

**Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000**

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum, **Jeff** and **Toby Herr** collection. This is an interview with **Esther Dezube** and her dog is also in the room, conducted by **Regina Baier** on December 7th, 2000, in Mrs. **Dezube's** home in **Boston**. Mrs. **Dezube** is the daughter of **Amalie** and **Norbert -- Norman Salsitz**, Holocaust survivors who have been interviewed for the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum's oral history collection. This interview is part of the **USHMM's** post Holocaust interview project. The **US** Holocaust Memorial Museum gratefully acknowledges **Jeff** and **Toby Herr** for making this interview possible. Oh, be quiet. This is tape number one, side **A**. We are off to a good start here. So as I said, there is a dog with us in the room, but I think if we put her outside, it would be even louder, so hopefully our listeners will understand and even enjoy at times. My first -- my first question is, give us your full name, and when and where you were born.

Answer: My full name is **Esther Cylia Salsitz Dezube**, and I was born in **Newark, New Jersey** at **Beth Israel** Hospital.

Q: Were you named after someone who has been murdered during the war?

A: Yes.

Q: What does that mean to you, and what do you know about these people? Can you bring them to life a little bit?

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

A: Well, it's hard to bring them to life, because I really never met them. But my first name is **Esther**, which is my father's mother's name. And I don't know a lot about her. I know a lot more about my father, and how he survived the war, but not so much about the personality of the mother, or the father, for that matter. My middle name is **Cylia**. That's after my mother's sister **Cylia**. I know a little bit about her. I know all the good qualities about her, and my mother seemed to adore her. I don't know a lot about her otherwise. And that's it. I actually -- my kids are named after survivors as well. And we did one other thing for our children. All their names equal 18, all the letters. They have 18 letters in their names. And 18 is a very special number in the Jewish religion, because it means **chai**, it means life. So we try to continue that on.

Q: Okay, we'll talk about your children a little bit later. I would like to now go back to you as a very small child, and to see the first memories of stories, of bits of stories that you now know were related to the Holocaust.

A: I -- I can't tell you the age, because it was always there. My -- and you can tell a little bit when they started, because I could see when they started with my older son. My bedtime stories were probably Holocaust stories. My father would sing me Yiddish songs, I remember that. My mother didn't read to me at night, my -- it was my father's -- not job, but that's what he liked to do. It -- it just didn't start, it was always there, they always talked about the Holocaust. Their friends were always

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

Holocaust survivors, they didn't integrate into the American society. So that was always the topic of conversation, I can't tell you when it started.

Q: Let's -- i-if you can -- I mean, I know it's really difficult, and especially if it started very early, to remember, but are there bits of stories that you remember that came up at what occasions, how did they talk about it? Is there anything that sort of comes to mind, that gives an impression of what it was. So their father sang to you, what -- what -- what else?

A: Oh, he would tell me the -- I mean, that's what he would tell me, he would tell me about **Hitler**, and -- and -- and children being killed in the war. I think he learned actually to temper his stories as he got older. He would tell me, you know, the children's fats were made into soap. He would tell me that -- you know, his -- his n-nieces and nephews were killed and they were my age. He would say that -- it would even start with food. I was a very fat child, and they were very proud of it. They were proud that I was fat because they had enough food to give me and children were starving in the Holocaust. That I remember very distinctly, I was not allowed to leave the table without finishing all the food, because the children in the Holocaust were s - - would starve, and I should appreciate all that.

Q: They would say that?

A: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

Q: How did -- how did -- how did you feel, I mean what was your reaction? How young were you, roughly, that -- I mean, when the father told you, for instance, about the --

A: I could be three. I mean, I was very young when they would s -- tell me these stories. You know, I just remember the stories were always there. How, you know, he lived in the woods. My mother did not tell me stories. My mother didn't tell me very much at all. It was always my father's stories, how he survived, and how they met, and how all the kids were killed. Not my mother. My mother would cry. She would -- she would start to tell me these stories, and then she would cry, and I didn't want her to cry so I'd always change the subject. I mean, I never let her tell the stories, but --

Q: Did -- did your father make them into stories for children? How -- how do --

A: No.

Q: -- you remember them?

A: No, they were not made for stories for children. They were as gruesome as he could remember them. He would tell me -- he didn't go through the concentration camps, so he didn't tell me those kind of stories. He told me how his father was killed in front of him, how his sisters were killed. I knew the story about my grandfather, I can't tell you what age I -- I knew that he tried to -- my mother's father, how he escaped, and how he tried to come back and find her. I -- I can't tell you when these started, but I-I always had these stories.

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

Q: Do you remember how you felt when you -- when you heard that? I mean, wa -- was it -- was it a -- was it fear, distance, curiosity, wha -- how did it make you feel? What was your response to --

A: Well, you've got to understand something, is that one, I was an only child, so I had no one to bounce it off except my parents. Again, my parents really only associated with Holocaust survivors. I didn't know another world. It was the only world that I had. I was not a giggly kid. I never was a giggly kid. The kids used to play with -- I ne -- I didn't play with dolls very much. I played with maybe trolls, later on in life. Make-believe was very hard for me, because I guess I had a taste of reality -- harsh reality first. I wa -- I drew a lot.

Q: What di --

A: I drew animals. I drew animals. I could relate to animals better than I could relate to people. I know that. I always drew animals. I have actually even difficulty, probably, drawing people. Again, how did I know it affected me? Only because later on. When you're growing up and it -- you really don't know how it affects you. I just thought this was the way in -- in that regard how everybody was. It affected me in other ways that I didn't have a family. It affected me that, you know, I saw my friends with grandparents and stuff like that. But the actual stories? I never heard **Winnie the Pooh**. I never heard any of these, **Snow White**. I didn't know.

Q: Did you have friends as -- as a young -- as a younger child? Did you --

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

A: I didn't have a lot. I had some friends. I had -- I had some girlfriends, but not a lot, because in a sense, almost like my older one, I was a little -- I call my youngest kid a little old man, and I probably was a little old woman. I just couldn't relate to them. I couldn't understand the -- the sparkling dresses and the fancy hair and clothes. My parents weren't into that, she never took me to malls. She never did any of these things, so I didn't. Did I resent it? Only a little, when I was older I resented it, not when I was young.

Q: Did you make -- did you make a connection to those stories that were told and to the songs sung, to your parents? When -- when did that happen? I mean, did it -- were they s-sort of difficult to deal with stories **[indecipherable]**

A: Well, you gotta understand that they were never told to me as stories. I didn't have to take a fairy tale and try to then say oh, I'm going to transfer this fairy tale to something that happened in real life. These were presented as real life stories, that really happened to them. So I knew it was my parents. I knew it -- that everything belonged to them, that I was part of that history. And they kept telling me I was part of that history. That I should be a good Jew, I guess, because I am a -- because I was born, it was their fight against **Hitler**. I mean, I had to maintain that. That is something that I was brought up constantly. And I do tell my kids that, a -- a little bit, is that because I sur -- I -- I was born, and I survived a Jew, and I maintain it that I am victory over **Hitler**. So this was something that I grew up, all the time.

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

Q: That's a heavy -- pretty heavy burden, potentially, for a smaller child to feel that much --

A: Probably was.

Q: -- responsibility.

A: I left the house at 16 and a half. I just turned 17 when I left the house.

Q: Let's -- let's -- let's -- I would like to sort of stay there just for a little bit before we -- we move onto that. Give me a sense, a little closer sense of what was family life like, the social occasion. How did you experience the home? And did you make comparisons to other homes that you saw, when you visited friends, for instance? Was -- I mean, you said that was a -- sort of the normality, that you feel -- that's what you thought it was. Did you have comparisons to other homes, or -- give us a little better sense of what it was like **[indecipherable]**

A: Well, you gotta understand, everybody has a dysfunctional family as far as I'm concerned, there is no perfect home. I mean, you watch on **TV**, that's where you make your comparisons. And you always wanted to be like the family on **TV**, not so much like your friend's family, but the family on **TV**. Cause they always complained about their parents, too. I didn't have a close home life. My mother -- I was closer to my mother than my father, only cause my father wasn't home. My father is a very driven man. Probably is why he survived. But also, he was an immigrant in a country and he had to prove himself. So he would get up at 10 o'clock in the morning, which

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

means I'm already in school. He would come back from meetings at 10 o'clock at night, and when I was young I was already in bed. He loved to listen to Yiddish music, which is not something that I liked. And on the weekends they would go a lot with their friends. I was a tagalong only because they didn't have a babysitter, and they would speak Polish, which is a language that I never learned. So I had to create my own world. I mean, I used to have dinner with my mother. She'd usually have the radio. So either she had music or news in the background. And she's very political oriented. And so she would always talk all about all the political situations and I had to always be abreast about it. And that would be our life -- our life. My parents didn't really integrate with me. Maybe it's part of the European culture. But we didn't do -- we went on vacations. We'd travel a lot. We didn't do a lot as a family, not that I can recall. My mother, again, she wouldn't take me shopping. She laughs at me when I say that. Oh well, you know, I took you on these trips instead of shopping. We didn't do the normal family stuff. My mother liked to read, and that's what she did. I don't recall us ever engaging in board games. I don't ever -- we never -- it was as if they were tired of life. And I couldn't relate. I mean, again, that's also fantasy. You know, board games and playing with a little kid. And they didn't know how to deal with it.

Q: When I interviewed your parents, and especially your father though, there was such a -- you called him a driven man?

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

A: Yes.

Q: There wa -- there seemed to be, when he talked to me, a great life spark in him though, at the same time. Tired of life, and at the same time very -- seemingly had life --

A: He's very driven.

Q: It -- it -- try to ex -- to try to -- for listeners who haven't heard -- who haven't heard the interview with your parents, and from your perspective as a -- as a younger person, because maybe that has changed over the years, how did you see your mother and how did you see your father in the earlier years? How -- how were they to you? How did you see them as persons?

A: My mother was reality, my father was fantasy. My mother is not a ha -- in my perception is not a happy woman. In a sense kind of bitter, but down to earth. I was never showered with compliments. She may disagree with me, but that's my perception. I -- I always liked to draw and she always felt that that was beneath her as an occupation. I was accepted to art school, she was very angry. She said, as a vocation, not a -- as an **advocation**, not vocation. She wanted me to be a doctor, it was it, black and white, you're a doctor or you're -- or you're a failure. She called me a failure when I was in college.

Q: Do you know why --

A: Yeah, oh --

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

Q: -- it was so important for her to -- that you become a doctor?

A: -- yes, and she explained that to me. She said that a doctor -- and again, this is her perception because she was a survivor. A doctor can take their skills and go from one country to another and start again. And if I wasn't a doctor I wouldn't have those transferable skills. And that's why it was so important, even though math was never a strong point. And it was just not a subject that I excelled in. I was always on the debating team, I was on the speech team. It was very interesting, I mean, when I was young, that's where I lean. And you know, yet I agreed to be a pre-med student the freshman year of college. And then I realized it -- I loved taking care of people, but I couldn't get through the chemistry and the -- the physics and the trigonometry to get there. I mean, if it was just lab work, I got A's in biology lab work and stuff. So that's the freshman year of college she called me a failure. But when you have no other siblings, y-you have to achieve all the goals that your parent want. And that's what they wanted. I mean, they didn't see me as almost a person, but an extension of all their goals. I can see that now. Maybe when I was younger I resented it.

Q: Maybe, or did -- what -- what -- how did you feel when -- ho-how did you feel about yourself at that time, and how did you -- did -- did you have anger? Did you have --

A: I had --

Q: -- compassion, did you have --

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

A: No, I didn't have compassion when I was younger, I have much more compassion now. Confusion, I think was the better idea. I knew enough -- it wasn't anger. It's one of the reasons I left home, because I didn't want to have anger, I didn't want to have resentment, and I knew that distance would take care of that. They tried to totally dictate -- my mother, not my father -- cause she just was around more -- dictate my life. In a sense I had -- she had to relive her childhood, her concept of a normal childhood through me. If I had boyfriends she would write a script what to say to these boyfriends. She would go through their mail to me, you know, judging them either fit or unfit. But yet, you know, she did give me freedom. I -- I dated early. So - - but I-I could see that she was more controlling in a way to give herself control over life. She needed control so that she could feel control, because the war didn't -- not let her have control.

Q: How about your father? He was fantasy, so --

A: He was fantasy. My mother didn't yell and scream a lot, but she would keep a grudge. She would keep it in her. My father, you can just spark him and he'll scream and rant, but on the most part, it's done and over with, you know? And you want to hide sometimes. I remember going into it -- he would -- he would pick fights, even when there were fights not even there. We'd go to a store and he would pick a fight with a salesman, or if he didn't like something a woman said, he would pick a fight. But it would be done. It would fester with my mother. We had a neighbor who was

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

German, and they would always have fights, always have fights. My father would take him to court, or they would -- screaming at each other. But the odd thing is that his oldest daughter was my babysitter. So it was an interesting relationship.

Q: About the other family, did you get to meet his older brother, **Leibush**, do you remember him?

A: No, no, there was a feud in my family. Okay, I don't know the feud very well. The feud started, I heard, when I was born. From one of my cousins, a first cousin, I heard that my father would -- and my father still is a very generous and giving man. And he was probably very generous and giving to them. And when I was born -- cause they had waited 10 years for me and they were going to adopt, I guess they realized that the fortune, or whatever my father had amassed wasn't going to go to them, and it was going to go to me. This is what I was told. And there were conflicts and jealousy because my father made it in life and the brothers really didn't. So I didn't meet them, at all. I mean, I never met **Leibush** at all. I met -- I met **David**, oh, maybe a couple years before his death. **Al** I met only once. When I was very small he gave me a book by **Edgar Allen Poe**. Why I remember this I don't even know. But -- and he was very tall, and I don't really have any other memories of him.

Q: So you never really had any kind of relationship to the **New York** part of -- of your fa -- I mean, to the -- to the --

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

A: To the brothers, no, no. Absolutely no relationship whatsoever. There was a cousin named **Benny**, who was my first cousin, who -- maybe when I got married, came to my father and said, I'm not -- I'm not my father's son, I want to start having a relationship back with you. And we became very friendly with him, and I liked him, and -- but they moved to **North Carolina** and distance has its, you know, way of cutting into family ties, so I don't see him any more. But I have good memories of him later on in life. My father has a first cousin name -- a nephew named **Eddie**, who I have not a re -- really a relationship with at all, but he is friendly to my parents.

Q: What about your mother's part of the family?

A: They were close. They -- I -- I -- there was a cousin **Leo**, who -- my parents never made a Passover, which is -- I don't know if you want me to explain it, but it -- it -- Passover is the time when the Israelites left **Egypt**, and they lived in the desert. And the actual name started when God -- after the 10th -- or the last plague, God said to put lamb's blood on the door of the Israelites, and then he would pass over their house, and we should retell the story in -- in the -- we call it the Bible, we don't have a fir -- a first testament and a second testament. Old Testament and New Testament, excuse me. But your equivalent of -- of the Old Testament, it's in there, and it says, you shall remember. So that is an very big holiday an-and it's a unique holiday because it's family oriented in the home. You don't go to temple, necessarily, for Passover. So my cousin **Leo** would always make it, even as a small kid I would go to

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

his house. There was a cousin named **Harold Anglestone**, who is much older, but I heard he made the wedding for my parents. We didn't cup -- keep up with his children, but I do recall him. I am friendly with **Leo's** children, and **Leo** has a twin sister, and I'm friendly with their children. Not extremely close, but definitely friendly with them, they're come -- we go to each other's family occasions. But I was always considered the outside -- I always felt like the outsider, even when I went to these occasions.

Q: Why? Or in what way?

A: Maybe I was al -- I wasn't so much younger, but I -- I ca -- it's like they would talk and I would always be in a separate group. I was always considered the outsider. Once I asked them, when I grew up. They said, your mother always said you were perfect, and that you, you know, you were always the best and the greatest. And so we really didn't want to have anything to do with you. And I said, well that's nice for me to know, but I don't really perceive myself as that.

Q: Why did your parents not want to celebrate Passover?

A: Oh, they wanted to celebrate it, they just never actually -- oh no, they wanted to celebrate it, but just -- they didn't do it at our house, because it would only be three of us. We always went to their house because he knew how to do it and it was a family situation. My father had only one cousin that was here in **America** that we were friendly with, that I have memories of, and that is -- he's a rabbi, **Shapiro** and

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

his wife, **Martha**. They always tried to include, but they were much more religious -- always tried to include us. So I remember going there to **Sukkot** and some other holidays. But I always felt like an intruder.

Q: Because you couldn't -- also because you --

A: They had many children, it was like there was their family and here I was, alone. So you felt it like an intruder. It was just a different world.

Q: The -- your -- your -- your mother also has family in **Israel**?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you go often? What kind of relationship did you have with them?

A: My mother had a good relationship with her sister, and still does. In it --

Q: That's -- that's the older sister?

A: Yes.

Q: Yeah.

A: The younger sister was killed, whom I was named after. We -- we'd go every two years when I was young, to **Israel**. Was a big trip. I remember once going on a propeller for like 36 hours to **Israel**. Then we would go on a cruise boat, cause I couldn't take planes very well when I was young. It was a big deal, but I was much younger than her children, they were 10 years older than me. So I was always, again alone. And they would talk Polish. The kids would have nothing to do with me, because I was so much younger, and I was in my own world.

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

Q: What did you do in that own world? What was it like?

A: I turned to art. It was my solace. I drew all of the time. And I was never alone when I did that.

Q: You never actually had animals though, at that time?

A: Yeah -- no, we had a dog. But my mother's -- you know, my concept of the dog is right now I'm sitting on a bed and the dog is next to me. And my mother's concept is the dog stays downstairs. Only once did the dog -- was allowed to go upstairs and she shredded one of my animals -- he, actually -- because I went to camp. And that was like my favorite animal. He knew which one it was and shredded it. So it was a different kind of relationship with animals. I was -- my father loves animals and he would pick up all these strays. And once we had three or four dogs at one time. My mother was not too happy. I would pick up stray birds, we had stray rabbits that I would pick up, and I would take care of the animals, too. I always had animals. Part of -- my husband laughs that when we got married, you know, the condition was that we had dogs. That was it, we're going to have dogs, when we could, and we did. But -- so art, and -- and dogs. I used to read, also, but not as much as my mother.

Q: What did you read?

A: Animal books and science fiction. I read the classics, but they were okay. I still read. I don't like -- my mother likes to read really heavy books and I don't. I like to escape in my books.

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

Q: She said she likes to read a lot but she doesn't like non-fiction.

A: That's correct.

Q: No, she doesn't like fiction, only non-fiction.

A: Only non-fiction, yes, right, exactly, and I read fiction. I'm tired at the end of the day and I like to escape. And I think that's a sense of just **[indecipherable]** with us, because she can't understand where I'm coming from. That's part of being a child of the Holocaust. Since I grew up in **America**, still acquired a lot of the American ways, and she can't understand them. She can't understand why I want to read fiction, why I don't want to have to -- why don't I -- I have my ears constantly up, listening for things that might affect me. And I have my ears up, but not the same way. My mother is hyper about it. And I want to be -- I want to have a -- a -- a semi-normal life. But I --

Q: Maybe this --

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Esther Dezube**. This is tape number one, side **B**.

A: You know, I was just thinking about when you were saying my father was very dynamic, it's his way of escape. You know, he tells all these stories, but they're mostly in the past, and they're not the present. He has some, but they're mostly -- he

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

dwells totally in the past because he feels comfortable there, and it's his way to escape. If you lock yourself in these stories, if you're constantly telling the stories, it's like an actor. If he's in a role, he doesn't feel his own pain.

Q: Your mother said to me in her inter -- did you ever listen to their tapes, by the way?

A: Yes.

Q: You did. She said that your father is a ham with other people, and at home he's very quiet --

A: That's right.

Q: -- very silent, so that would fit into it -- what --

A: Right.

Q: -- what you just said. You said you left home very early. Tell me more about that, the decision to do that, and where did you go?

A: I actually didn't make that decision. To this day I have no idea how it came about, but it appears when I was in high school, I was put in a program, it was an accelerated program that I only had three years of high school, and I went to summer school one summer, and then I went to college early. I don't know who put me in that program, I have really absolutely no idea. I wouldn't recommend it, to be honest, to anyone. But I -- I think they basically said that I was too mature to stay in high school and I just didn't fit in, which is an interesting way, I suppose, to put it. And so

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

I went to college early, and I didn't apply home. My mother recognized that we were starting to fight, I mean, I was hitting puberty. If I -- if I lived -- college at 16, then you know, puberty starts 14 - 15. I wa -- I was one, in the throes of it, but I don't know if my mother really knew how to deal with it. One, children weren't supposed to talk against -- back to their parents, weren't supposed to argue with their parents, they were supposed to be little mannequins. My mother always told me how wonderful she was. My mother would tell me how -- a good student she was. My mother always said how she listened to her parents, and I was not like that. So I guess what she was doing is trying to avoid, one a fight, and dealing with puberty. And I left home and I only came back one summer, first summer. Because after college they tried to put me, I remember, on a 10 o'clock tur -- curfew, and they didn't want me to grow up. They wanted me to go away, but not to grow up. And that was difficult. And I think it was difficult for them, too.

Q: Explain that a little bit more, they wanted you to go away, but not to grow up?

A: Right. Because if I grew up, I came bi -- my own person, which is not exactly, one, the way they saw me, or two, the way they could control me. They -- they -- a -- they -- every time we went into a room, the first thing they would do is talk about the Holocaust to my friends. First thing. And they would tell the stories. I mean, it was just everywhere. My first dates, my first friends, the first thing they came into the house, they would always -- they would tell the stories. And my friends were scared.

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

They just didn't want to hear them all the time. So one, it limited your friendship, but two, when i -- you know, they were offended that my friends didn't want to hear it. What kind of person are you if your friends don't want to hear it? They were afraid because it was a test, also, whether or not I would keep Judaism. And you know, I was away from home. What would I do? You know, I -- I -- I -- I dated people who were non-Jewish, but honest I could say that I would never marry anybody who was not Jewish. It was too much integrated in part of my life.

Q: So what did that mean to you then, to be -- you were so trained to be Jewish, in certain ways, it was -- no, it -- wrong, it was so important -- the emphasis was very **[indecipherable]** what does --

A: It wasn't religious emphasis.

Q: -- that's -- what **[indecipherable]** at that time --

A: Yes. My parents did not light candles when I was home. They had ham in the house. They still have ham in the house. They still have a -- a -- kielbasa and all these Polish delicacies. It was a heritage. That's what it meant to them. They eat bread on Passover. I -- I -- I -- I didn't go to a Jewish day school. I went to Hebrew school. I was not really **Bat Mitzvahed**. I had a party in **Israel**, but I never went through the formal training of a **Bat Mitzvah** in th -- in the **United States**, to this day. They had to -- and it was difficult for them, to be religious, with what they went through. I

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

don't know if they hated God, but they were resentful. But they still wanted a connection to heritage, and that they instilled in me very well.

Q: Did that become different for you, though, the religious aspect? Do you --

A: I am actually more religious than my parents. We -- do you want t -- I mean, I never had a -- a **sukkah** when I grew up. It's like a little hut that you put together and for seven days you stay in it, and it's a harvest festival. We have one. Every year we put it together, the kids, we have a dinner, we have a -- friends who come over. I'm not **Shomer Shavas**, which means that I don't -- I ride on **Shabbat**, and go places on shab -- on Saturday. But on Friday night all the kids get together and we have our Friday night dinner. To the point that my son works as a waiter and told them that he will not work on Friday night because he has to be home for the Friday night dinner. We celebrate the holidays, I change my dishes on Passover, we get rid of all the bread, I change the dishes, and we keep it -- actually, that's kind of an interesting story, because the year that I decided to change the dishes, I had to look for plates. And I went into this store and there were a set of plates that had Egyptian pyramids on it, and had the slaves. And I thought that was almost like, you know, God's telling me something. I bought those dishes, and they don't make them any more. They discontinued them after the year I bought them. And we still have them. So that way I'm much more religious. My kids go to a Jewish day school. Part of it is heritage. A

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

lot of it is heritage, to be honest. But I'm a lot more religious because I'm not as angry with God as they are.

Q: It's -- it's all right to jump back and forth a little bit --

A: I don't have a [indecipherable]

Q: -- when things come up. I would like to keep some kind of chronology --

A: Okay.

Q: -- so let's go back to, so you never really fit in.

A: No, I never fit in.

Q: How did you fit into college life? So we are now -- you are now what, 17? Where did you go?

A: I went to **Boston** University, and my freshman year I probably, using the vernacular, blew it. I didn't do very well in school. I remember I was in a pre-med program because my parents wanted me in -- to be in a pre-med program. I was a goody two shoes, basically when I grew up, in high school. I never cut. I never did anything really wrong. My mother didn't like my clothes and she would constantly tell me how I was inappropriately dressed. But I didn't do anything really **majorly** wrong. I was in the only kid in driver's ed when the teacher would say, drive faster. And here I was in college. I still, I never smoked -- I-I smoked once, cigarettes, when I was in law school. I didn't smoke, didn't drink, didn't take drugs, never took marijuana to this day. I didn't have a need to. But my -- blew my grades. I really

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

blew my grades. I wanted to have a social life and they don't mix. And the math was difficult and I didn't probably put an effort in it -- to it, but there was another aspect to it. I didn't want to go in -- I -- I realized that medicine wasn't for me. If I did well, I would have to continue. So I got a **D** in chemistry. Not that it was difficult, but I did. Can't go to med school with a **D**. My parents -- that's when she called me a failure, and I switched. She didn't sol -- I don't think my mother spoke to me for a couple of months. My father did. It was very interesting, my father later on became much more supportive of what I did.

Q: Wh-Why do you think that is?

A: Cause he was probably a very rebellious r -- youth, and you know, he really -- a little bit of himself was shining through through me, and I don't know whe -- he probably smiled and was outraged at the same time.

Q: It's kind of interesting, I didn't want to interrupt you, but I did bring the interview with your mother and when I asked her in the very beginning how she would describe herself before the war, she said this, **Amalie Petranker** was very happy go lucky child with shiny eyes. She couldn't carry for a long time a grudge or hatred. She loved people, but she was also a fighter, because she was a middle child. So she learned to fight for her rights. She was a little mischievous, she was rebellious, she questioned her parent's judgment. Did you ever meet that person?

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

A: No. I didn't meet that person. Parts of it I've met. My mother questions a lot of people, you know, and -- and their positions on life. No, I can't see my mother as a rebellious person. Maybe she was happy go lucky, but you know, she was much older when I was born. I didn't see that real happy go lucky person. She may have been when she first got married, but they had a love/hate -- they still have a love/hate relationship. They came from very different worlds. And they're at each other's throat for that, even in the way they speak Polish. My mother will correct my father, totally. No, you don't say it this way, you don't say it that way. My father had a sixth grade education. He did well, and he was very proud, and he ca -- he hid his report cards in the war because he was very proud, but he only went to the sixth grade and it had nothing to do with his ability, it had to do with that was the fact of life, he was the youngest child of nine and he had to go work. My mother was educated woman, very proud of her education. And she would let my mo -- father know that she was a very educated woman, and he was not. That would have a problem. My father had a girlfriend named **Rozia**, who he could never let go. And I heard that they really never dated very much, but he was -- she was probably his fantasy of what would have been. And he let -- he always -- he talks more about, sometimes, **Rozia** than my mother. So that hurts.

Q: Let's go back to your freshman year that you blew. What -- what happened afterwards? So you did get a **[indecipherable]**

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

A: I switched majors to political science and teaching. And I loved it. And I -- and -- and I have a teaching degree as well. I did my student teaching in -- in -- in high school government, which was very interesting cause I had the sweatogs. And I had a great teaching supervisor. And I brought my father in, talked about the war to these people, and about guns and violence. And that was one of the few days that they were silent. Was -- it was -- it was very good. Besides they made the bully of the class the leader. He was in charge. Cause maybe they wouldn't pay attention to me, but they weren't going to cross the bully.

Q: Did you see your father different in that situation?

A: He loves people. Yeah, he shone -- he -- he was shining. He -- he was animate, he was full of life. It's an odd way to put it, but I think he almost enjoys telling the tales. Again, I think it gives him a sense of purpose. But sometimes he gets choked up, he got choked up at my wedding, he got choked up when he blessed my -- my older son at his **Bar Mitzvah**, but he usually doesn't get choked up. So, yeah, he liked it. I think maybe he liked the idea that I thought of him, to ask him to come and -- and -- and speak. Maybe it was an acknowledgement that, you know, I never turned my back on the Holocaust, but I don't live it day in and day out like that. And I know that hurts them. I do. But I didn't forget it. It's still part of who I am.

Q: How did the students respond to him?

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

A: They were silent. They gave him an amazing amount of respect. Probably admiration that he -- he survived and he was a soldier and that he made it, and oh, he fought the Germans, or the Nazis. So they respected him, cause a lot of these kids were street kids, and they have a re -- respect of the pecking order. And he was, you know, lieutenant governor of **Kraków**, and that was pe -- you know, prestigious position. And I hope they walked away from that with some knowledge. We also did a trial where -- we did a rape trial and I made the boys the victim, and had the women of the class on the jury and the judge. I reversed entire roles. And that was interesting because I'm very attuned to victims.

Q: You just -- you just said that, I was -- I was just thinking, did that -- do you think that you brought a different perspective to that profession? I mean, not to stereotype it, but to bring somewhat different experiences, and perspectives to that, because of --

A: That incident?

Q: No, because of your own experience --

A: Absolutely.

Q: **[indecipherable]** came from --

A: Oh, absolutely. It's probably the field -- why I chose this -- bec -- became a lawyer. Absolutely, I bring my perspective of the victim, I was always for the underdog. Even when I was in high school, they were -- they were called **inedgibles**, the mentally retarded children in the class, and you know, they were segregated. Not

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

so much now, but -- I used to be the one to help them, lead them around, or take care of them, or be assigned to them. Cause I understood what the underdog was, because I never put myself as saying that I was going through the Holocaust, but I wa -- could always associate myself still close to my parents that it could happen to me, and that I had to protect other people because of that. That's very strong, I try to make sure that my kids are survivors, so that if ever it should happen to them, that they could survive. But I -- and I make them very attuned to that -- or I try, and also very proud of who they are, and respect others. Very important to me. But I still keep food downstairs, a little extra food, in case something should happen, my husband laughs every snowstorm, you know, why you stock up like for years? And he doesn't understand. I mean, I can explain it to him, but he doesn't understand. Just this mentality that if anything should happen, I am prepared.

Q: We'll talk a little bit more about that too, I just want to one more time go back and just ask you --

A: High school.

Q: -- when you go -- well, I sort of --

A: I mean college.

Q: -- well, basically, eve -- even a little earlier, di -- when you look back, did the Holocaust feature in schoolbooks at that time? Did you --

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

A: In -- only in hi -- only in Hebrew school, but no, not in the public school, this just not spoken. I was probably looked at as a very odd person that my parents were survivors.

Q: Did they know of -- di-did you talk about that at school?

A: I personally, I talk probably more about it now than I did when I grew up, but no. But my parents always talked about it, I didn't have to, you know? And it's also -- and if you have an accent, somebody's gonna go, where are you from? Even to my parents, it's the first thing out of their mouth. And they'll say, I'm from **Poland**, and my father jokes, I'm from, you know, the south -- south **Poland**. [indecipherable] a little -- and they'll -- he'll say then they're survivors. So it comes out very, very quickly, where they're from. I went back during my college years to **Poland**. I went with my mother on a trip. And that was an interesting experience.

Q: Because you wanted to go, or because she wanted to go?

A: She wanted to go. Well, she wanted to go because there was a man who helped save her life, his name was **Mundek**, and I -- he was very ill at the time. And my mother said that he was always in love with her. He never married. He'd saved 12 girls. And she wanted me to meet him. And so my sophomore year of college I went to **Poland**, and at that time you couldn't go as a Jewish group to **Poland**. Didn't exist. You had to go with a Roman Catholic group, led by a priest to **Poland**. And that's how we went, and that's -- it was very interesting because I never told them in

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

the group that I was Jewish. I mean, I never brought it up. My mother didn't bring it up either. She basically said, you know, let us blend in right now. And I remember the priest took a liking to me, and he always tried to make me go to confession to all these different churches. And I kind of bowed out. And we had one week that we were spending with our friends, with the people that helped save my father, and the people who helped save my mother. But while we were in the tour group, there was also a -- a group, they were the fir -- there was a group of first Christians or something like that, they were from **Ohio**, and they don't cross themselves either, and they don't go into confession. So I kind of said I -- I can't do that, or whatever. And he had no clue that I was Jewish, none. And there was a woman there who right away everybody knew she was Jewish. She also had a -- she was from **Auschwitz**, so she had the symbol. But even before, they kind of knew. They used to tell Jewish jokes on the bus, and they still made fun of Jews. Hardly any Jews in **Poland** at the time and they still made fun of us. And I -- and I knew then how my mother felt. I used to wear a **Moses** holding the 10 commandments. I wore it on the inside. It was very interesting. Then we spent a week with the families. And I met **Mundek**, but we couldn't talk to each other. But he was if -- there was like a light in his eyes. He was a very interesting, very nice man. But I spent -- we stayed at the house that -- of the woman who saved my father, because she had a house in **Warsaw**. And she had two children my age. We couldn't speak very well, but they all kind of -- if they knew that

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

I was Jewish, it was just never brought up. Holocaust was never brought up, never discussed it. There was a language barrier. But there was one boy who came over who did bring it up. And -- and we liked each other. And I said to him, by the way, do you know that I was Jewish? I had to tell him, I don't know, it's -- something compelled me that I had to tell him who I was. And he said to me, we're all children of **Moses**. But he was the only one of the group who went to the university. So it was very different, but I felt very strange there. You know, you would o -- go with other pe -- I would not -- I mean, he knew I was Jewish. And of course, I thought the other children knew because of what their parents told them. But it's just not -- I was told in some parties not to bring it up. And then we went, you know, to see my father's house. And I felt -- then I felt anger, because I couldn't -- here was my father's house, that didn't belong to him any more, that was taken from him, and I wanted to go up to these people and say, this is my heritage. My mother told me, you know, obviously, not to do that, not to bring it up, not even to mention we went to a restaurant to have tea. No one questioned my mother, whether she was Jewish, no one thought about it, and I guess I don't look that Jewish. It was not imprinted across my forehead. But at the end of the trip was the most interesting part because I sat next to the priest on one of the planes. And I showed -- he said, where do you go to school, and I said I went to **BU**, and on my **I.D.** was the Jewish star. And he looked at that, and you could see his eyes were widening, and he turned around, and he said,

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

“That -- that looks like a Jewish star.” I said, “It is.” He said, “Are you Jewish?” And I said, “I am.” And he said, “Well, I like you anyway.” And I think to him, he thought he was giving me a compliment. But, you know, there are two ways to approach those kind of people, yell and screaming, butt your heads, not get anywhere. Shake your head, and be polite. Show them that you can be better than they. And then other ways, press your point. And I -- and I think that’s the way that I usually do it.

Q: When was that trip, roughly?

A: '75. 1975.

Q: Have you ever gone back?

A: Since '75?

Q: Mm-hm.

A: No, I went to **Auschwitz** then, too. The trip was -- that was also very strange. We went to **Auschwitz**, but again remember, we went with a Catholic group. And now they have tours and say Jews died there. When we went there, they didn't tell us Jews died there. The official tour was that many people died there, period. Not one word that Jews died there. But you could see that -- the fingernails in the wall -- in the cement walls. You can see imbedded lines that match fingernails in -- in the gas chambers. And you just have a chill. I mean, you know, there’s just a silence and a chill. And that’s -- you know, you realize that it will never hap -- you’re not going to

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

let it happen again. But that's something for the perspective, versus dwelling on the past.

Q: What was your mother's response to that -- da -- ha -- and what -- what was your relationship to each other at that time?

A: We were close. That was probably one trip that we were quite close. I probably was not a very warm child. My mother wasn't that warm either, I mean, she would hold my hand, and -- and stuff like that, and I didn't want her to hold my hand cause I thought that was not the right thing to do, you know, women holding hands together. But she would never come and hug and cuddle and kiss me. And I in turn was not a huggy, cuddly person either. I'm much more with my children. But we were close. I think that we did hold hands then. It was almost like the world against us, except for these people that we stayed with. It tends to bind you.

Q: Did past become a little concreter in some ways then, because so much -- I imagine [indecipherable]

A: Well, I saw all the pictures, my parents would always show them to me. So they became affirmed, but not concrete -- any more concrete, because I think they were already concrete. You know, if you're in a ca -- you can see pictures of the gas chamber, and be in a gas chamber, and it's a very, very different feeling, but they were always in my memories. I -- I remember once -- this was past college, but I remember once we were with these young people, and again my parents bring the

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

Holocaust up right away. This woman stepped on a bug, and got upset cause she was a vegetarian, and -- and my mother said, well, that's how they used to crush children in the Holocaust. You know, there was a moment of silence after that, what do you do? It's a very awkward pause. But that's -- and -- and they never saw that it would be an awkward pause cause they had to keep telling. You know, some don't tell, some don't let go. And I think I had one of each.

Q: I think that's probably a good place again to switch the tapes. So this is the end of tape one, side **B**, interview with **Esther Dezube**.

End of Tape One, Side B

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of a **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Esther Dezube**. This is tape number two, side **A**. And I promised, in a sense, I wouldn't go back to your childhood, but I would like to ask you one more question. Did your parents ever -- how did they respond to sort of the trivial childhood problems that you must have had? The little problems that loom incredibly large. Did that have any meaning? Could they relate to that at all?

A: No, they couldn't relate to it at all. They had no patience for it whatsoever. Basically they looked at me as -- they wanted to ig-ignore that it even existed. You know, I was studying that the Pilgrims used to dress up their children in adult clothes, because they didn't realize children were children, didn't want them to be children, but to be miniature adults. And I think that's what they wanted me to be, a miniature adult. I mean, they -- I think my father took pride in -- in that I was a little girl, but no, I don't think they could deal with the trivial problems of growing up very much. It -- because, to them, they always compared it to the war, and it was so trivial to the war that how could you even be bothered, you know, by acne, or how could you be bothered with the fact that you're heavy, until later on, finally I went on a diet, because I wanted to. And they still tried to push food on me. I mean, how could you, you know, be bothered by these things, kin -- in comparison to what happened to us during the war?

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

Q: Do you recall moments of casualness, of -- was --

A: When we went on trips. Yeah, when we traveled to different countries. My mother didn't like to travel a -- my mother liked to travel as much, but she didn't like to go around as much. Once we got to the countries, she's perfectly happy reading in a hotel room. And my father I would explore. That was the time that my father and I really got to know each other. I remember in **Paris** my mother stayed in the hotel room, we went to the art colony, we went all around. But when we traveled, as if we were removed from the daily pressures of everyday life, that there was much more casualness. When we went on cruises, much more casual.

Q: I would just like to move the microphone just a little bit, so one second.

[**indecipherable**] get a little closer. Okay. And there's one more question about the family in **Israel**. So it was really difficult, we -- we talked about that. But -- but still, was it important for you to meet, at least a larger -- to have a sense of a larger family there in flesh and blood if you will, was that important since you didn't have grandmothers, grandfathers in -- in **New York**? Did that give you a different feeling of relatedness in terms of family?

A: To be honest, no. It was important that there was a state of **Israel**. It was -- it was important that I had a place to go. It was important that it existed and it thrived. But I was so used to being alone, and accepting of it, and they were so far away. So you gotta understand is, if I was going to rely on the fact that I had family in **Israel**, I

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

would be miserable every holiday, because they weren't with me during the holidays. They weren't with me, I couldn't call them up and say, let's do something. They were very far away. So, it was nice to know that I had family -- it's the lizard.

Q: So we are just hearing a lizard here in an aquarium, but -- just as an explanation of the sounds we're hearing.

A: So i-it -- it was a comfort level, but it wasn't like, oh, I had family, because it didn't play into my everyday life. I -- I -- family is very important to me. I -- it may sound like a -- a strange, opposite approach to it, but it's extremely important to me. And it was comforting that they were there, but not that it was a bigger picture and that I had some family. I tried to instill that in my children, it's one of the very strong things I try and instill in them.

Q: Well, let's talk about not your children yet, because you need to meet --

A: We're not there yet, yes.

Q: -- your husband first, or at least somebody you love, I guess, first.

A: Well, husband I knew since 14.

Q: That's -- let-let's talk about him. How did you meet, what did you like about, what -- what -- how did he become important to you?

A: One, I believe that my mother had this all prearranged in many respects. But I met him at 14, we -- he belonged to a youth group called **USY**, United Synagogue Youth, and I belonged to that youth group. I was active in the Jewish movement, I was --

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

was president of that group, of my chapter. And we met at a dance, a friendship dance, and we were supposed to give each other keys. I went with another boy, he went with another girl. Yet, he gave me the key. And I didn't date him after that, either. We were just good friends for many, many years. I knew his girlfriends, he knew my boyfriends. We had a lot in common. We're not very similar in personality, but we had common ground.

Q: Like what?

A: Judai -- he came from a family was not religious. He is, I think, fourth generation, on one side, American. **Israel** was very important to him, it was important to me. Judaism was important to him, it was important to me. Stability. I crave stability. And he was a very stable person. Regretfully, he isn't emotional at all, or romantic, or nothing, he's just not. Maybe if I was -- hindsight is hindsight, but he is a very stable person. He's a kind person. And he got along with my parents, my parents liked him. He would listen to their stories. And he used to like to fix things and my father liked to fix things, so that he fit in our family. I don't have an easy family to fit into. So that was a positive sign. Has it develop -- it developed when I came back from **Poland**, and I -- I went to **Israel** for a winter vacation, and he had taken a year in **Israel**. So we met there, and I still was not the apple of his eye, his bicycle was. He toured **Israel** all over with his bicycle, and went through **Europe** all over with this bicycle. He was more interested in the condition of his bicycle than I. But when

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

he came back, it was a very hard decision for both of us, because we were always good friends, and once you go past good friends, into a different kind of relationship, you can't go back. So we had to decide whether we were willing to risk it. We were both very young. And -- and my parents pushed us into marriage, I'm positive. Cause we -- I got married three weeks after I graduated c-college. I didn't plan my wedding, my mother planned my wedding. I didn't even get to pick my dress. She kind of picked my dress, and I wanted to change it, and she kept saying no, no, so I think I changed it a little bit. I think I picked the colors, that's about it. I walked into the wedding and everything was done. We were young, I was 20 years old when I got married. And we grew together. And I must admit, he's much more stable and I'm much more volatile. I mean, you know, a lot of times I'd say, I can't take this any more, you know, go away from me. And he'll be the one say, no, we gotta work this out, calm me down. But we had that bond of Judaism, and of our heritage, which was a very strong bond. He wanted a ki -- he wanted the kids to go to **Schechter**. It's very important to him. He still goes to Israeli book clubs.

Q: What about wanting kids, was that important to both of you?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: For you?

A: Yes. I wanted kids and I did not want an only child. That was very important to me. You know, we had discussed that. The kids, the dog, and a house with white

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

bricks, he keeps joking. And that's why he tells me I always get my way. Kids were very important to both of us. Continuation of our heritage. I basically raised the children. He'll concede to that, I think, because he's gone a lot. He does a lot of research, he used to do a lot of moonlighting, more -- only this year he stopped the moonlighting. He wanted children so badly that I had just finished law school -- we were married still when we were in grad school together. He was -- I was up here, I brought him up here, I liked **Boston**. I didn't want to return to **New Jersey**, I felt there was nothing there. Except my parents there was nothing there. So I -- I went to law school, he went to **Harvard** graduate school. Then I -- then he went to med school. And I took the bar, and I w -- said, we're not moving. But when he was an intern, he wanted a child. I don't know why, he wanted a child very badly. And I kept saying look, you're not going to be around. But he really wanted a child, I conceded. We had a child. And he was gone all the time, so I have a very close relationship with my older son, who has a difficult relationship with my husband. But it was very important for us to keep up Judaism. He's very proud of my parents. He can handle them very well. Sometimes better than I can.

Q: He can handle them well, or he relates to them?

A: Both. I don't know if he relates to them, but he can definitely handle them very well. He's willing to listen. Sometimes I get irritated because I've heard it so many

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

times. But he has that kind of patience. But he'll -- he'll listen to them. He'll let them vent. I let them vent now, too. But I think in that way it's a good match.

Q: Was it difficult for you to develop, sort of to give in if you will, or to -- to be intimate with somebody? I mean, because it seems to me that --

A: Because I was always alone?

Q: Yeah. There was a -- there seemed to be so few --

A: I don't know if I still give up all of myself. I don't, I know that. My mother said she had a difficult -- she had some difficult times with her father. And I think part of that is also influencing me i-in -- you know, if you don't give all of yourself to one person, you can't get all wit -- all that hurt. So I know that's part of it here. I'm much more of a romantic, he's not, so I resent it. But no, in the beginning, it wa -- it wasn't hard, because I was seeking it. I wanted somebody to care about me. My parents had -- care about me a lot, but in a different way. And I wanted a family. So that was really important, and he wanted that, so it wasn't that hard. I'm a strong willed person, but I do give in a lot. I don't argue as much. **Bruce** says I -- I win all the arguments, I don't think that's all that true. If there's -- if the both of us are in the room, **Bruce** will talk a lot more than I do. I don't talk on the telephone that much. I don't enjoy it much mo -- and that's part of being alone idea. I need my time alone at night. He laughs, you know. He goes to bed very early cause he gets up very early,

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

cause he's a physician. But I need that time from like 11 to 12:30 at night, and I'm alone.

Q: You became a trial lawyer --

A: Yes.

Q: -- too? So that you have also a very intense, talkative job in a -- in a way.

A: Yes.

Q: I mean, you talk yourself out during the day, in a sense **[indecipherable]**

A: I do, I talk myself out during the day, I'm always on the phone, I'm always with the **[indecipherable]**. I make -- I became a -- that was definitely related to the Holocaust, and actually I think my husband's vocation is related to the Holocaust, too.

Q: What is he?

A: He's an **AIDS** oncologist. And I know that he chose to go into **AIDS** when it wasn't popular. I don't know if it's still popular, but he had to fight a lot of battles.

Why in the world would a straight person want to deal with these type of people?

And that's basically what they used to say. And he said that the hol -- that the Jews were viewed that way too, and if we don't stand up for these people, who would stand up for the Jews? We have to stand up for these people so that doesn't happen again. And that's why he went into that field. And I've had to write many letters to the hospitals that tried to take his -- his room away, and all sorts of

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

interesting dynamics. But he fought on and he wrote [indecipherable], and he do -- he loves his field. Does research and sees patients too, at the same time. And I went into plaintiff law. I never in my life considered being defense, ever. Because the plaintiff was always the underdog. I never considered -- there's many different areas of trial law, corporate law, or my father wanted me to be a real estate lawyer. Just wasn't for me cause it didn't involve dealing with people, and protecting victim's rights. That was important to me that I protect them against -- and I -- and I view the insurance companies as people who -- or companies who take advantage of people. And I wouldn't let that happen to me, it would go against my grain. So when I try a case, a little [indecipherable] of that is in me. It makes it easier when you try a case that way. I won't take cases that I feel th-the people aren't trying -- you know, telling the truth. I -- I -- I -- I really make it a point that I want to be respected in my field. I can't be a top trial lawyer, because I have children and you have choices in life to make. And I made the choice that my family does come first. And I'm not unhappy with that choice.

Q: When you thought about parenting, before you had them, or just when you -- when you just had the -- your oldest son, what was sort of the -- was there some kind of plan, quote unquote, did you want to do something different from what you had experienced, did you have your own dreams?

A: Yes.

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

Q: What -- what would you -- what was sort of the game plan [**indecipherable**]

A: If you find the parent's manual, please show it to me, cause I have never read it yet. There were qualities of my parents that I wanted to continue and there were a lot of qualities that I didn't want to continue. I didn't want to be as judgmental, though I must admit I'm judgmental on things, but I don't think I'm as judgmental across the board as they are. I didn't want to live in the past, and I wanted to give them space. What I wanted to continue is their love of Judaism, love of family. My parents would probably do anything for me, and give me things. They've done a lot financially and spiritually for me. I want my kids -- I want to do that for my children. In a sense that's a little bit of an argument with my husband, too. He's more let them tough it out and I'm not. But I suppose that was part of the game plan, to create a heritage in a family.

Q: Did it work?

A: I don't know yet.

Q: It's a work in progress.

A: You know -- you know it works only when they have a family, because right now they're under my roof. So it's very hard to see what they're going to take with them. I see a little bit more of that now with my older son, because he's almost 18, but it's hard to tell with my younger two. I remember though, control issue, when I'd given birth to my oldest son, I was 27 and my mother called me and said I was too young to

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

raise my child, she was going to take him away. I think that was the only time I hung up the phone on Mother. You know, my husband se -- keeps saying, what -- what goes in one ear can go out the other ear. I'm trying to apply that a lot more as I get older.

Q: Do you think she was serious about -- I mean [indecipherable]

A: Oh yeah, she was quite serious. She didn't act on it, but I -- at the moment I think she was quite serious about it. I walked my child, it was March, in the stroller, you know. I didn't keep him in a playpen. I was obviously -- you know, you don't know until you have kids that, oh, my parents kept me always in a playpen. And she would get angry at me that I didn't do those things. I held them too much, I cuddled them too much, I spoiled them too much. And I didn't believe in those things.

Q: Though she craved it so much herself, when she came to this country and didn't find any of that, that was so strong in her interview. That she talked --

A: That's right.

Q: -- again and again, I do not -- I did not find the love and the warmth that I wanted. So --

A: And so you build a wall. You have a choice, you can have a nervous breakdown and crack, or you build self defense to those things and go on. And that's what happened. And also, I guess, the **European** way is -- is that again, kids probably were in playpens, and that's how she was brought -- she was brought up she had a

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

maid, so I had a maid til I was three. She didn't -- I mean, she would take pride in the fact that she used to bathe me. My father used to read to me, my mother used to bathe me and the rest of the time I was with the nanny until I was three, because she would teach, or whatever, but you know, it wasn't that si -- close. I mean, now, you know, people realize how much the bonding is important. I mean, people didn't know that then. But I -- I didn't -- I did not have an **au pair** until I had a third child. I had always somebody come in and help me, but I -- I still to this day don't work full time, I work part time, so that I'm the one who runs around when they have the plays in the schools and the doctors appointments and -- and all that. I do that. My **au pair** doesn't do that. Never did.

Q: Describe your three sons a little bit to me, and also you mentioned in the beginning the names, so you chose to name them after --

A: Yes. **Dustin**, now we have English and Hebrew names too. So **Dustin's** is -- is -- I mean, you say **Dustin's** not a very Jewish name. It's a German name, it means victorious, or -- going back, but his name is **Dustin Isaac**, and he his Hebrew name is **David Itzhak**, or **David Isaac**. **David** was a -- after my mother's father, and **Isaac** was after my father's father. You know, that was one thing I must say for my husband is, I mean, obviously he had a family too. And he didn't object that I named them after my side of the family. He kind of understood that it was important to keep their names alive. And I credit him for that. And 18 is something they do in their

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

family. And I felt it was just a wonderful idea, so that I incorporated it, some of -- like the spelling of **Isaac** is a little off, but it's 18. **Aaron Richard**, and then his Hebrew name is **Aaron Raphael**. **Aaron** is after his grandfather, but even my parents liked his grandfather, and I don't th -- and he had just died, so it actually fit in very well, but **Raphael** is -- is after **Rachel**, my father's sister. **Richard**. And **Michael** -- actually we had a little problem with **Michael's** name, my mother wanted **Frederick**, and I just couldn't see naming my child **Frederick**. Now, we thought even **Forest**, they told me they wouldn't even call him by name if he -- his name was **Forest**. They call my son, by the way, instead of **Dustin, Dodson**, on purpose cause they didn't like the name. But so **Michael** was actually my idea cause my father has a sister named **Malchia**, and **Fried** is **Frieda**, but it's spelled a little different. And his Hebrew name is **Simcha Meloch**, which is actually -- the translation is happy king. And that was their Hebrew names. So it's interesting in school they dwell a lot on how you got your name. Ev -- almost every year they ask the kids how they got their name, and they're supposed to write a report about their heritage. And they're kind of proud. At first **Dustin** wasn't proud of **Dustin**, didn't like it as much. But now they're -- they're -- they're proud of how they got their names. They don't know these people very well. My father did write when they were born, about the parents who their named after. But -- so that was important, to keep that going.

Q: Did you read your parents's books?

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

A: Yes, I did. But I didn't -- you know, I read their books, but they would test me on their books. You know, did you read this, and -- and if I -- and if I got one thing misquoted they would correct me, and why didn't you remember this, and why didn't you remember that. And they do it with my kids, too. And I have at least the temperance of years behind me, my kids are not diplomatic. So, you know, yes, I've read their books, but i-it was -- it's sometimes a little difficult. I wanted to read it to understand it, enjoy it, not to necessarily be tested on it. But I knew most of it, not all of it. I've read my father's vignettes, and I enjoyed those.

Q: The -- the published ones?

A: The ones that are coming out by **Syracuse**, because that really shows a lot of his character, and his -- and you know, his spunk and his mischievousness, which he a lot of times denies. Because that really shows a lot of him, more than a lot of what the situation made of them. So yeah, I read the books. My oldest son has read the books. My middle son has read one of the books, and my youngest son has read a little bit. It's difficult with him because he just hates to read.

Q: What's the relation -- I know I asked you before describe the -- the boys a little bit to me, but before we get to that also, what is the relationship, too, of the boys to the grandparents? Is -- is -- do th --

A: It's strained. All of -- for all three kids it's still strained. But they're closest with **Dustin**. One, he was the first. And like it or not, even though my mother probably

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

resented the fact that she was a middle child, all the time says, well he's the oldest so he should get more. He's the oldest, that he should, you know, have this kind of privilege. And I would look at her and say, but you used to complain about it. But it's different. I don't know how it's different, but it's different. I try not to do that to them. I-It's strained because they would love for them to sit there and look at them adoringly and suck up everything they have to say. My father started telling the Holocaust stories to my son when he was three years old.

Q: Repetition of them.

A: Yeah. So that's why I think he started with me at three -- until we put a stop to it. He would have nightmares. My older son is a very sensitive child, and I -- I think it warped him in some ways. He didn't do it with the younger two. We really -- I says, you can tell them you were a soldier, you can tell them that bad things happened to children, but not the gory details, and he went to the gory details with **Dustin**. In one way, he relates to them better for that. In another way I think that he's a little saddened in life by it. The younger two he -- he -- because we wouldn't let him, basically. He still tells the stories, but a much more -- not -- not a positive spin, but in the beginning it was a positive spin, you know. I was a soldier, I survived, I -- against the bad guys and the **Hitler** and -- and so they don't relate as close. Now he's beginning to tell them more of the atrocities, but they don't want to hear it. See, my son -- my older son is willing to hear it, but the r -- the younger two are not. They're

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

just not. And it hurts them tremendously. I'm the bridge. They can't relate to it as much. They're very proud of them. My father, you know, th-the -- that he survived the war. They're ba -- proud of both of them, but they don't want to hear the constant tales of woe. My youngest one when he's older probably will be more attuned to it, my middle one, no. He won't hear it. And they resent him for that.

Q: I think we should flip the cassette over again. This is the end of tape two, side **A**, interview with **Esther Dezube**.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Esther Dezube**. This is tape number two, side **B**. I'd -- I want to ask you, and I'm not quite sure how to say it yet, but I -- it'll come to me. Had -- do you remember being punished when you were not good? You seem to me ha -- to -- you seem to me to have been a very good, obedient girl. I think you called yourself a goody goodshoe, I'm not -- but a-at least very quiet, and -- and - and good, an-and willing --

A: Yeah, I was punished.

Q: -- what happened, sort of how did it happen, when y -- an-and did -- what did you -- an-and how do you reprimand your own children? Is there a difference in some ways?

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

A: Once I was hit with the belt. Most of the time they would either take -- a-and when I was older, I had **Barbie's**, they would put them in the attic, they would give them away. I had -- once had a **Shirley Temple** doll that my mother just shattered when I was bad, she was mad at me for something. I don't recall what I did, but she was mad at me and totally shattered it, broke it. It was more the isolation treatment. You know, they wouldn't talk to me. Or at -- my mother has this look that you just know she doesn't approve. And she would keep looking at you like that. There would be yelling. I don't think I was -- except for that one time that I really remember, I don't know if I was ever really physically punished after that. I was slap -- my mother would -- yeah, she -- and I -- and I did do that when it was in the beginning, but I've stopped that, she would take my arm and pinch it. That she would do. How do I reprimand my kids? God, I tried the whole gambit. I have three very strong willed child -- children and I have, you know, children who have **ADHD**. So they're a little -- sometimes a little more trying. I would slap their hands. I would slap their hands. But I'd warn them. Kind of say, I'll give you -- and I used the word Hebrew **makkah**, because I didn't want everybody to know what I was going to do. So they know what that word is, actually. And it's, I'll give you **makkah** if you don't -- so sometimes they'd even give me the hand. Once I slapped **Dustin**, I think, in the face, he did something that was just so rude. Slap on the hand mo -- and then -- then we tried this method called time out, which worked, because he knew I was serious, I'd

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

give him time out in the restaurant. Put him in a corner. It's called one, two, three time out. And they still know it. All I have to do is show them my fingers, I'm pointing one finger, two finger, three fingers and they knew I meant time out. It's a little hard when the oldest one is 18. Now his method is I take his car keys. But that's -- that's how I do it. That's my punishment.

Q: How did -- how did you relate -- or how do you relate to your husband's family? Is that a good relationship?

A: My husband isn't close to his own family, so it makes it much easier. He's okay -- my husband isn't a close, warm kind of person, though his mother tries in -- in -- on her behalf, I must admit, her mother tries to keep the family together. His father's dead. His father was a very kind, gentle man who was a hermit. He would sit on the couch, you have no clue he was there. But he was very fair. You know, when he had something to say he would say it, but he was fair. I get along with his mother, but his mother likes to talk about his mother. I mean, it's interesting when I go to her house, she's very nice, she'll give me care packages, she'll send things and she tries. But when the kids are there, she doesn't interact with the kids. That happened with my parents too, cause they didn't know how to interact with them. And I remember very clearly, **Dustin** was four years old and told my mother off. I would never dream of telling my mother off, but he told my mother off. She was mad at me that I brought up my son that way, by the way.

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

Q: And what was it -- what was the situation [**indecipherable**]

A: Oh, I remember it very clearly. He said, "You come up here **supposingly** to visit us, and all you do is read a book." He said, "Why do you bother to come to see us?" I think my mother was in shock after that. And she tried to make an effort after that, to do like chess with them, or something like that, or walk with them. She still doesn't know how to deal with them. I don't think she knew how to deal with me.

Q: You never challenged them in any way, in that --

A: They'll say I challenged them all the time, but I don't think I did. Not in any major way, no. Again, clothes or whatever, but not in a major way. Not in --

Q: How -- how did you feel, or -- how -- how did you feel -- how did you see yourself? How did you feel, really feel about yourself?

A: I like myself better now than I did then. Didn't like myself that much. I always saw myself as ugly. Fat, which is probably accurate. Not as much self confidence. I was willing to take a lot more crap, probably, than I am now.

Q: Did you ever see a psychologist or something, or was that something you would never do?

A: No, I would -- when I was -- I saw a psychologist once or twice. I remember once, I don't know. I don't remember the story, I took a knife out of a -- out of the drawer and said I would kill myself. My mother made me see a psychologist and I s -- the

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

psychologist said, she was just acting out, there's no issue in there. I don't know what started that, I really don't.

Q: Did -- did the psychologist know th-the family background?

A: I don't know. I was young, so I don't know. Do I see a c -- yeah, I see a psychologist, I have no objections for seeing a co -- psychologist. My kids see a psychologist, we have a family psychologist now. And we, you know, try -- with my husband sometimes we need to work on our -- we come from different backgrounds, different viewpoints in life, and if we're going to make this marriage work, sometimes we need a mediator. So I have no objections about seeing a psychologist. I know my -- I know that my father received shock treatment when I grew up, and he was seeing somebody. I -- I found this out later on, I didn't know when I was young that he was receiving shock treatment. I -- I don't think my father really takes care of himself, knowing a lot more about my kids, and the fact that they do have **ADHD**. It's genetic, and I'm positive my father has it. He's been diagnosed, I think, bipolar. That -- I do see a lot of that in them and I think if he had gotten help younger, it -- he would have been a lot better for it. But he doesn't want help in that regard. And it's just like my middle son, you have to acknowledge that there's an issue in order to get help. It's a difficult thing to do.

Q: I think in the late 60's, or even a little earlier, sort of studies about Holocaust survivors came out, psychological studies, did you ever read those?

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

A: No.

Q: No.

A: There was a woman who once called me from **California** and said they were doing a study, would I be willing to be a participant and I said yes. So I didn't mind that. I don't read all the Holocaust books that my parents do. I'm not a member of Second Generation, which my parents are extremely upset at me for. And it's not that I turn my back on the Holocaust, because I don't. I tell my kids about it. I am proud that my parents are survivors. I am proud in a lot of things that they instill me, and I try -- I tell my kids that. They know that my father is a holo -- they're very proud of him, like I said, in many ways. But I can't live it, eat it and breathe it like they do. And on top of it, I have three tough cookies of kids. I don't have the time. You have to give something up. And where my father probably would not think of anything of - - you know, running here and there, and meetings and not really raising me because that's what he did, I can't do that. And he doesn't understand that.

Q: Did you read some of the books that were written by children of Holocaust survivors? **Helen Epstein -- Epstein [indecipherable]** in the -- I think in -- in '79 it was published.

A: No.

Q: Never --

A: I read --

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

Q: -- curious? You didn't know about it, you didn't want to get --

A: I would go to lectures. I'd go to bra -- **Brandeis** has lecture series, I've gone to those. And to -- there's a movie series. I've gone to that. I've seen, you know, **Europa, Europa**, I've seen some of that. It's not that I'm not curious, but that I've had so much of it that I'm not so sure necessarily I'm going to be enlightened about it, because I think I have a pretty good grasp of how these people suffered and the tales may change, but the basic outline is there.

Q: Well actually, the -- the -- the last question was not so much about your -- the survivors, but about the children of the survivors, whether you kind of -- if you read books about the second generation, whether you were interested in it, first of all, to read those, and if you did, did you find yourself in them, or do you feel that you don't quite fit there either? Is --

A: No, I haven't read it so much, but it's very interesting is that you know who another child survivor is. If I walk in the room I can tell, and they can tell. I can't explain it.

Q: Try.

A: It's like when I went to a **Schechter** meeting and there was another woman there and we talked. And I found out she was a survivor -- a child survivor, and we just knew that each other were child survivors, it's some -- maybe our outlook on life. We're a little more serious, maybe. Probably a little more warped. Family, I think,

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

for child survivors are very important. I find that is a unifying fact in every one of the child survivors that I've met. There's this woman now from **Israel**, that we met through another family, child surviv -- you know, survivor, and we're -- we're close, it just -- I know what you've gone through, I know the stories that you've gone through. I know that, you know, your parents always say that, you know, we didn't have this and you do. And we're doing all this for you cause we have no one else. You just know. And you know that either you're going to resent your parents for it, or you try to deal with it. I don't resent them for who they are. Maybe when I was younger a little bit. I can understand that they went through hell, and that I'm just going to have to be accepting of who they are. I'm not going to be able to change them. You know, for many years you try to change somebody, and you realize you can't do that. So you either respect them, or you distance yourself, or you want to have nothing to do with them, those are the three choices. When you don't have a family, that's not an option. They're the only things that I have to a family, so it's just not an option. And so that's why I keep telling my kids, this is all we have. We don't have anybody else. You have to stand up for each other. You have to stick together. That kind of bonding I'm not sure is in a regular family. Everybody else is doing their own thing and not -- I tell the brothers, you better protect each other. Who else do you have? You know, you better understand, you may not like what **[indecipherable]** have to do. They come in and my father will scream at them,

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

they're not wearing socks. And they say, we're not cold. And that we're bad children because we don't tell our kids to wear socks when they command it. But I tell them, you know, you have to understand from where they're coming from. Put yourselves in their shoes. I don't know whether or not if you're not a survi -- child survivor that you can understand that. Or if you're not gone through that kind of generation, I don't know.

Q: Among your friends, are there any children of survivors?

A: No. Except for that one friend who is Israeli, yes. I -- I -- like I belong to a group of -- **Havurah** group, no, none of them.

Q: Conscious choice or happenstance, or who knows?

A: I think it was more happenstance. I mean I am friendly with this woman who is a survivor, but part of it subconsciously could be I still want -- I want to be an American. I want to fit in. I don't know whether I'm co -- more closely to a lin -- aligned to these people be-because they're Americans, but you know, if you also associate with survivors, you tend to bring it up a lot more. That means you're reliving it and reliving it and reliving it. And I don't want to do that. When the articles come out on my parents, I'm proud, I-I show them to my kids, and they read them. The little one is proud because his father is famo -- grandfather, you know, is famous, he looks at it that way, and you know -- my father goes, well, that's not a good enough reason. I said, let him bond that way. When he's older he can develop

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

other -- a-and **Dustin** is much more respectful of my parents now as he's older and understands more. So I see that the time is coming. They don't see that. They had no parents. They had no parents who ever butt into their lives, so they don't understand when or when not to butt into our lives. They just never had any mentors. So -- a-and that's why we sent them to **Schechter**, to be proud of their heritage, of who they are. And again, to make sure that it won't happen again to them. And I think they see that. I mean, my -- my middle one will go into a restaurant, very -- very -- and say, hey, there's Christmas stuff, but there's no **Hanukkah** stuff, why? I don't think an American kid would really pay attention to that. So it has sunk in a little bit, you know? I mean, maybe not the way that my parents -- but he's very proud of who he is. He's very proud that he's Jewish. It was difficult cause my oldest son was dating a non-Jew. I think my mother was much more willing to see -- let's wait and see, my father went -- still goes bananas over it. Absolutely goes banana -- has major battles with my son.

Q: How do you feel about that?

A: I -- if it's on tape and they marry I'm in trouble, but I don't like her, because I don't like her. I don't like her personality. He knows that I would be very upset if he married a non-Jew and wouldn't bring the children up Jewish. I would -- i-if the -- if the person would convert, I don't have an issue. I don't. Then they're as good as anyone else. Because I think part of our heritage would be lost. And I -- and I am

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

very close to that. I mean, my son's **Bar Mitzvahs** -- you know, when you have a kid who lives in an affluent society and he's having a **Bar Mitzvah**, it's very difficult to have him not focused on what gifts I'm going to get, versus, do you understand what this mean? That this is a tradition that you are perpetuating over thousands of years. That if you're not proud of who you are as a Jew, people will step on you. Maybe an American doesn't understand that. And I look. If somebody's talking about Jews, or saying something and I hear it in the background, I'll speak up. I'm very proud of this person, his name is **Lenny Zakim**. He died of a brain tumor last year, he was 47 -- t-two years ago, almost. They're actually debating to name a -- the new bridge in **Boston** after him. He was part of the **ADL**, and he went to law school with me **[indecipherable]** was -- he was a year ahead. I wasn't socially -- we were not on social basis, but we always used to say hello to each other from the same law school. And he would really go around, and make sure about anti-Semitism and stuff. But it was only -- not only anti-Semitism, it was anti blacks, anti anybody who had issues. And I think I'm instilling that in my kids, about discrimination. That's a product of the Holocaust. It's not only discrimination that you're Jewish, and believe me, I've had some anti-Semitism, I haven't had a lot. My kids haven't had so much, so they don't know yet what it is, but they will, and I want them to be prepared for it.

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

Q: I just have actually a -- a couple of follow up questions. Otherwise, I think we have touched on a lot of important things. And one is a very practical one. I forgot to ask you when, just for the record, when your children were born.

A: **Dustin** was born March 11th, 1983. **Aaron** was born December 17th, 1987, and **Michael** was born February 28th, 1990. I have to say one thing is though, I've had many miscarriages. That's why I have the big gap between the oldest and the middle. And because I really wanted a family, I never gave up. I had eight miscarriages -- no -- yeah, eight miscarriages, three live births. And I think part of that keeping me going, although I would get almost hives when I would go into the op -- the -- the -- the gynecologist's office was that I really wanted a family th -- to perpetuate our heritage. That was very important to me. So I just didn't give up. And they know that. I mean, I sing **Shema** to them every night, and even my s -- oldest one still asks for that. To understand, you know, that this is where it's coming from. I don't know - - **Shema** is an affirmation of one God, but it's also supposed to be said as the last thing on your mouth before death. And then, just you know, make sure that they understand that.

Q: One other question until I remember another one, is sort of political. You have gone through, in your teens actually, Civil Rights movement, Women's movement, all of these things kind of are also part of who you are to some degree at least. To

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

what kind of degree? What -- what -- what moved you, politically speaking? What was important to you?

A: Justice. I was for the Women's movement for equality and for justice. I don't go over backwards on it. I mean, I don't want any more rights, but I want to be respected. I am -- I've dealt with that personally. I was a women's lawyer where they were just starting to have women lawyers. I mean, there were men in my class, but the older men didn't have women in their classes. I was called deary during trials. And -- and -- and my theory in life, as I handle almost everything with that one is somebody goes -- this one woman that was just outraged that he was calling me deary, aren't you going to say anything to him? And I said, no, because I'm not going to change him. But if I'm a deary, I'm stupid, so I'm going to take it to my advantage, and just prepare. And I won that trial. And my basic thing is I start off with honey. Burn me and you're in trouble. And then I'll y -- rant, rave and scream, but I usually don't rant, rave and scream first, cause I saw my parents rant -- my father rant, raving and screaming. I'm not sure that he was better off for it. I had a -- I was pregnant with my first child and they told me I was unfit to try the case. Not the judge, but an attorney on the other side, because I would be going to the bathroom too much. He was a black attorney. The judge threw -- it was Christmas eve, the judge threw it out, and said I'm not touching this -- at least he was wise enough -- I'm not touching this one. It's much better for the younger women attorneys, I

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

guarantee you. They didn't have to fight that. I campaigned when I was in college, for **Scoop Jackson**. I went around and I did a lot of political planning, but a -- it was a -- politics is a very dirty animal. I didn't like the dirt. So I -- and especially for a woman, it's much e -- more of a dirty animal. I fight for justice wherever it is. For special education and stuff like that. I'm an independent. I'm registered as an independent, because then I'm not locked in the primary to vote for a Republican or Democrat, and I wanted to see where my vote counts. So I'm more of that. I mean, I hear what's going on with **Gore** and -- and I'm outraged because I think that there were a lot of shenanigans going on and the people's votes weren't counted. It's not so much **Gore** as a person to win, or **Bush**, though I think **Bush** is an idiot. But the fact is that these people were turned away from voting, these votes didn't count. And that gets my gall. It's the underdog again, that gets my gall. I've rallied for **Israel**. I don't do it so much now. I'm a little more laid back now than I used to be, but that's the only way I can handle my work load and my kids. Cause I don't have three wallflowers. I mean, sometimes I wish for three wallflowers, but I don't have them. And I want to make sure that they grow up to be people that give to the community, that's important to me. They give something of themselves to the community. My oldest son gave 10 percent of his **Bar Mitzvah** money to charity, to the Home of Little Wanderers. That was -- I didn't care which charity, but it was imperative that he gave. My youngest one says, I know, I have to give. So at least I -- you know,

Interview with Esther Dezube
December 7, 2000

good. You're going to have to give. And he chose -- you know, he's gonna choo -- he chose that Home for Little Wanderers, so he's going to give. That's important, for my kids to give back to the community and not always take. It's not easy, especially when you live in an affluent community. But my oldest one works at a soup kitchen. Third week of the month he cooks and he delivers. My youngest one -- my middle one does a little bit. My youngest one has to be pushed a little. He's probably not as giving as the others. But we're working on it.

Q: I have one more question, but before I ask that final one, is there anything that relates to what we have talked about, and that I haven't asked -- touched upon, or that's important for you to say?

A: I think part of the Holocaust children don't want -- do not want to be seen as different, although we are. We want to be normal. I don't know what normal is, but we want to be normal. And the only problem is our viewpoint of normalcy comes from a different plane than other people. I think that we carry -- we're a bridge, we really are. And we carry the torch to our younger generation, our kids, to make sure that they don't forget. And it's very hard, because unless they're living with their grandparents, they can't understand as much, and you do, so you don't know what to do. You understand where they're coming from, because they're removed and you understand where your parents are coming from, because you lived with it. And so

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you get battled from both ends. And sometimes you feel like the mediator between generations. And it's -- it's not the easiest thing to do.

Q: And my last question is why did you agree to do this interview?

A: Part curiosity. Part my parents, and part that I want people to understand who we are, and to be accepted for who we are.

Q: Well thank you very much for having accepted the interview. [indecipherable]

This concludes the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Esther Dezube**. Thank you very much. Oh, this is the end of tape two, side **B**.

End of Tape Two, Side B

Conclusion of Interview