise we would have died. And they gave us tents, to build the tents, you know how you call it?

**INT:** To live in, to sleep in?

**RUTH:** To sleep in, to live in, the tents, you know. With little cots. Cots and tents and we building those cots and tents. A little bit food, a little bit food came in from the Jewish people from Cypress. You know, they would bring us a little vegetables, we cooked a little with watery soup, a little piece of bread. Very, very, just to keep you alive, you know, this is how it was. We stayed there for three months. Three months. And I am pregnant. How a child can be born normal after all I'd been though in that pregnancy? No, I haven't seen a glass of milk in all my pregnancy. I hadn't seen an egg in all my pregnancy. I hadn't seen meat or water in all my pregnancy. Just a little piece of bread and some watery soup. That was it. But since I was pregnant, we were the first people to leave Cypress. And we left Cypress and we came to Israel. And we came to Israel and they put us into a Beit Olim, you know. But they were wonderful, the people there in the Beit Olim were wonderful to us. They knew what we'd been through. They fed us the best of food. The best of foods. While our accommodations weren't the best, we were ten women in one room. And the men were ten men in another room, you know. We were all either pregnant or they had the babies already. And until my Michael was born there, in the Beit Olim.

**INT:** When was he born there?

**RUTH:** In January, 1947. When you gave birth to him, he was the most beautiful fat baby, you know, that the women, the other women couldn't believe that after I had been through a journey like this, to have a baby like this. And they had little pitskelech babies, that they had plenty of everything in Israel at that time, you know. And me, going through a pregnancy like this, it looks

like he must have taken out everything out of me. And he was born the most beautiful baby, you know. A chubby baby. He's still chubby. Healthy, healthy and big and beautiful.

**INT:** You must have been very relieved.

**RUTH:** Yeah, it was a miracle.

**INT:** Were you worried all those months when you were pregnant? What was that like?

**RUTH:** Yeah. Well, what am I going to give birth to? A friend of mine was pregnant the same time as I am. Her baby did not survive. It was born, but it died right away. And she was told it's from... from all this that she had been through, through all her pregnancy. Then when he was about, I think, six weeks old or something, three weeks, I don't remember how old he was, a couple of weeks, you know, we got those little rooms.

**INT:** So then you went to Holon.

**RUTH:** Yeah.

**INT:** To Holon.

**RUTH:** To Holon. I'll never forget when I went into that little room and I stood there and looked at that little room and I said to myself, "Oh, how beautiful." It was so beautiful to have a home, to have a room. (Voice is shaky) I thought that it's a palace. That's how beautiful it was. (Crying) And soon after so you have to look for work in order to live. And that time you could buy anything you wanted in Israel. There was plenty of everything, you know. There was no money. My husband, he's a tailor. Tailoring is no profession. They don't need tailors in Israel. They didn't need a tailor in Israel. So he went looking for other jobs, binyan, you know, building buildings. He wasn't meant for buildings. He was a delicate boy with delicate hands but we had no choice. He went to buildings. He slept overnight to watch that nobody should steal the buildings, you know.

**INT:** Like a guard?

**RUTH:** Like a guard. All kinds of jobs he had. Until you turned around. He was one of the first people to take into the Tzava. He was young. How old was he then? About twenty-four. Twenty-four years old. You know, he was one of the first boys to be drafted and I was left with a little baby alone. That was terrible. And war, war, war (pause) war. I kept on asking G-d, when is it going to end? When is this (pause) suffering gone?

**INT:** So the war again.

**RUTH:** It seemed like (pause) there's no end. (Crying) The baby gets sick with the croup, the doctors don't want to come because they are afraid to walk because there was shooting right in front of the window. The things went by, you know. I had a friend, so she said to me, "You come over to the house and I will give you a couple of eggs for your baby." So I leave the baby with my neighbor and I walked to her house. On the way back, the shrapnel were going like this in

front of my eyes, like this they going. It was a miracle I didn't get killed, going for the couple of eggs for my baby. Right away there will be no water, there's no food, and there's no anything. And if there was an egg, it's just for the baby. And if there's a glass of milk, it's just for the baby, you know, not G-d forbid anything for me. And it was terrible to be again alone and again alone with a baby. And he's away and I don't know if he's alive. There was no telephone, you know. You couldn't get in touch with nobody. You know, you heard, oh, her husband was killed. Oh, her husband is already killed. What about... where's mine? When we were in Jerusalem he was in Yaffo, one of the first soldiers to liberate Yaffo. And I never knew if he's dead or alive. That's all I wanted is to see him alive. I didn't want anything, believe me. And then my family was good to me. You know, my family was good to me. From Argentina they would send a few dollars once in a while, a package of food, some clothes. So that was a lot of help. My sister from America, she would send some old clothes. That was fine. They baby some clothes, a few things to eat, a few dollars once in a while because the government had no money to pay us women. They gave us twenty pounds a month. You couldn't buy anything for that twenty pounds. It didn't... didn't even last for one week to eat, never mind a month. And then the money, the first you were supposed to get the twenty pounds, you didn't get it because the money wasn't in yet. My sister wrote from America, she wrote to us that if we want to come, if we want to come to America, if we want to come to America. By then we already said yes. We already said yes. (End of tape 2, side 2)

**INT:** ...six years, 1953.

**RUTH:** Yeah, right. August 1953, we arrived.

**INT:** How did you feel about leaving Israel? I know you were ready to leave. Life wasn't that good.

**RUTH:** Oh, oh, I felt bad. I wished I could make a life for myself in Israel. I wished. There was no way. There was no way. I wished.

**INT:** A lot of people were leaving at that time.

**RUTH:** Yeah, Bella did the same time as us, came a month later. A lot of people were leaving. Whoever had a chance, you know, had a family. I wished my husband could find a job. I could live... make a life for myself. But it just didn't look like it. We had not family again. My husband is the only person on this world. We didn't know anybody, nobody knew us in Israel and we just couldn't survive. I did not want to leave, believe me. I loved Israel. I loved it there because of the Jewishness, to bring up a child in a Jewish country with the Jews, that was worth a million. My sister kept saying in the letters, "You should come, you should come, you should come." And (pause) so here we are. (Tearful)

**INT:** Well, that took a lot of courage, though, to make another move.

**RUTH:** Another move.

**INT:** Another change, another unknown.

**RUTH:** But then my aunt came from Mexico for a visit to Israel. She was the first relative that came. She says, "What have you got here?" I told her. I said, "I don't want to leave, you know. I don't want to go to America. What's there?" She said to me, "What are you afraid of leaving? You haven't got anything. What are you afraid of leaving?" You know, it was Israel. It was my country I left. I left my country, my people. (Tearful) She said, "Go." I waited for her to come to tell me what to do because I couldn't make up my mind. I didn't know what to do. So I said, when she comes, she visited my sister here, you know, she used to come a lot to America, my sister used to go to Mexico. She says she thought that I should leave. So we come here and my sister takes us in to her house and the good thing was that my husband found a job right away. We came on Saturday. Monday, one of my sister's friends, we are still friends with these people, he takes him up to a factory and they sort of like they grab him.

**INT:** His tailoring.

**RUTH:** Yeah, his tailoring, you know. He was young and handsome and full of life and he could work away. He could work and he loved his trade. He missed his trade all these years in Israel that he couldn't make a living from it and he loved it. And they hired him right away. So then that was good. We came with four dollars. My husband had four dollars in his pocket. Until we turn around, it was winter. Our child needed a coat. I needed a coat. We bought a piece of material, he made a coat for me, he made a coat for my Michael. We found a little apartment.

**INT:** Where was that?

**RUTH:** It was in a two family, in the attic rooms. It wasn't... it wasn't... I didn't like that apartment at all, but I had no choice. Never mind if there was an apartment for rent, you know, they wouldn't rent it to you because you were a refugee. You were a refugee. Where are you going to get the money to pay the rent? And you have a child. We couldn't find a place to live so we had no choice but to take this apartment. It was Jewish people owned this house. We moved up there. We lived there, I think, about six months and my husband comes home one day and he says that in the factory he got a promotion. They want him to be foreman on the floor and he will get a salary, not like by hour like he was working by the machine, but hourly, and he will make ninety dollars a week. Oh, my G-d, I'm going to be rich. Ninety dollars a week. (Laughs) So we went out and we rented a nice apartment, you know, a little more money. A nice apartment. But the apartment was very nice, was wonderful the kids to play outdoors. It was like a garden apartment, but very few Jews lived there. There were all non-Jewish people. All the friends of my sons were non-Jewish. You had to go... you had to go to Hebrew school. It was away from the city. It was in West Springfield. It was away from the city, no synagogue, no Hebrew school. I had to move. I did not want to move because it was a lovely little apartment, a little apartment but it was cute. It was nice and we bought a little furniture and fixed it up nice, but that was the only reason we had to move away from there. So we moved into a two family house. And the people that owned it were Jewish people and it was close to Kadima Synagogue and it was close to Hebrew school. So this is the only reason why I made a change.

**INT:** What was it like for you to make all these changes? Here, it's not even ten years, right, after the war ends.

**RUTH:** Yeah.

**INT:** Look what your life has already brought you. How do you think you and Abram made those decisions? These are important decisions that you made.

**RUTH:** We did. We did. We were young. We were so young. We were in our twenties. And when we came to the United States, I was twenty-seven and Abram was thirty-three. You know, we were young people. I guess for young people it's different. I couldn't do it now. I couldn't do it now. When you are young it's a different, you don't think that far ahead. You make decisions very fast and you do things very fast. It's a different type of life when you're young. Now, my G-d. But when I think back I said, "How did I do it? How did I manage? How did I live? How did I do?" It's just because you are young and life teaches you. Life teaches you. You learn. You learn. You learn the hard way. And then my Danny was getting older.

**INT:** When was Danny born?

**RUTH:** Danny was born in that little apartment in West Springfield. He was about two and a half years old when I moved out from there. And then when he got to be about seven I started looking for a job myself. (Pause) Maybe seven, I guess. And I went to look for a job and it wasn't easy for me to find a job. My English wasn't that good. I didn't have the - how do you say - the courage. At that time a friend of mine said to me, "Go into Forbis and Wallace, to a department store, and fill out an application." She thought my English was good. She thought I can do it. That's what she thought. So I went in there and I'm sitting there waiting to fill out an application. I got cold feet and I said, "Oh, they're not going to hire me." I went home. I went home. So I took a job in the Jewish nursing home to cook in the kitchen, to cook. And I worked there about five years until we saved some money. It was a good paying job. I worked very hard, very hard, until we saved some money. We bought the house, to give a down payment, you know. And then when we lived here about two years I said, "That's enough." You know, that's enough. It's the work. It was getting hard on me. I couldn't do it anymore. I left it. I left this job and I went back to the same department store. (Laughs)

**INT:** You went back then?

**RUTH:** I went back to the same department store, you know, and they did hire me. And I loved it there.

**INT:** What kind of work did you do?

**RUTH:** I was a salesgirl in the dress department, in dressed. And I was dressed like a doll and I lost weights and I felt good about myself. It was just a beautiful job until they closed the store. That was a hundred years of business.

**INT:** When did they close the store?

**RUTH:** In 1975, I think. In '75 they closed the store and I worked there for six years. Oh, that was the greatest time of my life.



**INT:** Really? Why was that?

**RUTH:** Oh, there were people, nice people to work with, you know, and the woman in charge liked me and I liked her. And it was just my kind, my kind of work, you know, my kind of work that I liked. I liked waiting on people, seeing them putting on the pretty dresses, you know, trying to find them dresses that should make them look slimmer than they were (laughs), the slenderizing dresses, you know, until closing.

**INT:** So life felt good then?

**RUTH:** Good then. Those were the happiest years of my life were the six years that I worked there. I used to get up in the morning and dress, and go to the beauty parlor and have my hair done and put makeup on and it felt good. It felt real good to have a job like this, you know. It wasn't hard work. You were on your feet a whole day. To me, from all the work that I did in my life, this was a luxury. This was a play thing. Going to work was like I'm going out for a good time. I'm going shopping. I'm going for a good time. That was work to me, no other way, and too bad they closed the store. And then I went into another store for four years, to Lane Bryant, you know, also selling the larger sizes. And then I got sick and I couldn't work anymore and that was bad. Oh, that was bad, to take my job away and I couldn't work anymore. I went on disability and that wasn't good at all for me. I had no choice, no choice. I was sick, very sick, very sick. And that was it.

**INT:** And you fought again with that sickness.

**RUTH:** That sickness I fought again. I fought again. I did not believe I'm going to survive. I thought this is the end. Not many people do survive a sickness like this. Two operations in one year, with chemo, eight months on chemo, where do people survive something like this? I did not think I'm going to survive. I fought as hard, as much as I could and here I am. It's thirteen years and life changed. It wasn't, it wasn't the same anymore. And that's it. And now I just pray for my husband's health, my kids, myself, pray for everybody and go on with life.

**INT:** What are the things you worry about now?

**RUTH:** I just worry about my children, that's all. I worry about my children, my grandchildren.

**INT:** What worries you?

**RUTH:** Worries me my grandchildren should go on the right track. They should be people, nice people. My children should make a living, they should be able to support themselves. And us, me and my husband, are fine. We are fine. We don't need any luxury, don't need much. The little we have is enough. I just worry about my husband's health and about my health and we take every day as it comes. And then that's it. (Sighs)

**INT:** I have a lot more to ask you but maybe we should stop for today.

**RUTH:** What do you want to ask?

**INT:** Well, I think I have some questions about the kind of lessons to take from all of your experiences, the lessons you have given to your family about how to live life, a kind of philosophy of life it seems that you have really lived by.

**RUTH:** My kinds don't live, I mean they are not like us. This is a different generation. They had a home 'till they were grown people. I can't put my lone on them. It's not fair for them. They grew up and they have to live their life. I cannot tell them what to do. I do sometimes. I don't know if they listen or they don't. I don't know. I don't know if they did learn a lot from us. I don't think so.

**INT:** No?

**RUTH:** No.

**INT:** What makes you say that?

**RUTH:** 'Cause they don't live the life we did. We came from a different school, from a different world, from a different life, you know. It's not the same for them. And I wish on them a better life than mine. They shouldn't have to struggle. They shouldn't have to, G-d forbid, oh G-d please no, go through what I've been through in my life. And (pause) it's a different generation. It's an entirely different generation.

**INT:** What are your dreams for them when you think about that?

**RUTH:** To be well, to have a good life, to have a good life. That's all I want for them. That's all. Me and Abram would be just... we want health, that's all. We don't want anything else, really don't. We don't need luxury. Life has taught us that luxury is not important. I just want to have a home.

**INT:** A home.

**RUTH:** A home, a roof over my head, a home. You know, we're doing good. We're doing good. We don't long for anything. I have everything I want. I have everything I want. I have a roof over my head. It's all paid for. If we want to go someplace, we go. If you want to buy a dress, I buy a dress. I help my children as much as I can. I help my grandchildren as much as I can. They need more than us. We can get along with very little and it will be fine as long as we have our health. And just keep on going. Everyday... everyday is another day. And if G-d was good to me to get out from a sickness like this, you know, and be almost myself. (Laughs)

**INT:** Yes.

**RUTH:** Almost myself, you know, I go on with life. I drive, I go, I do. I volunteer at that center.

**INT:** I know you volunteer at the center.

**RUTH:** I volunteer at my shul. And just last week we had a luncheon. I helped out with the luncheon, you know. I like doing that. Again, I see people, I love people. And it gets me out of the house. I see people, I'm with people.

**INT:** I've always thought of you as a people person.

**RUTH:** People person. (Laughs) Yeah I do, I do. I go into the center and I help out there and everybody knows me, you know, and I know everybody. And it's good morning, Ruth, and how are you? And very friendly, very nice, very nice, yeah. And I do as much as I can. (Sigh)

**INT:** Maybe we'll stop for now. Thank you. (End of tape 3, side 1. Tape 3, side 2, blank)

**INT:** Today is Thursday, September 22nd.

**RUTH:** The 22nd.

**INT:** And this is the third meeting with Ruth Ackerman. We talked about the circumstances under which you were liberated. I remember that and we talked about some of your thoughts and feelings when you were liberated. I wanted to ask you to talk a bit about how you think you coped with the knowledge that you had about the deaths of the people that you loved. How did you cope with that after the war or over these past few years? How have you... how do you cope now even? And I know it's hard.

**RUTH:** They are in your mind. They are in your mind, especially when it comes to Yiskor, Yomtov. It's in your mind. You don't forget them. You can't. And you think a lot about them. The horror, the terrible death they had. They didn't hurt anybody. They were good people, honest people, and why did they deserve a death like this? You ask a question, you get no answer. You get no answer.

**INT:** But that's part of what you were telling me in one of our other talks about your feelings of bitterness and wanting to ask G-d why.

**RUTH:** Why.

**INT:** Yeah.

**RUTH:** Why. Again, there's no answer. You can ask and ask over and over again, you get no answer.

**INT:** Do you feel like you had the chance to mourn? Was there... was there an opportunity to do that? I mean you said before that the people never asked, nobody wanted to know.

**RUTH:** Yeah, well, you mourn inside your body, just by yourself. My aunt came from Mexico. She did not want to stay with me because she was afraid that I will tell her about her sisters, what happened to her sisters. She did not want to hear. So I said to my sister, "Tell Tante Chanecha she can come visit with me, stay with me. I will not tell her anything. If she doesn't want to hear then I won't tell her anything." And that was the end of it. Now I received a letter from Mexico

from her granddaughter. She is a Yiddish teacher in Mexico City and she went with a group of teachers to Poland and she has been to the concentration camps and she sort of like woke up, woke up. She writes me a letter I should tell her about the family, about her grandmother's family. I said to her, "I can't tell you in a letter. It's... it's so impossible to tell you all in a letter." I told her just a few things about her grandmother's sister and her three beautiful sons, seeing her beautiful husband. She was gorgeous and just a little bit of it. I've been twice in Mexico and not once did somebody ask me anything. This same girl didn't ask anything. Now all of a sudden she wants to know. So I wrote her back, just a little, what can you write in a letter and that was it. That was it.

**INT:** And that was true also for other members of your family, right? You felt that people weren't asked you?

**RUTH:** No. Nobody asked. Nobody wanted to know. It's too... it's too emotional to listen. I don't know. I don't know. Like Elie Wiesel said, "You have to talk about it. You have to tell what happened." I said, "Who are we going to tell it to if nobody wants to listen? We talk, talk, talk, to who?" You need somebody to want to know, to want to listen to it. They don't want to listen so I don't. I didn't open my mouth in all the years, in all the years.

**INT:** You kept that all inside?

**RUTH:** All inside. All inside.

**INT:** What part do you think the war and the Holocaust played for your children, let's say? What do you think they were thinking or knew or what were their interests? How did you deal with the war with your children would you say?

**RUTH:** You tried to be as normal as possible. You try to be a mother and you don't dwell on it from morning to night. You go on with your life, you know, with everyday life. You can't let it out on your children or your husband or your family. They are not to blame, you know. You can't let it out on them. You keep it inside. It tears you to pieces when you keep it inside. And that's... that's it.

**INT:** How do you think your children look at your war experiences? If I were to ask them, what do you think they would say about how they think about it?

**RUTH:** That they feel sorry when they look at me. You know, like is it true. I can tell in their eyes how sorry they are. Mit such a rachmonus, you know. That's all. They feel sorry for me. But I'll always try to be a mother and as normal as possible. I didn't talk about it from morning till night. Once in a while I would put in a couple of words. And, (pause), we go on with life. You can't live in the past. You cannot live in the past. You cannot dwell on the past. If not, you make yourself sick. You end up in a crazy house. You go on with life and you do the best you can with everyday. You can't put it out of your system, your mind. You can't. How many nights, you know, you lay in bed and that's all that comes back, it comes back to you. Nothing good. You don't think of anything good. You think of what happened and you think of this one, you think of that one, and where I went and how I did and the whole bit, the whole thing comes back

to you. You can't put it out of your mind completely, but like I said, you have to be normal. You have to be normal.

**INT:** You kind of live with those two.

**RUTH:** You like in between, you live in between.

**INT:** When you came to America and made that decision to come here, how did you deal with these two worlds, the new life in America and yet thinking about your past.

**RUTH:** It was bad. It was very, very bad. I really needed a psychiatrist then, but there was no money for one. I really needed a psychiatrist because I dreamt every night, every single night when I came to America. Didn't let me go, not one night it didn't leave me alone. And during the day I would cry and go to bed at night and dream again. And during the day I'd cry and I wasn't interested in anything. Nothing interested me. I was very bad, really very bad. If it would happen to me now I would run fast to a doctor. But then, you know, there was no money. Eventually, it sort of did let me go after a time. But I remember it, oh, it was so bad. It was so bad.

**INT:** You felt like you wanted to talk to someone?

**RUTH:** Yeah. I was a sick woman. I was really sick. Then a child came. That sort of made me feel a little happy. I wanted to have another child and my Danny was born. I was busy with him, with the household. And I lived a normal life. I lived a normal life. I stopped dreaming all the dreams of there. Oh, when it gets to you, it gets to you.

**INT:** Have those come back again?

**RUTH:** No.

**INT:** No?

**RUTH:** No. Once in a while, you know, I will dream that there's another war. It's all over or now it's all over and I'll say to myself, "Well then, I was young. I had no children to worry about. Now what am I going to do with my children?" (Laughing) You know, like they are little. You know, they are little all over again and where am I going to hide with them? What am I going to do with them, you know. Those are the dreams, you know, that I get back.

**INT:** I remember you told me about that a little bit after we met the first time, that you were worried you might have some... some of those dreams again.

**RUTH:** Yeah.

**INT:** But the dreams were about that children that you worried about.

**RUTH:** Yeah, the children, you know. I thought what am I going to do now? You know, then I was young. I had no children. I could do, I could run. The war happens all over again and here now I have children. Those are the dreams.

**INT:** So the worry is a problem.

**RUTH:** The worry, yeah.

**INT:** Do you think when you were raising your kids that you worried about them in a way that was different from other parents? I mean, do you think that some of that had an impact on how you worried about them? Would you say you worried?

**RUTH:** Like every other mother, like every mother worries about her kids. I don't think I did it differently.

**INT:** When you think about the balancing these memories but also the need to have a normal life which you did, and you created it for yourself and your family. What about the balance between having fun and working, for example? Do you think you found that balance in your life? Were you able to?

**RUTH:** Yeah, I guess I did, you know. Not much, you know. I worked hard. I came home, I was tired. There was a house to take care of, kids to take care of. But we did go out. There was a time, there were lots of Bar Mitzvahs and parties and I was always a member of the Jewish Community Center and I was always a member of the synagogue. We did... we did go out, not too often but once in a while, yeah. I felt that I needed this. I needed this very badly, to get dressed and to go out to see people. That was... that was important to me. If not... if not, you can even crack up, you know. You can crack up very easily. Yeah, you just have one mind.

**INT:** What do you mean?

**RUTH:** You have only one mind and you try the best to deal with life, the best as possible.

**INT:** Well, when you think back on your life now, what would you consider the successes in your life and what would you consider things you would have liked to do differently? Well, let's talk about the successes first.

**RUTH:** What I feel what I missed out?

**INT:** No, what do you feel has been successful about your life, that you feel good about it?

**RUTH:** When my kids were born and they had they Bar Mitzvahs. We traveled quite a bit, you know. We've been to Mexico twice. We've been to Argentina twice. We've been to Israel and that was good.

**INT:** And other things you feel bad about that you did, things you would have wanted to do differently?

**RUTH:** What would I want to do differently? (Pause) There are regrets in life like everybody else has regrets. I should have done this way, I should have done that way, you know. But you can't dwell on it. You say that's how it was bashert. That's how it was and you cannot live with regrets. You go on with life and you made the best of everyday and you thank G-d for what you have. Thank G-d I have my husband, I have my kids, I have a roof over my head. I have everything I want. I am not missing anything from my life. I don't need the minks. I don't need luxuries or jewelry. I don't need this. That's not important to me. I want to have nachas from my kids. I want us to be well and pray to G-d he should keep us like this for many more years to come, that's all. But I am not missing anything. There's nothing that I want that I don't have. I have everything I want. The little bit that I have I am content.

**INT:** That's wonderful. That's wonderful.

**RUTH:** Don't need much. Those material things are not important to me, not after what I've been through in life, you know. That's not important.

**INT:** Do you think that's something that your kids learned from you too? Do you think that or not, or how does that work?

**RUTH:** One did. The younger one did. The older one, (pauses) no.

**INT:** He's different?

**RUTH:** He's different. He's different, entirely different. You know, one parent has two children and a parent can have ten children, each one will be different. So my two boys are different. They are different.

**INT:** What about with the two boys, how do you think they see the Holocaust, or do you... do they think it's important to read about it or to see films or have they decided they'd rather not?

**RUTH:** I don't... I think they'd rather not.

**INT:** They'd rather not.

**RUTH:** I think that it's upsetting. It's upsetting. It's sad. It's upsetting.

**INT:** For them.

**RUTH:** For them.

**INT:** And that's some of what you found with other relatives. And do you think society in general, when you think about society's interest in this?

**RUTH:** I have friends and I have neighbors and nobody, none of them ever, ever asked me a question. They are not interested. They don't want to get upset. They don't even want to be sad. They only want to listen to happy stories. That's it. That's it. They're not interested. They're not

interested, so they're not interested. I'm not going to tell somebody something that they are not interested in. They don't want to hear, they don't want to listen, they don't care.

**INT:** That's lonely, then. It feels like there's no support then for that experience.

**RUTH:** Yeah, yeah.

**INT:** Unless, when you had this club Hatikvah, did people talk then?

**RUTH:** More, more yeah. We would talk with one another, you know, and tell each other their story, their life story. A lot of people would talk about it constantly and the others didn't even open their mouths. It all depended on the individual. I knew one woman and every time she would meet somebody she says, "What concentration camp were you in?" That was her first question, you know. And if the woman said she was wherever she was, oh yeah, she was there and she knew all about it and the whole bit. And others didn't say anything. They didn't want to talk about it. They wanted to block it out from their minds, but you can't, you can't, you know, just block it out. It's with you. It stays with you for the rest of your life. You can't just forget it. How can you? How can you?

**INT:** You know what I wonder, Rutka, given that you're the kind of person that you can't forget, yet you've built a life. You're an energetic woman who gives to the world and has given to your community and all of that. How do you think you did it? I mean, I guess what I'm trying to learn is how did you cope with all those hardships and yet manage to go on? How do you think, how do you understand that?

**RUTH:** I don't know. I don't know.

**INT:** Because it's quite remarkable.

**RUTH:** I don't know myself. I don't know myself. You make up your mind that you have to go on with your life and you have to build a life for yourself. You have to work. We worked hard, the two of us. We were never spenders. We never borrowed. We never had any charge, Master charge or whatever, just to go buy. We never paid any interest or anything. We had so much money, this is for how much money we bought a car. Never bought on payments, never paid any interest, you know. And we never spent our money foolishly and that's how we... we saved one dollar to the next thinking we need to buy a home, a home. This is what I really wanted in life the most was a home to call my home, my home, after all I've been homeless, to have a home. That was very important to me. So like I said, we worked, we saved, we didn't spend our money foolishly. We had enough money to put a down payment, a good down payment so the mortgage and the taxes wouldn't eat us up. And we're happy about that. We are happy about that. And the years went by. We came in 1953, forty-one years we've been in this country, forty-one years. I came '53. Forty-one years.

**INT:** And you did make a home for yourself.



**RUTH:** Yeah, I did and I'm very happy about it. But now we're getting older and it's hard. It's hard to keep a house. But we'll see what life has in store for us. We'll see another few years what's going to be.

**INT:** I'd like to ask you some questions that have to do more generally with your beliefs and attitudes. When you think about yourself, would you think of yourself as a hopeful person or as a more pessimistic person?

**RUTH:** What's pessimistic?

**INT:** Pessimistic is when you think bad things are going to happen rather than hopeful, good things.

**RUTH:** No, no. No, I don't think like that. I am hopeful. I am a fighter. I am a fighter and a hopeful person. You know, if today isn't that good, tomorrow will be better. It's got to be better.

**INT:** That's a good philosophy to have.

**RUTH:** I told my doctor, "Doctor, I am a fighter. I fought all my life. I fought. I fought to survive Hitler. I survived Hitler. I will survive cancer too." And I did. And I did.

**INT:** You know, I wanted to know if you would help me out with this. This is a kind of a questionnaire that asks specifically about how people cope and there are a few questions there that I would ask you and then you would respond to this by telling me if you did not do this at all, if you did this a little bit, if you did this a medium amount or if you did this a lot. I'll give you an example. Let's think about your illness, which I know must have been a very stressful event in your life. And then if you thought about when you found out you had the cancer. If I were to ask you, I tried to grow as a person as a result of the experience, would you say I did do this or did I not do that. Or if I were to ask you, I got upset and let my emotions out when I experienced this, then I would ask you to let me know whether you did not do this at all, whether you did that a little bit, a medium amount or you did it a lot. We're trying to understand that. So would it be all right if I went through those questions so then you could tell me?

**RUTH:** Yeah, I don't know. I don't know how.

**INT:** We'll see how it goes. We'll try it.

**RUTH:** It's hard questions.

**INT:** Yeah, I know, but it makes you think about some things.

**RUTH:** (Laughs) Yeah, hard questions. I never heard such questions.

**INT:** Let's try it. Let's see if it works or not. For example-

**RUTH:** Like for example-

**INT:** Let's say, if you think about your illness and how you responded to that, would you say that as a result of that you tried to grow as a person, as a result of that experience?

**RUTH:** Oh yes, as a person. Well (pause) I took life as it came every day. I lived for the day, and every morning I woke up and I saw the sun shining, that was a beautiful morning, that was a beautiful day, you know.

**INT:** Yes.

**RUTH:** That's it.

**INT:** That's a good answer.

**RUTH:** That's it, yeah.

**INT:** And usually, if you have a stressful event, is that what you'll try to do, try to do day by day?

**RUTH:** Day by day, day by day. You go day by day. You wake up in the morning, you look out till you see the sun shining, that's a beautiful day and you thank G-d you're not in a hospital. You thank G-d they are not cutting you up again. That's wonderful.

**INT:** Yes, or another question. When you knew about your illness, do you turn to work or other substitute activities to take your mind off things? Did you do that a lot, or a little bit or not at all?

**RUTH:** I couldn't do that a lot, you know, cause I wasn't well. It was bad. It was bad. It was very bad. But there is nothing you can do. You have to take... you have to take it just as it comes. You have no other choice. You have no other way out, you know. I felt sorry for myself. Why did it happen to me? But I sort of hoped. One day I would hope, the next day I would give up. Then I would fight again, and then give up again and it was tough. It was very, very tough, very bad.

**INT:** Would you try to get advice from someone about what to do? Was that something that you would do normally?

**RUTH:** What... what kind of advice can somebody give you? What can they say? Nobody can say. What is there to say? You just hope. I said to my doctor, "I want to die. I can't take the chemo anymore, you know. Just leave me alone." No, no, no, no. Two more weeks, three more weeks, and that's how I pushed the days and the weeks and the months and they days and the weeks and the months. I just wanted it behind me, looked forward, looked forward to another day, to another day until I was through with it. And it took a lot out of me. (End of tape 4, side 1)

**INT:** How about if I just go through this list and you tell me how, in thinking about that situation, I admitted to myself that I couldn't deal with it and quit trying. Do you do that a little bit, sometimes?

**RUTH:** Yeah. Like I said, you know, like one day I gave up and the next day I fought again.

**INT:** Right, back and forth.

**RUTH:** Back and forth cause every day was another day.

**INT:** Yeah. I restrained myself from doing anything too quickly. Did you sort of try to not make a quick decision, then think about things or remember?

**RUTH:** There were no decisions to make. What was there to make? You were under doctor's care. He was a good doctor. He did everything possible he could and he brought me back to myself, sort of. But every six months I go to the doctor. Monday is my appointment. So before I go, I get very nervous, you know. I say to myself, "What is he going to tell me now? What is he going to tell me now?" So after I go in and he says, "You're fine. Go home. I'll see you in six months," I sad, "Thank you, dear G-d. I won't see him in six months." I used to see him every day, every other day, three times a week, twice a week. And now he tells me to come only once, once in six months.

**INT:** He sends you home with a-

**RUTH:** Yeah.

**INT:** With a good report.

**RUTH:** Yeah. He says, "Go home. I'll see you in six months." And that's wonderful.

**INT:** Sure it is.

**RUTH:** It is. I said, "Doctor, do you remember how often I used to come to your office?" He said, "I do, I do." Every day, every other day, two, three times a week, three times. (Sighs) Oh, I was so sick. I was so sick.

**INT:** But you are a fighter.

**RUTH:** I don't know. I am a fighter.

**INT:** And probably you've been that way about other things too.

**RUTH:** That's right, you know. Even during the war, I didn't give it up. I just kept on fighting. In order to go on with life you have to be a fighter. If you are not a fighter and you give in, so you lost everything. You lose everything in life. You have nothing.

**INT:** So you learn to live with it and then you move on.

**RUTH:** I couldn't talk about it then, you know. I couldn't talk about it then. Now I can talk about it. Now I can. Then I couldn't. I couldn't.

**INT:** While you were going through it.

**RUTH:** Yeah, while I was going I couldn't talk about it. I would break down. But now I can. Now I talk about it.

**INT:** So people did not know then?

**RUTH:** Yeah, people did know but not in details. They knew that I am sick, that I was operated, that I came home. And the operations were not as bad as the chemo was. Oy! That was the worst eight months. Oh G-d, if I outlived this, I'll outlive everything, eight months. No day and no night, no day and no night. It was horrible.

**INT:** I'm sure and you felt that was unfair, rightfully so.

**RUTH:** Again you ask a question why.

**INT:** Yes. How do you think about G-d when those things happen? What happens with G-d?

**RUTH:** No, I'm not bitter anymore. I'm not mad. I'm not bitter. What happened, happened, you know. It was nothing. I don't blame anybody for nothing. Whatever happens, happens, and nobody to blame.

**INT:** If you still have a little bit of koyech (strength), these are questions that have to do with Jewish identity and I know we've talked about that a lot, but we're trying to get some idea about the role that Jewish identity played in people's lives. So I'm going to ask you a question and you can tell me whether you agree or disagree with these, okay? For example, I'm asking you about being Jewish and these are the thoughts that might come to mind. I am proud to be a Jew. Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree?

**RUTH:** Of being a Jew?

**INT:** Yeah.

**RUTH:** I am proud to be a Jew.

**INT:** I know you are. So you agree, you agree with that. Strongly?

**RUTH:** Yeah, sure. Very strongly, yes.

**INT:** I feel that I am personally connected to Jewish history, one link of the chain that extends for over 5000 years. Do you agree?

**RUTH:** Yeah.

**INT:** Jews have an especially rich and distinctive history. Strongly agree, agree?

**RUTH:** They sure did. Yeah.

**INT:** Being Jewish is so much a part of me apart from Jewish traditions and customs I couldn't stop being Jewish.

**RUTH:** No, I couldn't stop being Jewish.

**INT:** I remember you told me about that even after the war when other girls were wearing-

**RUTH:** Yeah, the crosses.

**INT:** For me, Jewish involvement is a way of connecting with my family's past.

**RUTH:** Yes, it is.

**INT:** I am committed to being Jewish but Jews shouldn't publicly display their differences from other Americans. Do you agree or disagree with that?

**RUTH:** Yeah, I agree.

**INT:** I feel there is something about me that non-Jews could never understand.

**RUTH:** True.

**INT:** When you think of what it means to be a Jew in America, would you say that it means being a member of a religious group, an ethnic group, a cultural group, a race, or all of those?

**RUTH:** I guess so. I don't know.

**INT:** When you think about what it means to be a Jew in America, is it that we're a religious group or we are also a group that has a special culture?

**RUTH:** We do have a special culture.

**INT:** A special culture.

**RUTH:** Yeah.

**INT:** Okay, so and a special religion, would you say that?

**RUTH:** Yeah, both.

**INT:** Okay, that's fine. That's good. How important would you say that being Jewish is in your life, very important, somewhat important, not very important, not at all?

**RUTH:** Oh yes, it's important.

**INT:** Do you agree or disagree with the following statement. Anti-Semitism is a serious problem in the United States today. Do you agree or do you... Strongly? Do you feel that?

**RUTH:** Yeah, oh yeah.

**INT:** What about the following statement. When it comes to a crises, Jews can only depend on other Jews. Do you agree with that?

**RUTH:** Sure. Sure. Can't depend on the goyim, that's for sure, not after what I've been through.

**INT:** Do you agree or disagree with the following statement, that being a good Jew means having values of social justice and concern for poor people and disadvantaged.

**RUTH:** Yeah. Yeah, I've been a good Jew. That's important. A good person.

**INT:** Do you agree or disagree with the following statement. Being a good Jew means having a personal commitment to Jewish religious beliefs. Do you think you need to have that?

**RUTH:** Yeah, yeah.

**INT:** Somewhat agree?

**RUTH:** Um.

**INT:** When you think about the Chumash, you know, about the Torah, which of these statements comes closest to how you feel? And maybe you can't choose one of these, so that's okay. Either that the Torah is an ancient book of history that's recorded by man or that you think the Torah is the actual word of G-d, or that not everything in the Torah should be taken literally.

**RUTH:** Oh, I don't know this, in the middle-

**INT:** That's it's the actual word of G-d?

**RUTH:** Yeah.

**INT:** Do you agree or disagree with this statement. A Jew's moral behavior should be guided by the Jewish religion. How you behave is a moral issue. Should that be guided by the Jewish religion? Do you agree with that or somewhat disagree?

**RUTH:** Somewhat disagree. You know, you can't live with G-d and with the Torah, you know, you can't live with it constantly.

**INT:** Well, being a Jew is separate from that.

**RUTH:** Yeah. Yeah.

**INT:** Do you agree or disagree with this statement. Jews have a special responsibility for one another no matter where in the world they live.

**RUTH:** They sure do, yeah.

**INT:** In your opinion, how important is it for a Jew to have a Jewish education? Very important?

**RUTH:** Very important.

**INT:** Very important. Do you agree or disagree with the following. Jewish religious practices are not essential for Judaism to flourish. Somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree?

**RUTH:** What is it? I didn't get it.

**INT:** It means is it necessary for Jews to practice religious practices or can there be Judaism without that do you think?

**RUTH:** I don't know. I don't know. It should be in the middle, you know, in the middle. Not too much of being ultra religious and not being a mensch, you know what I mean?

**INT:** Yes. Yes.

**RUTH:** A mensch is more important.

**INT:** I understand what you mean exactly. Hypothetically, if your... let's say if your child were considering marrying a non-Jewish person, would you support or oppose the marriage?

**RUTH:** I would oppose as much as I could.

**INT:** If your child married a non-Jew, how would you relate to the marriage? Would you be neutral, would you accept it with reservations, would you support it, would you oppose it?

**RUTH:** No, I would never accept it. What kind of... what choice do I have? What choice do I have, lose a child? What choice do I have?

**INT:** So you have some.

**RUTH:** I would have to just... I don't know. It would tear me to pieces. I wouldn't sit shiva like they did years ago, you know. They sat shiva if a child intermarried. I wouldn't do that. I wouldn't disown my child.

**INT:** But you would prefer to see-

**RUTH:** Of course.

**INT:** In what ways did you try to instill a strong Jewish identity in your children? And you could just tell me the ones that apply. Religious practice, religious education?

**RUTH:** Religious education. They went to Hebrew school. On Saturday morning we were always in shul. The holidays we observed and that's about all.

**INT:** What about identification with Israel and with Zionist causes, would you say they knew about that?

**RUTH:** Yeah, oh sure.

**INT:** Did they go to summer camps or belong to any youth group?

**RUTH:** Yes, they did.

**INT:** To Jewish groups?

**RUTH:** Ummm.

**INT:** What about Holocaust remembrance activities when there would be anything like that? Were they involved at all or was that more for your-

**RUTH:** No, it wasn't for them. It wasn't them. It was me. Now it's different. You know, now you come to the Holocaust memorial, you see little children of all ages. When my children were growing up, you only saw the elderly people that came. The Holocaust survivors only came out and nobody else came.

**INT:** That's right. It didn't belong to everybody.

**RUTH:** It wasn't their problem. It was only my problem, you know. For the few refugees who came, we lit candles and that was the whole bit. That's it. But now, I think it's wonderful. Really every time I... I'm beside myself to see children of all ages come, young people with little children, with teenagers. It's beautiful, just beautiful to see it. That I live to see this, you know.

**INT:** That is a change, definitely.

**RUTH:** Yeah. Yeah.

**INT:** And it's become a part of Jewish education.

**RUTH:** Yeah. Ummm. It seems like everybody's involved. When... then nobody was involved, you know, nobody was involved. A few refugees came, they lit candles, a speech, said Kaddish, you know, and we went home. I remember one time they showed movies from the concentration camp. So the people ran out. They couldn't see it. You know, it was too upsetting, so they went out and there was hardly anybody left and that was it. It's Springfield I'm talking about. Now it's, you know, every time I go it's... I'm just delighted, delighted to see the public, wall to wall people with children of all ages. It's amazing.

**INT:** Well, it takes a generation.

**RUTH:** How times changed.

**INT:** What, it's fifty years now?



**RUTH:** Yeah, it's fifty years. Yeah, exactly fifty years. In April was fifty years for the ghetto uprising in Warsaw, fifty years.

**INT:** And this year there will be commemorations for the liberation. I know in Israel they're planning.

**RUTH:** For that should be 1945. Yeah, that's right, next year. Next year is the liberation, you know.

**INT:** I have just a few more questions for you.

**RUTH:** Yeah, go, you have no time. You're not teaching?

**INT:** I'm not teaching. I'm spending my whole year on this project so I'm not teaching this year.

**RUTH:** You're not teaching this year.

**INT:** It's very fortunate.

**RUTH:** Oh, that's good.

**INT:** So I'll be doing this.

**RUTH:** It's hard work. You're looking for people?

**INT:** Yeah.

**RUTH:** To interview?

**INT:** Do you think Abram would?

**RUTH:** Oh, I don't know. I don't know.

**INT:** I'm going to be translating these questions into Yiddish because there are other people in other places that don't know English. And I think with Abram, he's feel more comfortable in-

**RUTH:** Comfortable in Yiddish.

**INT:** I could even ask him the questions in English but he could tell what he wants to tell in Yiddish. That shouldn't stop him if he wants to. Maybe he'll think about it.

**RUTH:** He was in Siberia. Then he was drafted to the Polish army and he's been here and there.

**INT:** And he's your husband. He's part of the story too. Well, maybe he'll think about it.

**RUTH:** Yeah, maybe he will. Maybe he will.

**INT:** We don't have to rush.

**RUTH:** No. Okay, call, you'll call him up a day and talk to him.

**INT:** I'll bring the kids. I'll tell him I'm bringing the kids.

**RUTH:** Oh yeah, then you made his day when the kids are coming and here is the tape. You made his day.

**INT:** Let me ask you a few more questions and then we can stop. This is a question about your children, you know, your son has kids. How important is it for your children to raise their children with a strong Jewish identity, do you think? Not important, moderately important, very important.

**RUTH:** Oh yes, it is important. One of my grandsons graduated Hebrew high school. I would say he is orthodox. I hope he continues, you know, that's all I hope. And they both went to the Yeshiva, to the Yeshiva Academy when they were little and one graduated high school, the other one just public school.

**INT:** Did they go to a Jewish summer camp? Did they do that?

**RUTH:** Yeah, yeah. One year they went to the Catskills, you know, the Chassidic camp, the Chassidic camp. I remember going to see them there, you know, I went to visit them there. (Laughs)

**INT:** Well, what about their involvement, do you think, with Holocaust and rituals around remembering the Holocaust? Is that a part of their life, do you think?

**RUTH:** I don't think so.

**INT:** Not now.

**RUTH:** No, I don't think so.

**INT:** Did you want to say more about that?

**RUTH:** I think it should be education in schools.

**INT:** In the regular schools.

**RUTH:** In the regular schools, the kids should be educated.

**INT:** Not just in the Jewish schools but in the public schools.

**RUTH:** Yeah, in public schools.

**INT:** Yeah, in my day, that certainly wasn't the case.

**RUTH:** See?

**INT:** Not at all.

**RUTH:** Not at all.

**INT:** There was maybe a paragraph.

**RUTH:** But now, you know, with Schindler's List and there should be education and never mind in Jewish schools but in public schools, and people should be educated of what happened and how little do we know what can happen. How little did we know? How little did we know? Who would imagine, who would imagine in their wildest dreams things like this, a war? My parents used to talk about the first World War, how the business they did with the Germans, how they were the best of friends with them, you know. My father used to tell the stories and then that day when the Germans marched into Warsaw my father was on the street and when he came up to the house he said, "This is not the same German that I knew," he says. "In 1929, 1919, what I knew. That's not the same German." Just by seeing them marching in, he saw a bunch of murderers like you would see it, he would see it. He would see a bunch of murderers marching into us. It's not the same German. It wasn't. He was right. He was right. He knew what he was talking about.

**INT:** And who would have thought?

**RUTH:** Who would have thought it? But still, your human mind couldn't absorb thinking that anything like this can be. How can you? (Sigh) Oh, how lost the Jewish folk was. How lost we were. Nobody cared about us. Nobody cared, how lost we were. Like sheep we went to the slaughter. A lost folk, how you say it in English?

**INT:** People.

**RUTH:** A lost people. A lost people. We were lost people. Whatever they wanted to do with us, they did. Nobody stopped it. Nobody said anything. Nobody cared. Now I'm mad. America, other countries, other Jews, why didn't you do something? They were busy making money. They were busy getting rich, then the war came out. They didn't know, they didn't want to know, they didn't care, they didn't see. That's it. It wasn't their business. I met this morning. I picked a woman up, I took her to the center. So we started to talk. I don't remember what we started to talk. She comes from Austria, from Vienna. She says when the Germans came into Vienna, the first they wanted the Polish Jews. So the Vienna born people said, "Well, they don't want me, you know. I'm all right. I was born here in Vienna, you know. They want the Polish Jews, let them, let them do whatever they want. They don't want me." So they stopped with the Polish Jews, they came to the Vienna Jews. So this is what the woman was telling me and I said that's true. That didn't want me, they want you. Not me. But then when they were through with them they came to the Vienna born. They didn't care where they were born. If they were Jews they were Jews.

**INT:** If they were one quarter Jewish.

**RUTH:** If their grandfather was a Jew, you know, they were also in Vienna and Germany people were also assimilated. Maybe they had forgotten that they were ever Jews, so Hitler reminded them. He reminded them very well.

**INT:** Are there refugees from Germany here in the community?

**RUTH:** Oh yes, yes, quite a few, quite a few refugees. I mean they came in 1938.

**INT:** Right before.

**RUTH:** They came 1939, there was one man we know he was in Auschwitz. And he was in Auschwitz, he was playing in the band. I just saw him this morning in the center. And quite a few came through China.

**INT:** Yes, Shanghai.

**RUTH:** Shanghai, yeah. They came, and they came here to Springfield. Quite a few couples.

**INT:** But when you would get together in this group or the other refugees, you knew it was mainly with the other Polish Jews?

**RUTH:** Yeah, yeah.

**INT:** They were-?

**RUTH:** Germans and German Jews and Polish Jews don't click. They are more superior, they had the education. They know it all. I have nothing in common. But it's too bad, but that's how it is with this. They... you know, they look down on us, you know. I don't like anybody to look down on me. I'm just as good as you are. What a difference does it make, we are all human. We are all people. But they... they clicked together, the Germans Jews. They clicked together. They are very good friends to one another, you know. And they've been here for fifty years or whatever, you know. They know each other for fifty years. And the Polish Jews click together too.

**INT:** Yeah, that's how it happens. Should I go on?

**RUTH:** Yeah, what, what do you got?

**INT:** Let me see what else I have here. Some of this we've talked about already. Referring to Jewish religious denominations, do you consider yourself to be, and I'll go over this list, conservative, orthodox, something else, secular, cultural, orthodox/conservative?

**RUTH:** I wouldn't call myself orthodox because I ride on Shabbos, you know. I pick up the telephone on Shabbos. I cannot be orthodox. Can't.

**INT:** So something other than that. Could orthodox/conservative? Conservative?

**RUTH:** Yeah, I would say conservative.

**INT:** But you were raised-

**RUTH:** Yeah, orthodox.

**INT:** Orthodox. And your parents when you were growing up thought of themselves as orthodox?

**RUTH:** Orthodox, yes. Oh yes. Definitely. No other way.

**INT:** Currently, if you are a member of a synagogue, with which denomination is that synagogue? Kadima, right? Kadima is orthodox.

**RUTH:** Yeah, orthodox, yes. Yes.

**INT:** And how often do you personally attend any type of synagogue, temple or organized Jewish religious service, on special occasions, on the high-

**RUTH:** Special occasions.

**INT:** On high holidays, special occasions.

**RUTH:** Few times a year. Yeah, well Abram, Abram is every Shabbos.

**INT:** He goes every week.

**RUTH:** He goes every Shabbos to shul. I'm lazy. (Laughs)

**INT:** It's okay with me. (Laughs) Now you can tell me whether you sometimes do this, never do this, usually do it or do it all the time. Do you or your household observe the following practices. Do you light candles on Friday night?

**RUTH:** Yes.

**INT:** Do you say the blessing over wine on Friday night?

**RUTH:** Yes.

**INT:** A blessing over challah on Friday night? Do you refrain from... do you try not to spend money on Shabbos? You could say never, sometimes.

**RUTH:** Yeah. I mean it's no big expense, you know, to buy a challah. (Laughs)

**INT:** You travel in a car, you said, on Shabbos.

**RUTH:** Yes.

**INT:** Do you attend a Seder during Passover in your home or somewhere else?

**RUTH:** Yeah, in my home. Yeah.

**INT:** You read from the Hagaddah during the Seder?

**RUTH:** Um.

**INT:** Do you not eat chometz on Pesach?

**RUTH:** No, no.

**INT:** Do you buy kosher meat for your home?

**RUTH:** Yeah.

**INT:** Do you use separate dishes for meat and dairy?

**RUTH:** Yeah.

**INT:** Do you light Hanukkah candles?

**RUTH:** Yes.

**INT:** Do you have a Christmas tree?

**RUTH:** No.

**INT:** Do you hear the Megillah on Purim?

**RUTH:** Yes.

**INT:** Do you celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut this year?

**RUTH:** Um.

**INT:** Do you, if you're not prevented by health problems, do you fast on Yom Kippur?

**RUTH:** I can't fast.

**INT:** Because of health problems.

**RUTH:** Health problems.

**INT:** Okay. During the past twelve months, have you done any volunteer work yourself or as part of a group for a Jewish organization?

**RUTH:** Yeah, oh yeah.

**INT:** You do.

**RUTH:** Oh yeah.

**INT:** For the center.

**RUTH:** For the center, for the synagogue.

**INT:** About how many hours in an average month do you spend, would you say, in these volunteer activities?

**RUTH:** Four. Every week four hours at the center. So that's twelve, twenty-four, and then in the synagogue I would say about four hours a month, you know, or something like that. And whenever they call me, you know, from the center they need to work something here, they need people to do work, I never say no.

**INT:** You're always there.

**RUTH:** Yeah, I'm always there. They know that, yeah. They say, you never say no. (End of tape 4, side 2)

**INT:** The 22nd of September. How many Jewish organizations other than a synagogue or temple do you belong to? Any others?

**RUTH:** Jewish Community Center, Jewish War Veterans, Amit Women.

**INT:** And if you belong to a synagogue, have you ever served as an officer or on the board or on a committee?

**RUTH:** No.

**INT:** Do you belong to an organization? Have you ever served as an officer on the board or on a committee?

**RUTH:** No.

**INT:** In the past year, did you and/or other members of your household contribute or give gifts to Jewish philanthropies, charities, causes or organizations?

**RUTH:** Yeah.

**INT:** Do you read any Jewish periodicals, newspapers or magazines?

**RUTH:** Abram gets the Post, the Jerusalem Post. Yeah, he gets that.

**INT:** The Jerusalem Post. How many times have you been to Israel? You lived there.

**RUTH:** We lived there and I was there only once.

**INT:** Has anyone else in your household ever been to Israel?

**RUTH:** My son, my daughter-in-law.

**INT:** How emotionally attached are you to Israel? Would you say extremely attached?

**RUTH:** Extremely attached.

**INT:** Among the people you consider your closest friends, would you say that none are Jewish, few are Jewish, some are Jewish, most are Jewish or almost all are Jewish?

**RUTH:** Almost all are Jewish.

**INT:** We're almost... we're getting there. We're almost done. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement. This has to do with political lobbying, you know, where people will go to Congress or go to politicians and ask them to do something special, to do that in support of Jewish causes is an important right for American Jews. Do you agree with that?

**RUTH:** Yeah, I sure do.

**INT:** Do you agree or disagree with the following statement. Separation of church and state is an important constitutional right. That means things that are religious should be separate from politics. Do you agree?

**RUTH:** Yeah. Sure.

**INT:** Somewhat agree. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement. Under no circumstances should the government give any support to religious educational institutions including textbooks, transportation.

**RUTH:** Yeah.

**INT:** You agree with that or-

**RUTH:** They should help out the religious schools. They should help out the Catholic schools. They should help out the Jewish schools.

**INT:** Okay, all right. That's fine. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement. It is the government's obligation to support the poor through a welfare program. Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree.

**RUTH:** They should help where it's necessary.



**INT:** Okay. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement. Abortion should be legal as it is now, allowing a woman to make her own decision in consultation with her family, rabbi and others?

**RUTH:** Her own decision.

**INT:** Her own decision. Okay. In your opinion, what proportion of each of the following groups in the U.S. is anti-Semitic. Here's what I mean by that. I'm going to list the groups and you tell me if you think most of these people are anti-Semitic. Big business, for example, the big corporations. Do you think most, many, some, few or you're not sure about whether they are anti-Semitic?

**RUTH:** I don't know. I'm not sure.

**INT:** Okay. Union leaders?

**RUTH:** I don't know. I'm not sure.

**INT:** Hispanics.

**RUTH:** I'm not sure. In every group there are some, but you can't say all.

**INT:** Right. So in some groups.

**RUTH:** Yeah, yeah.

**INT:** For example blacks, among blacks.

**RUTH:** The same, yeah.

**INT:** Democrats, Republicans.

**RUTH:** Yeah.

**INT:** All of them. Okay, liberals, conservatives, okay. Do you favor or oppose giving preference in hiring to each of the following groups. Here's what I mean. Do you, would you be in favor of let's say if a person who was disabled, handicapped, would come, would you be in favor of giving them preference?

**RUTH:** Yes. Yes, sure.

**INT:** What about for women?

**RUTH:** Yeah.

**INT:** For blacks?

**RUTH:** Sure, yeah, for everybody.

**INT:** For everybody? Hispanics?

**RUTH:** Yeah.

**INT:** For Jews?

**RUTH:** Um.

**INT:** For Asians? This is the last... last page. Now I don't know how you would think, remember this, but when you were growing up if you talked about politics at home, what, I don't know if you did or not, but what would you have thought your father's stand would have been on politics? Would he have been liberal, or middle of the road or a conservative thinker? Can you remember?

**RUTH:** He was a very orthodox man, and very Jewish and I don't think he was ever a politician.

**INT:** Yeah, right. I understand.

**RUTH:** (laughs) You know, his synagogue was important. His people were important but I don't remember any talking about politics.

**INT:** Right. It was different.

**RUTH:** Yeah, different. Yeah.

**INT:** Different issues. If you, would you, if you feel comfortable answering this, could you check off who you supported in the following list of presidential elections? Like if you remember this, in 1960, was it John Kennedy or Nixon?

**RUTH:** Kennedy.

**INT:** And in '64, Johnson or Goldwater?

**RUTH:** I don't remember. I think Johnson. I don't remember.

**INT:** Was it Humphrey or Nixon in '68?

**RUTH:** Nixon.

**INT:** Nixon. '72, McCarthy or Nixon?

**RUTH:** Nixon again, yeah.

**INT:** In '76, Jimmy Carter or Gerald Ford?

**RUTH:** Gerald Ford, I think.

**INT:** In 1980, Carter or Reagan?

**RUTH:** Reagan.

**INT:** '84, Mondale or Reagan?

**RUTH:** Reagan.

**INT:** In '88, Dukakis or George Bush?

**RUTH:** Dukakis.

**INT:** And in '92, Bill Clinton or George Bush?

**RUTH:** Bill Clinton.

**INT:** So which best describes your political identification now would you think, do you think of yourself as a Republican, as a Democrat?

**RUTH:** Democrat.

**INT:** Democrat. Conservative Democrat, moderate Democrat?

**RUTH:** Moderate. (Laughs) Moderate.

**INT:** And when you first started to vote also?

**RUTH:** Democrat, yeah.

**INT:** Has your party or political identification changed or do you feel the same?

**RUTH:** The same.

**INT:** Okay, those are the questions.

**RUTH:** That's it. Finished.

**INT:** Is there anything else?

**RUTH:** No, I don't think so. No. You have my whole life history.

**INT:** Well, some. I know there's more and I really appreciate this time.

**RUTH:** You're welcome. You're welcome. Anytime. Anytime. So that's it. Finished, okay.

**INT:** Well, what I'd like to do is I'm going to listen to these again. If anything else comes up for me, I'll call you.

**RUTH:** You'll call, you ask, yeah.

**INT:** If you have some more time. You know what I want to be sure to do? I want to give you those forms. Remember, you signed them and I told you you would have a copy about this so you would know.

**RUTH:** Um.

**INT:** This was that you agree to do this, and you are supposed to keep a copy and I keep a copy.

**RUTH:** Yeah. (End of tape 5, side 1)

Tape 6 is notes on the interview by the interviewer. They are typed separately.

**INT:** An interview with Ruth Ackerman on Friday, April Th. I wanted to finish some of the questions that we talked about during the hours we met because I listened to the tapes and there are just some incredible moment in the stories that you tell me and the things that you say about yourself, and I wanted to kind of get a little bit more of the fullness of the story. I have a question about how you explain to yourself your ability to make the life that you made. How do you explain it to yourself when you think about it that you were able to do what you did and continue what you did?

**RUTH:** For some reason, you know, a person goes on with life, you know. Every day is another day, you know, and make the best of every day. You don't cry to the world on the past. You can't do that. You think of today, you think of tomorrow. Yesterday comes back to you. You can't forget the past, you know, but you can't dwell all the time on the past, if not you can go crazy. And we are hard workers, you know, me and my husband, we are very hard workers. We don't spend our money foolishly. We always knew how to save a dollar and to put it away for tomorrow just in case we lose a job, just in case we cannot work anymore. We were always thinking of tomorrow too, not just today. And you go on with life. Now we're retired bit we are comfortable. We live nice and that's about all. I don't know what to tell you about it.

**INT:** I remember a story you told me about going to hear Elie Weisel and he talked about telling the story and you asked him, "But what if nobody wants to listen?"

**RUTH:** Listen.

**INT:** And I was wondering how you felt because we talked a bit about now an interest on the part of your nephew and maybe your niece who are writing and calling you and wanting now to know something about yesterday. But how did you feel when they didn't want to know? How did that make you feel?

**RUTH:** I was just shut out. I was shut out. Nobody wanted to listen. Nobody wanted to hear anything bad, only the good. When it came to something, like it would make them feel bad, they

didn't want to listen. So if somebody didn't want to listen, I didn't tell and it went on for years. Nobody asked, nobody asked. If somebody would have asked me, I would maybe tell them. But they didn't ask. They didn't want to know. They didn't want to. They wanted to shut it out from their mind like it never existed, like it never ever took place. I'm talking about my own relatives, you know. My aunts came from Mexico that I hadn't seen, one I didn't know at all, she left Europe when I wasn't even born. And the other and the sisters of my mother, you know, and so they came to see me when I came to this country. But I could tell that they just were shaken. They just didn't want to hear anything. So I didn't... I didn't tell.

**INT:** How did that-

**RUTH:** That makes you feel, how should I tell you, you know, like you have to live yourself with all of it. There's nobody to tell, nobody wants to know, nobody wants to listen. You have to keep it in your body for yourself.

**INT:** How do you feel now that they do want to know? How do you feel about that when they now say we do want to know? How do you feel about that?

**RUTH:** And I say to myself, my G-d, fifty years went by, nobody spoke, nobody said anything, nobody wrote a book or anything. Now all of a sudden they want to. And now after fifty years everybody, people are asking questions, you read books, people wrote books about it and movies, which I am glad that it isn't forgotten completely. After my generation is gone there won't be anybody else to tell and it will be forgotten. We cannot allow something like this to be forgotten. Everybody should, every child in school should know or read about it and should know what happened, it shouldn't happen again. We should try that our children's children shouldn't know from anything like this what my generation went through in Europe.

**INT:** So did it feel lonely then?

**RUTH:** Very lonely. Very lonely. We had though quite a few refugees here in Springfield so I tried to be friends with them, you know. We really didn't talk that much about the past, you know. The only question was what have you survived. I was in this concentration camp. I was in that concentration camp. But we really didn't sit down and talk about the past. But with these people I had more in common. For some reason we sort of understood each other, what we've been through, how we have to start a life all over again. But with the American born people, I had very little in common. They were afraid that I might say something that will make them feel bad. They were sort of afraid of me, you know. So if that's the case so I didn't say. I didn't open my mouth. I didn't say anything.

**INT:** And what did you do with those bad feelings because, of course, they were there?

**RUTH:** They were there. Many days and many weeks and months you went into a depression and you didn't think of going to a doctor to help you. After a couple of weeks, a couple of months, you felt better. Then a while later you went into another depression, but you were busy. I was always working. I was always busy. I had no time. That was the medication for me, was work. That was the survival, to get up in the morning and go to work and forget about

everything, just go on with life. Every morning you came home, you were busy with children, supper, this, that. You tried not to dwell on it, if not it is very easy to crack up, very easy.

**INT:** You know, some people when they feel that way, they can't get up and they can't take care of their children and they cannot go to work.

**RUTH:** I was lucky. I was lucky.

**INT:** Do you think it was luck?

**RUTH:** I was lucky, so I did. I did take care of my house. I did take care of my children. I went to work. I kept my house clean. Every day was supper on the table and that was my... actually my survival, you know.

**INT:** There's a great deal to learn from that. That's what we're trying to learn in this project, because think of all the people in the world who, I mean there's no comparison, but in terms of people who-

**RUTH:** They can't take bad times.

**INT:** They cannot.

**RUTH:** They cannot.

**INT:** Here, you're telling me about people who couldn't even hear bad things.

**RUTH:** They couldn't hear.

**INT:** We want to try to learn how you, Ruth Ackerman, Rifka to me, could do that. There are some important lessons there for people. So I guess that's why I keep on asking you. I remember at one point in the interview, you said sometimes it would just tear you to pieces, you know, kind of thinking about this. And so I know I would wonder, well, what does a person like you do when something tears you to pieces. And yet you went on. It's an amazing thing. It's very powerful.

**RUTH:** You do what you have to. You try to go with life because there is no answer by getting sick. You have to be busy. You got to have a job in the morning that you're getting up in the morning, you're getting dressed and getting all dolled up and you're going to see people. You are with people. You put a smile on your face and you are happy to see the people that they are working with you and this is how you spend your day. And when you come home you have other things to do. You have no time, you have no time to think. And then at night you're so tired you fall asleep, you don't know where the night went past, you know. And this is the only survival, this is the only survival to be busy. Go to work, get up in the morning and to face the world, and get dressed and comb your hair. That's what made me go on. Thank G-d in ever went to a psychiatrist. It seems like I sort of knew myself how to get out from the depressions, you know, to go on with life. Maybe it is because I was so young? The war started at thirteen. I was thirteen. At sixteen I was already in Germany. A younger person, for some reason, can deal with things

more than an adult can. I did. I had a lot of nerve. That's what people tell me. I had a lot of nerve.

**INT:** What do you mean?

**RUTH:** To go into the Arbeitsamt and say, "I want to go to Germany. I want to go work for the German people." It was like taking your life in your hands, you know. What if they would recognize me and say, "Hey, you are a Jew. You want to go to work into Germany? We'll send you to a concentration camp or we will shoot you on the spot, you know." but for some reason, how should I say it? A nerve to do what I had to do. It got to a point where I didn't care anymore. I didn't want to go on living anymore so I, for some reason, I took a chance on life. Either it will work and, if not, it's fine too, because life has no meaning anymore anyways. I didn't know where I'm going to get the next piece of bread from or where I'm going to sleep tonight or next morning they'll probably shoot me or kill me so I took that chance. People tell me I had a lot of nerve, a lot of nerve. I guess life brings you to all kinds of things to do in life.

**INT:** Well, here you have an example. I mean you just said you could have given up.

**RUTH:** Yeah, I wanted to. I wanted to give up already. I couldn't go on with it anymore, you know. I slept in the woods by myself. I slept where they keep the hay and they keep the straw, and I don't know how they would call it here. Hay stall. Hay stall. It was wintertime. Winter was the worst time. Summer is warm, but winter is snow and the cold weather. I was sick and tired. I was sick of this life. I didn't want anymore, you know. I felt that if I'll die I'll go to the other world, there's my father, my mother, my sister and my whole family is there. I'll be with them. Here I am all alone. What kind of life is this? It's no life. I wanted to give up. I didn't care if they would recognize me then and kill me on the spot. I wouldn't care at all. I was already tired of living, tired of living. And for some reason it was the right thing I did. And then when I got to Germany I wasn't afraid anymore of anybody to recognize me, because they could never, never, never. They wouldn't even think that a Jew would have a nerve to come to Germany to want to be a slave for them. That's what I was, only a slave, with the little bit of food that they gave me and a bed to sleep in. I worked very hard, from 5:00 in the morning till 8:00, 9:00 at night. Whatever their daughters didn't want it anymore, it was already worn out, torn stockings, torn shoes, torn clothes, they would give it to me. That's all I wore. This is what I wore, is what hand me down whatever they didn't want anymore.

**INT:** You know, it makes me feel like you dared life. You kind of said, I'm going to do this risky thing that is almost crazy to do.

**RUTH:** I met other people that did the same. I met others.

**INT:** Afterwards?

**RUTH:** Yeah, after the war I met girls. They used to catch younger girls and boys, the Polish younger girls and boys will catch them on the street to come into the house and take them out of from the bed and send them to Germany. And that's how I met a few Jewish girls that went like this. They were sort of caught or they were in the place or something. I don't know exactly what it was. But, I was tired of living. I just didn't want to go on with life anymore. I had enough of it.

I knew you have to die, you have to die, so what's the difference if you die today or a week later or two weeks later? What difference does it make? It makes no difference. Get it over with and that's it. And that's what I did. I was just lucky that they didn't question me too much, you know. They were just happy to see me. They were happy to see me that I am such a German lover. I want to go work for them, you know, I'm such a patriot.

**INT:** A volunteer?

**RUTH:** A volunteer. A volunteer to go work for them. That made me a very good person.

**INT:** I was also thinking about some other decisions that you described that you had to make. For example, the decision to move from Israel to America.

**RUTH:** Very hard. It was hard. We could have gone to America before going to Israel when we were in Germany. We could have gone to Argentina, could have gone to America, but my husband only wanted to go to Israel. He said he had enough of anti-Semitism. He wants to be in a Jewish state in a Jewish country with Jews. So we went there, went to Israel, but times were so tough. He couldn't find a job, hardly worked. Then came the war right away, 1948. I kept on saying I left one war, came into another war. My husband was taken into the army, was a young man. I was left with a small child, you know, with very little of food or anything. And my sister kept writing from America that she wants us to come since we cannot make a go of it in Israel, you know, we cannot make a living. We should come to America, all the "glicken" about America, she wrote. And she has nobody, and that's all she has is me and we should be together. And finally my husband gave in. We decided to come. But many a time, even last night, we were sitting and talking and my husband says to me, "You know, we should have never left Israel. We should have never left Israel." There is still that bond in you to Israel after so many years, after forty-two years, there is still that bond in you. Should have never, never left.

**INT:** What made him say that, do you think, yesterday?

**RUTH:** The kids would be closer to us, you know. There wouldn't be one here, one there. It's lonesome, very lonesome. Still Israel, how far is Tel Aviv from Haifa? Here I have a son in California. I have to wait a whole year to see him. I don't know. You don't know the future, what the future brings. You only know what the past, you know the present, but you don't know the future. And you don't know if what you do in life is right or wrong. You don't know if you do the right thing or you do the wrong thing. You cannot tell.

**INT:** And so would that be a regret that you have? Most of the time you say you really don't have regrets about things you've done. Is this maybe one thing that you do?

**RUTH:** I would say yes. I would say yes.

**INT:** It's lonesome now because the children are gone.

**RUTH:** Yeah. That's what it is. But still, I have to be thankful to G-d for my husband, that I have him. We have friends. We do go out, you know, but still it's not like...you miss your



children, your grandchildren, your family, the family is the bond. What can you do? You have to take life just as it comes to you. There is not a way out.

**INT:** In Israel were, was no family there, right? When you were there in Israel, did either of you have family there?

**RUTH:** I had cousins. I had a few cousins. My husband had nobody. He has nobody in the whole world. He's a survivor for a big family, an uncle, three sisters, mother and father and cousins, uncles. There's nobody, nobody. He is all alone, all alone.

**INT:** So when the two of you need to make a decision, or when you needed to make the decision about leaving Israel, how did you make that decision? You say he gave in.

**RUTH:** Yeah.

**INT:** When you have to make a decision about a move or change, how do you do that usually?

**RUTH:** We sit down and we talk. We talk it over. What do you think we should do? My sister is willing to make the papers. We too get tired of the military. I says how many militaries can I be in? How may wars can I live through? It's sort of, you know, you just couldn't take any more war. You couldn't take it. How much can a person take war? How much can a person take military? Every few months they would drag him again for the miluim. He said if not for the military, he would never leave Israel. If not for the military, because he was constant in the military. Even if he was two and a half years in the army, after he came back every few months they would take him again, every few months. That's what he says made him leave, that's what made him leave, no other thing. The rest, okay. So it wasn't that good. Later on it got better. But the military made him leave Israel. Couldn't take any more military and any more war. It comes to a point, you know. You just can't take it anymore

**INT:** There was a brief time in your life after the war when you did feel some bitterness about what happened to you and your family.

**RUTH:** Yeah. Yeah.

**INT:** I know you don't always feel that now. I think you were saying now you don't, less so. When was that? When were you bitter? What was that feeling like? What was that about, do you think?

**RUTH:** That was after the war. That was after the war. I was again alone. I was again alone and I was bitter of all what happened, of all of why we was left alone. Why was everybody taken away from me? I had nobody. I had nobody to talk to, no place to turn, you know. And, but again, I joined a kibbutz in Poland with all young boys and girls. This I liked very much. None of these people had family. We were all just like an orphanage, you know. And we sort of got together. We became like a family. We cared for each other. We liked each other and we cared for each other and this is what I liked very much. This is the right step I did. I think I did the right step by doing that, cause again, I got tired of wandering around, not knowing where to sleep. (End of tape 7, side 1) ...be with people, yes. People like myself, you know. They were all

orphans like I was. It happened we got to like each other and care for each other and we didn't talk about the past. We just went on with today and thinking of tomorrow, and that was good. That was very good being with people my age.

**INT:** That kind of gave you-

**RUTH:** Yeah.

**INT:** And when you came here was it that group of refugees that was that kind of support?

**RUTH:** Yeah.

**INT:** And in Israel were there people like that too?

**RUTH:** All went to Israel. Yes. We stayed in touch with them, you know. Yeah, there were weddings, you know, all young, getting married. Every few weeks we had another wedding to go to. But then when I came to this country I didn't like a thing about it. I was very, very lonesome. I was very unhappy.

**INT:** Things with your sister didn't work out?

**RUTH:** What I thought a sister was supposed to be wasn't. There was nothing there.

**INT:** So what she had written to you about coming and all of that?

**RUTH:** When I came, she just wanted me to be her maid. She brought herself over a maid. She had twins, and they were a year old and my sister likes to run around and have a good time. And I was left with the twins. She used to go away on vacations and leave me with the twins. The first week I came, I didn't know how to handle the stove. I didn't know how to handle even a can opener, I didn't know how to handle. She left me, went away I don't know for how long, leave me these two little babies. And I had a child six years old and she had another boy seven years old. And she just didn't care about me at all. She just cared about herself, a very selfish person. I could tell that there isn't there anything, not that I thought to be with a sister was to be with somebody that you can talk to from your heart, you can ask questions and she will give you a right answer, she will steer you the right way. She is much older than me. There was nothing there. There was absolutely nothing there, nothing there. We had nothing in common. Till this day we have nothing in common, you know. We just hold onto the friendship just cause it's not nice that two sisters should live in one city and not talk to each other. But there's still nothing. There's still nothing.

**INT:** She doesn't really know you.

**RUTH:** No, she doesn't know and I don't know her. We are strangers. We are absolutely strangers, you know. It's... I don't know.

**INT:** Would you have liked... what would you have wanted her to do that she didn't do?

**RUTH:** I wanted to have somebody to talk to, somebody to give me, to steer me which way. I came here... I was lost. I didn't know our language. I didn't know how to; I didn't know nothing. I wanted this emotional help. I didn't want her money or anything. I told her. I said, "I don't want anything from you. I just want your friendship. I want to have a good word from you. I want to talk to you." Couldn't. And till this say I can't talk to her. I cannot. We have nothing in common, nothing, absolutely nothing in common.

**INT:** And she was not interested? And what you did have in common, mother in common, I mean you had a family. What happened with all of that?

**RUTH:** We were strangers. We were strangers. I came from another world. It's like I came from a different world and she is from a different world, you know. And things that were important to her were not important to me and the opposite. What was important to me wasn't important to her, you know.

**INT:** Like what?

**RUTH:** Like to her, material things are very important. To me it isn't. For her a dress or a piece of jewelry or whatever, that's her life. That's very important to her. To me it isn't, you know, after all I've been through this should be important to me? It's not. It's not and I can't talk to her. I just cannot have a conversation with her. I just can't. We don't understand each other, this is the trouble. We just don't understand. Maybe I don't understand her. I don't know. I don't know, maybe, but she doesn't understand me. That's for sure. Again, she doesn't want to listen to bad talk or something that she should, G-d forbid, feel bad or anything, no. This is out of her mind.

**INT:** That must have been painful.

**RUTH:** Very painful. Very painful. I was very, very down when I just first came. I didn't like a thing about nothing, nothing interests me, nothing. I didn't care for anything. And just people would just stare at me and maybe it was just in my mind. I don't know. People would just stare at me like I came from another planet, like I had horns, like I'm not a human being because I came from a war, because for what I went through I'm not a person, I'm not a human being. I'm an animal or whatever. I don't know what they saw in me. And if we had the money to go back, we would have gone back. But we didn't have the money to come here in the first place, never mind to go back. We didn't have any. We had no choice. We just had to look for jobs, go to work, rent a place. And that's what it was.

**INT:** So really most of the memories and the stories were inside.

**RUTH:** Inside. It was inside. I don't know how it didn't tear me apart. It's a miracle. It really is a miracle. If I think back I say to myself, you know, how did I do all of this? It's just that I don't know. I don't know if it's because I was young. I couldn't do it now, that's for sure. I couldn't do it now, no way. Because I was young, I was twenty-seven years old when I came to this country, you know. I was young, I wanted to have a... make a home for myself, you know, a place for myself and by doing that I knew that we had to go to work, that's it. There was no such thing as welfare. There was no such thing as anybody giving you anything. We came to this country, my

husband had four dollars in his pocket. That's all we had. We knew we would have to go to work and make a life for ourselves, you know.

**INT:** Well, in some ways, you did what you had to do then in Poland despite everything, that might have looked like you couldn't do it.

**RUTH:** Yeah.

**INT:** But you kind of have something inside that is very life, it's life. Even as you're ready to kind of give up and you're feeling depressed and you're feeling it's too hard, but yet there's something that you-

**RUTH:** Yeah, I push.

**INT:** Face life.

**RUTH:** There's a push in you that you go on. You go on with it.

**INT:** Because, you know, that's not the only choice. There are other choices people make and yet you say I'm choosing life. I'm going to choose this because...

**RUTH:** I'm a survivor. I'm just a survivor. I've survived many, many ways of life, you know, different ways of life.

**INT:** And I know that was true with your illness also, lung cancer.

**RUTH:** Yeah. I said to my doctor, "I'll survive, doctor. I am a survivor. I survived Hitler. I will survive cancer, too." And just look at me. He really didn't say much, you know. It was just what I told my doctor. I said, "I will survive it. I'm a survivor." and I am. I am.

**INT:** Do you think your children are? Do you think they have some of that about life in their own ways?

**RUTH:** Yeah, maybe.

**INT:** I don't know your kids.

**RUTH:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. My oldest son, Motele, he's a survivor too. You know, he bounces down, then he bounces up. (Laughs) Just like me. He takes after me.

**INT:** That's interesting.

**RUTH:** Yeah. He bounces up and down and he goes on.

**INT:** He goes on.

**RUTH:** He goes on. His business.

**INT:** About his business.

**RUTH:** Umm. But he doesn't have to live through, thank G-d, there's no war for him. I hope there never will be. When it comes to the business he's a survivor. Really, he's a survivor. Because how many times I say to myself, I say oh my G-d, how is he taking it? How can he do it? How does he take it? I couldn't take it. I couldn't take it. And he bounces back.

**INT:** What about Danny?

**RUTH:** Danny is a different... he's a different type of person. The two kids are so different in nature, very different.

**INT:** How would you describe Danny?

**RUTH:** Danny's calm. Danny doesn't need luxuries in life. He's content with whatever he has. He's a happy kid. He's very happy and he is not looking for, how should I say it, to be a millionaire. He said that's not important for him. That's the kind of life he chose, you know, and I agree with him 100%. What is life all about? Just be happy and enjoy every day as it comes and by trying to reach the moon you never will. You never will reach the moon if you're trying to. So they are two different people, two different people. And I think my older son takes after me. He takes after... he's a survivor. (Laughs) He's a survivor.

**INT:** You know, maybe Danny in his own way, that's the way he chooses to get through the ups and downs of life.

**RUTH:** That's it.

**INT:** Well, all right. Thank you.

**RUTH:** Yeah.

**INT:** Wonderful. I love to talk to you. (End of tape)