

INTERVIEW WITH CHARLOTTE WEISS

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TRANSCENDING TRAUMA PROJECT
Council for Relationships
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Interview with Charlotte Weiss, a Holocaust survivor, February 4, 1994.

INT: February 5, 1994. And I would like you to introduce yourself, your name, address, date of birth, where you were born and just give me some current information about you.

CHARLOTTE: My name is Charlotte Weiss. I live at 24 Brown Lane in Cherry Hill. And I was born Charlotte Liebowich, and I was born in (?) twenty twenty in Czechoslovakia. What else do you want to know?

INT: Your marital status, how many children do you have?

CHARLOTTE: I was married for forty-four years to a wonderful husband, Isaac, passed away three years ago. I miss him very much and I have three wonderful daughters, and if it weren't for them I wouldn't be able to go on. And I have a close relationship with my children, my oldest one, Renee. And then I have middle one, Flo, and the youngest one, Judy, and they all live in the area and I am very happy about that.

INT: And they are married?

CHARLOTTE: Two are married, and one is divorced and I have six grandchildren. G-d bless them and they are my joy in life.

INT: Can you talk a little bit about your education, your employment status, your work experience?

CHARLOTTE: Okay, as I said, I went to, I was in concentration camp when I was seventeen. That means I could not finish high school. I did go to primary schools after the liberation from concentration camp; I took some courses and I tried to educate myself as much as I could.

INT: Were you employed outside the home or primarily at home (with your children)?

CHARLOTTE: Are you talking about the United States?

INT: Yes.

CHARLOTTE: Okay. My husband and I, when we came here it was very hard. We didn't know the language very well and my husband and I had our business in a Black neighborhood, a grocery store we ran, both of us together for quite a few years. There were a lot of holdups, a lot of hardships but we had to raise our children. And we did the best that we could. We didn't want with the country or anyone should give us anything. And we came with five dollars in our pocket and it was a very hard time for us. But after when we were like raising children, grew up, we decided we should get out of this business because it was very dangerous. And I took a job

with Strawbridge and Clothier, and worked there for about ten years and now I am employed with a dentist.

INT: You are still employed.

CHARLOTTE: I am still employed with the dentist. It keeps me going, and I like my job and it's okay. Things are all right.

INT: Can you tell me a little bit more about your economic status, what was it like, was it a struggle coming to the United States?

CHARLOTTE: Coming to the United States was very, it was an experience. We were very happy to come here. I had an uncle that lived in Virginia, and he sponsored my husband and myself coming up to the United States. And when we came there my uncle expected my husband to go to work right away. My husband was a religious man. He didn't want to work on Shabbas. He wanted to do things, you know, that would not involve Shabbas. And so that didn't work out. So he left me, I was pregnant that time with Renee. And I felt very nauseous, and I was sick but he had to look for a job someplace so we can both live away from my uncle. And he came to Baltimore, Maryland and he contacted a rabbi. His name was Rabbi Grossberg. He took him into his house and he said, "Isaac, you have nothing to worry about. I'll find a job and a place for you, then you can bring your wife." Then that was true. He found my husband a job. My husband was a, I don't know if you know. He was a shochet. He was a slaughterer.

INT: No, I didn't.

CHARLOTTE: But you know, for kosher chickens. And after he started working he brought me over from Alexandria, VA, we came to Baltimore in a one-room apartment which had no kitchen facilities. It was just one room, and a furnace room, and it had one cabinet where we kept, you know, whatever we had. We went to the five and dime and got some pots that were sort of like beat up and you know they couldn't sell anymore. We bought them for like ten cents a piece and some dishes from the stock room. But I couldn't be happier because I was, myself with my husband with no one to interfere, and we had enough money to buy food, and I bought a little hot plate where that I cooked my meals and I couldn't be happier. And after a while we were able to rent a regular apartment because I was concerned that my child is going to be born and I didn't have, you know, a regular apartment. So anyway, we did find an apartment, were able to afford it, and the apartment had cabinets, and it had everything and I just was elated. So my biggest joy came when Renee was born and I, since I didn't have a private doctor I went to a doctor in a hospital, you know, on a, people who don't have any money.

INT: Clinic.

CHARLOTTE: Clinic. And every time I went I saw a different doctor and I had a very hard delivery with Renee. About I went into the hospital like Friday, didn't get up until Sunday night. That's when she was born. But after a week's time I brought her home into my lovely little apartment, and I had a crib for her and everything. And then the state sent someone to see if I

am taking properly care of this child being that I was so poor and she was wrapped up in so many blankets. And the woman that came said, "Well you couldn't take better care of her than you do." And I am still ironing her diapers and ironed her little shirts, she was such a joy to me. And things that were not always great you had to struggle but I was very grateful comparing to what I went through this was heaven and nothing was hard for me. Nothing.

So what we did we do in Baltimore, 'cause my husband was, you know he had this job, (?). After a while he did something else. We bought a kosher chicken business and that didn't go. We used to deliver chickens to, to some restaurants, he moved to Florida and we delivered chickens to restaurants, and to the hotels, but after a while we couldn't sell for the price the chickens that the restaurants were able to buy someplace else so we lost the business. Anyway, it's a long story, a long boring story.

So then we moved to Camden, New Jersey. The reason we moved there is because we had a friend that has been in the grocery business and he said to my husband, "Isaac, why don't you come down to Camden, and we'll get a business here and you'll be able to provide for your family." And at that time I already had three children. Renee was born in Baltimore and Flo was born in Baltimore. Judy was born in Florida. And we came to Baltimore with all three children and I can't tell you the agony in Baltimore. We moved into a colored section which was very bad. My children had to live with the store in a colored section. We lived upstairs but we have to feed the children. There was no choice. We didn't have any money to buy a business and I had a sister, I had a sister in Baltimore and her husband had lent us the money to buy the business. And when we came into that store I didn't know anything about the business. I remember one Black woman came in and she asked me, "Would you give me a can of lye?" And I didn't know what lye was. I said, "Lye?" Who knew lye? What's lye? I didn't know what it means. She says, "Hey woman, you don't even know what lye means? How can you have a business?" But then she showed me.

So we were in the grocery business, I'd say, quite a few years. More than ten years. So while we were in the business my husband got sick, and started coughing a lot and we went for X-Rays. And the X-Ray didn't show anything. Anyway he started to. The doctor said that he had developed some type of an allergy. Allergy shots were about a year, and then that didn't turn out to be right, and we took another X-Ray and it turned showed that he had a tumor on his lung. When the tumor showed on his lung the doctor was interested in obtaining the X-Ray that he took a year before. When we took the X-Rays out it showed that he already had at that time a spot on his lungs and they didn't read the X-Rays properly. And I was absolutely lost with three children in a Black neighborhood in a store. It was very hard. And I didn't know what I was going to do at that point, but I called up the University of Pennsylvania and someone gave me the name of a Dr. Johnson. I called him up from the store and he finds that Dr. Johnson. "You don't know me, and I don't know you but I know you are a very good doctor, a doctor to a lot of people." And I said, "Please help me." And he said, "What is the problem?" "My husband has cancer and I'm here and I'm alone in a store with my three children. I desperately need your help."

INT: And you were a young woman?

CHARLOTTE: Yes. I was young. I was like thirty-four.

INT: And your husband?

CHARLOTTE: My husband was thirteen years older. And I cried. I couldn't stop crying. And he said, "Charlotte, calm yourself down." And he said, "I'm going to do what I can for you." And my husband was in the hospital and I was so desperately afraid to be in the store myself. And as it turns out while I was in the store I had a holdup. These two Puerto Rican guys came in and at that time they were wearing, you know, hairpieces. Not a hairpiece which was really blown up. This guy came, those two people came in and started speaking in Spanish and I didn't know what they were. But I was waiting someone should come in but no one came in. And one of the guys sort of like encircled me that came, one came on one side and the other on the other side and they started pulling my head down. And they pulled their headpiece down, threw me down to the floor, and one of them put his foot on my neck and started choking me. And I thought to myself, dear G-d, I didn't die in the concentration camp, don't let me die here. And they took the money and they left. I was very lucky.

When they left I closed the store and I went in the back and took a couple of aspirins to calm myself down. While I took those aspirins I was so upset that one of them got stuck in my throat, and I started coughing and I couldn't breathe. And I figured I better open the door real fast because I am going to choke here and nobody is going to, nobody is going to know. And I opened the door, this Black neighbor came and said, "Charlotte, what's wrong, I see the door is closed?" And I told her what happened. She said, "Charlotte, you'd better go home." I calmed myself down a little bit. I always tried all my life, I tried to get a hold of myself. Always have this strong will to survive. Being that what I went through I had to live, always had the will to live. And I close the store and then I went home.

In the meantime this Dr. Johnson called me and he said, "Charlotte, you can bring your husband in." And at that time he was in Cherry Hill Hospital, and I went to the hospital, and I took him out myself and I said, "I'm going to do this myself. Nobody has to help me." And I, what happened in the car, I learned to drive in the beginning here in Florida. I knew I have to know how to drive my husband. And I went to University of Pennsylvania, spoke to Dr. Johnson and we discussed the issue that the two X-Rays, that the first X-Ray already showed that he had a malignancy. Then of course I had a case that I could have sued someone but I didn't want to sue. He said, "Charlotte, if you are thinking about suing I am not going to be on your side but I am going to do everything I can to save him." And that's how it was. The operation took almost, you know, almost all day. He cut most of the tumor out. He lost a half a lung but he lived. He lived. He lived twenty years after the operation and I just thank G-d for that. I always had a strong belief in G-d. I knew he has a plan for me and he is going to carry out the plan; no matter how hard the times were I always knew that he had some plan for me. And I followed that plan. I took everything in stride.

INT: Do you have a religious faith and belief?

CHARLOTTE: I always had a religious faith even in the hardest time when I was in concentration camp and there was real hard times. I always felt that somehow I will survive, and I always used to talk to G-d and say, "Look G-d, if you really want me to go please let me die natural death, and let me be able to eat as much as I want to before I go," because most of the time I was hungry, very hungry.

INT: This was a recurring dream that you had about having food and the war and being so hungry. I am struck by the experience of the robbery. Could you share that terrifying experience with your husband?

CHARLOTTE: No. Oh, I talked to my husband about it, but he was not a well man, and one time I had a robbery, another robbery while my husband was in the store with me. Luckily my children were all in school and I just thank G-d for that. Those two Black men came in, and one stuck a gun in my neck and he said, "Give me all your money." And at that time we were selling these, you know, what do you call it?

INT: Money orders.

CHARLOTTE: Money orders and we must have had like maybe six, eight hundred dollars in the drawer from the money orders which belongs to the company, didn't belong to us. And they said, "Just give me the money. You have more." And I said, "No, I don't have anymore," because whatever we had I really gave it to him. And they put my husband in the closet and they gave him, they beat him up something terrible, put him in the closet. And my husband lost a wife and three children. I was his second marriage. He had three little boys. I'm jumping from one things to the other.

INT: That's fine.

CHARLOTTE: My husband, at one time lived across the street from us. His wife came from the little town as I came from and I knew his wife. She was a very elegant, nice little lady. His oldest son used to be friends with my little brother and he used to come in, in my house. I mean never in my wildest dreams did I dream that this man that lived across the street from me with his wife and three children is going to be my husband one day. But sometimes, too, stranger than fiction and that's really, never dreamt about it. The way this happened, I mean I am jumping here from.

INT: That's fine.

CHARLOTTE: Anyway, the way this happened, when I came out of the concentration camp with my four sisters, we were five sisters, I wanted to know what happened to our house. We had a nice house at one, I wanted to know if anyone was left from my family. My mother was taken to the crematorium and my little brother. I had a little brother and I desperately wanted to know what happened to the house. So after the concentration camp, you know, the trains were free and we were able to go anyplace we wanted to free of charge. So my sisters and I went, decided to go on the train to go on to Czechoslovakia. And when we were on the train, the trains

were full of survivors that went different places and I looked out from the window and I, on a platform outside the train I saw a girl that came from the same town and she said to me, "Charlotte, what are you doing here? Where are you going?" I said, "I am going home to see what happened to our house. Maybe I'll find someone." She said, "Don't go," she said, "Because I found your father in Prague." And when I heard that she found my father in Prague I took all my schmattas from the trains and my sisters too and we came down from the train. I went to see my father. It was more important than to go home.

Anyway, my father was in the hospital. He had TB. He was in a coma in the concentration camp. We had no idea that he survived. But when I came to the hospital to see my father I did not recognize him. A two hundred pound man, he didn't weigh more than eighty pounds. He was a skeleton, skin and bones. His skin was peeling. He couldn't reach the knob, he couldn't lift a leg. He was close to death. And but he recognized us and we sat on his bed and he said, "My children. You are my children. How lucky I am." I can't tell you the emotional pain that we all felt and how we cried when we saw my father lying. We didn't know whether he is going to survive but we had lived to see him and that was the greatest feeling. The greatest thing.

Anyway, two of my sisters stayed with my father and the three of us still wanted to go home and see what happened to our house. So we went back on the train the next day. We had no place to stay and it was like that by that time I was eighteen years old. But an eighteen-year-old girl in the Europe was not an eighteen-year-old girl in U.S. Eighteen years, I would say was like a girl of twelve years. I had no experience. I was very protected at home. Never went out with any boys, never in my seventeen years. My job basically was to go to school, help my mom at home, be very obedient children. And things were different then than they are today. To tell you that I was not happy, no. I was. I was a happy child and I knew exactly what was going on at home and we didn't have great wealth. I came from a middle class family.

Anyway, we went back to the trains and we went home. When we arrived to our small town there was this man waiting at the station, waiting for his wife to come home and his children. And who was this man? My husband.

INT: Your current husband who you married.

CHARLOTTE: Yes. I didn't recognize him because when he lived there he was, you know, a religious man and at this time when I saw him he was, you know, he was dressed. His head wasn't covered. He had beautiful hair. He was very good looking. I didn't recognize him. I didn't take any interest in him either. Then he said, "Where are you girls going?" He didn't know me either. I said, "We are going to see our house." He said, "There is no house. There is no place to go."

INT: So he hadn't recognized you either?

CHARLOTTE: No.

INT: He knew your family.

CHARLOTTE: No. He knew my family but I was a little girl compared to him. He had family with three children. And he said, "Just come on down. I'm going to board up the house for you." Anyway, what happened to our house, the windows were out and the Germans kept horses in our house. So you can imagine. All the windows were out. It was just like a frame without anything. The doors were off. The windows were off. There was no place to go in there. He boarded up a Jewish house. Most of the Jewish houses the windows were out and the Germans kept horses or they themselves lived there or whatever. But there was no place to go. The Gentile people that lived there, there were Ukrainian people that lived there didn't want the Jews back.

INT: And this was in Prague?

CHARLOTTE: We were not in Prague.

INT: This was in Czechoslovakia?

CHARLOTTE: This was in Czechoslovakia but not in Prague. It was a small town which I would say maybe was about 200 kilometers from Prague.

INT: And the name of the town?

CHARLOTTE: Peresva.

INT: Can you spell that?

CHARLOTTE: Peresva. Anyway, we lived in different places. At one point we lived in Kosice, that was a bigger town. It was about 100,000 Jews living there. But my mother came from that small town and she always had a desire to go back although my father didn't want to. She says, "No, my family is there. I want to go back." So we went back and in the later years when with my mother that's where we lived. So I was maybe a child of six or seven when we came back to this small town. So we lived in that boarded up house for a few months with no food. And my husband later to be took a special interest in the three girls and he, he was liberated the year before. And he already opened up a little store, a fruit store and he established, you know a new kitchen for the people that came home from the concentration camps and he saw to it that we were not hungry.

INT: And at that time he realized that his family had died?

CHARLOTTE: Right. Right.

INT: He was a widower.

CHARLOTTE: He was a widower, yes. Because if his wife went with his three children, his oldest one was only like seven or eight, if she went with the children there was no way that she could have survived. So as time went on he started coming in more and more, you know, to take

care of the children but we didn't want to stay there. My two sisters were younger. I was older. So we didn't want to stay there. And after a while when he saw that his wife is not coming back he started asking me questions whether, you know, if I would be willing to marry him. I can't say I loved him because you know, he was so much older but I said to him that I felt a strong security with him. I felt he is here to take care of me and my sisters. And I said, "Look, I'm not ready now but suppose we go out to Prague and we will talk to my father." And even my father is going to think that it's okay that it's going to be right, let me do it. This what I said to him. Looking back, I mean a girl now would never say that. It would seem strange but this is the way we were brought up. A girl at that time, she did not make the decision, a decision like that on her own. It had to involve her parents. And it had to be with the parents' approval.

INT: This is the tradition on it which was accepted?

CHARLOTTE: Yes, I wanted tradition. And we greatly respected our parents. So as it turned out after a while we did come to Prague. It was hard, very hard to get there, but we made it, and I came to my father in the hospital and we discussed it. And my father knew him that he was a very nice person, and he knew his family and he knew he was married before. He said, "Look, if you children love each other that's okay. I don't have any objection." So anyway that's how we became engaged. But no home, no place to live, no job, nothing. But we became engaged. After a while my father came out of the hospital and the city was able to help us out on Prague, found an apartment for my father and they also helped him with money because he was sick. Couldn't work.

INT: And he was how old at that time?

CHARLOTTE: My father, he was maybe, let's see, forty-three, forty-four, forty-five tops. Yeah.

INT: Relatively young.

CHARLOTTE: Yeah. Yeah. We moved in with my father, my five sisters and I, everybody moved in together. We had a two-bedroom place, everybody fit in and my husband slept on the sofa. We didn't have any, have any relations before we got married. There was not allowed and I wouldn't dream of doing it. And finally we decided to get married and have a wedding. We married in my cousin's house downstairs. Someone came and married us. We had a small luncheon with a little food, very little food. We were on coupons, got coupons. Everybody took their coupons out, and we bought whatever we could and you were married.

INT: Was it a religious ceremony? Was there a rabbi?

CHARLOTTE: Yes, there was a rabbi there.

[Tape 1 - End Side 1] [Tape 1 - Begin Side 2]

INT: Well, I'd like to when we get back, get a little bit more information about your father. Okay, religious organizations and any Holocaust related activities that you became involved in up to the present?

CHARLOTTE: To tell you that I was involved with the Holocaust I didn't, I wasn't I always had a strong connection with people that survived the concentration camp. After this day I feel most comfortable with that. I have quite a feeling I am different but I feel comfortable with the people that went through the same experiences as I had. I understand them the most in the atmosphere. And of course I have my sisters, I have two sisters in Canada. I have a sister in Atlantic City, a sister in Baltimore and we are all very close and I love them dearly. And what seems strange to me is when I see a lot of American sisters and they don't get along or there is some resentment over money I can't understand it because from what I went through this would not be in my life. I think that the most important thing is to be happy and love one another and we can have our own diamonds and money and everything else, it's not going to bring you that kind of happiness that you can have with someone that you love and care for.

INT: I think it's unique you have such a special relationship.

CHARLOTTE: Yes.

INT: Can you talk then about what your life was before the war, growing up with your parents?

CHARLOTTE: Okay. We were seven children. My father was in fruit business. He used to buy and sell fruit. I can't say that we were rich. Let's say we were middle class family. We had fairly nice house compared to other people. I'm talking about the little town. We lived in a small town.

INT: And this was?

CHARLOTTE: Peresva. But when we lived in Kosice, it was a large town. We had a nice house in that town. We went to school and things were better in the bigger town. Of course you'd say.

INT: Can you spell that?

CHARLOTTE: Kosice. Okay. It is on the map, I'm sure. One hundred percent.

INT: Your father, was he born in that area?

CHARLOTTE: My father was born in the area where my mother came from. That's where they met. And my mom had always a strong desire to go back to her family and to that small town. So after a while I guess she spoke so much to my father. Let's go back, let's go back that we did go back. So most of my years were spent in Peresva and I went to school there, which enjoyed very much. I had a special relationship with my teacher. I used to be the treasurer of the organization that we had there and I just loved going to school. I babysat for his children, and

but the children, the Jewish children there all were not for the Gentile children. They were completely alienated from the Gentile. I had no Gentile friends. I didn't want to have any. I wanted all Jewish friends. A Gentile girl could not come into our house because there was so much anti-Semitism even there. Our windows were locked up many times.

INT: And this happened before the war?

CHARLOTTE: Before the war, yeah.

INT: So you were segregated by religion and by school in neighborhood?

CHARLOTTE: In neighborhood, right.

INT: So what kinds of experiences of anti-Semitism did you have?

CHARLOTTE: A lot of the children even called us "Jew," you know, "you Jew." And there was no connection between us and them at all. I mean we were completely severed from them. They didn't come to our house and we didn't go to their house. The only dealings we had with them was when we wanted to buy potatoes from them or whatever on the market. Otherwise no friendships with them. I mean we didn't feel that we can be friends because there was so much anti-Semitism all the time. And I went to school there and just I love my school and in the morning when I got out I knew I have to make my beds. I made my sisters' beds, everybody had to leave the house in order.

INT: Where were you in the birth order, it sounds like you were one of the oldest?

CHARLOTTE: I have one sister that is older than I am but she was sort of born she was not so well. You know my mom felt like she is not capable of helping her in the house because she is small and she was sort of like sickly. So I was the one that had to participate in helping my mom. And we used to when we would get up in the morning like Fridays 5:00 and bake bread. And she woke me up to help to make the bread, and the cake and whatever had to be done. And so I used to say, "Mom, why don't you wake her up? Why do I have to get up?" "It was because if she was stronger and you are well and you can help me more than she can." So anyway, I helped my mom whatever, to make noodles and cook and everything. We had like a farmhouse.

INT: Your sister was how much older than you?

CHARLOTTE: A year, just a year older.

INT: And your other siblings?

CHARLOTTE: I have a sister, Lenka, she is a year and a half younger, very close. My oldest brother, he died at home at five.

INT: A health problem?

CHARLOTTE: He had, he got sick and he died. By the time they took him to the hospital he died.

INT: Appendicitis.

CHARLOTTE: Appendicitis and my mother didn't know what the problem was. He said his stomach hurts and at that time they didn't know what. So she applied warm compresses, which was bad because his appendix busted; by the time they got to the hospital he was dead. Then I had another sister who lives now in Baltimore. She is four years younger than I am. And then I have a sister that lives in Atlantic City, she is seven years younger. She is the youngest. Oh, and I had a brother that died in concentration camp. And he was fourteen when they took him but he was in between. He was like fourth in line.

INT: And your older sister, she is still living?

CHARLOTTE: Yeah. Yeah.

INT: How old is she?

CHARLOTTE: Yeah, she is seventy right now.

INT: What was, were you a religious family involved in the community?

CHARLOTTE: Everybody was religious, not extremely religious, not religious as you see the Hasidim in New York. My father never would be it but he always has a yarmulke and a hat on. He was sort of modern religious. My mother had no hair. She wore a sheitel all the time. Our house was always kosher. There was no question about eating unkosher. And but most of the Jews were kosher there. And it was, it was not an easy life because we didn't have the convenience that the Jews have here. We didn't have electricity. The water was outside with a pump, you know. We had chickens in the farm. We had a cow, we had, we had you know, a big garden. Large, large garden where most of the vegetables came from. My mother used to get up four, five in the morning summer time and get our vegetables in and bring it; by the time we children got up there was vegetables on the table and we eat breakfast was always with a vegetable. And there was baked bread and you know, we were never hungry. We never had any luxury but we were not hungry. But we considered ourselves pretty well off, you know.

INT: Did your parents have education? Could you just touch on what kinds of families they came from and did you grow up with grandparents?

CHARLOTTE: No. I never knew my grandparents. You see the people died younger at that time. My father's mother had known, or his father, the same from my mind, I wish I would have known. But my parents' education, maybe they went to grade school, that's it, no more. It was important for a boy to get time to go to cheder to yeshiva. And this was like a secondary education, you know. I had Hebrew teacher that came to our house. As far as the Hebrew or Jewish education in a school for girls it wasn't necessary. I went to a regular school but as far as

Hebrew the teacher came to our house and he gave us lessons. I didn't like it. I used to hide under the bed when he came.

INT: I don't think things have changed.

CHARLOTTE: No. And I remember he used to, he took the broom and got me out from under the bed. I'll never forget that. Then I had to sit and learn Hebrew and I learned Hebrew. Actually, I learned just about to read, you know, the Hebrew language, and I go to the synagogue, and I know what I'm praying but that's fine.

INT: Good for you.

CHARLOTTE: But I don't know Jewish history or anything.

INT: Was this required of all the children that had been?

CHARLOTTE: Yeah, of all the children. The little one we had, he went to cheder. He went to cheder. But the girls had to be taught at home and it was a good life. It was, sure I had to work a lot. I mean I had to help Mom with everything. We had a woman that came like once in four weeks to help us with the wash because there were no washing machines or anything. So she helped with that wash but that didn't mean that she is going to do it all by herself. We all helped. We all helped.

INT: What did you observe about your parents' relationship, how were they affectionate with one another? How did they make decisions? What did you notice about how your parents interacted?

CHARLOTTE: My parents at most spent at that time were very private. They did not display any open affection toward one another. To tell you the truth, I have maybe seen my father and mom kiss one or two times. I think whatever affection they had for one another was done in private. And their most concerns where their children. And we never thought about parents being sexual, never seen it. Certainly I've never seen it. I never read any books on sex. It was never discussed and as a matter of fact my older sister was 12 years old and she got her period for the first time, she hardly knew what it was. She didn't. The family didn't tell us. We just didn't know she was in bed for two, three days and we didn't know what the problem was until my mom, before she confided in me 'cause I was her sister and I didn't know how to deal with this. And my, you know, my mom came up and she halted communications. She said, "What's the problem with your sister?" And now she asks me if she is bleeding. I said, "Yes." Then she felt bad that she didn't tell her. I mean it just wasn't discussed, not just in our family. I don't think in any of the families.

INT: But there wasn't preparation about what it was.

CHARLOTTE: No.

INT: To be a woman?

CHARLOTTE: It wasn't. It wasn't. It absolutely wasn't.

INT: And your sister felt what, about going to your mother and instead she turned to you?

CHARLOTTE: She turned to me and she was real shy about discussing this with my mom. But after my mom found out she went up to her, and she talked to her and then she told her, "Listen, every woman is going through this and don't worry. It will be all right." We were about to call the doctor. And then she cried that she didn't know. You know, it's...

INT: Your mother cried or did your sister?

CHARLOTTE: My sister. My sister cried. But when I got mine I knew.

INT: You were prepared.

CHARLOTTE: I was prepared.

INT: Could you talk a little bit then about their roles? Were they very traditional roles between your parents and how they made decisions and was your father fairly dominant? What did you notice in terms of their roles?

CHARLOTTE: Well, as I said, I was taking Hebrew lessons and meantime I didn't want to take it. I went away with my girlfriends. And my father was very strict about that. He said, "I'm paying this man. All of you has to be here." When I came back and the teacher was gone and I didn't take that lesson I knew things are not going to be good. My father took out his strap and he gave me three times over my behind. And he punished me and he said, "You are going to stay in the house. You are not going to go anyplace for so many days." Okay. I accepted that. I never remember my father hitting me before that or after that. It must have been painful for him 'cause basically he was a good man. My mom hit me more than my father. She did. She didn't like anything that I did whatever, I didn't know there is a rules I got a few spankings. I can't say I got. You know, not to a point where I would feel they abused me. I don't. I really don't feel that.

My mom did try to provide for the children at the time when the bread was low when the Germans worrying about the coming of food. And she used to go to the bakery at night and go with bread on the black market. And I knew it was a struggle for her to provide for her children and I felt with her very much. And I'm just sorry about one thing that she didn't live to see us come to the United States, and be married and didn't live to see her grandchildren, didn't have any joy, really much joy out of her life. She was only forty-two when they put her in the crematorium. So I don't have any bad feelings about my mom, really none and my dad either for that matter.

INT: But there was joy in raising a family and even in a struggle for day to day...

CHARLOTTE: Even in the struggle and even though we didn't have much I should (?) before the Germans came in we could not get any food. We could not get any bread. We had to feed six children. What a struggle. And my father could not sell anymore of his produce, and he could not do any business and we were just in a limbo. We didn't know what's going to happen with us. I mean I remember the last satchel when we were at home. We had enough food for Passover but then, but then you know, the Germans came in and moved we'll have to go quickly. So they came into our house and they said, "Just pack a few things and let's get out of here." And then we got out with nothing, just a few things in our bags.

INT: What were some of the signs that times were changing, that there were signs, you know are there signs of invasion, or persecution or searches?

CHARLOTTE: Well, as I said, I was born in Czechoslovakia. In 1938 the Hungarians came in. Things have changed. They came into our country and then everything changed. Nothing was the same because Czechs. The Czechs were a democratic country and was pretty nice when we lived there. But then when the Hungarians came in they sort of like "Jewing" everybody, you know, "Jew, Jew" and very anti-Semitic. And it didn't take long before the Germans came, and things became very difficult and they were talking about taking the Jews to the concentration camps. I used to go out to the train stations where hundreds of people were already evacuated from different towns to Auschwitz and we went out to the stations and brought the little food that we had, we were hungry. And we saw what was happening day after day. They were transporting Jews from different, from different areas to Auschwitz. So we knew it was only about a short time before they will take us.

INT: So your parents were aware of, they were learning about what was occurring in other parts of Czechoslovakia?

CHARLOTTE: Yes.

INT: (interruption) Can you talk about what was some of the values, expectations that you had learned from your family? Their philosophy of life or things that you carried with you from your family?

CHARLOTTE: What I carried with me. I always believed even as a child and I carried the belief, mostly that there is a G-d and he is going to come back to me. What made me survive?

INT: Some of that I'd like to touch on the past experiences in your family, what about a loving family and positive environment, what were some that you carried, your values or beliefs?

CHARLOTTE: I always felt that a person has to be good and you treat others as you would like to be treated yourself. And assume any other person first the good before you, before you look for the bad. And so I could get along with people and basically I feel I'm a loving person. I love people and I don't know whether what else I can tell you.

INT: You've always felt your values helped you through survival of your experiences?

CHARLOTTE: Yes, yes. I love my sisters. All the time I can't tell you I didn't have a squabble here and there at home but you know, it doesn't amount to anything. I think I realize what's important, you know, you don't keep harping, and wanting, and be mad about it, and then keep it in your heart and don't forget it. So this I don't do. I love them and I guess I'm going to love them 'till I die and I know they'll love me. Not much more.

INT: You talk if you can about what else is going on when changes occurring, the signs that times are getting worse and can you talk about that, about your worries, fears?

CHARLOTTE: Well, absolutely no, we had the last place which was in 1944. Things got very sad because my mom started saying, "Look, children, I don't know what's going to happen, whether they are going to take us away and we just have to try our best to do whatever we can for ourselves." So the Hungarian soldiers came into our house. We didn't even have time, you know, use separate dishes for Passover. We didn't have time to put them away or prepare anything for that matter to take on our way wherever we are going to go. And the Hungarians came and they rounded up the whole family and they took us into a big farm place. You know, a big yard where all the Jews from the same town were, a lot of Jews, a lot of people with crying children, little children, babies, you know, infants. And they told us to take out all the gold and all the jewelry and hand it over to them. We didn't have much jewelry. Whatever we had we gave them. And after that it was into cattle wagons, they took us to a ghetto at that time 'cause during that time food was very little. They give us some water, and a piece of bread, and we put our things in those wagons and we came to maybe I'll say a whole day's driving on the train to a place called Mateszalka in Hungary.

INT: And you were all together.

CHARLOTTE: We were all together at that time, and there was a ghetto and our place where we stayed was in attic. In a person's house in the attic, my family. The other family stayed in different places. And the attic was so terribly hot. There was no air. We slept with a floor there without any coverings, or any pillows and without any food. I did bring from home we brought some dried beans and things like that that could stay a while without any shouldn't get spoiled. And every day they woke us up at 5:00 in the morning, we should come down from the attic and go sweep the streets.

INT: Then they put you to work.

CHARLOTTE: To work.

INT: All the families?

CHARLOTTE: Yeah, go to work.

INT: And you were ordered by the Hungarians.

CHARLOTTE: The Hungarians.

INT: And they were at that time colluding with the Germans.

CHARLOTTE: With the, with the Germans, sure. The Hungarians were just as bad. They were having the girls and my youngest sister, they, and she had pretty hair. They took her and cut her hair off. And she was completely bald. That was the greatest trauma in her life, you know, being without hair. But later on she didn't know that once we come to Auschwitz they would take our hair off anyway. And we were sweeping the streets and my family was very, very hungry and we had those little beans. And I went downstairs from the attic and I tried to cook those beans and somehow someone had a pot and I made a fire outside, cooked those beans forever. Then finally, you know, that the food was done and I carried it upstairs, you know, to the attic. And we were trying to save every bit of it, you know, when just as it turned out we saved the beans for a few hours and from the extreme heat they got soured, couldn't even eat it. I'll never forget how I cried at that time. Anyway, we were there four weeks, very little food and lost a lot of weight. And after four weeks they took us back to the camp and shipped us to Auschwitz.

INT: What were your parents' feeling, expression to you? What were they talking about?

CHARLOTTE: They were not talking a lot. They were in such shock themselves, in so much agony and seeing their children be hungry. And they themselves, my mom cried constantly. And the children were just quietly sitting in the corner crying ourselves. And we knew that, you know, the end is coming. As we came close to Auschwitz, my mom looked out to, there were little openings from the doors and she looked out, just enough opening so that air could get in. And she saw the smoke going out from the crematorium. And you know, as little as she spoke to us about it she said, "G-d, I didn't know they'd have crematoriums," because she saw the smoke going up. She knew that while we were already standing in Auschwitz, and they didn't open the doors, but she saw that smoke coming up she said, "I didn't know they'd have crematoriums."

And after that, you know we didn't get out until they opened up the doors and we came down about. It was the one incident that I can't forget that we were, when we were in the cattle wagons and this neighbor of mine, a young woman that had twins, just about two weeks old. And these twins cried all night. They were so hungry, and she didn't have anything to feed, and they had no milk, and these babies cried and cried. Somebody pushed in like herrings so they had no room and these babies cried until the morning they were dead from hunger, thirst. That you know there are certain things that stand out in my mind. Of course a lot of bad things happened but this is what I remember.

And then when we came down from the cattle wagon, there was this man, Dr. Mengele was standing right here in front of me, at the train and he just waves his arms right and left. And left meant you are going to the crematorium and right meant going to the barracks where we, you know, eventually would have gone out to work. And I saw my mother go to the left and I didn't know exactly what it means. I didn't know whether I should go with her, run with her or what. But, you know, as fate had it she went there and she went straight to the crematorium with my little brother.

INT: And from that experience you don't know what went into the selection, whether it was age or size?

[Tape 1 - End Side 2] [Tape 2 - Begin Side 1]

CHARLOTTE: You know, how can a person look? And so she looked old then. So he sent her to the left, you know to the crematorium. We were young. We were able to withstand all this, you know, pressure and everything so he sent us to the right.

INT: And you were age seventeen?

CHARLOTTE: Yeah, seventeen. And I saw my father's half a loaf of bread we were sending him but the train, he went down, he picked up on the ground that we were on the trains. There were bread, there were people had to throw everything down that they had. They had a little suitcase. They had all kinds of things on the ground and my father picked up a loaf of bread and I said to my sister, Helen, "Helen, look. He has bread." He has bread and I looked at him and I screamed, "Dad, Dad," you know in Yiddish, Tatah. "Give me this bread." And my father gave me a look, he was like in a daze. And all five of us ended up to the right. And after that (interruption) I don't know if I am speaking eloquent but I am doing the best I can.

INT: You are doing wonderfully.

CHARLOTTE: And I cannot be what I am not. I am not a highly educated woman. I am just describing it as I see it and as I know it. And after we arrived in Auschwitz and we went to the right. We came into a big building and this building we were all, our hair was all cut off.

INT: Could you tell me about that experience, what that was like for you?

CHARLOTTE: There was no time for emotions. There was no time to think, gee, they are doing this to me. How am I going to survive? What am I going to do? We were concerned about our life, to be alive. Nothing else mattered what they did. They could not take away our desire to live no matter how much hair they cut off, no matter what they took from us. But we just wanted to live even without our hair, without anything. And then they handed us a dress, a striped dress and a jacket. They took the shoes away. They took everything away from us. So now what? Are they going to take our life too? They gave us a wooden pair of shoes and a dress and then they, we were allowed, a lot of young girls. I didn't recognize my sisters because all of her hair, all of the girls had their hair shaved off and I had to look, practically look in my sister's face to recognize her. Just to see from the back we all looked alike, you know? And we were desperately trying to be together, you know.

INT: In the same barracks.

CHARLOTTE: In the same barracks so they won't separate us.

INT: I'm amazed that happened and you were able to stay together.

CHARLOTTE: Yes, but as it turns out we went to the same camp, block 8. We were all together and they gave us, it was like you know, an old cubicle I don't know. I can't describe how many people. Maybe about ten, twelve people were feeding into an area like here, you know, like one after the other like bunk beds but they were not actually beds. There were just woods separating one area from the other. So there was an area on the bottom where like some people slept and they were on cots. And I slept on top. If you wanted to sleep you couldn't lay down like this. There were just a piece of board, nothing else. And we had to actually lay on the side to be able to fit.

INT: And that's how you slept with your sisters?

CHARLOTTE: And that's how I slept with my sisters and with the others. And in the morning they woke us up 5:30, maybe 6:00, I didn't have a watch but it was still kind of dark and they called us up, save ourselves. And we, the five of us were standing in line.

INT: They had a role call?

CHARLOTTE: A role call. And they counted us and after that they gave us some jobs to do, I don't exactly know, it was just the ground under. I still remember exactly what I did.

INT: What happened with the role call? Did they call your names, did they call numbers?

CHARLOTTE: No. Each one of us had a number. My number was 20,630. And that was my number and my sisters, different numbers. And we were all called by number. We couldn't go anywhere from the area from the concentration camp. We couldn't go to the toilet. Everybody had to go and couldn't go. In the morning we got a, we got around a spoonful of soup that consisted of yellow turnips without any bread or anything in it. One slice of bread that was maybe this thick which was mixed with wood grindings, half flour, half wood.

INT: Mixed with wood?

CHARLOTTE: Oh yeah, yes. Even though a lot of girls had diarrhea from that but even that wasn't enough. We went to the bathroom as a group. It was a room that had toilets open like holes on each side like a big area, and toilets like on one side and on the other side. And there was a couple, there was one thing like in between the two areas of toilets and hitting the other one in the back if they didn't do it fast. And we was scared. Who could relax and go? Yet most of the girls couldn't go because you know, was terrible, just terrible. So and then we went back in a group, back to the barracks. It was just, it was awful. But you know when you are young, somehow, somehow you just survive. You try when you are old but you can't do that anymore.

INT: When did you learn that your mother and your-

CHARLOTTE: I learned right away. I learned right away.

INT: You knew when by going to the left?

CHARLOTTE: No, I didn't know at that time. But when we were already in the barracks and there were girls from Czechoslovakia, from Hungary, from all over that were already in Auschwitz like four, five years and they were like the couples. They were taking care of the others, these two be so nervous and hit everyone. You couldn't ask a question. They were you know, like hysterical from what they saw everyday. They were burning people by the masses of people when sent to gas chambers and they were burned. That's what they told us and we saw constantly the smoke going up from the chimneys 'cause the crematorium was so close to our barracks that the smell you could smell, you know the smell of flesh. And we were waiting every day that they are going to take us this night, tonight, tonight. And they did it mostly at night.

INT: How did that occur? How did that selection take place?

CHARLOTTE: I don't know. I can't say but I know because I don't. I mean I'm glad I don't and I as far as what I know is they took them to a place to take a shower in a room and instead of the shower they let the gas on. But I was lucky enough not to be there. And even now if I hear, you know, the things that happen I really don't want to hear 'cause I went through so much I can't store anymore things that already have from that time. So if I see even a television show, whatever, I'm turning it off because it gets me very upset, so. After that I was in Auschwitz for three months can be very long time because I was very, very hungry and so much to remember in one summer some day that we didn't have to do anything when we were outside. Getting sun was outside. And I was so hungry and tired. Then I laid down on the ground and I took a stone-

INT: Put it?

CHARLOTTE: ...under my head as a pillow and I slept there, you know, for a couple of hours.

INT: You were allowed to do that on a Sunday to be outside?

CHARLOTTE: We were, yeah, on a Sunday we were sort of free. We didn't have to work. So we all, you know, got together in that yard and we all wanted to eat but there was nothing to eat.

INT: Did you talk about food?

CHARLOTTE: We did talk about food. Talk too much about food-

INT: Share some of the stories.

CHARLOTTE: With my sister, "Do you remember like Mom used to back [bake?]? Do you remember Friday morning how great it was with the fresh bread, you know, Shabbat with nice dinner table," and I had some friends there, and I could remember when we went this and that. But you know, our minds were so depressed from not having enough food we didn't even want to talk. We just, we had one thing in mind, food. And we were there like three months and after three months it started to like be nothing again, to go on a train to go to a ammunition factory. So when-

INT: Did you transport money for labor?

CHARLOTTE: Yes, for labor. So the girls that were there four or five years, they told us, "You girls are so lucky you are going out of Auschwitz because that means if you are going out of Auschwitz that means you are going to be alive and they are not going to kill you. So if you do go, please tell the world what they are doing to us. Tell everyone, every time looks like nobody knows, nobody is doing anything to save us." So when they lined us up again to go on a transport away from Auschwitz this Dr. Mengele did this selections again and my sister, Rosalie, she was about ten, eleven years old, and she was very thin and very short, small. And he picked her from my line and he said, "Come on out. You can't go anyplace." When he picked her out and there was a small room where they kept all the people that he didn't want to go on the transport and the room had a window about as big as this table.

INT: And how did you know this? Were there stories?

CHARLOTTE: I knew at that time, I already knew what the story was.

INT: Can you talk about what you were feeling at that time?

CHARLOTTE: Well, the girls, the girls, the girls, you know they were there a long time. They said to us, "Don't think that you are going to find your mother or your father because you won't find. They all burned in the crematorium. Can you see that smoke? That is what is happening. They are burning people here hundreds, by the thousands. So don't expect to be alive." There was one girl from Greece, and she sort of went out of her mind and she said, "My mother," I'll never forget the song she sang, Mama. She sang it like in Greek and then she sang it in German. She was there like a couple of years and she sang out of desperation, crying every time she sang the song she was crying for her parents and now they always try to, you know, tell her, "Don't be too difficult, they are going to take you to the crematorium so don't think." But that was her way out. She was just. She didn't talk. She just sang and that's the only song she knew how to sing. I'll never forget that.

INT: How do you think that the women that have been there for four or five years were affected, and I think you touched on it?

CHARLOTTE: They were, I don't think that these girls could ever lead a normal life. I don't think they could. What they saw nobody should ever see there in their lifetime. First of all they saw the people that were pushed into the gas chambers. They saw everything. They hugged the crying children. They saw everything except being in the crematoriums themselves. They saw people tortured to death. They saw people torn apart from those dogs. They had such vicious German Shepherds and you know, when these Germans had let those dogs out they were just tearing people apart. I myself was lucky enough not to see. But they told us what they saw. They were saying that we are, you know, the girls were saying that we ourselves are not ever going to get out of Auschwitz because we saw too much and being that we saw so much the Germans were going to eliminate us.

INT: And did you believe this?

CHARLOTTE: I believed it, absolutely. Especially the people that were helping with shoving the dead bodies into the ovens.

INT: So they actually used prisoners to do this?

CHARLOTTE: They used prisoners to do the work. So they were always using prisoners to shove, you know, the dead bodies that were taken out from the gas chambers into the crematorium. These were the Jewish, our people that get. And they were saying that none of these people would get out of Auschwitz. They knew too much. If they were lucky enough and be liberated by the Americans or the Russians, then they were lucky. But I don't know what happened to them. I don't know. But these same girls told us, "Go if you are lucky enough to get out of Auschwitz. Tell the world. Tell the world what they are doing to us. Don't keep quiet. Tell everybody." Anyway, when we were lying down to go on a transport again after three months, what I forgot to tell you is when we came out from the trains I saw mountains of shoes, mountains of glasses, mountains of clothing. Everything that the people had on themselves had to be eliminated. An unbelievable sight. Such desperation between the mothers and children. Mothers crying and children crying. Some of the mothers were very young. The children were torn from their arms, given, the children were given to the other people that were meant to go to the crematories and the mothers, you know, Mengele felt that they should go to the right side that they were still young enough. Children crying terribly. It was such a chaos that we didn't know where we were. We didn't know what was happening. Was it hell? What was it? And it felt like hell. It felt like hell. We felt this is the end.

INT: And your emotions? Can you tell me a little bit about how you felt?

CHARLOTTE: At that time everyone was like looking out for himself. "Don't touch me. Leave me. Let me go. Just don't do anything to me." Sure, we were concerned about the other people but most of all, when is it going to hit me? When is it going to hit me? What is going to happen to me? What is happening here? G-d, please, you know, everyone cried and it was a chaos in desperation.

INT: And that image stayed in your mind?

CHARLOTTE: Oh, how can you ever put it behind you? How can you? I'm trying to leave this in back of my mind not to bring it to my consciousness but how can you? It is always there. It's always there. How can you ever be free? How can you ever be really, really happy when this is always in your mind?

INT: You mean free of the memories, the flashbacks?

CHARLOTTE: Free of the memories. How can you? Sure, you try. You do everything you can and you try to present yourself as a normal human being but you know you are not. You know what you went through and it's there. I had found do not allow myself to, to bring this into

my mind in consciousness because I would not be able to live with this on a daily basis, so. After that and yet I was very lucky 'cause I did not go through what a lot of people did. A lot of people were hanged, you know, a lot of people were raped. A lot of people experiments were made on them. I have a friend that lives now in Florida. They were making all kind of experiments on her. She has not, she survived, yes, but she has had all her life problems with her stomach, with her always. She is losing weight. She is gaining weight. She has been in and out of hospitals. Emotionally and physically has left her in a very bad state. And so you know, I didn't have that. So I was very lucky. The Germans, I can't say have hit me. I did not put myself in that position. I did not do, I obeyed whatever they tell me to. I was not raped, thank G-d, 'cause a lot of girls were.

I remember when we were transported out of Auschwitz again to a town called G near Stuttgart, I wasn't used to, G-d and my sister, as I sat with her like in Auschwitz she was the last thing to go to the crematorium, my younger sister 'cause she wasn't strong enough to go and they put her in that little room. And we were all, Dr. Mengele told us all to take our clothes off and we were naked and he inspected our bodies to see if there was no, any marks on our bodies. And we were taken to go on a transport to go to work. Anyway, my sister was put in that little room and she knew what her fate was going to be. She already knew because we were three months in Auschwitz so we knew what is going to happen. And we were standing in front of that room, a little enclosure where she was closed in, and she was jumping up to that window and it was like (?) her face, she was small.

INT: And you were where?

CHARLOTTE: I could not see her but it's like it was like in a hole that you had to jump up and she jumped up to that window, and I saw biting her hands and her fingers. And she was saying in Yiddish, "Sisters, don't leave me." And when I saw my fourth sister crying so much and I was naked there standing in front of Mengele, and I ran after him and I put my life at risk and I sat there, "Please, let my sister live, we are five sisters. Let my sister live." And he turned around and he said, "That she is too weak and you can all five of you, you are five sisters you can all stay here but she cannot go anyplace. She has to stay here but you can stay with her. You can stay with her." And you know what that meant. That meant going to the crematorium with her. There was no problem for him to send a few more people to the crematorium but he wouldn't let her go. Anyway, so we had no choice. We had to leave her there and just go on.

So they lined us up in front of the train station. It was a big room and usually we go five in a line. So we five sisters always got together and being that she wasn't there they gave us a fifth person. And we did cry, that you know, Rosalie, dear Rosalie the youngest child, the youngest sister is not with us. And as we were standing there all of a sudden I see Rosalie running like wild and she was looking desperately looking for us. What happened is one of the girls that was there like three, four years, she saw me crying and my sisters crying so much she went into that room, she took Rosalie out. She gave her a dress, one of those striped dresses and she said, "Run." And she told her where to run.

INT: Where to run?

CHARLOTTE: Where to go. And she led her there. She put her life in danger and when we saw Rosalie run I said, "Rosalie, Rosalie." She came running. My luck was that Dr. Mengele was someplace but I didn't see. We took her back in our line. And of course the woman that was our fifth didn't want to go out, you know, she was afraid. But we told her, "Listen, she is our fifth and you have to go someplace else. She went out. She was an older, you know, he was not as young as we were. And I pinched Rosalie's cheeks, really pinched her cheeks and I told her, "Stand on your tip toes and don't look at him when he comes us. Don't, look away." And walk on your tip toes and that's how it happened. She walked through and went to our, you know, the trains with us, and those cattle wagons again and she ended up with us.

INT: She was able to walk by unrecognized.

CHARLOTTE: Unrecognized.

INT: It's a miraculous story from you acting so courageous. I am very struck by that, your attempting to save her life.

CHARLOTTE: This was not the only time that I, she doesn't remember, Rosalie, but this was not the only time there was selections. Other times, you know, to come out from one line to the other. She was, I guess would be one of my sisters which would be all together. And so, but she doesn't remember that but this part she remembers. So anyway, so we went into the cattle wagons again, and they took us to a town called R (?) and that meant already that meant we were away from Auschwitz and that is good. You know we went to a concentration camp which was equally as bad, wires around and of course nobody could go near those, were instantly killed. As a matter of fact there was a young girl there that trying to get out, I don't know what she was trying to do. She was hit by those wires and she died instantly. There was a lot of incidences like that.

INT: This camp provided more hope? It was not-

CHARLOTTE: This camp provided more hope in a way that it was not crematorium in that camp. Otherwise we were just in as much danger. People were sent from there to Auschwitz, back. You know, some people that were like it was one woman who was pregnant and her pregnancy already showed and she was sent back. There was always people sent back for some reason.

INT: And the fact that she was pregnant would be a reason for selection?

CHARLOTTE: Yeah, she (?) she couldn't work and you know, the Germans didn't want any babies. There was one woman that was pregnant. The woman came from my town but she was able to hide it because she was tall and the food wasn't enough so her pregnancy really didn't show that much. So anyway, when she had her baby there was a lot of good doctor that was equally Jewish and she knew about it that she is going to help her deliver the baby when the baby comes and they will have to do something, you know. She had the baby, luckily at night. She had the baby and they took the baby, she knew if the Germans would find out that she had a baby

she will go back with the baby. So in order for her to be safe she took the baby and put it in a, there was a basement with potatoes and stuff. She took the baby in the cold basement, left it there all night to freeze to death. And the baby froze to death and that's how the baby was already dead, that's when they had to tell them, the SS people that the baby was born that and that's how she survived. So it was terrible.

Anyway, in that concentration camp in Reisen we equally had very little food but we went everyday. We went everyday at 6:00 in the morning, we started to work in an ammunition factory. We were woken up at 5:00 in the morning. By the time we got there we had to start at exactly 6:00. And I knew what on time and I had those wooden shoes, no coat, no anything and we walked in that big snow with the wooden shoes with no stockings or anything. We were terribly cold. Then as we walked a lot of snow accumulated on the bottom of my shoe and you couldn't stop for a minute to take the snow off because the SS man with a gun. You could not stop for a minute. You had to keep on walking. Not only that we, they taught us songs, and they made, you know, the German people should believe that we have a good time. So we had to sing songs while we were walking to the factory from the concentration camp.

INT: These songs were in German?

CHARLOTTE: In German.

INT: And did you understand those words?

CHARLOTTE: Oh yes, I understand. I still know the songs. How can you forget? And they were like work songs, you know.

INT: And you saw what happened if you stopped?

CHARLOTTE: I had a lot of snow on my shoe and he came and picked me out front, you know. So of course I fell. That when I fell he said, "Get up you or I'm going to shoot you." He tripped me and I couldn't get the snow off because I couldn't walk. There was so much snow on the thing. And he said, "Get up or I'll shoot." I got up real fast and I tried to walk the best way I could. You know you don't believe-

[Tape 2 End Side 1] [Tape 2 - Begin Side 2]

CHARLOTTE: I wish I would have had the dogs right there, you know. And so when we came in, in the factory, we had a lot of civilians there and there was one civilian that was, he was very nice to us. He was very nice to us.

INT: This was a German?

CHARLOTTE: He was a German. A German civilian and he showed us what to do. You know we worked with, at one point we worked with large machines, you know the machines were so large you could pull it up and down. They were practice [?] like ammunition was. But

later on we were able to get into a smaller room where it was warmer. It had to be warm, the temperature to be warmer before the items were doing.

INT: So this was a factory.

CHARLOTTE: It was a factory, an ammunition factory.

INT: And all of you, the sisters were employed in the-

CHARLOTTE: Yes. Yes, but we were working in different shifts. The three of them were working on one shift, and I was working when they were working night I was working day and when they were working day I worked nights. Two of us were working, you know, the same shift. So anyway, yes, so this man was a very, he was a civilian, a very nice guy and he had a daughter that was the same age as Rosalie. She was like ten or eleven years old, and by that time, and the war was starting to come to the end, and there was planning, the Germans were going to lose the war. (daughter doing something with videotape)

INT: How did you know that the war was coming to the end? How did you hear this? How did you get this information?

CHARLOTTE: See the only way I knew, we didn't have any papers or radios or anything but this guy, he was a nice human being, Mr. Shofts. He kept telling us the war isn't going to last much longer. The war isn't going to last. It's going to come to an end. And he told my sister, Rosalie, he said the Germans were always telling us that you Jews are, "We had a war because of you Jews. You created that war." That's what the Germans were saying, you know, to everybody. They were saying to the German people that the reason we have a war is because of the Jews, they created the war. And he said to Rosalie, he said, "Rosalie, it's as much your fault if we have a war as it is my daughter's fault. She is the same age as you are. It's not your fault. We can see now what he has done." Hitler, why he was against them, you know, but he couldn't do anything. So-

INT: How did you feel meeting a man, a German man who had some compassion, given your experiences up until that time?

CHARLOTTE: This man has brought every day a slice of bread for my sister, Rosalie, every day. You know what that means. It meant lunch. It meant risk to him. If they would have caught him, you know, they would have sent him away to a concentration camp. And he made sure that Rosalie eats that bread up so nobody would take it from her. And he also did for Rosalie, every night like 2:00 she was very tired. He told her to put her head down on the desk. He covered her with his coat so she can take a little nap and watch for the SS woman. If he saw the SS woman coming he woke her up real fast. So every night he did that.

INT: And you knew this because you were working the same shift or she told you about that?

CHARLOTTE: At one point I was working with her and also talking what she was telling me that he did that for her which was great. But one thing that stands out in my mind, they gave us each day a slice of bread, and when my sister and I were working the same shift we decided we are going to split that one piece of bread and save one piece just in case tomorrow we are not going to get any bread. We were always afraid of tomorrow. And so this Mr. Shoft gave us a little nacht table. How you call that?

INT: A night table.

CHARLOTTE: A night table and he gave us a key and he said, "If you want to keep something in there here is this night table. You can keep it in there." We accumulated like eight pieces of bread from a week and put it in that night table and locked it up. Of course if the bread doesn't have any air it is going to start getting moldy. What we did was took the fresh bread, put it in there, took the moldy one out, ate the moldy one, kept putting the fresh bread in. And one time when there was, when I was in the concentration camp there was a control, the SS man said, "If you have anything in your pockets or if you have anything in your hands put it out because I am going to control. I'm going to search." There is a search ongoing. And I had this little key from the night table, and I knew I am going to have to open up my hands, and you know, and shake everything out and I didn't know what to do about the key. And I said, my G-d, what am I going to do with the key? And I took the key and put it in my wooden shoe.

INT: And how did you end up being responsible for holding the key?

CHARLOTTE: Well, I'll tell you what happened. And he saw me bend down, and he came over right, and the SS man and he said, "What did you put in your shoe?" I mean they saw everything, everything. You couldn't hide anything. And of course I took off the shoe and gave them the key. He didn't say anything to me but he gave the key to an SS woman and I knew this is the end. I mean every little incident, everything that they didn't want us to do I knew it is going to be very bad. And when I came to the factory that day and I saw Mr. Shoft, you know that German civilian, and I cried there and I said, "Mr. Shofts," and I told him what happened. "They are going to kill me now. Now this is my end. The bread is in there." He said, "Why did you save all this bread?" I said, "I was afraid they are not going to give us any bread tomorrow."

And it didn't take long and the SS woman came, and she said, and she came up to me and she says, "Show me what this opens up, the key." And I showed her and he could have broken the, you know the night table open but he didn't want to. It would have caused more problems. So she came and she found those eight pieces of molded bread and she looked at me, she said, "You swine, you pig. You people are hungry and you are taking eight pieces of bread and you are putting it in there to get moldy. It looks like you have too much bread. You are not going to get the bread anymore." And I cried bitterly. I couldn't even talk I was crying too much and she didn't need an answer from me. I was afraid to talk. I was even afraid to look at her. And this Mr. Shofts, you know, that guy, he came up to me, to her and he said to her, "Fraulein," he said, "If you have a heart she should not be reported. If you have a heart please, please don't report her. She saved that bread because she was afraid of the next day." She says, "But they are getting bread every day." He says, "But she was afraid. So please, please, I beg you." At this

point he really put his life in danger even speaking to her and sticking up for a, for a nobody, for a Jew. But he did it.

INT: And you heard this.

CHARLOTTE: And I heard this. I was there, and I heard it, and it helped because this one has never reported me. And when I came back, you know, to the concentration camp from the factory I was waiting for them to call me but they never called me. I never saved bread again, never. One time when I put a piece of bread under my so-called pillows, I had a couple of rags that I put under my head as a pillow. There was this girl that stole that piece of bread from me one time. I'll never forget that. It meant life, that piece of bread and I never saved any bread since then.

INT: Did you see the SS guard again? What did you feel when you'd see her? Was it like waiting, to be taken away?

CHARLOTTE: Well, you see there was no room. I was afraid to look at her. I was afraid of what she might do. I was trying to stay out of her way to look away, not looking at her. At one time we got a meal 12:00 at night in the factory. They gave us soup. So at night was better than, you know, than during the day because the factory themselves they cooked something. In the concentration camp we didn't have much. But we were freer in that factory and there was a lot of people working there, not only just the survivors but a lot of civilians worked there. And I saw some raw potatoes that were not cooked yet when we went to have our 12:00 night dinner, I saw some potatoes on the side that they were being cooked and I stole a couple of potatoes. And I put it into my shirt, you know, I had a tie, put it in there. And that SS woman saw me do that.

INT: That same woman?

CHARLOTTE: It was the same woman. She saw me do that. I was a bad girl. And when we went back to the factory I had to finish off the night, you know. That SS woman later on, she became sort of friendly with me, in a way she told me to take her boots off when it was raining or whatever, to polish up her shoes. I was honored to do that, a great honor that I had. And then I helped her put the boots on.

INT: What do you think that meant that she asked you to do those things?

CHARLOTTE: What it meant that I thought that she took a liking to me that maybe, but you know I am going to find maybe a little bit more, you know, liking from her, and that she is not going to do me any harm, or persecute me or whatever. I looked like a German girl because I had like light brown hair and I looked more German than Jewish. And she said, "I thought that you were there," when I got those potatoes. She said, "I always thought that you were better than the others but there isn't one good one of a Jew. You had to steal those potatoes. Don't you get enough food here?" I didn't answer her because I didn't know what to answer. I just started crying. And she looked at me and I was afraid she was going to report me, you know? She took the potatoes away. She didn't report me but she never asked me to do anything for her again.

She just kept looking at me, you know, that I'm no better than the others. I'm just a rotten Jew, a stealer, a no good bum. But I was lucky in that respect. She did not report me. There was, that meant life.

INT: And what do you think was motivating you to act to take food? What was motivating you, given your experiences, of coming close to death?

CHARLOTTE: I really wanted to provide more food for my sisters. Many times even the soup, you know that we got 12:00 at night, I used to save up a little soup in, leave it in their little night table and leave it for my sisters when they come during the day shift because they were at the same place. One time they took us out on the front to take out carrots, you know, from the ground. And certain people were chosen, and I was chosen one of them, and I took a lot of carrots from the ground and I put it in my shirt. I wanted to bring it to my sisters, especially my older sister that was always hungry and always coughing. She could have coughed all winter long. She wasn't warm enough. There was not enough blankets to cover her. Then, and you know, I always wanted to give my sisters a little more, not so much for myself but for my sisters.

INT: So you acted to protect?

CHARLOTTE: To protect my sisters because sort of at home even I was like the provider for my sisters. I used to make the noodles at home so we would have it for the end of the week. You couldn't buy noodles or anything here into the stores like you buy here, everything ready made because everything had to be done by hand. And I see how cook my mom, Passover came. I was busy with preparations and doing cooking; I was not in school, my job at home was to help my mom and to provide for the family. So I sort of took like the role of providing for my sisters. So that's, you know.

INT: At many opportunities you put yourself at risk.

CHARLOTTE: Oh, it was a great risk but how lucky Rosalie that I wasn't deported. G-d was looking over me. I always felt that. He was looking over me. In all those years and all the problems we had, even, you know, in the United States, try to make a living which wasn't easy going through those times, the hard times with my husband's illness, the whole doubts that we had. I am grateful for everything that I'm still here and I'm able to be with my children and grandchildren. And if my time comes I've lived my life, and I'm grateful for everything and I'm going to have but since as a young child. I'll be able to die naturally. But hopefully nobody is going to kill me because that's what my only wish is no one should kill me.

INT: You are certainly grateful that you are here.

CHARLOTTE: Yeah, yeah.

INT: How long did you remain in that camp? How long were you there? And what happened when liberation came?

CHARLOTTE: When liberation came, I can't tell you the happiness, the great happiness we felt, the tears. When the Germans saw that, you know, that they are losing the war they put us, we started walking, walking forward, deeper into Germany. Walking was bad because we were so weak. We didn't get enough food so you know, but we walked. We walked to another camp further away from the camp where we stayed before.

INT: And how did this happen? Was it announced that there would be a transfer?

CHARLOTTE: No, (?) oh, you mean when we were liberated?

INT: Yes. What was, what had occurred and how did you get there?

CHARLOTTE: Okay, later on we walked a while and then they put us into cattle wagons again to take us deeper into Germany so that we can't be liberated. And-

INT: You were told this?

CHARLOTTE: We were told this.

INT: And you believed it?

CHARLOTTE: They didn't tell us that we are going to be liberated. They told us we are going on another transport away from here. But the reason that we are doing this is we knew, we knew somehow that you know, that the war is coming to a close. That it has to come to a close eventually. And we were parked one night when the train didn't go and we heard the bombs falling. We knew something is happening. We constantly heard bombs falling and we were in the cattle wagons in the trains and we stopped for that one night. The train didn't move and we heard bombs around us. As a matter of fact the trains where we were in was bombed in the front. We were like in the middle and a lot of people died in concentrations camps. You know, people died in the trains. We were being bombed by the Americans and they died. But the rest of the trains in a morning, early in the morning it was like dawn, they opened up the doors all of a sudden, and here we see the Germans sitting on the ground, the SS people sitting on the ground. It was like in a field. And like on a field, and it was like a mountain going up and they were sitting on the ground. And we were saying, "What's happening here? Why are they sitting on the ground?" And the guns were put down on the ground and all of a sudden we see was American soldiers and he said, "Come on out. Come on out." And we started jumping down from the trains, and we saw American soldiers and these girls were falling all over these men, kissing their feet. Oh, American soldiers. We were kissing their feet, and we cried, and we screamed and he said, "You are free. You are free." Oh, I can't tell you. I can't tell you what we felt. You couldn't believe it. And then the other side of the fence there were men, and they were like skeletons and they couldn't go down from the train. They were rolling down from their mountains.

INT: These were other survivors.

CHARLOTTE: Survivors. They couldn't walk. They couldn't do anything. They were like skeletons. And after that, you know, when they told us we are free they took us someplace, was where they came with big trucks, put us into the trucks, took us into a place where and they had a kitchen where they gave us food. And you know there is a lot of people that died after the concentration camp that they were so hungry, and they stuffed themselves with food and they died. Their stomach couldn't take it. You had to eat very little.

INT: And you were taken to a German home?

CHARLOTTE: Well, we were in Germany and they were set up some, it was like military camps. And they took us there, and they fed us and we stayed a while. And you know, then everybody went wherever they wanted to go.

INT: You stayed long enough to rest?

CHARLOTTE: I stayed long enough to rest. And then we were free. We were free. We could go anyplace we wanted to go. And well, the American soldiers were very helpful and they took us in trucks wherever we wanted to go. They took us to the next city or to the next train we wanted to go. We were free to go wherever we wanted to.

INT: How did you make decisions of where to go?

CHARLOTTE: Well, we wanted to go to Prague. We just wanted to go to Prague, all of us and see you know. This was our country, and eventually I wanted to go home, and see what happened to our house and you know, the girls, we were all young girls and there is nineteen-, twenty-, fifteen-, sixteen-year-old kids. And by that time our hair got, you know, little longer, and we wanted to get out of these clothes and they gave us clothes. They gave us civilian clothes, dresses that we wanted. And I guess the joint distribution from the United States they sent a lot of clothes that they gave us whatever we needed.

INT: Did you have thoughts of why there weren't bombs earlier?

CHARLOTTE: Oh yes.

INT: Where were Americans?

CHARLOTTE: Of course we had thoughts all the time that we were there where, you know where are the other Jews? Why aren't they doing something? Why are people, you know, standing still and not doing anything? Why aren't they protesting? Why, where are the other countries? What's happening that they let us be slaughtered like cattle and they are not doing anything? So, but we had no answers, we had no appeals, nothing.

INT: How did you learn about your father? As far as you knew he was still at Auschwitz. You didn't know whether he had survived?

CHARLOTTE: I remember when I told you that somebody...

INT: Told you?

CHARLOTTE: Told me my father is here? When a little time passed then we didn't hear from my mom I knew she went to a, she is not going to come back. I mean millions of people didn't come back. I knew she is not going to come back. That's also the reason why I wanted to go home because where do you go when you come from a place like that? You want to go where maybe you will be able to meet the rest of your family, and I have a lot of uncles there, and aunts and cousins. We were such a big family. No one came back. No one. No one came back.

INT: What did you believe about him or hope about your father? You didn't have an opportunity to see him at all in the camps or know his whereabouts?

CHARLOTTE: Well, you see the men were separated from the women. So when I saw him when we got off in Auschwitz when I saw him at the train station with a loaf of bread I wasn't sure whether he is going to survive. I couldn't even go out and talk to him but I wasn't sure whether he is going to survive. But he was in Buchenwald, and he was in the coal mines and he came back with a black lung. And we were lucky enough to have him for a few more years and here to the United States.

INT: Did he tell you about his experiences at different camps and how he survived?

CHARLOTTE: Mostly that he was in a coal mine digging the coal and every day people were falling like flies. Every day masses of people die and they always replaced them with other people. And there were mountains of people, dead people that they were just waiting to be sent to the crematorium. And wherever he went it was death. Wherever he went. So you know, hunger mostly. Hunger and abuse.

INT: So it was soon that about this time when you were trying to go back to Prague that you had heard that your father was alive.

CHARLOTTE: Right. Right.

INT: Could we go back to that time when you were able to see him? You knew he was alive and you returned back to the hometown.

CHARLOTTE: Yeah. As I said, after the Americans liberated us, and gave us enough clothing on our back, and gave us a few extra things to change in and shoes. Actually, we were able to go after I came to Czechoslovakia, which was not far from where I was. And we were able to go on the trains free, no charge. You were able to go anyplace you wanted. And when we came to Prague we were able to go into any restaurant and get free food. Everything was free because masses of people came back, and as I said, we tried to go to my hometown to see what happened and maybe someone came back. At that point my friend called me and she said, "Your dad is here." So we stayed in Prague for a little while, went to see my father and he looked like no dead

person looks, as bad as he did. But after a while, you know, he recuperated. He was six months in the hospital.

INT: Can you talk about how do you think, you touched on this, but how do you think you coped? How do you account for what helped you through?

CHARLOTTE: First of all I was young. And when you are young you can't believe that at your young age they are going to take your life. I was, I had great hope. I had hope even the smallest hope, you know, but I still, I didn't lose that hope that somehow we are going to survive. I didn't give in. I never gave in, never. Even the most desperate moments I didn't give in and I just had that strong desire to survive. And that's basically what I think helped me to cope on a daily basis and that's what helped me to survive, I think, great belief and hope.

INT: You talk about that your faith in G-d was a source of strength.

CHARLOTTE: Yes.

INT: Did that change? Were there times that you questioned that belief or faith?

CHARLOTTE: No. I still believed strongly in G-d. As a matter of fact, before I go to sleep I say my little prayer to G-d 'cause I am alone now. And things are not rosy when you are alone in a house and those long evenings, you know, it's, it's not, but I miss my husband very much. And I find it difficult to be alone. We cope with life alone without my husband. And as I said, I went through such hard times, and I coped, and I survived and you know, in a time of crisis regardless whether it is in a concentration camp or in other situations you have someone to lean on. You have someone to believe in and he is always there.

INT: And so many people had depended on you, your sisters. You seem to be a source of strength and support for them.

[Tape 2 - End Side 2] [Tape 3 - Begin Side 1]

INT: It can be painful to talk about, I want to question you about how did you mourn the loss of family?

CHARLOTTE: My mom?

INT: Your mother and your brother. How did you do that, alone, or with your sisters, your husband?

CHARLOTTE: Well, many times when we would get together with my sisters we talk about our mom. And it happened to her what happened to everybody else and we won't ever forget her, never. We loved her. And I've left, you know, memorialized her in Miami Beach, you know, her name is right on the Holocaust...

INT: Museum?

CHARLOTTE: Museum. I do whatever I can. You know, I give donations in memory of my mom. Sure, I am sad that she is not here. She would have probably not be here now. As far as crying for her when I was in concentration camp and I knew she is not going to come back, yes, I cried. But there was no time for mourning because we had to survive ourselves. So, you know, we always remember her, and we love her and there is not much, you know, we can do at this point. And as I said, you know, when I came to Prague with my husband to ask permission from my father to marry, we got married, and we were on our own and we were trying to come to a easier place...we were trying to come to the United States is because who wouldn't? Everybody wanted to come to the United States. We wanted a better life. We wanted a family, we wanted, you know, to come here and you know, build a life.

INT: And you didn't at that time consider going anywhere else, for instance to Palestine?

CHARLOTTE: To Israel? No. Because my family, at that time my father and my sisters, they all wanted to tell me and I didn't think, to the good life. And I wrote a letter to my uncle. I have his address, and I asked him if he would sponsor me and my husband. And he wrote us back that he would. He sent us papers and we were in the displaced persons camp in Germany for three years waiting for a visa to come to the United States.

INT: What was that like?

CHARLOTTE: You know, just a normal life. It wasn't great, but we had enough food and everything. And after the war, and we waited for our time to come and...This picture was taken at that time.

INT: A picture of both of you?

CHARLOTTE: A picture of my husband, yeah.

INT: Both of these pictures were in Germany?

CHARLOTTE: No, this was taken in Czechoslovakia, this.

INT: Which one?

CHARLOTTE: The big one but the small one was taken in Germany.

INT: This was after you got home already?

CHARLOTTE: Yeah.

INT: So this was in the displaced persons?

CHARLOTTE: Right. After the war.

INT: Oh, wonderful. How young you were there.

CHARLOTTE: Yes, I was young.

INT: And the other picture?

CHARLOTTE: These are four of the five sisters. That's her father and my (?).

INT: And when was this picture taken?

CHARLOTTE: It was taken after the war. After the war that we got situated.

INT: After your father got out of the hospital?

CHARLOTTE: After Zayde got out of the hospital. It's my father and my husband. And this one sister is missing here.

INT: You all look so much healthier.

CHARLOTTE: Oh, this was after we already, you know, we had time to come to our strength and everything. So you know, we had a blanket on our back. And I took the blanket, took it to a tailor and he made me a suit out of it. So that was like, I would say maybe a year or two after we were liberated.

INT: But even a year. I mean, it looks like so much longer.

CHARLOTTE: Well, they are going to get you started eating and eating and you gain all this weight back. At that time we were.

INT: Your father, he lived much longer?

CHARLOTTE: Oh, my father died in 1973.

INT: Oh, so he left, too.

CHARLOTTE: So he was able to come to the United States, and I think the joint distribution committee took him out and my uncle took me and my husband out to the States. So I came to, we were three years in DP camp waiting for a visa. Finally got the visa, came on a boat. The boat was called Marine Jumper. It was a military boat. And at that time I was pregnant with Renee, and I didn't know that I was pregnant and the whole time that I was on that boat for ten days, I threw up. Was something awful. Couldn't go once to the dining room, not once. And was terribly ill. Terribly ill. And finally, we got off the boat after ten days. My uncle was waiting in New York. For us he met us there, my husband and I. He took us into a big

restaurant. I will never forget that. And he knew we had come from the concentration camps. We were very hungry, but actually, I wasn't hungry anymore because that were like, you know like three years after the concentration camp.

INT: The ship came arriving to New York.

CHARLOTTE: In New York, 1949. We were liberated in '45. And he took us to a large restaurant. And I washed my hair on the boat with the salt water and my hair stood up and I came into this restaurant and people were looking, who was this creature with her hair straight up. And my uncle was sort of like ashamed, I think, and he turned around and he said, "I just brought her over from Europe." Anyhow, they looked, I just brought her from Europe. What is your problem? Europe is no wonder you look like this? And they put a whole bunch of stuff, food on the table. He said, "Give them whatever they want. Just fill the table up. Fill the table up with all kinds of foods." And we are just looking at the table, I felt like throwing up.

INT: And you were pregnant at the time not sick from the journey?

CHARLOTTE: Yeah, and I just couldn't even look at food. "Anyway, eat, I am paying for this. Eat. Eat." My husband ate, you know, as much as he could. My uncle said, "I'm paying for all this. You are not eating." I said, "I can't eat." I started eating something, you know, and it was just like in my throat. And as soon as he went out of the restaurant I threw it up. It was awful. I couldn't eat it. And then we had to drive from New York to Virginia and that took a few hours. And when I got there he has the most, the most wonderful daughter-in-law in the world. And the daughter-in-law began to dictate with all different kind of foods, anything she could cook she cooked up and there was a big thing with food. And who could look at food? And her name is Mary and I'll love her until I die. She is just wonderful that lady. And she spoke to me in Yiddish. She said, "Eat, Charlotte, eat. Eat," I couldn't and I said, "I want to go to sleep. I am so tired I want to go to sleep." And Mary said, "Well, she wants to sleep so what's the point? She is not going to eat." So she let me go to sleep. And it was like in the evening, and I slept 'till morning and I didn't get up to eat. You know old food was left on the table, poor Mary.

INT: How did it feel to be a part of a family with relatives?

CHARLOTTE: Well, I'll tell you. I really didn't have a good time with my uncle. It was the truth. My uncle came from the old country and he, of course he still had old fashioned ways. And you come to the United States, you keep a person for two days, for three days and then you go your own way. No matter what you do you don't stay here. My husband came from a religious family, and as I said, he was in business with his wife and with his father-in-law. He was not used to doing labor work, you know, like going out and doing labor work. And he was not trained for anything else and he didn't have the education. My husband was a very learned man in Yiddish, you know. Like when he was alive he used to go up on the stage and read the Torah and it was nothing to him. And in a synagogue, here in Beth El the rabbi knew him, and we were in both synagogues, and they all respected him because they knew how much he knows Jewish traditions, and the regions and the Bible. And he knew about everything, you know. And he was not my, my uncle was not learned in that respect, my husband was. He went to the

yeshiva. He studied for years. Although he was not educated in English but he was very educated man in the Hebrew.

INT: And your uncle had been here for a period of time?

CHARLOTTE: He was here.

INT: And was assimilated?

CHARLOTTE: Right. Yes. So anyway, my aunt at that time was not alive. She died like two years before I came, and my uncle said that I married a man that is never going to work. Is never going to work because my husband couldn't do any labor work. So he started like talking against my husband that he isn't going to amount to much to anything in the United States you have to work, and he thinks he is going to be a rabbi and he can't be a rabbi. He doesn't know the language, and what it was he thinks he is going to do when, and I still didn't know that I was pregnant.

INT: And how did you feel when he'd say these things?

CHARLOTTE: When he said things like that I was very upset and I had nowhere to go and I came with five dollars in our pocket. We changed it from the money that we had to American money and we had five dollars. Where do you go with five dollars? What do you do? And my husband didn't want to work on Shabbas, that was another problem. So he says he is going to get him a job but he's got to work on Shabbas. I said to him, "Do what you can. I got to get out of here. I don't want to be here." And my husband took a job as a milk deliverer, you know, to get up 4:00 in the morning. At that time they used to deliver milk to people at the door, you know, leave the milk at the door. And so he went with this guy, he couldn't communicate with him, but he went with him, picked up the crates and delivered it to the people at the door.

INT: He didn't know English.

CHARLOTTE: He didn't know English. Anyway, after two, three days my husband said, "This is not the job for me." I mean that is not a job for him. I said, "Please, just make enough, enough money so we can get out of here." And, but he couldn't do it. So my uncle got him a job, construction worker. He supplied him with high plastic boots so he could walk in the, you know, in the mud, or dirt or whatever. And he said, "Well, I have a neighbor that is going to take you." The neighbor took my husband to the construction work and I said to him, "Please, stay. Please stay two weeks no matter how hard it is." I would have been glad to go instead of him but I couldn't do it. And he went and he stayed like two, three days. He said he can't do that either. So we were like sort of lost. At that point my uncle thought that since he sent up the papers, you know, that we are going to be a burden on him and he is going to be responsible for our livelihood. He didn't want it.

INT: He didn't want to financially support you.

CHARLOTTE: He didn't want financially support us. I didn't blame him for that but the time was so short. He didn't give us the time to you know, to see what, what life is all about and what we are going to do. This Mary, his daughter-in-law, she spoke Yiddish from and she, she said, "Charlotte, don't worry. Something will happen." In the meantime I kept losing weight because I couldn't eat and she said, "There is something wrong with you. First of all, we got to take you to a doctor."

INT: You were losing weight instead of gaining weight.

CHARLOTTE: I was losing weight instead of gaining. And she took me to a doctor and the doctor gave me a complete examination and he said I'm pregnant. Mary could not conceive any children but she adopted two kids when she married. But I'm sure that was, you know, painful for her that she could not. She was about my age, maybe a year or two older.

INT: And how did you feel to learn that you were pregnant?

CHARLOTTE: I was very happy because actually, I was married to my husband for almost five years and I couldn't have any children. I couldn't conceive. So finally, I don't know when it happened that I conceived, and I was pregnant, you know, on the boat already but nevertheless, I was very happy. But I had no place to go and I had, my future was so, you know, nowhere. So that Mary, she said, "I'm going to try and see if I can help you." And she, she said, "Come with me. We'll go make an appointment to the Jewish Family Services in Washington." When we went out there and she told them the whole story, that you know, my uncle took us out but my husband can't do the work. He's got to be trained for something what to do and we can't live with my uncle because he doesn't want to keep us.

INT: How did you talk about the situation to your husband? Did you argue about it? Did he accept your opinion that something had to be done?

CHARLOTTE: I could not argue with him because I knew what he was all about. I knew he can't do that kind of work. I just asked him to do it so we can get out, to endure it. I knew this is not going to be his livelihood. He won't be able to do it. But I just want him to do it long enough so we can get out of there. But he, apparently he couldn't. But you know, I didn't argue with him, so anyway, what happened is Mary took us to Washington, and the Jewish Family Service did not want to take us in because they said that my uncle sponsored us and he is really responsible for us. And so anyway, I came back. But she kept in touch with him, calling all the time. As a matter of fact, she called Baltimore, which was close to Washington. She called Baltimore, they wouldn't take us in either. And we were desperate but Mary knew of a rabbi in Baltimore, so Hertzberg she called him and she explained the situation to him and Rabbi Hertzberg said, "Let Isaac come to my house and we'll see what we can do." Mary gave my husband enough money and he took a train, went to Baltimore.

INT: He traveled alone?

CHARLOTTE: He traveled alone to Baltimore. And he came to Rabbi Hertzberg, they kept him there for four weeks, came to him, gave him everything he needed and they told him, "Don't worry. We are not going to let you go until something happens." So he went with my husband to the Jewish Family Service and the rabbi said to them, "Look, here is a family. She is there and he is here. They don't have any money. They don't speak the language. They have no place to go. He can't make a living. You've got to help these people survive."

INT: And you stayed with Mary while he went?

CHARLOTTE: I stayed with my uncle while he was in Baltimore. And-

INT: How did you feel to be separated, it's the first time?

CHARLOTTE: Very bad. Very, very bad because I was, actually, I was mad at my uncle that you know, that he put such pressure on my husband eventually he would have done something. He just didn't have, you know, the patience and the time, so let us decide to see what else he could do. And so finally after my husband, after the fifth week they finally agreed that they were going to train my husband, you know, to do something, something that he wants to do. And until he is being trained they are going to see that we can have an apartment, and pay for the apartment, and pay us for the food, whatever we need. So when that happened, I can't tell you how elated I was and how happy I was because my husband called me, and the same week I asked Mary's husband to get her, you know, a trunk. Whatever we had, you know, accumulated there that she take me over to Baltimore, I no longer want to be here. I want to be with my husband. So that's what they did. I bought a little station wagon and put all my schmattas on there, came to Baltimore. We rented a little one-bedroom room and there was, you know, no place to cook in or anything. We lived in that little room but I was happy. I was away from there. I was very, very happy. And they trained my husband to be a slaughterer (in Yiddish) I told you that. A slaughterer. He killed kosher chickens, anything, anything just to be on your own. And eventually when he started to learn the trade, like maybe six, seven months before he knew what he was doing and they supported us. And when we were able to rent the apartment we did. And from then on you know, things were okay.

INT: So he was able to feel better about himself?

CHARLOTTE: Absolutely.

INT: And respect himself?

CHARLOTTE: Respect himself and being able to provide for his wife and the child that was coming. We went through a lot. I mean I can't say that we had a great life, made a great living and we were living in luxury. No. But I always, no matter where we were I loved my children and cared for them. Even though when we had a store the children used to come home for lunch from school and I made sure they ate lunch. I made sure their clothes were clean, and their hair is brushed, and I did whatever I had to do for my family and helped my husband. And you

know, that's how we are here today. I know now that gold doesn't grow on trees and you got to work for whatever you have.

INT: These are some of the dreams immigrants had?

CHARLOTTE: Yes, yes, yeah.

INT: You had mentioned a little while ago how you married your husband and it wasn't, you know, love at first sight. It wasn't very romantic?

CHARLOTTE: No.

INT: He was older. How did you come to love him?

CHARLOTTE: I was not in love when I married my husband. I mean you know, at that time, looked for security, for a home, for someone to take care of you. To be someplace. But I have grown to love him as we, you know, got married, and had children, and you know, through thick and thin we had to be together. It was not like children today where something goes wrong and they get divorced you know. My children meant more to me than my life and no matter what we had to have a home for these children. And I had no former education that I can go out and earn a living for my children alone. We had to stick together in order to support the children. And I greatly respected and loved my husband later on. I can't say that we always had fun, went places. We came two immigrants and we had to survive. But there was this big caring and affection that came later and I would have never dreamt about, about divorcing him or leaving him, never.

INT: Were there feelings of suspiciousness, mistrust?

CHARLOTTE: Never.

INT: Just coming to the United States and starting your life again, how did you feel about Gentiles and how was it resettling here?

CHARLOTTE: Ah, let me tell you something. I can never be a friend with a German person, never. I can never trust a German person. As far as Gentile people, even up to this day there is a division. I cannot, I am friendly to them but I cannot really be a good friend to a Gentile person. I don't think I could. I could not. Because even the Gentile person stood by. Everyone stood by and let us be killed. And you know what I'll tell you, Lucy? G-d forbid should anything happen to our Jewish people in the United States, let's see how many of your Gentile friends would stand up for you? Let's see how many. And I can guarantee you none of them would. None of them. So-

INT: So during your many hard times, businesses, and relocating as many times you just came to count on yourselves or on Jewish friends and family.

CHARLOTTE: Right. Right. My husband could never see a Gentile man being his friend, never. There was such a division. There was so much difference, you know, between the two upper (?) he just couldn't.

INT: Related to what you just said, what role would you say your Jewish identity and tradition played in your life as you adjusted when you came to the United States?

CHARLOTTE: Well, Lucy, at one point, at one point where we lost our business. We had no way of making a living and we had to buy, with a background in education that we had, we could not do anything, you know. We had no profession or anything, and at that time we already had the three children and my brother-in-law had a business, a grocery store in a Black area. He said, "The only way that you will be able to make a living is in a Black neighborhood. You don't need much training. I'll come, and I'll help you out, and I'll even lend you the money and this is the only way you will be able to survive." And that's how we did it. We bought the business. As long as I live I'm not going to forget the first Shabbas that we had to keep our business open because we had to keep it open and my husband was cutting out some, some meat or whatever and as tears were rolling down his face and he said, "Look what I have to do to keep my family." He cried. I'll never forget when I saw, you know, how he suffered in that. And he promised himself that if G-d is going to let him live that there is going to be a time when he will be able to do, to do penance you know, and to do shiva for what he did.

INT: That's how he viewed it to keep hours open on Shabbas and sell treif?

CHARLOTTE: And he didn't want to do it in the worst way but we had no choice. So like for ten years we had to do it. But when a holiday came many times I let him go away to Breakers, 'cause they had Breakers in Atlantic City. He spend the two days there and I let him go to Israel to see his brother. He has a brother in Israel, very religious.

INT: Are there things that you didn't do together?

CHARLOTTE: Together, we went to Florida, if you can remember to, he was davening the holidays. He had a job there like for the high holidays. So we went there with the whole family stayed there a while. I can't say that we went on too many vacations with my family. We didn't. First of all, we didn't have that kind of money. Second of all my husband was very kosher. To him, you know, just to go into a restaurant and meet, he wouldn't. And-

INT: It was okay at the Breakers because they were kosher.

CHARLOTTE: That was kosher. And we, you know, when the children were married we went a few times to the mountains, you know, to the Bronx but I can't say there really was too many vacations. My husband has a family in the Bronx you know was an extremely religious area. He has a brother there. I mean he had a brother who passed away. His brother left four children, and they are religious, you know, with those peyos, and the beards and everything. They have nothing in common with me because I'm not religious and when we came to Israel to see his family I had to put on a scarf. I brought a scarf. For three years in Germany after the

concentration camps in DP camp I wore a scarf because that's what my husband wanted me to do. Like when I came on the boat I took the scarf away. I said, "It's not what I really want to do. I mean I did it for you but now, now I want to be free."

INT: He allowed you to be your own person?

CHARLOTTE: Well, I guess, pretty well, but I had to keep kosher. We observed all of the holidays, went to synagogue, and he had but one desire that his children should be a little more religious. You know, that was his life. He wanted his children to be more observant. But you know, children have to live their own lives and he couldn't do much about that. He was always like talking that his brother's children, look at my brother's children. And they are very Hasidic. So they have nothing in common with his cousins with my children because it's like two different worlds. So-

INT: So you were able to influence him to be less religious?

CHARLOTTE: No, I was never able to influence him or anything. He had his own mind and I was not able to influence him. He was strong in that respect. You know as soon as we went out of the shop he really started being more religious than he was. He took a job as a misgeach. Know what a misgeach is? In the Jewish area of your home in the, in Cherry Hill he was also misgeach with the, you know, the caterers and he was a well-respected man. He was because he knew a lot, you know. He was a learned man in his religion and that's what he wanted to be. He wanted to do things to be able to observe. He felt many holidays came and he was hired as a, as a cantor in different synagogues, and so he enjoyed that and I went along with him. And-

INT: This was a source of much more happiness for him?

CHARLOTTE: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. And so that's what he did, and that's what made him happy and I was glad. I was glad that he was able to do it before he, before he died so he, you know, so that he passed life as his own way.

INT: How do you think the war, your experiences of both you and your husband affected the childrearing, how you parented your children?

CHARLOTTE: Lucy, listen. From my perspective I can tell you. I did everything I could. From my children's perspective it's probably a different story.

RENEE (DAUGHTER): For all of us it will be that way.

CHARLOTTE: I don't know. I don't know whether I did right or I did wrong. I did the best I could do. That's all I can say. I did the best I could. Looking back, should I have done something differently? Maybe some things but all in all I had to also do with my husband, wanted me to do and what was agreed with me. Many things I didn't agree with him, many things I did. But you know, if you want to live together you have to agree on certain things, and you have to let go and there is nothing I could do.

[Tape 3 - End Side 1] [Tape 3 - Begin Side 2]

INT: Related to what you just mentioned, what about your attitudes about leisure, having a good time. It sounds like you didn't spend very much time, you and your husband on vacations.

CHARLOTTE: No, I didn't, Lucy. And now that I would want to I don't have anyone to do it with. So that's happened in my life.

INT: You were devoted mostly then to your children, giving them an education, providing a secure life?

CHARLOTTE: I want very much my children should have more than I had. Although I wasn't able to afford a lot of things but I always emphasized to them how important it is to have your education. Because when I came I didn't have that and because I didn't have it I had to struggle so much. So I was lucky enough that my children got scholarships, and loans and were able to do it. And I helped as much as I could. So that was my most important thing, that was still top priority for me that my children should get the education because I could never finish high school. So that is one thing I can tell you, Lucy, they were always number one with me. Always put my children before anything else.

INT: And so it continued to be important to your husband that they be educated?

CHARLOTTE: Oh yes. Oh yes. He wanted them, he really wanted them to be more educated then in Hebrew he wanted to remain desperately to go to Stern College. Desperately. He was even willing to finance everything just so she will get a more religious, go to a more religious school. But as it turned out Renee won a scholarship and she didn't need our help. So-

INT: How did you view the process as you were raising three daughters and they wanting to make their own choices? How was it?

CHARLOTTE: Well, my husband had three sons and they were very little when they died. He, I cannot. He was not the kind of father, you know, that he would get real close with the children or took a child on his lap and started explaining things. Where he came from this has not been done. He grew up in a family, or his mom died when he was like four years old. So he was like an orphan himself. He was raised in different houses, you know, with this aunt, and this aunt and he didn't have much love from there. His father eventually remarried and of course his stepmother didn't have much compassion for him. So he sort of grew up in a loveless atmosphere. And I knew that. I knew that. And-

INT: How do you think that affected his ability to show affection towards his children?

CHARLOTTE: He loved his children very much. I knew that. I don't know how much affection he showed them but I knew he wanted everything for them. He loved them. I, the children will be able to tell you more, you know, but from my perspective I can tell you he really loved them. The only thing that he regretted all his life and felt terribly guilty about that he was

not able to give the children a more religious upbringing. He wanted his children to observe more, to have a kosher home, at least a kosher home and to bring his children more into Judaism. And that he could not accomplish and he felt that G-d is going to punish him because of that, that he is going to somehow be punished for that. In a lot of ways he blamed me because he said that if I would have been strong enough to insist I would have been able to accomplish with the children more than he did. But to tell you the truth, I don't come from such a background. My sisters are not as observant. As a matter of fact two of them have kosher homes and the other two don't. And although we did have a kosher home they have their own life, you know? And I couldn't feel the same thing that he felt, I couldn't. I did the best I could and that's all.

INT: What was it like parting from your sisters, you had to leave them and say goodbye?

CHARLOTTE: Getting married?

INT: Yeah. Well, getting married and relocating to another area. Here you had survived these years with your sisters, the bonds must have been so great. What was that like?

CHARLOTTE: I see my sisters at least once a year from Canada. From Atlantic City, as a matter of fact I just saw her. The one from Baltimore, she is a widow, too, she has a boyfriend so she is busy with him and she has three daughters. Each one of us has our own lifestyle and we are old now. It's not the same thing as it was when we were young. But when we get together there is a lot of bonding you know, between us. We always talk about our homes, about our childhood, about our mother, about concentration camp. We sit all night we wouldn't have enough time to talk about things. And you know, we each have to go our different ways and it's life. It's life.

INT: So at the time when you married you had to kind of commit to a new family?

CHARLOTTE: Commit to a new family, to my husband, and when I had children this was my, my responsibility to them and my sisters were secondary as now as their families are first, too. So-

INT: And your father was able to have some contact with your children?

CHARLOTTE: Oh, my father lived, died twenty years ago. Yeah, he at one point my father stayed with me and eventually he remarried also. He was sick.

INT: What was that like for you when he was sick?

CHARLOTTE: Well, my father was in the mountains with his second wife when he married. Then he got a heart attack and I brought him down from the mountains to University of Pennsylvania Hospital so he can be treated here. And he didn't like the food. I used to carry in food for three months from home. I used to cook food and carry it to the hospital. Everyday I went. It was hard leaving my family to go to see my father every single day. And then my father had a stroke when he lived in Florida that time. When he had his first stroke he was with

me and we took him to the hospital again. We just traveled back and forth to Florida to see him and I was lucky enough to be in Florida when he had his second stroke. I'm telling you it was awful. And I was in a hospital with him and I called all my sisters. We all came, that's the way. Before he died I asked him, "Where would you like to be buried?" Because he knew, he said he wanted to be in Cherry Hill. So we brought him from Florida to Cherry Hill and he is buried here. And that's it.

INT: How do you think your adult children look at your war experiences?

CHARLOTTE: I did not discuss with my children. They know some part of it. Most of it I don't think they knew. I did not come out and talk about the concentration camp. I, first of all I wanted to keep it in the back of my mind. I wanted to live for now and I wanted to bring up my children, they should not have the sadness and the pain that I went through. I didn't want to fill their hearts with pain.

INT: You wanted to protect them.

CHARLOTTE: I wanted to protect them. But you know what? No matter how much you try to protect your children they see through you, they feel they are different than other children. Holocaust children are different than other kids. I don't think my children had as many good times maybe as the other kids did. They did not grow up in a home where it was all happy and vacations and everything else. But, you know, this is what life is. You've got to accept whatever it is. Can't change it. I don't know whether I feel that my children are, well, you know, they are okay. And my experience.

INT: Did you believe there were strengths that you transmitted in this legacy?

CHARLOTTE: Well, I think so and so far you have to ask my children about that. But you have to come above it no matter what it is. No matter what it is you got to try, get over it and get on top of it. Mind over matter, and just try, and do what's right, and survive and that's it.

INT: I think you've touched on a very important issue when you said that children of survivors feel different.

CHARLOTTE: Yes. Yes, I know they do.

INT: In what ways do you know that their life is different? Could you just elaborate what you saw or felt?

CHARLOTTE: From my children? I don't know. I think the children would be more able to tell you what they would have liked to have had and they didn't or whatever was missing in their home life and they didn't have it. I don't know. What does a child need more than love? Maybe I wasn't able to give them material things as much as I would have liked to. I remember I took Renee to a Five and Dime, bought her a little dress for two and a half dollars. But my children were always clean, and they were always dressed and I always made sure they have good shoes

on their feet. I remember I used to take them Camden to Shapiro's where they have special shoes. They always had their shots and they were always loved. And I don't know what else I could have given them. I could not give them the things that I didn't have or whatever I had. Whatever I had, certainly made sure they had.

INT: Were there times that you thought there were conflicts in terms of the way you were raised and you were raising the children in your values, lifestyle?

CHARLOTTE: From my perspective, by the way I raised my children and the way I was raised, well I didn't want to raise my children the way I was raised. Because at seventeen a girl should be able to know a boy and go out with a boy, you know. I was really, I had no experience with boys at all, didn't go out. There is no question about sex. Sex wasn't talked about, I wasn't able to read a book about sex or anything. If I read a romance book where the love was so great I used to hide it under my pillow. I discovered a lot of things from those books that wasn't talked about.

INT: So you wanted it to be different in terms of your relationships with your daughters?

CHARLOTTE: Yes, the schools were different and you know their own friends and their fears, you know, when they found out I. One thing I didn't discuss with my children, you know, like when they were supposed to get their periods they knew it before. You hear it from someone else not from me. And I certainly did not, I wasn't there in that respect for them. So I don't know if that hurt some or I didn't hurt but they knew. And the education in schools were different than they were in Europe.

INT: It's hard to overcome a discomfort with sex and living in a new culture.

CHARLOTTE: Yeah. But to looking back and having some, you know, feelings that about certain thing that I should have done, maybe some. Maybe. But I would like to know what they are because I myself don't know.

INT: One of my questions is, you know, regrets or disappointments and what you could have done that you had not done and your fears?

CHARLOTTE: With my children you mean? I would like my middle daughter should get married. She has got a hard life.

INT: The one that is divorced?

CHARLOTTE: Yeah. It is hard with her children. I would very much like to see, Jessie, my only grandson, being bar mitzvahed. It is very important to me. I would like my grandchildren should marry Jewish, very important to me. And this would be a great accomplishment in my life if they would marry Jewish. It's really important to me. And should just be healthy. (?) I pray every, every week when I light candles that G-d should preserve my children and my

grandchildren. And that's for myself should just, my life now is through them. I want to see them have everything. I want just them to be happy and healthy.

INT: How else would you like your children to experience Holocaust related activities, your memories, your experiences, what would be your desire?

CHARLOTTE: Well, Renee is doing something about it. She is doing something about it to memorialize my mom and you know. And she is active and through her acting there will be any other Jew will be active too, I hope.

INT: And your grandchildren? They know about your experiences?

CHARLOTTE: I spoke to Flo's daughter and gave them a little bit. Not that much. But now that we have the tape they will be able to hear what I have to say. This is basically it.

INT: Is there anything else in terms of summarizing the impact of the Holocaust on you and your life and your children?

CHARLOTTE: All I can say, if the Holocaust wouldn't have happened I wouldn't have been here tonight to tell this. As fate were I was raised, I would have gotten married to somebody else, not my husband. But it wasn't meant to be, I guess. It was meant to be so. As far as the Holocaust I can tell you one thing, Lucy, I cannot forgive the people. I cannot forgive humanity that they stood by and let, and let those six million Jews be destroyed, and burned, and gassed and shot. And nobody did anything about it. Nobody. How can people, how can nations stand by and not do anything? Where was the world? Where was consciousness? Where was everybody? What happened? The fires were just burning and nobody was there to do anything about it. So when you have Gentile friends, it is okay to have them but believe me, G-d forbid should anything happen here they would not stand up for you. They wouldn't. They don't believe in that. So you are on your own wherever you are, especially as a Jew.

INT: (Long pause) This is a good time to end.

CHARLOTTE: Yeah. Yeah.

INT: Thank you.

CHARLOTTE: Thank you.