United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Judith Meisel
January 20, 1999
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Judith Meisel, conducted by Ginger Miles on January 20, 1999 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Santa Barbara, California and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

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Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: This is an interview with Judith Meisel, conducted by Ginger Miles, on January 20th, 1999, in Santa Barbara, California. This is a follow up interview to a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum videotape interview conducted in 1990. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum gratefully acknowledges Jeff and Toby Herr, for making this interview possible. This is tape one, side A, Judith Meisel. [pause] This has been a minute of ambiance in the Meisel home and now we go to the interview. So, the first thing that I wanted to ask, just a few background questions --

Answer: Mm-hm.

Q: -- because the museum evidently does not have the full names of your brother, your sister and your parents.

A: Uh-huh. Well, my father's name is Osser, it's O-s-s-e-r, Beker, B-e-k-e-r, that's my maiden name. And my mother's is -- her maiden name was Friedman, Mina, M-i-n-a. And -- And my brother is Abe, A-b-e, Beker, B-e-k-e-r. And my sister, at that time her -- Rachel and her married name now is Levitin, L-e-v-t-i-t -- t-i-n, Levitin.

Q: Thank you. And there was also a question about do you know when or how your father died?

A: My father died in 1938. They found him on the street dead. We didn't know, when they brought him back to the little town where we were in Yasfenna -- he died in Kalnus

-- whether it was robbery or -- we -- I really don't know, or a heart attack, I have no knowledge. But I know that he was -- he died in '38, before the Russians came into Lithuania. And that's how my mother moved to Kalnus, to the big city.

Q: All right. Just a few more background questions. You had mentioned in the interview that you were still kind of haunted and thinking about Stutthof?

A: Stutthof.

Q: Stutthof.

A: Concentration camp.

Q: Yes, and I wonder if -- well, there was a question about how did you spend your days there? Did you work, or --

A: In Stutthof concentration camp, we mostly stood and in the beginning, we stood in appelle and then -- when we first arrived --

Q: In a --

A: In appelle, just waiting to be taken, either to the gas chamber or to be killed or to crematorium or any -- that, and we worked. The following -- I think a month later, after we were there, we were -- we worked in a small -- there was a small factory and they were making big bolts for the German army. I don't know what they were doing for the German army or Polish, or -- I don't know. And we worked there, just loading and there would come off the conveyor belt and we would put it in -- into boxes and take it. Then, after awhile we worked in the fields, there were fields that -- picking vegetables like cabbage and that, bringing it in for the -- into the camp. And -- And that's what we did.

Q: And when you say we, you were?

A: My mother and my sister.

Q: And at night, you were --

A: And the -- the rest of the people, I mean some people just would take sweaters apart, the wool from the sweaters apart. There were groups of people sitting there. It came apparent that the -- the money that they made or what they -- they were knitting scarfs. So, they would send them to the German army and -- and th -- but th-the labor was done by the people who, they were there and that's from this goods that they took away from us when we arrived.

Q: And was there any sort of ways that at -- at night, after work was done and you were with your mother and your sister, how would you spend your time then?

A: We were so exhausted and so hungry that when we would be in the barracks, we -- we could not walk around in the barracks just at our will, we had to get into the bunk bed and stay there, when we came in at night. During the day, we weren't allowed to be in the barrack.

Q: Okay, and I also wanted to ask you then to jump to Mrs. Unstrom?

A: U-Unstrom, yeah.

Q: Mm-hm, and her family. When you were with that particular family, I know it was -- were you --

A: That was not in Stutthof, that was --

Q: I'm -- I'm moving now --

A: Yeah, oh.

Q: -- these are just background --

A: Okay.

Q: -- follow up questions.

A: Oh, okay.

Q: So we will be moving --

A: Mm--hm.

Q: Were you paid in any way for your work?

A: No, no, no. We were -- she knew we were kriggskafangener, which was refugees that were under the -- you know, they didn't know we were Jewish and we worked as slave labor, you know. And -- And we worked there and it -- she was just horrible -- just horrible. Had 11 children. And every night was a ritual, whatever was leftover from her children, she would tie our hands behind our back, so we would amuse her children, eating on our knees. And if we did -- if they didn't laugh enough or amuse them enough -- was a ritual for her -- she would beat us. And on Sunday, would take us to church, which -- she had one dress, we would put on that dress, I -- and go with her to church. And I just went back there, the first time -- I was back there now twice, which in the last six years, and the first time I was back, I couldn't believe I found the place. They changed it a little bit, they made -- you know, but this was the place where we were.

Q: In what city?

A: It's called Misucheva. It's 80 kilometers from Danzig. It's near Stutthof. And I -- I found the place and it was just -- just incredible to g -- relive to s -- wi-with the place. And with her, wh-when they -- in -- was in 1945, he ha -- it was around March, we -- they were evacuating all the people from the area and we sailed with her and we were told -- she told us -- this is the story that she said, that if -- we didn't want to go with her, but if we didn't that they would let out the sewers, they're letting the sewers out and flooding the whole area, which is near Gdansk, which is a large port. And so we left and we went to Denmark with her. And as soon as we went into the harbor, we were torpedoed, the boat torpedoed. And we were -- I don't know how long I was in the -- in the -- in the sea. You know, it's the North Sea there, Atlantic.

Q: How old were you at the time?

A: At that time, I was fiftee -- no, I was 16 years old. And so she w -- from then, we lost her. We didn't know -- she enda -- she survived the dr -- she wasn't drowned and we were in the water, I have no idea how long. I was so numb that when they picked me up, they wrapped me in blankets, I was -- my sister and me, we held up on a plank. To this day, I don't swim -- and --

Q: You were torpedoed and then you -- so you were in the water?

A: In the water. The boat sank that we started out from Danzig.

Q: Oh.

A: And the -- then, from there, they took us with a small boat, all the G-Germans -- this was, you know, now it's Poland, but at that time it was Germany and they took us to the -- to Denmark. And when we arrived in Denmark, they put us in -- in a gymnasium.

Q: Was it the Germans who took you?

A: Yeah, the Germans. But they didn't know we were Jewish. They were -- took us with Mrs. Unstrom, but they picked up all the people and they took us to Denmark. They put us in a big auditorium. and we could go out now, for the first time. We could go out and -- as long as we came back by dusk.

Q: Was this like a -- a school?

A: It was a school and it was -- the place was called -- the little town was called Svininga, in Denmark.

Q: And did you then -- you were then separated from Mrs. Unstrom?

A: We were separated from Mrs. Unstrom, but we found out that she survived and five of her kids drowned. And it was very interesting, there was a trial in Denmark, because we -- well, I don't know, do you want me to talk about that? Well, when we came to -- to Denmark, on May fifth, 1945, I'll never forget the day we were liberated, the war was over, yeah. Actually, the very end of March, it was like maybe the 30th of March, so -- so I was only maybe five weeks later. Five weeks later, du-during that five weeks, before liberation, we didn't do anything, we were just -- could go on the street. We could -- had to stay in the little town. We could walk around and as long as we came back by dusk. And we were all in this big auditorium and I remember one day we were walking, my

sister and I and there was a woman working in the fields and we asked her, “Are there any Jews here?” And she said, “When you Germans --” she thought we were Germans -- “When you Germans are going to be in concentration camps, the Jews will come back from Sweden.” And we were afraid to start asking her more -- for more information because we thought, at that time, that we were the only two Jews, that we were going to survive. And that was very important to us, because before we got to Mrs. Unstrom, we -- we -- when we first escaped -- you probably have that on the tape, no? When we first escaped, the -- what happened is they took us out of Stutthof. And that was the end of December or the very beginning of January and in that -- that I can say that is because the Christmas trees were still in the people’s homes. So we knew it was around that time. We didn’t know exactly the dates and so forth. And as soon as we wa -- we walk a whole day -- my sister was so sick with typhus. By then, already, my mother was taken into the gas chamber. I was with her inside the gas chamber and that, you have that, I’m sure, on the tape. And I had absolutely -- I could hardly walk, but I really had such a strong sense that I wanted to survive, because I felt someone has to tell what happened. Because the mo- most difficult part of it was that we all thought none of us will come out alive and there will be no one to talk about, no one to tell anything, nobody will know. And we all vowed ourselves that we will tell -- whoever survives will remember and we will tell and that’s why I was back a couple of times to Stutthof. It just -- I feel that everybody there was my family, and that I have to go -- as painful as it is, I have to go out to tell. So we -- my sister -- I was dragging her and she keeps saying, “I can’t go on.” She was -- she had

typhus. Just right then, she had gotten typhus. And I kept saying, “We will live, we will live.” And I kept egging on and all of a sudden, the sky opened up and the bombs started to fall and everybody started to run, everybody started to run. And I had no energy. I just fell into a ditch with an -- there was another woman, Luba, who was helping me. She was holding me up. I don’t know who was holding who, we were all three. And we saw a house and we walked across the house and we knocked on the door. And the woman opened up the door and as if she knew we were coming and we were wearing the striped dress with the clogs and [indecipherable] the wind was howling, it was a big storm. And she quickly tore off, and we were now standing naked in front of her -- tore off our clothes and gave us clothing and told to the Russiansaw who was working there, he was a prisoner of war, that we are -- to taken us to the Umschlagplatz to be killed. And that’s where they took all the people, to the Umschlagplatz to be killed. And they gave us some food and oh, I was so sick from just having the first -- you know, real food. And we stayed there a couple of hours, til night time. And h-he sat there and she gave us a shawl and clothes and gave us some food and she told him to take us to the Umschlagplatz. Why she did it -- you know, my sister always says, “You gave -- give that woman credit that she saved our lives.” And I said, “Yeah, because if she hadn’t taken off the clothes from us and if she hasn’t told the soldier to take us, where he saved our lives.” What he did was, we went out and Luba, who could not longer go -- she was much older and we were and she said she was going to remain there. And when I was just back there, I found out that she died and they buried her right there in the farm. And so, anyways, we went

with this so -- Russian guy and he said, “I’m not taking you to the Umschlagplatz. What I’m going to do is -- is I’m going to -- I’m going to take you to the nearest point where it’s frozen.” It’s called the vikes -- it was called the Vikesel, now it’s the Vistula river. And -- the narrowest point and wi -- and he was on the horse, he was making tracks and we were following him. And he said to call on all our force. If it’s wet, we will drown, because that means that the ice is broken. And we should do it at night so nobody detect us. And all night long, we were crawling across. Th-They just filmed it and the film of there, you know, it was beautiful, you know, in the summer and that. And we got across on the other side and he told us to go to a convent. Th-The nuns w -- an -- but we should say we are not Jewish, we should say --

Q: What country is this? And what language were you speaking?

A: This is -- we were speaking to him -- my sister knew Russian, because we lived under Stalin for a few years. And -- but this was -- they were all speaking German. Now, it’s Poland, but then it was Germany, was East Germany. So, what happened is we -- we -- my name became from Udit -- Uta. Beker is a German name. And hers, from Wachal became Anna and we were now were wandering and we got to the -- to the convent and the nuns were wonderful to -- but they knew.

Q: So, the river was frozen?

A: The river was frozen. We crawled across the river all night long and we are able to go on the other side. And he said to go to the -- on the other side. The river divided so it was -- where Stutthof was, was on one side and da -- and the road -- there is a bridge now that

you can go over, is -- but it's really frozen because they have horses going across, I mean, that particular year, it was frozen. That was also when they attacked Russia and they couldn't do it, because the winter was so s-severe. And we are talking of the year of 1944 -- '45. And so, we -- she -- and we got into the convent. The convent, the nuns were wonderful, they washed us, they bathed us, they took care of us. And my sister's typhus got better, but I got sick. And they said to us that we cannot -- they cannot keep us. They knew we were Jewish -- that we would have to -- they would have to baptize us. We'd have to convert. And that we didn't want. It was the most important thing. The more they said they would do it, which in -- few days we decided we will not stay there. We were -- we talk about it now, how foolish we were. But we didn't know what that meaned, conversion and we, only to survive, to -- wanted to survive as Jews. We wanted to tell the world what happened as Jews. We didn't want to be Catholics or anything else. So we left and my sister -- and I was very, very sick, the -- again we met another Russian, because the Russian liberated that area and there were lot of fighting and took me to Danzig and left me on the steps of the hospital. And my sister said, "You can't say a word, you s -- you're stoom, you're no -- no -- don't make -- you know, don't talk." And she, without realizing it, crossed the bridge and went back to the same place near there -- near Stutthof, without realizing it. Because when I was just there, I've realize how close it is to Stutthof. She went to the bridge and they told her that there is a place there -- she didn't know from Wehrmacht, from what, you know, she didn't know of that -- that they are looking for work -- that they need workers. So, we wen -- she worked -- went into a

Wehrmacht station, which is -- you know, the German army, where they get all their -- and thats was Mrs. Unstrom, that's what she had. She had this huge, huge house and she was running like a hotel, or -- you know, for -- a stopover for the Wehrmacht -- for the German army to come. And when we worked -- and then, when I get better, she came and -- and got me back to the -- to the house where she worked. And it happened so fast, it happened within weeks, with the period of week. I was in the hospital, I think, for two weeks. She came and picked me up and we were there maybe 10 days on that farm and then we sailed for Denmark. But those 10 days was just horrifying, horrifying days, beca --

Q: Do you think she knew you were Jewish?

A: No, no.

Q: Why on earth would she have treated children so badly?

A: Well, why -- why did they kill the million and a half children and a million -- 11 million people, six million Jews, why? I mean, she was German, her husband was in the SS. She -- She was real Nazi and -- and th-the people that are living around Stutthof right now, and I went into a couple of houses and interviewed them and asked them, did -- did you know what happened in Stutthof and they said yes. But, I'm talking the people who were, at that time, 18 - 20. I mean, they're in their 80's and 90's, you know, and it's -- the older people. And they said, "Yeah, we knew." "What did you do about?" "What -- What can I do? They were our enemies, the Jews, the Slavs, they had to be

exterminated." And, you know, it's -- was something, a matter of -- of fact. This was what was supposed to happen to them.

Q: There was another question that someone in the Oral History Department wanted me to ask you about, that you mentioned about your hair being pulled --

A: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

Q: -- out in Stutthof.

A: Concentration camp.

Q: How did that happen?

A: Well, when we first came from the ghetto -- when we were taken t -- from the ghetto, it was around July in the ghetto and we had to line up. First we had to take off whatever we had, our clothes and everything and -- and just throw it in the piles. And I'll never forget when I first came in, the piles of shoes and combs and toothbrushes and you name it, they had it there. And I kept saying to my mother, "What's happening?" And she said, "I have no answer." And then they told us to get undressed. The first one to get undressed was my mother. When I think of how many times she had to stand naked in front of those beasts. She was such a beautiful, religious woman, gorgeous woman and had to be just like this, before they even killed you. What -- the humiliation that -- having to see what they are doing to her children. So my mother and my sister and my mother, she had gold denture, they just simply yanked it out. And her whole face was full of blood. And they threw her a striped dress, the Kapo lady threw a dress and a pair of clogs and pushed her on the side. And then my sister and then me. And I had long, curly hair -- blonde, curly

hair. And they used to call me Shirley Temple, because Shirley Temple had -- did I know who Shirley Temple? But they used to -- you know, [indecipherable] she looks like Shirley Temple, they used say. And the Gestapo lady, on one side, tore out my -- the long locks and the guy -- big, black boots who -- who it was the commandant, took out and he said, “Oh, this’ll do for my poopy, for my dolls -- daughter’s doll,” in German. And then they continued cutting it and that and my whole head was full of blood. Then, the next one had to get undressed, her name is Hava. And my sister -- my daughter is an artist and she has paintings going around, all over the country and she has a painting about this. S -- It’s about stories my mother told me and she depict this Hava so incredible. And when I went back to -- to Stutthof, Hava is always with me. I’ll tell you why. Hava got undressed, she was wearing a loose dress. And when she -- by the way, when my mother got undressed, my mother had sewn in, in her -- a pouch in my sister’s and mine, like little pouches. She didn’t even let us know she did that. She put it -- sewed it in, because she thought -- there was some rings, there was diamond rings, some watch, some jewelry and some rings and whatever she had, so she put it in, she cushioned it. When we took it out, it fell all over and we never got it. Hava took off her dress and a little baby fell out. The baby -- I -- a tiny, little baby, because gave such a little squeak and he picked up the baby and he threw it. And -- the commandant. And, so those are the memory when I went to Stutthof, Hava. So, anyways, whens -- we got into the bunk -- to the barrack, and my mother was on top and I was in the middle with Hava, my mother was on top with my sister Rachel. And Hava would rub my -- like this with her fist, my hand. And I would

say to her, “What do you have in your fist?” And she never answered. And we would all say, “Hava, what do you have? What do you have?” She had a little baby’s shoes, when they took -- and because she wouldn’t give up the shoe, they took her out. We all had to stand outside and watch and they put a bullet through her head. So that’s Hava’s story. And I have to tell it, because there’s nobody else for her to talk. I’m sorry.

[indecipherable]

Q: We’re moving now, to tape one, side B.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is tape one, side B, Judith Meisel, and we’re continuing to talk about -- you were mentioning your brother.

A: Well, my b -- when they took us from the ghetto -- from the Kovno ghetto, they took us trucks and we went to Kinigsburg, I remember, cause I could remember seeing the name written there. And from there they took us to Stutthof concentration camp. And at Stutthof my brother was taken from us and we didn’t know where they were taking him. And we didn’t find out until 1947 that he was alive, and he was in Italy, that he was in Dachau.

Q: So, as far as Stutthof and how it affected your life and your relationships, do you still have dreams? I know you have thoughts constantly, but how often does this come to you?

A: How often do the thoughts come to me? I think about it all the time. I think about it, I mean -- I dream about it. When I can’t fall asleep, it comes back to me, and it’s like a

mirage of -- of -- see people's faces. I don't remember a lot of their names, but I can see their faces, I was with. They're constantly with me and when my first grandchild was born, I remember when I held him, I held him for all the children that didn't survived.

Q: That must have been a beautiful experience.

A: It was just -- I felt like I was holding him for all of them who were my age, who didn't survive. So, I'm constantly thinking that here I am, thank God I'm alive and so forth. People ask me constantly also, "Do you feel guilty that you survived?" I'm constantly asked that. I said, "No, I don't have no guilt." I feel I had mazel -- I had the luck that I survived and because I survived, I have a mission that I have to tell and wherever I'm invited, I go out and I speak as long as they pay my -- my fare or a hotel, I go out to speak. And I've gone to places like Lubec, Texas and -- and -- and Livington, New Mexico and places like that, you know. Because I feel the scary thing is that the deniers are out there. And I feel that I need to be out there to tell what happened, to see what racism and bigotry do if it's allowed to flourish.

Q: I -- I have a question which relates to your and your sister's decision to leave the nunnery.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: And that was the strength of your faith, of your Judaism. Did you have this kind of attachment to being Jewish before the Holocaust?

A: Oh yeah. I mean, we lived -- from the time I was born in a little shtetl, I guess, from what I remember, we had a real Jewish life. I mean, my mother was very, very religious

and my father, too. N-Not as -- from what I hear from my brother and my sister -- I'm the youngest in the family -- that she was more than him. But we -- we knew we were Jewish first and til this day -- to this day, if you ask me, "Who are you?" I will say, "I'm Jewish American." I will not say I'm American and I'm Jewish, because my Jewishness came before my American. And that, to me, is very important. And I think I've instilled that also in my children. And the most important thing to me is to have a Jewish life and to live a Jewish life -- an ethical Jewish life and to respect other religions, their differen -- to respect their differences and to -- to me this is most important thing. But I will certainly -- my Judaism meaned more than anything, was my life. But it wasn't just me, I was the younger and my sister. My sister was like my sister and my mother and everything, and her -- from her strength. I did what she told me to do. Now, it's a little different, she's more -- a very sick husband, very sick and it's more difficult, so I'm become the role -- the mother figure to her now.

Q: When you say ethical Jew -- how do you distinguish ethical and religious and how does this affect your faith?

A: Well, to me, I have to respect -- I think my involvement in the Civil Rights movement -- I got involved really, not just as another human being feeling for another human being. I got involved because I let everybody know I'm Jewish. It's a moral racism. If the African Americans are not having, or the Black community do not have the same rights as I, as a white person who is Jewish -- they don't have the rights, I don't have my right. My right is tampered. And, to me, this became my -- my big thing as far as -- morality is

for each person -- how shall I say it? Each person derives themselves what is moral and what's immoral. My arriving on immoral is that we cannot allow to happen again, what happened, to anyone, no matter who they are. Black, White, Yellow, anyone. And to me, that's the morality for me. I don't know if I'd --

Q: Now, respectfully, I'm taking this back a -- a little bit -- a -- a long while, to liberation and the moment you realized you were free and those first few -- few days and how you and your sister responded.

Q: Well, we heard the word, Achtung, Achtung, that "Germany capitulia" -- that the -- there -- the war was over. And we couldn't believe her, my sister said, "We have to tell them we are Jewish." And I started crying, and I said, "I'm afraid. What if they find -- what if it's a hoax?" And -- Because we was in hiding still, you know, we -- nobody knew we were Jewish. And we went over to the Red Cross worker, the lady, and we told her we were Jewish and she stood up and she started to cry and then she pulled out a piece of paper and she said, "Can you prove that you are Jewish?" And we signed both our name in Hebrew. And she got up and gave us each -- it was a big, heavy -- big hug. And she said, "Do you know where you are?" And I say, "We know we are not in Germany." And from then on, they took us right to den -- to Co-Copenhagen and they put us into a big gymnasium and the place was called Endrupskoola. It's a big gym -- actually, the Germans had build this for them to -- as an athletic club -- was huge complex. And there were several thousand people there in the -- in the auditorium.

Q: So, they built it?

A: The Germans, when they occupied Denmark, built it. And the most interesting thing was that I was walking -- I was -- my sister and I -- it was like the second day we were there and I heard a woman going around and saying, “Shalom.” And I said, “Aleichem Shalom.” And she gave me a hug because her mother had told her -- they had just come back from Sweden -- that she heard that they m -- to see if there were any Jews in the -- amongst the refugees. And Bella Katsinelson and she’d -- in fact, when I was just there recently, she reminded me and she brought me back -- brought me to her house --

Q: You saw her recently?

A: Yeah. And -- But the interesting thing was that we couldn’t leave unless we had a Dane sign out for us to come out. And I -- when they told me that I -- we were free, I collapsed like a puppet and they -- was pu-put in immediately into a real chair. And I wor -- and when -- and they gave me a kerchief.

Q: They is the Red Cross?

A: The Red Cross, they gave me a kerchief, cause they could see my hair was -- little bit of hair and wounds and so forth. And I never took that kerchief off. And then I remember the reporter asking me -- immediately the reporter descended on us, and they’re ask me, “Do you hate the Germans?”

Q: What language do they speak to you in?

A: German. “Do you hate the Germans?” And I said, I remember [indecipherable] “I am -- I hate hate.” And -- Because hate stifles you, you can’t live with hate. I am outraged, I am full of rage that the world allowed this to happen, that this -- something like that

happen. And the second one was “What would you like to eat?” And I said, “Bread, herring and potatoes and all the water I can drink.” And the next thing happened, they came in there -- Red Cross lady came and she said there was a family -- a lady -- a man and a lady who would like to take us out for the day, they would like to show us Copenhagen and buy you some clothes. And their name was Paula and Swen Yensen. Well, for us it was heaven. And they took us out, and they took us out every day and then she saw how sick I was, she immediately took me to a doctor and they put me to -- into Siloril sanitorium and I had TB. I had -- my lungs were collapsed, my stomach was shrun -- you name it, I had every possible -- and I was almost for two years, in a hospital. They nursed my back to health. I weighed 47 pounds, I was 16 years old. And they literally nursed me back to health. Strangers. I couldn’t even talk to them, because they didn’t speak -- but Paula and Swen Yensen, they didn’t speak German, they only spoke Danish. And I learned Danish very quick. And they kept on saying -- and we kept on asking, “Are there any Jews?” And they said, “Oh, they’re coming back from Sweden.” I said -- we kept saying, my sister and I, “How do you know they’re coming -- there are Jews coming back from Sweden?” And they told us what happen, how they took the Jews over to Sweden. And I’ll never forget when the first gathering -- the first gathering of people that came back from Sweden. And they took me and they put me in pa -- and they put me in -- in the wheelchair, my sister and I and they took us both to the harbor and I saw the arrival of this Jews from Sweden, the first arrival. And the first one, Rabbi Fritakker came off the boat and he made a special cheriyon, or a special blessing. He was the chief

rabbi then. And I think that I f -- we kept saying, “The Jewish people survived. If they survived, maybe my brother survived.” And we began to look for my brother and then we found him in 19 -- he was -- wrote to us in 1947. We put a -- we made a big poster and we sent it. We found someone who also survi -- who also came to Denmark and they --

Q: You and your sister --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- in Denmark?

A: Yeah. Her name was Rena Gortz and she had left a -- a child with a family -- a Polish family and she was looking for the child. But she knew she had a brother-in-law in -- in Palestine and he wrote to her, the brother-in-law, saying that her husband survived and he is in Italy. And we said, “Well, Regina, maybe we’ll -- we should write to your husband, maybe he know --” And sure enough, about a month later, my brother saw it on -- you know, he was like in a Displaced Person’s camp in Italy and he saw it -- the --

Q: He saw what?

A: The -- We made a poster.

Q: You had a picture of him?

A: No, no, we had no picture wi --

Q: Just his name?

A: Just his name and then he wrote immediately for us to come and by then, my sister had met her future husband, who was Danish. And I wanted to -- when he came -- then he eventually ended up in Canada.

Q: Before we get to Canada, though, I -- you were going to tell me about one of the first things the Red Cross gave you when --

A: Oh, the first thing when we did, is they put us into showers. Before they took us to Copenhagen, they put us into showers, washed us and then they gave me the kerchief. And then they gave me -- the kerchief I don't have -- they gave me a blanket. And that was my first piece of possession I had. And I wore that blanket all over, I wrapped myself around. And they gave me a dress and it was much too -- my stomach was big and I began to develop after awhile, so -- but everything else was just hanging, like flesh, you know, just skin. And -- And so, the blanket I have. When all the years -- in fact, I asked my sister, "What do you -- what did you do with your blanket?" She says, "Well, when I got -- could afford to buy a new one, I threw it out." I said, "That's the difference between you and me. I still have it and now the museum wants it." So, I still have that blanket and I'll probably give it to them, except that blanket -- every time my child was sick, I cuddled it. It was my security blanket.

Q: Even after you had children?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: You cuddled them in that blanket?

A: Yeah. That was my special blanket.

Q: Why do you think -- what did that blanket represent to you? Or does it?

A: Freedom. Freedom, freedom.

Q: Mm-hm. So, getting out of Denmark -- you were there for how long?

A: Well, I got to Denmark -- well, I was there from March of -- you know, before the war was over -- from March of ‘45 and I went for -- it was August of 1949, to Canada.

Q: And -- And so, how did you reunite with your brother, only after Canada, so -- if so, how did you make plans for -- for immigrating?

A: Well, he -- he -- when h -- when he survived Dachau, he wanted -- first thing he was going to go, is to look for us, to Lithuania. But when he came to the border, they told them that if he gets in, he won’t be able to get out, it was the Russians. So, he went back and he went -- go to Palestine then, to -- to Israel. Well, there was the British blockade, he couldn’t. So -- and they were taking people to Cyprus. So he remained in Italy and a woman -- it was very hard to get in the United States or Canada. There were quotas and so forth. So him and 22 others, a woman who literally mortgaged her house -- her name was Mrs. Sadoff, and brought the 22 young guys to Toronto, to Canada.

Q: Was she Italian?

A: No, no, she was Jewish and she -- a lot of people did --

Q: Russian?

A: No. Born -- I think she was -- maybe came very, very young, as a child, to -- I think from Lithuania to Canada. But she was very involved with the refugees and so forth. She passed away since then. And he came on a quota to Toronto. And as s-soon as he came, he -- well, we were corresponding constantly and -- and that -- he -- I wanted to go to him. I wanted to leave Europe. By then my sister was married and had already a child, and --

Q: Where were you living?

A: Hm?

Q: Where were you living? You?

A: Me, I had -- I was living by myself. I was live -- first we lived with a family, with the Frankel family and then, after my sister got married, I got a little -- tiny little hole in the ground, just for myself and I lived there and I -- I became a nanny and [indecipherable]. And my school was so disrupted that I began to -- I used to take courses and I spoke Danish fluently. People couldn't understand -- I learned it so good because I wanted to communicate with the people. I just loved them, they -- to me, the Danish people are a holy people. They are so incredible. I'm -- they're so incredible what they did, I mean, it just -- it's as like -- it's just unbelievable, like Paula Yensen, and this is -- this was happening all over Denmark, that when the Jews were taken over to Sweden, they have -- their friends had a factory and her husbands was taking care of the factory. When they came back, all the money that was made over the -- the two and a half years that they were in Sweden, were given to them. I mean, homes were painted -- their homes were painting -- flowers in their homes, everything -- I mean, it's just -- and the fact that they risked their lives, you know, it's --

Q: When you wrote back and forth from Denmark to Italy, what -- the -- can you remember the moment when you discovered that -- that your brother was alive? When you got the first --

A: Yeah, I have a postcard he sent. He sent a high holiday postcard, I'll never forget, with a picture. They used to do the -- the picture would come in, you know, like heart and inside put a picture, that was the mode. And my -- my brother -- we could not -- I mean, we could not believe. We were horrified of telling h-him what happened to my mother. We just kept saying -- and we couldn't just get the words to say that was taken in the gas chamber and I saw it. Many things -- my brother and my sister don't want to talk about anything that happened. They can't understand that I can go around speaking about it. I mean, they are proud of me that I am doing it, but they can't. It was more things of how we can get together and -- and -- and be together. My sister already by then was anchored down in Denmark, so I left for Canada.

Q: Just a moment now. Did you -- How did you tell him that your mother was dead?

A: We didn't until not too long ago. When they did --

Q: But he knew she had died?

A: Yes. Not how. Not how.

Q: So, I'm sorry -- what -- so, you were writing -- yo-you received a postcard from him. Your sister --

A: We were writing mostly is not what -- what happened and the horror and so forth. We were more really writing of how we can be together and start as a family, be [indecipherable] him and me and my sister, whether -- wherever it would be that we would be together. And if he had gotten to Palestine, I would have been in -- in Israel today. In fact, it was very interesting, when I first met Martin Luther King, one evening

at dinner and he asked me, “Why did you come to the United States?” And I said, “Well, I didn’t, I came to Canada and I came because of my brother.” If my brother was able to have come -- Canada was the furthest from him to come. The first one was to got to -- to Israel, to Palestine, but he couldn’t. It was the British blockade. I probably would have been in Israel today, cause I came just to be with him.

Q: So, did he help arrange a visa for you --

A: No.

Q: -- or did the Danish help?

A: No, no. I had to do everything myself. I had to -- one of the things that I had to do is I had to pay for the -- and I didn’t have money. So I had -- a gi -- friend helped me with some money -- Jewish friend. Paula was very upset, because sh -- that I told her I was leaving, she couldn’t understand. She -- Paula Yensen, because they wanted really -- their dream was to adopt both of us, they had no children. They were Lutheran family, they were wonderful. And -- And so they -- oh, so hard to think no [indecipherable]

Q: Do you want to take a little break?

A: Yeah.

Q: So, how you got -- how you planned to get to Canada and the goodbyes you had to say.

A: Mm-hm, mm-hm, mm. Mm-hm. Well, as soon as my -- I -- as soon as I found out my brother came to Toronto, to Canada, he had no money to help me to come. The -- There was no place that I could go. There was really, in Denmark, not even a HIAS that could

help me. You know, HIAS was who -- was an organization that helped refugees, you know, go places. And there was the visa, how do you -- you get? Before that, you have to go to a doctor and thank God that in Denmark is socialized medicine so you have to see that you don't have syphilis and th-that. And me having had TB was -- became a problem, but I was already clear out of that and they gave me a clear bill of health to come into this country. And so, I worked. The people who I took care of, the kids I babysat, I did all kinds of things in Denmark to earn some money to come. And one summer, I pick strawberries. That's why when I go by now and I go on the way to San Francisco, I go on Salenas and so on, I see them picking that and I said, "Oh boy." No matter how expensive we pay for strawberries, we get it so cheap, because it's very hard work. You know, you empathize with what we get so cheap, the vegetables and how little they get paid, the migrant workers. Really, I always bring these things back, constantly to me. And so, when I finally had enough money, then there were everybody saying goodbye and Paula and Swen Yensen, they were -- they were just horrified that I would leave them. They were -- I was their little pia, their little child. And -- And I sailed -- I went through -- on train and I took and I was -- went to -- through -- going to Bremerhaven, where I sailed from.

Q: With a visa?

A: With a visa. But I had to go through the -- the zone and I was taken, you know, here I am on the train and after all that, I'm going to Germany. I remembered -- I'll never forget that -- with the visa and then there is the eastern zone and the western zone and you get

on and you have to constantly show your visa [indecipherable]. And lo and behold, as I'm doing that, for some reason, they take me off the -- the train. And I was going through Paris first, because a woman by the name Mrs. Wagner, Madame Wagner, she was -- she knew me from Denmark and she was going to pick me up in France. And here, I can't -- I can't -- I'm -- I'm taken over in Bremerhaven, and -- because it was stamped for there, but I was supposed to leave from LeHavre -- from France, going to Quebec. And for some reason -- I mean, I didn't -- you know, it was stamped and they were -- they were not, but I gave them such a hard time. I was crying and I was like this. I mean, it was just so upsetting and I couldn't talk to them and I didn't want to talk German and being in Germany, I just hated, you know, the fact, you know, that I have to [indecipherable] what is happening, that kind. And so finally they stamped it and the next day they put me on the train and she picked me up and I was a wreck. I get on the train -- I get on the boat, and --

Q: At LeHavre.

A: At LeHavre and I'm sailing for Quebec. And the whole boat -- it was called the Scertia, was owned by Conrad Whitestar or something -- and the whole boat, there are German uniforms and -- I mean, I'm not going up where the -- all the regular passenger are, this was steerage, you know. And all of a sudden, I hear there are about -- they're all guys and they're speaking Danish. And I went over to them, and I said "Adudansk," I mean, I started talking to them Danish, and I became -- they -- they protected me. All the trip, they were taking care of me. They were just incredible. They were so wonderful to

me. They were going on a special thing in -- up in Canada somewhere, doing agricultural -- you know, Denmark's very a-agricultural. They had some kind of a thing going there, yeah.

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is tape two, side A, with an interview with Judith Meisel, conducted by Ginger Miles on January 20th, 1999 for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

A: So anyway, so then we finally -- when we arrived at Quebec, I was -- and then wa -- oh, so when -- part of that I -- si -- they told me they -- they were not in steerage, they were, you know, in the regular passengers. And they got me up and they said, "Oh, if you're Jewish, there's a whole group, there's about three guys who are Jewish and they are on the boat." So, that was even better for me, you know, and I started talking. That's how I met my ex-husband, aboard ship.

Q: And which language were you speaking?

A: The -- I was speaking to them, I was speaking Danish and to the three guys, a little bit of Yiddish they knew, very little Yiddish, but we communicated. The Danes spoked English, so they could translate. They were my translators. And I met my ex and I came to Canada, and --

Q: To -- Before you get to Canada, did you have a little courtship on the boat, or how long did it take?

A: Yeah, yeah, well --

Q: How was that?

A: The boat -- The boat was almost -- over 10 days, I think was, you know, not that fast those years, the boats going. But they --

Q: What was his name?

A: Gabe Cohen. And yeah -- and he said, he -- he almost pr -- he proposed almost right there and then to me. He was coming back. He was -- during the war, went to Israel to fight -- really illegally to go to fight.

Q: He was American?

A: No, he was Canadian. And he could not get -- but he's lived all his life in United States, but he didn't know that his father was born in Ottawa. And his mother was born in New York, but they lived in New York all this time, in Brooklyn. And he -- he could not come back in it -- to United States directly, he had to come back through Canada. So, I -- he had family Montreal and he took me off the boat and we went to visit his family in Montreal. And my brother comes to pick me up and here I'm gone with some guy that he doesn't -- and he hadn't seen me, so it was -- it was kind of difficult and finally I came to Toronto and I stayed in Toronto. We got married in Toronto.

Q: So, how -- you -- you arrived --

A: We arrived in July and I think it was the 22nd of -- of August, in -- in Quebec.

Q: This was in 1940 --

A: '49.

Q: -- nine.

A: '49.

Q: You arrived in Quebec and was your fa -- brother waiting for you there?

A: No, my brother -- yeah, my brother was waiting, but I didn't know, was miscommunication. So anyways, we got -- and he went back to Toronto and then I came

there like two days later, to Toronto. And I remember going out on the -- on the -- putting me on, on the train and I had to go by train from Quebec to Toronto and I couldn't speak to anybody. I was completely -- until I finally fell in the arms of my brother, you know? And from there on -- we had tiny, little room, and --

Q: Did Gabe go with you on this --

A: No, no, he couldn't, becau -- no, he tried to get back to United States, he had a hard time, because he was -- he went illegally to fight during this -- the war of liberation and with Israel, you know and so --

Q: So, you were with him for two days, and [indecipherable] --

A: I always say I -- I knew him four days before we -- we got married, all told -- saw each other.

Q: So --

A: And we have three children.

Q: -- when did you marry?

A: We married 1950. January first, 1950.

Q: So, after your fo --

A: From July, na -- I -- I didn't see him.

Q: After your four days, you went to your brother and he went to the US?

A: Who, my brother?

Q: No, Gabe.

A: Yeah, he went to United States.

Q: So tell me about being with your brother and seeing him for the first time.

A: Well, for the first time, was really, you know, we -- we really rarely talked about what happened to us. We just wanted to know what's going to happen, what's going to be our future, what are we going to do, how are we going to live. And -- And it took awhile til we began. I mean, we didn't dwell on the horrible things that happened to us. It was more about the now. What are we going to do now and so forth. Then, I got married and my brother moved in with me and lived with me for awhile.

Q: You got married in Canada?

A: In Canada. In Toronto. And then, after we got married, it was very difficult to get me back into United States, because there was a McCowen Act Law. There was a immigration that you had the quota for so many people they would let in. And I -- I arrived and we got married in Janu -- Jan or Fe -- New Year's Day, we got married. And I arrived, I think to --

Q: 1950.

A: 1950, and I arrived in nine -- let me see. I arrived in May of 1950, I arrived to New York.

Q: Married?

A: Yeah. By train, cause plane were too expensive. Trains were cheaper then.

Q: You didn't need a passport to get there, or did you?

A: To United States?

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: So what kind of a citizen were you considered?

A: I was an alien. An alien citizen. I wa -- had no country.

Q: Stateless?

A: Stateless. So I had to get a -- and -- and I married -- I married a Canadian, so that was even a double whammy. But his parents vouched for me. They had to put certain amount of money in the bank, they had to show that bank account -- I still have those documents -- and all that, to bring me into United States, to vouch for me. And then, after he -- he wa -- he had one more year to finish college and after that, he -- he got an offer -- he is Jewish educator -- he had an offer to come to Toronto to work for Talmuttor, which is a Jewish day school, and we went back to Toronto and then my -- then my sister came to visit. But my brother got -- then my brother started courting his wife Simmy and he got married and my sister came.

Q: In Toronto?

A: In Toronto.

Q: So, your brother moved with you and your husband?

A: No, my brother stayed in Toronto when I moved back, but when I moved back, after I got married, he moved in with us.

Q: All right. Can I just go back a little bit, to your first weeks and months of marriage. Did you and your husband talk about the Holocaust at all, with each other?

A: Me and my husband?

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Oh yeah. I think there was a special thing that he knew, you know -- I had a lot of fears. I'll never forget our honeymoon, I locked myself in the bathroom and wouldn't come out, cause I was so scared of every little thing. Every new thing was the -- just a scary thing for me. But the most important thing is that I had lots of fears. I always looked for an exit and to this day I still do that, where all the exits are, when I go into a movie or anything. And I -- I -- I still have the same fears. I could never put like -- my field is early childhood education and I started two preschools. One here and one in Philadelphia. And when you put the -- you don't -- they don't do it now as much, but we used to [indecipherable] put like a child's name and put it around the neck so if we shouldn't lose them. I could never do that, because that's when people went for the firing squads. Things like that and a lot of nightmares and so forth. He had lot of -- share of problems that -- but our marriage didn't broke because of that, because --

Q: It wasn't that?

A: No, no, no.

Q: Where was he during the Holocaust?

A: He was in United States and he went -- in 1947, he went on to fight for state of Israel.

Q: So, he had very strong --

A: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

Q: -- was it --

A: Comes from a very religious family.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Very Jewish, Zionist family.

Q: Were you involved with Zionism at all, yourself?

A: No, I really didn't know. I di -- I didn't know if my parents were Zionists or something. I know one thing, that my parents -- in my parents home, we had very modest home in a little town and I can remember that we used to have little bags of earth and -- it was -- came from Palestine, came from Israel, from the Holy Land, so the f-for when a person is buried, the first shovel of that you brang from the Holy Land to put in the grave and every year there would come around a emissary from -- from Israel -- from Palestine then, and would sell this. And we would have that and ou -- oh, you know, so there was connection with Israel, with -- with the state of Israel. We had the JNF box, the -- that -- that -- over there, there is a li -- where you give for tadocker, you put in money and it goes for Israel, you know. We always have that, we cose -- call it the pushka.

Q: This is back in America now?

A: No, that's back in the shtetl, we always had pushkas for this, to -- for charity, to give. But there was all ones -- always for the -- Palestine, for the state of Israel. So, those are the kind of links, whether they were active Zionism and so forth, they didn't -- they lived, they didn't leave to go to Palestines.

Q: Since we're on the subject of -- of Israel, I -- I think it would be interesting to ask this question and that is -- do you think that the founding of Israel has a meaning for

Holocaust survivors in general?

A: Oh, definitely. I feel, if there was a state of Israel, maybe this would not have happened. I think that the fact is that Israel to me, is the most important thing. That it is the protection for people and the in-gathering of the exiles that we were -- we had -- we -- we did not have a homeland. And I feel there was no one talking up for us. The rest of the world really didn't care. They knew it was there, but they didn't do anything about it.

Q: Including Jews in the rest of the world?

A: Oh, I -- including the Jews in United States. I think that they were so i-isolated and so insulated and not only that, but there was fear here. The Jews had fear here, because there was a Father Coglin who was on the radio constantly, telling [indecipherable] and was very anti-Semitic in -- in the 30's and -- and in the 40's. There was a Nazi party and the fact that United States went into the war ver -- th -- I owe my life to them, that they liberated me, if it wouldn't be for United States, but at the same time, they went in so late. And so, to me, Israel is s-s-stands there and -- and we must make Israel a strong nation. I don't like some of the politics what's going on in Israel today. That bothers me, because that's not the kind of state I would like to have.

Q: What about it bothers you?

A: Well, it bothers me that the equality is not there, that the --

Q: Between?

A: Between the religious and the non-religious. The fact that they, because I am not a ultra Orthodox Jew, I am not considered Jewish to a lot of them. And that the state -- the

state has to be separation of religion and th-the poli -- you know, I think the politics in itself. And I think that, to me, peace is a long way off there. I try to go there about every two years, lately, to live there for about a month or two months. Basically, the people want peace on both sides. But on both sides, there are hatred. And the Arabs have such hatred for the Jews. I mean, there used to be before it was all about Israel, now they're saying Jews, they're hating Jews. And -- And it's a very difficult thing when I -- I -- I have examples where I went to visit a very dear friend who lives there. American family, went there very early and they've lived there for a long time. Their kids grew up with the children whe -- in that little town where the interfadder started. And when the interfadder started, stones started flying through their window. And this is the kind of thing. Now, do you give up that peace and -- and let it happen to you, with -- stones kill. It's a very, very difficult situation there, but nevertheless, I feel that, as a Jew, I'm very proud of Israel, what they have done. And I hope that there will be peace in Jerusalem. There'll be peace in Jerusalem, I've always felt, will be peace in the world. Cause it takes in so many religions and so many, it just everybody.

Q: I find it so interesting that your family, even before the Holocaust, even before any awareness that there may be a Holocaust, was contributing to Israel. Can you tell me about that? Was that common?

A: Oh, it's very common. It's -- I mean, th-that part of the --

Q: How did the word get around in Jewish communities?

A: Well, because Palestine was our life. I mean, this was our -- this was in -- it's in -- in our -- part of our Torah, it's part in the -- we -- we -- we pray. We pray to Jerusalem. It's in our prayer book. If I forget the -- Jerusalem, let my right hand be cunning, you know. It -- It was always there and we were always taught. And Hebrew was the language and -- but it was part and parcel of all of us. And it was the yearning of every Jew in the shtetls, in -- especially w-where I lived, in eastern Europe, in Lithuania, that someday we will go to -- I mean, we -- we have it in the seder, you know, when -- Passover, everything, that -- to be in Jerusalem. Next year in Jerusalem. It is -- and if you say how old the Bible is and how old is the prayer books, that's how old it is for the state of Israel.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: It wasn't until the political state of Israel, but the state of Israel was there.

Q: Now, what I -- we're -- we're just about to -- to get you some children.

A: Some children.

Q: From the first marriage.

A: Yeah. I only have from the first marriage.

Q: Okay.

A: Yeah.

Q: So, could you say now -- you were living now in Toronto and Abe is working and you are working, too, or --

A: No, I was -- at that time, I was just my ha -- my ex was working, I was just a housewife, keeping the [indecipherable] my daughter was born in '51, so we had to --

Q: And his job was?

A: What?

Q: He was?

A: He was educational director at the synagogue.

Q: Mm.

A: Mm. [indecipherable]

Q: So your children --

A: My daughter was born in Toronto. And then, my sist --

Q: Her name is?

A: Mina. M -- named after my mother, and when my brother got married, my sister came with her son, Oscar and he was -- at that time, he was three years old. And, the -- then she decided she would stay and get a working permit, which she had, temporary, and she could work --

Q: Away from Denmark?

A: Away from Denmark. Her husband stayed on in Denmark and to see if she likes it and if she does, they would move here, to us, cause I kept only wanting her to move. I mean, I just didn't want her being so far away. And -- but it was very difficult because we didn't have the money to bring her over and -- and everything else, so is -- she stayed for almost a year. I watched her little boy and my little -- my baby -- and Mina and she went to work and she's a seamstress and -- and collect these -- she used to come home with those little tickets, you know, how many buttons and how many that and we would sit there and

figure it out by the pennies, you know? This was years ago. And I'm -- this was in 1950 -- 50 -- wait a minute, that was in 19 fif -- beginning of '51. No, what am I talking, n -- they are married December second of '51, yeah.

Q: Do you remember how it felt when you -- when you -- did you no --

A: He married a Canadian girl. Jewish Canadian. My brother.

Q: Oh, your brother?

A: Yeah.

Q: I -- I was thinking of Mina, your -- your first child, named after your mother, did -- the moment when you knew you were pregnant, did you have any thoughts that went back to your experience there, or --

A: Well, I've always felt that that -- always worried about what kind of world I'm bringing in. After all, I -- I used to pinch myself all the time that here I am in Canada. It's like United States. I can go into any store, if I have the money to buy whatever I want. I'm -- don't have to be hungry. I can, you know, do anything I want to. I -- I can be proud. And the most important thing is -- was -- always is that I didn't have to look over my back if I'm lighting the Sabbath candles or if I'm doing anything Jewish, this was wide open. And that was the biggest satisfaction in living here tuvusta. And I had a very difficult pregnancy -- very di-difficult. I -- This was years ago, I too -- I found a Danish doctor who I could speak Danish to and he was wonderful. And I had almost like three days of very hard labor. And finally, when she was born, I'll never forget when I went back -- Dr. Williamson, I went back to him and he said, "Well." And I ask him, "When

can I have another child?" And he looked at me, he says, "[indecipherable]," he said, "Boy, you women, you -- do you remember how difficult?" But then I had -- I had a -- a miscar -- I had a stillborn child after that. That was very difficult to take, because those years, they couldn't do anything, said it has to take it's natural causes and I was sick. And then after that, my son Michael arrived. And was not easy, but was fine. And then Debbie. And they were three years apart and I just wanted to have a family, I -- not a lot of children, but I wanted to have more and more and then the third, you know, it wasn't really like we planned it. We didn't plan it, whatever happened. And --

Q: Are they -- the other second two named after any other relatives?

A: Yeah, they're all named after relatives and they're all named Hebrew names and they're all called by Hebrew names. I never liked to give them a Hebrew name or a Jewish name and then call them a Danish -- a Danish or a -- my sister is different -- or a, you know, an American name. I figure that's the name I gave them at birth --

Q: So the second -- the boy --

A: Michael, but the Hebrew name is Meechiel, which is Michael and Raphael is this -- his second name, the two angels. And my -- I remember asking my in-laws if they wanted to -- after all, the first one I named after my mother, was only that I should ask my in-laws if -- who were very religious, now it's your turn to name, you know? And they said no, they don't want to name after anyone. Was very interesting, because my father-in-law's name was Jacob and my mother-in-law's name was Jacob. See my -- her father was named Jacob. And if the two are the same, they usually have -- the namesake

is usually carried after, you know, from the person passes away, you give the namesake, but you can't give the namesake if the father is the same name. So, they had a lot of difficulty when she was getting married and she told me that. I never heard of it before, but she was very adamant that I should name a name that I liked, that the child will like when he's -- you know, and will able to carry that name proudly. So that -- and when Deborah came along, was -- I had a sister-in-law who was shot down. Their plane was shot down over Bulgaria. She was going to -- back to Israel, she was from Israel and her name was Debore-ore and so I named Debbie after that.

Q: And Michael is named after?

A: Michael is named after my -- we picked out -- we didn't name him after anyone. Meechiel Raphael, the angels.

Q: Did your children learn about your and your -- your experiences in the Holocaust? Did you have a way to share it, or --

A: My children knew that I was a survivor, but a survivor of what and how and when and what was happening, they didn't know. They -- I never sat them down and told them that, you know, I'm a survivor and that they would ask me such questions, "Where is your m -- what happened to your mother?" And I would say she died. And, "How did -- oh, wh-where did she die?" And I said, "Well, in foul way." And I didn't even mention Stutthof, I would say foul way. I tried to shield them as much as possible that I could. I worked at the children's camp in -- and -- called Camp Rama. It's a Hebrew speaking camp.

Q: Where was this?

A: This was in -- this particular incident was in the Poconos, but I worked -- they have several camps all over the country. And they would have me speak -- it's called, Tishubov, it's when the -- the temple -- the second temple, when it was destroyed and it's a holiday. It's a mourning holiday and they've made it in -- really made it into memoral -- memorialized the Holocaust, Tishubov. And they would have me speak to the older campers and my daughter was there and I remember speaking to them and not trying them to -- traumatize them with real horrors, but [inaudible]. And my daughter came over, she says, "Mom, I don't believe, it's a lie." She just didn't believe me, she says, "You never told me." And she was 14 years old. And from then on, many things. They knew that I had no relatives. They knew that I would say certain things to them. In my house, you're not allowed to fight, you know. I've had enough fighting. And -- But I would come out with words like that, or that would say, "We do not throw out food. Food is sacred. If you don't eat this today, you're going to eat it tomorrow." And I would, I would make them eat it tomorrow. If they were hung -- they say, "Well, we're hungry." I said, "Well, there's food you left yesterday, eat it." That's the thing I would do. They told me that. They still tell me that.

Q: You were learning English as well, during this time.

A: Yeah, well, with my oldest daughter I spoke Yiddish. And it's -- was very interesting, she went to Israel for her junior year at the Hebrew university and she wrote, "Guess what? I'm in advanced class of college Yiddish," because she knew Yiddish. She knew

Yiddish before she knew English. And -- But I learned English, I went to night school and I learned, and --

Q: In Canada?

A: Yeah. And I had to communicate with my ex, because he doesn't speak Yiddish. He was -- he -- his parents were born here. My -- His mother was born in New York and his father in Ottawa. And his grandparents were very young when they came over, so there was no Yiddish spoken in their house. So, there was an older woman, I would go and she would translate the English letters for me.

Q: From?

A: And she would s -- at the end, she would say, "He loves you, he loves you, he's going to marry you," at the end. And -- So she -- yeah, and she --

Q: He was writing you from where?

A: From -- From New York to Toronto. And I would write him in Yiddish and he would go to another old lady who would translate it to him in Yiddish. And -- and --

Q: So you had to be careful with this [indecipherable]

A: -- I had to really work hard on my -- and I would refuse people to talk to me -- then my Danes, I had -- was a whole group of Danes in Toronto that I got to know and I would stay away from them, because I didn't want to speak Danish, so was really -- but I learned pretty fast. For some reason, languages I pick up, yeah. [indecipherable]

Q: I can say you do. How many do you speak now?

A: Oh, I don't -- I used to speak a lot more. I mean, I -- Yiddish I speak fluently, I would say. And English -- I mean, I don't -- Hebrew I understand some and I, you know, I read Hebrew. Danish, interesting enough, when I went to Denmark, I -- after I was there for a day and a half I spoke it, but before that, I can understand. So, when I come to somebody here in den -- fra -- whose Danish, I tell them, "Speak to me in Danish and I'll answer you in English." It's hard, a language if you don't speak. You forget it.

Q: I'm going to turn this over to the other side -- other tape.

A: Okay.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: This is tape two, side B, Judith Meisel and we are talking -- I -- I'll hold that -- about your film.

A: My film. Well --

Q: Could you tell us what -- what you mean by your film?

A: In -- In 1998, in June, three students at University of Soderon, California Graduate School -- film school -- took me back to Lithuania, to my little town, to the Kovno ghetto, where I was, to Stutthof concentration camp and to Denmark, where I escaped from the Death March. And we completely -- did a complete walk through of wherever I was and the film played here, a -- or -- it opened up for -- in '98, of September, oh, Labor Day weekend. And within a week, it was sold out, 686 seats were completely sold out and they had a fundraiser for Beyond Tolerance Center. It's been my dream to start a

Beyond Tolerance. We were going to call it Tolerance Center, but tolerance, it means so much, it's just an ambiguous, you know, thing. So we calling it Beyond Tolerance. And, because I've always felt -- because I go out and speak into schools all the time and wherever I go, that children need to be taught tolerance, from the very young age, especially in the schools. And the schools don't have the money, so we got a whole group of people together here and who are funding it and it's part of the county school system. So we have a one -- one is diversity, which is -- Scorbell Museum has a very good thing, it's called a diversity -- teaching for younger children. Facing History and Thyself is going to be part of it, that schools --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: History and Thyself, which is an incredible thing, they teach all histories. And one is called Living Voices and it has about -- a com -- they do a composite of Anne Frank. I was the edu -- it came out of me, when I was the education chairman for the Anne Frank in the World exhibits, which we brought here in '97. And it was here for a month and a half and I want to tell you, was the best thing Santa Barbara ever had. And we brought 10,000 students. I worked a year and a half on it, really got to know the school system and we brought that to Santa Barbara. We brought 36 th-thousand students downtown in -- where the exhibit were. We had a whole month of all kinds of things going in -- of teaching what racism and bigotry does. We had an incredible, credible program.

Q: Focused strictly on Jewish life?

A: It's -- no, it was a tea -- well, it was -- it went with the Anne Frank in the World exhibit. We included all faith communities. We included the Chumus Indian, which we have a popul -- a sizable population. We found out that when we did that, that there were two Chumus Indians and they didn't talk to each other. Doing this, they began to talk to each other. So we did that. And we -- the African American community had their own programs. We had programs -- completely diverse programs, but all teaching to tolerance. How to do away with hatred and bigotry. And it was a wonderful -- and my daughter has paintings that she painted for the 50th anniversary. It's been going around all over the country. My daughter --

Q: 50th anniversary?

A: Of liberation. My -- She's my oldest, Mina, she lives in -- she's an artist, she lives in Mendocino, California. And it's opening this -- opening in -- on February seventh, on my seven oh birthday. It's opening up and I'm so happy my children are coming in, because it's my birthday.

Q: Where is it opening?

A: And it's opening at Abington Friends, in Jenkintown, Pennsylvania. And from there, it's going to go to the Sidwell School. Is it Sidewell or Sidwell School in Washington, DC. And it's going to be there, opening. It's also Quaker school. Supposed to be a real wonderful Quaker school. That's where Chelsea Clinton wanted to go. And then -- so I been going and I go out speaking wherever I'm invited, I speak about -- but my field is early childhood education.

Q: That's what I wanted to ask you now --

A: Mm-hm.

Q: -- when you got your children and your education and your career goals, how did that unfold?

A: Well, when we moved to ch -- to Rochester, New York, I still didn't -- I was rather not well, I had a stillborn child, was a -- was -- and I was very -- not too well. So, I didn't worked. When we moved to Wilmington, Delaware, I was very involved in the community. I was always involved in the community, always. If I knew there was something had to be done in --

Q: At school, or --

A: -- in a poor area, or whatever.

Q: -- synagogue?

A: A synagogue and a school, wherever I could. And wherever I could make myself understand, because my -- my English was still not the greatest. But when I -- in -- in Philadelphia, I got really involved in the Civil Rights movement in Philadelphia. And --

Q: What made you first -- how did you first know about it and how did you feel?

A: Well, what happened was I was asked by a woman if -- who organizes, called the panel of American women. It was a group of women, and we went -- who went out to speak and they spoke mostly how it was -- this was in the early 60's, like '61, how it is to live in United States, as a Protestant, a Catholic and a Jewish person and a Native American. And th-they asked me to be the Jewish person, and I said, "No, I'm very busy,

I have" -- I was busy in my synagogue, I was busy with Haddassah, which is woman's group, a Zionist organization, who take care of the hospitals in Israel. And I felt I really did not have time, with three children and I was busy enough. I just didn't do anything. Then, I'm sitting and watching the news and it was David Brinkley and John Chancellor, talking about a group -- I mean, I love news -- about a group of people that congregated themselves in front of a home that an African American family had moved into that home. And it was called -- I don't even want to repeat it, of course. And taunting them, and it looked like 500 people. And the police standing, they aren't doing nothing. And for me, it was like Kristallnacht, when people saw what was happening in Nazi Germany and nobody did anything. Everybody was just, you know, looking and doing nothing. Well, I wasn't going to do that. I felt that if that family -- the name of the people were Baker, if the Baker's weren't -- in Folcoff, Pennsylvania, which is near the airport -- if their home is not safe, my home is not safe. So I -- I got dressed and I -- I was -- remember -- I was -- was sitting and took some cookies I had baked and I called a friend who was involved with that panel, if she would come and go with me to the Bakers. They were still trying to get me on that panel and those people were all I met through the public school, through Henry School in Philadelphia. And I said, "Yes, I want to go." And we went. And I -- for the first time in the United States, I was in Philadelphia, in the city of brotherly love, feeling this thing of hatred, when I was called white trash and throwing things at me when we walked by. We parked the car at a distance. And I went to Sarah and Horace Baker, I -- I have lost contact since, with them. In fact, they are

going to try to have a reunion with all of us when I'm there, in Philadelphia. And from then on, I called up the lady who was doing the panel was Lois Stalvy, and I said to her, "Lois, I want to be on the panel." And I started speaking out what was happening to me, that ultimately this was going to be the result. And we spoke all over, all over. I'll never forget when I went to Columbia, Maryland, which was a brand new town that was just built. And we were refused -- I was there with two African American women -- was refused to be served, the guy would not serve us. And I walked up to him in my broken English and -- I mean, my English, I told him, you know, "We're waiting long, where is the food?" And he said, "I don't have tea, coffee, or anything for the likes like you." And I walked up and I remember having the water -- glasses of water, spilled out the water and I just -- and walked out. I said, "Let's go. We don't need this white trash." And I -- you know, and I walked out. Said it loud enough that everybody turned around. Then I made a statement. And I went on and I felt that the Civil Rights movement was a si -- a time in my life that I felt -- this was before even Martin Luther King, that it was a very, very scary, that this is going to happen all over again. There were riots. There were all kinds of things that this is happening in the United States. I knew very little about the United States, even though I've lived here already a few years. I -- I had just become a citizen -- I had just become a citizen. It was -- Nixon was running for office. I was -- and he lost, the first time he [indecipherable].

Q: Who was president when you became a citizen?

A: Harry Truman. And th-there was just so many things going on, that [break] judge

asking me, and the question. You know, they ask you who -- who would become president and -- oh, no, he was -- he -- Nix-Nixon, oh, I'm sorry. When I came here, Truman was the -- but Nixon was the vice-president, so he was with who? With Eisenhower.

Q: Eisenhower.

A: Eisenhower. Now Eisenhower, for me, was my idol, because he was my liberator. And when I heard his name -- to this day, when I see the American flag, I cry. I get tears in my eyes. The -- The Star Spangled Banner is just the -- the greatest thing that -- greatest piece of music to my life. I mean that -- here they were. There is no country in the world like United States. But I remember distinctly when the judge asked me, "If the president dies, who becomes the president?" And I say, "God forbid, Nixon." And the judge said -- I'll never forget, the judge said, "You don't like Mr. Nixon?" And I said, "No, I want Mr. Eisenhower to live." He said, "It's okay, I'm a democrat." I'll never forget that, that was in Wilmington, Delaware.

Q: Oh my God, you got the right judge. So now, you're --

A: There, for the first time, I could go and vote.

Q: And how did that feel?

A: Oh, greatest thing. I think that people don't realize what we have in this country. That we can do anything we want with the ballot. That one vote makes a difference. And I don't think many people exercise that right. And that's why, it became, during Civil Rights movement, so important for me -- every African American, every black person I

met, I'd say, "Did you vote? Are you registered to vote? If not, let's -- I'm going to help you." And I had a hard time doing it, because I was not -- you know, and [indecipherable] I was not even an -- a citizen myself, I couldn't -- I did -- started doing that. And I just -- I just felt I had an incredible kinship with the Black person, because, you see, the Black person never hurt me. I was never hurt by a Black person. I was hurt by a White Christian person. So they were a different people and why would they, because of -- because they were -- looked different than me, I couldn't -- couldn't understand that. And people would say to me, "Well, you have to live here to -- to understand." So I guess -- but I couldn't believe that United States would be that racist. And so I began to speak out quite a bit on that. And I took on -- there were a lot of, you know, the deniers and that, and -- and was hissed on and -- you know, and all the -- the -- the things during that time. And went into certain neighborhoods, which was very dangerous. I didn't even tell my ex where I was going. To -- To --

Q: At this time your children --

A: -- registering -- my children were still little and my children always thought that something is going to happen to me during that time. I know that my phone was bugged, because we had a police commissioner by the name of Rizzo and I would come home and I'd say, "Hello Mr. Rizzo, I live in your neighborhood." And he did, he lived in my neighborhood. And I said, "Please stop bugging my line. I'm --" I always telled to him, "I'm a caring person, I'm not a subversive person." I used to go on and tell him all the thing. Anything I want to get off my chest, I would tell it into the phone.

Q: Did you sense, at the same time in -- that Americans were anti-Semitic?

A: Anti-Semitism here in this country is different than anti-Semitism that I experienced in Lithuania. In Lithuania, it's right out, anti-Semitism in the real [indecipherable]. They hate you and they're going to kill you. Don't say all, but even being back there with the film, they still talk candidly about hating the Jews. Even after so many years.

Q: Even to you?

A: Last year.

Q: Did they say why?

A: What did they say why? We are known as the Christ killers. And anti-Semitism -- you have to remember, in Lithuania, in my little town or even in the big town, the synagogue is not there any more. There's not a single Jew in the towns -- town after town. The church is standing majestic. The synagogue was almost across the street, is not there, it's a parking lot. But in that church, when I was just there -- I was there a couple of time, the last six years, if the priest -- and it was quite almost weekly, would preach that the Jews are Christ killers, that the Jews killed Christ.

Q: To this day?

A: I'm not talking now, I'm not there, but I'm talking when I was there, when I lived there. In, say in the 30's and 40's, when I -- then it gave the people the right to go out and -- and kill and maim. If they killed -- if you were -- killed Christ our Lord, you shouldn't live. This is what that. Now, I don't think a priest is going to go in United States and say that.

Q: Do you see any kind of connection with this strong religious Christian right movement?

A: Oh, that frightens me. It frightens me -- it frightens me with the anti-abortionists. That they can go out and maim and kill for their ideal, what they want? What they think is the right thing? What they think is moral? Is it moral to go out and kill a doctor, what's left four little children behind? I mean, to go out -- those are the kind of things that worries me, yes. And that --

Q: Do you see it get -- get that serious in -- a-again?

A: If we -- it can, if we let it happen. And again, it goes back to the ballot box. Who we -- Who we elect. And what's happening now in the country with Clinton, what's happening now? We're the laughing stock of the world. 40 million dollars you give a man who's not -- I mean, how can it be so independent that it was all for the Republican party over the -- how can you have a person, give him that kind of money, to do whatever he wants to bring the president down? To me, it's scary. It is very s -- very scary. I mean, what he did is wrong, but he's the president of the United States, he had another years and a half or two years for the term. He's been a good president for the economy, for the people. I mean, this is between him and his wife. This is not betw -- and I think he lied because he wanted to protect his family. It's as simple as that.

Q: They really laugh at us in Europe for this.

A: Yeah, I mean he's -- everybody -- everyone, th -- all the presidents, they've all had that. And it -- I think that is because they are so powerful that people go towards it.

Q: I -- I want to -- there's a -- a whole list of events and I want to go back to the Civil Rights movement that there are several things that the Oral History department has put down that I think I want you to look at and see if there's any -- anything there that you in particular had experience. I don't know if you were here then.

A: Well, I was here and I was glued to the television with the McCarthy era. It was a very frightening time for me. It was a frightening time because it was scary that people were -- you were afraid to talk to your neighbor. You were afraid to say something before you would get a summons. I mean, there were so many people who were being brought to trial. The McCarthy era was a very, very, very difficult. The Korean war -- war is scary to me and my brother-in-law was -- my husband -- my ex-husband brother was in the Korean war and it was very scary, cause war is very scary. The Civil Rights movement, I feel was the greatest thing that happened in United States, by changing the course of events. I think it -- not only for the Black community, m -- as much it did for the White community. And --

Q: In what way?

A: In what way? I think that we began to look at it that racism is wrong and bigotry is wrong. And I think that when people went to the south with the -- the buses, when they went with the buses to register people, to see their hatred of the group of people who were just [indecipherable] -- the Klan and -- and that -- that it's wrong. That if it can happen in Germany and we allow this to flourish, it's going to happen here. And we're going to have to put a stop to it. But it's changed now. You have now a Farrakan, who to

me is a demagogue. He's a -- He's a leader in -- in the Black community, but he still -- why do you need -- get a leader -- the difference between him and Martin Luther King and Farrakan. I mean, you get a demagogue, who hates the Whites, hates everything, hates everybody. And Martin Luther King, to me, preached -- preached self respect, the sanctity of life and to be peaceful and to be -- with the ballot box, that we can elect officials and I think when I went on the March on Washington, I'll never forget. It was the hottest day, I remember. Saturday, we -- I stayed with a Black family for the first time. Here I am a Jewish, religious girl. Brought my tuna fish and my piece of choller.

Q: This was six -- in the 60's?

A: This was '63. And I stayed and I'll never, never forget it. And I went and I heard, "I Had a Dream." But I had met him before.

Q: Well, tell me about this, yeah, yeah.

A: I met him before. I lived in west Mount Airy in Philadelphia, Germantown, west Mount Airy area, and -- and I was begin -- when I got involved with the panel of American women, I met a lot of interesting people and there was Judge Raymond Pace Alexander. He was the first -- I believe, the first African American judge to be elected to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. And he wa -- I was walking my dog and he was walking in the morning and he said, "Oh, why don't you come and have dinner with us?" So I came -- I went and I had dinner with them and --

Q: With his family?

A: Yeah, with his family. He said, “I have a -- two -- two friends of mine are coming, one is a reverend and the other one, too,” I think and -- and it turned out it was that -- di -- didn’t I think so, he said, “Oh, but I know that you --” because we’ve been in several of the fellowship commission and so forth and he saw I was eating fish and that. He said, “I’ll tell Sadie that you can onl --” I said -- I said, “Just some vegetables [indecipherable]” So he -- when the dinner was served, Sadie, his wife said, “Judy, I have vegetables, this is your -- this is the vegetables on the side. The rest of it you can’t eat, it’s chitlings.” So they turned out it was Martin Luther King and Ralph Abernathy was there that --

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Oh.

A: And it was very interesting and then, I remember --

Q: How many of you there?

A: We were -- he was there, Sadie and him and there was, I think, two other people. I can’t remember. I think the Mitchells.

Q: A very small dinner?

A: Y -- Very small, yeah.

Q: Wow.

A: Yeah.

Q: And -- And, so tell me what happened.

A: So, he asked me, you know, want to know and -- and Raymond Pace Alexander told him I'm a Holocaust survivor and I'm [indecipherable] with this panel of American women and we -- you know, told him all that. And he said, "No, tell me, why did you come to United States and not Palestine?" And I told him, I said, "You know, I would have gone to Palestine. I had no intention coming to Canada if my brother didn't come to Canada. If he went to Palestine, I would have gone. Would have been -- ended up in Palestine." So -- And we were, you know, it was very interesting conversation, it was more about Philadelphia. Philadelphia was just beginning to organize with OIC, with -- they felt that if they trained people --

Q: OIC.

A: OIC, which is -- I can't think what is [indecipherable]. It's was organized by -- oh, I can't think of -- he was a minister who organized it, that if you take people and you train them in skills, like mechanics and that, because they weren't going to go through college, and certain people that you would get them off the street and -- oh, it was Reverend Sullivan's group, OIC. And they were talking about -- and I think they were there, he was there. It was very interesting group, but it -- it is interesting that on the second time I heard him speak was at the Fellowship Commission, which I was involved a little bit in Philadelphia. But the third time I went is when he did that, "I Have a Dream." And to see all the thousands of people and to see all shades. I mean, this was not just Black people. To me -- and to get the buses, I remember was -- I had to pay into the Urban League, I be -- you had to become a member of the Urban League. I don't know where the Urban

League is now. And we all went on the bus and I went to -- with another friend, I went to -- because I didn't ride on the Sabbath, so I had to stay close by, I stayed in -- in the district. And I had m-money, you know, with hotels so I -- so there were a lot of African American families who put people up in their homes.

Q: I'm going to the next tape -- next side.

A: Hm?

Q: I'm going to the next tape.

End of Tape Two, Side B

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: This is tape three, side A, of an interview with Judith Meisel, conducted by Ginger Miles, on January 20th, 1999, for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Okay.

A: Okay, so to me, being involved was that I felt that there was a quality, because we alway say, you know, and -- and some of the words we -- we say democracy, I mean, I've always felt that there is no such thing as a democracy. We just say the word democracy, but a democracy's an utopia for -- to aspire to that democracy. And I feel that United States is constantly working towards that end of a democracy of that. And that end of when it came with the Civil Rights movement, meaned for me that I am -- want to be part of that, to bring it forward. And then, of course, after that, became, you know, the Vietnam War and --

Q: But before we get to the war, how did you follow up from, "I Have a Dream"? Were you -- did you go back home and were you active, or --

A: Oh, I -- I was very much involved. We organized a group called Northwest Interfaith Movement, where I lived. And where we had -- we began to have a -- a whole group of us and I think it still may be going on, where we met once a week and we took the New Testament and the Old Testament and we saw what was creating their anti-Semitism, all the isms, you know. And we developed that. I went out to speak, I must -- at least twice, three time a week, speaking to -- in Black churches, in Catholic schools, in -- in universities all over. The Panel of American Women. And each one of us spoke. The -- I spoke what happened to me, fo --

Q: You would tell them about your experiences?

A: Well, experiences, but me -- very [indecipherable] we would open it up from -- from the audience, questions. The Catholic person would speak how it is to grow up as a Catholic in Philadelphia. And then the Protestant would say, “Well, I never knew who wasn’t there, you know, I never saw it, you know, what was happening.” But it was a-an incredible, credible, we were an incredible group of people. We were going to have a reunion in Philadelphia. And most of them were housewives, but all of them felt really dedicated to erase racism and bigotry from the schools, from the -- from -- you know, the most important thing is your -- what do you call it? The political person who is in charge of your neighborhood. You don’t have that here, but your -- I can’t think of the -- wh-what it’s called.

Q: In -- In Europe?

A: No, no, here, in United States.

Q: A council --

A: Not -- Not the -- the counc -- well here in -- in -- you have it differently in back east. The ward leaders.

Q: Oh.

A: Those are your important people. They are the people who take your trash, who arrange. Those are the people who do a lot of the things and certain neighborhoods, it’s done, in certain neighborhood, it’s not, you know? Those are the nitty gritty grass roots things that I got very involved, because I can’t do globally. I’m -- you know? But you

can begin in your own neighborhood. And -- And a lot of those kind of things I did, I -- I -- I must say, I worked very, very hard. Then my marriage broke. Can I go on? And I have three ch --

Q: I -- Can I -- Can I -- Can I --

A: Yeah?

Q: -- bring it back to the children before we --

A: Mm-hm.

Q: -- and then go to the marriage breaking?

A: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

Q: You said something which brought together both your experience as a speaker -- when you spoke about your experience as a survivor and that your daughter was there.

A: Uh-huh.

Q: And then we went from there, to have a break and then we spoke about your daughter and what she's doing now.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Can you tell me a moment in your relationship with your daughter, when she began to understand the stories that you told, what had happened?

A: Oh, I think that my daughter knew all along that was happen -- we just didn't talk about it. This was not a conversation that we had at the table -- at the dinner table.

Q: H-How did she know?

A: Well, she -- sh -- when you ask her, she'll know that we didn't have any relatives, we didn't have -- that I didn't -- that I -- certain things would bother me, like they -- you know, if they put -- put something on -- like, for instance if she would come home and -- and wore like a tag with her name on, I would immediately take it off and she'd say, "No, I want to wear it." I'd say, "No, you can't." And I didn't give them reasons, but they begin -- you know, children, they begin to talk to each other and so forth. They say they always knew, but I remember not sitting down and talking to them. How they knew, I don't know. They knew. They knew, they had the feeling and so forth. And my brother certainly never tells his kids -- anything that his kids know, I told them. And the same thing with my sister. And I was very protective of them. I did not want them growing up here, to carrying my burden what I had. I was very protective of them, until a certain point when they got older and they began to ask questions. I never -- when they asked me a question, I told them. I remember when Eichmann was taken to Israel and my son came home and they talked about it in school. And he said, "Is Eichmann one of -- is Eichmann the guy that killed your mother?" And I said, "He killed many, and my mother was among them." I'll never -- that was the first time I said -- he was 12 years old. So, you know, snitches -- snatches like that, but I didn't sit down, now I'm going to tell you my story, or -- or --

Q: Did ever any of them cry when you gave them an answer?

A: No, no, no. I tell you, I cried so much that I -- after a period, I had no tears. After my mother was taken, I cried and cried and cried and -- in fact, I cry more now than I've done in years.

Q: Do you think that's a healing experience?

A: I don't think I can ever heal. I don't -- I don't think that I -- it-it'll ever heal. How can you? You can't. There's no such thing.

Q: But crying --

A: There's no forgiveness and there's no heal. I can't forgive a person who does something like that. You know, it's -- it's not for me to forgive, it's for the people who are not here to forgive.

Q: Who?

A: Who were -- who are dead. Who they killed.

Q: So --

A: I mean, someone asked me the other day, "How will the Nazi -- how will Germany -- I -- I don't like to use the word just Germany, Nazi Germany know that they are forgiven?" I said, "That's not for me to say. Maybe never, because they have to be forgiven for the people who they killed. And they're not here. So, I can't forgive them for them."

Q: So, jer --

A: But I don't go around hating and make my life so miserable that I can't live, cause that's the satisfaction, if I did that, to Hitler, and I'm not about to do that.

Q: But you are an activist and I think that is the way you --

A: I don't know an activist. I'm involve -- I -- I don't know active. I don't go out with -- on the corner and raising a flag and that. I -- I -- If I see something, I go ahead and do it. I --

Q: You were telling me about your marriage, so maybe we should get back to that.

A: Yeah.

Q: Your first marriage. What happened? Oh, you don't have to go into -- whatever you want to tell.

A: Well, I had a very s -- good marriage until it happens -- it was a very -- with a friend of mine, and it was an affair and my marriage broke. I went to Israel, which I dreamed to go for the first time. I became -- I went as a counselor with Camp Hamar and my marriage broke. When I came back, he had an affair with my -- one -- a very good friend and -- and once trust is broken for me, I cannot deal with it. I had a hard time dealing with it and --

Q: You brought your children --

A: Yeah, it was very difficult, because the -- my youngest one was -- at that time was 14 and Michael was 17 and -- and Mina was fir -- was a sophomore in college. And it was -- was very difficult and I lev -- it left me penniless. He literally left me penniless, took all the money, everything, whatever we had. And I tell you, I'm not ashamed to say that. He really, literally -- and it's one thing, I'm always -- I always say that, you can fall in love as much as you can fall out of love. You can do that, but you don't hurt your children.

And to see -- when I kept thinking constantly, and those years was very difficult, was -- that my mother suffered so much to see us hungry, and devastated with cold and hungry and have nothing. And here I am again, left, I was nine years by myself with raising three kids.

Q: And how did you make a living?

A: I held on three jobs and my kids all went to college. I worked very hard, I went knocking on door at senators for senatorial scholarship and thank God I have wonderful kids, who adapt, and -- and they went on scholarship and when they graduated, they ended up paying and paying and paying. They just finishing paying. And one is a very successful attorney. And my daughter is an artist and she married to a physician, thank God. And my youngest daughter is a meeting planner and married to an accountant and they -- wonderful, wonderful children. And wonderful grandchildren.

Q: But you're so -- your own education, at that time when your husband left, ho -- where were you?

A: Well, at the -- the thing what was, is that I st -- worked as a preschool teacher, as an assistant preschool teacher and then -- then I became a teacher. I started going to school. But I would go to school like once a week and so forth, you know, just take some courses. But when the marriage broke, I went school --

Q: Full time?

A: Full -- not full time, nighttime.

Q: Nighttime.

A: Four times a week. And a li -- I don't know if you know Philadelphia, but I use go -- went to Temple University and I would take and drive -- take two buses and stand in cold and come home at night. My kids told me they lived on hot dogs, because that's -- I would leave and say, "This your dinner." And I'd go off and --

Q: When did you graduate?

A: And I graduated the year my daughter, about couple of weeks before I got my degree, before -- my daughter was married and I was s-so excited with my degree, that I completely forgot about her wedding. It took me forever. You know, she said, "Mom, I'm getting married, and you talk only about your degree." But it was 11 years I went for it. It was just such a satisfaction to have that piece of paper of mine. I'll never forget, I went to register at the first time, Temple University. I go and register and you know, you go around the tables and you advisors and you know, you tell them what and you meet with them. And I come back, and my ex said, "Where are you? How come you're in graduate school? You didn't even go to undergraduate school?" And I said, "Well, that's what they told me -- that's what I should do, I should take non-matriculate courses and see what I would like." So I took a lot of non-matriculate courses and I -- and eventually I had to matriculate and work very hard on a whole summer on calculus and you name it and I don't still ta -- after that, I don't know what happened, you know [indecipherable]

Q: What year was it that you graduated?

A: I think '57.

Q: From college?

A: No, no, no, no, oh that?

Q: From college.

A: From college, was -- I started in ‘57. I think was ‘70 -- ‘74 or ‘75.

Q: Oh. And you still had children at home, or --

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: And -- And how --

A: I had two. Mina was already in college.

Q: When you graduated from college, there were still two at home?

A: Mm, mm, mm.

Q: And -- And then you started working?

A: I had a sene -- when I -- the year that I graduated, he was a senior and -- in high school and Debbie was in eighth grade. Eighth or ninth grade.

Q: And did you go ahead and get a teaching job, or --

A: No, I worked in the same place. I stayed in the same place. See, those years --

Q: Which was?

A: Germantown Jewish Center. And I started there the preschool, practically. Nothing. And I start one here. I came -- there, it was only in the morning. The kids would go from nine to 12 and then I saw that there was a need for parents, already a lot of women, for single woman and I [indecipherable] because I was single, that they needed a place in the afternoon that the kids should stay, so I started in the afternoon, which was very unusual. And so I taught all day. I’d run home for an hour and then when I’d come -- and the --

they went there til four and then, at 6:30, I would go to teach Hebrew school, of congregation out of the jeshuona in Philadelphia. And so I held three job. In the summertime, I worked at Camp Rama. And I would leave the 24th, 25th of June and come back around Labor Day [indecipherable]

Q: In Israel?

A: No. In -- I went -- one summer I went to them in Israel. I worked at Rama -- Camp Rama for many years. Various camps, one in the Poconos, one in the Berkshires, so --

Q: And you taught when you were there?

A: No, there I was in charge of the guests who would come and the store -- the camp store. And odd jobs wherever they need me. They would say to me they can put me in anywhere.

Q: So your -- your whole -- not your whole life, but a -- a lot of your life was surrounded by Jewish community, then?

A: Yeah. And the Jewish community was very, very important, but to me, the general community is just as important. And I'm very involved in the general community. I got involved here that I was honored by the anti-Defamation League. They gave me the woman --

Q: In Central Park?

A: -- of the year. Yeah, you'll see all my plaques.

Q: Oh, how wonderful.

A: And they -- the Woman of the Year award, I got five years -- four years ago, the Woman of the Year award, I got five years a -- four years ago, in Santa Barbara. And I was shocked that they chose me, but they said I have been doing so many things. The Anne Frank I did was not a Jewish thing. I mean, it was Jewish in fact that was bought, but it wasn't really -- we bought with -- to educate childre -- school children from all over the county. I -- I tried to get involved wherever I feel I can be of any use.

Q: I'd love to see your awards, but I think that what would be nicest, if we, instead of going into another --

A: You don't want any this?

Q: I do. But I -- I think that your personal history is very, very important and of great interest.

A: Mm-hm, mm-hm, mm-hm.

Q: And that -- so, that -- that -- second husband, who I have seen around today --

A: Mm-hm.

Q: How did he come about?

A: Oh yeah. Well, I was almost, as I said, eight -- eight -- almost nine years, I was by myself and when Debbie went away to college, she went to -- first to Macallister and then she went to Maryland -- University of Maryland. And she was my youngest and oh, the day she left, everybody wanted to know, what are you going to do with your house? It was a big house. Was, you know, was a nice house, wasn't a big mansion, but it was a nice, comfortable, four bedroom house in Philadelphia. And I said, "Nothing." And I

remember when she went away, I got undressed and I pulled down all the shades and I was running around and I said, “I’m -- I can take care of just me, just me, just me.” You know, I was just -- this was so overwhelming, that you know, I had the kids and -- and the responsibility. I think that is -- with the divorce, I think that biggest difficulty is that the woman, especially the woman, is the father and the mother and everything. And then, the biggest thing that I would have would -- when they would come home, they would spend some time, a couple of hours, he would take them to a movie, or take them out to a tuna fish sandwich, to -- and they’d come home, say, “Oh that’s -- we had such a wonderful tuna fish salad,” and everything -- you know, sandwich, everything. It would kill me, you know, here.

Q: With Daddy?

A: Yeah, with Daddy. Here I am, you know, everything, you know -- who’s up and get you out to -- to go to school and everything else. And when I started preschool -- what? What is that?

Q: I-I’m just hearing something. Maybe -- I’m sorry --

A: Oh, oh. When -- In preschool, I used to tell the teachers -- when I -- there was a single parent, when they come to pick up the child, don’t tell them anything. The -- If the kid bit somebody, or that. I had such empathy for a single parent. It was just, you know. It was very difficult.

Q: Very difficult.

A: Very difficult.

Q: And, I think through all this, you probably have been very, very moved by the memory of your mother.

A: Yeah, and -- and when it happened to me, tha -- when my marriage broke, I still don't know to this day why it did it. I have absolutely no clue why it did it. Is it something --

Q: Let's get to him. Maybe he wants us to get to him.

A: Yeah. Well, I -- I -- I began -- then I began to start dating and I -- you know, what to me, I figure, oh, I'm going to -- if I do get, I'm going to get somebody who has money and I'm ga -- not going to have to -- three jobs to work on and everything else. And I remember meeting somebody and I was going out with that person, and that person was -- oh, was pretty well off. He had his own airplane and -- and was really, you know and I was scared to death to get on the plane and everything. But he always berated his wife and after going out with him for a month or so -- he liked me, and he was get -- I figure, no, anybody can berate like that -- see, I didn't and I felt that -- so I stopped dating and then I was so tired. I had no -- I didn't even want to go out anyplace, because used to come Friday night, that was my Sabbath. I would literally sleep. I -- I -- I just collapse from exhaustion, because I also work Sunday. So, it was like from -- you know, from Sunday at -- to Friday and then Sunday again, it start the whole thing. So, one day we decided to go to a -- I had another friend who was never married, an American born. An- And we were -- decided to go to the Jewish [indecipherable] center. And they had -- but women -- men and women, how is it, you know, your first date when you go out after a divorce or something and -- and there was just a discussion, you know, how is it to be

single and that kind of thing. And then, after it was over, they had some Israeli dancing and he was there. He asked her -- Rebecca and me out for a drink. I had -- to a bar and I've never been in bar in my life. And I said, "Yeah, we'll go, we'll take." And we went and the wait -- come in, the waitress said, I remember, on City Line Avenue, the waitress said, "Well, you got 15 minutes to get a drink, cause we are closing." So, we ordered the drink and then he said, "Can I have your telephone numbers?" And Rebecca said, "Oh, he's going to call you." And I said, "No, he's going to call you." And then he called me and we went out and th-that's -- that's history and then we met -- I remember he took me to -- it's -- it's playing now, oh well. [doorbell] Oops.

Q: All right, now that was flowers that were delivered for -- well, you spoke where?

A: Laguna Blanca, it's a private school here.

Q: And what did you speak about?

A: I go out speaking about what happened to me and they saw the film that was made.

Q: The name of the film?

A: The na -- it's called, "Sack for Alt", in Danish it means, "Thank You for Everything." And they saw that film before and they were the only ones that had seen it, except for when it played at the Labarro Theater. Everybody is -- wants me to show it to them, but it's now going into film festivals and maybe to the Academy Awards. It's an incredible film. I wish you have time. Maybe when your uncle comes back, you could see it.

Q: I would love to, if we can.

A: Really?

Q: If we can.

A: If you -- If you can. So they -- I s -- I spoke Thursday and I spoke about what happened, but mostly about the Civil Rights Movement. And it was very appropriate, so that's the flower, thanking me.

Q: And I -- it's a beautiful thanks, is-isn't it? And -- Since this list is -- is activating a lot of your thoughts and your experiences, why don't you just go down it and --

A: Well --

Q: -- say what-whatever comes to your mind.

A: The Vietnam War, and I remem -- that was very difficult for me. The most difficult part was my son didn't have a high number and I was worried -- terribly worried about -- of him being drafted. E -- E -- I had sleepless nights about it. My brother and my sister live in Canada and you know there were a lot of people who went to Canada. And I was literally, if it didn't stopped, I was thinking of moving back to Canada, cause I just could not deal with that. And the scary part of the -- became even worse is when the Kent State -- I remember when the Kent State, with the shootings at Kent State, it was devastated. It was very scary time. The new left movement, I didn't have that much of -- didn't -- busy. The sexual revolution is -- the drugs and so forth. I think it was scary for me, the drug situation, because here I was with two teenagers and I remember the kids used to love to come to my house, his friends. And my son is -- played basketball and he was on the varsity team, so all the kids would come. And rather than him going down to north Philadelphia in a very not good neighborhood, we had a basketball court put in and he

would play at home. And I remember baking pies so they would all come in. And I'll never forget this instance. I was running for my second job, teaching at congregation B'nai Brith. [indecipherable] congregation B'nai Brith, [indecipherable] on congregation in Philadelphia. And my daughter and my son, they were home and then there were like four of Black kids who were playing basketball with him, who were on -- from Central High School. And I remember this friend of mine happened to come and drop off her daughter. And she said, "Are you kidding, you're going out and you're leaving four Black kids with Michael and Debbie?" And I said, "Why not?" She would not leave her daughter and that's why I remember I was devastated. Here is -- I trust my kids, in my own home. They were -- they are all the time in my house, I trusted them and here is -- she's trying to tell me that I'm doing something wrong. And nothing happened. My kids grew up in a very well integrated neighborhood of west Mount Airy. And I think they are better off, because they are better human beings today. They are very involved in their own communities, wherever they live and I'm grateful that I gave them that kind of home to live in. So, the drug scene was very scared for me and I would say to them, "If you are caught and smoking marijuana," -- which was that time, marijuana, "and you're arrested, there's no way I'm going to bail you out. I work hard enough just to make you regular, decent human beings and if it's against the law, then you shouldn't do it." I knew nothing about it and so forth. And so that's -- that was it, you know, but thank God, my kids, I don't know if they ever smoked marijuana or not, but I -- they've never been in trouble with the law, thank God. The feminist movement I had a hard time understanding. I

couldn't deal with, but I felt that because I was a single mother, I felt I should get equal pay for what I did, for that I worked hard for it. I remember the assassination of Medgar Evers and I was devastated. How it could happen them, because he was by then, a real name in every community. And John F. Kennedy, I -- I felt that we will never know what he -- kind of president he would have been, died too young and too violent. And Martin Luther King, he was -- he became my children's hero.

Q: Can you remember --

A: Somebody to look for -- I remember Robert Kennedy when he was shot. The fact that you could see that on television, it was just incredible.

Q: Can you remember your feelings when King was assassinated? I think I better go to the next side.

End of Tape Three, Side A

Beginning Tape Three, Side B

Q: I just want to say, this is Judith Meisel, tape three, side B.

A: I remember it was on a Saturday when his funeral -- when ro -- when John Kennedy's funeral and it was a big blizzard and we were all in watching the funeral, I can so vividly remember. And I remember when Robert Kenne -- I mean, those are all memories that I have, but Martin Luther King was somebody larger in life to me. Larger in life, that they could take him and that he went to a place to get better pay for ga -- people who were taking out garbage -- and that he was killed like that. I thought Truman -- I loved Truman. I liked Eisenhower.

Q: Why did you love Truman?

A: Well, Truman was the United States. When I came here, he was the figure. He was the president in United States. I was lucky to be here. It was like we used to say in -- in Yiddish, a golden immadina. Or, to accept the gold you didn't see, this means th-the -- the grounds are paved with gold. It wasn't, but it didn't mean that, it meaned that I was free, there was freedom and -- and that he was a -- spoke to the common man. Reagan, when he went to visit the gravesites of the German soldiers in Bittburg, I was at the preschool and I got a call from Jerry Rankin, who was the editor of the Santa Barbara News Press, if I could say something as a Holocaust survivor, if I would say to Reagan. And the caption was, "What does --" Reagan lived far away from here, but it still said, "What does --" No, the caption was, "What does Reagan's neighbor thinks of him going to Bittburg". And I had plenty to say, and to me, why visit the perpetrators who killed -- the killers -- and not visit American soldiers who were killed saving the people? I couldn't understand him. It just beyond me. It was just way beyond me that he could do such a thing.

Q: Did you ever get an answer why he visited?

A: No, no. But I -- I remember writing it to -- to him and to congressman and -- but I remember I was so hurt. I felt it a personal hurt that here is a president of the United States, going to commemoration and going to Bittburg to honor the -- the soldiers -- to lay a wreath on the soldiers, well in the Americans he didn't. And that was just too -- too difficult for me. I thought when the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum was

established, I thought that was the greatest thing that happened. I thought, that has nothing to do because Jewish. That here is a museum, a federal museum that speaks to the world what racism and bigotry does when it's allowed to flourish, and man's inhumanity to man. And it's still happening and I hope as many -- my -- what'd I say -- my wish one day, is that it take all the leaders of the world -- all the leaders of the world and bring them in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and just show them and talk to them what happened and what's still happening in their countries. It is still happening, except it is far away. And, I was very proud this year of my -- my youngest daughter, when the Honduras flood, she called the Honduran embassy and she wanted to know what can she do. I always used to tell my children, "Don't tell me what can I do, I'm only one person." One person can do a lot. So she said, "Oh, you'll be proud of me." So I said, "Well, what'd you do?" She says, "I called up the Honduras library, and I -- embassy, and I said, Well, how -- what can I do to help?" And they said, "Well, we need diapers, we need aspirin and formula." And she says, "Oh, I can do that, how do I ship it?" They said, "Well, if you have it in three days, we'll ship it for you." She said, in no time at all, she had an auditorium full of things. What she did is she Xeroxed -- put a note out in all the schools to bring. People really want to help. They don't know how to do it, we have to empower them to help. Because I think, basically, like Anne Frank said, basically people are good at heart. They are. It just -- we have to just get out the goodness in them.

Q: Excuse me. I -- I want to use this as a -- since you were talking about your daughter, is this the same daughter who's the artist?

A: No.

Q: This is another daughter?

A: No, she is my youngest.

Q: Could you say again about the daughter who's an artist and tell a little bit about what she's doing --

A: Well, ma --

Q: -- [indecipherable] it relates to you.

A: Yeah. My daughter started doing --

Q: Which daughter is this?

A: In Mendocino, Mina. She's the oldest and she's an artist and we always knew she was going to be an artist from the time she was a -- she was a toddler. She always liked to draw and do things and put things together, collages and all kinds. She is -- does a multimedia. She started saying stories that my mother told me and -- I'll have to show you, and stories that my mother told me about. And she writes it about each painting that she did, or each collage. Like sh -- about Hava. She tells the story about Hava and she has a little shoe in the hand. She has one painting with shoes. She -- with real shoes. She always used to collect shoes, I said, "What do you need the shoes?" She said, "You'll see." And it's been going around to various schools all over the country, as long as they pay for the shipping and so forth and she does a wonderful -- she -- she does the

narration, she has a -- what do you call it? She narrates -- you know, she does the talk about what she does with the exhibit is, she's compared my mother to me and then from me to her and from her to her two daughters. And it's a beautiful, beautiful, beautiful exhibit. It's really -- it -- it's -- it's -- it been -- wherever it's been, it's been very well received. It's been twice already to Santa Barbara. And -- So it's opening up on February seventh, in -- with a reception and her being there, at Abington Friends, in Philadelphia.

Q: It's a school?

A: School. It's a Quaker school. And then it's going to another Quaker school, at the Sidwell school or Sidewell. I don't know, Sidwell, in Washington, DC. And that's opening up, I think, for April fifth. So, I'm very, very proud of my kids, of all my kids. And the film is -- is incredible what they did with the film. They got the si -- not only that, we have Congressman Copps, who lived here. I used to come to speak to his classes at UCSB before he became a congressman. You may have heard about him. Most incredible man and he had the largest class, the largest auditorium on the university, 875 students. And I would come twice to speak. And he was so wonderful to me, he -- I had -- came down with breast cancer and the day after I was operated, he called me and he gave me the schedule when I'm going to be doing it. I said, "Oh, Dr. Copps," I says, "I can't even walk across the --" "You'll be here," and sure enough. So unfortunately, he became [indecipherable] he -- one -- first one time and he lost, the second time he won. Two years into his term, at Dallas Airport, he had a heart attack and he died. So his wife runned for his ticket and she got in and this, now -- she got in on her own, Lois Copps.

And he speaks about me in the film. So they -- they filmed him like a couple of weeks before he died, the filmmakers. It's just a -- so she wants this film. This is her wish, to show it at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and invite the congress to see it, because he was really loved. He was an incredible man.

Q: This is the same film you've discussed before?

A: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

Q: Thank you --

A: Yeah.

Q: In Danish.

A: Yeah.

Q: And the filmmakers are?

A: Laura Bialis, Sara Levy and Broderick Fox. But Laura Bialis is really -- she raised the money, she did everything. And now she's entering it into film festivals and it -- there is going to be an opening, I think, in LA, I don't know, in February, Stamford alumnis are going to have it. But, it's entered now into various film festivals and because it's entered in film festivals, you can't give it out too much, because there's a film festival here and they are not sure they are going to take it, because it's already played. It's just -- so, for her, she's -- she's holding onto it for dear life and every day we get calls, please can we see it. Because people couldn't get tickets. It was sold out in one week.

Q: How does that make you feel?

A: Makes me feel -- I don't want to say it makes me feel good, it makes me help to fulfill my mission of tell the story, that I promised. We all -- especially the last two weeks. We promised each other that if we survived, we wouldn't forget each other, that we will remember each other. That we will tell the world what happened. To see that this doesn't happen again. And it's still happening and it -- it's -- it's very -- I'm very devastated when I read what's happening in Algeria, how many people daily get slaughtered. And it's -- a lot of it has to do with just religious hatred now.

Q: When you say we tell each other, do you mean your sister or do you mean something more general?

A: That -- That -- When we -- that -- the people used to say that we have to tell -- whoever survives has to tell the world what happened.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And because they are not here, I have -- I feel my mission is -- and I'm -- I'm going to be 70 when the paintings open -- it's so happen it's opening up -- is -- how long do I have --

Q: [indecipherable] opening on your birthday?

A: That's when the fil -- the paintings are opening, Mina's art painting.

Q: I-In Philadelphia?

A: Philadelphia.

Q: How wonderful. And that's [indecipherable]

A: On February seventh.

Q: Seventh.

A: So you know, it's all -- to me, I want -- before I go out of this world, I want to leave this world a better world. I can't say about the world, but my community and where I live. And it's -- and through my children, and hopefully my grandchildren, that this doesn't happen, doesn't occur. That we can live side by side and respect the differences and because we're all made in the same image of God.

Q: Yeah, that's interesting that there's so much religious hatred right now --

A: Oh.

Q: -- i-in -- in this country, too.

A: It's all over.

Q: In this country.

A: It -- It really is, and it scares me. The fundamentalist groups are scaring me.

Q: You know what scares me?

A: Because their tunnel vision, they can only see thems -- what they are -- is -- they don't care about anybody el -- and what is happening with the abortionist group -- with the anti-abortionists, is -- is the right to life or is -- they only see from conception to birth. Afterwards, they don't care what happens to them. They don't. I mean, there's so many -- so much suffering and hunger and -- and squalor people leave.

Q: And yet, you say you weren't connected with the Feminist movement, but that's very much about women's rights.

A: Well, I -- yeah, in that sense, I am. I'm not the one if I -- to, you know, to have -- to be -- in the beginning -- I think the -- the Feminist movement got such a bum rap is that they didn't want men to open up doors, you know, and this kind nitty gritty. I -- I don't mind if man opens up the doors or, you know, or -- or picks -- or takes my bundle and -- wh -- I don't need it. To me, the most important thing is that we get equal pay and that we have a right to our own body. It's very important. And I think that the biggest difficult because of that is that there are not -- because I am breast cancer and thank God I'm in remission is that there is so little studies done about women, there are more about men, because it's a man's world. And I think we're now realizing it, how little it's been studied about women illnesses. It's been more about men. And that -- for that I -- I am, if -- if you call it Feminist, I don't know, I think it's just the di-direction I want to go, this country to equality.

Q: Equal rights.

A: Equal rights under the law and -- and -- okay. Oh, '48, that was -- I can tell you, I wasn't in Denmark. I'll never forget when the state of Israel was created. It was just incredible that we had a state. In 1947, Israel was partitioned by the UN, to live side by side, that's what right now is going on, but they want to live side by side. 21 nations, surrounding Arab nation declared war on Israel and Israel was isolated and fought that war and it so ironically, now we are -- right now, we are fighting -- they want the same thing what happened. But look what happened. The Arab nation -- the League of Arab Nations, said to all the Arabs, "Flee. Leave Israel and go fight against Israel." And Israel

said, Ben-Gurion said, “Stay, you will live side by side with us.” But they didn’t. So now, it’s happening, the Intifada -- I spoke to -- when I was in Israel, to a couple of young people, soldiers. The worst part is to be sent into the area, to the occupied area, because children, they are fighting and children throw stones and stones kill. So it’s not a real war, but it’s there and I think that the only way that it’s going to be -- peace will come, is if Yasser Arafat outlaws Hamas and all the rhetoric of hatred and then Israel does the same thing of hatred against, but -- but Israel don’t go and blow buses up with children. They may use harsh words, but they don’t blow up buses with children -- with innocent children. Hamas and the Palestinians have -- I don’t [indecipherable] say the Palestinians, they’ve been blowing up -- how do you negotiate peace with a suicide bomber? You can’t. You can -- you can do it with a leader, but a suicide bomber only knows one thing. He’s going to kill themselves, because he’s going to go to heaven and blows up, yeah. It’s wrong for Israel to blow up houses, too, if they find that they have been members of Hamas or something. It’s wrong in both side. But still, I think that the most difficult thing that I think is happening is, that if -- that nothing is going to happen until this hatred -- you don’t have to love each other, but you have to be able to tolerate each other, to live side by side. But if you’re going to have nothing but hatred, it’s not going to happen. I don’t know, what do you think?

Q: Now, we’ve taken a break, but I -- I just happened to mention to you about the child -- you told me about a child survivor’s group, are you --

A: Yeah, there is an international children -- child survivor's group. For years, I -- when I would say to my sister, you know, this and this, she says, "No, it didn't happen." I said, "What do you mean it didn't happen?" Then she would say, "How do you remember, you were only a child." And it used to bother me all the time, she would come out with that. And, so when I heard that there was a child survivor's group, the one -- and it -- from all the places, it was one near here, in Oxnard, we went and the energy of those people was incredible. Is somebody here? Fred?

Q: Yeah, he's there.

A: Oh. It was incredible. Most of them, physicians, attorneys, you know, higher education. The most wonderful group of people. So I've been going this wee -- past -- and this -- in September I went to Washington, they had a conference. The next one is in Prague. Oh, I would -- never been to -- I've always want to go to Prague. So, they have a region -- Hm?

Q: [indecipherable] center, their -- their headquarters?

A: Well, it's very interesting, they just broke off in two groups, so the -- the santa -- the -- there's none in Santa Barbara, there's one in LA and I don't really go there. I tell you, to go into LA with the traffic, I hate that traffic.

Q: What is the name? I want to tell --

A: It's Child Survivors inter -- Fred?

A2: Yeah?

A: The -- The child survivor's group, what is it called, the real name? What's the -- I me --

Q: I'm sorry, you what?

A: I didn't talk to -- tell you, I went back in '93 with a group called the s -- the Crusaders. They're owned by Buena Vista Film, which is owned by DisneyWorld. They took me back to Stutthof concentration camp for the first time. They want it to come out when Schindler's List was showing. They wanted to show that they were at the concentration camps and by a fluke -- how -- it's a long story how they got to me, and they took me and my grandson and my son back. And they made three 10 minute tape. They took 18 two hour tapes and they only edited out three. And the rest of it they shelved, I never got it. But this -- the documentary that I talk about, that was done. That's a whole documentary. So I have the 10 minutes, if you want. But this is what I got from the B'nai Brith -- from the Anti-Defamation League. You know anything about the Anti-Defamation League?

Q: Yes, I do a little bit.

A: Yeah.

Q: Could you tell us what the -- what the --

A: Well, the anti --

Q: -- what the award is?

A: The award is for -- they gave me as the Outstanding Woman of the Year, Distinguished Community Service award.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: It all went with it and then they made me a local hero in ‘95, but I’m always doing something.

Q: And what is this?

A: This is the -- that whole weekend, when they honored me for that, the county, I got -- oh, this I got an honor for the county for what I do for the county and -- and different things.

Q: And over here too, Santa Barbara --

A: Yeah.

Q: That’s wonderful.

A: I don’t know, I keep getting every once in awhile. But my grandchildren I should have mentioned, yeah. I have six wonderful grandchildren. The seventh is my husband’s granddaughter. And I have, it’s Aaron and Benjamin and Ilana and Yaelle and Seth and Jennifer. And I wish they were -- lived here. I don’t get to see them that often, but they are all wonderful. And they know my story.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Oh, do they know my story. Because I speak to their schools when I go there and yeah, they know.

Q: So things are more open than they were --

A: Oh yeah --

Q: -- in your children’s generation?

A: -- oh yeah, yeah.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Yeah.

Q: That's a very [indecipherable]

A: It's different with grandchildren and that. They are like your bank account, you know, your dividends, you know. They say the reason grandchildren and grandparent get along so beautiful is because they have one -- a common enemy, the parent.

Q: That's cute.

A: But we're very close, they're wonderful. And I going to go and get to see them on my birthday, they're all coming in.

Q: Oh, that's wonderful.

A: I hope the weather [indecipherable] does something nice and just --

Q: Did you say that? I mean, I asked [indecipherable]

A: Well, I keep a kosher home. I've always kept a kosher home. I eat out only fish when I go out. I -- But my house is strictly kosher. I live -- unfortunately in Santa Barbara where I live, it does not have any kosher butcher. I have to go to Los Angeles to get my -- my chicken and we don't eat meat much, but my chicken and whatever kosher things I have. When I first came here to Santa Barbara they had absolutely nothing and I went to Vons, who is our supermarket and this and I started getting in -- they started getting in some frozen chickens and some other products and now they have quite a bit. Also bagels. There were only one bagel place, it was horrible bagel. Now, we have so many bagel places. But we -- I am so lucky that I live here in Santa Barbara, it's paradise, it's

wonderful. And I am -- I am on eight boards. I am on the hello board. I am -- was asked to be trustee on the most wonderful, wonderful things -- Santa Barbara Jewish Community Foundation, where we help people -- Jews. And we help people, we send kids to camps, various camps of their choice. And I'm sort of their idea person, but [indecipherable] to. And I'm program chairman for Haddassah and let me see, what else? Oh, I don't know, I'm just in -- in the community, I'm very involved and my big things is that I do go out and speak a lot and it takes a lot out of me. And I'm -- built the preschool here with -- started with six children. When I left and retired, there were 60 children on the waiting list. So, they -- hopefully they're going to build and add a bigger place so they have more room. And I'm very, very involved.

Q: That's wonderful.

A: Yeah.

Q: I know there are lots of other thoughts you have --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- but you're just going to be keeping --

A: After you leave I'll remember I didn't say that.

Q: Is it painful, do you think, to tell your story, or telling the story more of a -- you say healing will never be complete, but is it --

A: I think the story is -- helps me in a sense that I can get the message out and that I feel that maybe there will be somebody listening. The biggest thing I had last year, was I spoke at a large Catholic high school, in one of the largest here, real, real big one. And it

was 11th graders. And I was going out to my car in the parking lot and this young man, he looked like a man, you know, the 11th grade, tall guy. He said, “Mrs. Meisel, I want really to thank you for coming to my school. I was going to join a group -- I don’t know, they hate Latinos, they hate Jews, they hate Blacks and they call themselves skinheads, I don’t know if they are skinheads, but after I heard you today, I’m not going to join.” And if I saved one life, I’ve saved the world. And that’s -- to me, is very important. So those are the treasures that I treasure when I go out. Be-Believe me, it’s not easy. So -- and the deniers are out there, saying that this never happened and you can’t debate them, cause it’s not debatable. It’s the same people who would say that there was never slavery here in this country and it’s the same people who hate everyone, it’s just full of hatred.

End of Tape Three, Side B

Conclusion of Interview