United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Gabriele D. Schiff
July 27, 2000
RG-50.030*0460

PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a taped interview with Gabriele D. Schiff, conducted by Amy Rubin on July 27, 2000 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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GABRIELE D. SCHIFF
July 27, 2000

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Gabriele D. Schiff, conducted by Amy Rubin, on July 27, 2000, in Forest Hills, New York. This is tape number one, side A. Mrs. Schiff, would you please tell me your name at birth, and when and where you were born?

Answer: My name is Gabriele D. Schiff. I was born in Hamburg, Germany, on October fifth, 1914.

Q: Could you tell me briefly about your family, and about your home life in Hamburg?

A: I was born to a physician and his wife. We had a very assimilated home life. I was the youngest of four children. I went to high school, as far as I could get in Germany. It was all under the Whymar Republic, which of course, 1933, was taken over by Hitler, and my schooling, at least my formal schooling, came to an end. And at that time, one had to think slowly, about preparation for leaving Germany. I was about 16 at the time, and it was a very difficult Germany, and the most uneasy time for Jews, but an e -- uneasy time for Germany, all around. Vesters, strikes, and on the whole, you are looking how to create a future. My first job, as I always wanted to be a social worker, from my seventh year on, I became a secretary in a Jewish girl's orphanage. And at that time, it became clear that the girls who had no German passports, mostly of them Polish orphans, would be sent back to Poland. It was partly my job to help prepare the children for a life that we really couldn't foresee, but it certainly meant separation, separation from the place they knew, as well as if they had relatives, separation from relatives, into the unknown. I have done that about a year, and then decided to better learn England, prepare --

English -- to prepare for eventual immigration. I went to England, and tried to learn shorthand and typing. I never did very well. I worked in household, but then a letter came from a colleague in Hamburg, telling me that there were still so many children that could possibly go out -- correction, not so many, but some. And I decided, against anybody's advice, to go back to Germany. And I stayed in Germany for about a year, and again, helped children, also worked for the German Jewish community. It's interesting that even though we had very assimilated, from the very beginning, my 50 year career in social work, was almost all in Jewish social work. I prepared for my immigration, which was very difficult for many reasons, which perhaps we don't have to go into. The secret police at one time got hold of me, which was not a pleasant experience. They took my passport away, and eventually I got out of Germany, because one of my English friends, a former boyfriend, wrote me a fake letter that he was going to marry me, and I would become an English citizen, and set a date for our marriage. And at that point, I got my passport back, and left in a hurry. Again, I stayed in England for a very short time. I didn't work. By that time my mother and my oldest brother had immigrated to England, and so it was a bit of a family reunion. It's all not [indecipherable] clear in my memory, but somewhat like it. And my brother from America, where I als -- also had a brother, came. He was a lawyer here, working for the office of Price Administration, he must have been the levelator. Anyhow, he picked me up, and we came together to America. And it was a little funny story when I arrived here. People who thought I'd gone into the wilderness in America, my aunts, etcetera, had given me, of all things, tea kettles. So when I arrived here, and the customs opened my stuff, I was surrounded by the tea kettles, and the customs official looked at me and said, "Golly, what do you want to do? Trade with the Indians?" That's the beginning of America.

Q: When did you arrive to the U.S.?

A: In 1937, in September.

Q: So, just briefly maybe, we'll turn back to your years in Hamburg, and could you tell me a little bit more? Was your family observant of religious holidays?

A: No, we were very assimilated. Yes, proforma -- it's a harsh word, but we did observe Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Actually, I still do it, even though my life had gone up and down in between. And we were an upper class, very well known family. And what you did was always being looked at by others. But, I should mention my mother -- and I've inherited that from her, liked to help people, and she always volunteered. And she had what she called office hours in our house, and she would counsel people. And as a child of seven, I was sitting under the table, listening to these stories, and that's why I decided I wanted to help. And another -- and that's the last story of my past, we had a big house, and I had a governess, as ever -- anybody had to, had a little money in Germany. And I was always afraid when the governess had the day out, and I was alone in the big house. So my father, to comfort me one day, bought me a big, chocolate teddy bear, and said that, "He'll keep you company." I didn't want chocolate bear, I wanted somebody to talk to. So I cried. So my father, who was a little impatient, said, "Well, you are but spoiled. There are many poor children who have no teddy bears." I said nothing, and I thought. Day before, we had taken a walk, and my governess had said, "Let's walk slowly here," no, correction again, "let's walk fast, because this is where the poor children live." So, I thought, teddy bear, poor children. So during afternoon, I ran around, back to that neighborhood with my chocolate bear, and when I saw a little girl that looked poor to me, pressed the chocolate teddy bear into her arms. Once later, my mother was playing bridge, and one of her partners said, "Our neighborhood is changing, because an absolutely strange girl walked up to my little daughter,

and gave her a teddy bear." And I always say, "I have spent my life giving teddy bears to the wrong people."

Q: You said that your family was a total of seven children?

A: Four. Four children.

Q: Oh, I thought you said that you were one of seven.

A: No. One of four.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: The youngest.

Q: And briefly, would you tell me what happened to your family members, your immediate family members through the war years?

A: Yeah, we were very lucky, we all got out of Germany, but not together. We have never been together again as a family. My mother left a little later than I did, to England, which she lived -- let's see, she left after Crystal night, and only got out because my Dutch brother-in-law came from Paris to take her out with the help of the Dutch consulate. He came, and he was politically quite on the left, and had brought quite a few fake Dutch passports, and got out two or three well known writers, who were in concentration camp. One of them, Eric Musam, some people may be interested him, he was later killed, but he got him out. So [indecipherable].

Q: And did you have any encounters with anti-Semitism when you were growing up in Germany?

A: Who hasn't? Yes, and I only gi -- I had all -- I -- I had, as everybody else did, I remember well my first encounter, when I was, well, maybe 12. I had a girlfriend, very blonde, and very Aryan, and her father was an architect, and we were quote, best friends, end quote. And from one day to another, she said, with tears in her eyes, "My father forbade me to play with you any

longer, because you are Jewish, and he belongs to a certain German organization, and would be a danger for him if his daughter is running around with a Jewish girl." That was my very first -- and, I had to give you all these things you get from everybody, because of course, you met it everywhere, from your greengrocer -- and you met the other, too, people who stood up for you, and perhaps a most outstanding one was we had a super in our house, and he denounced my mother to the Secret Police, and denounced me, too, because I had a non-Jewish boyfriend, which was against the Nuremberg laws. So, I mean, we had our share of this, but compared what later on happened in eastern Europe, it's all chicken feed. No [indecipherable]

Q: Okay. I think we can perhaps move on then, to your early years in America, and what you did when you first arrived. Any striking first impressions that you had, and that you'd like to recount?

A: Cause New York is overwhelming if you come from Germany, and my family -- I had an aunt here, who was very well-to-do, and was very nice to me, but I didn't fit into that type of society at all. I looked European, English was bad, politically I was too much interested in Social Democrats. They were very nice to me, but I didn't want to play the role of a poor relative, that's just not in me. And I had a Quaker friend in Philadelphia, who was a teacher of music. And we had been through a lot in Hamburg together, we had gone to school together. So I phoned her, and said, "Etta, please get me a job, any job." And she came through. And I lived in the house of a lovely Quaker family, where my friend Etta also had a room. And I did a little a-around the house. I'm really not very well trained in that respect, but they were very good pe -- were actually lovely people. I took a little bit care of children. And money I didn't have. Furs I had, but no money. And the man of the house, who was a lawyer, professor of law, discovered that I have a usable brain. And he thought to get anywhere in this country, I would have to study, and

get at least a Bachelor. And he gave me a chance just try for a scholarship in a very good American college in Swarthmore, which has helped me for the rest of my life. And they again were very nice, because they believed me. I had my examination for the university in Germany, which I didn't have, but I said I had lost it. And I could make up for it in an examination, I passed with very good grades, and so I got through Swarthmore in two years. That, of course, was a big help, because then, during those two years, I used my furniture, rented an apartment with borrowed money, and sublet rooms to other students. And that way, I got through college. I just missed feeb -- Phi Beta Kappa, which I'm really angry about, because I had the cooking to do for -- and I had it easy because I majored in English, which was not in English literature, but I minored in German, so it meant I could concentrate on my major. And later on, I took psychology.

Q: So when you were in school, you were also focused to some extent on social work again?

A: Never left my mind. I did not tell you that before I even mentioned Swarthmore, I had gone to the Pennsylvania School of Social Work, who had told me I could not study social work if I wouldn't have an America Bachelor. It was very different times, and that was one reason why I was so glad to go to Swarthmore. And the day I had my Bachelor, I went back to the University of Pennsylvania, I say, "Here I am, please let me in." They were very psychologically oriented at that time, and they seriously said to me, "Well, you know, you will have to work with people who know pain, and suffering. And to know that, you have to know it yourself. Did you ever have any suffering and pain?" And I said, "Yeah, I just left my family in Europe, I make a very precarious living here. I've met many good things, but I've also met [indecipherable]

Q: Did you have much fear in you when you arrived in the United States? Do you recall having that kind of emotion?

A: I recall having a lot of anxiety. Not so much fear, which is very much related. I didn't think I would not get through, that never occurred to me. But I didn't know how.

Q: And what did you continue to hear about developments in Germany and Europe during this part of your schooling, and your early years in the U.S.?

A: To be honest, I was so concentrating on daily life, that it was not very real to me. I knew what was going on in Germany. I was dead sure, if I'd ever become a citizen, I would go and try to help rebuild. I felt guilty. I was safe, and my friends were not. I was in close contact with the Quakers, who were the only organization, I believe, who could, at that time, get into Germany, even could -- and get into the camps. And they, at that time, were starting their so-called refugee section, and they ask me to work in it, and to set it up. And so I knew particularly about Germany, that people had lost their jobs, difficulties in getting out, were taken to camps, but if I'm very honest, for instance, Crystal night is not in my memory as the overwhelming experience it was, becu -- I think like, human beings, and young ones, you think about studying, about your boyfriends, about whatever the day brings. Yes, it's all going on in Germany, and you also -- at least I was, a little bit cruel, and you thought, "Why didn't these people get out?" Later on, I [indecipherable] they couldn't, but I was somewhat mixed up in my thinking. It came back more and more when I -- at the refugee section, as my daily bread, and had to write and answer letters from Germany, people pleading for so-called affidavits. And while I was working with Quakers, I was sent to get affidavits, and I was, of all things, going to Iowa. Now, imagine this German Jewish girl, with fairly good English, but still not -- still the the English English. I was sent to farmers, who in their turn had rarely heard of Jews. So we had a great time not -- of learning each other. They showed me their farm, and they showed me everything they a -- and they talk with thee and thou, as the Quakers does. And whatever they showed me, I'd never seen before.

And the very nice old farmer got a little impatient, and showed me a cow, and said, “Did thee ever see a cow?”

Q: So when were you in Iowa, and what exactly were you trying to accomplish while you were there?

A: The latter I can answer first one. Probably in ’38 - ’39. It’s vague, but I think so, because ’39, I went to college, so it must have been before ’39. What was your question?

Q: And what were you trying to accomplish while you were there?

A: I was charged to get affidavits of support for refugees who were still in Europe, and wanted to come to this country. And somebody had to guarantee that they would not become a charge of welfare. And I got quite a few affidavits, because I could plead my cause. I had seen it. And I did that, really until I went to college, working for the Quakers, being a counselor in a refugee camp. Now, this was a Quaker camp for refugees who had already arrived in this country.

Q: And where was this refugee camp?

A: In Nyak, New York.

Q: Can you give a little more description of the camp, and the individuals you helped there?

A: Sure. The people who were there, were very often couples where one part was not Jewish, or a -- some were political refugees, and not Jewish. The Quakers helped everybody. The majority had Jewish blood, it was not that they were -- I don’t think we had an Orthodox Jew in the camp. But it was comparatively young people, it were majority professional people, who needed retraining in this country, and the director of that camp was a minister. That was a -- an interesting experience for me, and I learned a lot. And the camp was run like all camps, there’s lots of language classes, and community interest. Some sport, but very little, the people had other interest at that kind than sport. Was a lot of writing to find where relatives were, and you

[indecipherable]. There, you never forget -- forgot that there was a war. I mean, not the war [indecipherable], but there was liberation for a war. And it had the most intellectual group that I've ever met in camps. Oh gosh, I have another camptery. Okay, a -- and I know that I wrote what I called a national hymn for that camp, which we sang for [indecipherable]. I can't sing, I don't know music, but I wrote it. And --

Q: Do you remember it?

A: No. I know where the camp was, Sky Island on the Hudson, and that was a refrain of it, everything was beautiful in Sky Island of the Hudson, [indecipherable]. I threw all that stuff out, today it would be interesting.

Q: Approximately how many refugees were in that camp?

A: I really can't -- can only guess a hundred, wild guess.

Q: And how long were you working there?

A: Two summers. It only existed during the summer, for people who couldn't afford a real vacation, and who needed an effer -- American atmosphere. The food was so American, they had difficulty in eating -- well, it was very well meant, very human, and was in the estate of an American psychiatrist, who still is around, Dr. Viola Bernard. She still may be [indecipherable] the museum. She's not Jewish, but very, very interested. And she had a beautiful estate, and the faucets were sort of heads of lions, so you can imagine. Okay, so much for that. And after one summer, in '39, I started college. And in college, I had to run interesti -- I had many lovely, lovely experiences. But one experience that fits is, I was a -- later on -- is that true? No, doesn't happen in college, comes a little later. So I graduated, made many friends. Was interesting to me, that there, we really didn't know who was Jewish, and who was not. You know, that was such a difference. I was a rarity at that time, because refugees weren't so many at that time. And I

know, I get along with people, and I had a great time, and eventually I graduated, in ’41. And there was no question I’d go to school of social work, I got another scholarship, which meant another job on the side, but these things are typical for an immigré. And I kept my apartment with my furniture, I rented a room -- separate rooms. And began to be more involved with refugee questions. I had a room mate who was very much on the left political, and didn’t let me forget that it was Fascists who did all this. And we were very young. And I always get involved in strange things, so I was -- well -- political involvements, so stay out of it. And I found life very interesting, got much more Americanized. Had a very easy time in school of social work. My placement was with the children’s agency, and it all seemed to me very easy. I don’t know why they made so much fuss about it. The only bad thing was, I had in the morning, and in the evening, to travel for over an hour, through all of Philadelphia. So much for that. I still was in touch with the Quakers, I still have them out with the refugee faction. And I always have had a great respect and love for the Quakers, but never wanted to convert, because I always thought, you don’t run away from something that’s difficult into something that’s easier. So the Quakers were asked by the War Education Authority -- this is now ’41. Don’t hold me to the dates. Not ’41, I had a -- nonsense. ’43, I graduated from school of social work. There is something I don’t remember, and that’s what -- I think right after school, I went to Maryland, to the state hospital, because I was more and more interested in psychiatric social work. And I spent one difficult year in a state hospital near Sikesville, Maryland. And that was a -- hospital of about 3,000 patients, and five physicians. And there I became very much aware of Europe and it’s difficulties, because the majority of our five physicians had come from Europe, and had escaped Hitler. And there were also one Jewish physician who was American. And I told you, I get involved, sometimes I also in the wrong place. I became, in my free time, the director of the recreation for our camp of

-- of conscientious objectors. I could wro -- write a book about it if I want. And that was not liked by the American attendants, because they had their husbands in the war, here was this one Jewish female, and she was playing around with the people who were trying to escape war duty, and messed up situation, I was in between vics. And the Jewish doctor, saw me going with my CO friends, a whole unit of them, singing Christmas carols. He called me to his office, and sa -- and said, “If I wouldn’t be punished, I would spank you. You are no [indecipherable]. You tried to be a Christian,” -- which I never tried, I just like to go around with some [indecipherable]. And he gave me hell. So I got it from Jewish side.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is tape number one, side B, of an interview with Gabriele D. Schiff. Mrs. Schiff, would you please tell me about your reaction to the start of World War Two, while you were in America?

A: What, of course, I remember first of all, was that I was suddenly an enemy alien. I’d been thrown out of my country, to come to America, and find myself an enemy alien. I could not have a camera, I could not have a short wave radio. And for every trip, I had to get permission from Washington, which means my brother, who was in Washington, working for the government, I could only go and see him with special permission, which I got. I didn’t go too often, but he came to me. I -- these are individual things. My outstanding best friends at that time, were the director of the labor relations board in Philadelphia, and his wife. And they were ardent pacifists. And on the day the we -- war broke out, they asked me, “How do you feel about it?” And impulsively, I said, “I’m glad that,” -- now this is when America got into the war, -- “that America is getting into the war, because that will give the allies more power.” And they looked

at me in disgust, and said, “How can you be glad about any war?” And I said, “Is it better when people are slaughtered in camps? Do you want that to go on for eternity?” So we had a very long discussion. We stayed friends afterwards, and we both kept our opinions. They were pacifists. I had been a pacifist for a good time of my life. As a matter of fact, when in Germany, I was the youngest member of the [indecipherable] for Human Rights. So, that will always be my interest. But, I changed when Hitler came, and I gave up the pacifist, I just couldn’t. But that’s my outstanding memory. And then, of course, it was the anxiety, I couldn’t get letters from Europe. I had heard so much about the first World War, because I was born in the beginning. But when I was five and six, the memory was still very strong, my parents, and [indecipherable]. So, I knew what was going to happen, and I also had a ration book during the war, but I suppose everybody had it. I don’t know, I was in an institution, in that camp -- no, in the state hospital, and we got very little to eat, but I realized it was still much more than they had in Europe. And then, of course, I had very strong sympathies for the allies, and once in awhile, I got letters smuggled from England, or from my sister in France. I suffer always for some contact, somebody asked me this question. I don’t remember if the letters were censored or not. I don’t think I ever was out of contact with my mother. I looked -- I kept my mother’s address, but not the war time, one, so I -- I really don’t know. I remember how I threw my camera into a river, because I wasn’t permitted to have it. Why I didn’t give it to an American colleague, I don’t know. And I -- I did not have too many Jewish friends while I was in Philadelphia. I had roo -- Jewish room mates, but one was American, and as I implied, very much on the left. The other was also from Germany, and very assimilated. And so certainly we were interested, we read the papers, and we hoped that war would be over. But we also tried very hard to live from day to day. Now, this changed for me in 1943 or four. I’m really not good with figures. When the War Education asked me -- War

Education Authority, to go to Oswego, New York. And Oswego was a camp, it was a former army camp that had barracks, and awful ones. And there's barbed wire around. It always amazes me, the only time I personally have been in the camp, with barbed wire, and real barracks, was in America. Because I was always insisted on living right in the camps, because you can't be of help if you are billeted in a hotel outside. And these were a thousand refugees, who had been in -- yeah, it was called concentration camps, but were not extermination camps, in Italy. One was called Perramonte, just for your information. And the refugees, the majority, by far, were Jewish. I think we had about five non-Jewish people, but we had some. We had some Ukrainians. And Dr. Ruth Gruber, who was the assistant to all [indecipherable] acres, who was an -- high in the government, had been sent to Europe to select from different camps, a thousand refugees. These had been invited by President Roosevelt, with the idea that Italy was starving, and he would at -- at least take a thousand mouths out. Well, it's really not a very bright idea, but it helped a thousand people. And they were invited to -- the whole time, they didn't know if they could stay in this country. And what that means psychologically, you can't do it -- can't imagine. Actually, one was sent back because he was insane. The others eventually stayed here, in '45. And I've met them over the -- my career in social work, all over the place. And that was my first camp ex -- no -- well, the other was a vacation camp, this was a camp with all the difficulties of a camp. People not having any privacy. Some people died. One person died shoveling snow. The administration was blamed for that. I got an [indecipherable] to later camp life. The food was always [indecipherable], it's always in camps. People have to have an outlet for all their feelings, so they fight for food. We had a few birth. We had a hospital run by a Jewish laf -- doctor, who was supervised by Dr. Ruth, who had already an MD in America. In the hospital, I had an operation, and I remember my refugee doctor very well. However, it went all right. It was an ope

-- operation, an appendix, and they found an ovary was -- they took out an ovary that shouldn't have taken out [indecipherable] forget. And I stayed in that camp, almost through the end. I think I left a month before. People eventually got the permission to stay. Most of them came to New York. Ruth Gruber co-wrote a book about Oswego, "Safe Haven." I disagree with the book, but anyhow --

Q: Can you explain why?

A: I -- Because she saw a side from the point of view of a rather optimistic American. She worked very hard, I mean, she really -- she helped. These people wouldn't have been here without her, but how she described the camp, I don't quite agree with. I saw more conflict than she did. But ac -- but we are still good friends, I still see her, and Oswego people have also [indecipherable] word?

Q: Community?

A: Community. They meet once in awhile, cause we all are old people now. And some of them died, some of them have grandchildren. The grandchildren I met in my last job, and some of them, because in that job, among other things, I ran a scholarship committee for refugee, and second and third generation. And suddenly, some of my Oswego grandchildren turned up. [indecipherable], they are very bright, and good students. Europeans know how to study. So, you see, that's why I say my life is so interwoven, one with each other, Quakers from all occasional [indecipherable] etcetera.

Q: Can we go back momentarily to your very first experiences, helping refugees, and that's when you were working with the Quakers. And could you give a little more detail as to how you started to get involved in that kind of work? Was it through the friend in Philadelphia, or someone else?

A: I tell you, my girlfriend, whom I knew from school, was a Quaker, and was a daughter of the deeding Quaker in Germany. Somebody writes a book about it, and interviewed me. So, through her, it was natural that I met other Quakers. And I met a professor of social work, Hetta Calls, from Czechoslovakia. She was a professor of social work in Bryn Mawr, and for quite some time I stayed in her house, and she was a president at that time, or the founder of this refugee section, and she knew that I knew typing, a little shorthand. And she introduced me as her secretary to the American Friend Service Committee in Philadelphia. And I was very lucky, I got to know Rufus Jones, and Kelly, and learned to loved, and admired a lot. And met my first -- I was a refugee of -- myself at that time, really in the camp. What I had to do as a secretary was really mostly writing letters, trying to search for people, trying to get affidavits, trying to talk to lawyers. A little bit helping people to adjust. Helping them to get lessons for car driving. Women didn't really know how to drive. I don't know how to -- not today. And it was not that common in Germany, or Austria. The refugees at that time are mostly from Germany -- not in the camp Oswego, but what I imagine Philadelphia was pretty much German Jewish [indecipherable].

Q: Where was the camp that was run by the Quakers, the two summers? Where exactly was that located?

A: In Nyak, N-y-a-k, New York. It's how -- it's about an hour from here, upstate, in Westchester.

Q: Okay. So, after that experience, the experience with the camps, the two summers in a row, then eventually, you were able to work in Oswego with refugees, and that work there, what was your daily responsibilities?

A: Taking histories, in case people could stay in this country. Taking histories for the sponsoring agency. Helping people to adjust to camp life. No European knows camp. And that men should

do the cooking, don't tell me. And to see that the hospital functioned. We were just -- every religion had a -- a -- [indecipherable] what's the word?

Q: Every religion had a place of worship of some kind, or --

A: No, it had a person from every religion was a social worker. [indecipherable] one wa --

Q: Some representative?

A: Yes, [indecipherable]. And also a -- a Jewish agency. I was really quick repre-representative there. The Jewish agency admaroon became my best friend, she just died. And the Catholic had one, too. And there were lots and lots of adjustment question. People had left their homes, didn't know where the other person was, the family was torn. A -- and as I say, we had to take very complete histories for the government, no personal really, but there you had to know the facts, and the facts were not too well known. And -- and they had had the camp experience in Italy, and some had illnesses, and some had venereal illnesses, and we suddenly had the last [indecipherable]. You had to ha -- make the things work, you know? The idea, to be behind wired bar -- barbed wire, we had -- we had to be in this free country, in a camp. So it was really psychiatric social work, and immigration work.

Q: How many --

A: Yeah?

Q: How many other people were working in that camp, approximately?

A: Hard to say. We had about -- we had a director, and a deputy director, American. We had about four social worker. We had a head nurse, and I think some other nurses. We had teachers, we had -- no -- no teachers there, the children could go out of camp to school. It was a fight, but we got to school. We were always fighting. I think that's about what was there, and then all sorts of people came from other agencies to study these strange animals from Europe. But the biggest

group was Polish, and the second group was Yugoslav, and they couldn't stand each other. And we also had a non-Jewish prince from Lithuania, who got into fis -- a fist fight with somebody else, because they both thought they were princes. I mean, anything and everything possible. We did have a library, we did have lectures, we did have good concerts, there were good musicians among the group. It was daily living. Was a lot of anxiety.

Q: There are about a thousand --

A: Yes.

Q: -- refugees?

A: Yes.

Q: And mostly Jewish?

A: Yes.

Q: And from which countries, primarily? You said --

A: Yugoslavia, Poland, Austria, Germany. But were far the most from Yugoslavia, and Poland.

Q: And what was the age range of the refugees?

A: Newly born, to about 90. We had children being born there. So we had kindergarten also. The age range was really everything that had been in camp in Italy, and they had it all ages, like.

Q: And there were elderly people, as well?

A: At that time, over 50 seemed elderly to me. I can't remember real old people, my age, for instance, my age now. I can't remember. I remember mostly i -- in their 20's, and then in their 50's, but --

Q: What were your own living conditions like in the camp?

A: I had a room, we all had rooms. Not in the barrack, as far as I remember. I cannot remember where we ate, I think it was in a mutual dining room where all the staff ate. I lately think it was

all in a private house, where the officers had lived, when it was a military camp. But, I remember well my little room, but funny, you know how [indecipherable]

Q: Did you do much socializing with the other refugees, or the individuals you were working with?

A: Both. I made good friends among my colleagues, still went on -- until now, I mean, we are now older, have died ,or God knows what. And about the refugees, I also made friends. And that was quite acceptable, not in all camps I've worked in, but this was quite acceptable. I had a young man interested in me in that time, and so had my colleague. It was all very romantic, and we got to know them very well, and some of them, on later stages, became my clients. One -- for instance, my agency, when I say my agency, I mean Self Help. I worked 39 years, so it sort of became mine, build a house here in Cos-Cosina Boulevard for displaced persons, and -- a big apartment house. And one of the first people to move in was a client from -- of mine, from Oswego. So ways always cross again.

Q: How long were you in Oswego?

A: Pretty much from beginning to end, just in a year.

Q: What were the dates, approximately? Do you recall?

A: Yeah, from '44, to '45.

Q: Were you paid to do that work?

A: Yes. Wallit -- well, the government paid me. No idea what, but they did pay me.

Q: And had you received any very specific, specialized training for working with refugees by that point?

A: Just my heart.

Q: What would you say you were able to learn about the war, or other events taking place in Europe, from the refugees, that you had not learned elsewhere?

A: I did not know that there were camps in Italy. I did not know the war conditions. Yugoslavia had an awful secret pol -- police, Usetasha. I had not known of that existence, and the madness, and the badness of the war was really beginning to come home to me, when I heard these people who had escaped by night over the mountains. Who had sent children to other countries. The living with danger, the constant being afraid some knock at the door will be the secret police, and you'll be taken away. It became all a reality. And, of course, I was there when Roosevelt died, and that had a terrific effect on the camp population. They were really depressed. It's something that is now a -- people don't want to acknowledge, American Jewish people, that Roosevelt made many mistakes. But he also was a big hope for people. And, of course the ones who came to America loved him for that in -- invitation, and they were devastated when he died. They couldn't know that Truman did much more perhaps, in the end, but it was really a -- a major depression. I always felt that all the deaths they had seen in Europe were suddenly coming to life again by the death of Roosevelt, who had sort of been a power figure to them. So all that made the whole time much more real to me. I -- also, I didn't have as much of a private life. In Philadelphia things were going on, but here you read the papers much more, and people had a country, but they had lost their parents. You saw, actually the people. [indecipherable] had been in the hospital, the doctor had refused to take care of them. And for the first time you really heard it, from word -- by mouth. So yes, it -- I always said this was my oderver to camp life.

Q: Did Roosevelt's death also represent great uncertainty?

A: Yes. It did represent great uncertainty. There was uncertainty anyhow, about who would come next, and how would he handle it? It just brought home the nothinglessness, of the

refugees. No country, nowhere really to go, no profession, they couldn't make it. Just emptiness, all gone.

Q: Were there cultural or religious activities in the camp? I believe you already mentioned concerts, so there were some cultural activities.

A: Yes. There were -- you had to be very careful what you did, because there were these great political differences. And you very easy got into a fistfight or something of that sort. So we tried -- we tried to have lectures, but not about politics, if possible. Oh yes, we had the other thing. As we were supposedly strange animals, yeah, they sent us a psychiatrist from Chicago, who was supposed to help people. I think he may have been of European origin. He certainly didn't know how to handle people in camp. And he asked questions you ask in your private office, but they are do -- not applying to camp life. But the administration was very proud, we had a psychiatrist. We were glad when he left, but --

Q: What was his name?

A: Dreyfuss. I think that's correct.

Q: Did you have much success in helping individuals find family members?

A: We didn't do too much of that in that camp. There was another outfit what worked out of England, a location service, which matched thousands of families, but we didn't do it, we didn't know how to do it there. And we really were extremely busy with keeping things under control. People went on hunger strike, it -- all sorts of things. They fought with each other. As I say, somebody died shoveling snow, and family thought the administration should never have allowed him to shovel snow. And that's the only one I remember, there may be other ones. And had organize that people were visitor in the hospital. They were always so busy, the men were

not so busy, the men had a difficult time to take women's jobs, like cleaning the barrack rooms they had. We had single men, and they had to take care of their shabby, little apartments.

Q: How would you characterize the political tensions that you referred to earlier?

A: They were old border tensions, between the Yugoslav and the Austrians. And then there are always fights between the Poles, and the Germans, I mean [indecipherable] traditionally have a little fight. It was not really politics as such, it was just old enemy. It was excited people who would use every little incident to get excited about.

Q: Were people housed together with other individuals of the same nationality, or was it a mixed housing situation?

A: I can't [indecipherable]. I think they were [indecipherable] but I am not sure. I think there were.

Q: And you were mentioning earlier about men having to take on roles that traditionally were carried out by women. Were men and women essentially doing the same type of work in the camp?

A: Yeah, I think the men helped in the kitchen, but so did the women, but I know we couldn't get the men to work in the kitchen.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to add about your time in Oswego, before we move on?

A: No, not really, no. I forgot to say that during my time in Maryland, I became a citizen. That's important because I wanted too much to be a citizen, to eventually go to Europe.

Q: What was the process like in becoming a citizen?

A: You know, it's all 60 years ago. I had to bring a witness. I was the only one to be naturalized, and funny enough, in the small town of Westminster, Maryland, they hadn't naturalized anybody, as far as I know. Anyhow, I hold number one certificate. And of course, I was afraid, I

should know some American history, and I know I got questions, what makes a suggestion a bill, when it had to become a bill, and so on.

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Gabriele D. Schiff, conducted by Amy Rubin, on July 27, 2000, in Forest Hills, New York. This is tape number two, side A. On the last tape, we were speaking about your time in Oswego, and -- where you were working with refugees, and now perhaps you can tell me what you did after you finished your time in Oswego.

A: When I came back from Oswego, I had moved from Philadelphia to New York, and I was waiting for papers to clear, to go eventually to Europe. I went back to a job I had had before, and that's the juvenile court. I was always interested in working with delinquent youngsters -- so-called delinquent. And I worked for what's called Youth House for boys, and later for Youth House for girls. Again, as a psychiatric social worker, taking histories this time for the judge to have -- make decisions what to do with a youngster, send him home, go to placement, or whatever was indicated. I had done that early in the game, I forgot which year. I did it again when I came back from Oswego, and that was by the middle of '45. And I did it until the end of '46, when I went, with the Joint Distribution Committee, to Europe. I had been in touch with the Joint a long time before. Actually, I'd known about it all my life, cause my family was very instrumental in it's creation. And the Joint was one of the agencies working in Europe after the war. The other was UNRRA. Those were the two main agencies. Of course, every religion had it's representation. The Joint, and the U.S. Army, and the UNRRA was p-part of it, were really the most constructive factors in rebuilding. I am very aware that they are under a lot of criticism, but having been on the spot, I can say that they performed a miracle. Europe at that time was chaos, people not knowing where they came from, not knowing where they were going, practically not knowing who they are. The Joint and UNRRA [indecipherable] really established

camps, with the help of the army, for various groups, eventually for all people. There have been so many camps, and they were different in the different zones. You had the British zone, and you had the American zone. I can't remember if they had a Russian zone, but they had three zones. And em -- each zone had it's country director, and then there was a director for all the work, in Paris. He was in charge of it all. I know that when I came over, I was first going to Paris, to be oriented toward what was expected to me -- of me, and to be assigned to a country. I did not know when I left here where I would go. I assumed it would be Germany or Austria because of the language. To my great surprise it was Italy. And my much bigger surprise came, I went to Rome, because the capital always was the center where the Joint worked out of, and I spent a few weeks in a sort of reception camp called Genechita, City of the Movies. It was the Hollywood of Italy. And that was a camp for every refugees that had been picked up. Every nation, and wi -- religion. Men, women, children. I don't know how many. To me it seemed thousands, it may not have been. And that camp, I remember as a nightmare. If you ask me who administered it, I do not know any more. I know it had no individual rooms. There were partitions between the families, sort of made of sheets -- bedsheets, where you could hear every noise from the neighboring bed, which means your private life was open to the children, open to each other. It may be part because it was my first real camp, but I was absolutely overwhelmed. The second day I was there, there was a rumor that a Chinese had killed his wife. If that was so or not, I have no idea, but everybody talked about it. That was, in my memory, the most primitive camp, but as I say, I had just arrived, I had no basis of comparison. In a way it was good, because every other camp seemed like -- not paradise, but at least not like hell. And I must say, I don't remember anything of the beauty of Rome, which I had not seen before. I only remember this miles of humanity, badly dressed, hungry, cold -- it was winter, I came so -- in February, I think. And --

and then I was told I was to go to Milano, because I had experience with hospital work, and [indecipherable] work. And I got on long train ride. It still was right after the war, and people always forget, your trains weren't running. Italy itself had no food. The people were under the impression still of the war. Yes, they had won the war, oh, Italy didn't here -- take it back, I'm not sure Italy won. But they were -- everything was gray and gray. And it took us very, very long to get from Rome to Milano, which usually takes a night. Sleeping [indecipherable] didn't work, it was -- Italy was just a country in which a war had raged. And one shouldn't forget, it wasn't only all Displaced Persons, it was all the Italians themselves. You were hungry, and tired, and had no work. When I arrived in Milano, this rehabilitation center, being a former hotel, looked like absolute luxury. I did not stay in the place. I think that had had reasons, because it was tuberculosis all over the place. We had, as far as I remember, no children. Some younger people. I remember a young woman, perhaps in her early 20's, from Yugoslavia, who had survived with her parents, and they had gone through hell, and she had ch -- tuberculosis, and died, very much at the beginning of -- and I never forget it, I can still paint her face. And that -- it's really difficult to talk about, because it's a double experience. Here you had survivors faced with death again. Now, what that meant to them, I can't imagine, I can only feel a little bit in my fingertips. And still you had the same political groups fighting each other, that was the Hungarians and the Poles. All Jewish people, but different ideas, different religious traditions. Being angry at the world. This is [indecipherable] people. I remember three of young men who were not even 20 -- I mention that because you, at that age, could survive, and then in the 30's and 40's. You hadn't many old people survive, and you hadn't many children survive. Not in these camps. We had a doctor from South Africa, who was the M.D. director of the camp, and we had Displaced Persons physicians. We had about three physicians. Now, either ask me how

many patients, I really don't know, about a hundred, could be mistaken. Too long ago to ve -- to remember figures. And, what perhaps has to be mentioned is that was the time where streptomycin was a rarity. The doctors practically only had lermotorax to work with, which was a much more complicated procedure, nobody [indecipherable] it could be dangerous. Also, for the TB doctors, they had to stand very long. This is procedure, and I know once or twice somebody fainted. And streptomycin, we always had to get on the Black Market. Now, this was the center of the Black Market. You exchanged streptomycin for either coffee or cigarettes. And the accepted -- accepted currency were cigarettes. And -- and the other thing was, there was something -- the army run co -- called the PX, which was like a shopping center, with a very low prices. And we had, as American, or an English workers, we could buy there, and we could exchange. There are also two currencies. There was green dollar, and oh, what was the other called? A script. A script, as far as I remember, you couldn't take out of the country, I don't remember it. The green dollar was much better, and you could get anything for a green dollar, from two dollars to [indecipherable] dollars, there was no rule or regulation. And there was a fight to get food, because the Germans had no food themselves. And all these things are of course, forgotten. Now, one of these stories -- oh, I don't know how many, have been in articles I have written over the years. They are not very new. I've told them before. But one can't duplicate them, I can't invent new ones. And one which shows you the difficulty with food. Jewish holidays, of course, played a very, very big role. And these were the first holidays in freedom. So, my people in the -- I call it camp, it's really abcenter, wanted to be like home, and have geese and chickens for Rosh Hashanah. Now how to put loose geese and chickens, when all I had was the canned goods the Joint hand me? Now, many, many of my people weren't even used to that. So, the only thing to do was to ask if any of the DP's would be able to look after

live chicken and geese, and there was somebody. So then I went to the mayor of this little village, and asked if I could have some, I would bargain against canned peas, and stuff like that. Well, they let me have some. So, in our DP Center, we had guk, guk, guk, guk. And they were a big excitement, we had them for a few months. We had to feed them, they were like everybody else, starving. And the whole group, of course, was very much interested. And Rosh Hashanah came. We had a cook who was German and not Jewish, so he cooked the beasts, and when he was cooking them, to get the feathers out, he used boiling water, and when he did that -- you know what a mushkia is? The Jewish [indecipherable] overseers, which we would have foster, came in, and he looked at it and said, “Trayfa, no good, no good. You can’t eat them. Now tell your community what happened.” I said, “We m -- have to find a way out. This means life to them.” Well, I had an Orthodox part, a community, they all wanted to go right to America, and the un-Orthodox want to go what was then Palestine. Now, the un-Orthodox said, “We can eat -- eat it.” The Orthodox says, “Trayfa, trayfa, it can’t be done.” Then the Orthodox committee came to me and said, “You know, you have to ask a miracle rabbi.” A-Again this gentleman assimilated [indecipherable]. Well, eventually, I found a miracle rabbi in a camp in Austria. Now, try to phone, in occupied Germany after the war from one country to another. I had to call General Clay’s office, who was the commander of all of the German zones, and I got some soldier who thought I was utterly nuts. “What do you want, chicken? Buy some chicken.” “Excuse me, I have to,” -- “All right, you get clearance.” I get clearance, I call for the wonder rabbi, and I get him. And he says, “First of all, are you a Jewish daughter? Well, this is a very difficult question, I have to think about it. Would you call back in two hour?” I said, “But the things have to be cooked. I have no time to waste, I have excited people.” Call back. So I go through the whole thing again, get the same soldier to Clay’s office, who just -- who just shakes

his head, I am sure, but gives me clearance. And then I get the answer, it's a little difficult to translate from the German Jewish. "If the geese and the chickens were boiled in water that was higher than the boiling mark, then they are trayfa, but if that was lower, if was water right out of the faucet, then they can be eaten." So I was on very good terms with a young DP camp director, who had had a baby. I said to him, "Please, you bathed your baby this morning in hot water from the faucet?" He knew exactly what I was doing, said, "Yes, Miss Tarenberg, I did." I went back, called my two committees together, and said, "That's the answer from the [indecipherable] rabbi, we can't go any higher, and we are going to eat the animals." And we did. But these stories, once in a lifetime. Bad food is in all institutions, one of the main cause for trouble, because people don't have so many things to fight about, and they let out all their hostility, their fear, their anxiety, on food. And I have had so many debates about food, you can't imagine. In the three centers I worked in. So that was part of it, but the emotional atmosphere on these holidays, with the families, some were all over the place, if they were alive, was really unforgettable. On a more cheerful note, we had our first wedding in camp. And that again is a story, how overly sensitive people are under those conditions. This young couple wanted to go Aliyah beth -- you know what it is? To Palestine. And when they married -- at that time, of course, we had to create a wedding dress. Well, the Joint had sent us lots and lots of material for cottons, and out of the cotton material, we made dr-dresses for the whole group. And in a actual over-identification, I made myself a dress, too. We must have looked like a flower garden. Anyhow, when they married, I wanted to give them a wedding present. You don't have very much to give, and anyhow, money seemed to be the most important. Well, I took some lira and put them in an envelope, which was from my office, it was a little torn, and the young lady first said -- didn't say anything. And much later came to me and said, "I didn't thank you, because I was annoyed,

because you didn't take care enough to put that money in a nice envelope, and write something nice on it. We are taking that money, not for our personal gratification, but we'll give it to Aliyah beth." I said, "You're welcome, if that gives you satisfaction. I'm sorry. I surely didn't want to hurt you." But that's typical for the over-sensitivity. That was a Greek girl from Saronica. And I found them a particularly sensitive group. I don't know as much as [indecipherable] that I know about the other European countries. But they are a very sensitive group to work with. We had quite a few. We also had a supposedly Sephardic Jews -- Jew, from Greece somewhere, who turned out not to be Jewish at all. He was a Turk, and when a -- when he got angry, took a saber out -- I was talking -- and run around with a saber, but he ran away, end of story. As I say, the interesting thing is that all that I remember so well, probably because I felt guilty that I couldn't do more to help them, that they all have forgotten the bad part, and of course, compared to the concentration camp, this at least meant some security, but that they didn't know to which country they would go. I remember one woman who had a utterby breakdown, with good reason. She had waited and waited for her husband, eventually located him in Poland, but he was married to another woman, he had thought she was dead. And -- help. And then, a young lady who really -- later in this country, when I met her, by chance in the street, became a friend of mine, had marched all the way from Romania, that was days and nights. And she was young, she was almost a year -- a year -- was about 17 or 18, and almost all her family had been killed, but one brother who had gone to Palestine. And she tried violently to make an adjustment once she'll come to America. Had bad case of TB. They all had TB, but this was one of the worst. And I looked after her, I s -- sat up at night with her, etcetera, etcetera. You do what you think has to be done. It's not always social work, what's [indecipherable] happen. And one day we got a cable from Palestine that her brother had died in the war against England. Now I had the nice job to

tell. And of course, she practically lost her mind, and so for quite a few nights I stayed with her in her room, and played, as well as I could, mother figure, but -- and she never got over, not even today, is happily married, but she had to tell all her past. Many didn't talk about their past, but she felt she want to describe the halls, and there were many children. It was a very religious home. And so every day, we set aside a certain hour for telling. And then I left, and I didn't hear about her. I thought of her sometimes. I had a picture, with a very nice dedication. And really, 40 years went by, and I -- I'm here in Forest Hills in a street, in front of a store, looking at some hats. And a very tiny voice behind me said, "Aren't you Miss Tarenberg?" That was Celie, that's her name, Celia. And she had come to this country, had gotten TB again, was in a TB sanitarium. Had married, happily. Her husband died. Had married again, living quite near here. Has two wonderful children, and is a very good business woman, which I'd never thought. Had [indecipherable] in business. We see each other once in awhile. It's gone -- I never [indecipherable] something, I cannot identify this [indecipherable]. You find that in DP camps, people became either very, almost fanatically religious, or said a God who lets concentration camps happen. It's very difficult to say something to either. But I found that over and over again. And it's interesting that the stories I got at that time, went riva -- really well, just about liberated from camps, were quite different than what you get today. I remember, I think out of my personal sy-system, I remember so well a young man who was very close to his father, they were very religious, and he had seen his father jump into the fire with a Torah in his arm. You don't hear that any more. But I must say, I almost cracked up on that one.

Q: How were you able to communicate with people from so many different countries?

A: With my broken Yiddish, and German, and to other member, we talk English. English was taught in the school in Germany, and so when you had people from Germany, who went to a

high school, you sometimes could. I do not remember communications difficulties. In what we said, yes, but not language-wise.

Q: Did you start learning other languages yourself?

A: No. I can make myself understood in -- in -- in Italian, or in Dutch. In Europe you pick up languages from traveling, but I don't speak that.

Q: So I just want to establish the setting of this experience, not necessarily at camp, but more like a rehabilitation center, as you call it. Was it wintertime? And exactly when did you arrive there, or as best as you can recall, month and year?

A: I think in the mer -- no, that I can -- I think in Merrano, I arrived in the spring of '47.

Q: You talked about the individuals there having tuberculosis. Did you see many deaths? Were many of them very ill?

A: I -- in Merrano, I saw quite a few. They are -- were all ready for rehabilitation, so you didn't see too many -- they were not -- it's not true, they were not already for rehab. We see -- so I saw several deaths in -- in Merrano. I cannot remember in Passau.

Q: Now, were you paid for doing this kind of work, as well?

A: Yes. I was paid by the Joint Distribution Committee, and I was paid, actually in America, because of all the difficulties. We got a certain amount of script, I believe, in the country where we worked. But we came back to America, and found quite a bit of money after three years. We weren't rich, but --

Q: Did you sign up for a certain time period to work there?

A: Not on a certain place, a contract was usually for 18 months, but you could break it any time, if you had to, and people did.

Q: Did you have any other friends, or acquaintances in the United States, going to do this same kind of work in Europe?

A: I had two friends who did --

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: This is tape number two, side B, of an interview with Gabriele D. Schiff. On the other side, we were talking about people you knew, who also went to do relief work, and work with refugees in Europe.

A: Yeah, I know these two, and I met other people in Europe with whom I still am friends, colleagues of mine.

Q: What was the journey like to get to Europe? Any specific recollections of that experience?

A: No. I don't even remember if I came -- probably by boat, I don't remember anythi -- yes, yeah, I came by boat, but I really don't remember anything whatsoever about it.

Q: I think you already made some kind of reference to the kinds of discussions that you had with refugees, and whether or not they wanted to talk about their past. Did they more often want to talk about the war time experiences in comparison to their past before the war?

A: That is difficult to say, because is a highly individual -- some people had a great need to talk about their homes, and to show that they had little a farm, or a good business, or -- and I think people react in accordance with their personality. You can't really make generalizations. Some people had a great need to show how clever they had been in surviving, while today we recognize that survivor, was luck. There are some things that have been shown, which made survivor, for instance, in a camp, somewhat more likely, if you had a close relative somewhere who needed you. If you had a reason to survive. There are such things that one can perhaps a

little, generalize. Some people who had a somewhat guilty conscience, had to justify the way. There was much more things that had to be hidden at that time. I remember one man was so upset because he had stolen potatoes. And well, there were much more serious crimes that had been done. And yes, after the people trusted you, you would have the conflict that you could have saved somebody, but you ran, or whatever it was. I always have difficulty with some of the things, because you cannot document them, you have to trust my memory, and some of these stories, I don't even mention, because I have no way of showing they really happened. I know it, but that's my quarrel I have very often, with people I discuss this whole -- memories are memories, but they are not documentation. They change. Human mind is stra -- is really doing strange things. And people who've changed their story don't even know that they have changed it. I've had people tell me another person's story, and thought it was theirs. So, what I always say, but that's now a personal opinion. Your facts are the skele -- skeleton, and the stories [indecipherable] are really the flesh you put on the skeleton. Cause it's amazing what happens. And then there are, of course, people who do it with a purpose. One experience is that when we were very eager to get people to America, and they were -- the doctors felt they were really ready to go, but their x-rays didn't show it, we thought of [indecipherable] that the right x-rays were taken. And the same people, when it came to restitution in this country, wanted me to testify that they had tuberculosis. That's very difficult to decide what to do.

Q: Were there any instances where you knew that it was wrong to do something, but you knew that it -- in the end it would help someone, so you did it?

A: I think I'm not going to answer that.

Q: Do you feel that your own memories have changed much over these years?

A: It has changed by getting old. I ha -- the facts are not changed, but many things I could remember even two years ago, as you see me groping for words sometimes, that's the process of aging. I don't think that the facts of any of the things I say, aren't true. I can't guarantee, but I don't think it is.

Q: In the conversations you had with refugees, did they talk much about their goals for the future?

A: If they had them, yes, but in the early days I'm thinking of right now, they didn't know. They didn't know what country, and what would be expected there. And then we had the alt, which is a trade school there, and they learned some trades, which they really couldn't use in the country they were going to. A shoemaker. Now we got many from Russia, but I mean, it's not a very desirable trade here. Bookbinding. Now, you would teach computer. But that wa -- was a good idea, to get people who had never experienced the working process, having to be up at a certain hour, having a lunchtime, etcetera. But these school -- trade school, they had at least an idea how a normal person works. It was a good idea.

Q: Did any of the refugees with whom you had contact, speak of any desire to take out revenge?

A: Yes. Absolutely. They still do, today. And when they hear something -- I heard somebody say when all this business happened with the French Concorde, it should happen to German. I said, "It did happen to German, and shouldn't happen to anybody." I mean, there you can see the raw feeling, yes. And then, the question, will they ever go back for a visit to Germany, and Poland, and so on. And there's some who do, and some who don't. I am surprised that so many non-German Jews settled in Germany. I never quite understand that. It happened, I saw it myself.

Q: Have you returned to your hometown in Germany?

A: Yes. I -- I wanted to g -- to see the graves of my parents, because I'm one of the few who knows where her parents are buried, and I thought [indecipherable] me, and I did.

Q: When were you there, and how was the experience, visiting Germany?

A: I have been there for two days or three days before, wanting to show my husband, who was from Poland, my hometown. I tell you, a experience -- I always have up -- a city in which I don't know a single name in the phone book, is not my hometown. I've heard it's a beautiful city, and they were very surprised the taxi drivers, that I speak German without an accent. I could relate to the young people, who really had nothing to do with all this. But when I saw somebody over 55, or so, I curled up. I didn't know what you did during the war. I looked at our old house. It was a funny feeling. But something nice. When I was born, my father planted a pine tree in our garden, and by God, it survived. It was nice. I always said I am a survivor, so -- and people have gone back in g -- much greater numbers to Poland. They hate Poland much more than I hate Germany. I mean, [indecipherable] is in my own ca -- but I'm not a person who hates. That my Polish friends -- not my husband, he never hated Germany. You find in there, some of my husband's stories, which you will find interesting. It -- certainly you had people who never stopped talking about what they did to escape, or to get out. And it was good for the ego, I think, it -- then, in this country, nobody wanted to hear about these stories. And now, it has become very fashionable. If I have to read another book about the Holocaust, I jump. And they get farther and farther away from the truth. I mean, that's natural. Life marches on, we hope. Anything else I should te-tell you?

Q: When was your visit to Germany, the one you were just referring to with your husband?

A: 1953. '54.

Q: And just to go back momentarily, to the conversations you had with refugees in Italy, and any talk --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- of revenge. What, at that time, was any of the specifics of -- of revenge that -- that people would have liked to have taken if they could have?

A: You know, they really didn't have the strength to do more than throw a -- a few words around, all the Germans should be killed. These strong words. Yes, they should be taken off this earth, I've heard that. I never heard other children should be killed. I mean, you would think that comes in from the [indecipherable]. I never heard it. I -- they wanted to kill individual commanders of a camp, kapos, you know, the -- yes. But it was a -- obviously only talk was too much, yet the hostility was there. Was -- overriding it all was anxiety. What will become of us, what has happened to our families? Yes, there was a hatred against landlords taking over farms, or -- and then there were the differences in how the people had survived, which influenced their attitude toward everything. The people who had lo -- fought in the motho ghetto, they are much more warrior-like than the ones who had hidden in the forest. And you see that also, in the second generation. Now, in my last year, I been working with the 50 and 60 year old children of my original clients who have died. I mean, on, and on, and on. But now it's come [indecipherable]

Q: What kind of assistance were you offering to the second generation?

A: I had them organized into groups. Now, we have so many groups, you can take your pick. I even had to have somebody in Los Angeles, but I don't know her, it went by letter. I have a -- my main work, when it really was work, was helping them to come to terms with the generation conflict. Want to hear anything about it? In so many cases, the parents expect that the younger

generation should make up to them some of the things they never had. They overstress the value of education. They put so much pressure on, that the young people can't live up to it. But they haven't had it, and here they had the chance, they have to take it. All right, when the time comes that a 18 year old wants to move out of the house. You can't go -- leave us. Everybody has -- else has left us. Then the young person feels guilty. She wants to live her own life, or he, and on the other hand -- I've had many, many interviews around that. Around differences in religious activities. And it works both ways, I have -- I had parents who were practically agnostics, and children were fanatic [indecipherable]. Then the adjustment difficulties. Young people here certainly live different type of lives than parents have in Czechoslovakia. And that depends on which community they live in, but now -- when I first came here, I preached about the necessity that we should know more about DP camps, because they were the catch all. And I was very mad when I heard of the big conference, that some of my former colleagues are, who were very nice, and I couldn't go, which annoyed me. But -- not really. And then I started to think, the second generation is in their 50's and 60's and 70's now. They must have something in common, and usual a social agency isn't really geared to this type of problem. They could probably best help themselves. And I helped them to come together in groups. Now, we have the English transport children is one group. Then we have the hidden children is another one. There's a [indecipherable] which name I'm -- I really don't know which. Federation of Children [indecipherable]. Now, unfortunately, they all compete with each other. But they do good work, they all bring out the monthly newsletter. And that was very nice. I always get them from all of them, and I give them to students I share the contact with, et-etcetera. And the English transport children were having a question where you can ask for relatives of friends. And I remembered that my mother, in England, as a volunteer, was connected with a hostel where children from

Germany and Austria, who went over with the English transports, stayed during the war years. And in a small place in Yorkshire, which I had almost forgotten, I was up there a few times. And really for the fun of it, I wrote to the editor, and said, "I wonder if any of your subscribers will remember an old lady in Italy, who ladled out the soup for lunch every day in the hostel." And lo and behold, I got three answers, after 60 years. From somebody in Canada, somebody in South Africa, and somebody in Maine, and they remembered my mother, etcetera, my brother. So it still goes on, you know? It's a personal experience, but it's an indication that it still is this reaching out for the past. Well, [indecipherable] of my personal memories. Cause the experiences were very different than somebody who was in England, or hidden in the Ukrainian forest. A whole group has gone back to Poland this year, but I don't know what they had, I'm -- had [indecipherable] to find out.

Q: In the rehabilitation center in Italy, where you were, in Merrano --

A: Yeah.

Q: Correct? You mentioned there was a German chef, someone who was not Jewish?

A: Right.

Q: And was that unusual, for there to be someone German?

A: It was not in Merrano. It was in Barishkamine.

Q: Okay. Were there other Germans working then at the camp, or at the center in -- in Germany where you were?

A: I don't think there was --

Q: Or is that chef the only one?

A: -- very much working, anyhow. There was a DP director, who then cheated, and had to leave. I can't remember. I just remember that cook.

Q: Were there any tensions with the chef and refugees who might not have felt comfortable with a -- a German there?

A: There may have been, I don't remember. I really don't remember any German personnel, I just remember this one guy.

Q: So let's go back a little bit, to Italy again.

A: Yeah?

Q: And could you tell me if there was much in the way of Zionism in the realbit -- rehabilitation center where you were?

A: Well, I lived through the day in Merrano, when Palestine became Israel, and that was one of the most exciting days for the people. And we had an ardent group of Zionists. They were not in numbers so many, as they were young, intelligent, aggressive, and I was pretty close to -- with them, because Merrano is geographically near a pass, called the Brederal, and we got really [indecipherable] the people who went to Israel, later Palestine, and we hid them in the sanitorium, and the Zionist group, of course, was mac -- most active in that. That we had all sorts of dealings with the -- the Bricha, and with the Haganah, and -- and that was good, because the people felt alive, you know? And then we brought people to this house of Italy, the people who wanted to go to Israel. Again, yes, people did die. I remember the leader of the Zionist group, a young man, just before going to Israel, died.

Q: Did many of the individuals, the refugees you were with, leave for either Israel, or other countries while you were there?

A: Practically nobody left. It's -- you'll see, i -- the Truman act had just started. There was a trickling of people. Many, many people were afraid to ler -- leave, I forgot to tell you. They were

afraid of life outside. They had been under discipline for so long. They wouldn't tell it that way, but it would come out of the conversation. You asked me something I didn't catch all.

Q: During the time you were at Merrano, were many refugees leaving, and emigrating to other countries?

A: Some. A trickle. One or two to Australia, and one or two to South America. There were no visas to be gotten.

Q: How long did you stay then, in total, at that center? What -- when, approximately, did you leave?

A: I am not -- really not sure. In '47, I had a car accident, I didn't [inaudible]. I would think toward the end of '48.

Q: Did conditions change much from the time when you first came to Merrano, to when you left?

A: Some people had left for Palestine. Some had gotten better. Oh yeah, we had this one incident [indecipherable]. We had one grim incident, which could have been avoided. People did not want to leave the sanitorium, because yes, while ma -- word of mouth, they wanted to get out, it's awful, no food, but, it was actually a very good place. They had good food, and they had good care. So, when they were going to be discharged to a regular camp, or to wherever they could go, they didn't want it, they didn't like it. And a group of them got together, and said, "We won't go." And there was an awful fight with the administration, and I know I was sent to look at another sort of camp, that was empty, and they were supposed to go there, near Milano. And when we got there, I was with them. There was no water, and actually not much either. And they hated even the [indecipherable] there. And, the whole group decided to go back to Merrano. And the administrator there had no food for them, you cou -- you got food -- rations for the persons you have. And he didn't know what to do. And, as he couldn't -- he did not take them back into

the sanitorium, they had no damanna, no talmedge in Italy to stay, they were all sent to prison. Now, this should not have happened, but it did. And were all sorts of law students, they didn't stay in prison very long, I think there is a -- but it became a big issue. And eventually, I think, they went back to the sanitorium, and eventually to different countries. But it created so much ill will, Merrano never quite lived that incident down, and it's written up in drawings, and [indecipherable] everywhere I heard this story. Nobody knew much about how to handle survivors, and how to -- there was no government, there was nothing. We all had to do as best as we could, and sometimes it wasn't right.

Q: Did you often leave the center and s -- for whatever reason, go into the near town, or to the local area, and meet other people in the area?

A: Me, or the DP's?

Q: You.

A: Yes. First of all, I was partly stationed in Munich. I could, on my free days, go to Munich, which was a big city in [indecipherable]. I also was very interested in seeing what was going on in the country. The country was really Austrian, and then became Italy after the second World War. And again, i -- everybody hated everybody else. And the Germans came out during the day, and the Italians at night. It was really very strange. Merrano is a beautiful little city, and oh yes, we had time for a private life. I was also, somewhere around that time, living in a hotel. I don't know why, but I did. I worked in Merrano, in the real center, but I worked -- I lived across the street in a hotel. I don't know why, but I did.

Q: That's where you stayed the whole 18 months?

A: In Merrano, yeah. But in the hotel, no. I really couldn't tell you anything. I can picture the room in which I lived, it -- I know during the whole time, I had a room in Munich, a tiny room, in which I had a peasant bath wi --

End of Tape Two, Side B

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Gabriele D. Schiff, conducted by Amy Rubin, on July 27, 2000, in Forest Hills, New York. This is tape number three, side A. I wanted to ask you where you were living during your time helping refugees in Merrano?

A: I was living partly in the Hotel Flora, across the river. I was also traveling quite often to Merrano, where there was a camp. I don't know where else I lived, I remember Flora.

Q: So in Merrano you were not living amongst the refugees, is that -- is that correct?

A: I think so. I just can't remember.

Q: Were you successful in helping to find family members for the refugees in Merrano?

A: Once or twice.

Q: And I know we spoke earlier about some of the religious holidays that were observed. Any particular cultural events in Merrano, in the center?

A: Wedding. I think two weddings I remember. A bris I remember. But, of course, when Israel was declared Israel, we had a big celebration. I'm sure we had Pesach, but I don't remember a thing.

Q: Were there any commemorative events, for events that had taken place during the war, such as the Warsaw ghetto uprising, for example?

A: Not that I remember. We had the evening for Jewish folk songs, and I remember very well that our youngest patient at that time was about 14. She came to us from Bergen-Belsen, a concentration camp up north, I think on a British. And she never had any formal education, or anything. Her father was a journalist in Warsaw, and she had a beautiful voice, and she sang a

song, “Aus straita librend,” our city is burning, and she had her own tears. That’s about the only get together of that sort I remember. But again, don’t forget, 60 years ago, or whatever it was --

Q: Were refugees asked to do some work in this rehabilitation center?

A: Yeah, they had the school, trade school, and the arch, one of the [indecipherable]

Q: And in addition to that, were they asked to take care of any of the administration of the center, or help in any of the duties?

A: Yes, but I -- I remember somebody helping with the clothing room, giving out clothing. Probably yes, but I wouldn’t really ever known that, but everything so --

Q: How did that situation differ from what you saw in Oswego? Were there more refugees there working to help the camp stay afloat in Oswego, compared to Merrano?

A: Merrano were sick people, and so it was very limited what they could do. Yes, I know, one of our porters was also a refugee. I don’t know, don’t remember that it ever became a problem in Merrano. They liked to do it, I think they were paid for it.

Q: So now would you tell me about you departure from Merrano, and what you did after?

A: You know, some things are really a little difficult, because one’s own life gets so mixed up with it. I went for a prolonged -- do the e -- no, I ended with the Joint, somewhere during the summer, in I believe ’48, I don’t know what it was. And I went to Brazil, for personal reasons. But I needed a job, and so I went to the Joint office in Rio. And they, of course, didn’t know what to do with me, because I don’t speak Portuguese. Women doing that sort of thing in Brazil is not customary at this time. PS, I had one of the first flights from Rome to Rio de Janeiro, which took about 37 hours. And I had never been in a plane before.

Q: How was that experience?

A: Overwhelming. We went down in Dakar, were so many big flies. Was all very, very strange, but [indecipherable] as the only Jew with me, that was a displaced person. But the Joint thought, what can we do with her? Well, the only thing we could think of, because they really had no displaced persons around, was sending me around to get money, to -- as a fundraiser. A, I am the worst fundraiser under the sun in any language. B, I was a women -- woman, Thirdly, I don't speak the language. So, it was an absolute failure, but on friendly terms. We just decided we weren't for each other. And I took the next plane back to Paris, where I had a sister. And I went to the Joint, and said -- I said I'm back in Europe, I might just as well work, and they assigned me to Germany. They sort of were quite glad to have me back at the time. So, that's how I started in Bashkimine. Passau came a little later, but I had them both together, and then I was stationed in Munich. But I really wasn't supposed to be there too often, they thought I had to go to time in Munich, I better stay in my village often.

Q: Did you see a great deal of devastation from the war?

A: In Italy, I did. In Munich, I only saw the main streets, really. In Frankfort, I saw a lot. But it obviously didn't impress me very much, or I would be able to remember details, I don't.

Q: Did you feel very different about being in Germany, than when you had been in Italy, right before?

A: Yes. To be in your own country, in an American uniform, and not belong anywhere is very difficult. And I didn't like the Germans very much, and I never liked the people from Bavaria, the city was prejudiced, but there it was. I never felt at home in Munich. I got along well in Bashkimine and Passau. Now, in Passau, I spent month in the hospital. You can have it as a story, I mean, I -- in a way, connected. We all had the command of Jeeps in Germany, because they were always meeting in another place, or yet to another camp. That's how I saw so many

camps, because you were sent to see if a patient's ready for discharge, or whatever. And we had a person in charge of our own district, from England. And there was -- there were meetings forever, and this was in November, this I remember. And it was a very foggy night, and I had a young Czech driver, who meant very well, but didn't know too much about driving. And we couldn't find the house of this English commander. And we drove down a mountain, and where he thought was a street, it was a mountain going down, and the Jeep rolled over, and over, and over. Have a happy ending. And I don't know much what happened after, I was first taken, I'm told, to the house of the commander. I was unconscious, and then eventually taken to the Passau hospital. There I woke up, in a German hospital, which was all I needed, and with a big, s-swollen head, and it turns out that I had a fracture of the skull. Luckily, my driver came the next day. Nothing had happened to him, and he wanted to apologize. It's very often the person who sits next to the driver. And I was in that hospital for months. I think it was March that I got out. I was very lucky, I had no le -- nothing left over. My eye is a little affected, but for weeks I couldn't see, I thought I would never see again. And it was not Christmas, was some holiday, I know people were very nice to me, and a Catholic priest always came and gave me the Last Rites, and I could really take my choice. And eventually I was asked, where would -- did I want to go for a convalescent leave. And I chose Merrano, because I knew doctors there, and I knew the place, and I didn't want to go to a German German place. And in Merrano, I met my future husband, who was a doctor there. So I said to the end of his life, "I had to fall on my head to meet you." So you see, it has been a rather eventful life.

Q: When did you meet him, when was that that you returned to Merrano?

A: I met him in ’48, we got married in ’52, cause we had different quotas from different countries. I was an American citizen, he was Polish, and so they had a long to-do, but we made it eventually.

Q: How long did you stay in Merrano at that point?

A: I guess about four weeks, and then I went back to work. I went to the end of that contract, then they established another year [indecipherable], I don’t know the name, I went there a few times, to help the worker there to get organized, but something ashabat, I really don’t know. And then came back.

Q: After you recovered from the car accident, were you still enthusiastic about returning to do the ru -- refugee work?

A: Yeah. Everybody was surprised, and told me I could get a pension if I stopped working. [indecipherable] me all sorts of things, but didn’t really occur to me.

Q: While you were working in Germany, and perhaps even in the hospital you stayed at for so long, did you ever experience anti-Semitism, post-war anti-Semitism?

A: I experienced doctors who were not nice, but they never said it was because I was Jewish, they said I was an American, and we had everything. And I -I’m quite sure it was of religion, but I’m not one who always finds anti-Semitism anywhere. It was unpleasant, and I was very glad when I got out of there. There I have the documentation.

Q: And at the same time, did you sometimes enjoy your excursions to Munich? Were you able to enjoy anything in the city?

A: Well, when I was in Passau in the hospital, I couldn’t go out. When I came back, yes, I enjoyed Munich. Had nice friends, we went out a bit. But, as I say, in Munich it’s not -- it’s a beautiful city, it’s not my territory. I would never go for a vacation there. The countryside is

beautiful. And many, many people stayed there. Munich was the center of the DP camps, and also had the big TB sanitorium, where I visited, never worked, Goljing. And we got often, people discharged from there, mostly from other camps, but also from Goljing.

Q: So, would you describe to me the conditions that you found each of the camps in, the ones that you worked in, in Germany.

A: Well, I worked only in the DP camp -- in the TB centers. I visited many of the other camps, and they were different. I mean, some were more luxurious than others. I remember a barracks -- the camps had a very good self government, which I admired, and they didn't have barbed wire around. If the people could leave, I don't know, I rather doubt it, because it might not [indecipherable] I don't really recall the -- I don't know -- remember any details. I remember camps as a -- probably because I never stayed there over a day, I just went in, took my history, and went out again.

Q: So in Birishgamines, and in Passau --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- those were the two places where you spent more significant time.

A: Yeah.

Q: And those were both rehabilitation centers for TB patients?

A: Yeah.

Q: And not displaced persons camps, per se?

A: They were centers for displaced persons -- Jewish displaced persons who had tuberculosis.

Q: How many patients, approximately, were in each?

A: I really don't know, anybody who wants to know, the Joint has all these figures. I really don't know -- 80?

Q: And what was your routine, did you go to one per day, did you go to one and stay for the week? How did you go between?

A: Usually for the -- usually for the week. One week, work days in one, and the weekend, at least twice a month in Munich, and then of -- to Passau. That was a very pleasant routine. I felt quite at home in both centers, and Munich was always full of gossip, who was going with whom. And once in awhile, I could go to a museum, or do something nice.

Q: Your friends in Munich, were they Jewish? Were they also doing this similar kind of work, as you?

A: Yeah, they were mostly Joint people, or any of the other agencies. I do not remember picking up anybody from Munich, or Merrano -- yeah, Merrano -- one, it was not a friend, but a person I was in contact with about -- for a long time.

Q: Was -- would you say it was unusual for you, as a young, now American, to come and do this kind of work in Europe?

A: No. There are, of course, plenty of us.

Q: Or as a women, in particular, I suppose.

A: Wa -- again, a great many. Very often the nurses were also American. Oh, I trained nurse's aides sometimes to [indecipherable]. I only remember we had a very nice nurse from New York, a Jewish nurse. No, a -- UNRRA had many, many social workers, and so had the Joint. I wouldn't know how many, but I would guess over a hundred. They worked in every country, Poland, Hungary, and -- I don't know if anybody was attached directly to the army, but we worked very closely with the army, and we were very helpful. And the American army was really very helpful to the displaced persons. The children loved the soldiers, they got chocolates. And when we called on them because there might be trouble, not very often, they were always

helpful. I have good experiences, as far as human beings are concerned. And I got very fond of the displaced persons, because they were so courageous. They had such a will to live. You would think you gonna [indecipherable] suicide or anything other -- I didn't, I saw -- we get -- we must get married, we must have children, otherwise Hitler has won the war. That, over and over again. It really could be exasperating with this forever complaining about food. I know I once lost my temper when somebody complained he hadn't gotten enough sausage, and after all, six millions had been killed. And I says, "They weren't killed for you to get sausage." They were always these fights. The Russian engineer, you had all sorts of people. A Russian Jewish engineer. And we had sort of hostess, who was Italian Jewish. There quite a mix there in Italy. They all got, somehow, along with each other.

Q: How would you compare the differences between the groups of refugees in these three different rehab centers, in Italy first, and then of course, the two in Germany.

A: That was a different time. The ones in Italy were still much more under the influence of the war, had many more concrete needs. We had no money, we had invented pocket money. I remember I would -- think it was Monday, I set a little [indecipherable] and gave out pocket money. And in Bashmine, and Passau, the war had been away a little longer, they knew a little better what would happen next. They were less aggressive, also less interested. You had much more, as I remember, much more ablusionaries in Italy than in Germany. But I fow -- because it was my first, I always felt much closer to Merrano than to Passau, in particular, I -- I never really got warm with Passau, but that was my -- I didn't like to be lectured, and many things play into it. And I had a friend in Gola, who was above anybody, but somebody else was the director [indecipherable] get into question of competence, and . . . it was the only one -- I saw cotaferata in Italy --it was -- I only saw -- it was very pleasant. And one day, I was very courageous, I

wanted to see Dachau, which was, of course, not in vention any more. But I overestimated my nerves, I simply fainted. I didn't see a thing of Dachau.

Q: You entered the -- the area --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- and then fainted right away?

A: Yeah, right away.

Q: Did someone come to your assistance?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Did you see any other concentration camps?

A: No, I didn't want to. And it wasn't as fashionable as now. Now you have tourists arrangements to see Auschwitz, etcetera. There wasn't my job.

Q: Have you returned to see concentration camps in Europe?

A: No, I wouldn't. I wouldn't see any reason why. I know enough about it, I wouldn't make anything better by seeing it. I haven't even been to our museum here, at the [indecipherable] Holocaust Museum. I would have gone to the Holocaust Museum, if I could. I would go e-eventually to the museum here, too. They got my first forgers by that time, I didn't really have any contact with Washington. So they wrote, and I sent them, and I was sorry later, but [indecipherable]

Q: The refugees who were in Germany, the ones you worked with, were they primarily from certain countries?

A: You mean in Bashkimine? Yes, the majority was from east Europe. Poland, Romania. I can remember -- oh, Hungary, there's quite a few from Hungary. Not from Germany, interesting enough.

Q: How did these refugees feel about being in Germany?

A: Well, they wanted to get out of it, but again, and you can't underestimate the self-centeredness people had to have to survive. And Germany -- one hated Germany, and you hope [indecipherable] what happen, and so on, but your main interest was to get out, and to make money, and to get well. There were -- in the three places, there were some political fanatics. Some against Roosevelt, others were against England, others were -- hated Germany. But they made a lot of [indecipherable] noise, no other action that I can remember. But of course, there may have been things they wouldn't have shared with me.

Q: What sort of advice did you offer to refugees in any of the counseling sessions that you had?

A: Let me pin it very much on the problem they wanted. If it was a family problem, which it often was, you did the usual counseling. I -- a thing I advised all of them to get into some working process, be it in someplace it could help in the village [indecipherable]. And in other, we had schools, in some are -- in other, Bashkimine, there was a big wi -- camp, very close, where they had very good causes, so we encouraged them to go down there. And otherwise it was the usual counseling, where do you -- how do you come to der -- terms with things you don't come to terms with? What ways of adjustment? Give them opportunity to talk about their childhood, about their escape, trying to set their mind at ease about whatever they had done. Listen to the good things they had done. Trying to build up the personality as much as I could. And also trying to get some sort of community council getting started [indecipherable]. Really, pretty much what a social worker is supposed to do, but I did it as a sideline, the main things were always what the day brought. Not enough sheets on the beds, or not enough peninsilino, streptomycins. Could they get coffee, or decaf, or -- at remember that I organized any trips. Also,

trying to get the doctors, to -- who were medically trained, but not psychologically, to understand the patient better.

Q: Do you feel that your own training as a social worker prepared you for these roles that you had to fulfill?

A: Prepare? Not. My training helped me to find my personality, and to use it constructively, and that helped. But the actual causes, it didn't do me any harm. Know what I mean? It's -- it's hard to say what you bring to the training, and what the training gives to you. It gives you discipline, which I had before. It made me understand American life better, and the social system, which is very, very different from Europe. I certainly knew more about welfare and all these things. And the mixture of being European and having American training helped me, yes.

Q: Were the living conditions pretty similar in the two centers in Germany where you worked?

A: From the DP's, or from me?

Q: Well, mostly for the DP's.

A: Yes, they were very similar. I think Merrano, because it was beautifully located, and had more appealing rooms, was I think, the more cheerful setting, if a TB sanitorium can be cheerful.

End of Tape Three, Side A

Beginning Tape Three, Side B

Q: This is tape number three, side B, of an interview with Gabriele D. Schiff. Would you continue to tell me about differences, and similarities between the different centers. The two in Germany you got to know, and if you'd like to compare with the one in Italy.

A: Comparisons are always difficult, no matter what you compare. The thing that stands out in my mind is that the people in Italy were closer to their real survivor experiences, and were more revolutionary, and also had more of a feeling of quote, that's coming to me. And they really felt

that the world owed them a living. Certainly America, because it was so rich, and Germany because it had handled them so badly. As far as the camps, they were both located in pleasant surroundings. I think the kooven ital -- Italy had more contact with the population of Merrano, than the group in Passau had with the inhabitants of Passau. The problems were pretty much the same, health, where to go to, how to handle one's past, and what the future will bring. This is an oversimplification, but by now, some of the details have slipped my mind. What is very much on my mind is the fact that many of the people who are still alive, of my rehab center population, are in their late 50's, I think up the end of 60, and I wonder how they will handle the process of aging, which is something that affects all people, but I have a suspicion that it affects them differently. From my work with survivors in this country, I have seen that they pretty much go to a second -- through a second immigration when they get older. Certainly the language that they have handled rather well, through ha -- the middle years, gets to be slightly problematic again. I find that older people, including me, are apt to count money in their mother tongue, which they haven't done for years. Also, of course, living in a city, a big city like New York, where you haven't gone to school, or know anybody from the olden days, makes you doubly lonely. Loneliness, of course, comes with aging, but as a survivor, you sometimes ask yourself, what do you survive for? I have often heard complaints by survivors that there is nobody they went to school with, no neighbors that know the streets they have walked in. And if it comes to memories, most older people can escape into pleasant memories, and do, but what can the survivor escape to? Slaughter, and burning, and anxiety, and death. So, I think -- and I know that at the moment, studies being made about it, that there is actually a difference. Yes, the experience of aging, we all have, but in a way, the survivor has it more so. Everything gets overly intensified.

Q: Have you focused on these issues of aging among the survivor population in your work, after returning from Europe, in New York?

A: I have. And I have had an -- when I still had cases -- later I became an administrator, I have had cases of people who were older, and my agency had a coffee house once a week, for older survivors, and that always gave me a chance to talk to different people, and as I'm, in a way, one of them, they share it with me quite frankly, their pleasures, and their worries. And, of course, sickness is another one, where people born and raised in this country, may have a relative come in, or a long time friend when they need help. It's always very different -- difficult for the survivor who lives alone, to find a person who helps take care of their bookkeeping, whom they can have on their living will, and all these documents that run all our lives, become problems, and make it suddenly clear again, yes you thought you were an American, you thought you were at home here, and suddenly you feel like a foreigner.

Q: I'd like to return to your time in Germany, and to your own living conditions.

A: Okay, which --

Q: So when you were in either Birishgamine, or Passau, what were the living conditions that you had on a weekly basis, a daily basis, how can you give some picture of what your own conditions were like?

A: We were so much daily living that they almost are not conditions. I had a room. I had office hours from about 10 to about four. People came to me when they had question about their pocket money, when their laundry wasn't intact, or the cook was angry, somebody had sent the food back. So I think part of the time, I was made of all purposes, and then people had sometimes gotten letters from consulates in a different language, which I tried to translate. They had to make official phone calls, which I made for them. And almost always, they took this opportunity

to talk about what just worried them that particular day. They hadn't heard from an uncle in America who was supposed to give an affidavit. The consulate hasn't let them know somebody had treated them badly. There was a rumor that Australia had -- took only people in agriculture. Whatever came up during the day, and then in the evening sometimes, we really talked about olden times, how it was at home, how they had sat around the open fire, how the grandfather had lived with them, how different it all was when the Russians came, who came riding into the kitchen, and had very different ideas of civilization. Also, on the other hand, had been very helpful. Many had been liberated by the Russians, who had liberated Auschwitz, and had really only good things to say. Other had stories that they simply had to tell, because they've had such an injustice had to be done to him. I remember a little story which is indicative. In a camp, there were a husband and wife, and as most camps, as -- especially concentration camps, there was absolutely nothing to eat. And one day, the husband had managed to gather two potatoes to bring to his wife, who was in the barrack. And it was a very wet, damp day. He tried to balance his way on bar -- bare feet through the ward with his two potatoes, and he was very close to home when an SS man came and just threw the potatoes out of his hand, down to the floor, into the mud, so that they couldn't be eaten any more. And he said, "That was one time where I cried." And I must confess, I cried when I heard the story.

Q: How do you look back on the emotional reaction in you, during your time working with refugees, and how -- you say you cried from this story. What other incidents really got to your center, and bothered you, disturbed you?

A: The interesting thing is, the big stories don't upset you as much as the small ones, and the reason is, I cannot identify with thousand people being killed, but I can identify with a husband being proud to relieve the starving of his wife, and have it spoiled. And I've always felt, when

I'm honest, it is these small things, the things that could have happened to me, in my experience, because the other things I haven't experienced. I have not lost somebody in a fire. I haven't lost anybody through Hitler, really, but I've lost a much -- many other things, and I know the loss were innocent. Things I have experienced are easier to ad -- identify with. There are some stories of escapes through snow nights. Now, I have some there from my husband, but as you will read them, why should I tell them? That -- his life was full of these small stories that get you. And not only me, but everybody we knew.

Q: Did you feel that there was an emotional toll, or price that you had to pay to do this kind of work with refugees? At the end of a day, did you reflect to yourself, and try to -- try to come up with ways to look at each day with perspective?

A: Yes, I try to review each day, and to see if there's something I could have done better. And when I found something, I welcome it. An emotional toll, perhaps it didn't take, because I felt guilty to begin with. And everything that I could do, would relieve my personal feeling of guilt. I came out of it, I think a better social worker, or to b -- say it better, a better listener, because so much of the help one could give, was simply by listening with a sensitive ear. You may say a trained ear, because people were so unhappy when they came to this country, that nobody wanted to listen to them. And they were bitter about it. And even today, the first thing one's being told, oh well, when we came to America, nobody wanted to hear us.

Q: Did you keep a journal, or in any other way record your reflections?

A: I didn't keep a journal, but when something really moved me, I made either a story out of it, because I liked to write, or put it down verbatim. I kept those notes for a long time, but I don't have them any more.

Q: Again, with respect to the centers, or the DP camps where you were working in Germany, were there similar types of religious activities and observances, as what you saw in Merrano, and also, what could you say about any of the cultural activities taking place in the camps, or centers in Germany?

A: I don't remember. I don't remember that we celebrated a Jewish holiday. I may not have been there during holidays. I don't remember the split between Orthodox, and the assimilated that we definitely had in Merrano. You may have had several [indecipherable] in Barishkamine, not in Passau.

Q: Do you have more distinct memories of Merrano, in comparison to the two in -- places in Germany?

A: Yes. I think because it was the first, and I came back from my own recuperation, and I stayed in touch with some instructors who went later to Israel. And the young girl I mentioned to you as the youngest, was later adopted by one of the doctors, and they went to Israel together, and then married a doctor, and came here, and stayed with me for some time, and I helped her find a job here. Yes, Merrano has many more memories. The others, I never feeled at home, and it was somehow -- it was more of a job.

Q: And what time period were you, more or less, in Germany working with refugees?

A: From '49. I think part of '48, the end of '48. In '50, I came back to the States.

Q: In any of these situations, whether in Italy, or in Germany, did you encounter any families that were intact, any family members that had already found each other again, or was it all single individuals, even if there were marriages within the camps, or the centers?

A: I think there were families in [indecipherable] in the first camp, where I was a few days. I cannot remember -- I think husband and wife, I may have met one or two couples.

Q: And in Germany, were there marriages in those camps, or centers, just as there were in Italy?

A: Made a mistake, in Italy there weren't, in Germany there were.

Q: Maybe I made the mistake, but . . .I may have also gotten the wrong impression about something else. I think I was told that in one of the places you were in Germany, you were the only relief worker living in the camp itself, is that true?

A: These were rehab centers, and they were -- they were listed as DP camps, so I use it sometimes. I think everywhere I was -- no, not in Italy, but in Passau, and Barishkamine, I think I was the only one living there.

Q: And was that a choice on your part, something that you asked for?

A: I think I was the only worker, and it was [indecipherable] it was the thing to do.

Q: So, in other words, when you were working with refugees, you were living amongst them, or --

A: Yes.

Q: And then you would go on the weekends, or at some other point to Munich, is that how your routine went?

A: There was never a set routine, but very often I would do that, yes.

Q: And again, just like I was asking with respect to the refugees in Italy you worked with, in Germany, did many of them wind up leaving the centers while you were there, and how did the conditions change from the point when you started, to the point when you left?

A: Basically they didn't change. Some people left, their visa came through, sometimes they found a relative unexpectedly, in Argentine or somewhere. The big change was, there was a Palestine one could go to, by -- or rather Israel one could go to. Palestine you needed the English

permit, and didn't get it. So that opened up new hope, and the spirit was a little more hopeful toward the end of my work, than in the beginning.

Q: When you would take down the histories of refugees experiences, on a daily basis, were you surprised and shocked from -- with what you heard, or did you go through a sort of transformation during your time with this work, and --

A: No. Even today, and I have taken hundreds here too, I think every history is different, and it will get me, I sometimes get mad at the client in my mind, and sometimes I admire them, but I've never gotten to the point where they don't touch me. They may not -- I'm sure they don't touch me as much as they did in the beginning. But I was very prepared for my husband's stories. But that came out a little later. No, I -- I never really got tired or blasé about it.

Q: And yet, weren't you often surprised? Was every day bringing something new to your awareness that you had not heard before?

A: Not every day, but once in awhile, I did hear about a criminal act I'd never heard of before, or some event I had never heard of. And that overwhelmed me. There was one mention, at one point, which I can't document, of somebody who claimed to have eaten human flesh. That was something I could neither understand, nor digest. I've never heard it again, other people said it was never [indecipherable]. I don't know.

Q: Did refugees talk much about war crimes trials taking place?

A: Not at all. I don't know which ca -- which year the war crimes took place. Not at all.

Q: In Germany, did the refugees often talk about specific perpetrators, and --

A: Yes. They talked a great deal about the kapos, the people who were the supervisors in the concentration camps. And they had grim stories to tell, and they would repeat the stories over and over again.

Q: But you also heard about people who had done good things, and they remembered that too. Polish peasants who had survi -- had helped survive a couple. Some had survived, a couple -- had saved a couple's child, and some person said, "None of us would have survived, if it wouldn't have been for people who were helpful." I heard that from both Italian -- more Italians than Poles. But also Germany, but less so.

Q: Did you meet individuals from your own hometown of Hamburg?

A: Once or twice, yes.

Q: People you had known?

A: No.

Q: So will you tell me now how it came to pass that you left Germany, and eventually returned to New York?

A: Well, I guess my contract was up, and three years was long enough, and I had met my future husband at that time. And the eventually hope was to go to America. And I -- I just had had -- I -- I felt it was time to go home. I had an apartment I wasn't -- didn't know what was going on there. So I came home. And [indecipherable] immigration agencies, for HIAS -- for New York Association for New Americans. Then, for a short time, I went back to the juvenile court. And then I heard that my latest agency, 1959 -- in the meantime I got married -- Self Help, was looking for somebody to take over for vacation. And I said I'll do it. I came for three months, and stayed 40 years. And I worked as a caseworker first, psychiatric social worker, and eventually ended up as deputy director. That was an agency that worked exclusively for survivors. It started with survivors from Germany, but soon became survivors from central Europe.

Q: So you want to continue telling me about this organization you worked for, Self Help?

A: Right. It was founded in 1935 by German refugees. And they founded it, and worked together with the Quakers. So, in name, it is always a non-sectarian agency, but today it works only for Jewish survivors -- that is not true, either. Anyh -- it works. It still has a section only for survivors.

Q: Did you get involved with restitution issues?

A: As an agency, yes. We worked closely with claims conference, and the president of the claims conference was a board member of our agency, w-we worked very closely with all agencies, as another German Jewish agency, the blue card --

Q: You've made references to the fact that you later met many of the survivors and refugees you had helped. And how did those meetings usually come about? Did you take initiative to try to contact them --

A: No.

Q: -- or did they come to you?

A: No, neither nor. Just by chance. Self Help has a great home health aide service, and people ask for our home health aides, and they were often survivors. And Self Help, together with other agencies, runs quite a few apartment houses, which were originally for survivors, so I met survivors there. Then United Helpers, this the agency has a scholarship program. I met them for that. And yet, there's also a German Jewish based nursing home. By now I meet quite a few there.

Q: What can you say about the similarities, and differences between the different organizations you've worked for through the years, that have helped refugees?

A: HIAS is an immigration agency founded by Jewish people from eastern Europe, and has many of it's connections in eastern Europe, and Poland, and Hungary, and so on. The American

Joint was founded by German Jews, and it's connections are more in western Europe. Both agencies are immigration agencies, both work in many countries in Europe, have many similarities. There's room for both of them. Basically, they have the same goal, I think -- it's hard to say. I really w-would have to read the formulation of their missions to be able -- I know what the working differences is, but what's in their mission, I couldn't say. And then we have the Jewish Federation, which funnels all these agencies. You have a small, but very effective German Jewish agency called the Blue card, which is a relief giving agency. The other agencies, basically, are not giving relief. They help with everything else. And the Council of Jewish Women, I think doesn't do anything, they used to help with immigration. And Self Help has become rowt -- right now, an all around agency, that has a -- a very large homemaker service, with almost 3,000 homemaker. No, not 3,000, over a thousand homemakers, and it has five apartment houses that it runs. It does five senior citizen centers, for the city. And in our housing, too, there weren't enough immigrants any more, so it's open now to Chinese, and everywhere, who is living in that particular community.

Q: I know that you mentioned this briefly earlier, but I was wondering if you could elaborate on something you mentioned in the way of survivors who you met first in DP situations in Europe --

A: Mm-hm.

Q: -- showing a certain perspective about their experiences, and that over the years, in meeting them again, were meeting other refugees again, or for the first time even, that you've seen a different kind of perspective shared.

A: That applies mostly to the way things are remembered.

End of Tape Three, Side B

Beginning Tape Four, Side A

Q: This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Gabriele D. Schiff, conducted by Amy Rubin, on July 27th, 2000, in Forest Hills, New York. This is tape number four, side A.

A: In comparison, the more sheltered time in the DP camps is, in their memories, more positive than it was when they lived there. There, the old insecurity and fear was overwhelming. Now that the struggle in the outside world has been not easy, to say the least, the time in the DP camp is seen in rosier and rosier light. I have a friend who is writing a book, who I sometimes talk to, and he asked me to give him some names of people who would give him their -- their history. And I suggested them. And he said it was very difficult to get anything negative for them, they were only ready to paint it in the most positive pictures. That, of course, is rather interesting, and my only explanation is that life on the outside was strenuous, and makes the camp experience, sheltered life, not to worry about job, not to raise children, in rosier light than it really was.

Q: What do you say is the long term impact on your own perspective, of having spent so many years of your life working with refugees and survivors?

A: I think for me it was a natural thing to do. I have never had any doubt about going into it, and I must say, coming out of it, I find in a way this history is a logical ending to about 40 years of service, which I have given with pleasure, also with heartache, but that's part of life.

Q: I believe that recently you donated a few items to the museum. Could you briefly tell me about those items?

A: Yeah, the one, and I think the most interesting one was a passport issued by Raoul Wallenberg, in Hungary, to Jews. It was given to my husband, and I happen to have the original, and I sent it to the museum. I also sent them a picture of the sanitorium in Merrano, and one has

the director on it, the other our first group of graduating nurse's aides. I also sent them most recently, a large snapshot of Goering, which was taken by my brother, who was asked to interrogate Goering in Nuremberg. That picture came into my hand, and I thought it has a better place with the museum.

Q: And today you just showed me an item that I'll be sending on the museum.

A: Yeah.

Q: You could explain that, perhaps.

A: I really don't quite know how it came into my hands. I think it was really given to me by a friend who had found it at a book fair. It's certainly not a historically reliable document, because it's strongly politically influenced, but it is interesting.

Q: Would you just explain it? What is the actual item, just so we have on tape?

A: Yeah. This is a paper booklet listing all concentration camps in greater Germany. They have ever listed some camps which I am not even sure that they were concentration camps, and they broke it down to great camps, and small camps.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to add?

A: I would very much hope that some research will be done to the psychological adjustment of the aging survivor. For instance, the influence of the history married marriages -- marriage -- that will be edited out -- which had a tendency to get very difficult at the point of retirement, when the couple, for the first time, really got to know each other, because they had the time. I've seen that, and I very -- I have many case histories for that. Somebody should really explore that a little more. And the influence of course, of the generation differences, which is much stronger if you live in the country which were -- you were not born, and where the morals, from beginning, are different from the ones you were raised with. I think I've said it, another point of that history,

this is one phase of the survivor story which has not yet been fully explored, the aging of a survivor. None of us has as yet survived aging.

Q: Thank you very much for being interviewed today. It's been a --

A: Thank you for taking me. I really enjoyed it, and I'm very pleased. For me, this is a very positive ending to something I have given much of my life to. Thank you.

Q: Thank you so much. And this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Gabriele D. Schiff.

End of Tape Four, Side A

Conclusion of Interview