# Interview with Bella Tovey

## June 10, 1996

Question: Why don't we -- I just need to get an outline of your voice.

Answer: Okay. My name is Bella Tovey, and I live in Silver Spring, Maryland. And what else do you want to know right now?

Q: I'm going to slate this tape by saying my name is Nina Ellis, and I'm interviewing Bella Tovey. Today is Monday, June 10th, 1996. and we are at her home in Silver Spring -- Silver Spring, right, Maryland. I saw your video interview, and you talked a little bit about your memories of your liberation. And you were quite ill at that time, so a lot of it, I guess, is hard to remember. But could you maybe start there with some of the events around that time that are most outstanding to you? And how you remember that general period of time?

A: Well, I remember -- okay, that's okay. I remember being liberated by the British. That is, I don't remember it, but I was told later that I was liberated by the British. Q: What do you remember? Do you know where you were that day and what your condition was?

A: Well, I was in Bergen-Belsen in a barrack in a -- I was one of the lucky ones at that point, because I had a -- I wouldn't call it a bed. Stop it for a second. I can't think of the name -- I had a bunk which I shared with another girl because what happened to me in Bergen-Belsen, and I already -- I did say that, but maybe it need clarifying. That about a month before liberation, I was lucky enough to have been taken out of the barrack, of the death barrack that they called, where I was on the floor with many other women. And I was taken out of the barrack, thanks to my girlfriend, Frieda, about whom I also talked a lot. Who managed to get me out of that barrack into a working barrack, and it was there that I shared a bunk with another girl. And it was from that barrack that I went to work, but for a very short time. Actually, I had had -- by that time, I had had typhus, and when I came to this second barrack where I was supposed to go to work, I came down with typhoid. So that I basically worked for a very short time. And then no sooner did I get of this typhoid, I came down with what they called paratyphoid. It must have been a repetition of that high fever. And it was then that I -- as I was still sick with typhoid, I had fever and I don't remember much happening to me, that I was liberated. I do remember that my girlfriend, Frieda, came. She was very concerned about me. Things were obviously going on in Bergen-Belsen. The British must have been very close. Some of the SS men were trying to escape. Things were unsettled in the camp. I don't know it, but I remember being told. But my girlfriend, Frieda, who was in a different part of Bergen-Belsen because she worked as a runner for a

hospital, worried about me. She knew something was wrong. She told me later she sensed that something was really wrong. So she came to see me, and I was on the bunk. I was feverish, I had not eaten, and I think I said that for certain more than a week. And I don't think I had anything to drink for days on end. When people tell you that you can't live without food and drink, well, I managed. And I wasn't the only one in camp. But anyway, she did come, I think she brought me some water. I think she managed to bring me -- she says she brought me some aspirin. I don't remember. And she sat with me through the night, and, in fact, I do remember something else. As she came to my part of the camp, I think they were trying to stop her. Because somebody did -- she was shot, somebody hurt her. And I remember that the only thing I remember is seeing Frieda and seeing blood. I saw a lot of blood. She told me later that it wasn't that she was bleeding so profusely, she was hurt in her arm. It was a very -- what is it? It was not a very severe wound. I think the bullet must have just scraped her skin or something. And she had enough presence she just, you know, put something around her arm, but it must have been red. I saw her bleeding, and this I remember. I also remember people shouting that we are liberated. I also remember that somebody tried to give me something to eat, and I couldn't eat. And I know now, I knew later, too, that I was very lucky that I couldn't eat. Because what happened is that British soldiers felt so sorry for the inmates that they gave them their rations, and most of the inmates in Bergen-Belsen were not able to handle that kind of food. And -- go ahead.

Q: Let me ask you to go back just a little bit. Do you remember very much about that working barracks before you got sick? Can you tell me something about who was in there, what it looked like, what your average day was like right before you got sick? Because it was about a month that you were in there altogether, right?

A: Oh, sure. I remember the barrack. The barrack was a long barrack. There were bunks on both sides. If you ever saw any of the pictures, it was the normal kind of a thing. You walked in and the bunks were on both sides, and it was like a throughway. Like a corridor in the middle. The bunks were double. You know, one on top of the other. Very small, crowded. Two women, two of us sharing a bunk. We didn't have too much room. If I had to turn around, my partner had to turn around. You know, we had to be always aligned. So it was -- but it was heaven in comparison to the barrack from which I came where we were on the floor and just some straw. It was just terrible. Of course, the barrack was also infested with lice, even the one I was in. Because . . .

Q: Did you have any bedclothes?

A: We had a -- oh, yes, we did. We had a straw mattress, and we had -- everybody had like a blanket. I remember we had a blanket. I remember it was dark gray. I don't remember exactly -- certainly no pillows, no sheets. But, as I said, this was heaven. Now, I went -- most of the people who were in this barrack went to work.

And the work that I was taken to or was sent to was to sort clothing in a warehouse. And, of course, the clothing was the clothing that they had managed to bring from the other camps. From Auschwitz mostly, because a lot of inmates in Bergen-Belsen had come from Auschwitz. And this was mostly clothing that belonged to Jewish people or other people that were taken to concentration camps. And we had to sort things, socks and stockings and underwear. All of it, by the time we got it, I think it was already washed. And there was an SS man in charge. Every morning we had to get up, I do remember we had to get at about 5 o'clock. Appell was at 5:30. I was given -- when I came to this barrack, I was given a uniform, a famous gray and blue striped. Basically, what women were given. It's like a dress, not a jacket. Men wore pants -- slacks and jackets, and we wore like long dress. And underneath, since I was working in the warehouse, I was permitted the first day when I came, because I probably had rags by the time I got to this camp. But I was permitted to take from the warehouse a pair panties, I suppose maybe some stockings, maybe slacks. I don't remember that. And it was winter. A blouse and a sweater. I didn't have a bra, I didn't any bra. I was just as flat as anything. I was very skinny already. The way one could survive in Bergen-Belsen when one worked, and that's why the death rate on this working camps was a little lower, was that you could steal something and exchange it. So when I finally got to this working place where that first day that I got my clothing, when I came home -- home meaning to the barrack -- I would, say, take off my sweater. And the next day, I would just put on my blouse and that uniform, and that sweater stayed on my bunk, let's say. Or I sold it that evening for a couple pieces of bread maybe or a bowl of soup. Then the next day, I would go to work, and when I was working, there was always a chance you could sneak in somewhere and get a pair of -- get another sweater and put it on and then I had something. Unfortunately, we had a kapo. A kapo is a Jewish woman. Actually, she was probably just a couple of years older than I. She was very pretty. She was not a _____ like I was. I was very skinny, I looked like -- I was already at that point a walking skeleton, and I think she disliked me. She disliked all of us who looked so terribly bad, and I thought one day of trying to read. I'm sure something was written about Jewish women -- of course, she was a bitch. But why she was so particularly mean to me and those of us who looked so bad would probably make a good case study for a psychologist. Was it that she saw in me what could happen to her? Probably. There was another reason why she disliked me, and that was my own fault. The SS man who was in charge of our group sent her to get some books from a little -- there was a little office where he had some books. He needed something. Well, she was I think illiterate, or if she was not illiterate -- maybe she was not illiterate. But she certainly did not read and write German. I don't know how good her Polish was. I didn't speak to her much. She was born in Poland, she came from a little town. She was very pretty. So he sent her to get the book, and she brought the wrong book because she didn't know how to read. But she didn't have the courage to tell him, "I don't read German." So he turned around and looked at me, and he said, "This

little one looks smart. Why don't you go and get me the book?" And I made a horrible mistake, and brought him the right book. And she never forgave me for that, so as a result, what she did is the following day when we came on appell, she made me lift up my uniform to check what I missing. And when she saw that I didn't have a blouse on, that I only had the sweater which is what maybe I was hoping to steal so I could have a bowl of soup. Right away, whatever I sold and whatever I got for it I shared with my girlfriend, Frieda, always. So she said -- she started beating on me, of course, and she said, "You're not going to take anything back with you." Even though this was a kind of a gentleman's agreement, everybody did it. She did it, too. And so my career in that sense ended. I had an interesting thing that happened because of it. I'm taking you to a different part. The girl with whom I shared that bunk was a cousin of Frieda's friend in the hospital. When Frieda was taken out from that barrack, from that death barrack, very -- originally, if you heard my story, you know that someone whose life was saved my Frieda's sister took her out of that place. And she first didn't want to go, but she went because, of course -- that same, her name was Salka Longett (ph), the same woman who took Frieda out of the death barrack took out another girl by the name of -- her name was Ruth, and I don't remember her other name now. And Ruth was her girlfriend, so she also saved Ruth. I mean -- I don't mean save, but took her out that horrible barrack where the death rate was the highest. So when Frieda was able to get me to this working barrack, that friend of hers, Ruth, with whom she became friendly now because they were working together in that hospital, managed to get her cousin. And that cousin's name was -- I don't remember anymore, Franka (ph), Francis. She was a very placid, not very bright girl, and I think she was just not a very nice person. But maybe, maybe just not to me, I don't know. She fared much better with the kapo. First of all, she was not that skinny. As I said, I think she was not that bright. And she was managing to -- and she didn't get sick as I did shortly after that. But whatever it was, but she knew that all of us were bringing things. She didn't know that I was being picked on by the kapo, or she didn't pay attention. What she did do is that after the war, after I was already out of the hospital and now I'm going ahead of it. I didn't see my friend, Frieda. I fully expected her to come and see me, and she didn't. She came to the hospital once, maybe. I don't remember. But just the relationship was not what it was, and so I went -- when I was already better, I went to see my girlfriend, Frieda. And she was cold to me, she wasn't very pleasant. I don't know that I ever told anybody that, but I just remembered. So I said, "Frieda" -- we went out for a walk. It was already in the DP camp. And I said to her, "Frieda, what's going on? Why are you so uncaring? Is something wrong?" And she got very angry. She got very upset, and she said that Francis, the other girl, told her that I did not share with her everything that I was able to get -- you know, that I was getting, bringing some stuff and I was probably selling it and getting maybe some bread. And I want you to know that Frieda was not living in heaven there. I mean she was working in that hospital, but she was hungry from -- I mean there was just no question that Bergen-Belsen was

a horrible place, even if you work. And she said that she was very hurt when she heard Francis tell her that I did not share, because this was -- you know, we were like sisters. This was an agreement that -- we didn't write anything to each other, but this was a given. And she said to me that that's what Francis told her, that I did not -- that I basically cheated on Frieda. And I got terribly upset, I remember I cried. We had a long talk, and we made up. She believed me. I'm grateful to this day we are still friends. In fact, I just saw her in Israel again. But so I had this terrible experience, but it was this Francis with whom I shared, that bum. And it was this Francis who I remember, because she did not get sick as I did, when I was so sick toward the end of my stay in Bergen-Belsen that she just was just a very uncaring person, at least as far as I was concerned. So . . .

Q: The close relationship that you had with Frieda was clearly very important to you. Was that -- did other women have close relationships like that?

A: That was very important to many of us. Very often a relationship such as this was was there between, let's say, two sisters. If some of them were lucky and they had a mother and daughter, but usually two sisters, two cousins. Interestingly enough, not always did the two sisters get along. It was not always, but many of us did form these kind of relationships, and it was extremely important for all kinds of reasons. I mean not just -- first of all, it was important to survival. When we were on the death march, when Frieda couldn't walk, I dragged her. And when she didn't want to get up, I pushed her. Or I couldn't -- and in Bergen-Belsen, if it wouldn't be for Frieda, I probably wouldn't be sitting here and talking to you. There's no question that she saved my life, and I don't think this was true just for me. We had a lot of us formed these kind of relationships. I know that Henry, my husband, had a kind of -- actually, he was with a group, but he had one friend who I didn't even know about, because Henry doesn't talk much. But we were in Sweden a couple of years ago, and we were staying with one of his friends with whom he was in Auschwitz and in the camps. And his name is Jacob, and they were awfully nice to us. We had a tour, but then we stayed a couple of days with them. And Jacob told me for the first time, I didn't know, that he's alive because of Henry. That Henry literally carried him during the death march. Henry never told me that, but these things were happening to a lot of people. This was very important to have somebody.

Q: Once the British came and you started to get your health back, you stayed there because it became a DP camp; is that correct?

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: How did -- what was your life like there, let's just say, for like the first three months or so of that summer of 1945?

A: I'm trying to remember. I probably came out of the hospital -- I was liberated on April 15th. I have no dates to give you, I don't remember when I was -- they

probably took me out of the hospital as soon as I was not contagious. Because when I was taken to the hospital, I had paratyphus, but I was already lucid. I, for instance, remember being taken out, not fully, but I remember that they put us on a truck or something, since the sick people went first. But I do remember being sprayed with DDT, I always talk about it; it's such a wonderful feeling. And I remember that the air, when we're driven out of Bergen-Belsen, the air smelled so sweet once we left. But I don't remember how long I was in the hospital. It was not probably a very long time because I think that it was already in May I was already in a DP camp. In the DP camp, actually, you probably know about it, was formed in a place called Bergen, not Bergen-Belsen. Bergen had -- these were army, this was an army camp. And what the British did, is that they took over the German Army camp, and they turned it into a DP camp. The Jews were not the only inmates there. They had Russians -- I don't think there were too many Poles there, meaning non-Jewish Polish people. There was Polish, but no Jewish. They had men and women, but they kept the barracks separately. So I was put in, I remember I was in Block -- if I'm not mistaken -- Block Number 73, which was one of the blocks where the women were put. And what they would do, we were given a room, the blocks was a two-story house. I don't remember how many rooms were on each floor, but I do remember that we had a bathroom and showers on one floor and then one -- so I have no idea how many. I don't remember. I do know that I was given a room on the second story, second floor with this Francis. Probably because I came out with her, and I very quickly moved out. I didn't want to share with her. There may have been somebody else in that room. And I met a very nice girl who was from Lódz, was in Bergen-Belsen, who was about five years older than I. And I actually came to borrow a frying pan from her, I wanted to do something. And we became very friendly, and she took me into the room where she shared with three other women. And so we were five of us in one room, and we also had bunks, but these bunks were now private. I had my own bunk, and there was one above me and there were five or six bunks. Because I think eventually, we took in another girl, and the room had -- so we had bunks. It was a good-sized room, and there was a table in the middle. And then there was a closet, I suppose, for clothing. People had clothing. And then, of course, if we wanted to wash and shower or use the bathroom, there was one big communal. I suppose this was the way soldiers lived in these barracks, so that's -- it was summer. We were coming out from a bad situation, we had food. It was not wonderful food, but we were -- I'm trying to remember. We probably were given all the bread we -- we had enough. I remember for the first time not being hungry, which means that we were given soups. I think ONR moved in rather quickly and provided, they had big kitchens. We had to go to the kitchens to pick up our -- I think, midday soup meal. In other words, we were given soup and probably bread. I don't remember anything more than that.

Q: What did you do during the first few weeks? What did you do? Were you strong enough to go out? Could you leave the camp?

A: I don't remember leaving the camp. I think what we did in the beginning, we were trying to -- I have all kinds of memories. Well, the first thing that we tried to do is to find out who was alive. I remember going to the -- there was already probably something, a community center formed. In fact, there was one. In fact, if you ever heard about Hadassah, Gross Rosen, her husband, she by that time was not married to him. She comes from my city. Her name was Hadassah Binka (ph), I think it was. She was a dentist. She survived, she was in Bergen-Belsen. I think her husband-to-be, much older than I. If not much older, certainly he was an adult before the war. So there must have been Jewish who formed some kind of a community, and maybe they were the ones who worked with ONR to start bringing things. So I remember going there probably, and trying to get lists of people who survived. My girlfriend, Esther, started volunteering in a hospital. I probably took care of things in the room. Maybe I was the one. Because everybody was doing something. I was probably the one who would go and get the food. I was probably still weaker than the other girls there because I had come out of the hospitals, and they were not -- they came directly from the camp. There were some, I have a memory of sitting on the grass. So I think that behind the barracks, there may have been some lawns. We probably would sit around and talk. We probably talked a lot about what happened to us and about our family and whether we're going to find anybody. That was in the beginning, I had a very difficult then with my girlfriend, Esther. I found Frieda, remember I told the story what happened. She was already at that point sharing a room with some other people with whom she was, so we never -- we did not get back together that way, because I had found Esther. But our relationship was great, that was the problem. I was -- my girlfriend, Esther, was very hopeful that her boyfriend survived. She came from Lódz, and she was in Auschwitz, she was an only child. But she went to Auschwitz with her parents. She was separated from her parents, but managed to go through Auschwitz with her boyfriend's mother and sister. They went to Auschwitz together, they ended up at some, I don't know what camp. I think they were in Mauthausen, but I don't remember, and they ended up in Bergen-Belsen. And my girlfriend, Esther, who as I told you was about five years older than I, that she mothered me because, you know, I was -- in 1945, I was born in 1946, so I was 19 right after the way, not quite 20. So my -- no, I wasn't even -- wait a minute. I was born in 1946, I was not even 19; I was 18, going on 19.

Q: Let me turn the tape over.

A: Yeah.

Q: This an interview with Bella Tovey. This is Tape 1, Side 2.

A: So what happened to her that she was in Auschwitz, talking about my girlfriend, Esther. With her boyfriend's mother, and she was practically engaged to be married to this guy. Having been five years older than I, she was -- I know that she graduated from Gymnasium before the war. She was born in 1921, yeah, so she

was about five years older. Anyway, she buried that future mother-in-law and her boyfriend's sister in Bergen-Belsen. In other words, they didn't survive, but she had hoped that her boyfriend survived. She had heard from somebody that he was in a camp with his brother. And then, must have been about a month after the liberation, maybe a little longer, but I remember that we were together in this room with the other girls. And somebody came with the news, must have been a friend of her husband -- of her boyfriend. In fact, it was a friend, I remember, who was his friend and told her that -- his name was Manik (ph), I don't what, the Polish name was Manik, whatever. That he was killed a day -- he died or something happened a day after liberation. Just a day after liberation. And my girlfriend, Esther, went into what I now know, into a deep depression. She refused to get out of bed, she stayed in the bunk. And I was very concerned for her. And I do remember that I would sit and I would sing to her for hours. The other girls, we all tried to take care of her, but I was the closest to her. And I would sit there for hours, and I would sing.

Q: What would you sing?

A: All kinds of songs. Polish songs, anything that I remembered. I came from a bit of singing family. My mom had a beautiful voice, and we always sang at home. So I sang whatever, you know. And I would try to make her eat, and friends came. In fact, Henry, my husband, who was not my friend then, but he knew Esther because he comes from the same city. And they were together in the ghetto in the same area. Anyway, I remember he would come and bring some goodies. Men always managed to bring some food. They managed to -- he probably already was getting out of the camp occasionally. But I don't remember how long it lasted, but I think that what I did then and I talked to her. And I would have a talk to help, and then -- originally, first, of course, she was talking about her boyfriend and Manik and what friends they had and how much she loved him and all that. But then I would -- today, I suppose I could say that maybe I acted as a therapist. But I didn't have any schooling, I just did something instinctively trying to help her. So I started to ask her to tell me about life before the war, what she did before the war. What school she went to, who were her friends. And then she told me that she had a boyfriend before the war, that she had a boyfriend, and they were kind of like childhood sweethearts. And in 1939 when the war broke out, her boyfriend, whose name was Lolak (ph), and his father -- his father was a professor at the Jewish Gymnasium, and they knew because they were intelligentsia that they're going to be -- they were in anger. They were told that the best thing for them is to get out. At that time it wasn't because he was Jewish, this was when the Germans were removing the Polish intelligentsia, and among them, of course, the educated Jews, too. So Lolak's father, his name was Seka and Lolak decided to run away to Russia. And they came to Esther, and they wanted her to go with them. Lolak, her boyfriend, was a year older than Esther, and he graduated from the Jewish Gymnasium in 1938. He was accepted at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, but he waited for

Esther, who was also accepted. And they were going to go in 1939 to Israel, but they missed it because war broke out. So they were really serious about each other, and he wanted her to go with him to Russia. But she was an only child and she couldn't leave her parents, so they parted company and he escaped to Russia with his father. When she started to talk to me about Lolak, I kept going back to Lolak. Whenever she would mention her boyfriend, then apparently life took its course. Lolak was in Russia, she was a very pretty girl. She met this guy in the ghetto, and they became close and had he survived, I'm sure she would have ended up with him. But I just wanted to know about all of that, and I made her talk to me about all that. And I was singing to her, and she was so -- I think that I probably spent probably the rest of that month, May, maybe into, I would say -- I would say that it took about maybe a month to get her back out of bed. And she did get out of bed, and she went back to work in the hospital where she had started before she decided that life is not worth anything. And I want to tell you that -- two things: Number one when she came back, when she came back to herself, somebody came and told me that my father is alive and was in Munich. I had . . .

Q: That's your . . .

A: My father. That somebody by the name of Aaron Nakabovich (ph), that's my father's name, is alive, and he should be somewhere in the camp near Munich. Now, I had not seen him on the list, but somebody said that they saw him on the list. I did find my sister at that point -- no, I didn't. I knew my sister had a chance to survive. No, I didn't know anything about my sister, but I put my name on the list. And when I heard that my father is alive, I decided to go and look for her. Now, this is an interesting story. Because what happened is that traveling through Germany at that point was impossible, but people did. We were looking for people, so the first thing that was necessary was to outfit me for the trip. And my girlfriend, Esther, who was not a wonderful thief, stole -- I didn't have shoes. I had like cloppers, it was summer. And I probably had some clothing that the ONR gave me, but where I'm going to go on a trip, I need something a little more decent than that. A warm jacket maybe. Evenings in Europe, even in the summer, are cold, colder. So she stole shoes, two shoes for me. But they were two left shoes, they were, you know, kind of like, you know, like shoes with lace. Good walking shoes. So she stole them, or organized them as we used to call it in the hospital. Somebody gave me, or maybe I had a pair of slacks. And then another girl -- the whole room got together and they outfitted me. So I got a pair of slacks and I got a nice shirt and a shirt to change, and a sweater or a jacket, and even a kerchief. And Esther was telling me how to, if I need to get off the train or I need to step down or something, since I'm wearing slacks, you can't tell that they are two left shoes. But if I always step out with my left foot, then nobody will notice that I have two left shoes. Managed very well with these two left shoes, so I went, but I didn't go. It had to be arranged. I didn't go alone. I went with, actually, Henry and a friend of his, because they had had pneumonia and they were being sent to a sanitorium just to

make sure that it doesn't develop into something else. So they were going to a place called sanitorium near Munich, and I wanted to go to Munich, so I went with them. And it was an experience, because you couldn't buy tickets. You had to -- some of Henry's friends literally carried us and threw us into a train that was leaving Hannover. I don't know how we got to Hannover. I know how we did. Henry had a friend who was already working for the British, he spoke English. So he managed to borrow a Jeep. So the three of us, with his friend -- his name was Alexander, took us to the train to the nearest city which was called Hannover. We went from -- and a couple of his friends must have gone along, because I remember being thrown into the train through the window, okay. And somehow the three of us got on the train, and the train went to the -- stopped at the American zone. Because, you see, we're in the British zone. So we had to get through to the American zone, but this was the beginning of the war. The soldiers were very sympathetic to us, they knew who we were. All we had to do is tell them that we are Jewish, DP, you know, people -- refugees. And the Americans let us through, we didn't have to -- later on that became much more difficult, but at that point, it was easy. I do want to tell you this, and this was very important. The American and the British, I don't know about the Russian soldiers were extremely nice to us in the beginning. When they shipped the American boys home, and they knew the young -- I don't know -- the young, they knew what Americans, I suppose, wanted to do and maybe the British did the same. They wanted to send the war-weary soldiers home, so they sent them home. And then when the new soldiers came in, those who didn't see the concentration camps, those who didn't see what we went through, they started fraternizing with the frauleins, with the German girls and they were much nastier to us. They were not so understanding, it was much harder. It was painful, too. So that's -- but, you know, I remember at that time being very angry about it, but I now understand why a little better. But anyway, I went through, we went through to the American zone. I got to Munich, turned out that this was not my father, of course. But when I came back, oh, I also want to tell you -- I also want to tell you that the train wasn't always -- then one of the trains that we took on that was really funny. We had -- Germany was devastated. The cities were bombed out. The train -- the trip that should have taken maybe, I don't know, 10 hours, we were traveling for a week. We would stop in places, we would stop in DP camps, some Jewish inmates would take us in. Then we would go farther. It was a whole undertaking. I remember being, for one stretch of the road, we hitched -- we managed to hitch-hike or something, I don't know. We managed to get on a train that carried oil or gas, because they were those round -- what do they call them? I suppose, trying to remember. They looked like a big, round barrel, and you couldn't -- there was no way, and the only thing it had like a little balcony in front for I suppose the conductors. And I remember Henry and I and his friend, we were sitting on one of those little, it looked like a little balcony.

Q: Was this the tank car?

A: It was like a tank, but it was like a round. And in front on both sides, it had these -- there is a name for it. It looked like a little balcony, but it wasn't a balcony, with the little railing. And I suppose you could stand on it, or if you were weary, as we were, we would sit down. And since it was night, we would hold onto the railing, and since it was night, we would doze off. Because I remember occasionally, the trains were moving very slowly, but nevertheless, I remember once in a while kind of feeling that I'm sliding down. I suppose when you're young, you don't worry about it, but it was not always the safest way of traveling but we did it. And, as I say, I did get to Munich, but by that time I had parted company from them. And, you know, I don't recall how I got back from Munich, because that was probably an experience; I was alone. But again, what was helpful is that if I met some Jewish -- I remember getting on a trolley in Munich, and I don't remember how I paid for the trolley. I think what probably happened is that somebody -- I said something, and somebody said to me, "Am _____ who?" It means -- it was kind of a Jewish password, which meant are you from my nation, are you from my people? Because there were a couple of guys who I think paid for me and asked me where I was going. And I was telling them that I was looking for -- I had an address, but it was already in the evening, so they suggested that they would take me to their house, to wherever they were staying in Munich. And it's funny, there were two guys; I didn't know them from Adam, and I said, "Okay." Well, I had no choice anyway. I could have, I suppose -- to stay on the street would have been ridiculous. They felt that it was too late for me to get to where I was going, so they took me with them. And I think they had some kind of an apartment, they must have gotten an apartment from a German family. And they gave me a room, and there was no other -- there were just the two of them. You know, when I think about it, they could have raped me. It doesn't matter, they actually they were very nice, they gave breakfast. And I think they even took me to where I needed to go, and then I found that my father was not alive. But I found a cousin, a distant cousin. Who was it? My mother's cousin, who was younger than my mom. Anyway, she survived, and she already had a boyfriend or something. Because I remember she gave me some money, she gave me some clothing. I don't remember. And she told me that my sister's alive. So that was great news, so I somehow managed to get back to Bergen, to the DP camp. And I'm trying to remember how I got back there, but I don't recall. I probably took the same, you know, chance with trains.

Q: Why did you go back?

A: To Bergen?

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Because that was my base. I had no intentions of not going -- if I had found my father -- I didn't leave for good. Even if I had found my father, I would have gone back. I would have gone back to see how Esther is; I had made friends. And they

gave me clothing, not all of it was mine. Besides, it was my base, but I went back, so I went back. Also, I knew that if my sister is alive . . .

Q: Did you never think about not going back?

A: From where?

Q: From Munich?

A: Munich was also in Germany.

Q: Yeah.

A: And who wanted to be in Munich? I didn't have anybody in Munich. There was no reason for me to stay there. That cousin, maybe she even offered to keep me, I wouldn't have. I didn't know her that well. I felt much closer to the people I had in Bergen, so -- but I also knew that if my sister's alive and I was registered on the list, then she would know that I'm in Bergen. And this is what happened. When I came back to Bergen, it must have been already early July. My sister was there. She had come from Poland to Germany. Now, she was liberated by the Russians, and because she was liberated by the Russians, she was sent -- the Russians sent most of the people who could walk, they sent them back home. Home, for my sister was Poland, Szydlowiec, the city where I was born, and that's where my sister went. And she didn't stay there that long because she was alone and she met with some unpleasantness. Some Polish neighbors were extremely nice to her, and then she walked out into the street and some s.o.b. said to her, "So Hitler left some of you." And my sister decided this is not for her. So she went to another -- she found another cousin who, by the way, is my cousin whom I knew much better and stayed with her for a little while. And when she found out that I am alive, she decided to smuggle herself to Germany. And she did come with an aunt of mine, who also wanted to come to Germany. So she, my sister, and my aunt -- this was mother's youngest brother's wife, who had lost two children but survived with her niece. And she and her niece and my sister, which was a niece on her husband's side, they managed to smuggle themselves through to Germany. That was a little more difficult because you had to go through the Russian zone, you see. And but I have a feeling that my aunt who was an adult, she had been married before the war, she had two children, she may have had some money with her already. And they managed to come to Germany and to Bergen and to the DP camp, and my sister found her way. She knew where I was, and when I came, she was in that room with, you know -- and, of course, we took her in.

Q: Do you remember coming into the room when she was there the first time? Do you remember the meeting?

A: I probably -- you know, it's funny. I remember that I couldn't recognize her. She was also very thin. By that time, some of the girls started to gain weight. It took me a much longer time to gain weight. I never got real heavy, but I already looked a

little better. My sister was still very thin, and she was -- she's little. My sister was only 16, she was a kid. And -- so I think I was in a state of shock when I saw her. She looked so vulnerable, you know, so small. But she's not a vulnerable person, she's very strong. She's a strong woman. She was even then strong. It was wonderful to have my sister. And then, then we had some rough times because we, you know -- well, first of all, I had to tell her that I thought that my father's alive and he isn't. So we cried about that, and it was a mixed thing. It was good to find her, it was probably wonderful for her to find me. But, you know, until my sister came, I remember we were looking for things, but we were in a kind of a -- it was kind of a never-never land. I don't know how to explain it. With my sister's coming, the reality that this is it, the two of us. And at that point -- and at that, I was lucky, I had a sister. There were some of us who survived all by themselves. The reality set in that this is it, that I'll never my mother. That I'll never see my father. That I'm never going to see my kid sister or my kid brother. That was it. And in that sense, I think that was hard. We also started to fight, and we fought mostly because of ideas. She was going to go to Palestine. She came in, she had been -- when she was in Poland until she came, she was involved with a group of young people who were being already -- I don't want to use the word "indoctrinated," but yeah, they were.

Q: The Zionist group?

A: Yeah.

Q: What was the name of the group?

A: I don't remember. I belonged to a Zionist organization during the war, it was Dror. It was probably the general Zionists. I was not opposed to going to Palestine, but I had a fight with her. The reason was simple. When she came, she also brought a letter from my uncle here in America. I had four uncles in America, and after the war they were looking for family. And when she was in Szydlowiec, she found letters from my uncle written to the Jewish community asking whether anybody by our name from our family is alive. So she managed to get the letters and the address. And when she came, she brought all of it so that we could write to our family and tell them who we are and where we are. So I said to my sister, "Nina" . . .

Q: Her name's Nina?

A: Nina, her name's Nina. Her name actually was Piena, but when she came -- Piena, I don't know how she got the name. Her name was Sabena, but when she was little she couldn't pronounce her name, and when people asked her what her name is, she probably said, "Piena." So the name stuck, and we called her Piena. When she got to Israel, she found out that Piena means corner. Well, she wasn't going to be called corner, so she changed it to Nina, that's how -- but anyway, my sister and I started to argue, because I felt that we had four uncles in America and

we should go to America. If we don't -- oh, there was another reason, and I do have to be honest about it. If we were permitted to go to Palestine from the DP camps -- and when I say "we," I don't mean just myself, I mean most of the survivors of the Holocaust. At that time if they had opened the gates to Palestine, I think that 90 percent of us would have gone to Palestine. There would have been no question about it. Given what we went through, all of us felt that this is the place to go. So I didn't have any quarrel with her on that subject, but I was looking at reality and my sister was not. The British were not letting anybody in, and it didn't take much time for us to find out what was going on in Palestine. And I didn't want to enter already. I needed -- you asked me why I wasn't getting out. Except for the trip that I took, I stayed in Bergen. I'm beginning to think -- I wasn't interested in getting out of Bergen because I couldn't stand to see German children. I couldn't stand to see German -- I hated -- I hated the kids because they were not my sister. I was very -- I knew it was probably a very normal feeling for a lot of us, and I didn't like those feelings. I didn't want -- I needed to get out of Germany, and I kept saying to my sister, "We have a chance to get out of Germany." My uncle wrote us immediately that he's already applying. That as soon as they permit anybody to come to America, we will be the first people to get the papers. My uncle was very wealthy, and he wrote; he said he has contacts. He's going to make sure that the Polish corridor was after all open. He was going to make sure that his nieces -- we were the first ones that he found out that we were alive -- that his two nieces were going to come. So I knew that we can go to America, and I knew we can get out of Germany. And I said to my sister, "Look, if things change in Israel," in Palestine, it wasn't Israel, "we'll go to Palestine. I agree." I said to her, "You are my younger sister, I'm older. We're going to do what I say." This is what I thought I have the right to say. And she -- well, first we fought because she said to me, "It doesn't matter what you're saying. I am not going anywhere but Palestine. Nobody will send me to another crematorium." She was absolutely convinced that if she goes to any other place but Palestine, the same thing that happened to her parents is going to happen to her. She's not going anywhere, forget it.

Q: Did a lot of people believe that way, or . . .

A: Oh, she wasn't the only one. As I said, look, most of us would have gone to Palestine. Some of that feeling was there. I didn't come to America with a feeling that this is the best place for me. I came to America because it was better than being in Germany. I mean, I wanted to get out of Germany, I would have gone to the moon. And I definitely would have gone to Palestine if I could, but I couldn't. So the fights between us -- and that's kind of, it took its toll. So what did I do? There was no point fighting her. I figured she's only -- she's a kid. I'm going to take care of the two of us, and we'll manage. Fortunately for me, my girlfriend, Esther, went to Poland to see what's going on there. She took a trip, she brought some pictures back. Talking about my girlfriend, Esther. She came back and she decided she needs to -- gee, I didn't know I had that much to tell you. I'm sorry.

She decided that she knew that she probably could go, get to Palestine legally, because she was accepted at the University before the war and she had family in Palestine. But she also knew that it would probably be better to be in the American zone. So she managed -- and also, things were easier in the American zone. The Bergen camp was not an easy camp. When winter set in, we were cold. We were not so very well taken care of, I found out later. So she managed to get over to Szczecin near Frankfurt, which was close to a DP camp and sent for me. Well, I wanted to take my sister. There was no talking to my sister. My sister by that time had joined a Zionist organization in Bergen. She was going to school, she was learning Hebrew. But I decided okay, so I said to her, "Look, I'm going to go see what I can do." So I went over to Szczecin, it must have been about November of 1945. Don't ask me what I did in between there and Bergen; I honestly don't remember, honest. But I did go to -- as I said, I went Szczecin. In fact, Henry came to get me. Again, he was just a friend. He was a very good friend of Esther and he had at that point enrolled at the University. He was already in Szczecin, he was studying medicine at the University of Frankfurt, and Esther asked him to come and get me. And so he came and got me and I went to Szczecin. When I came Szczecin, Esther already had a room that rented with a German family, and it was moved in. And I found work, I started working through Henry who had a girlfriend whose sister worked in the Hias. My husband had a lot of girlfriends after the war, but that's okay. And then -- so I started working the Hias. Well, you know what the Hias is, and when I went to work to the Hias, there was -- again, you see, I was very, what do you call it? What's the word? There was one thing on my mind. I wanted to get out of Germany. I was just concentrating on one thing.

Q: Very focused.

A: Very focused. I certainly was. So I was working the Hias, and hoping that this will help me. And, indeed, the first papers that came to the office of Hias were for me and my sister from my uncle who later I found out, as I said, he was a very wealthy man. And he probably was able to get his congressman to send through the papers. Whatever it is, my papers came in first. And then, of course, other papers came. So I knew that I'm going to go to America. Now, what do about my sister? In the meantime, I was going back and forth to Bergen. First of all, when I came to Szczecin, I registered myself and I registered my sister, as if she -- because she had to live in the American zone to go to American. So she was registered, the papers were written, she was in Bergen. I brought her once or twice to visit me when I went there, but God helped us, we were called to the American Consulate. And first, I think to the doctor for examination, so I brought my sister. I don't remember how, somebody brought her; she came. She went with me to the doctor, she went with me to the Consulate. And we were issued probably already the permission, the papers to come to America, and we were supposed to wait for tickets because at that point nothing was yet leaving Germany for America. This must have been March. Now, my sister went back, and she said that she needs to

take care of things.  And we were waiting to hear, and I think that I got -- when I -- I don't remember exactly how I heard . . .

**End of Tape 1.**

## Tape 2

Q: This is Tape 2, Side 1 interview with Bella Tovey. I'm Nina Ellis. It's June 10th, 1996.

A: On one of those trips back to Bergen when I was trying to get my sister to either come or go, I found a letter written to Esther from Lolak, her first boyfriend. And I remember I ran like -- I don't remember, but I made it back to Szczecin within a short time, and I brought her that letter. He was alive. He had survived in Russia with his father, and I was the one who brought her that letter. That must have been sometime early in 1946, maybe February, one of those before. And then I remember, of course, that I kept saying to Esther, "I have to wait till Lolak comes. I have to meet him." I never did then, because what happened is that we were issued tickets, and the first ship, I think, came to this country in April or later April. And our ship was supposed to leave Bremerhaven, that's the port of Bremen, I think on the 10th of May. Because I came to America on the 24th of May 1946 on the second ship. In between, my sister while I was running back and forth said to me, "Bella, I'm not going to America. We are leaving in two days." That must have been April, still late April, and I already knew that she's supposed to come with me, too. "I'm leaving tonight or tomorrow with Aleah Allah (ph) to Palestine." She was 16 years old. The bill that Truman worked on to commit the children to go to Palestine was apparently the British agreed. If you remember history, the British did permit children to be taken to Palestine, and my sister was one of those who was permitted to go because she was not yet 18; she was 16. So we parted company. Of course, I didn't realize that we parted company for such a long time. As far as I was concerned, I was going to America, and then I was going to take a walk through Palestine one of these days, you know, when things straighten out. And I came back and I couldn't wait for Lolak to come from Russia either because the ship wasn't waiting for me. And I remember that -- I do remember how this was organized. The Americans took us to a special place, it must have been some kind of a school that was turned into some dormitories. We had to report a good week before the ship left from Bremen. They took us, we spent there a couple of days. After that, they put us on trains, and those trains took us -- when I say "us," I'm talking about -- I think I have pictures from those trains. They took us by train, all of those people who were going to take that ship to Bremen. In Bremen we were again put up in some kind of a barrack or something for about a day or so. Then we were put on the ship. These ships were -- I think that what they did for us, they transported us the way they were transporting soldiers back home, because that was the only way. This was only '46, and we were put on a ship. Then the ship was Marine -- the first one, I think was Marine Perch and I came on Marine Fletcher, or the other way around. These were the two ships that were going back and forth bringing some of the first refugees to America. And we were on the ocean for 14 days, 14 miserable days because I was very seasick, and then we came to America. And Henry came on the same ship with me, had nothing to do

with me. He, too, wanted to get out of Germany even though he was in medical school. And he was able to get to America without the help of anybody through what was called the corporate affidavit. What happened is that the Joint was trying to bring some refugees to America, and since they were trying to fill the quota, they knew that the quota isn't going to be filled, we'll be lost and not everybody had sponsors. So what the Joint was doing, they were getting out corporate affidavits. What it means apparently that companies, some companies got together and they sponsored. So Henry was not sponsored by a family member, but he was sponsored by Joint. And he came to this country, and we were -- since he was a friend of mine, we kept together on that ship. And we did not, as I said, this was not at that point, there was nothing between us yet. But I think it did bring us together, and then in America in the beginning when we were here. Totally two lost souls. Not knowing any English. You know, just feeling very lost. I didn't get the best reception in my family, although, again, in retrospect probably there were many things I didn't understand. But . . .

Q: Tell me about coming -- you arrived in New York? Tell me about, do you remember, Bella, was that an important moment?

A: Well, I remember -- I do remember something. I remember the day when the ship came to the -- when it came close to the port of New York. I remember standing on the -- by that time I was feeling better. I think the sea must have gotten calmer, and I was already not -- because I was sick. I was a mess. I couldn't eat. I remember a difficult passage, but the last couple days things were easier. And I remember looking at the lights of New York. You have to understand we came Germany. Germany was dark, it was devastated. There was nothing. Suddenly I thought I am coming to an absolute paradise. And I also remember because I must have seen from a distance the roads and cars. Cars going, they looked like little match boxes because it was far away, but so many of them. And I remember we were so overwhelmed, it was a beautiful and scary sight. It was absolutely beautiful, I do remember that. I'll never forget that first impression of New York from the ship. And then it was Friday I remember when we arrived, so my four uncles were waiting. Some, probably other members of the family. Mostly also a little curiosity, you know. But it looked like, you know, we were the first or the second group to arrive from concentration camps, so there was a little bit of that. And I do remember saying good-bye to Henry. I don't -- I suppose Henry was taken by the Hias, because he didn't have anybody to, you know, nobody was waiting for him. But my uncle arranged with his son, who he was married. I think he had, his wife was pregnant. It was a young couple, so they took me to their house in Brooklyn. They were very religious. Somehow he thought that because I'm coming from Europe that I'm very religious, so they took me. But they felt that I'm observant, so they took me for Shabbat to their house. And I have to say that my cousin's wife was -- my cousin and his wife were very nice to me. Particularly she, Miriam, I didn't have much language with her. She didn't speak Polish; she didn't speak

German. I don't speak Yiddish, I could understand some. So were probably communicating. She was speaking in Yiddish, I was answering her in German. And I spent that Saturday, that Shabbat, with them. And then on Sunday, I don't remember what I did on Sunday. She may have gone with me shopping or something. I probably called Henry in Hias, although I don't remember that. And I do remember that on Monday, I was taken by my cousin who worked in my uncle's factory to the factory. My uncle owned a jewelry factory -- not a jewelry factory, it was making bracelets for watches. The name of the firm was Jacobi & Bender. It was a very, very big factory at that point. My uncle, as I told you, was a very wealthy man. He employed a couple of hundred people, probably. So anyway, I was brought into his office, and I had a problem with my uncle anyway. When I first saw him, I don't remember that impression when I first saw when I got off that ship. I think I was probably overwhelmed, but when I walked into his office I went into a state of shock. He looked like my father, it was my father's brother. My father had five brothers. He looked most like my uncle -- I mean, this uncle looked most like my father. And here was this man who was this big, rich uncle who I didn't have any language with. I couldn't talk to him, my benefactor, if you will. He brought me to this country, and he looks like my father but it's not my father. So I think it had an effect on me, it was hard really. He -- I don't remember exactly what was happening. Things were going on probably, but he sent me with a cousin of his who was a refugee from Germany. He had brought -- we had some family in Germany apparently, and my uncle did bring -- you know, he was a good man, but he was insensitive. And I don't think he meant -- he meant to be a good person to me, but he just didn't do the right thing, perhaps not knowing how to do the right thing. But, as I said, he brought his family from Germany, some of his cousins, you know, before the war. And one of them, her name was Dora, had already was working already in the factory for him. She was working in the office, and she spoke German. So I had a common language with her, and he sent her with me shopping. Because I didn't have clothing, I had -- I really didn't look very presentable. So she went with me to the stores, I remember, in New York. And he probably gave her a carte blanche or whatever and she bought me clothing. But she was afraid of him, too, I suppose, so she was very careful. And I can understand, so she bought me three pairs of panties and two bras. In other words, she was very -- she wanted to make sure that I had enough for a beginning. And after that, that evening, my other uncle -- I had, as I told you, four uncles. My other uncle who was his -- who was Uncle Max's, the rich uncle's -- he was the one who was contracted. He was the one who was taking care of things. He was a very religious Jew. He was the one whose son's house I went to Brooklyn. So it was that uncle who lived at that point in the Bronx. He had lost his family in Germany, but he had two sons. Not Germany, during the war in Poland, but he had two sons that he managed to bring to America before the war. So lived in the Bronx, that religious uncle.

Q: What was his name?

A: His name was Uncle Favish (ph), and Uncle Favish was a very religious, ultra-Orthodox Jew. And he rented a room for me in the Bronx somewhere not far from where he was with some person. And I think he was stingy, and perhaps he didn't want to exploit his brother again. But he was not -- again, there are all kinds of members in the family. He rented a room for me for $35, and he paid this woman. Her name was Mrs. Fox, he gave her $15 and said to her -- maybe he gave her $20. But I remember that I had -- no, I think he gave her $15. And he said that when I come, I'll pay the rest. In other words, he didn't have brains to pay for one month's rent for me. I don't know where he thought I was going to get the $20 from, but that's what he told her. So I come into this room, I get this furnished. And, by the way, it was very difficult to get rooms in New York after the war. So, you know, the fact that he found me a room was a nice thing. I move into this -- I get into this room, this is Monday evening, and I'm supposed to come to work Tuesday morning to my uncle's factory. So I come in, and Mrs. Fox takes me -- the first thing she does for me is she takes me to the bathroom to show me how to flush a toilet. And I started to cry, because I knew how to flush a toilet. I didn't come from -- when I started to cry and I said to her, she spoke German. And I said to her, "Why are you showing me how to" -- She said to me that when she came to America, she didn't know how to flush a toilet. So I said, "Well, you know" -- she came from Hungary somewhere or something. I said, "Well, you know, there may have been places in Poland where they didn't have toilets in your time, and maybe even in my time. But, you know, also didn't stand still in these 30, 40 years that you've been here." And I -- we had a bathroom in our house, and we even had a toilet and it flushed water. But anyway, so that was my beginning. She also didn't let me use the Frigidaire, because that was not in the agreement, which meant that I had to eat out. So I had a rough beginning, if you will. You know, if you can understand it. Funny thing is it wasn't, I'm sure, it wasn't meant that way. I had -- I started working, and I, you know, I got my first check and I made my arrangements. I had my rough couple of months in the beginning. Actually, I have to say that my wealthy uncle took me to his house finally. On July 4th, the factory closed for one week. And he had told me before that he is going to take me to his house for a week so I can meet his wife and his daughter and spend a week in his house on Long Island. He lived in Lawrence, Long Island. So I went with him.

Q: You hadn't been to his house before that?

A: No, no, no. This was the first time I was invited to his house to spend a week. And I went to his house. Oh, I want to tell you something else that happened to me which very interesting. I was very upset in the beginning because I couldn't manage my money. Later on, when I could admit to Henry that my family was not treating me the best way, Henry would -- he managed much better having come to strangers. But sometimes this works out. So anyway, but at one point when I was sitting and eating my lunch, and my lunch consisted for the first couple of weeks until I could get myself -- because I was making $18 a week after taxes. And I had

to pay $35 for rent and the first $20, I had, too. So I was having trouble managing, and I ate my main dinner in the automat. But for lunch, I couldn't afford to go out, and I couldn't keep anything in the fridge. So I bought a loaf of bread in wax paper, and I would take two pieces of bread and I would wrap it in the wax paper. And when people sat down to have lunch at work, I would take my two pieces and I would eat my two pieces of bread. And I was feeling sorry for myself, to be very honest. I wrote to my girlfriend, Esther, that I wished that I were back in Szczecin. So one day, Dora came over, and I was sitting and I was probably feeling sorry for myself so I looked say. Or maybe I was crying, and she said, "_____?" "Why are you crying?" So I couldn't take it anymore, so I opened the two pieces of bread to show her that I'm eating -- you know, after all I went through, I'm also telling you that in 1946, I wasn't quite 20, so I wasn't that grown up. So I was feeling sorry for myself. I think that if I had been more adult, I would have managed my uncle better, too. You know, I could, but I didn't. So I opened those two pieces of bread, and I said, "_____." "That's why I'm crying." And so she got very upset. You know, I was telling her that I was eating two pieces of dry bread. You know, this is my lunch. So she got a hold of me and dragged to my uncle's office. And then she started to talking -- I didn't know what the hell she was saying. And he looked at her, looked at me. And he pulled out $50 from his pocket, and he told her to tell me that -- oh, the first thing she said to him, because I had asked her, that they are not paying me enough. That if they paid me a little more, she would -- you know, I could manage. So he said, and I understood that, because my English was -- I was beginning to understand. This is what they pay here, meaning -- now, maybe this was policy that he wasn't telling anybody what to pay me. I was working in the wrapping department, and that was what they were paying. By the way, I was working on accord, this was piecework. And eventually, I was able to make more money because I quick. But at that point, I was still having trouble, so he gave me the $50. So he said to her, but he can give me $50. And he said to me to her, through her that if I need more money, I should come him. Now, you see, this is where he was not sensitive. I never went back to him for another $50 or for another $10. What he should have done -- see, when he died in 1966, I came to this country in '46. So that's 20 years later. When he died, he left me $20,000 in his will. I mean, I was not the only one. He left for all the survivors, for all the children who survived, because I and my sister and then later on he found a couple of nephews. There were a couple of people who survived from my family. All of those, there were about eight of us -- all of us were given some money. You know, he left them in the will. He was a very wealthy man, but, you know, this not even a Jewish -- Jews usually leave their estates to their family. But he did have in his will, he left for all of the children who survived, for all those, some money. And he left me -- now, if he had given me in 1946 $1,000 and send me to school to teach me how to type. I did go to, of course, evening classes, and I started to learn English, and I was reading. So, you know, but if he had given me a kind of a help in the beginning, it would have been worth more than the $20,000 in 1966. It was nice to

get the $20,000, and he was working and earning good money. And it was -- I think it was -- I want to tell you something nice about his wife. His wife, when my uncle took me to his home in Lawrence, Long Island, I took my little valise with my belongings and my aunt waited for me. She may have met me before, she may have come to the factory. But I didn't -- I was never in their house. I had a room, and they welcomed me very nicely, and she came in and she asked did I need anything. And I said, "No," and she wanted to see what I have. She looked through my clothing, and she said, "Tomorrow we're going to go shopping." And she did not take me to Klines on 14th Street or whatever. She took me the same stores where she shopped; she was a lady. She shopped in Saks Fifth Avenue or wherever. She took me those stores, and she bought me some very beautiful things. She bought me shoes that I wore for years, and clothing. That I remember, she was, you know -- so that was my beginning in America in that sense.

Q: Did you start to socialize and have friends and meet other people fairly quickly, or did it take a while? You knew Henry, and did you keep in touch with him and -- how did you sort of . . .

A: Yes.

Q: . . . get beyond just working in the factory?

A: Mostly it was I stayed -- in the beginning, I didn't make friends, although I am a sociable person. But mostly I saw Henry. Henry and I started getting closer, and we became a kind of a twosome. I don't think so. Henry's very good friend survived the war and came to America. He worked in Philadelphia, but he would come for weekends. So often the three of us would go to the zoo. We would go to museums. I remember Henry took me to Radio City the first time, dropped me off there. It was a beautiful city. I worked, I started to -- I found out that my sister was turned back. They attached an illegal transport to the legal transports, and my sister was sent back from Marseilles. When I came to America, my sister was supposed to be in Palestine. It turned out that she was back in Bergen because they had turned back the whole transport because, you know, the Haganah was -- well, they needed to do it. They were attaching some illegals to the legal transports. And so, but then about a half a year later my sister ended up in Palestine. And I remember I started sending her packages because things were rough in Palestine. Did I make friends? Yeah, I think what happened is that I started to make friends with people who survived the camps. The same probably -- as a matter of fact, the first years in New York, most of my friends, and, in fact, many of them I just met somebody who reminded me -- I found them work. Many of them ended up working in my uncle's factory, because they came in and they needed work. So I would, you know, ask whether there is a need for somebody, and they would come to work. So I became friendly with one girl whom I brought in and we sat across from each other and we spent time talking while we were working. And she was a concentration camp survivor, she was already married.

Some other friends came from Germany. In the beginning, I'm just trying to remember, Henry and I did not get married till 1949. And I lived in the Bronx and Henry lived in Brooklyn, and that was a little difficult. So I finally moved to Brooklyn. I didn't like the lady I lived with, so it was not a pleasant situation. It was not bad, but I didn't -- so I moved into a much nicer place, where the lady permitted me to use the fridge. I could make myself a cup of coffee, a cup of tea. And eventually, I moved in where Henry stayed. Henry found a wonderful family, American Jews who came in, their daughter got married. They had a room. I understand Mr. and Mrs. Rhinehart (ph) was wonderful to Henry. They took him in like a son. And then when Henry and I got kind of engaged and when we were going to get married, I moved in. And after we were married, we stayed with the Rhineharts for several years, and then we managed to get an apartment in Brooklyn. So we moved into this apartment, and at that point, as I said, I was working. And Henry, he had started going to Brooklyn College in '48 just before we were married. And he was going to school, he was riding a bike every day, so that he could save some money on transportation. But these were good years, and, as I said, he was probably older than many of the students at that point, except for some soldiers who had come back. You know, they were veterans, GIs who were going to school. So I think Henry befriended a few -- I think Henry may have had two friends who were American. It started because they studying together, but my friends at that point, most of them were people who survived the concentration camp. I think it was probably still very important to be -- we spoke Polish with each other. That was not so good for my English, although, as I said, I did become friendly with some people at work. The first person who really befriended me, interestingly enough, was an Irish lady. She was much older than I, her name was Sarah. I don't remember her -- who said that I reminded her of her when she came to this country. I was freckled, I probably could have passed for Irish at that point. I had kind of reddish hair. And she remembered herself, more or less that way, so she was very friendly to me. And then there were a couple of Italian girls, I do remember as a result of becoming friendly with Toni and Annette -- that was their name, because we had lunch together. That I would come home and show off my English to Henry, and Henry was much more meticulous about his -- about everything. He was much more of a perfectionist. I was picking things up, and I would say -- this was even before we were married. And I would say to him that I am going to -- maybe we should go and see a picture. And Henry didn't understand why I wanted to see a picture, because that was picture, a movie. Or if I wanted to make myself a sandwich. But I was picking up the English that was spoken in the factory by some of these people.

Q: Some of the people then that you were mixing with were, a lot of them also immigrants, sound like. This Irish woman . . .

A: This Irish woman.

Q: . . . and some Italian girls.

A: The Italian girls were born in this country.

Q: Oh, they were born here?

A: But they were Italians, and they lived in Brooklyn. And if you've ever been around there, I don't know how it is now, let me tell you they do sound a little different, I suppose. Then after we were married -- but, as I said, these were just acquaintances. Most, I agree with you that most of my friends in the beginning, it was language, common experiences I'm sure had a lot to do with it. All of my friends in New York before I came to Washington were survivors. It isn't just that they were Polish, they were survivors. We may have met some people here and there. I remember we met a very lovely German lady who was much older than we were. She befriended us, and took our horror, I remember later. She was a -- she had come to American shortly before the war. I remember that she had a son in Long Island who was a physician, and I don't remember where I got -- we got terribly upset when she told us that she couldn't have us meet -- she wanted us to meet her son, but she couldn't have him invite us to his house, because when he came to this country, he had converted, and he didn't want to admit that he was Jewish. And so he didn't want -- she didn't -- now, she didn't. She remained Jewish, but it was -- and I remember to me this was so upsetting. On one hand, I understood why, because I was contemplating doing something like this shortly after the war. I was thinking of going back to Poland, and I was thinking that if I go back to Poland I'm not going to admit that I'm Jewish. Or I was thinking I would go somewhere, because why go through that again? But I couldn't do it.

Q: Go through what again?

A: Go through what I went through. It never left me, the possibility that someplace somebody -- I want to tell you something. Whenever something happens in Israel, I get into a Holocaust mode. The best place for me to be when something is going on in Israel is actually Israel, because there I see that the ship isn't sinking. But when I'm away, I always think that if something happens in Israel, I always think that it's another Holocaust.

Q: And when there's a bombing or something . . .

A: Anything. So in that sense, but then when I actually met somebody who did it, I remember I was so terribly shocked that he did that. But I remember that she . . .

Q: This is Tape 2, Side 2 with Bella Tovey. Can you say at the end what you -- I'm afraid that we missed what you said at the end.

A: Well, about this man who converted. Well, he -- I mean, one part of me understood him because I remember people saying maybe he didn't want his children to go through what he went through. But another part of me found it very

upsetting. Well, it's like well, he handed Hitler a victory, I thought, you know. There weren't going to be any Jews, you know, insofar as -- so it's a very mixed feeling. I have a question for you. Did any of the people who you interviewed ever talk about the fact that they thought about not being Jewish?

Q: A lot of people went through kind of crisis about whether or not they were going to be Jewish, observant, very . . .

A: So I didn't think so. Not on your . . .

Q: Especially in the DP camps, you know. People maybe weren't practicing any religion at all. It was very difficult for a lot of people.

A: Oh, neither was I. I want to tell you that until 1959, well, actually -- yeah, until 1959, I never came near a temple and I was not a practicing Jew at all. Didn't light candles, and I had a real detour with God. I mean, I got married in 1949. Henry and I wanted a civil ceremony, and they only reason I agreed to get married in a rabbi's study is because of my four uncles, you know. So we had a religious ceremony, but that was -- I didn't have any dealings with -- but that's different, but I wasn't denying my Jewishness. I was not religious, I wasn't going to be observant. It was my detour with God. In other words, that had to -- if I were a Catholic, I would have the same feeling. In other words . . .

Q: What is the word you're using?

A: Dean (ph) Torah.

Q: What is that?

A: Dean (ph) Torah means dean, a misjudgment; Torah, based on the Torah. It's a court based on the Torah. In old times when two Jews had a -- in Poland, for instance, when Jews had some of their autonomy, if you will, then often when there was a problem between two people, some kind of a -- they would rather than go to the civil court, they would go to a rabbi and have what you call a dean (ph) Torah in front of the rabbi. It's basically a court case. Well, I had that kind of a dean (ph), Torah with God, but to deny my Jewishness, you see, was different. That I couldn't -- I couldn't do that.

Q: You got married in 1949, and you stayed in New York because your husband was in school?

A: Right.

Q: What happened then to you in the '50s, say, leading up to when you went to visit your sister in 1959?

A: Okay. '52, Henry got a job in Washington. He got out of Brooklyn College with a -- he graduated, and he had a bachelor's degree in chemistry. And he had a very interesting experience. He applied -- actually, three experiences. First of all, he

was -- it was suggested to him that he go on to graduate school. He graduated magna cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa, but we couldn't afford it at that point. And he just wanted to go work, so he applied to DuPont; they didn't respond. Then he applied to Kaiser Pharmaceutical Company, and he got an interview, and to all purposes, go the job. And then just as courtesy, he was taken into the office of the Vice President. And the Vice President -- this was 1952 -- the Vice President said something to him in German and Henry answered him in German. And he said to him, "So you're not an American, where were you during the war?" And Henry said, "I was in Germany." And "Where were you in Germany?" And Henry said, "Courtesy of Hitler, in a concentration camp." And that was the end of his job, he didn't get the job at Kaiser. That was '52, chemical companies did not employ Jews very readily. But he did get a job a month later with Berikson (ph) Research Laboratory, and he was sent by Berikson, who was a Swede educated in America. And he employed Henry and gave him a job in Washington, and Henry opened an office in Washington for him where he was going to do some research and literature search. And that's how we -- Henry came to Washington, and I was very upset. I didn't want to leave New York, I really didn't want to leave New York. I had made my friends, it was my place. It was very hard for me to move. And, as a matter of fact, Henry was commuting between January and May. He would come here every week and come home for weekends, come to New York. And the commute was difficult because we didn't have the turnpike. It was a real trip, but he did and he finally -- but, you know, we had to make a decision. He wasn't going to go back to New York, he had a job and a job that was a good job. I remember when Henry came home and told me that he's going to be making $75 a week, and I said to Henry in all earnest, seriously, I said, "Henry, what are we going to do with all this money?" Because it was a lot of money for us, it was. So I came here in April, and the cherry blossoms were out and the city was beautiful, I remember. And Henry's boss, Berikson, was here, and he literally wined and dined me. And then so I agreed that I had to move, so we moved and I was miserable in the beginning. First of all, Washington in 1952 was a very provincial town, and New York was really an exciting city. And I didn't have any friends, and I was very lonely. I was really lonely, it was really difficult. So what we would do often is spend a week here and go to New York for weekends. So we were going back and forth. But then I met some friends, I made my first American friends. I met two neighbors, they were both my age. Their husbands were Henry's age, so we were kind of the three couples, the six of us. The funny thing is that they were all from outside; they were not Washingtonians. One, Shirley, was from Allentown, Pennsylvania and the other was from New York. So that made it that was our kind of bond, and we became very friendly. And we stayed friends till this day, as a matter of fact. These were my first friends in Washington, and in 1954, I think, I had my daughter. I became, you know, I gave birth to my daughter. That was five years after we were married, and then about a year and a half later, I had Craig, we had Craig. And we had the townhouse, a little townhouse, a semi-detached home in Silver Spring not

far from here. And I was doing absolutely one thing, I was saving money to go to Israel. By that time, of course, my sister was already married. She had two children, her husband had already been in the War of Independence. And we were in contact all the time, I was forever sending packages. Times were rough in Israel, in Palestine. I mean in comparison, I was rich. But I was saving money to go to Israel, and in 1959 I took my five-year-old daughter and three-and-a-half-year-old son; in March of '59, we went to Israel. I took a ship, I had to because I was taking an awful lot of stuff with me. As I said, things were rough in Israel. And I went to Israel, and I spent -- I left my poor husband for all this time. He came for a month, actually. I'm sorry, he was gone a month. He had, at that point, he had started working and had left Berikson. He was working for the National Cotton Council, and it was a very good job. And he had some trips that he needed to take to Europe, so he came to Israel. But I was in Israel from March to September 19- -- I was in Israel for a half a year. I saw my girlfriend, Esther, of course, who was by that time married and had a little boy. And I was with my sister, she had three children at that point and I fell in love with Israel. At that point, I think that's when I started making peace with God a little bit. I walked the streets of Es Salt and Jerusalem. I walked into the first synagogue that was in Jerusalem, and my sister who was not religious would light Shabbat candles. She wouldn't say a prayer, she would say, "Shabbat, Shalom." And I thought this was a very nice custom for a beginning for me, and I started -- I became very interested. I always loved history. It's funny, you said you liked it because I always like history, always loved archeology. If my life had normally, when I was child I used to tell my father that I'm going to be an archeologist, I didn't do that. But when I came back from Israel, I had already been enrolled. I was going to night school in Maryland, and I seriously thought of becoming an accountant. I thought it would be a good thing to do, I wouldn't have to work maybe full-time, you know, raising kids. But I switched, I decided to study Hebrew. And I started to really, I started studying Torah. I enrolled at Baltimore Hebrew College. I took all my courses there in Hebrew. I got my degree in Hebrew letters, and I became a licensed Hebrew teacher. And while I was going to school, I started teaching Hebrew in different synagogues. For a while I taught at Northwood when they had Hebrew as a language. And then the last 10 years before I retired, I was supervising the Hebrew Department at Washington Hebrew Congregation, so that was my last -- but studying Hebrew, studying Torah, studying the town, I did it a lot of reading. And I also for the first time, I did not before, I didn't talk much about the Holocaust and I didn't read much. I started reading a lot.

Q: When?

A: I started -- well, it kind of came together. I needed to understand, I needed to understand a little bit. I couldn't make peace with the Holocaust emotionally myself. I don't think anyone -- occasionally, sometimes, you know, if they tell you, you know, that a therapist or a psychologist or a psychiatrist can help. These are not

problems that a psychiatrist can -- I mean there was nothing that I could work out with a psychiatrist. It isn't that I needed to understand why my mother didn't treat me right or I didn't -- there wasn't anything like that. To understand the Holocaust, you can't understand the Holocaust. In other words, I can't imagine that anybody can be helped by a psychiatrist in terms of the experiences of the Holocaust. Perhaps some people, if they have some guilt relate it to the Holocaust. I'll be very honest with you, I never felt guilty that I survived and some didn't. Because I didn't survive, I didn't do anything to anybody to survive. I survived by sheer luck. Some Holocaust survivors have this guilt, even if they survived the same way as I did. I don't know why. Maybe that kind of a thing can be cleared up or helped through some therapy, just to understand that there's no guilt in having survived. On the contrary, if anything, perhaps a little triumph that Hitler didn't accomplish everything, that somehow we're here. And, you know, I married and I have a son and a daughter, so, you know, why should I feel guilty about that? But to go somewhere and try to understand and to make peace with the Holocaust on an emotional level, I don't try and I can't. When I get a bad dream, when I have a nightmare, I either take a pill or I get up and read a book. Henry does it all the time. When he sees his father's face -- he doesn't tell me much, but I know that he was -- the last person, he was Auschwitz with his father, and he can't get rid of that face. He sees his father with that -- once in a while, he tells me that he sees his father because they were on a train together, and he had this three, four-day, you know, gray growth. And his father gave him something that he had, they came out of the ghetto of Lódz. That was a horrible place to begin with, and so he didn't have much. Maybe he had some cigars and maybe he had some -- maybe he a silver dollar or something. And he gave it to Henry and he said, "Take it. I don't need it anymore." Or something. And I know when Henry has that dream or when he sees this, he just gets out of bed. I don't ask him. Goes down to the den. Take a crime story and he reads. You can't solve anything about that. But I needed to solve for myself, I don't mean solve. I needed to understand how God could permit that. Now, Henry doesn't have this problem because I think he's an atheist or he' an agnostic. So he's not asking God how God could allow it. Insofar as he's concerned, he has an expression, he says, "Shit falls." Look what's going on all over the world. There are people killing people in other places. So maybe in that sense he doesn't have, but I have -- I'm not an agnostic. I have some kind of a belief, I don't necessarily believe in a Jewish God. I believe in a Supreme -- I believe in God. So I have to figure out for myself, I had to, how this could happen. And they way I have solved it, and I think I've said that perhaps in other places, when I read a book by Dr. Fakenheim (ph), Professor Fakenheim, I think he was a professor at the University of -- Canadian. There's a University in Canada, I'm trying to remember. I don't remember the name. Anyway, he was a professor of history in Canada. He now I think is a professor in Moretus in Jerusalem. And he wrote a book, "God's Place in History." I don't remember exactly, you may not. And he said something in the book, and it's absolutely true. He said that God was

not in Auschwitz, that God gave us -- when you speak to the Jews, he gave us the Torah, but that's not important. He gave, he taught people what is right and what is wrong. And if we choose to do the wrong thing, then we do it. And God didn't create Auschwitz, the Germans did. And what happened in Auschwitz was between the Germans and their victims. And now, perhaps in the earlier history, according to Fakenheim, did interfere. He took us out of Egypt, but that was a god of a different time. In our time, God does not interfere. So I have that kind of a peace with myself that I don't blame God for Auschwitz; I blame the Germans for Auschwitz. Just as I blame, just as I will put the blame of the people who kill each other in Burundi, Rwanda, Yugoslavia.

Q: I want to ask you something that you have not spoken about, okay. First of all, I wanted to ask you this because to so many survivors it's an issue. And that is did you talk to your children about your experience? And if you did, when did you and why did you? And if you didn't, why didn't you?

A: Oh, okay. Well, you know, it would be nice if my daughter could -- because I sometimes talk to her about it. I did talk to my children. I think at different times, and it depended -- when the reason came. I didn't live it all the time with them. Actually, when the kids were little, when they were growing up in the house, these were really happy times for us in many ways. But I talked to them because when they were little, and they wanted to know, for instance, why Lisa Zidner has a grandmother who's coming to visit and Janie has a grandpa and grandma coming, and where are my parents and where are Henry's parents? So I told them that both my parents and Daddy's parents are not alive. Why aren't they alive? I said, "Well, they died in the war." "How did they die?" "Well, they didn't die -- they died because of the war. And when you will be bigger, I will explain it." And I did, and, of course, in 1959 they were in Israel with me, and we talked a little bit more about it. The children were still little. When they got bigger -- and I did. For instance, on Tu B'Shevat, I always lit candles. That I did even though I didn't go to a synagogue because this was the anniversary of the destruction of my ghetto. So I lit candles, and when the kids were big enough and they would ask me why I'm doing it. And I told them I'm lighting the candles to remember my mom and my father and my sister and my brother. And as they were getting bigger, I would tell them about some of the things that happened to me. Depending on their age when they got big enough. Henry did much less of it. He had a lot of trouble talking about it. On the other hand, and I did discuss this with my daughter, I asked her whether she feels -- because I wanted to know. That was some many years later, whether she was -- when I read the book my Helen Epstein, did you read it? Helen Epstein wrote a book called, "The Children of the Holocaust." I think she wrote about that second generation. And I was very upset when I read the book, because apparently she wrote the book, she based it upon a study that was done. Or maybe she did the study, discussing it with a psychiatrist or some psychiatrist in Boston, whose children -- whose patients were children of Holocaust survivors. And she paints a

picture of real neurotic, disturbed children, and I was upset. First of all, the first thing I did at that point, I wanted to know from my daughter and from my son whether something like this -- after all, no matter how objective you think you are, you're not objective, you know. Did I? Did I fill them with these kind of -- some of the stories that she writes about, you know, these children really grew up in very dysfunctional, difficult homes. So I talked to my kids, and both my children told me, and this was not right away, but through the years; this is the picture I got from them. That theirs was a happy childhood, that they had a good home. That they were aware of a lot of things and they were not totally not affected. In other words, okay, in other words, what they -- then, as a matter of fact, let me tell you how they saw. That they were not to be compared with the children that Helen Epstein is talking about fully. And, in fact, it was Robbi (ph) who came out, my daughter, with the idea that perhaps we were lucky, Henry and I. We had survived the Holocaust and we were young. I had lost my parents, lost my sister and my brother, but I didn't lose a husband and I didn't lose children. Many of the children described in Helen's books were raised as second children. They were raised by people who had lost not just their past, but their future. Some of these people lost their children. Later I met some -- I know some people were -- sorry. Robbi had a friend who told her -- he was a survivor's son -- that he didn't know that he had a sister until his father was on his death bed. When his father was dying, he told him that before the war, he was married and he had a daughter. Why these people could not deal with it, I don't know. I belonged to the generation, and there were many like me, who survived the war and did not lose husbands and children. I was too young for that. That may have made a difference. I think that for anybody who studies the Holocaust survivors, I think they should draw that line. That was more difficult for people who had that. So in that sense, I'm not taking any credit, it may have been easier. Did my children -- were my children affected by some of it? Definitely. In what way? Well, first of all, the fact that Henry did not talk was not very good. It would have helped if he did. On the other hand, I can't say that he never talked. He talked about before the war how things were at home. He just didn't talk about Auschwitz, he couldn't. And that was probably -- but I did. And I think that was -- Robbi always felt that that was good. That I had, that they didn't have to imagine things being worse than they were, so that was helpful. On the other hand, Robbi said that I was neurotic about certain things, and, for instance, I was probably overprotective. I tried not to be. Up here, I tried not to be. I sent my son and my daughter -- my daughter was 10 years old when she went for four weeks to camp, and my son was nine and a half. In other words, I sent them to camp away from home. I gave them a lot of freedom. I did not -- but that was up here. Emotionally, I suppose if Robbi was late from school, I may have been a little more upset than I should have. Fortunately, even though Henry did not -- Henry acted in this sense as good balance. When I, when we went -- when the kids learned how to swim and we'd be going to a swimming pool and I would go with the kids, and they learned how to jump from the, what is it? From the diving board. And so we made an

agreement, so I said to them, "Okay, when I'm not here, you can't jump off the diving board. You can swim." And so the kids said, "Why? Why can't we? We're good swimmers." By the way, I'm not a swimmer. I can float. So when we came home, but I said, "No, I won't allow you when I'm not here." So the kids as usually they would take their case to their father. So they would say to Henry, "Daddy, Mom won't let us jump off the diving board when she's not there." So Henry looked at me and he said, "Bella, tell me what is the difference?" First of all, he thought it was funny. He said, "What could you do for them if you were there watching?" So that was already -- but anyway, I said, "Well, I'll feel better if I'm there. I'll holler for help." Well, anyway, this was said to me. Henry said to me, "You can either be there all the time, but you cannot restrict them." So that was settled, and this was how we settled some of theses. So yeah, I had some, I wouldn't let Craig ride a bike to the library until Henry said that this is crazy, and then Craig rode the bike to the library. But we settled this.

Q: You negotiated together?

A: Yeah, we did, we did. Yeah, we did. On the other hand, when Craig went to Harvard, he didn't tell me. This is how I found out about the book. He took a course on the Holocaust. He has a library on the Holocaust. That's not his field, but, you know, this his interest. There's no question. So were the kids affected? I think so, definitely. But perhaps not in a totally damaging way, I don't think so. I hope not. My daughter had some problems, but I don't think they had anything to do with the Holocaust. In fact, she used to say to me that when she had -- she had a chemical disorder. She had a premenstrual, what is it? Premenstrual syndrome, PMS, that led practically to depression until they finally medicated her. It was just totally uncalled for, because it wasn't recognized. But she said to me that it got to a point that when she was in Princeton and she started having problems. And she would go for help, and she said, "Mom, I got to a point where I wouldn't tell them that I'm a Holocaust survivor's child, because they would get into it, " and she said, "and my problem had nothing to do with the Holocaust."

Q: So she was aware of . . .

A: Yeah. But as I say, she's fine. And she's on medication, but if it hadn't been neglected. She had some rough years because of that. But it was, she said on the other hand, she probably is a little bit more high-strung than she would have been if she hadn't been raised in a house by a mother who, when the phone ring, I would jump. So . . .

Q: And now that your children are adults and out of the house and it's just you and your husband, does he talk more? Do you talk more to other people about what you went through? Is it even a different phase of your life now in your own thinking about the Holocaust?

A: Well, this has been a process. As I told you, originally, I did not talk about the Holocaust at all. I started talking about it. That was right away a . . .

Q: We need to switch tapes here.

**End of Tape 2.**

## Tape 3

Q: This is Tape 3 of an interview with Bella Tovey on June 6th, 1996 -- June 10th, 1996. The question that I started to ask at the end of Tape 2 was, your children have left home now, and you and your husband are here together, and how is your thinking about the Holocaust today, compared to when you had children at home, or when they were young? Where are you now in your thinking about it?

A: Well, mostly, as I said, I didn't -- we don't, Henry and I -- it's funny. We don't talk about the Holocaust. I can talk to Henry about it, although I will say this: In 19- -- there are a couple of things that happened. First of all, I talk about the Holocaust more mostly because -- and I started originally when I was a Hebrew teacher talking to my class. First I talked to my children at home. Then I talked -- but mostly that's why I agreed to interviews, I gave my oral history. When I started reading that people were denying that the Holocaust happened, I think I took, I made a definite decision that I need to make some kind of a contribution if I can, because I realize that there are people who are denying that the Holocaust happened. And particularly I remember reading about a Professor Butz, B-u-t-z, I think. He was at the University of Northwestern, and he wrote a book called "The Hoax of the Twentieth Century," denying. In other words, this is not just, you know, some of these skinheads denying the Holocaust. But this is scholarly work being written that the Holocaust never took place. It's that kind of a thing that made me want to do it. That, plus the fact that we did take Roberta and Craig to Poland in 1989, shortly after Henry retired. We went back to my city, to Henry's city, went to Auschwitz. We went to all of these places. We went to Mogilev. Our son and our daughter wanted, they felt it was an incredible experience. My husband paid for it by becoming -- and he's never been depressed. He was depressed for three months after we came home. It was a rough trip for him. He did it for his kids, and it was at that time that he talked about his experiences because it was -- I mean we were in Auschwitz.

Q: To the kids?

A: Yeah, to the kids. Most of the time Henry and I do not talk about it. When I'm called up occasionally by the Children's Museum, I go and talk, because I feel it's important. I gave a talk at my temple a couple of years ago. Henry actually gave a talk once in his life last year at the Liberation. We had a wonderful service dedicated to the liberators last year, and Henry was one of the people who the rabbi -- Henry's very fond of our rabbi, so he twisted his arm, and Henry gave a short talk. That was the only time that Henry talked. I will also say to you, though, that when some of my friends who are survivors -- I don't have too many friends here. I have one couple, but we have some friends who occasionally come from New York. When we get together, usually, and this is kind of a joke and a password. That one of our friends will say, "Well, we came to Auschwitz.

Why don't we go home? Why don't we go to sleep?" In other words, if I can explain what happens, yeah. I think that when we are together, particularly with people who went through what we did, we find ourselves somehow drifting back. And usually somebody then will say, "Okay, we're already in Auschwitz. Why don't we call it quits? And why don't we go to sleep?"

Q: I don't understand that.

A: What happens is that we are together. We can be talking about our kids, we can be talking about politics. Henry and I volunteered this days in the Whitehouse, and we are very, very pro-Clinton, for instance, so we talk about politics. We can talk about music. My husband loves birds. We can be talking, and then suddenly somebody will say something, remember something that happened. And then we'll start talking about -- and one thing leads into the other, he'll mention something, then we start talking about the Holocaust. And then somebody will usually say, "Well, we are in Auschwitz. Why don't we go to sleep?" Meaning, that somehow Auschwitz is the, what is it, is the synonymous thing with Holocaust. So we got to Auschwitz, why don't we call it quits? Why don't we stop talking?

Q: Meaning, let's not talk about this anymore?

A: Meaning that somehow it's -- no matter what we talk about, when we are together with people who went through what we went through, we somehow end up getting to Auschwitz. So yeah, can I say that we do? Yeah, we do. Somehow it didn't leave us. I remember you have on that big film, the big one in the Holocaust Museum, somebody said that she tries not to teach her children to hate. I never taught my kids to hate. And if they want to forgive, my son is flying to Israel today. I hope he has a good trip, and he's so happens that his trip is paid for by his University. And the tickets, he's going via Frankfort with Lufthansa. And from there I think he's taking via -- to Israel, but he's stopping in Frankfort for a day. I will not go to Germany. My son is going, he isn't going to visit Germany, but he is going to go through Frankfort and go on. It's okay.

Q: Because you still have . . .

A: It's okay for him, and it's fine, but I will not go to Germany. I will not forget and I'm not forgiving. Not where the Germans are concerned. So am I left with something? Yeah, probably.

Q: Do you have grandchildren yet?

A: My son has three adopted children.

Q: Are they old enough to ask questions?

A: Probably, but we haven't gotten to talk about it. His oldest daughter is 10 and a half. Two are from Korea; one is from Peru. And Kendall is going with Craig to Israel, so I don't know. I'm sure that Craig has talked to her about it.

Q: It would be interesting maybe as they get older to see how you think about talking to them.

A: I don't know. Come to think of it, we have talked a little bit because they come home for Passover, and it is during Passover that we talk a little bit about it. As a matter of fact, last year I was 50 years when we were liberated, and Robbi and Craig, our son and our daughter, and my son-in-law -- my son is divorced -- planted 50 trees, 100 trees, excuse me for us in Israel; 50 for me and 50 for Henry in honor of our liberation. So we talked about being liberated and our children and grandchildren were here, so we do talk a little bit about it already.

Q: How did your relationship with your sister turn out?

A: Great. I have a wonderful relationship with my sister. My sister did what she needed to do, and as I said, once I came to America, I did not take a walk to Israel. I did not go to Israel, I settled here. I've pretty lucky in this country. It's been a great country for us. I have some moments where I feel that perhaps I should have gone to Israel. Because I think that maybe all Jewish people should be in Israel, but it's nice coming to America. I have my -- as I say, I have my mixed feelings occasionally. But this is by now my country, so in that sense I think I'm like many of the first, what is it, immigrant Americans. I'm probably more patriotic than even my children. I find that Americans don't appreciate this country as much as people who have come here. And I mean that honestly, with all its faults, this is a truly great country. A very democratic country. There's some problems, problems everywhere. Wasn't it Churchill that said it's the worst of the best systems? Oh, no. He said something. It's a bad system, but it's the best of all the bad ones.

Q: It's come to my conscience here about a year or so, especially last winter during the presidential primaries, you probably are -- my assumption is that you are sensitive to hearing anti-Semitism expressed by political figures or aspiring political figures. How does your experience play itself out in your political view of your life here? Or maybe it doesn't.

A: Well, I am sensitive to it, and for instance, definitely when I make my decisions about voting, I am very careful to -- I definitely am sensitive to anti-Semitic or even, you know, that kind of an expression. Henry worked with non-Jews most of his life, and some of them were truly wonderful people who had no -- they were not prejudiced. But he had friends who would occasionally say I Jewed him down or something. And when it comes to political people, I could not stand Baker. I thought that the Bush administration was -- and it's not because they were Republicans. Reagan had his faults, God knows. I didn't care for some of

his politics, but he was not an anti-Semitic. Bush was an anti-Semitic, he was a kind of an aristocratic anti-Semitic, if you will. And Baker, even worse. Clinton is -- maybe that's why -- that's not the only reason I'm fond of him, but Clinton with all of his faults -- they accuse him of so many terrible things, but I think he's basically a totally unprejudiced man. And to me -- to me, this is more important than anything else. I don't worry about relationships between, I'm not God. I'm not telling people how to live. I don't care whether Clinton has a mistress or will have a mistress, that's not my business. I think that the most important thing about a human being is to be fully accepting of other human beings. And I treasure people who are able to see human beings as human beings regardless of the color and religion and whatever. And Clinton, to me, with all of his faults, and God knows he's got lots of faults; everybody does. Clinton is a truly unprejudiced man. I sometimes wonder whether hopefully maybe this is true for this younger generation. My daughter, for instance, I have some non-Jewish friends, but not that many. We had more when Henry was working. Robbi, even though she belongs to a temple and she's Jewish in the sense that she's more observant that I am, 50 percent of her friends are not Jewish. And maybe your generation is less prejudiced, maybe you have -- although God knows that's probably not true. I work in the Whitehouse, and I hear all kinds of things when I answer the phones. But to me, this is the most important thing about a person.

Q: Is this something that you learned from your parents or something that you learned as a result of your experience?

A: What? Not appreciating a human being who can be without a prejudice? I'm trying to think. My father was a very tolerant man. My father was a religious Jew. My father was a very tolerant person. When people would come and say that they saw a friend's son smoking on Shabbat, and my father did not smoke on Shabbat. He would say, "What's the matter? Only the non-observant have a right to smoke on Shabbat?" So I probably grew up in a very tolerant home. That may have been, but I think that the war had a lot to do with it, too. There's no question. I mean our mind is a reaction. When I meet people who survived the Holocaust, and there are some of us, who will say -- although I think if they start thinking, they wouldn't -- who will say something derogatory about blacks or something. I get terribly upset, I think that we have absolutely -- if we didn't take anything out of those camps, we have to remember that we are all human beings. And we have to remember something else, that it's so important, it's so important not to allow yourself a kind of a -- if people think that just saying something negative about another person is not dangerous, they're wrong. I think that the minute you open up the possibility that somebody is not quite worthy of the same treatment as you are -- I'm always that when I talk to children and, you know, when I talk to any groups, that when somebody will try to take away one right, when somebody will try to tell you that you are not entitled to one thing of all the thousands things that other people are entitled, that's the

beginning of the end. I think we all have to be so sensitive to it. To me, this is so important that every human being has to have the same rights. And we have no right, I have no -- if I sometimes, think, you know, if I get angry at something or, you know, when I hear these stories about welfare, it doesn't matter that there are more blacks who are on welfare. It doesn't matter. Use the words that there are more people in New York who are on welfare, but don't put the labels of black, white, green, yellow. I'm very proud of the fact that my son adopted two children from Korea and one child from Peru. It means that he grew up in a home where he didn't hear that being Jewish is better than anything else.

Q: And yet, you told me an hour ago that when you, in 1945, you couldn't stand the sight of German children, so you've made a lot of -- you've sort of come a long way in your thinking. That's different?

A: No, no. That's different. Let me explain. When I said in 1945 that I had to get out of Germany, I emotionally was very troubled. I adored my kid sister, and I lost a kid sister and a kid brother. My brother was born in 1933, and he was 10 years old when he was taken to Auschwitz. I wasn't home anymore, and my sister was 12 years old. I lost two children, my younger siblings, and when I saw families -- and I lost my parents. And when I would occasionally get out of Bergen and I saw people, normal people -- a father and a mother and a couple of children -- walking on the street, and they took that away from me. And they did it, so yeah, I hated them. And frankly, I was afraid -- I didn't want to stay in Germany; I didn't want to hate that much, and I didn't know where that hatred would bring me to. I don't think that I would have gone out and killed somebody, but I'll tell you this: When I heard, because I wasn't involved, when I heard that the inmates in Bergen-Belsen put a couple of barracks on fire where the SS men were put in. When the British came in, they took some of the SS men who didn't manage to escape and put them in a barrack and they surrounded them. And then some of the prisoners who can walk, some of us had -- not all of us were in my shape. They put those barracks on fire, and the British soldiers walked away. Of course, they later, the prisoners were not allowed near those. These became suddenly prisoners of war. But I was delighted to hear it. I think they should have killed more Germans. Are you asking me now whether I still -- now, I don't hate the Germans who were born after the war and have nothing to do with it. I mean, obviously, emotionally -- even emotionally, I don't hate them. But I have not forgiven the Germans who were involved in it. And, by the way, I didn't read the book by Goldhagen, and I don't know how factual. I don't know, but I'll tell you this: He is absolutely right when he says that many, many, many more Germans knew about what was happening, benefited from it, and were participators to the Holocaust. There is no -- I don't, I have no doubt about it. I am not a historian, but I saw enough. The German soldiers didn't have to kill us. The Germans -- my God, it happened in my own house. A month after the war broke out, a German bitch came in with two SS men or soldiers, and they took

everything out of our house. And what do you think these people did with all the things that they took from German homes? They sent it back to Germany. How did the Germans suddenly get all these things? Insofar as I'm concerned, to me, the German nation was collectively guilty. They followed Hitler, they did it. But I don't hate the Germans because they have blonde hair or blue eyes or black hair. I hate the Germans for what they did, that's different. I don't like Farakan, not because he's black. I hate Farakan for what he's preaching, that's different. When I'm talking about tolerance, I'm talking about treating people as human beings. But I will tell you this: I'm not a Christian, I'm not turning my other cheek, and I'm not forgiving those who hurt me. In that sense, maybe I'm Jewish, yeah. I'm not forgiving the Germans. Let the pope do it; I won't. And if there is a God, I hope there is a God, I also hope there's hell. And in that hell, I hope Hitler is still burning. Do I sound mean? Fine, that's how I feel.

Q: When you talk to children in various places, what do they want to know? What do they -- I'm sure it depends on how old they are.

A: Well, it depends, it depends. And they ask some questions. I will say this: I'm more careful, I wouldn't say what I just told you about Hitler burning in hell to children. You know, you have to be a little more -- although I tell the children that I have not forgiven the German people who did it, those who did it. And I may also say that if God wants to forgive them, that's his business but I'm not. You know, that's -- children ask very interesting questions, very often what they will do, and this is so touching. They'll come over and they'll say to me, they'll say to me, "Do you have children?" And I'll say, "Yes." And they'll say, "That's good, so you have somebody you can love now." Which is really very touching.

Q: Is there anything else?

A: No. I don't think so. I think I talked more than enough.

Q: Okay. This is the end of this is the third tape. This is the end of the interview with Bella Tovey on June 10th, 1996 at her home in Silver Spring, Maryland. And I'm Nina Ellis for the Holocaust Museum.

**Conclusion of interview.**