

Sonia Golad Interview

October 6, 1999

This is Deborah Jordan. It's October 6, Wednesday at 4:00 p.m. I'm speaking with Sonia Golad and this is a test. What was your full name at the time of your birth?

Sonja, S-O-N-J-A

And do you have a middle name?

No – Borowik. B-O-R-O-W-I-K

And that was your last name?

Yes.

Okay. And when were you born?

1927, um, February 15, 1927.

In what city?

Vilna and its known now as Vilnius, Lithuania. It was Poland when I was born there.

Can you tell me anything about the circumstances of your birth? Were you born at home?

I don't know exactly. I remember that my little brother, he was five years younger than myself and they took him – they took my mother to the hospital and he was born there and they said “Oh he was born in the hospital and I mean it was a big to-do. So, I don't know if I was born at home or circumstance. I know I had when I was a young child, I had medical problems. I mean, I remember going to the doctor's office and staying under a light and --- and -- and then, you know – I never knew what it was all about. I mean I just knew that I was not well. I mean I was kind of sickly.

Yeah, you don't, was it eyes or ears or respiratory -- ?

No, no. It was, I think, respiratory. I think it was something to do with the lungs.

I see. And you remember lights --- from the doctor?

I remember going to the – no – going to the doctor’s office and I was lying down and there were bright lights. And that’s all.

That’s probably a very early memory, then.

Oh, yes.

What were your parents’ names?

My mother’s name was Esther. And my father’s was Israel.

I should say something at the start of speaking to you, because you may have to help me a little bit in that I’m very interested in hearing everything that you want to say, especially about the war and what we’re trying to do with Project 2000 and what we’ve been told in the class for interviewers is that we need to emphasize the pre-war and the post-war. And it’s hard because when people start talking, I’m very interested in everything, and it’s hard to channel it so you’ll probably have to help me get back to the subject. But we’ll try to talk about it and then come back, and you keep me on the subject too.

I was born in a family of five. My parents, an older sister, and a younger brother. My parents had a men’s clothing manufacturing. We were sent to private school, a Jewish private school. And – and then I remember that we had a maid and she was a prompt girl. Gentile -- Polish girl – a farm girl. And she actually raised my little brother. And, I’ll come back to that, but she was the one that wanted to keep my little brother when we were going to the ghetto. And he said, “No, I’m going with my parents.” He would have been alive today but this is the way he was. I mean...

Well, what was your brother’s name?

Abrusha

Abrusha. A-B-R-U-S-H-A

Yes, Abraham. You know.

Abraham. Can you describe the -- the street where you lived? Do you have memories of that?

Yes, 57 Zevana.

Oh, Wow!

57 Zevana.

What a memory!

It was a courtyard and we lived in an apartment -- upstairs in an apartment. We had two bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen, and off the kitchen, there was a place for the maid. And I remember my father being very -- on Sundays we used to come -- people used to come -- he was involved in giving loans to Jews that cannot, could not afford anything. He was very, I mean he was collecting money and very, you know, what I am trying to say is, he was involved in good deeds.

This is your father.

My father. Right.

So he was benefactor to people -- .

Well, not this way, he used to get money from everybody and as a comedian

Fundraising?

He was a *chabad*. But they used to come to my house. I remember them coming on Sundays and coming and then my mother used to have you know, some cookies or whatever it was and coffee and tea and all that. And they used come in and tell what they need and you know, and he would dish out the money.

Wow.

Yeah, he was very, very... I mean he was so involved in it, and I think I kind got from him, that part that you gotta do something for someone else. You know. To really, mean, make it meaningful.

Hmm.

Because I was very close with him and like I say, it just, you know, this I remember definitely. I mean it was -- we were on the second floor and there was a balcony. And what I'm saying is, because when I came back to -- after 1945 -- in the end of 1945 -- I came back to my hometown to see if anyone is alive and I walked around. I didn't recall any of it. Even my name, I -- it had -- some -- people had to tell me who I was. And when I came around the street I -- then it came to me that "Oh, here was a ghetto. Here is where we stayed." And here was the house, and it was only the balcony hanging because it was still from the bombing. It was still down, it was just the balcony hanging. And I, at that point, I went to the train station and I said I better write it down because I didn't recall any of it. And so I wrote my dairy and fifty years later, I found it. Didn't know I had it.

When did you find it?

When -- when Steven Spielberg send -- sended -- you know, a crew to interview me for the Shoah Foundation, you know. And he says bring all of your documents and put on the table and we'll zoom around and you explain what it's all about. And I said "All right" and I went to look in boxes. I have a lot of letters from students, you know, I must have maybe 10,000 letters from all these things. And I start hunting for documents and there was my diary. Yellow pages. I took it to Kinko and had it put in.

Why?

I mean it was falling apart already. But on the table, in the video tape, it shows the - I picked it up like this -- it was little pieces!

How wonderful though -- they were able to copy and get --

No, no, they put it together. I show them where. Because it was in Yiddish. So they put it together and this is what I show when I go to speak with the children. Ah, that I found my diary and -- and I didn't recall having it, even. I carried it with me through all -- I mean, you know -- coming back to Germany and from Germany to United States and to Chicago. And from Chicago, I went to Iowa when I married my husband. And then it came to Kansas City and I said I carried it with me in my little suitcase, I am sure. And never recalled having it or looking for it or anything.

Oh.

And so, finally I found it and, like I say, Steven Spielberg, in 1996 is when he, you know, he send out a crew to interview me.

So your testimony is part of the Shoah Foundation.

Uh huh.

-- your testimony --

I got it. He send me a tape.

Oh good.

And the nice part of it is, every year for New Year's, I get a letter from him.

Oh, how great. That's wonderful.

Yes, yes, he's very nice. So, like I say, I have, he send me the tape, you know. And so that was -- but going back to my home -- my childhood -- so we went to private school. And I was in 9th grade and then the war started. So --

Well, let me ask first, you said that you lived in a courtyard with an apartment upstairs. Can you remember anything about the street -- trees, sidewalks, or -- ?

Oh yeah, sidewalks. And it wasn't just Jewish people, it was Gentiles, too. And outside, next to us was like a little hotel like. So we used to watch people come and go and all that. During the bombing, I remember my father taking us down in a basement. It was kind of a dirt type of thing. You know, go down there. And we could hear right across the street was the bombing, you know shells. And we were hugging each other and lying there and finally when it stopped we got out of it. So, it was a type of a thing like that.

And you had a maid. So did you --

Yes.

...this was an apartment -- so you didn't have the land, you just lived in the apartment?

No, we were in an apartment. Right.

Do you remember, Sonia, taking vacations when you were little?

Yes, we had a summer home.

Oh.

Well, not a home, much. It was a, like a cottage. It was on a farm you know. And we used to go and milk the cows and drink the milk. And then it was not far from a river. And we used to go and swim.

How did you get from your apartment to the cottage? Was it a train or a bus?

Well no --

It was close?

We a -- it wasn't a train. It was a buggy with a horse. Horse and buggy, you know.

What kinds of foods did you eat when you were little? Did you keep a kosher home ?.

Yes, it was all kosher. Right. And we used to -- well, my mother used to tell the maid what to make. But we used to look forward on Sunday because the maid was off and

my Mother used to make this terrific cooking, you know. And we used to look forward on Sundays to have her cooking, you know.

What were some of your favorite things to eat?

Well, yeah, I remember *cholent*, and that is twenty-four hour cooking. Friday night you take your pot with everything in it –vegetables and beef and whatever, you know. And you have a big pot and you put your name on it, I mean on top of it, and you take it to a bakery and they put it in the oven. And then Saturday after services, about twelve-thirty, one o'clock, we used to go and pick up. All the pots were out, and then I used to go with my father, because I liked to see it. All the pots were out in front of it and you gotta go and look for your pot. And you got the pot and you bring it home.

So, it's like a big stew with vegetables and beef.

Right, right, right, right.

That sounds wonderful.

But it was cooking slowly for 24 hours.

And that makes it all the more yummy and then you can smell it.

I used to. I remember that part, you know. A lot of it is kind of, you know, hazy. But those things, I do remember.

You and your brother went to private school?

My sister too.

Your sister too. Oh that's right, older brother -- younger brother and older sister.

Right

And five of you.

We all went through private school.

Can you, do you have memories of your teachers at all? Any of your teachers?

Not really, I know I was a very good student. I mean, they always put me on a pedestal. Because I was – I wanted to learn, to learn all the time. My sister was not. She was busy with boys. She was, she was busy with boys. My little brother, well, he was too young yet to really make an opinion about him. He was doing all right,

but not really that terrific. But my sister, she was busy with uh... She didn't want to go to school and then we made her go to school and all that.

Now he was 5 years younger and your sister was -- ?

Was, was - my sister was 6 years older.

Six years older.

There was another child, but it died.

At birth?

Un uh.

No?

He was a year or two, maybe. Between – he was the child between my oldest sister and myself.

I see. What did you do? Do you have memories of what you did...

Yes.

...as leisure activities when you were little?

Uh huh. Yeah. We used to go ice-skating in my – my school had like two courts, with fences around it. In the wintertime, they put water and we had ice, we had ice there -- ice-skating. And in the summer time it was grass and all of that. But it was ice-skating and then we used to go skiing. And in, like in the summer time, like I say, we used to be on the farm, like, we used to in the woods and pick up the berries and things like that. And so on...

So you were athletic?

Not really.

You liked to be outside.

I liked the outside, yes, yes, but I wasn't athletic, no. So we had some friends there that we met, and the maid stayed with us and then my parents used to come on the weekend.

Do you remember friends when you were little? Do you have memories of friends in that neighborhood?

I know I must have had a lot of friends in my school but I don't remember any of them -- don't remember any of them.

Did you have a any special hobbies, did you like to sew or --

I liked to read a lot.

Read.

Yes, I liked to read a lot. And I remember making, like, little art pieces, things like that.

Crafts.

Crafts.

What kind of books did you like?

Well, the mostly the books we had was in Yiddish. And it was mostly by Sholem Aleichem and by Yitzchak Peretz – Peretz. I liked them because they talked about the life in Russia and you know, under the Tsars you know. All that and the heartaches they had and all of that. And then the other one was, he was writing a lot of poetry and I liked that part.

That was Yitzchak Peretz?

Yitzchak Peretz.

[Phone rings and Sonia excuses herself]

So you spent a lot of spare time playing outside, reading. Do you remember having boyfriends when you were little?

I remember not so much in school as in the ghetto. I had some friends - boyfriends in the ghetto.

How did you meet one another? How was it - was it in school mostly?

The school was a coed.

Oh.

Yeah. It wasn't you know. And in the ghetto it was - we used to live together. You know, so that was that.

So, your family was reasonably well off. You didn't have to work when you were young. You didn't have summer jobs and stuff.

No, No.

And did your mother work?

No -- she worked with my dad in the store.

Oh she did?

That's why we had this maid all the time.

Do you remember your maid's name?

No, don't remember.

Do you have – do you know - recall whether your parents were strict or lenient with the children?

Well, they were kind of strict, but they couldn't handle my sister. [Laughter] Whatever they tried it didn't do no good cause she had boyfriends on her mind and she was beautiful girl and used to being them in the house, you know, and mother asked if she did her homework and she would say "I'll have time to do this." But anyway, no -- they were -- my mother was the most -- the one who took care of raising the kids mostly, not my dad so much.

She brought, brought you up, more than -- got involved in the raising.

Right.

Were you ever rebellious? Did you -- or were you...?

I don't think so, I really don't think so. Because I was kind of sickly. You know and I, they gotta be careful with me and careful with that and so on so forth. So I don't remember any mischief – mischievous – or anything.

Were your activities, you know, cut short because of the respiratory problems? Do you remember if you had asthma?

Well no. I had gym. I used to go to gym. But I really don't know if that was for the lung, I mean, something to do with tuberculosis – something like that. I'm not sure.

Do you remember anything other than your sister's being rebellious or having some problems with your parents. Were there any things that were - created tension, like with your brother or were there --? Did the children get into fights?

No, no, we adored the little brother. Oh my God, looking for – looking at – and just this worry – gotta do something for him – gotta do that, you know -- constantly looking after him. But no, we adored him.

And you would take care of him as being the youngest.

Oh yeah, oh yeah, he was the apple of the eye. [Laughter]

So your sister was pretty and your brother was attractive, too?

Oh yes, he was blonde. He was really – I mean, he was very light. In fact, when my son was born, he resembled him so much because he was born with blonde hair. Now, he's darker -- but he was with blonde hair!

I don't think I got your -- your father's name was Israel, your mother's name was Esther and your brother was Abrasha.

Abrasha

Abrasha. And your sister?

My sister, Vera.

Vera -- wonderful names.

It's kind of Russian names.

Yeah. [Pause] So everyone got along pretty well. You didn't have ...

No.

...bickering.

I don't remember that. Probably was but I don't remember that, you know. I remember my sister. She had a very -- I mean a -- kind of a wild streak in her. She put me in a trunk and closed the thing – the top -- and I couldn't breathe so I pushed out my head and it broke my nose. [Laughter]

Oh no!

[Laughter] **I'll never forget that!** [Laughter]

I don't blame you. That's a prank that --

She was, I mean she just wanted to do things that hurts, you know, and all that stuff. But you know. That's the way it was.

What -- do you remember -- you mentioned that your father was -- to help others -- and tried to raise money?

Yeah, he was like Chairman of the committee, I mean, you know, of the -- of the -- organization they had and whatever it was...

Do you remember what -- other than that -- if your parents had political or organizations that were important to them, or what kind of values or standards they had for you -- did they instill?

Well, I think it was sort of neat what he was doing. I mean, giving to other people that needed and that to me was the most important part of it. My mother used to, used to invite people for Passover and things like that. We always had a house full of people.

So that was important to both your parents.

Yeah. And my uncle, he was the youngest of my fathers family, the youngest one, he lived with us. And, so you know, my father used to be the head of the family. He was, his parents died, I mean his father died, before my mother even got married. And his mother died, I remember because I liked to come to her -- you know -- she was -- and, you know, I was little. And I used to come and just be with my grandmother. And I slept with her in bed and then all of a sudden I hear my father and my mother telling me "You had better get up sweetheart." I say "Why, what's the matter?" "Your grandma passed away."

Oh, right when you were there.

I was right with her in bed. And that stuck to me.

Oh sure.

That really, really made an impact on me.

Was she ill or was she...?

An older lady, I don't know. I have no idea what it was. But I was sleeping in bed with her, I was a little kid, you know.

So that was probably your first experience with death.

Yeah, right -- with death -- uh huh.

Do you remember what religious life was like in your general community?

Oh yes, first of all, we had our synagogues in one street. There was an original ghetto. And it was the second ghetto when the war started. It was the second ghetto. And that street had all the butcher shop and all the rabbis lived there and most of the, you know, Jewish congregations and there was a big synagogue and a little smaller one. We belonged to the big one. And we had to sit upstairs -- the women -- and the men was, were downstairs.

So it was orthodox.

Oh yes, everything was orthodox. But we didn't have no more curtain or anything like that. We sat on the balcony part of it, you know.

So that Vilna was a big --

Very cultural town. I mean they have, they had artists and famous actors and -- I mean there was everything there.

Did you go films or plays, do you remember?

I remember going to operettas, but we had to sit in the back of the theater. We couldn't go sit in the front of it.

Why?

Because we were Jews. The Polish people made us walk in the street. But I took it for granted that this is the way it's supposed to be, 'cause I'm Jewish.

That was the allotted place for you, then?

Well, I mean, that was normal. It was just normal. I never questioned it. That's why I say, when it really happened, we didn't question it. Cause that's the way it was.

This is it -- this is it.

We didn't know there was going to be war soon when there was.

How did - do you remember your family how holidays and Shabbat were celebrated?

Well, like I say, Shabbat was always to bring the *cholent* home, you know. And then, holidays was always a house full. People she invited. My mother invited people that they didn't have any family and so on, you know. And that was very nice. In school now, I remember that we had pen pals in New York. I wrote to one of them and she answered me. I had - I was looking forward to all of those things you know. We had, we had excursions to go to Kovno -- that's a town in Lithuania - - and always with the Jewish people, you know. And it was really nice. I mean I

remember it. We had field trips to go to different towns and so on, you know. Yeah, it was interesting.

And did you travel in buggies there?

It was on a train.

On the trains for the different towns.

It was on a train. Uh huh. To Kovno. And we stayed in the homes, in the Jewish homes, you know.

You mentioned your Dad's brother.

Yes.

And did you have a bigger extended family? Your grandmother passed away when you were pretty little.

Right.

Did you have other uncles?

There was an uncle and another younger brother -- my father's younger brother -- and a sister. And they all perished.

Did your mother have relatives that were nearby?

Yeah -- no. All her relatives, mother and dad, and all the uncles and aunts lived over the river in the suburb like, you know. It wasn't a suburb, it was like, away from town, you know. We lived in town, they lived in the outside - outskirts of town. And we used to make excursions, we used to look forward to it. On Sundays, we used to go there. We used to walk, many miles. I mean many, many miles.

So you were walkers!

We earned our right to go and see the grandparents and we used to look forward to it.

I'm sure.

You know, the aunts and uncles were just like around them. You know, they lived all next to each other. And we were the only ones that lived in town.

Do you remember -- most of the activities that you said you were involved in were with other Jewish people in the neighborhood. Do you remember doing things with -- and you had to sit in the back in the movie theater --

Right.

...did you have activities that were part of the secular community or was it strictly --

No, it was all Jewish. We just palled around with the students from our school and that was about it.

But there was a lot of art and music and there was a lot of cultural --

Oh yes, oh yes. I do remember that my maid used to love to go to church for weddings. She used to take us. And she would kneel and she told us just to sit on the bench. We never you know, crossed or nothing, but we used to sit there everyday we had to go to church and listen to the whole thing and you know.

And you would be taken by the maid to the weddings?

Yeah, right. We used to be taken by the maid. Right, uh huh.

And do - they must have had music in the church? Was the church big?

Oh yeah, it was a big church. It was right next to our ghetto after - during the war. It was a...

Do you have memories of, or experiencing any antisemitism? You mentioned the movies but that was the standard way --

But I never knew -- well yes, there was pogroms. On Passover, every Passover night, they used to -- had to have -- a Jewish killing. Someone had to die, because they said we drank Jesus' blood for the *Seder*. So there was always just one person - - one Jew -- was killed, then it was all over.

So he would be a sacrificial --

Right.

And we - just to get the time frame straight in my mind, we would be talking about like the late 20s -- the early 30s?

30s right, uh huh, right, uh huh..

So you remember some pogroms --

Yes, a pogrom – yeah, once a year always. But there used to be more than that, but I mean once a year was always the Passover -- before Passover.

Did you have any occupation at all, growing up? Did you have any jobs that you did?
You were --

I was working – I mean I was only –

You were little. You were young.

I was only 12 years old! [Laughter]

Do you remember in school, wanting to pursue a line of work? Did you have a desire to be a nurse or doctor or teacher?

No.

No.

No, I was just busy with homework and reading and going to the operettas. That to me, was interesting. I didn't go so much to movies. I went to operettas.

And you liked the music? You liked light opera?

I loved the music. I loved it.

Do you remember any of the – the composers from any of those? Were they --

Well, I know that – what was the waltz with the widow? I forgot the name of it.

The Merry Widow?

The Merry Widow, right.

Is that Strauss?

That's a – no I think it's a Russian composer – forgot who it was.

I can't remember either.

Yeah, neither. I mean that was – you know -- I remember that – oh I loved to go to operettas. I used to go like, they used to have it – they don't have it like three, four weeks of one operetta -- used to be a week and then the next one and that's it. I mean, you know.

So they were traveling companies.

Oh yeah, oh yeah. They had a lot of them, and it was very cultural. I mean, really was.

Do you remember, were there any like circuses or – what am I trying to say -- any carnivals, festivals, like that?

There were but I don't think we went to it too much. I don't recall it. I don't recall.

Did you have any pets in your house? Any dogs or cats or horses?

No, none. My grandparents had a horse because he was grain dealer. He had a horse and stable and the whole thing. Yeah, oh yes.

Did you ever get to ride him or did any of -- ?

No, we see him and that was that. I mean, we didn't, no, I didn't ride him.

So your father was a men's clothing manufacturer.

Right.

Was his trade involved with Jews and non-Jews or was it strictly --

Yeah. With Jews and non Jews. They worked for him. But they had a store and they were selling to Jews and non-Jews.

Do you recall him doing fairly well before a lot people's lives fell apart?

I think so, I think so, because every time, my mother used to buy some clothes for my sister, and I said "oh, you bought her a dress and I want one too." And so we had to go out and get me a dress. And so on, you know. It was always – always -- for the Holidays especially. You had to have new clothes. You didn't go to *shul* with an old dress. I mean you had to have brand new. And we were -- yeah, I remember gorgeous little dresses and all of that.

What's your favorite color?

At that time? You know, I really don't recall. I think it was kind of a pinkish color. I think that was about it. I don't know. I don't recall to much.

Did you wear glasses when you were little?

No, no. I didn't have any glasses. I was near sighted but I didn't have any glasses.

Did -- were your -- was your brother and sister fairly healthy? You were the one that had some health problems. But they were pretty --

Um hmm. They were fine.

Were your parents -- your parents were together up until a lot of the war happened. You didn't have another mother. You didn't have either of them remarried. They were together.

No, no, we were together until they send us to the labor camps. And to the concentration camps -- then they separated us completely and that was the end of it.

Were you - so you were too young before the war. You were married after the war.

Who me? When I came to the United States. I was four and a half years in concentration camps.

So you were in a --

In 1941 -- '49 -- '39 -- the Germans bombed us -- our town. They gave a part of that Poland, they gave to Russian. The Russians came in, came to our town, and then they in the schools, they said they took away the Hebrew books and the Jewish books. You gotta learn Russian. So we had to start from scratch and learn Russian. So we had that part. And then, there was 1939 until 1940 for one year. Then, after that, in 1940, they gave the city of Vilna to Lithuania, because that was the original capital of Lithuania before the Ger -the Polish people way back when in 1900 something -- took away from them in the war. So, they gave it to them and they came in and they said well, you have to learn Lithuanian now. So we had to add another language. But that only lasted for not quite a year, because the Germans broke the treaty with Russia and they came in 1941.

And you were only...?

And that was that.

Thirteen? Fourteen?

In 1941 I was 14 years old, uh huh. In 1941 I was 14 years old, right. I was born in 1927.

So --

I didn't even know when I was born or anything. I got -- I signed up in 1990 with the Red Cross here in town -- to look in -- to find -- I knew that my mother was killed because they told me to go to the right and then she went to the left, and they were all killed. I know my father was sent away somewhere I am sure he was not alive.

My little brother, I didn't know what -- I thought maybe he survived. So I signed up to find out what happened you know and then I get letters every year: "We're looking, we're still looking." Then in 1996, I get this package. I mean, the Red Cross called up and said, "We gotta come to see you. We have all kinds of papers." And I said, "Why do you have to come to see me?" And they said. "Well, its something that we have to discuss with you" And they bring me the papers telling me when I -- which they found it underneath the camps. They dug it out. Some Polish people told them that they put caskets underneath and they dug the holes and they covered it up and so they unearthed it. I mean, uh...

Unearthed it.

Yeah, uh huh. And they dug it up and they found these original documents.

That were buried by the Germans?

Right! And my name and my mother's name were on one list there. And it says when I was born and her maiden name, the whole thing. And it tells me I was sent away. There was nine names -- a roster of nine names -- only three of us was sent away to a concentration camp in Germany. The rest of them were all killed. So she was killed in that -- in Stutthof concentration camp. Then I got this letter, telling me about my little brother, and his thing -- where he was and where he came from and the whole thing, and his mothers maiden name and -- I mean -- every little detail. And the street number and the whole thing. And he was sent away September - September the 8th, 1944. To Auschwitz.

Your brother.

He was killed. Then I get this other one. Now we found your -- about your dad. He was by Baden Baden, in -- close to the French -- in a camp -- Daurtmergen was called the camp. And it says his number and his ID and the whole thing you know, when he born and then they say he died. It didn't say he killed. He died -- December the 10th, 1944 at 6 P.M.

Completely accurate record.

6 P.M. -- all typed up! And the, from Switzerland, they called, they wrote me a letter, it said if you want a death certificate, we are going to issue it because we know exactly the time and everything. We found it, you know. So, I didn't ask, I said, "What's going to be --do, you know?" But now, I did ask for it because I am not sure if my father put away my -- cause in Germ- in Poland, if you had a little money, you had to hide it. So, I don't know if he send it away or not -- I was too young to know anything. But I, you know now there's claims and all of that. I said well, I can't tell you, but I mean I know he was a manufacturer and you know. And I said, now I want a death certificate because then it tells them that he was -- that he

died – really died. You know. He wasn't just an imagination or anything. I mean he died in the camps.

You see it in writing.

Right, uh huh. So that is something. Oh, it's unbelievable. My story comes from all over.

You were all over. Your whole family was all over.

Oh, it was unbelievable. I mean the way it was. I mean was – it was... Then I was involved -- I didn't even know until 20 years later -- a man in Israel writes me, was looking for me for 20 years. And he finally found me and he writes me a letter and he sends me a book, a little book, written about an escape from a camp that we were in – labor camp. And I was a maid to the *Kommandant*. And for two weeks I told them how far the Russians were pushing back already. 1944 – you know, we were pushing them back. And I was giving him information of how far the Russians are from our camp. And they dug a tunnel from the outhouse, underneath, to get out of there to the woods. And the night before, I found out that our camp is going to be liquidated. I didn't know if they were going to move us or if they were going to kill us all. But I said, its time for you to leave. And so, forty men and one woman, that was my sister, escaped from there and he wrote me that 28 of them survived. And all of a sudden I was in the paper and the whole thing kind of came up telling me that I'm a, you know a hero and all that stuff. I wasn't. I mean they wanted me to come with them and I said no, I have to cover for you. So, I went and made -- used to go for roll call, outside, early in the morning. I used to make -- and I dropped the coffee and he hit me on the head. I made it so it was gonna be longer so they'll have time to leave and they wouldn't find out that they escaped, you know. So it looked like three hours it took me to me to make him breakfast, you know. In the meantime, they were hitting me on the head, hitting me on the head. Well, when I got to United States, they found out I have a tumor in my head. They had to remove it and I was paralyzed -- I'm paralyzed on that side. And you know, they found out that I had a tumor. It was not malignant but it was - they had to remove it from the facial nerve and so they removed the hearing box and the balance box. I don't have any hearing or balance. This left eye doesn't shut at all. I mean I have to use my finger. And so, anyway, there was a result from that. So they made me to do it. They ask me to go, and I said no, I have to cover for you. But I never recalled this until he sent me a little book and it's written in there.

Wow! And that was probably as a result of your injuries that you don't remember.

Yeah, right. Uh huh, right.

Sonia, when and how did you first become aware of the Nazis' presence?

In 1941.

And what – what do you remember about that?

In June of 1941, I remember bombing and we were hiding in the basement. And – and then all of a sudden when it stopped, we heard the um, we heard the tanks coming through the streets. And then they said -- they had signs up, that all Jews stay in your homes. And that was the beginning of it. And then there was no food. My, my, our maid smuggled in some food for us but then she had to leave because only the Jews were -- had to stay in their homes. And then it took it two weeks and then they – they walked in and they – “Out, out, out! Everybody out!” And we only took what we had on us. You know, my father told us, “Put on a hot – a warm coat or something. A lotta clothes underneath.” Just -- we couldn’t think anything, just whatever we had.

So this was the Germans occupying?

Right. Vilna. Yeah, right. And in two weeks they marched us to the ghetto.

In Vilna?

We had two ghettos. We had two ghettos. One was 50,000 Jews and the other one was 35,000 Jews. And out of 250,000 population, 85,000 were Jews.

200,000 total --

250 --

250,000 and 85 -- were Jews.

85,000 were Jews.

Do you remember your families impressions upon first seeing the Nazis? Did they – did they seem threatening?

Yes, yes they were and I couldn’t understand, they said we’ll be all right, we’ll be all right. And all they said was we’ll be right, we’ll be alright. And holding on to us and all that. Just don’t walk away anywhere and all that. And-- just like that, I mean -- we marched into the ghetto. And then we had to find a place to stay. We went to an apartment upstairs and there were like 35 people there and we had to be in this room, took turns to sleep on top of the table, underneath the table – I mean it was just --

Not even straw mattresses or --

And then, and then they had one big room and a kitchen. We took turns with cook for each family. Potato peelings and things like that. And there was one little

bedroom, very small one. And I remember, because this was a hiding place. When the Germans came in, they took you out to work. The ones that were not taken out to work, were sent away and they were killed. So, we tried to hide and so I remember that time, there was a big buffet, a hutch -- you know, a big, big -- and we pushed it towards the little room, towards the door, and we nailed down that hutch because they were, they were looking. They was trying to get in to find out where we were hiding, you know. And I remember we had to crawl in to the inside to the hutch, into the back, and they close it up again. And then there was a little baby, my little cousin. My aunt, her -- my uncle was sent away to Russia, before the Germans came in, he was sent away to Russia.

To forced labor or just segregation -- ?

No Russia was just taking away young people and he was a young one. So they had a little baby and the baby started crying and she put the hand on the baby's mouth and suffocated it. And so after they, after they -- everybody come back in from work, then we mingled, and we were all right for a little while. And then we hid in the -- in the -- underneath the roof. Not the attic but we made a hole and climbed in between the attic and the roof and closed it up and that's the way the second time was, I remember.

So you were in the ghetto, but you were -- they were going to come in and clear the ghetto so you had to hide?

Well, they had -- they had quotas to meet: so much today, so much tomorrow, five thousand, ten thousand. So, you know, the thirty-five thousand in the other ghetto was liquidated completely and it was -- there is now a marker-- finally -- I mean the Jewish Congress -- World Congress -- finally got to the Lithuanians. You know you found it there, why don't you put a marker that this was -- thirty-five thousand Jews were killed here and then were buried in this place?

And that was the smaller of the two ghettos?

They finely did it, they finely did it.

Yeah.

Now they have a marker there that it was -- you know, was thirty-five thousand Jews were killed right there. All my -- all my family from where my grandfather and my grandmother were -- you know aunts and uncles they were coming from the outskirts of town -- they were sent into the second ghetto. That's where they all have died.

So they were just -- just came in and just shot -- killed everyone --

Yeah. Yeah they -- after two weeks they killed them all.

And we're still in 1941, now?

Now we are in 1941 and 1942.

Um, hmm.

In 1943 I was working. I was taken outside. In 1943 I was working with my sister at the airport loading ammunition and for the front -- for them to go to Russia. And then after -- after work they didn't take us to the ghetto and they took us to the train station. And we didn't know what was going on. They put us in the box cars, closed the doors, didn't tell us anything, and it seems like forever that we were, you know, going with the train to Estonia.

In just your clothes from work?

Well we were working, that was it. You know. But that was not enough I mean we got there in Estonia, they took us -- they opened up the -- for the train you know -- I mean from the box car. And we went out, and they put us in a room and told us to undress completely -- naked -- and then to leave the clothes right there. And they shaved our hair, shaved our heads, and they took us into a shower and we supposed to shower and then walk out another door. So whatever -- whatever we had there -- I had a locket or something, you know, a picture or anything -- nothing -- it was all there. And they gave us one dress with a number, and they told us, "From now on, it's your number. If we ask you who you are, you tell your number. 03 0933 -- that was my number.

And this was in Estonia in forced labor?

In Estonia in a forced labor camp.

And just you and your sister?

And then they came -- another transport -- and my mother and dad and my little brother were sent there, too. But the men and the women were separated.

But did you ever see -- did you see the other members of your family arrive after your sister was with you?

Yes, yes. I was there. We saw them. My mother was with us but my dad and my little brother were in -- on the other side of the elec -- of the barbed wire fence -- and we used to see them and this was all. And then I remember, in that camp, in Narva, there was a camp -- a labor camp.

That's N-a-r-v-a?

Narva. N-A-R-V-A Yeah, uh huh. It's in Estonia. And in that camp I remember that they -- we had to take turns to go down stairs in the basement. There was a big furnace, and we had to put things to make fuel for the winter, you know. I mean, it was winter time and the dead people -- the ones that died was put out outside -- and we had to bring them in into the basement and put them in the furnace.

The people?

Yeah. But you know when the flame hits the people -- I had to do this one time -- and I said "Oh my God I put in someone that was alive!" No they -- the flame made the limbs move, and I thought that was someone that was alive But in the terrible hell, we had an escape there, too, for -- because the German solders didn't watch us. They couldn't watch this. So they were outside.

They were too busy doing other things?

Well no. They wouldn't watch this, because it's impossible to see all these things. And we used to sing a song. We used to talk with each other, and say what we expected to -- you know -- what the future will bring and so on and so forth. And it was in a hell it was like a little heaven.

Where you kept your sanity.

Yeah, right. I mean just -- just talking and -- and imagining things. You know, that's what's going to be and all that. And, you know, it was just hope, hope, hope -- and that was it. Then we were there until 1944, and we were sent from one -- then the Russians in 1944 started moving, you know, the Germans back. So we -- they had to move our camps. So we had to walk from this one camp all the way to another camp -- Goldpils [Goldfields]. And this is the camp where they escaped. The people, you know, I told you about.

How do you spell that, Sonja?

Goldpils? G-O-L-D-P -- Oh God --

I-L-S?

Something like that -- Goldpils. Anyway --

And that was Estonia also?

Yes, oh yes. And we had to walk by the Baltic Sea. Hundreds of miles-- and it took us forever, I think. And the ones that just dropped dead, they threw in the -- in the sea.

Were you still with your sister then?

Yes. No, no. My sister escaped. I mean, we went to the camp and then she escaped with the other forty men.

From Narva?

No, from Goldpils [Goldfields].

From Goldpils.

She was with me there, you know. My mother was there, too. But she escaped in that thing, and then my mother and I was left alone. But then the Russians were pushing them back so they liquidated the camp -- the one I told about-- to leave, you know. And they took us on a boat to Germany to Stutthoff concentration camp by Gdansk, by the sea, you know. And we got there, and they start this -- down there was hundreds of hundreds of thousands of people, you know. And they come from southern part of Poland and from Czechoslovakia -- from everywhere. Anyway, we got there, and they -- and I was with my mother, because my sister was already escaped, you know, into the Russian -- she went into the farm houses and things like that and was hiding. But anyway, I was with my mother. And then, one day they told us to get outside and then told me to get to the right and told her to go to the left. And I wanted to go there, and they wouldn't let me. So I had -- I was sent -- like I say, there was only three names on that particular one. I was sent in a boxcar again to -- to Neuengamme, that's another labor camp. And that was a last experimental camp and they experimented on me.

And your mother went?

My mother went to the left and she was killed.

And your sister was already in Russia?

And my sister was in Russia.

And your dad and brother had been lost in the beginning?

My brother [probably meant to say father here, not brother] was sent away from that camp, too. But he was sent away and he was there for a few more months in the camp and was killed. And my little brother was sent away in September and was killed in Auschwitz.

And you were all scattered all over the map.

Oh yes. Oh yes.

Do you remember -- were there any newspapers or any information that you had at the time when -- you would have been only six years old in 1933 -- when the German boycotts happened and the book burnings. Was there any that --?

I don't remember anything.

You were not aware of that.

I don't remember any of that.

The race laws or *Kristallnacht* were --

No I don't remember any of it.

-- were somewhere else.

No.

Is your first recollection of any kind of persecution -- do you have a memory of that? Do you have being in school -- or any kind of -- other than being in movie theaters when you were -- that's the way it was.

Well I heard from the Jewish kids that went to private -- to our public school the he had to sit in the back and they constantly were calling "Jews! Jews! Jews!" they said. They were always taunting them with "Jewish." But, I mean they had to sit at the end -- at the back of the schoolroom. And I didn't -- we didn't have it because we were in a private school, you know. And it was a Jewish school. But the people couldn't afford it had to go to public school and that's when they got it all.

Were you ever taunted on the street on your way to school by Polish children or -- sometimes children can be cruel on their own?

Yeah, right, right. Because we had to walk -- walk to school. We didn't have any transportation anything like that. We had to walk and we'd come across "Oh, look at the Jew" -- you know, that's all.

Did they do anything to -- synagogue where you worshiped or -- no?

I don't remember any - no.

No. Did anyone along the way -- you were able in some ways to help yourself. But do you remember getting any help from non-Jews?

No.

No, no one?

No.

No rescuers for anyone in your family?

When I came back to – after the war -- to my home town, I went to see my – my -- the maid -- she took every thing from our home, you know. And I asked her if she would please give me something, she said, “I don’t have nothing, and you can’t stay here, because I’m married to a Russian soldier and he hates the Jews.” So she threw me out, and I had to go to the train station, like I said, you know, and I start writing down all those -- my diary, you know.

Memories, yeah. You were -- so how many camps did you go to?

I was in the ghetto first, then I was in two labor camps in Estonia

Right.

One concentration camp in Poland.

And what was that called?

Stutthof.

Stutthof.

Stutthof, right.

And that was in Poland.

There was in Gdansk, you know, right outside. Then I was in an experimental camp, Neuengamme, in Germany. And then in Bergen-Belsen. But when I had the experimental thing I didn’t know what they were giving me. I was so sick when they liberated me in Bergen-Belsen that they sent me to Sweden. Sweden took in some refugees, and I was three months in the hospital. And they found out that they gave some kind a of shot that brought on a virus, that I still have it.

Wow.

I mean I had it. I had to take a whole month of antibiotics. Five years later I still -- it showed up again. And I thought maybe I gave the cancer – my daughter, you know. But the doctor says, “No look at all your -- ” I had a breast – I mean surgery on my breast. That was a tumor, but it was benign. I had -- I had all kinds of tumors, but they were benign. And they said, “No. You know, yours were not -- it wasn’t cancer. So you didn’t give it to her.” But they don’t know what it was. The

doctor even wrote to Switzerland to find out if they have some records of that. All they said was we have the records of the twins, and that's all.

No records of individual people?

No. Not for this camp. They didn't have the less experimental camp. That was only six weeks before we were liberated.

In Neuengamme?

Neuengamme, right. And -- and then, that's when I found out that I have a virus that --

That may be with you for always.

Yes, yes. I mean, if you have to test it for something it will show up positive, you know what I mean, it's a -- it's been like this, I mean you know.

What are the effects from that -- just...?

Well they don't know. They don't know if it -- if it effects any other blood cells or whatever, they don't know. But I know I was three months in the hospital. They gave me -- I didn't have my period. And they gave me in Sweden -- they gave me some shots and it came back. That's when I had the first child. This one was my first child.

And where did you meet your husband?

I met him in Chicago. He lived in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. He was -- he was in the army in Germany, you know. But I met him in Chicago when he came to visit a relative or something.

So he was in the US Army?

Oh yes he was born in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. He was American born. And I met him there. And then six months later we got married.

So you were recuperating when you met him?

Beg your pardon?

You were recuperating -- or you were working then?

Oh no I was working for Hart, Schaffner, and Marks [a men's clothing manufacturer] in the payroll department. And I was working in a -- in another company. I was, you know -- I was at a desk, you know, and taking care of the payroll and

everything else. And then I at night I used to go to school. And on weekends I had to take another job because I couldn't afford the rent for -- the room rent.

[Laughter]

You were a busy lady -- and Chicago's expensive.

Well I had to -- I had to work at Lerner's on the weekend. And then during at night I used to go to Austin High to learn English and -- you know -- and other subjects, you know. And then I learned I could -- I applied after I married my husband -- to -- I applied for citizenship papers, because I only had to be two years in the country, because I married an American citizen. So I started learning you know, the Constitution and history and the whole thing because you were you were questioned then, before you even given the privilege of being a citizen, you know. And I studied, and then I -- and I had my child -- and I said oh I gotta have a car. I gotta drive. I can't depend on other people doing it. So I went to high school in Cedar Rapids, and took Drivers Ed. And I, and yeah, I passed it. I mean all the kids and all all the sixteen year olds and I am there! [Laughter]. But it didn't stop me. And I -- like I say -- I passed it and I'm driving. And then I lost her. I have my son who lives in Los Angeles. And -- thank God-- he had a testicle removed because of cancer, but he is all right now. I mean it was about eight years ago.

Does he have a family?

No they expecting now. They expecting.

Oh -- that's wonderful!

Yeah and so --

So you're a grandmother through you daughter and through your son.

Well, my youngest daughter she has two children. One was *bat mitzvahed* just last month -- I mean August, actually. And those are the two -- hers -- by there.

Oh.

Yeah, uh huh, right there, uh huh. Those are hers. And that's one of my other two -- my older ones. One goes to the University of Colorado in Boulder, and the other one is in private school.

So you have five children?

No I had -- I had three.

Three -- and they --

One, between this one and my son, was stillborn. Seven months I carried it, and it was stillborn. And then I had -- had -- my -- my son. And then I had my youngest daughter. She's today -- she's forty-one years old. We're taking her out. So anyway that's about the story of my life.

When we talked about -- a little bit about liberation -- so that came for you in 1944.

1945.

'45 -- and you were in --

-- April -- April -- in --

Bergen-Belsen?

Bergen-Belsen, right. But I was sent to Sweden. And I didn't -- I was so sick in the three months in the hospital.

And this was after liberation you were sent there. They sent you there?

Yeah right, right before they liberated the camp, you know, they sent me. And -- and -- I didn't know my name I called them by my number. And they found out there were twenty Jewish girls among the other prisoners -- you know, Gentile prisoners and, you know, gypsies and things like that. But anyway, there were twenty girls and then they all scattered around in Sweden, you know. Everybody took them in, you know. And the doctors started looking for them, so they could find out who I am. So when they came to me and said, "Your name is Sonia Borowik and you come from Vilna." So I said, "Oh, now I remember my -- my father said you can be at the end of the world after the war. If you are alive, you come back to your home town to see if anyone else is alive." And that was just -- I didn't know my name -- and this came back to me. And I said -- and I was taken in by a dentist's family-- beautiful family -- were wonderful to me! And I said, "I gotta leave I can't do --" She said, "Well -- how -- you going to Russia you never going to get out of there." I said, "But I promised my father and I got to go."

And this was in Sweden?

In Sweden in 1945 -- the end of 1945.

And when did you make the promise to your dad?

In the ghetto.

In the ghetto.

Right, when we got there. And I remembered it. Isn't that something -- that that stuck with me I didn't know my name, but I remembered that, as soon as it came back, you know? And so I came there and I looked for them, and I found out that my sister was alive, but she went away to Germany. And then my father -- the maid told us -- that my father my mother and my little brother -- nope, they didn't come back -- and so they're gone.

How did you find out that your sister was still alive?

My -- my -- the maid told me.

Oh.

She was there -- she was -- she came from Russia, you know, and she -- she saw -- she saw her, you know, so --

And that was the same maid you had growing, growing up?

Right, uh huh. So then I went back to Germany. So I had to illegally bribe the locomotive conductor to go over the border from Vilna to Poland, you know, where Russia you know is. And I have some watches, you know, jewelry. They give me everything in Sweden -- and I had to give it to them and he put me in the coal. And I cross the border, and then I had to cross the border to Berlin. And on that, I did on my own, because I didn't have any more things. [Laughter]

Gosh.

So I had to watch the guards go across the river there. And when -- when they were going this way, I was in the middle, and then when he came to the middle, I came went there and I made it to to Berlin. And in Berlin they had the Joint Distribution Committee already settled there to get in the children from, you know, from the survived, you know, to get them all in and get them on a boat and send them to Palestine. That time was Palestine. And so when I came there I told them that I'm looking for my sister, but she was already gone to the American zone in, in Germany. And he says would help us, you know, screen the children, and everything. So I said all right. So I worked there. And I sent -- I sent -- I sent them on the train, I took them to the train. And those are the children that became the first ones that came to -- to Palestine. On the -- on the -- on the -- on the -- you know -- the-- the -- the ship that was -- that was the *Exodus*.

Exodus, right, right.

And I send them on the train. And then they they take -- took them to the *Exodus* -- the ship -- and they got them. And so, one little girl -- I have pictures of it -- the whole thing, you know. At that time I already took pictures from the Joint Distribution Committee and all that. So I have all these pictures. And then I came --

I came back to -- then, when they -- when they were gone, I said I gotta go and find my sister. So then they gave they gave me an escort to go through -- Berlin was all ready divided. So I had to go through, and they -- they put me on the on a truck and they-- they -- sent -- took me over there. And I found my sister in, in a, in Germany -- in Heidenheim was the town not far from Stuttgart.

This was still 1945?

1945.

And she -- how were you able to find her?

Well they -- when you -- you come into a displaced person camp and you register so that is how I found out.

So she was registered there?

Yes she had a child already -- her husband and her had a child. And when we got there I -- I went to work for the UNRRA -- United Nations Relief Organization?

Uh huh.

And I did again the same thing, because I had the languages, because I knew Polish, I knew Russian, I knew [laughing] -- and German, you know. So I had to be the, you know, to screen them again, you know, to see where they come from and where -- who they are -- and all that. So I worked for two years and they sponsored me to come to the United States

UNRRA did?

UNRRA did, yeah, uh huh.

That's great.

And I have recommendation papers and everything. So when I came to -- to Chicago -- I went to this -- I mean, nobody told me where to go, and they weren't -- you know -- we came -- you know -- we didn't know what's going on -- and they were not organized. The Jewish community wasn't organized. So there was no place to ask anything. So I ask people where is the employment agency -- in broken English-- I'm going to the employment --

And this is when you first got to Chicago?

Right. And I said -- they said -- well, there is a job for -- I said I can, you know, I can type, but in German, you know, not in English, but I am gonna go to school I'll learn and everything. But I can do, you know, payroll and everything like that. Oh

yeah, we have one in -- for at Hart, Schaffner and Marks. And then one -- one lady says, "Uh uh, she's Jewish. They don't -- never had a Jewish employee in the offices." Well Hart, Schaffner, and Marks -- Hart is Jewish.

Right -- I would imagine.

And when I came in, he saw me and he started asking me questions. And I told him, I said I worked in Germany. I showed him all the recommendation papers and everything, you know --because from UNRRA. I have all those things -- "To whom it may concern" -- the whole thing, you know. And -- and he says, "You know, you don't have to have the typing we'll put you in the payroll department." I worked for them for two years.

In Chicago?

Yeah.

After you were -- you know, you went to the hospital for three months and then you were -- you went from Sweden directly to the US to Chicago?

No no, no, no, no.

You went through you went through Germany, again. Berlin, you said.

No, I went from Sweden -- from Sweden I went back to my hometown in Vilna.

And this is still '45?

1945 -- December of 1945. I was liberated in April of '45. And I went in December of 1945 in my home town and from there I started going back to Germany so I can find my sister and then emigrate. So then when I worked two years in in in Germany for the UNRRA, they sponsored me to come -- in 1947 I came to the United States.

Can you speak about what it was like to see your sister again?

It was a little strange. Because she already was set with her husband and her child. And all she wanted -- I wanted to ask her what happened, you know, where she was. She wouldn't talk about it. Would not -- still doesn't.

What happened...?

What happened when they escaped and all that. No -- nothing. She's a very -- well how can explain this? -- she's a bitter woman. And she -- she -- she doesn't even get along with her children. She lost a daughter, too. But she was much younger. She was same name, even.

Oh God, it's so sad.

We both named them after my mother.

What was your daughter's name?

Esther.

Esther.

But they called her "KC," because she -- when she came to California -- she was from K.C. -- Kansas City.

Kansas City.

KC -- yeah. So she was known as KC. KC Kahn.

So your sister has a different reaction to to everything...?

Oh yes, oh yes. They never talked about -- among themselves they talk about everything. But they never -- you know -- I told her, I said why don't you go and -- Spielberg is -- "Oh no, not me. I'm not going to do that, you know, and all that stuff, I mean, you know." But this is the way that she was, you know. But I -- I -- you know-- like my children -- my daughter -- especially young -- my younger daughter -- you know. She says, "Mother, you can't compare yourself to her. I mean, look, you came in you took care of a family and you went to school and, not only that, but I was president -- 1977 -- for sisterhood. I didn't know how to conduct meetings yet, so I went to UMKC and took parliamentary procedures.

While you were -- while you were -- you were learning how to conduct meetings while you were doing it?

The summer -- the summer I took a course for six weeks for parliamentary procedures. And I learned. And I am conducting now -- they -- they say wow you do the best job there is. I say well, because I cut off people that are out of order, you know, and things like that, and, you know, it's all there. So anyway -- but anyway -- after that, I went to school. I mean, even if I -- when I had my children, I used to have a babysitter and I used to go to school at the Jewish Community Center on Linwood when they were there yet, you know. And I used to take courses. I took bridge, I took typing, I took anything I could do -- I mean just to get knowledge.

You have an urge to learn and to grow all the time.

Yes, yes, yes -- all the time. When I read -- I read books and books galore. But I mean when I read the paper it's from top to bottom. I don't read the movies pages

or nothing like that -- just the metropolitan and the *Kansas City Star* and that's that. But I go out from page one 'til to the end and to the other -- always.

You have not lost your thirst for knowledge all the time?

No, no -- not at all -- not at all. And when they have some courses or something or a speaker or something I am the first one to go. Because I am interested in knowledge and you know I was hungry for it. Because, look, I was only -- actually I was twelve years old before -- when, you know, with the Russians with the Russian language and everything -- there was no learning any more.

You lost your years for learning.

Yes, yes.

They were taken away.

Yes.

So now you still you want it back.

I -- I -- I hope I did. My -- my children tell me that Mother you are a survivor. You will survive this, you'll survive that. I mean with this thing, you know, even so bad, and I said Oh God I can't -- I don't think I can take it anymore. But they said --

With the paralysis you mean?

Yes, yes, it is very painful -- very painful.

Does your does you face hurt from it in addition to your mouth or just -- does this side of you face hurt, no?

No this doesn't hurt. No, this doesn't hurt. It's just that I have this burning in my mouth, and now it's much better. I learned how to open my mouth. I couldn't even open my mouth. I was like this and talking like this. I couldn't -- I couldn't do it. Finally I'm forcing it now, you know, to open, in between, you know. So it's hard but, I mean, I'm doing it.

You are.

Trying to -- I'm trying to, you know.

What was your physical condition when you went to the hospital right after liberation?

Oh the girls had to take me under my arms and drag me.

You were, I'm sure, very, very -- you're a small person anyway.

Oh I was -- I was -- I was sick. I was really.... Well, I'm five-four and a half -- so you know -- but I mean I was -- I was so sick. I mean I was like eighty pounds or something, you know. And a skinny bones and that -- but I was so sick -- and they were carrying me under the arms so the Germans wouldn't throw me in and kill me -- you know, shot me. So I was walking around when they were holding me like this you know. And I got on a boat and I was on the—on the -- they gave me the upper bunk, you know, and I was there and I couldn't talk or anything. So they took me straight to the, to the hospital.

And you had lost your memory then?

Yes. Yes.

You had probably blocked it out.

Yes. Yes.

Was the medical help and food supply and things provided for you well in Sweden when you went?

In Sweden? Yes. Yes. The Swedish people were very, very nice -- were very good. They took me in like I said -- they took me into this home and they felt so bad that I had to leave them because they expected me to, you know, to do things for my self and everything, you know.

And you remembered what your father said.

Yeah, that was that.

Do you still keep in touch with anyone in, in Sweden?

I used to, but not any more. I have, I have postcards and things like that I mean you know it shows you this Swedish. I have pictures I took for Jewish -- a Jewish group was getting ready to go to Israel and they wanted me to go with them, you know. And I have pictures of them, too. I mean, I, you know, after the war I was -- I was joining things. I joined Junior Hadassah in Chicago when I first came. I said I gotta join something. I got -- I gotta go and do things, you know. I wanted to Americanize right away -- so there was a part of it.

So when did you become a citizen?

In 194-- in 1949 I got married, in 1950 I was a citizen. That's when my daughter was born, in 1950, the oldest one.

I was too.

Oh yeah? She would have been 49 years old in September.

We're the same age. How did you -- when you went to Chicago really to to try to to put your life together. And --

I was sent to Chicago.

Yeah.

From New York -- from --

From the UNRRA.

No from HIAS.

HIAS?

Yah -- Hebrew Immigration -- HIAS. H-I-A-S, you know.

And they

They sent me to Chicago.

Sponsored your -- from Sweden to Chicago?

No, from Germany.

Germany, right.

When I came -- where I came to -- do you think that's enough? I got on the boat -- *Ernie Pyle* boat -- he was a correspondent for the war ...

Right.

... he died. They called the *Ernie Pyle* -- he was a soldier you know -- I mean a military boat, you know. And we were eighty thousand of us were on the -- anyway we go right in the middle -- right outside of Cleveland, England. And all of a sudden BOOM! And what happened? Lost an engine.

Oh no!

So we anchored in the middle of the ocean and plead with England and England wouldn't let us in because they had to pay a fee you know and they didn't do --

Oh gosh and there were eighty thousand people on the boat?

Well I have -- wait a minute, I have the thing -- I have to see it -- I'm sorry I be right back.

That's okay.

[Long pause as Sonia left the room to get something.]

This is the way I travel with my, with my brief case. Wait a minute, that's not the one. Hold on. Hold on. Here is my -- here is my, my diary.

Oh goodness! These are yellowed pages and laminated. And --

Yeah.

And this is in -- written in Hebrew?

Yiddish.

In Yiddish.

In Yiddish. I want to show you what I got -- the thing. I have so many papers, it's unbelievable. Oh there it is. See those are the ones they found. The thing -- the whole thing. [Sonia is showing and referring to the Red Cross documentation regarding her family.]

Meticulous records of everyone.

Yeah, look, here the whole thing. Anyway, I'm going to get this thing out because of the boat. I want to show you what it really -- what it happened, you know. This is the UNRRA where I worked. And this is Joint Distribution Committee. This is the girl I sent to Israel.

Ahhh. Those are wonderful pictures.

Huh?

Those are wonderful pictures.

Oh yeah. Oh there it is, there it is, here it is. Here is the ship and a sailor wrote to me. I mean he gave me this thing -- look at that -- here it is.

[Reading from letter] "Great thrill, Sonia. [Laughter] Ernie Pyle."

Ernie Pyle right. No not eight thousand -- not eighty thousand -- eight hundred displaced persons. Here -- there was from Plymouth, England.

[Reading again] “Plymouth Sound, played cards, sang, and took lessons. On its way from Bremen to New York, put in with engine trouble.”

Ay.

[missing from audio]

You started talking about how you met your met your – met your husband –

Oh.

In Chicago.

In Chicago.

[audio restarts]

What attracted you to one another?

I was actually going with a man that was in college in Chicago. He was -- he was going for a doctor -- not a doctor but a -- what do you call it? – it’s a doctor degree but it’s not a regular physician.

Masters?

No it’s a --

Doctorate?

Well not the chiropractor, but just, you know, just -- I don’t know, anyway, he was going to college there and we met at a dance or something and we were kind of close. And then his mother passed away in New York. And that’s where he went. He left for New York. He wrote me letters. I have the letters. And he says I don’t know if I’m coming back and all that. And I felt kind of -- kind of -- you know that. And then my husband came to -- to Chicago and I was introduced to him. And he -- every weekend he was coming to see me! So --

Did you meet at a -- a party or did you go out.

No we just went out, you know. And – and then he wanted to get engaged right away because he was afraid that I’m going to go out with other men, you know -- and I said – so we got engaged. And then I said well wait a minute I got to get to know you first before I go and get married. So I did -- I did -- we did go for six months. I used to come to him to Cedar Rapids and he used to come up. And then in 1949 in December we got married.

Can you – um --

Another terrible thing that happened: he's got – he has a sister living here in Kansas City and his brother-in-law was driving the car to go to Cedar Rapids, Iowa where the wedding was going to be on a Friday. On Saturday afternoon we get this call you better go ahead and get married now because he died -- he killed -- he got killed and he-- the funeral is on Sunday.

Oh no - on the way to the wedding.

To our wedding.

Oh gosh.

So we got married in the house. They called on the radio and told everybody that the wedding is not going to be held on Sunday you know in the synagogue. And everybody went to the station and came to Kansas City. We went to Chicago for to just to get away. We had reservations for New York to go for the honeymoon. We canceled that and we just went for the weekend and came back.

So you had a small wedding?

A small -- just a handful of you know you have to have 10 people so that was that. And that was that. It was unbelievable it was just unbelievable. I mean -- I mean if I could tell you what else can happen to me. I mean this is -- and I am surviving and I am surviving and I am surviving. I mean how much more? Oh God you can't – [Laughter] Oh!

And what was your spouse's occupation?

Well in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, he had concession stands and he was working in a [unclear] bureau – something-- a manufacturing thing -- something. And then he bought a house before we got even married. And when I got married we right in the house you know.

This is in Cedar Rapids?

In Cedar Rapids. I had my daughter -- nine months [laughing], she was born. And then we stayed there you know and then in 1951 she was fourteen months old. We came to visit here, his sister and so on, and I said you know I like this town. Because Chicago is too big and Cedar Rapids is too small. It's not for me. And then this is just perfect. So two weeks we sold the house and two weeks I was here already.

Wow and this is where you decided to stay?

Chicago is a different story. In Chicago they held me up. And I had, I had, I was in the hospital for that too.

They held you up?

Yeah. I was walking towards, towards my, towards the apartment where I had a room you know in someone's home. Somebody hit me in the, in the, you know, and took my purse and held me up. And I ended up in the hospital with – oh --

After all that you've been through then you get mugged.

Oh yeah! It was, it was unbelievable – unbelievable. I think what else can happen to me?

Yeah! Where did you first live when you came to Kansas City?

We lived in an apartment on, on, right off of Troost. Not - between Paseo and Troost somewhere. 36th and something. 36th and something.

And you were already already pretty conversant in English then?

Yeah. Yeah, well I mean I could get by you know because I already had two years of English you know.

So when you were little your family -- you spoke Yiddish most of the time?

Yiddish right and Polish. And Polish.

And Polish

And Polish right, because the maid was Polish.

So you were kind of bilingual in your house even when you were little?

Right.

And then Lithuanian?

No first was Russian.

Russian.

And then Lithuanian.

Ah. So you were multi-lingual.

A year for this and a year for this and German came in after that.

Depending on who was occupying

And Swedish was after that.

Gosh. So did you – you had to take English lessons more when you came here or were you pretty conversant by then?

By that time I was already -- I could... In fact when the children got a little older I went to work for insurance company. And they -- my children were saying we dare you. I say all right.

They should know better.

You only going to last one month that's it. No I lasted much more than one month. I lasted 2 years.

What were your biggest challenges when you -- well you were – let's see -- you were -- first you had to get better, then you got married, then you had your daughter and then how soon after that?

No not get better -- better from what?

Well --

I have to get, you know, get the English part. And the life itself -- I mean I wasn't used to any any kind of life after that.

You had to start over.

Right. Right. And I lost all this. I mean my youth was gone and just from childhood to adulthood you know.

But I mean -- I don't mean get better I mean in the physical sense when you had 3 months to, you know, to get some strength back and to try to even begin to start thinking about a new life.

So I was actually two years in United States when I got, after I met my husband and get married you know.

You have such different backgrounds, what were your -- that you had some shared interests..?

Well, he -- he was in a company that liberated a small camp. So he was kind of -- he was -- he saw what really happened in a camp, you know. So he was -- he didn't

know exactly what's all about. But when I told him you know -- you know I am a survivor of the Holocaust. He says "I understand it's all right." But we never talked about it. Because like, I say, you know we didn't... But when my children got older I should have told them all of the -- they knew I was a survivor of the Holocaust but my son wrote a letter. I mean he was at that time Pembroke Day not Pembroke Hill and he was graduated from Pembroke Day School. And they had to write -- they prepared him for college -- and they had to write a paper. So the teacher says on any subject. So he decided to go to the library and find out how Hitler came to power, what, how it all started, you know. And he wrote this beautiful, beautiful paper and the teacher says "Well just to finish up this, if you can, just get an interview with a survivor." He said no problem, my mother is one." So he came to the house and "Sit down and tell me from day one." And that is how I started telling the story.

And when, when did he come to you? About how many years ago was that?

In 1973

'73 -- and you had not really talked about it?

Well, they knew, but I didn't really talk. But my daughter, my daughter used to tell me afterwards when we wrote the paper and everything. And she said, "Mother why didn't you tell us? We could have understood your nightmares. You used to be so nervous at times. You used to, I mean, you did everything for us, but you know you didn't seem to enjoy life itself because you put in all your strength into us."

Yeah you were carrying a burden and --

Right and she said why didn't you --- I said, you know, your father wasn't there you know so you know we don't talk about it too much you know. And I says maybe I was going to shield you from all this but I was wrong. But anyway, he asked me from day one and he wrote the paper and the teacher says do you think your mother would come and talk to us. And that is how it started.

So you went to their school and...

Their school first and then my youngest daughter -- my daughter this one -- the one that is forty one today. She, she says you got to come to my school now you know so then I...

She wanted you, too.

Oh I mean it started out like this you know. And then when the Holocaust Center for Education, you know, started sending out speakers and that -- that was it -- I mean they ask for me already you know. I mean a lot of them died out you know, and they have one lady she's a nice lady --- Bronia -- have you heard of her?

Yes I have - think I have heard.

She's a short -- kind of real heavy -- and she has a very distinct accent. I mean mine is bad but it's not that bad you know. And she has this distinct -- and they send her only if I have a something that I can't go you know. Because the feedback is that the children expect the survivors to look like her. And they said oh it's so sad to look at it -- all the survivors look like this and all that? So when I come to a school when she was there once before and they looked at me and they say are you a survivor? I said yes I am. And I say what do you expect from a survivor? Oh well we had one and she was -- and she didn't speak that good English and I don't know and we just didn't associate with the whole thing. And I said well there is you know all kinds -- and people tell their stories -- each one has a different story, I said, you know, and just... And when I speak and towards the end I tell them "Oh," I say, "I just want to leave you with one -- with one thought. I'm teaching tolerance and that's what I want you to remember. Be tolerant to other people, to other religions, to anyone. Just be tolerant."

Are the -- do you feel like you get and have -- even when you spoke at your son's and daughters' schools -- you get a good response from the kids?

Oh yes. Oh yes. At first, I mean in 1973, they didn't understand it yet. I didn't have all these papers yet. When I go to school I - I have a table and I put out everything and then after my speech, after my presentation, they come across and they look at everything. And then they can see for themselves. And I say you can judge you know. They very interested in all this. And so, you know, when I tell them -- I said this is my story -- I am not talking about how Hitler came to power and all that. That is politics, nothing to do with me. I am just telling you what happened to me and that's what I want you to, to understand you know. So you know there was beautiful questions they have and all that.

Yeah. What what do you feel -- what do you -- where do you find the strength to overcome you know how -- how -- what makes you a survivor? I mean what -- what-- what power do you draw on within you that -- that helps you?

God. My belief in God. He made me survive for some reason, for some purpose, and I feel this is the purpose. I got to speak out. I got to talk about it I gotta tell people what happened. They shouldn't forget. And that's what I'm trying to do I really do. I mean my-- my -- my belief in God is such that -- I don't go every Saturday to services -- because I have problems getting up and all that. Sometime I'm dizzy, some times not. But I do my candle lighting I talk to God every night. I talk to him every night. I talk to my daughter I say please ask God to forgive me for what I did and get me to live a few more years or something. This is the way I feel. There is not an hour a day that goes by that I don't talk to my daughter and God.

I can -- you know you are a beautiful person to look at and to talk to, because I see I a shining in your face, I really do...

Oh, you're sweet! You're sweet!

...and I see it in your eyes. I see just such a lively, a joyful person and I it is -- to me it is really a miracle to have you talk because you give that to the people that you talk to.

You should see me after this. It changed my -- I had to go see Dr. Middleman -- he is a psychiatrist -- because I did not want to live any more. I just said this is enough -- how much more can I take? And he made me see things, you know. And like I say, I now I am back again to -- I couldn't socialize with anyone, I couldn't get out of the house. And now I am getting out. I had my first board meeting sisterhood and it went by pretty good. And now we having a luncheon and everybody is call me for reservation, for questions, for answers. I mean I'm back in the stream. And so this is the way I feel, you know. It's just a -- I guess, I guess I have to struggle a little longer.

So you have, you have been a mother, a student taking courses. You have worked at Hart Shaffner and Marks on the payroll. You have been co-president of the sisterhood –

No, I've been a president.

A president.

And now a co-president -- now.

Taking courses on parliamentary procedures. And you have no spare time [Laughter]. Do you have any recreation? Do you do you like – oh, you paint, too.

I don't paint, no, it's needlepoint.

Oh it's needlepoint – and you're good!

I do needlepoint-- I used to do it.

56?

No -- Sonia Golad. [suggesting the interviewer misread SG as 56]

Oh I see. I see.

You got to see it from far off. It's of -- it's of a French painting. This is petit point and this is needlepoint.

It's beautiful work. Just beautiful and there is different.

Yeah this petit point, see. It makes it like a noise you can see the eye and all that. And this one you know like the fingers. And this is needlepoint [unclear] needlepoint.

Yeah I and I did a lot of -- a lot of making sweaters for the children and for the -- my grandchildren and doll clothes and all that you know. I, I do a lot of this hanging everything -- my needlepoint.

You have a beautiful house.

Apartment.

A beautiful apartment and it's filled with pictures of your children and your grandchildren.

Yes, oh yes. Oh yes. That's my life you know. My husband I mean, is not well but I, you know, try to do the best I can.

What do you -- what would you attribute your ability to adjust to a normal life and be able to have children and raise a family? How do think you were able to do that?

I think I have this from my home, from my home when I was a child. The way I felt my mother taking care of everything and doing this and doing that so on. And I -- I think I, I try to prove to myself that I can be a good mother.

Because you had a good mother and you know strong that tie is.

Yes and I, you know,- and I was such a... At first I was, you know, a nervous wreck is what I was. And I- I try to -- when I had my first child and then the second and third I, I just felt I got to tell tell myself that I can -- I can go ahead and raise my family. It's a family. It's a new family. And I have to make do the best I can. And that you know this is it. I mean my husband has a family but you know it's different when you, when you marry into it. It's not the same as as yours.

So he he has family from before?

Oh yeah, he's got -- he's got a sister here. He's got a sister in California. He's got a brother in a, in Staten Island. And he had a twin brother in Cedar Rapids, Iowa that died last December. So he's taking it pretty hard you know, with the twin.

And you had a pretty -- you were both -- you both raised your children -- your husband was instrumental in --

He was busy in the business, and I was mother and father. Taking to baseball -- to baseball my son had to go to baseball, to football. I taking my daughter was in dancing school, and piano lessons, and had to go to the Starlight Theater because she was in shows [laughing]. This goes on and on and on. But I gave her anything -- because when I was a child I learned to play a piano.

You also play the piano?

Yeah. Oh not now, but I mean when I was before the war. Yeah, I took piano lessons.

So music was important to you then, too.

Oh yes, very much so. So now my daughter is, is playing the piano beautifully. I mean you know, and she was a dancer in the Starlight Theater and she was Ozzie and Harriet's in *The State Fair* and whole thing on stage and all of that. I had to go the *Music Man* -- the whole thing I mean was on television on Christmas shows.

So you have grandchildren that you -- that you must love to be around too?

Oh yeah. Oh yes. Oh yes. The young one, the young one is taking piano lessons. They just bought a grand piano and she taking lessons. And the older one, she's a poet. And she likes -- I mean she does ballet. She is in ballet. I mean everything is ballet, you know. And she goes like three, four times a week to ballet classes and she's going to be in *The Nutcracker*.

Oh wonderful. Wonderful.

She is thirteen years old.

So you have how many grandchildren now?

I have four.

Two --

Four girls

Four girls.

Two by the youngest one and two by my oldest daughter.

So your son is the youngest?

No my son is middle.

Middle, okay, and then.

My daughter is the youngest my son is forty-four years old.

And a forty-one year old daughter and a forty-nine year old daughter.

This been forty-nine right.

Sonia what -- I just have probably one or two more questions. What does -- how important is being an American to you? What does being an American mean to you?

Well, when I, when I came to the United States I wanted to Americanize right away because I felt this is my -- I am in a free land. I am, I am now free. I, I, I, I know about antisemitism, but they don't come up and tell you in your face. And to me that was the most important part I should be treated like a human being and a citizen of this country that maybe I can contribute to it and, not to be called a Jew constantly. And that was my main purpose to go and when I learn -- when I studied about constitution and the history and my husband was asking me questions, you know, so I can you know be prepared for it. He said I didn't even know this. You were born here and you don't know a lot of them don't, don't.

Do you mean not to be identified...

As a foreigner.

... as a Jew.

Right.

As Jewish being the most important thing about you or the only thing about you. You want to be an American too because you're not a member of the Jewish "race."

Yeah, yeah -- right.

You are an American.

I mean I wanted to be an American citizen because I want to be free and that's what I -- what I was you know. I survived to be free and that was that. And I, and I, you know, this why I do things. I was -- I was even on the Committee for the Humanities. I was on the State Board.

For

For humanities.

For Humanities - for school curriculum?

Uh huh. Jewish Community Center. I was sent to -- I was in Springfield and I, I was there for the board meeting and all that. Oh yeah I have all kinds of papers.

Have any post war events had a significance for you like the civil rights movement, assassinations, the State of Israel? Is there any one event that's happened since the war that's had a special meaning for you?

Yes the -- especially the ones with the terrorism in the schools -- with the children. That is unbelievable. That brings back -- I mean when they pushed us into the ghettos, you know, and, and, and then we didn't know if we were going to be alive. I mean, you couldn't go to school or nothing and here you have free schools and you are scared to death to go to school. That brings back...

So like in Colorado or in California -- the gunman in the school?

Yeah, yeah, right. All this. Right, right. And then you -- they - you see it on television how he smirks and he smiles. I mean what is wrong with those people? And then they don't-- they don't put them in jail. They just let them go. It's ridiculous. It's awful. I mean, why don't they make the parents responsible for them -- for the kids? You mean they wore black coats and everything and the parents didn't know? Didn't see it?

Yeah.

Why don't they take them away and tell -- what is wrong with you? Your child -- don't talk about the rest of them. Let the rest of the people... And this is the part it infuriates me! Infuriates me!

Because they're children and the danger that they have to face is awful?

It is awful. It is awful. Yes, my granddaughter who won the Starlight Theater -- and she wore the Star of David on her -- on her thing -- she was going there to get some popcorn or something. And a man says, "oh I see you are Jewish." She was by herself. And I said "and what did you tell him?" And she says "Yes, and I'm very proud of it." But I said my God it is scary.

Because you don't know what people want to know

Yeah. You don't know what is you know an admiring it or if he is going to do something to you, you know. It's scary.

How did having your own children in light of your past experiences -- can you describe your emotions when you had children?

Yes. It was a very... I mean I wasn't told what to expect and what - there was no mother to tell me anything. There was nobody. And you know and, and, and I didn't know what to expect. And my husband was always busy, busy, busy. And, and like when I had this, I had to go to California to have this surgery for my, for my tumor, you know, and I was paralyzed. My, my husband was so busy with the business that my niece -- I mean his nephew's wife, told him, aren't you going to California to be with your wife? He says "well I can't leave the business." She says "you leave the business." And he came there just for the two days there, you know. And when I came out was wasted out completely I mean it was just awful, couldn't

even -- I mean you know completely wasted and the doctor told him, he says she's paralyzed. And he saw me and he says I can't handle it. I can't handle it. So he went back home.

So you had to contend with it on your own.

Yeah, I had my daughter. That was the one that was my, my -- I mean she was my confidante, and she was my advisor, and she was everything to me. And I went and lost her.

Are your -- are the grandchildren..?

They close but you know they are all so far away. And you know, I mean now it's better. The youngest one was very, very -- I mean she had to get counseling. But ...

Is your son-in-law...?

Yeah he remarried and -- but thank God he got a nice woman that I approved. In fact he asked me if you approve of her. And I spend some time with her and I said yes. And they were here for my granddaughter's *bat mitzvah*.

So they obviously value your opinion. That's wonderful.

Yes, yes, yes. Still, I said I still call you my son-in-law. He says that's what I am.

Good, that's wonderful

No, no they are very nice -- he is.

And are your children -- your daughter was named after you mother.

My mother right.

Are any of the grandchildren named after any, any of your family?

Yes my, my granddaughter, the oldest one Kathryn she is named after -- God I forgot already. But anyway we do have -- my, my son was named after my father. And my youngest daughter was named after the man that was killed going to my wedding, you know. You know the uncle, you know. And also by my, my grandmother. So we have enough names you know to...

Allow to be able -- to have them go on --

Right. Yes. Right, yes.

And you said at first you didn't talk about your experiences in the war with your children until they reached a certain point.

Yeah, when he was already you know in, in high school one was graduating and ...

Have you talked about it with grandchildren yet?

Yes -- oh yeah. The grandchildren, every time I get letters I have to bring it to them to read to see everything I mean they very... And I, I was speaking there in their schools—in Hebrew schools, you know. They belong to Beth Torah, and I go there and I speak each year, and the little one takes me too. She was only in third grade, she wanted me to... I said no. She said well we learning about immigrants - how they came, you know, but I say well that's fine. I will bring you the picture of the boat and I'll tell you the story how I came, you know. And what you have to do to come and all that. So that was that. I mean she was very excited about it you know. Oh yeah. And then the other one, in California, I had to come there. They had to pay my flight because they wanted me so bad.

Hey that's great. That's great. Are there any sounds or smells now that bring you back to your childhood or make you think of maybe before the war when you were little or the things that make you nostalgic? You might have painful things too associated with that.

Painful things is the years in concentration camps. That was most -- that was one that stands out now. You don't see the good things in front of it. You only see the bad ones that you lived through. And where did so many years -- where did everything go, you know? It just -- it just comes back this type of things, you know. But I read now about Nazis is 78 years old and they just finally got him to go to be on trial, you know. I said where is -- where is -- what's going on here. I mean everybody is shooting everybody. Every country is shooting the, the, the ones that did all the killing and everything. What, what is going on?

It hasn't halted. I mean it's different and maybe in different countries now and it's the nineties but ...

Brother look at Argentina and South America. God, they had them all. Brazil and everybody there.

Did you ever stop believing in God?

No. Never did. As bad as was going in the camps. Please God let me live a little bit longer. And it was always with God. Always with God.

And you were the one who was not real healthy as a little, little girl

Right, right.

And here you are surviving everything.

Surviving all that, right.

What is -- so you are active in the temple today?

Synagogue.

Synagogue today. Do you have a favorite Jewish holiday?

My favorite Jewish holiday would be Passover, because it's freedom. And anything that has to do with freedom -- to me -- this is it.

[Unclear].

I can associate with that. Passover is the one that really makes me nostalgic.

Well, I don't have to ask if -- are you active is one of the questions...

Active in what?

I can see that you are still very...

Oh, yes. I read the Torah, too you know. In our synagogue we have a women's -- we don't have it -- we can't go on the *bima* you know, for take out the Torah. But we have a women's -- in the chapel -- we have a women's service and they always call on me because in my age group nobody can read Hebrew.

Read the Hebrew?

This is the Torah -- without it you know, with out all the -- and I read it. I read Hebrew. I mean it stayed with me through all these years, it stayed with me.

What do you think moved you to open up to your children and to the schools and to become a speaker? What do you feel it came from?

I think, I think when my son sat down and told me you got a tell me everything. Mother don't keep anything. And he opened the door for me to really acknowledge, you know, what happened and how I can prevent from that happening again if I speak about it. If I tell people my story. Maybe they will have more tolerance, you know, this is the whole thing. I mean the tolerance is what we want. I have some -- I really have some nice letters telling me, you know, that I brought - I mean I, I made a difference in their lives and that was real important.

Which was your desire when you -- way back when you came out -- when you were liberated and when you, you know, when you knew you had survived. You remembered your promise to your dad so that's been in your heart. So it's been your heart all this time.

I went back knowing that I wouldn't be able to get out and I had tough time getting out and all that but I had to go back.

So you said probably your lowest point was the trouble with the paralysis and the pain from the tumor and things that made you -- you know, that was the lowest point where you thought I just can't do this any more I can't make it any more.

Right, right, right. But it didn't stop me from speaking. I told them, I said I have a speech impairment because I have a paralysis caused by a tumor that was removed from the beating on the head I received in the camps. I said just listen to what I have to tell you. Don't-- you don't have to watch me -- my face and all that. I said just listen to what I have to tell you. And they listen and then they have asked questions and stuff -- beautiful questions.

What kind of questions?

One of them asked me -- and that was the first time I ever heard that - when you heard that Hitler commit suicide were you glad -- were you happy about it? And I stopped and I said "oh my God this is the first time ever someone asked me." And I said "no, I was not. And I will never be happy. He should have stood there and answered to the world what he did and not leave his people take the blame for everything." And they applauded. They stood up and they applauded. It was unbelievable And it was just like that it come to my head -- I said "no I'm not happy. I wasn't happy then and I'm not happy now."

That's not what it's about.

No. I said you know he is gone like a coward. And they, they, they thought he was God himself.

Thank you so much for talking.

Thank you.

Thank you for talking -- it's been wonderful.

I speak too much don't I?

No, no, you don't. I wish we could speak longer. It's just been wonderful, and I thank you very much.

I thank you very much.