

Oral history interview with Rosalie Schiff
RG-50.751*0021

Interview of Rosalie Schiff
I-A -- Rosalie 5/20/98

RS: I was born in Kraków, Poland, on December 20, 1922. I had two siblings. I was the oldest. My sister was two or three years younger than I was. My brother was born when I was about six or seven years old.

DP: What were their names?

RS: My sister's name was Luci, Lucia and my brother's name was Heinrich, Henry. My parents, I remember when I was small, they were not so well-to-do until my father invented a factory with insulated walls. We had another business. My father sold wood, wholesale and retail, to homes. We had a very good life and a large family. I had two grandmothers. My grandfathers were already dead because I remember I was a little girl when my father's father died. We had a very close family. Every Saturday we went to a park and we children played with our cousins. Our parents were having some conversation about what's going to happen in this world. Later on we all went to dinner at our house or in my aunt's house. My mother was not working because my father made a good living.

DP: What was your mother's name?

RS: My mother's name was Helena and my father's name was _____.

DP: What was your maiden name?

RS: My maiden name was Baum. My father was a religious man but I should say modern religious. He told us that religion was very important to him but he was not a fanatic.

I was a very mischievous child. I was a tomboy and sometimes I gave him a lot a problems. For instance, my mother I did not respect too much because she was too lenient on us. My father believed in discipline. My father never hit us. He punished us or he ran around the dining room table with a _____. He wanted to catch us when we did something wrong, of course. How much could he help me when he would hit me with the _____? But this really happened very seldom because when he stuck his finger out, I knew I had to mind. I was very upset sometimes because he punished me, with right.

DP: What did you do?

RS: What did I do? I kicked the maid. I kicked her once. I kicked her twice. I kicked her because she put on my socks when I went to school in the morning and I just wanted to kick her. So my grandmother gave me silk stockings. Because I was not allowed to

wear it yet I gave them to the maid. I bribed her with the silk stockings but I did not tell my grandmother. For what I need the silk stockings?

DP: What did your father do to punish you?

RS: Just wait! One day the maid already had enough silk stockings so when I came from school I look at my father's face and I knew that something was wrong, that she tattled on me. He looked at me and he said, "Did you kick Maria?" I said, "When?" And he said, "Early in the morning when you go to school she puts your socks on." I said, "Sometimes." And he said, "You are without dinner, here is a paper and write a hundred times that I am not a horse and I should be nice to help." I was crying under the table and, of course, my mother gave me something to eat. She said, "This poor child is so skinny."

DP: How old were you?

RS: Seven, eight—until the war started. Then my father was very angry because I did not respect Maria. I said, "She's a maid." He said, "No, she helps us a lot and you should respect her even we pay her for it." At night my mother was angry at my father because he punished me. She asked, "What kind of father are you? You are punishing the child so terribly." So he said, "But the world will not understand that she's a horse, that she's not a human being." And my mother didn't say anything.

My father was dealing with chocolate factories so every Friday he brought from work a great big box of chocolates. He put it in the dining room because we had made the dining room special for us. Since my father was dealing with wood, there was a beautiful buffet. He was hiding the chocolate in the buffet and he locked the buffet so we would not get it. Everyday we got a piece of chocolate after dinner. One day I said, "No I need some chocolate." I went to our neighbor, Mrs. Gaterer, and I said, "My father forgot to leave the key to the buffet and my mother needs the key." She gave me the key and I came downstairs to our place and I ate half of the box of the chocolate. I got so sick. By the time my father got home I was already in hospital. They had to pump my stomach. I did some terrible things.

My father really paid a lot of attention to how we ate. When we made noises with our mouth we were not allowed to sit at the table because he said he does not need music, how we hold the spoon and the fork, and I think I appreciate this my whole life. I see many people eat just terrible, of our caliber. They don't have any manners.

One time I didn't go to school. I skipped school. I went to a bicycle place where they were running around. You could lend a bicycle for a few cents and you were riding the bicycle around. I saw some boys on the corner. I wanted to show off so I stand on the seat and one leg I had on the seat and one in the air and I wanted to show off that I can ride the bicycle this way. I fell, I was unconscious, and I broke the collarbone so if I would be born by poor people I would be crippled. My father, what could he do? The chocolate, he said I'm already punished because I'm vomiting but with the bicycle he had to pay attention. So he came to the hospital, Dr. _____, I remember, wanted to put my hand in a cast like this and I had a big thing here.

DP: What thing?

RS: Piece of iron, I think.

DP: To hold your arm up?

RS: Yes. It was terrible but it didn't work so they had to call a doctor from Germany and the doctor put my arm in perspective.

DP: What do you mean? In a cast?

RS: In a cast. When my mother took me for a checkup I was throwing fits if she did not buy me a Napoleon. I loved Napoleons so she had to stop in a bakery and buy me whatever I want otherwise I would not go to the doctor. My father would give me a kick and he would say, "Here you go," and that's all. That's why I did not respect my mother so much. I loved her very much but I did not respect her because she went against my father.

Anyway, we had a wonderful, wonderful life. When we were sick my father did not go to work because his life was at home and his place was at home. He did not want to go to work until the doctor came and gave us some medicine or the fever went down. I never remember my father and my mother fussing and fighting. My father was the head of the house. Of course my mother didn't even know how to cook so we had two maids, one for the kitchen and one for the children.

My father went to synagogue on Saturday. Every Saturday morning he went to the synagogue. The non-Jews were throwing rocks at him. I remember like today when he got back from the synagogue he was very, very upset in what kind of country we are living.

DP: Jews threw rocks too?

RS: No, non-Jews.

We celebrated every holiday. Not that he was so absolutely orthodox, he was not, but it was important to him to show his children who they are. My little brother went to _____ to Jewish lessons and the girls did not go so my father took tutors in the house. Every tutor that came to the house we got rid of them. One time he hired a woman. He thought maybe a woman would have better rapport with us, my sister and I. We didn't like her because she made faces. I don't know. She was kind of a nervous person or whatever. She wore black stockings, a long dress, and a kerchief on her head. She was ultra-orthodox so my sister and I talked to each other, "How can we get rid of her?" We bought some glue and put the glue on the chair.

DP: What happened?

RS: This time we were learning so good. The teacher was so proud of us but when she got up, since she was orthodox, she was without a skirt because the skirt got stuck to the

chair. My mother had to give her a skirt to go home and right away she quit. My father was furious with us! But what could he do?

The years went by. We were growing up; we were in school. I will never forget my childhood—never. It was a good childhood.

DP: How far did you go in school?

RS: I was sixteen; seventh grade.

DP: Seventh grade?

RS: Wait a minute. We start at seven—I don't remember, already. I don't remember. Our schools were different. Of course we had to bring good grades. We had to sit at night and study until midnight. That's what my father wants because he said, "This is going to be your future."

What else do I remember? My father was not so far religious orthodox like a charitable person. His whole life was charities. Even he came home at night he always looked to help some poor person. I remember on Fridays he did not work. He worked on Fridays, yes, but not—he was in the business but he was giving away money and wood so that people would not be cold—to the poor, whatever he had. And every Friday I went with the maid to bring him lunch. When I brought him lunch my father was so proud of me. He told everybody around him that I brought him lunch, how nice of me, and he gave me fifteen-cents. This was my allowance because I worked for the fifteen-cents. Otherwise I didn't. I got everything in the house—bananas and oranges. There was nothing too expensive for us but the fifteen-cents I had for my own spending.

My father, every evening he went to his friend, Mr. Gaterer, to talk about politics, what's going on. This was already towards the World War II. My uncle from Germany, and later on he lives in England, he's still alive, told my father to run. My father said, "Why should I run? I just put a train station to my business so they could load up the wood and things that they were making—the insulated walls." It was toward, already, 1939, towards World War II. My father did not want to leave the country which, in my opinion today he made the biggest mistake because he would be probably alive. I don't know about today, but he would be alive. And my mother, I don't know because she was so very sick.

DP: What was the matter?

RS: She had, in war, mastectomy.

One day, September 1, 1939, the war broke out. I remember they were transporting the German Jews from Germany and the Polish Jews where supposed to take them in. My father gave away one room and he said, "We don't know what's going to happen with us. We don't have to live so comfortable." Not that we lived so comfortable. We had two or three bedrooms, I remember. We gave the room away to three girls from Germany.

Then they were talking about they would kill all the men and they will leave women and children alone so my father, really not wanting to leave his family, just

before—I don't know if this was already when the Germans came in—I think it was just before that, he packed some stuff. The bombs were falling and we were in the bunkers, my mother, I, and my two siblings. My father did not want to go. This time I understood, finally, how much I loved my father so I walked out from the bunker, the bombs were falling, and I screamed as hard as I could, "Daddy, come down. They will kill you." And he said, "They will kill me anyway." Those are the last words I remember. I don't remember what happened afterwards because when he left my heart and my mind and my soul left with him. So my mother was all alone and it was very, very hard. The Germans came into Kraków on September 6 and the war started September 1. We were already without our father and my mother was very immature, I should say, because my father did everything.

The Nazis came to Kraków. I was standing on the street throwing candy to them because I thought I didn't know what's going to happen—my sister and I and my brother. I even remember the song they were singing. When I hear the song I just go to pieces.

DP: What song?

RS: "*Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles.*"

Times were very hard. We did not receive anything to eat. We had to stand in the line for a piece of bread and anything what we were supposed to get to eat so we were very hungry. Those three German girls were still living with us. I remember my mother had some saccharine and she baked a cake. She had some flour left and she put so much saccharine in it, it was impossible to eat. So she gave it to the German girls. My mother asked them, "How does it taste?" And Zee said, "A little bit sweet." But we were so hungry.

Of course the chaos started. The Germans on the streets, they were beating the Jews. Oh no, before that the bombs were falling but they did not harm our part of town because across from our street was where all the Polish kings were laid to rest so they did not bomb our part of town.

But I saw some people on the street screaming and yelling. The chaos really started when the Nazis came in. Some women were standing outside with their children and they grabbed the children from their arms and throw them in the air and shoot them. It was just a chaos. They were beating Jews on the street. They were plundering the Jewish properties. We were denied of the Polish economy. We did not get anything to eat. The Germans started to confiscate jewelry, furs, art masterpieces, bankbook accounts, clothing, and other valuables. But of course not from those who didn't have anything because there Polish Jews were cobblers and tailors. They were very religious and they had a lot of children. It was hard to feed the children. They told them to open the mouth and they pulled, brutally, golden teeth out from their mouth. Jews were captured on the streets (tape ends here)

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DP: Many Jews were captured on the streets?

RS: Yes, beaten and mutilated, tortured and shot. So when somebody left the house, they never knew if they were going to be back. Mostly they did this to upper class people like doctors and lawyers. They wanted to degrade them.

Jewish synagogues and prayer books were burned to the ground while the people were still inside of them, like the *Kristallnacht* in Germany. The more pious Jews were set on fire by their long beards. They were praying but somehow God did not hear them. I used this prayer when I made a bar mitzvah in _____, Israel, for my little brother:

Right away we were made to wear yellow stars and, later on, Star of David on our arms as a means of identification. We were so very, very, very hungry. We did not have anything to eat. Whatever supply my mother had in the house, we used it all. Jews were hunted, captured, and kidnapped from their homes and put to hard labor. Immediately we were separated from our aunts and uncles because everybody had to look for themselves. We had connection with them but not as close as we did before.

Shortly, my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. I remember, sometimes I run outside and left my mother my underwear to wash with one arm because they had to take off her breast. I feel very guilty until today about this. My mother could not move her arm because they did a radical mastectomy.

DP: Tell me more?

RS: It's very terrible. Dr. _____ took her, I don't know, to a hospital or to a room somewhere. I don't know how much anesthetic they gave her. I doubt if any because there was such a chaos in town. I don't know if Dr. _____ could get any anesthetics but I remember standing outside when Dr. _____ did the surgery and holding hands with my siblings and crying. We thought we were full-fledged orphans listening to our mother scream. I had many, many nightmares about that because, not that I did not love my mother as much as I loved my father, I loved her as much as I loved my father, she just could not discipline us.

It was at this time that I met a young man. Of course I was sixteen, I started already looking at the boys. My mother, poor thing, she was so afraid. At this time I started my period, when I was sixteen-years-old. When I started my period I didn't know anything about it because my mother never educated us, or my father. I came to her and I was crying. I took some rags. Of course I used rags instead of

DP: _____?

RS: Yes, and my mother, I was mischievous about something and she said, "Why are you so nervous?" I said, "Because I'm bleeding. I'm bleeding to death." And my mother slapped me, slapped my face, first time in my life. I smarted off, "I'm bleeding to death, you are hitting me." Then she told me that a woman has this every month. Of

course I did not have afterwards, I don't remember, one or two times maybe because in concentration camp we did not have our period.

I met a young man who later became my husband and he was so good to my mother. He helped her with everything she needed really. He smuggled food for his family and for my family. She was so sick and she could not really pick up anything or her hand was stiff and the doctor did not have time to take out her stitches so my sister and I took out her stitches. Fragile and sick from the surgery, my mother was forced to leave Kraków with her three (I should say brats) children. We were made to leave our home with very little belongings, only what we could carry in our hands. We were moved to a small town near Kraków but

DP: What was the name?

RS: I don't remember.

There we were locked up in one room with no connection with outside, without any food, with nothing. My mother and my younger sister were stricken with typhoid. Until today, I'm thinking, "How did it happen that I did not get the typhoid and my little brother?" If not for my boyfriend I don't know how we would survive because at night he took off the Star of David, the band on his arm, and brought his new adopted family bits of food. If they would catch him they would mutilate him or hang him but he didn't care. We became very good friends. I met his family. I remember one day my boyfriend was smuggling chickens to the ghetto—live chickens. He had a big coat with pockets inside and in every pocket he had a chicken. So one day he did not come home on time and I was standing with his mother near the entrance to the—I'm mixing it up here, this was already in ghetto. Anyway, the ghetto was formed in 19

DP: How long were you in the small town?

RS: I don't remember. I don't have any idea.

So my mother had typhoid and mastectomy. She was not able to do anything. If anybody thinks that I helped so much—no. I didn't know how to do anything because nobody taught me how to do anything. We were moved to the ghetto.

At seventeen I had already seen violence, hunger, destruction, and murder. The ghetto, I cannot even describe what a horrible place this was. Everyday the streets were covered with blood, corpses of women and men and children. Especially the little children will always, always stay in my mind. The little children were sitting on the corners on the streets. Some of them did not have any limbs anymore. They were already orphans. They begged for food but nobody had a piece of bread to give it to them. I really don't know how to describe the ghettos.

DP: The best you can.

RS: Our ghetto contained 320 very small apartments where 19,000 Jews were living in unbelievable congested conditions. The German guards stood at the gates leading to the ghetto so no one could leave its confines. The crowded and unsanitary conditions caused epidemic of typhoid, tuberculosis, and dysentery. The walls of the ghetto, built with our

own hands, were shaped like tombstones boding what was yet to come. I remember we lived in one small room without a floor, without windows, just a big iron door.

DP: What was on the ground?

RS: Just earth. Nothing. I don't know how many families together lived there. I don't know even we had a little stove to cook. I don't remember.

DP: Did you have a toilet?

RS: Yes, the toilet was outside—together with all of the people from the building.

DP: Did you have a place to wash?

RS: Yes, we had a sink, I think. I think, yes or no. If I would know I'm going to do that I would have tried to remember at the time.

I had so many nightmares about this particular room when I came to United States. I didn't know why until I started to talk about it. I saw my mother, my sister, and my brother for the last time in this room. You know, I can hear an echo from the Germans when they took her. Echo. How they screamed, the words they screamed, because when I went to the Memorial Center in Washington I hear the Germans scream exactly like they took my mother. I could not go into the, how you put it?

DP: What did they scream?

RS: _____.

DP: What does that mean?

RS: Out, dirty Jew! Out!

During those nightmares I would be in this room. Of course the room did not have a window so with candles, I think, or I don't know I had electricity or naphtha little light, I don't know. I don't remember. I had many, many nightmares about that because I had nightmares that I am in this room trying to escape with my children and my grandchildren but I could not escape because the room did not have windows so I screamed until we went to Poland about fifteen or sixteen years ago. I could not find the room, I was looking for it, because there was such a chaos in the city. Those particular nightmares subsided a little bit.

The life in ghetto was not to describe. We did not receive any bread—nothing, nothing. We had just a slice of bread, each person, so I was standing in a line with my sister to get the bread. We were very, very, very hungry. They were killing everyday so many people. Mothers were hiding their children, hiding old people. It was just a chaos until they started to evacuate us. On June 1, 1942, they started to evacuate. They took many of my relatives to truck and my boyfriend's relatives. They took them with trucks. Later on they put them in boxcars where they died in Belzec, in exterminating camp Belzec. I remember when those appears, those horrible situations where they were taking

the people I looked through the keyhole from the front door. I had an aunt that I was very fond of. She was my mother's sister. She was so beautiful. This was my favorite aunt and I saw her going to the Belzec, probably. I was just devastated because I loved this aunt. She won many beauty prizes. She had big blue eyes, a little piggy nose, and a little mouth, and beautiful blond hair and she wore those big brimmed hats. So beautiful. So I remember going to her house because she was in millinery business and trying on those hats. I could never see myself looking as beautiful as she did. They took her away. I don't know what happened to my aunts, to my uncles, to my whole family. I don't remember because I was just looking for my sister, brother, and my sick mother. I don't know where they went, where they died. But I know they are not alive.

This evacuation took really many days. They were taking and taking people to the transport. Old people hardly capable of walking, hospital patients, and some Jews crippled on crutches were being led to the courtyard by others. For many days they remained standing in the courtyard. This also I will never forget because when I think about it I think about my grandparents. They remained standing in the courtyard without food or water. Hundreds of them collapsed from exhaustion, hunger, and elements. Others were shot brutally with machine guns. They were evacuating people. We didn't know where. They said they will relocate people. We didn't know where and how—nothing. They made authorization cards, like driver's license, who you are and what you're doing for living, or whatever. My mother, my sister, and I, we could not work, we did not work. The cards were really crucial because without the cards we were taken to the exterminating camp. I saw many people standing in a line outside. Although I did not leave my mother for. Let's stop for a second. I need a glass of water.

My mother, myself, my sister and brother because my brother was just a little boy—we were not working. We just couldn't find anything to do because. This is really not to describe what a chaos it was. Who would hire a twelve-year-old girl to work in Poland? Nobody. We didn't come up from a rough background so it was twice as hard on us.

DP: From a "what" background?

RS: I didn't come out from a rough background.

DP: Rough.

RS: Yes. The only thing I had to do when a spoon was missing on the table to go in the kitchen and get the spoon but nothing else.

I decided to stand in the line. I don't remember. This was the first time I left my mother alone in the house because I was guarding her. I already saw what was going on. They were taking people out and we didn't know where. So I stand in the line and suddenly a man—I shouldn't say a soldier but a man—came toward me. He wore a light brown suit and light brown hat. He approached me and he took out my card because a card everybody had. He took me out from the line and he said, "You are too pretty for the line." I didn't know what he meant. He did not wear a uniform so I was not afraid of him. He put a stamp on my card. This stamp was authorization to stay in town. I run home because I was afraid, always, they would take my mother. Of course I didn't know

if taking my mother is bad or good because we were kept in the dark. We didn't know where those people are going. I run home and I don't know how my friend was there, my boyfriend was there, but my family knew that we were being transferred by boxcars next day. My boyfriend wanted me to remain behind with him. I don't know why but my mother—I shouldn't say that—my mother trusted William because she really thought that he was a very nice person since he helped us so much. My mother agreed that she would allow it but only if he marries me first. And he promised that he would marry me first. We didn't sleep all night. This night I will never, never forget. My mother was fainting. She said, "How can I leave my child here?" But how much she trusted my boyfriend she was afraid, of course, to leave him with me because she didn't know him so well. My mother had gold coins. She had a rope from top to bottom full of gold coins. I think this was the last possession my mother had from all the wealth that my father made and she wanted to give this to my boyfriend. He would not take it. He said, "You take it. Maybe you can buy a piece of bread with it—exchange for a piece of bread." My sister was crying. My brother, he always loved me because I played more with him than my sister did. He fell to my feet and he said, "I want to stay here with you. Who's going to play with me?" I started to cry. What did he understand? I said, "You can't because I have permission to stay." He hugged my feet. He did not want to let go of me. Early next morning the Nazis knocked violently on our door and they took my mother, my sister, and my brother and I never saw them again. Later on I found out that they died in Belzec. I just can't imagine how my mother died. She was about thirty nine- or forty-years-old—a young woman. Of course she was sick but with one breast I can imagine what kind of fun the Germans had with her. I don't think about this often because it upsets me terribly. I have many nightmares what they did with her with one breast, how they terrorized her. But they took her away from me and I never saw her again.

I moved with my husband—we moved out, I think, from there to another apartment in the ghetto and I was living with my husband's sister in one room. We slept together, of course. Beds were not available. My husband slept in another room.

DP: How did you happen to get married?

RS: The rabbi that my father supported did the (tape ends here)

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DP: How did you happen to get married?

RS: The rabbi that my father supported at synagogue married us. I remember he wanted some money from us but I did not have any money to give it to him. So we were a legally married couple. We were living with five other families in one room with children, old people, young people. I don't remember what happened. One older woman was laughing at us.

DP: Why?

RS: Because we got married now in the fire of Holocaust but I did not have a choice. My mother asked of me to do that and asked of William to do that.

DP: Did you know anything about being married?

RS: No. Not at all. I didn't know even any difference between a woman and a man. I was kept in the dark. This was absolutely the hardest, the hardest thing I had ever had to go through.

DP: Why?

RS: Because I was scared. I didn't know anything. What did I know? I didn't know how naked men looked. You know? I didn't know. I didn't know how a child was born.

Miraculously my grandmother had somehow managed to remain behind. Many nights I lay in the bed and I think, "I wish I could remember how I met her, where she was." I think she was in her apartment. She had a little apartment. I don't remember. We took her to live with us. My grandmother was so wonderful to me all my life. I loved her. She was starving, of course. Of course we didn't have much food to give her. Many times I gave her half of my bread or William gave her half of his bread. One day she said, "My child, don't save me because I'm old already." I don't think that she was very old because her oldest child was my mother and she was thirty nine- or forty-years-old so she would be in the 60s. She had something wrong with one leg. She had a stiff leg. I never asked her from where and how. She sang songs to me that I have never forgotten—German songs, Polish songs. She sometimes even lied for me. She didn't know she was lying but she would do anything in the world for me. When she spent the night with us I had to sleep in the same bed that she did because I wanted to be so close to her. One day she said, "My child, don't save me. I'm not going to survive this hell." I told her, "Grandma, I love you so much. I was raised with you. You can't talk to me this way. I'm an orphan." I had an idea—maybe I'd go outside and somehow I'd get a piece of bread—so I put her in the attic, I covered her up with papers and old rags and I said, "Grandma, please don't move. Don't make any noise." What I found out when I watched "Schindler's List" is that the Nazis had a device that they could listen to the people that were in the attic. I came back with a piece of bread and she was gone from my life. I remember I was so upset that I couldn't speak. It took me weeks to recuperate from her death. I came back and she was gone.

Some children were jumping—six-year-old children, five-year-old children—were jumping in the outhouses and I don't know how to describe the outhouses with the waste inside and bugs. So filthy. So filthy. They jumped because they wanted to save themselves. The Nazis were always running and catching people. Always. Some children jumped into sewers but I think in sewers they were eaten up by rats. Some children opened some hiding places and there were other children there. They would not let them in. They did not have room for them. It was just not to describe—how horrible, what life was. It was so terrible. It was not meaningful to anybody but still one wanted to live, one wanted to survive. What has a beginning had to have an end.

Later on my parents were gone, my husband's parents were gone, everybody was gone.

I witnessed something that made me lose faith in God and humanity and it took me a long time before there were a lot of questions from rabbis and preachers, “Why, why, this happened to us? Why we have to be so persecuted?” The Nazis liquidated a nearby Jewish orphanage and I be darned if I would ever, ever forget this. I saw children flung from second- and third-story windows with their heads down, babies and tiny children were tossed in the air for target practice, innocent Jewish babies were held by their legs and smashed brutally against a brick wall. I looked outside and there were little eyes, hands, and insides of the Jewish babies flowing with blood. I screamed and cried in terror. I would never believe that anybody could do this to a poor little child. Also I had many nightmares about this. Later on they took the small children, whoever was left, with carry-ons and with baskets, they took them to the courtyard and they told their parents that they will be reunited. I remember the moment in “Schindler’s List” where the parents were screaming for their children. The Germans told them that they will be reunited. As the babies sat and cried out of hunger and wet, German officers fed them a bullet in their mouth. I saw this with my own eyes. The more things I saw like this I was losing faith in God. I had so much faith in God. I was raised with God. How could God allow something like this? How? Little innocent children. Later I saw a Nazi stick a knife in a pregnant woman’s stomach. She just fell back. When I was pregnant with my oldest child, he was born in **Linz**, Austria, I had many nightmares about this vision of killing this pregnant woman. Thank God my pregnancy was, I wouldn’t say normal because I had to have many blood transfusions that I received in Dallas later on—I did not have enough blood in my body to carry a child so I was sick through the whole pregnancy—I was in and out from hospitals. Finally, instead of a honeymoon, my husband and I were transported to Plaszow camp. Plaszow was built on two Jewish cemeteries and surrounded by barbed wires. It wasn’t, I don’t know, or it wasn’t the same camp that I saw _____ **Goetz**. I think _____ **Goetz** was shooting the children, the babies, in the mouth. I don’t remember exactly, but I think so. _____ **Goetz** was a monster. When he was walking on the premises, the earth was shaking. I was so afraid of him I was always shaking.

DP: What did he look like?

RS: He was tall, about 6’4” or 6’6”. He had a vicious dog with him and he was killing and killing.

DP: Was he thin or fat?

RS: Oh, fat! He had enough to eat. We did not have enough to eat. For *anything* he was shooting people.

DP: Was he good looking?

RS: I was afraid to look at him. Even the house that they show in “Schindler’s List” I don’t remember. I was afraid to look up.

One of his little amusements was setting vicious dogs on the prisoners when we walked to work. I am afraid until today when I see a big dog—I don’t go near him.

Much blood was drawn from prisoner's arms for the sole purpose of making them weaker. This blood was drawn by unsanitary personnel and, of course, was thrown away because no German would use Jewish blood for transfusions.

One day my aunt and my little cousin were brought to the camp just to be recaptured by Goetz's cruelty. This little girl—I don't know exactly if she was seven or eight, very smart—she spoke German, Polish, and French. She picked up her little arms and begged for her life by saying, "I'm old enough. I can peel potatoes in the kitchen." But Goetz took her down and put a bullet in her head. My aunt went to a camp. My aunt survived. She was living, not in the same camp than I was but in an even worse camp. I was there one week and people were dying like flies there. I saw her through the barbed wires and she looked terrible. But they killed my little cousin. This was the last one.

DP: What was your cousin's name?

RS: _____. Her father went to Israel. Now he's dead, probably, because he was old when I saw him last time. I thought that he ran away with my father but he did not know anything about my father. Also I found my father's one partner. I thought he ran away with him and he said, "No." He told me, also, that my father was killed—he was shot or he had a heart attack and dropped dead. I don't know. What's the difference? He's not here.

My husband was smuggling food every day to the camp knowing that every crumb was a risk of being shot, mutilated, or hanged.

DP: How did he get the food?

RS: He was exchanging things. For instance, I would have a dress and he would go to the country.

DP: How did he get there?

RS. Walking. He was walking miles and miles.

DP: Out of the camp?

RS: Out of the camp; took off the Star of David.

DP: And nobody caught him?

RS: He gave something to the watchman at the entrance to the camp. This wasn't ghetto. I get all mixed up.

I know one thing when I was with my husband, not together even, I was never so hungry because he always had something to give me. I don't know where he got it. I don't know how he got it, but he always had something to give me.

There was a hill in Plaszow where they used to shoot and hang people everyday. Each morning greeted by new host of bodies hanging by their necks. One of my tasks was to get there and place the bodies in the wagons to be buried later—to little carts. I

was pushing the carts with those people. I never dared to look at their faces because I was afraid I'm going to find a familiar face.

One afternoon my husband was brought back from his factory and he was charged of sabotage.

DP: What kind of factory did he work in?

RS: Nail factory.

I found out about it and I threw myself on the ground at the entrance and I told them to shoot me too—that I don't want to live anymore without him. The Jewish police dragged me back to my barracks. When he arrived he could run away but if he would run away, they would kill 50 people for him and he knew that I was in the camp, and his sister, and his aunt and uncle. Luckily, before Goetz could (tape stops and then resumes)

When somebody told me that they brought William for sabotage, I ran to the entrance and I threw myself on the ground and I said, "If you have to kill him, kill me too." So two policemen dragged me by my hands and feet away from the entrance and brought me to the barracks. I screamed and yelled and kicked. When they brought William in, William told me that he

WS: No, you didn't talk to me. Okay, okay.

RS: How do I say that?

DP: Just say it.

RS: Say I flung my body down on the grave in despair.

I learned that Goetz's thirst for blood had already been quenched by 17 other people that he caught with bread this day.

DP: What do you mean "that he caught with bread"?

RS: That they brought bread inside the camp or something. The brought something and he killed them.

DP: By the way, what year were you taken to Plaszow? What was the date?

RS: Which year? I don't know.

WS: I remember.

RS: You remember?

WS: Um, hm.

DP: What year?

WS: This was in September 1943. _____ I don't remember. That was in 1943. The day I came in then she was taken. I remember exactly.

RS: They brought him in for sabotage. Goetz was already so drunk and earlier he killed about 17 other people this day so he was quite drunk and he heard about my husband's transgression.

DP: What was his transgression?

RS: That he started a fight. The foreman called an inmate a "dirty Jew" and my husband asked, "Why you are calling him a 'dirty Jew?'" He started beating him.

WS: This is the story I told you. Don't tell them the story I told you.

RS: That's what I don't want to say.

WS: All right. Go ahead.

RS: The foreman hit this boy

WS: Let me say it. I was going down each day to work. I was on this job _____ . I _____ from ghettos. I was from ghetto now I was going from Plaszow and because of this job I stay alive. There was a foreman, Polack, who did some work for the Germans. We were a bunch of young boys. One of these boys, each time he hit him, and hit him, and hit him. I was behind everybody. One day I just couldn't take it. I asked him the question, "Why do you hit him?"

DP: Who hit him?

WS: The foreman. Jews told me he was just like _____ they called themselves. When I asked him why he hit him he said, "Because he's a dirty Jew." I said, "Well he's a dirty Jew, you are dirty Polack." "Then we'll just get you like him" and he hit me. When he hit me I said, "No don't tie in with me because with me you'll not get away with it." He hit me again and I just hit him and he didn't expect that. He ducked then everybody joined in and we started fighting. They called police, they drew guns, shooting in air, and took us all in for sabotage. That's the way it happened. Then they pulled me out. Before they pulled me out, that's what I found out from her and other people there, they _____ to work in companies like I do but they were in way back smuggling food, some of them. There was a group of, I think 15 or 17 people, and some of them they caught with food. Because they caught them with food they made _____ on weak, weak plates to all our mouth and all concentration camp came out and they made them look to it. Took these people, the whole group, and made them dig a big hole—huge big hole. Then they take the watchmen shot him, make the family of the boys cover them with the dead. About an hour later they brought us up _____

and he just took a look, said there's twenty-some boys—young, just beat them good up and take them to hard labor. Then they took us upstairs _____ . They took us upstairs so that I wouldn't dare anymore go out to work. They start beating. I always hear some _____ should treat me was a boy from my town. He just pat me and let me go by _____ because somebody—the one who were beating were Jews which were police, Jewish police, they made _____ in concentration camp. He doesn't even want to hear about them. He told him to put us upstairs and work. When they took us upstairs

DP: What do you mean upstairs?

WS: There was an attic somewhere in this thing.

DP: What thing?

WS: In this barrack. I don't know how it was. I don't know if it was upstairs or no it was on a piece of land somewhere. I don't remember how it was. Let me think about it, too, how it was. I tell you it was a piece of land where they took us and there they told us to just stay and watch, like watchmen, and when Goetz was passing by you should salute and say some German thing without making a mistake. My luck again, the _____ went to some boy, made a mistake, and just shot him in the head. Second, he did good. I tell you, when he came to me I made a mistake, too, but he didn't even look at me—passed me by. Next after me made a mistake and he shot him. Just plain luck!

RS: My husband could run away but if he would run away they would take 50 people in place of him. Before he came up he could run away but anybody who run away they took 50 people in place of this one person. He knew he could not run away because they would kill me, and his sister, and his aunt, and his uncle, and I think a little boy was there—his cousin—too. So my husband came in in the camp. Luckily Goetz was so fed up with killing the other group of people that they beat him up and put him to work. They brought him in and he was working for Schindler's factory. But soon afterwards, early in the morning, another boxcar (tape ends here)

Interview of Rosalie Schiff
IV-B

DP: Your insecurity. Sorry.

RS: In the boxcar, I don't know. There were about 120

DP: No. What were you wearing?

RS: I was wearing a green skirt and a brown jacket with no socks in freezing cold. We were loaded up like animals.

DP: You had little wooden shoes?

RS: And the wooden shoes.

DP: Did you have any underwear?

RS: I think so. Just one pair of underwear.

DP: And the skirt—it was painted, you say?

RS: Yes, the skirt was painted. I don't know where I got painted. Maybe in Plaszow. The skirt was painted with yellow stripes.

DP: How did you feel going in the boxcar?

RS: Just horrible. Just horrible.

DP: Why?

RS: Because I knew they were taking me away. I didn't know where. I didn't know they're not going to kill me which I don't know that I cared so much. But they took me away.

DP: You were insecure?

RS: Yes, sure.

DP: Why?

RS: Because I was all alone from now on. At least William sometimes brought me something to eat and here I was all on my own. And of course, you know, we just got married so it was hard.

DP: What color was the skirt painted?

RS: Yellow. Yellow stripes.

In the boxcar, the boxcar I guess I will never, never forget. The boxcar had so many people that we could not even move. It seemed to me that everybody was taller than I was. I was urinated and defecated upon because everybody had to use the bathroom wherever they were standing. There were no bathrooms. Some prisoners appeared to be asleep. They had their hats taped on the side and I thought that they were just taking a nap. Later on I found out that they were standing dead.

DP: Did you have any food?

RS: No. No food and no water—nothing. I think I remember that some people drank urine because they were so thirsty. I don't remember if I had—no I didn't—my little container where I took my soup but some people did have. I think they drank urine. In the same brown jacket and green skirt I survived but years later but not until I was exposed to much more filth and lice. I remember the skirt started to fall already apart because the paint probably was eating up the material.

DP: How long did the trip take?

RS: Oh I don't remember. About four or five days. We were standing, and going a few steps, and standing, and going.

DP: Was it winter or summer?

RS: Winter. It was very, very cold outside. We were standing close to each other. People were dying and screaming, "Bread! Water!" through the boxcar because I was in a boxcar that had windows. Some people were sticking their heads out and begging for water or food.

DP: How did the people treat each other in the boxcar?

RS: Everybody looked for themselves, naturally, because this was a matter of survival. There were more pushing each other and crying and screaming. I don't remember exactly because the boxcar made such a terrible impression on me that until today I'm not going to go in in the boxcar. I go through the other door. I don't ever want to go into the boxcar. And there were Nazis on top of the boxcar, too—on the side, on top with guns. I don't know anybody escaped from the boxcar or not because I think I was too much of a chicken to do that.

DP: Weren't the doors locked?

RS: Oh sure. When they opened the door in _____, this was another tragedy. _____ was an ammunition factory. There were three camps together—A, B, and C. Luckily I was sent to the A or B. I don't remember but the C, it was just horrible. All people were dark yellow. Their legs were wrapped around rags. They looked so horrible and they were dying of tuberculosis. Not many people survived C. I don't know or even the Germans were in the Barrack C because they were making, not bullets, but for the big artillery.

DP: Cannons?

RS: Cannons.

DP: What were your living conditions like?

RS: Oh, it was just horrible. I was assigned to a lowest bunk.

DP: How many layers of bunks were there?

RS: 4—3 or 4. I don't remember.

DP: What was it like on the bunk?

RS: In the bunk there were all straw mattresses or nothing. Some of them had straw mattresses, some of them had nothing, just bugs.

DP: Any blankets?

RS: No.

DP: How many people to a bunk?

RS: 4 or 5 and sometimes at night we had to run to our place where we slept because the other person took it so they were fighting. There was a lot of fighting going on and squabbling about that.

DP: How many times a day did you eat?

RS: We got soup at night.

DP: What kind of soup?

RS: Soup was dark brown soup from potato peels. Sometimes you could see a little thread of probably horsemeat or whatever. I don't know. In the morning we got a slice of black bread. This was really a fight for life because many people stole the bread from one another.

DP: Did the women seem to bond together at all?

RS: Yes. Some of them.

DP: How? Tell me.

RS: Because we were in the same boat so we had to keep together. Sometimes we had to keep warm together because it was so cold outside.

DP: What did you do to bond together?

RS: I remember in one camp _____ there was a little girl that lived with me in the same house, Lucia Gaterer. I saw her in the camp and

she was very small for her age. She was my sister's age. I was hiding her when we went for our _____. Luckily many times they did not catch her. She went to work but sometimes not on our _____.

DP: Do you remember women who were pregnant?

RS: Yes.

DP: What happened to them?

RS: One woman was pregnant. I didn't know anything about pregnancy at this time still. She lost the baby. It was very tiny. I think it was a boy. I don't know if he was alive or not but my girlfriends took a piece of paper and threw it in the outhouse.

DP: Did you protect the women that were pregnant?

RS: Oh yes.

DP: How?

RS: We protect them by sometimes lying for them. Like this woman who was pregnant, she did not go to work next day and we lied for her which would put our life on the line. Otherwise there was a lot of stealing when I got my piece of bread. If I didn't watch it, somebody stole it.

DP: Was there a difference between the women and the men as far as the way they acted?

RS: I don't know because the men were on the other part. I was not with the men at all. Every day we marched in the morning to work. Jews and dogs were not allowed on the sidewalks.

DP: Where did you march?

RS: In the middle of the road and sometimes the cars were going.

DP: Was this a village?

RS: No we went out of the camp to the factory.

DP: How far?

RS: I don't remember.

DP: How long do you think?

RS: Probably an hour or more. Who tripped, they put a bullet in their head. So we were not allowed to go on the sidewalks.

DP: What did the people in the cars do when they passed you?

RS: They just honked and we went on the side.

DP: Did they know who you were?

RS: Sure they did. Sure they did.

The beds were full of lice. Lice were just marching up and down in the bunk beds. It was just horrible, horrible, filthy. Every night we had a selection. I don't even remember in what I slept—the same clothes I wore in daytime. I don't remember. I think in the same clothes I was always.

We had a selection so we had to get out of the barracks. Right meant to live little longer and left they took away and made, of course, place for some other inmates came from other camps.

DP: Where did they take them to kill them?

RS: I don't know. To exterminating camps. What do I know?

DP: Do you know which one you were near?

RS: No, no. We were completely blindfolded. Not blindfolded. We lived in darkness. We didn't know where we were, what we were, nothing. I found one time a pin on the outside premises. I picked up this pin and I had an idea. I squeezed some blood from my finger and I put on my cheeks and my lips in order to make me look a little healthier because who was pale or who didn't look good right away they took them.

When I got my soup I always looked where grass was growing. I tore some grass and put in my soup and I mixed it up so it would be a little thicker.

The fear of the Germans, of the Nazis, was so severe, was so horrible that I was always nervous. I was always shaking. One time I was ordered to clean up the toilet. I was sweeping the toilet but of course I was young, I didn't want to be there, so I took the broom and another little girl and I were dancing a waltz. We were teaching each other how to dance a waltz. You see how I remember names? His name was _____ . He was

DP: *She* was.

RS: Pardon me?

DP: She.

RS: No, he. _____

DP: _____? You said a little girl.

RS: No, no. The little girl was cleaning the toilets with me.

DP: So who was _____?

RS: _____ was a Wermacht soldier.

DP: Oh. It wasn't the SS that was guarding you? It was the Wermacht?

RS: Wermacht and SS. "_____ " he screamed at me and he took the broom from my hand and hit me over the head and walked out. SS would take a gun and kill me for it. I said, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry." And he walked out but I was lucky.

Once I stored a piece of bread in my bosom. It must have been Yom Kippur, I don't know, that I didn't want to eat. I think was Yom Kippur Day. I slept with my hands on my breast. I don't know how much I slept at night because I was always afraid that they would come and get me. I was guarding this piece of bread so nobody would steal it. I got up in the morning and the bread was full of lice. I shook off the bread and I ate it. I didn't care how many lice were left in the bread.

At work every day people were dying on one side or the other side so we had to pick them up and threw them in trashcans. This hurt so much because sometimes you got close to those people. You were looking for somebody to get close to and we had to throw them away like they wouldn't be human beings in the trashcans.

DP: There were no crematoria there?

RS: No. No. Where I was I didn't see any crematoria.

Behind me was standing a woman. Her name was Pavlovska and she was hitting me and hitting me and beating me. Not just me—everybody.

DP: Why?

RS: Because she was a Nazi. She was hitting me. Every time I turned around I had another blue spot on my back and she screamed to us, "Faster! Faster!" To work fast.

I was again transported to another camp, Cestrshwa. Here I was starting again the transport with the boxcar. This boxcar was open. It was the end of winter and it was so terribly cold. Cestrshwa was not so far away from _____ because in this vicinity they had a lot of ammunition factories and Cestrshwa was an ammunition factory. I was getting weaker and started to spit out blood. I was coughing but not when the Germans saw it because they would kill me immediately. The little pin that I had to squeeze the blood out was my savior, I think, because I was touching my jacket to be sure the pin was still there.

The lice were under my skin, too, so I had to pick them out with the same pin.

DP: You didn't have infections?

RS: I had boils all over my body and I have still.

One day I run away from work because I really had enough. I was itching so much and I could not scratch myself because Pavlovska was hitting me even more so I was afraid to scratch myself. I run away from work because she went for lunch. When a woman is mean, she can be very mean. She had a husband that was 6' some-inches tall, big blond, murderer. I put some water on myself to wash off the lice. On my arrival I was greeted with two big Nazis, one was Pavlovska and the other one I don't know. They took me away, kicked me, beat me, and put me on the table. Of course I didn't have a towel even to wipe myself. They put me on the table and beat me half to death. I don't know how I survived this beating because it was so horrible. All my boils popped and made me feel a little better because when a boil is closed, pus is in there and it hurts. Next day I had to return to work in the morning. I was limping a little bit. This was a horrible day for me I remember. It was cold outside and the wounds that they made on my body felt even more cold. If I made a mistake at work, because we were making the little bullets, they put me in pails of water outside and I had to stand and hold my hands up until I dropped. For punishment, also, they took me to Barrack C.

DP: To where?

RS: Where the yellow people were.

DP: What was it called?

RS: Barrack C. There were three parts but we didn't have any with C because they were all sick people. They were dying, all of them. They replaced them with other people that they brought in. They put me there because I made a mistake at work and I was not good for the work. Luckily I had two Polish foremen and they took me out. I think they had a crush on me. They wanted to take me out from the camp and they told me they are going to make some false passports and that I don't belong there. I talked to myself. I told them my mother died here, my father died, my siblings died here, and I wanted to die here too. I didn't want to go but they always made special things for me. Sometimes they brought me candy or whatever.

One time at work I tripped but another inmate grabbed me and I got a beating for it. Not severe but they hit me a few times. Those were little things, really, because every day I was hit so it was not so severe.

DP: Were there any doctors or nurses who took care of you?

RS: No. No. I don't remember any doctors or nurses at all. Of course I would not say that I was sick. I would be afraid. The worst thing really, for me, was the people were dying next to me—left and right. One day I went toward the men's barracks. In the men's barracks I saw a familiar face. He recognized me too. I don't remember his name. He said, "You remember we used to be neighbors and played in the sand pile together." He said, "Come over here tomorrow and I will throw you a piece of bread." I was so happy. I said, "Thank you. Thank you." Next day I was thinking about it all day long that I'm going to have extra piece of bread. I came to the place where we were supposed

to meet and he threw me a piece of bread. I didn't even have time to go to my barrack because right away they grabbed me and they grabbed him and I had to experience his hanging. I think this was the end of my life. I did not prick my finger anymore. I did not want to live because I put in my head that I killed him, that I murdered this young, cute boy. (tape cuts off)

Interview of Rosalie Schiff
V-A 5/21/98

DP: You murdered this young boy. . .

RS: And I did not want to live any longer. I put it in my mind that I killed him. People were dying left and right. There were not very many left in the barracks because it was toward the end of the war. Some people who survived they took off the buttocks from the surviving inmates. The dead people. They were not probably completely dead and they started to cut off the buttocks and ate the dead flesh in dire grasp of survival. I will never forget this—how people could get so. . . I was hungry too but I could never, never do that.

DP: This is a terrible question but was there any way to cook it or did they just eat it raw?

RS: No, no, no. They ate it raw. I don't know. I don't remember this. Maybe there was somewhere to cook it. A lot of people were dying, or killing themselves. It was very easy to take ones life.

DP: How?

RS: If I would go to the barbed wires I would be killed. I would die. But I was always hoping, even to the end when it got so bad, I was always hoping that *somehow* I would survive. I was not counting that I will ever talk about it because I did not count on it—that I will ever talk about it. It wouldn't bother me so much even if they would hang somebody but I had to witness his hanging because of me. I did not care or I'm alive or I'm dead anymore. I didn't prick my finger. It was like the end of my life. It's just one step farther I didn't take that I didn't go to the barbed wires. It was towards the end of the war and they told us to go to one big room. I don't remember where the room was—in this same camp was a big room. It was January 17, 1945. In this room everybody thought it was the end of us. We were listening to the planes over our heads. I was so terribly weak I couldn't walk. I was spitting out blood and thought I had tuberculosis. I was so thirsty and hungry. They were taking people out on long walks and shooting them. I remember one Wermacht soldier, I remember how he looks even—blonde hair and he was not very tall, and he said to me

“_____.” I don't know why he told this to me.

DP: What does that mean?

RS: “We are lost. For you comes a new life.” I was already so sick and so hungry that I didn’t know what he said. I was repeating and repeating it. He told me “Go in this corner and hide there.” I went into the corner and I was repeating it to my colleagues and they said it means that we are going to be alive—that we are going to be saved. I don’t remember how long we were staying there but not many were left already because they took everybody out and shoot them. I was laying there in the corner on the floor and they left me there. I don’t remember how many days it took when the Germans were gone. They were gone and they, of course, took our life and our pride with them and our humanity.

DP: How many of you were left?

RS: I don’t remember that.

DP: Were there a lot left?

RS: I don’t remember, no, but this was a terrible moment for me too because I wouldn’t know what to do with myself even I would be free. Left behind, we cried and screamed. Out of confusion, everybody was screaming “Why we are still alive? Why? For what? Everybody’s dead!”

The bombs were falling. We were so hungry. After several days, we were frightened of our own shadow, we slowly ventured out and started a timid journey into the city. Of course the Russians freed me. I was barely walking holding to my two girlfriends that we survived together—three of us hold together. I fell upon a hospital and this was really my lifesaver because I had dysentery so bad—I didn’t have anything to eat and I had dysentery—and I smelled so horrible I couldn’t stand myself. I fell upon this hospital where I threw away my dirty clothes.

DP: Who ran the hospital?

RS: The Russians. They gave us some other clothes. They did not feed, of course. They just were _____ some of us begging. We were so skinny that everything was begging.

DP: How did they clean you?

RS: For the first time I took a bath. From years, from years. This moment was the happiest moment in my life because they had showers and bed tops. I laid in the bed top. They gave me a piece of soap and if I didn’t wash myself hundred times, is not one time. You could make mud pies out of me, I guess, with the lice. They gave me some medication to stop the diarrhea but they didn’t know what was with me that I was spitting up blood. I thought I had tuberculosis.

I left the hospital. I remember I found a pair of brown shoes. They were so small and I squeezed my foot in those shoes and I was so happy. Also I found a box of chocolate covered cherries. Basically I'm not a selfish person but I was hiding this box of chocolate because I wanted this box of chocolate for myself. I didn't know that this will make me feel worse so at night, when everybody was asleep, I ate up the whole box of chocolate. In the morning I was vomiting. I got so very sick and they gave me some medication. This postponed my leaving the hospital but I was so greedy for this chocolate. I am today a chocoholic, of course, too. I felt so bad that I didn't give anybody a piece of chocolate.

I went out of the hospital. I don't remember how long I stayed in the hospital. Also I would like to state that the Russians were raping the inmates in the hospital. I don't remember where this was. There were several girls. Of course they were good girls and bad girls like always and one girl wanted really something to eat so she slept the Russian soldier in a bed and I slept on the floor in another room. The next day she said, "Would you like to sleep in my bed?" and I said, "Sure I would like to sleep in your bed." I hadn't see a bed in a long time so I went and laid down in her bed. At night (this I have never told anybody) came a Russian soldier to me and told me in the Russian language, "We gave you the freedom and you don't want to give it to us." I kicked him real hard and I started to scream and he run away. I was very cautious of the Russian soldiers, really, because I knew what they want.

Slow by slow I got out from this hospital, hitchhiking and walking. I don't know if I hitchhiked. It took me weeks until I got—because I was afraid of my own shadow—until I came to the hospital I don't remember how many kilometers it was from Cestrshwa to Kraków. When I approached Kraków, I don't know if I could react today differently than I did at this time, because Kraków means blood on the streets. I was even more upset. In Kraków I slept on the streets, I ate out of the trashcans for quite a while, until I had enough guts to knock at the home of my parents. Of course I found our house occupied. Like I would stand there now and do it, I had my head against the wall and I was crying so hard. I knocked on the door and I saw my father's furniture there. I begged the woman who lived there to let me sleep on the rags in the corner, that I'm so cold and sick. She responded, "This is my home and my furniture." I told her, "I don't want the furniture, I don't want anything. Just let me sleep here on the floor." She told me, "Get out, dirty Jew!" This made me feel real bad that people did not change after such a terrible war. She cruelly informed me, "On the third floor is a college professor and he has a room for rent and maybe he will let me in." I went upstairs and I told the college professor that I used to live in this house on the first floor and, please, I came from concentration camp. He was an older man and a poor man, too. He said, "I already rent this room but since you are a survivor I am going to let you have the room. I will give the other man the money back." Of course I was thanking him. He was poor, he needed the money, but I told him I don't have any money. I told him I have two girlfriends with me, that we survived together, and he said, "Bring them in." He gave us a single bed. We slept, not lengthwise but widthwise, with our feet on the chairs but we had a roof over our head. The professor even gave us some food. He didn't have much but his wife was somewhere in the country. He was by himself in Kraków. Two Polish hearts but what a difference in people. He probably took a look at me and he said, "It really touched this old man's heart" because I was still just twenty- or twenty one-years-

old. This room was very cold. He could not afford to buy wood to make the room warm—to burn in the stoves.

DP: You went to the Jewish Community Center?

RS: No. He said for me to find somebody, that he would share his room with another man. A registration office for survivors opened, was formed, that we could find one another. Over there I met a young man who came from Russia. He had a lot of money and he rented the room from this old man—they shared the room. This man fell in love with me.

DP: The young man?

RS: I did not want to look at him. I told him I was married. I don't want anything from you. You just rent the room with the professor. He's a very pleasant man. I think you'll both get along and you will help me this way—that you will buy wood for heating up the place. They were living together and were getting along fine.

I was very hungry. I didn't have any means of supporting myself so he gave me money and sent me to buy some food. He loved me so much that he did not want me to carry the food so he took my girlfriend and he paid her to carry the food. So that's why I started to gain weight. But I was always doing this to him.

DP: Doing what? You have to tell me.

RS: I was always putting him down. Of course he would not touch me because he was a very decent man but he was very, very good to me. I started to go out. I was a young woman. I went out several times with other young people to have fun or whatever and he started to be jealous. It was in June 8 when they killed my mother

DP: 1945?

RS: Yes. And I did not go anywhere. I stayed all day in the house. I laid in bed and cried.

DP: Where were you living now?

RS: In this house.

DP: In the same house?

RS: Yes. I was crying all day because I remembered my mother and he got mad at me. He didn't talk to me, thank God, but still he gave me some money so I didn't need him to talk to me. He invited a painter to paint his portrait. Very cruelly, being so young, I made fun of him: "Look at this gorgeous man. He needs a portrait of himself." He said, "Because of the blue eyes I am so miserable." Because of me he was so miserable and couldn't even sit still for the portrait.

I was going every day to the registration office to find out if anybody came back. Of course I did not count on anybody but I somehow counted on my husband. Somebody told me that my husband was dead, that they knew that he died. I was very upset because I knew there is nobody else I looked for to be alive. A week later I was walking on the street. A young woman approached me and she asked me, "Are you Rosalie Schiff? You are married to William Schiff?" I said, "Yes." She said, "Your husband is alive—he's coming back." I fainted. They took me to somebody's house and revived me with smelling salts. William came back I don't remember how many months later. He came to the same apartment. The man that fell in love with me told William to take some money from him, that he's in love with me, but he doesn't want me to be hungry anymore. William did not want to take the money from him. William and I left.

He was upset I did not stay with him. He told me, "Look at how much I had."

DP: Who was upset?

RS: The man. "You can have a good life." I said, "I don't like you even. I don't love you, I don't like you, and we cannot make a life together." One time he got so mad and he said, "Look at that wonderful family you come out from. I know your family." I said, "It shouldn't bother you at all that William's father was a barber and my father was different." I said, "I love William and I'm going to go with him." Later on William saw him in Germany and William was looking for Michael for little things to buy and he asked about me—how I am and everything. This was the end of my big love.

We left hitchhiking to Austria where seventeen months after. . . No, what am I saying? This was '45. Michael was born in '46 on July 18 so how many months is in there? Seventeen months?

DP: Thirteen.

RS: Yes. I had my first child. We came to America.

DP: When?

RS: In 1949. I had two more children and I have three grandchildren.

DP: Where did you live in Austria?

RS: In Austria we lived in Linz. Very, very bad life we had, too, because I was still spitting out blood. I was very, very sick. Nobody helped me. My pregnancy was terrible because I always thought that somebody was going to kill me. But thank God, Michael's okay. In Linz, Austria, we lived in one apartment with three families together. In each bedroom was a family with a child or without a child. People from all walks of life. It was very, very bad and a hard life because in daytime we did not have any water and gas, I don't remember, and I had to cook at night. People were fighting over who was going to cook first, squabbling all the time. Food was scarce. We got some food from packages from _____.

DP: From where?

RS: _____ and that's what we lived on. We didn't have much clothes. We didn't have almost anything.

DP: Were there mostly refugees?

RS: Yes, those were refugees. It was a DP camp.

DP: Where? In Linz actually?

RS: In Linz, yes. I wanted to go back for a minute. When I went to hospital to have my child I was very frightened because I did not know how this child was going to come out or where was it going to come out. Nobody told me.

DP: You didn't know how to have it?

RS: No. Of course I was not well because I spit out blood and they didn't help me in the German hospitals at all. I had to translate from German to Russian. There was a Russian woman next to me because was not like separate rooms for delivery. All of us were in one big room and everybody was screaming, of course, with pain. I saw how this Russian woman had this child. (Tape ends here.)

Interview of Rosalie Schiff
VI-B

RS: Anyway, I delivered and my oldest son was born with a clubfoot. When the umbilical cord was not cut yet, I saw that he had clubfoot. Of course I had lot of pains—I almost kicked him.

DP: How did you almost kick him?

RS: He was between my legs and they didn't cut it off yet. The German doctor finally quiet me down and he said that "he's going to be a genius."

DP: Did you have any anesthetic or medicine?

RS: No, no, no.

DP: How long was your labor?

RS: About 24-hours. Was a big baby. 10½ pounds. And I wasn't big as I am now. I was very small. Of course I didn't have any water at this point. He was born probably with a clubfoot. The doctor said, "You will see this is a very smart child." And of course when I brought him home, I was in hospital for two weeks, and when I brought him home he really became my whole life. I was so happy that I had something to hold and call of my own—losing my whole family. I was very much overprotective. I didn't know what

a mother was supposed to do with a child. I remember I had a carriage so I didn't let anybody look at my baby because I was afraid they would give him diseases or

DP: Or what?

RS: The evil eye. He was a beautiful child. It was in summer and one woman came toward the carriage, threw the blanket off, and she said, "Uhh! What a cripple!" Of course I was very upset but hopefully I told that we can fix it by surgery or whatever. I breast fed him and every time I finished breast feeding him I was passing out because I was not strong enough. The baby food I had to cook at night—had to make my own baby food—like carrots or whatever. Life was very, very hard in Linz but I was very happy that I had the baby.

DP: Was it in a camp, _____ camp?

RS: Yes.

DP: How many people in the camp?

RS: I don't remember how many people. I know there were three families to a three-bedroom apartment. It was very hard. All kind of people.

DP: Was it near Mauthausen?

RS: No, no. No, Linz is not near Mauthausen. I don't think so. Yes? Is it? Anyway, we did not have enough food for ourself but I tried my best to give my baby the best I could. In wintertime I didn't have enough clothes to put on him so William went to German and he bought on black market some little slacks, wool slacks, and a sweater. He brought several of them. Finally I found out that I have an aunt in England that was very wealthy before war. I found out my uncle is alive and he gave me the address to my aunt. I wrote her a letter to send me a little coat. My aunt was, before war, very wealthy and she went from Germany to England. She survived in England. Instead of sending me a coat she sent me some Sweet 'N Low. And this Sweet 'N Low she thought that I can exchange for a coat or something. I don't know what she had in mind. Anyway I was very, very angry about this because I knew that my aunt had enough money that she could give me a coat. They had a fur factory with mink coats.

When Michael was three-months old I told I'm going to feed him so much that he is going to gain lot of weight and he'd be healthy and I can go to get this clubfoot fixed. There was no doctor in Linz at this time that wanted to help me so I put him on my back and smuggled him to the other Linz on the American side, I think. I don't remember now. The doctor said that he could give him a brace. They put him in a brace and the brace would not help him. Finally we got papers to come to United States. When I came to United States it was another hard life—a different hard life. We did not speak the language. I was very, very sick. I had one surgery after another.

DP: What kind of surgery?

RS: I had hernias and all kind of things wrong with me.

DP: Are these from the camp?

RS: Yes.

DP: What?

RS: Hernias and I was low on blood so I had to go to Parkland Hospital and they gave me blood transfusions. I remember I had to eat almost raw liver but my blood count, finally here in America, it was okay. Life was very hard. My husband was not making enough money.

DP: Did you come right to Dallas?

RS: Yes. We came from _____ to New Orleans. From New Orleans we came to Dallas.

DP: Why did you come to Dallas?

RS: Because this where they send me. I didn't ask any questions. Here in Dallas we were brought to a hotel where we had to live with bugs and rats.

DP: Do you know the name of the hotel?

RS: I know who owned it but I don't remember.

DP: Who owned it?

RS: Jack _____. It was very close to the _____. The heat I could not stand in Dallas. Most of the time I was laying in a bathtub. There were several refugee families living in this hotel. One day I came out from my room and went to the other room where the other family used to live and I saw a big rat. This woman's baby was asleep and the rat was standing on the baby bed. I couldn't scream because I was afraid that the rat would jump on the baby and kill the baby so I run out and called the mother and the rat went away. So again it was a very, very, very hard life.

Before we went _____ on a ship we had to go to the consulate in Austria. The German consul asked Michael, "How old are you?" in German language because Michael spoke only German. Michael said, "I'm three years old." He finished three on the ship. And he asked, "How old are you, Uncle?", to the consul. And he took him all over. He was so smart. He started to speak when he was really eight or nine months old. Right away I went to Scottish Rite Hospital where Michael's leg, in time, was corrected with. . . No, they put him in a cast in Germany, too, because I have a picture of it but he needed several surgeries. Here in America his foot got finally okay after several surgeries.

For us America was wonderful but was a chaos, too. We were living without air conditioning. We were living with three families in one apartment. I was the one who was responsible for the rent and the rent, I don't remember how much it was at this time but, I could not afford it so I rent two bedroom and one bath. So I rent the back part of the apartment on Cleveland, I think it was. First we lived on Browder Street. On Browder Street Jewish people owned this house so they had trouble with Michael because Michael was a very mischievous child. The old man took his cane, was running after Michael, he always wanted to beat him up but could not catch him. He was picking all his flowers and how many times I talked to Michael not to do that because they were going to throw us out from the apartment. But Michael would not mind. Then when we went on Cleveland I had to rent one room. I rented this one room to a family with two children and we had to cook together in the kitchen. They were all fighting every night, this whole family. Of course I did not understand English so I didn't know why they fighting but Michael came one day and told me, "Mother, he's going to other women. That's why they are fighting." I said, "How do you know?" He said, "Because I already understand English." And it was true. They were fighting. Finally I had to evict them or they moved. We lived there I don't remember how many years. William was walking to work to save 10-cents on a bus.

DP: What did he do?

RS: He was working for a city sewing machine, repairing machines, sewing machines. I was with my son at home because we did not believe in woman working and leaving a child. Finally, I really don't remember how many years we lived there. Anyway, we saved up money and we bought a house on Piedmont. Was that when I had my second child? I had my second child I don't remember where—on Cleveland or on Piedmont. My second child was a little girl which I was very happy. I wanted a little girl. This house was in a wrong neighborhood, away from Jewish life. We bought a little car and I learned how to drive. William had the truck from the city sewing machine and I could go to the grocery store and buy some food so we were doing a little better. But otherwise when we lived on Browder the Jewish Family Service was supporting us. We ate old bread in order to buy something for our children—for my son, later on, of course, for my daughter.

DP: What was your daughter's name?

RS: Rachael. She's four years younger than Michael. My daughter, after I gave birth to her, had double pneumonia with convulsions and I almost lost her. Bringing those two children to this world was the most important thing in my life because I had something on my own. I had a family. She had double pneumonia with convulsions

DP: How old was she?

RS: She was six weeks old. She was in hospital. The doctor at _____ told me that she's not going to live.

DP: Frau Dr. who?

RS: _____.

DP: S-e-l-l-e-r?

RS: I don't know. B-r-u, I think.

DP: _____?

RS: Yes. Did you know him? He told me that she's going to die, that she was a child without oxygen. I took it so hard that I almost had a nervous breakdown. Thank God she was okay.

DP: How did they treat her?

RS: With oxygen probably. I don't remember. I talked to myself, "If I lose this child this is going to be the end of me. I cannot lose anymore—anybody." I took it too hard and I was very, very depressed. I did not have a nervous breakdown but I was very depressed. I didn't want to do anything, just lay in bed and cry. Finally she got okay. Oh, and Michael, also, had—I don't know how to say it in English

_____. He had dysentery and was vomiting. When he was four months old he could not keep any food on his stomach because I overfed him. I wanted to be a good mother. So, he had to go away from Linz to another city to the children's hospital and I was there with him breast feeding him. It was a Holocaust survivor child. The mother had a completely nervous breakdown. I think she killed herself afterwards because this child got sick so I offered that I'm going to breast feed this child to save this Holocaust child. I did so and the child got better. Michael was okay too.

We lived in Piedmont. In Piedmont we bought a new house, a brand new house. We just paid something down. Of course I had a house of my own. William was working from morning until night. Saturday and Sunday he took all of us and went on calls. He was repairing sewing machines. But still we were very bad financially off.

When Michael was seven years I wanted him to start going to Hebrew school. Even at this time I did not believe in God at all. Then when Helen came I took him to Sunday school every week to Temple Emanuel. I dropped him off and I did not want to go in even. Only on high holidays I took the children to the synagogue but not on Saturday. I did not believe in God. I was still very, very upset from the war. I met a next door neighbor that I am friends today with them. They were not Jewish but they did not know what I'm all about. I told them I was born in Poland and his mother was a Polish woman. When she started to speak Polish to me I was very, very upset because immediately I did not like her because she was Polish. Without any reason. Those people didn't know at all what I was all about, what was my religion, nothing, nothing. I didn't want to talk about it. I was afraid of my own shadow, I was afraid of a policeman, I was afraid of somebody when they knocked on the door, I was afraid to let my children out because they might get hurt. I was very, very crazy—overprotective but my children

hated it. Of course Michael said, "Mother leave me alone. I'll be okay." He could not climb a tree or nothing. I could not lose another member of the family. This was in my mind. We saw that it was too hard to live in this neighborhood. We moved to Richardson. No, no. This particular neighbor, she helped me a lot because she saw there was something not right, that I was so afraid of everything. She said, "Rosalie, why can't you face life?" I said, "I'm facing life. I'm happy." And I was not happy. Something bothered me. I put my problems under the carpet always. I did not want to talk about it. When somebody asked me where I came from I said from Austria. People did not understand me in grocery stores. I could not pick up my luggage from the station because I couldn't speak any English. I met one Polish woman who taught me how to say certain words. I wrote it down and I went to pick up my luggage from the station. Under those circumstances I was in freedom, in the stores was everything—a lot of food, but I could not buy anything. I didn't have the money. William was walking to work, to downtown, from Browder Street and I watched every penny, every penny that I spent. I bought clothes in Salvation Army. When I saw a woman drive I was so envious of her. How can a woman handle a car? Later on we bought a car and I learned how to drive, too. But those memories haunted me. Every night I had nightmares, every night I was in concentration camp. I was afraid of a vacuum cleaner. I didn't want to tell my children why. Michael sent something, we have a pass or whatever, when he was very young. He knew that he was not born in United States so he asked us what happened in our past when he was just a little boy. I told him that I was in Poland. Of course he understood Polish, Michael and Helen. That in Poland was a terrible war and I lost my whole family when he was very little. But he always asked, "Where is my grandmother, where is my grandfather, where is my aunt." When Christmas came I saw cars outside and I was so envious that people had family, that they had aunts and uncles and cousins, and I have to be so punished because God did not want to save us and this was really not true.

When we moved here to Richardson I went with the children at this time. I started to go for services and in beginning even I wanted to show my children that they are Jewish so I was kosher in the house. Even when it was so hard for us to buy a piece of meat or a chicken, because we didn't have any money, I was kosher. I wanted to show my children that they are Jewish. But this was pretending and, of course, in my mind pretending was not enough. Let's say I was a very angry, insecure human being. Not enough that I was physically not well. I was emotionally sick. When I moved to Stagecoach I started. . . No, in Piedmont I started to learn English and after five years we got our citizenship. We were very happy that we had Poland and Austria behind us. Little by little I made friends but they were friends just the survivors because the others I was afraid they would not understand me. Like I say, this first woman when I lived on Piedmont, she was my friend and she many times didn't ask me rudely but asked me nicely what bothered me. Today, of course, we are still friends. Her husband is passed away and I went to the funeral and I'm very grateful to her until this day that she understood me.

DP: What's her name?

RS: Mrs. Spozzio. Her husband passed away and she had very fine two children and the children (Tape ends here)

Interview of Rosalie Schiff
VIII-A 6/1/98

RS: When we moved to Stagecoach we didn't know how we were going to pay for rent so I told William not to worry, that I would go to work. Of course I was so insecure because I could translate languages, I'm very good with languages, or I could do something real productive. I went to work for J.C. Penney's as a saleslady. At this time the accent really hurt me because not many people in Dallas had an accent. I also worked for Margo's la Mode selling bras. Of course I brought every penny. . . . No, Bobby was born. Bobby was born on Piedmont or here. I don't remember where Bobby was born. When Bobby was three years old we moved to Piedmont. I went to work but it was not right because I left the three-year-old one in a kindergarten and I felt very bad about it. I went to beauty school and I became a beautician. I was making a little money so we could pay the rent and we brought a family from Poland to Dallas when Bobby was born.

DP: Who?

RS: _____. We brought them to Dallas.
Tape stops and resumes with: I brought a family, William's uncle, to Dallas because I wanted to have a family. They were very, very ungrateful. At the same time Bobby was just a few weeks old, Michael was bar mitzvah. I made the bar mitzvah by myself, 450 people. I cooked, made the tables, and everything because I didn't have any money to have it catered. Those people came over here and I had seven people in the house. When I was pregnant with Bobby I had a hernia and, during the pregnancy, I had to have hernia surgery. I was really not feeling well or not up to having so many people in the house. She was very mean, the aunt. She did not want to help me in the house. I had to cook and wash and wash the dishes after seven people and a little baby. They lived with us for four months until they moved out—finally. I was very happy to get rid of them.

I was sewing at home. Somebody gave me four colors sewing on coats, no jackets, the lining I was sewing on the four coats. I did not know how to sew but I had to learn myself. I had to make some money so I could stay with my children at home. When I went to beauty school I also sold cleaning products from door-to-door. I took Bobby with me to make an extra dollar. Of course Helen and Mike were in school already. Every dollar was really spent very wisely.

I was not happy. I was happy that I could make an extra dollar but something always bothered me. I questioned God. I questioned God, "Why, why did I have to go through what I went through? Why did my children have to be raised without a family?" In a way I felt very sorry for my children. I started to adopt people in trouble, an older woman, Mrs. Jacobs. My children called her _____ Jacobs. I was taking care of her. Every holiday she was with us. I took her shopping every week and she came over and spent time with my children. My children loved her very much. I remember many times when she came when Michael was home he picked her up and put her on top of the table. She was a little German lady. Of course Michael spoke German and she spoke broken English but I was very happy to have her. She was a very, very fine woman.

But life was not still right for me because I was upset. I was so upset. I talked about my past all the time. It did not leave me for a minute. I decided to go to college. William went in business.

DP: What kind of business?

RS: We saved enough money and he bought a small apartment house, with Michael, together. I went to college.

DP: This is after how many years?

RS: I don't know how many years.

DP: How old was Michael?

RS: Michael just went to college. I took a course in English and psychology. I wanted so badly to understand, to let go of the horrible memories of my past. Basically I was a very happy person. We went dancing very often. I was happy I could do that. Whenever I could get a free ticket or I babysat with children. They were in business with clubbing so they had dances in the Apparel Mart and I just went out and had a good time.

DP: Where did you go to college?

RS: I went to Richland College and I took a course in English and psychology. When I fixed hair at home, because I didn't want to leave my children still, Bobby came from school finally and said, "Mommy, when I will live the day that you are going to be home" and started to fix hair at home. I met a very, very nice woman. She was very important in my life. She was a psychiatrist and she knew what made me tick because I started to talk to her. I fixed her hair.

DP: What's her name?

RS: Leona Levy. She died. She passed away of cancer.

DP: When?

RS: She left Dallas but I don't remember which year. She gave me books on psychology to read. I was getting my thoughts together but that did not help too much because I was still very upset. I wanted to know why I felt so lonely and so bad and so depressed that I had to lose my whole family.

We celebrated our 40th anniversary and all my life I was crying that I didn't have a wedding because I got married in the ghetto with a Star of David on my arm. The rabbi that my father knew was still in town so he married us. I always cried on weddings. Michael asked me why so when he grew up Michael made us a 40th anniversary. At this time I did not talk about Holocaust at all, still. It was fifteen or sixteen years ago, in 1982, and Michael made us a beautiful 40th anniversary party. For the first time I was

interviewed from the *Dallas Times Herald*. We had two newspapers, the *Times Herald* and *Morning News*. I was faced with my past. This party was beautiful and I was happy because I got married. My uncle came to the wedding and I was finally married. I finally had the “dream of my life”—a wedding.

DP: Did you wear a white gown?

RS: No. Very light pink gray. Was a very beautiful gown.

DP: Long gown?

RS: Long gown.

DP: How many people were there?

RS: All the survivors, the children of the survivors. We had about 300 people.

DP: Where was it?

RS: In Temple Emmanuel. Rabbi Klein married us.

DP: Did you have a _____ and everything?

RS: Oh yes. Yes. Everything.

DP: Did you come down the aisle?

RS: Yes.

DP: You came down the aisle?

RS: Yes.

DP: Did you have bridesmaids?

RS: No. No bridesmaids.

DP: No bridesmaids. Did you have a different ring?

RS: No.

DP: No different ring?

RS: No, no, no. This was made in memory of the Holocaust, of Shoah, and in memory of the destruction of the temple.

DP: What was the day?

RS: The 10th of June. I didn't want to make it on the 10th of June because my mother was taken on the 8th and I didn't know if she was still alive on the 10th or not.

DP: But that's the day you were married to William?

RS: Yes. No, no. It was not the date I was married to William. I was married to William two weeks later in the ghetto. For the first time I was interviewed on the newspaper and the dedication of the Dallas Memorial Center we donated all the money went for the dedication for the Dallas Memorial Center.

DP: What money?

RS: We had gifts from the people. Everybody gave a check to the Dallas Memorial Center. This kind of made me happy.

DP: Do you know how much money that was?

RS: I don't remember, no. William has the book even of everybody who gave something. Of course speeches bothered me very, very much that Michael made and I had to make a speech. But finally I had a wedding like a girl is supposed to have.

After this, one day I went down when the Dallas Memorial Center was built. I went down but I did not go through the boxcar. I still don't go through the boxcar and I promised myself maybe next time when I go down there I will go through the boxcar because the boxcar was in my mind—horror. Really I don't remember everything from the boxcar because it's just a very bad memory. Anyway, I went down there and somebody was working there at the Holocaust Memorial and she told me, the secretary, to stay here for a minute because she has to go to the ladies room. I was there all by myself and when I looked around at the pictures, I saw for the first time what really happened to me. I wanted to scream. I started to hyperventilate. She was just a few minutes upstairs and when she came down I was probably pale as a ghost. I told her, "Don't you ever leave me here by myself."

DP: When was this?

RS: When the Dallas Memorial Center was built.

DP: When was that?

RS: I don't remember which month was it.

DP: What year?

RS: It is about fourteen years or thirteen.

DP: 1984?

RS: Yes, something like that. I still did not want to face my past. After the party I went to the ladies room, I broke down, and I cried. I cried because I had to be blessed by the rabbi in memory of the Shoah and of my past.

I was afraid of a policeman. I was afraid of a policeman so much. When we were in the apartment business sometimes the police came by looking for somebody. I was so frightened I turned cold when I saw a policeman. One day I went to a policeman in a Tom Thumb store and I asked him, "Can I touch you? I want to get to know you." He probably thought what this crazy woman wants from me but I wanted to touch his uniform. I told him that I'm a Holocaust survivor and I started to cry and he said, "I understand because I have family that were in the World War II and I know how you feel." I told him, "Just take the gun on the other side." Of course today I'm not afraid of him anymore and we talk. I see him often in the store.

I was hyperventilating when I saw bright lights so I joined the J.C.C. drama club. Of course we had to have the lights on us when we were performing. The woman that was directing it, she probably didn't understand why—she knew I was a survivor but I didn't want to go under the light. But slow by slow I did. Like a little child that is afraid that something is going to bite them, that's the way I was.

How do you put your life in perspective from such a horrible past, from such a terrible life? It would not be bad if you lose your parents in an older age, if you lose your parents with natural death, but every time I think about how I lost my parents in gas chambers, it's just unforgivable, unforgettable. Sometimes it's very hard for me to live with it still. But I decided that everybody from my family that I loved so dearly I will make bar and bath mitzvahs for them and put them quietly in my mind to sleep that I can talk about them. This was my plan. One time I was downstairs in the Dallas Memorial Center. I was kind of browsing around, not very comfortable. I'm never comfortable there because I look at my skeletons, at my past. I met somebody that gave me different future, that gave me different perspective for life. I met my dear friend, Diana Plotkin. She took me aside and I will be grateful until I die for this because this put my life in perspective. She sat me down and she said, "Come on, talk to me," and she put it on computers. I talked about my grandmother. I started, like a crazy person, to sing the song that she sang to me and I cried and I cried. I talked about my father that I loved so dearly that was such a full human being that I can say thank you what I am today because he taught me from right to wrong. And I talked about my poor mother that was so sick that would have probably died of cancer but was killed brutally. Finally I started to talk about it.

DP: And you never talked about it before?

RS: No. No, this was the first time I talked about it. When I started to talk about it I felt so much better. I felt that I had unlocked my problems. Of course I did not want to put my problems on anybody else because I don't wish on an enemy to be in my shoes to know what's going on in my heart. I went to a synagogue and I registered to be bath mitzvah, to be bar mitzvah for my seven-year-old brother with blonde hair and blue eyes—big blue eyes—that the Nazis killed so brutally too and the Polacks did not want to

take “this dirty Jew”, did not look like a Jew, did not sound like a Jew but he was a Jew. I made this bar mitzvah and I unlocked one stone from my heart. Then I had an idea. I would do it for my sister the same—my sister with the green eyes and light brown hair and so bright, so smart. I went to somebody who was bar mitzvah and he made the bath mitzvah for my sister. I put her in my mind to sleep. For my special cousins, one from my mother’s side that by six, by probably four, she spoke with three languages—French, Polish, and German—she was the apple of our eye, of her mother’s eye. Her mother lost several children. She was the only one alive. She had big blue eyes and blonde hair. She was so bright. I don’t remember ever that she was a tiny baby and I used to carry her around and play with her, I made a bath mitzvah for her. Her name was

_____ Kirch. I put her to sleep in my mind. I put her to sleep when she was seven years old. She was brought with my aunt to Plaszow camp. She picked up her two little arms and said, “Please let me live. I can peel potatoes in the kitchen” and he put a bullet in her head. She just fell down. The blood was running from her head. And from my father’s side I took one child. I made bar mitzvah for him so I put my father’s side to sleep. And I started to talk about it to children, to lecture. In beginning it was so hard I had to take tranquilizers. Every time I went I said “No more. I’m not going tomorrow to speak anymore. I can’t, I can’t.” And I put my notes in perspective so I will not stutter. And it got easier and easier. Today this is my life. This is my life to teach what can happen when somebody hates. One crazy man, one crazy man killed so many innocent people. I speak with love to those children. I teach them what hate can do. I am so happy that God gave me this gift because many survivors cannot do what I’m doing. I feel like I’m a full person who can teach what hate can do. Today I’m happy. I’m happy. It’s hard for me to talk about it still. Many times I cry (Tape stops here.)

Interview of Rosalie Schiff
IX-B 6/1/98

RS: I will never, never forgive or forget. How could, how could anybody kill children? How? I will never forgive them for it. The faces of the children from the ghetto will ever, always, always stay with me. I will never forgive for it.

For many years I stayed silent. My pain and my anger was locked away deep inside of me but before the Middle East war I felt compelled to raise my voice and my silence. My people were threatened again. And the ghost of my past arose to remind me that I am the living photograph and that survivors speak because they have to. When I speak about the Holocaust I feel very emotional. I see the faces of my family. I wish I could see all the faces from my family. I just see my poor, sick mother and it’s sometimes very hard to be functional. I speak to churches, colleges, and very frequently to schools. Speaking to schools makes me particularly very happy and gives me the greatest feeling of fulfillment and accomplishment. Many of my listeners cry when I speak. I find myself embraced and admired by many different types of religions, races of people, and this makes me very, very happy. We survivors are the only living testament to the truth of the horror that was the Holocaust. Our eyes, our hearts are seared with snapshots of this horror. Our mouths raised in speech are the only snapshots we can share because real photographs would be too gruesome for the truth is almost

unbelievable. I don't know if anybody, anybody, can understand my pain. A survivor speaks because he has to. A survivor speaks because reminding others not to recreate the horrors is the only way we have left to fight back. It is very important for me to spread the words while I'm alive. I will do this. This is my mission. This became my life or I'm sick or I'm feeling bad or I'm feeling good, I'm always eager to tell the truth of what happened to me. I hope that nobody is going to be so victimized like I was, so dehumanized like I was, from a family like I came from—from such a wonderful family—I was made to nothing. Today I hope I can rise above. I have to rise above because I'm the one who represents my family.