

Interview with Miru Alcana
August 30, 1992
Los Angeles, California

Q: Okay let's begin by -- if you can tell me your name.

A: Yes. My name is Miru Alcana. I was born in the island of Rhodes in 1915 and I was deported in 1944, July 23, 1944. From Rhodes, we spent three days in one building and after they took us to different couple of boats to take us to Pireo and from Pireo we went to Athens. In Athens was a camp of concentration and the name was Haidari. We spent over there three days in Haidari and three of our family, relative, they pass away because was thirsty and they couldn't survive. The name of this people who pass away was Moselton Hasson, is cousin of my mother. Also Allegra Buroff and her mother. I don't remember her name. After three days we was in Athens, in Haidari, they put us in wagon like animals with no water, no food. Only they put some bread, very, very hard. They put boxes of little onion, white onions. Also boxes of honey and also something else. We couldn't eat because the bread was very hard, we can't chew and besides that no water; how can we eat the honey? How can we eat the onions without water? How we would dump the bread with no water? So we arrive in Auschwitz after three weeks, traveling through the night. Daytime we was hiding different places but we didn't know where it was. Finally we arrive in Auschwitz but during the trip, three men, they pass away in Serbia. One was Rahamim Galanti, another Alchadef, Yomtov and the other was Yehuda Notrica. Those three mens, they died because they was thirsty. Without water, they couldn't survive. Finally we arrive Auschwitz. In Auschwitz, they separated from our parents. They told us we would see every night but you young people, you will go to work. Then every night, you will meet your parents. So -- was not like that. The only thing, when we arrive, they choose us for work and they put us in line. In the meantime, we was hungry and thirsty and finally we smelled the meat. Smelled the meat and we said I hope those SS they should choke because they having barbecue, They having broiled steak with music but we didn't know what was going on. The only thing the other people, the French people who was in line with us, they said, when did you arrive? We say a few hours ago. So there are your parents, are cremated. Cremated, what mean? We don't know that word, cremated. In our country, we never heard that. They say those people who doesn't -- that are not too strong to work, they put in the ovens. You can imagine how we feel to hear that. To smell they are burning our parents with the music. Because not to hear the screaming. We start to cry, screaming, nothing we can do. After they start to count and they send us to take shower. After they put in our block, in every -- number 20 the first time. Four o'clock or before, they start to call "sel appel, sel appel" That means they have to count. That is the story of Auschwitz and our life. I don't know what to say else. The only thing when we was working, they choose us to work in the factory. I was working in gleeov but I don't know how to explain what means gleeov. The only thing was big trunk to put pieces of material to

make machine gun; to some electricity to make very, very hard. Just like in one little room where there are 500 kilowatts for twenty minutes. Then after, we have to take out and bring to the other girls to work. Then put the other box over there. That was all the work in Auschwitz. In the meantime, we didn't have nothing. On Sunday, "kein arbeit kein brot". They don't give us anything to eat. But every 12 hours, we was working. They used to give a little soup and one tiny piece of bread. We have to keep for the next day to work. In the meantime, there was people who they steal your bread and nothing you can talk because we couldn't talk German and we can't defend ourselves in Yiddish. Really, we have very, very hard life. That is the history of our life.

Q: Can you tell me what you remember about when the war first broke out? Do you have any recollections about what was happening at that time?

A: When I was working?

Q: Yeah, what were you doing then when you first heard that the war had broken out?

A: In Auschwitz I used to go to bring bricks or – in Auschwitz also the barracks, the food for us. But in Auschwitz we have bitter experience. We used to accept three slice of tiny bread to buy a panty, a brief, a panty. When we washed and we was waiting for a little bit sun. Sun, we never saw in Auschwitz and we tried to put -- to be in the air. The Polish, they grabbed the panty and they go to the blockkova to say, look the Italian, they stole my panty. Was not true, we can't talk and then the blockkova came. They punish us and they beat us without no reason because we didn't know the language. We didn't know Yiddish and we suffered worst than the Hitler. In Germany when I was in Buchenwald, working in the factory, I used to help the other girls. Because they couldn't do their own job so when I have 20 minutes to rest until the trunk was in the oven; so I used to help some girls to do their own job. I tried to save the girls. Otherwise, they will be killed, they will be cremated. So thank God, they are alive. When I was liberated in Theresienstadt I went to Prague. From Prague, I took the train. I went to Budapest to look for medicines for the girls because they have dysentery. They gave me but before I had problem with -- in the office because they don't want to give me anything. They say bring your sister here and we will help. I say they are in the hospital. The Russian, they don't have nothing to help them. I saved them and I want to take home back with me. I spoke with the manager and I say, listen, I came from Prague. I spent three nights and two days and a half in the trains. Now I need help from you. I want to save my sister. I say here is my names. My name is Miru Alcana and they say, what is this. Deanna Galanti, the other. I say they are my sister, my father passed away, my mother got married. So they are Galanti, the other sister, half-sisters. Finally they gave me medicine and also gave me 1,200 merango (130) for each one. I came back to Prague, not to Prague. I find they was in Rattot. I came back. I looked where the Rattot to see where is the camp to meet them again. Finally I have hard time. I don't know how many

kilometers I walk and finally we was together until we came back to Bologna, Italy altogether. I accomplished something in my life. They recognized what I did for them and we are in touch with them. They call me often, one, she live in Vancouver, Washington. The other live in Miami. The other live between -- the other sister she live between Switzerland and France. But when they come to see the sister, we meet each other. What else? Another girl, she live in Johannesburg. She write me and once in a while, she send something, present. At least they recognize what I did for them. I'm satisfied, not what they send me but at least they recognize and they never forget of me. That is all my life. Maybe I got something else but right now I don't remember. Don't forget, I'm old lady.

Q: Let's go back now to before you went to Auschwitz.

A: Yes.

Q: At the very beginning of the war. You can tell me what you remember about that time and what you were doing at that time?

A: In that time, I was at the hospital study to be midwife but I couldn't because with the situation of the Jews. They were not allowed to continue to study so I was nurse. Nurse, I used to do shots for so many people and I used to do tests of the urine for diabetes and albumin. Also I had store one of the best of Rhodes. Perfumeria Rosa di Rodi they used to call. Was a store of classic perfume. For many years, I was very pleased to manage that store But until the Germans -- first of all, when I was -- before that I was working with the government, the manu foreste. But I couldn't work over there, they say, because I was Jewish so I lost the job. After I went to work in that store where they sell the perfumery. From there I used to go to the hospital to finish the course. In the meantime, I used to make good money for the shots I used to give to people. Also with --. I used to make good money. One of the best worker or salelady or employee you can tell was myself because I used to make good, good, good money. After we start with the problem of the Germans so until we finish to be in the hands of the Nazis. Now when I hear still the Nazis is growing up, really I'm getting nervous. I'm sick. But nothing you can do. People, they are cruel, people they don't know what they want. It is just that they are envy and mean.

Q: Sharon told me that before the war, you were involved in Ort, O-R-T?

A: Pardon me?

Q: I wrote down O-R-T. ORT. Is that -- she said before the war, can you talk about that?

A: I don't remember what you --. Let me see.

Q: Can you talk about that a little bit, into the tape?

A: I hope she will change something. She will not copy everything.

Q: No.

A: Huh?

Q: Yes. They'll summarize.

A: Because so many things --.

Q: It's okay.

A: After -- did you open? After I came back from concentration camp, I used to work. I used to be in the Jewish community in Bologna, Via Gombruti Nove, nine. I used to help all those girls to cook and to be together because I thought it was my duty to help them because they were orphans, no parents. But I was also without parents but I tried to help them. In the meantime, I used to go to the hospital to see the people who came back from concentration camp was in very bad shape. I used to bring something to them every single day. I used to go to Istituto Rizzoli and also to Santa Orsola hospital to help them. In the meantime, we used to have La Wiza like Hadassah over here, Wiza. We used to -- I was very active, I was member and I used to make cookies to have tea, to give tea and then to make money to send to Eretz Israel. Because Israel -- I was very Zionist in my country because my brother was president of the Macabee. My grandparents -- my grandfather died in Jerusalem; my grandmother, also. They were very, very Zionist. Also I continued to be Zionist and I was revisionist in my country in Rhodes. So when I was after the concentration camp, I used to be running from one place to the other to bring cassette, how do you say it? I used to go from one house to the other to bring the keren ami box, the blue box to receive some, to get some money to send to Eretz Israel. Also in this country, I do the same thing. Twice yearly, I have to bring the cassette, the boxes of -- the blue box to the Jewish Fund for Israel. I think for today, I don't have else what to say. Maybe --.

Q: Okay, let's talk a little bit about what it was like to grow up in Rhodes. When you were a child --?

A: In Rhodes?

Q: Yeah, can you tell me like about -- like the neighborhood where you lived and what life was like there?

A: The life in Rhodes was beautiful, beautiful. We had wonderful life. First of all, we went to school. Our parents they was very religious and they was --. They gave lots of advice. They teach us how to be human being, to be generous, to be unselfish. At the school, I used to do good work and after the school I used to work. After the school, I used to work. After I finish the school, I went to the hospital to learn midwife but unfortunately, like I will repeat, I didn't have luck to finish because on account of the religion -- of the Nazis. From there I started to work, to make living, to help our parents.

Q: Can you talk about what it was like at the school?

A: The school -- we used to have --. This school was Jewish school. We have part Italian, they have teachers in Italian, teacher in Hebrew and also teacher in French. But most important, the more classes we had, was Italian subject. Then French, and after Hebrew. Hebrew we have three times weekly for one hour. In fact when I go to Israel, I have no problem with my language because when I studied the dikduk in Hebrew, the only thing I learned with point. I didn't learn without. But they teach us for little island of Rhodes, no matter how many they used to before teach the boys. The boys they used to send to the chabra or to college, Hebrew college, but the girls, they were not allowed. Only the boys they should. But later they start to teach us, the girls, three hours weekly. Was not so bad. At least we learned something. The most important what we learned, to respect the people, to respect our parents and to know the Ten Commandments, what is very, very important. At the school, they used to teach us Hebrew history and so we continue to keep that in our mind. No matter what we went through in our life, still we keep what we learn from our parents and from the school. That was wonderful experience in our life.

Q: Okay. As a child growing up, also, can you talk about what other sorts of things you did? Like did you learn any music or did you have any hobbies?

A: Not hobbies, no hobbies. The only thing is to study and to be --to work in the house, to help the parents. To my mother, to help in the family, in the house. But no hobby, only we had gymnastic, we have exercise with the school, you know, like boy scout. That is all, we didn't have too much like over here. We was more conservative. We didn't have too much liberty, no.

Q: Can you describe what the neighborhood was like, what it looked like?

A: Oh, wonderful neighborhood we have. Everyone very friendly like one family. No matter how many neighbors we have, everyone is just like family.. In fact, we used to say Auntie Rosa, Auntie Straya, Auntie Rebecca, but we didn't know if they were relative or not. Because our parents they say, say hello to Auntie Rebecca or say hello to Auntie Rifka. To everyone we have to say Auntie. So for us all the neighbors was family.

- Q: So the neighborhood was all Jewish then, right?
- A: Yes, everyone. We didn't have no strangers.
- Q: Okay. Can you talk about your brothers and your sister some?
- A: Pardon me?
- Q: Can you talk about your brothers and your sister?
- A: My brother was good, good shoemaker. He make boots, boots.
- Q: Which brother are we --?
- A: Josef, Josef. He -- very expensive. Also Nissim was mechanic. He used to work with engineer, Lanarie. Italian fellow. He was with him. My sister, Miriam, she had three children. Two girls and one boy, beautiful children, very smart. Unfortunately they weren't in -- they was killed by the Nazis, they put in the ovens. My brother-in-law was wonderful, wonderful fellow. He respected everyone of us. Really we was in good harmony, the whole family. I had -- my father had another two brothers, another sister. The brothers was very, very wealthy. One, he had ten children, five boys and five girls. Everyone, they was married except two young boys. They escaped during the capitulation of Mussolini. He went with Abe Lindberg in Turkey and they are saved in Israel. But the others, the big family, everyone was killed by the Nazis. My aunt, wonderful, she had five children. The girl was married with one baby. My brother Nissim, he was married and he had little girl a year and a half. No one they came back.
- Q: Just one more thing about growing up. Can you just -- what language did you speak, like at home? You've mentioned so many languages --.
- A: Yeah, but the most important is the Spanish, Ladino, you know, because it is my mother tongue -- lingua, language. Because in the house, we speak Spanish, Ladino. Also at this school, Italian and French. Hebrew we learn at this school and also Greek with some French and a little bit Turkish. We did -- milkman who is to bring us every day milk and yoghurt so we learned Turkish. The woman who come to help for the washing the clothes, she used to speak Turkish. You know, when you are young, is easy to catch the language.. But the most important what I talk is Italian, Ladino, and French. That is it -- I think is enough. And also now Hebrew, I can manage very good and Greek also.
- Q: That's a lot of languages. Can you talk about what it was like being a Greek Jew growing up --.

- A: Very important, the best. No matter, after my experience traveling all over the world, I find out is no religion better than ours, the religion, the Jews because I used to live in Italy with the Italians. Wonderful, wonderful people. Very nice, I respect them but it is not like us. Now here with the Mexicans who hate the Jews and the Protestant, so many people who I met over here, when I find out how they are mean and they hate the Jews, I find out the best is ours. Because we don't hate no one. Only we respect and so that is the most important. We try to help everyone with no interest but the other religion is just --. They do for interest. Otherwise they don't do nothing for nothing. I respect my religion and I will die the way I am, this was the best.
- Q: Can you describe what it was like being Jewish when -- before the war though, in Rhodes?
- A: We was very religious. We used to light the candles on Shabbat and we never warm up on Shabbat. We didn't open gas, we didn't --. We had, we used to keep warm the food from Friday night for Saturday. We used to read, stay in the house. In the morning, they used to go to the temple. Then when they used to come, we had breakfast and lunchtime. They used to go in the morning tefilla; and lunch, they used to say the berakhot. Saturday, for instance, the Havdalah, every Saturday night, the Havdalah and when was Shabbat, we used to light the candle and say the Kiddush. But in our house, in every house in Rhodes, it was the same thing. Four o'clock, 5 o'clock, no lights, no nothing. Everything was ready for Shabbat. We waited for the guys, the men who come from the shop, take a shower and then ready for the Kiddush and to be on the tables.
- Q: Did you find that it was difficult to be Jewish? You mentioned how you couldn't keep certain jobs because you were Jewish.
- A: Yeah, over here, over here, yes. When I applied to the Bank of America; they told me to write down. When I write down, I'm Jewish, they say we will call you back. They never called me. I applied in Safeway for a job. When they saw Jewish, they didn't gave me job. In many places, I applied and they didn't give me.
- Q: But you had mentioned how before the war, you had that problem also?
- A: No, no.
- Q: I thought you said you ---.
- A: No, not in Rhodes. Never, never, never. We didn't have no problem with the Italians. The only thing -- the Greeks were anti-Semitic, was against us but we didn't have nothing in common with them. Now, they are very anti-Semitic -- how did you say? They can't stand the Jews. They don't like it. It's written on the wall, no Jews, no Americans. That is in my country.

Q: Okay, let me turn the tape over.

(End of Side A, Tape 1)

A: And I hope with the strength of God will be with us and they will be safe, Eretz Israel. Because without Israel all the Jews, they will be kaput. They will be lost. Today we should work hard to keep that Eretz Israel and I hope someday we will have shalom, we will have peace in Eretz Israel. Thank you.

Q: I have some more things if that's all right.

A: What?

Q: Some more questions. If we can go to the -- back to the beginning of the war, can you tell me what you remember when the Germans -- what happened when the Germans invaded? What it was like then ---?

A: ...on this?

Q: No, it's on. The tape is on.

A: Is on?

Q: Yes. Do you understand my question?

A: Yes. I supposed to do before. When I start to talk.

Q: But I'm talking now about specifically when --.

A: The Germans, they came?

Q: Yes, specifically when they came.

A: Okay. The Germans, they came to Rhodes. They was allied with the Italians. After Mussolini fell down, so the Germans they said, now we are the boss and you will do whatever we say. When they came to the Jewish quarter, they say we have to bring the men; they have to come with the licenses of their job and then they have to work for us. Every night they will come back. So everyone they took the license of their job. They went there to that building and they didn't came out. After three days they spoke out again. They came, they say, the womens and the children, they have to come -- they have to go to that building. In case they don't go, all the mens they will be killed. And they say they have to bring all what you have, gold, money, silver, anything what you got in the house because you will be concentrated in one village. With your money, you will eat and you will be safe. Everyone, they took all the -- what -- all the jewelry,

whatever they had, they brought with them. We went there and they came out with two big boutava --.

[background voice]

Not boutava, no, no.

[male voice in background]

A: They came out with big tray and we put the money, we put the gold, we put the silver, everything what we had and we gave it to them. So many people, they didn't want to give the money so they put it in the bathroom and they flushed the waters. The building where we went was a commando, how you say, a building for the pilots, the officer, pilots, officers. You can imagine how many toilets they have. Everything was full of money, full of gold. From there, the Germans, they took everything what we had and they used to beat us if they don't give whatever they had. After the, like I say, they put us in -- they gave the alarm and we start to walk to the port, you know, to the -- to take the boat. Like that they took us to Pireo, took three days or five days to take to Pireo. You can imagine, was the, the 23 of July; we arrived the August 16. The 12th was from Rhodes to Athens; from Athens to Auschwitz, the 23rd and we arrived the 16th in Auschwitz. To Haidari was in July 23rd.

Q: How much time was there between the time when the Germans invaded and the time you were deported?

A: How many hours?

Q: How long was it? How much time? Was it hours, days, weeks?

A: Only they gave us three days to be in the building and then after they took us they gave the alarm and we walked, walked, walked, so many people. They have pillows, they have blankets, they have clothes, you know, to change. We walking like a caravan to the depot to take the boat. So how many, I don't know, they gave the alarm -- not to see us.

Q: Were there any, were there any specific events that happened that you would be able to talk about that might stand out in your mind? Something that you -- things that maybe you saw that had a very strong impact?

A: The only thing I saw the three women who pass away in Haidari. Really was a --. I saw the Nazis how they beat the big shots in Athens without they --. They call the mens downstairs, down from the building. Before they start to walk to the wagons, they have stones in the floor like point. Every time they took out the shoes and they led them to walk in the stones who was tall, how did you say? like pieces of stone, like marble, pieces, in point.

Q: Like pebbles?

A: You can put -- if you put your feet, you will get blood. You should see the blood running from the feet. That make me sick to see those innocent people die from the -- how you say -- from thirsty because they ask one drop of water. The mens who was beaten from the Nazis with the whipping and walk in there, in the --. That was very bad impression. I say what will be the end of us? What will be when we will be in their hands? In fact what happened was like that. We suffered more from the Polish. The Jews, the women of Poland and from Hungarian. They used to beat us, they used to steal our blanket, they used to steal our clothes, our panty, our bread. Those people they do very hard to us. Even if they want to save their own life, but they shouldn't do that what they did it to us. Then not only that, they steal and they should go to the blockova, the head of the block to say, the Italian they stole us. They stole this, the Italian, they do that, the Italian. We didn't know the language, we didn't know Yiddish, we didn't know German. We didn't know how to defend ourselves so that was very bad. In fact, one Magda, she get me one punch in my teeth and she broke four teeth to me. But I'm glad she died in Bergen-Belsen. Otherwise, I would look for her. Yesterday I find lady, no Friday, I met lady. She said do you mind shall I sit over here in the bus? I say yes. I say you got foreign accent like me. From where are you? She say, wait a few minutes. After she say, from Austria, Vienna, I say, Frau Ober____; I start to talk German. I say you are not from Austria, German. You are____. I say how long you been here. Do you have a nice apartment in the _____. She said no, we got nice house, nice house. Little house, not too big. But I like Brazil. I say, oh very Schoen. I start to talk in German. _____. Brazil, Rio de Janeiro. Oh, ya, ya. I say, you are Nazis! Your husband is one of the Nazis who left Germany to go to Brazil. And now from Brazil, they would recognize him and he came over here in the Spanish because he speaks Spanish. How do you like that?

Q: What did she say?

A: She say, no, no. Do you have children? She say no. Why you are going to now five o'clock, two o'clock, you going to downtown. I told in Spanish to pick up your husband because they will recognize him. You're going to pick up him and to go home. Not to be alone. But I wish to go with you to recognize him and I will choke him. Because he Nazis. Look how clever, they went there. They will recognize. They spent so much and after they change the --. They went back to Vienna, they find out they will recognize them and so they come to Los Angeles. If I had time, I will go to see where she will stop and where she will go back. I will hide myself but I didn't have time. I didn't want to aggravate it myself. Look the Nazi. Did you hear on the television? The Nazis now what they want? Me, no Nazi, me no. You are not, your husband, yes.

- Q: Okay. If we can -- we ended up jumping around a little bit but if we can go back to when you were in Auschwitz? No, you were in more than one camp, is that correct?
- A: No, Auschwitz.
- Q: That was the only one?
- A: Only Auschwitz, yeah. From Auschwitz, they send us to Buchenwald, Villestadt to work in factory. We didn't have no time. We didn't know if it was daytime or nighttime. We were underground.
- Q: We would like to have, as much as possible ---.
- A: What?
- Q: Do you want me to stop for a minute?
- A: Pardon me?
- Q: Do you need me to stop for a minute?
- A: What you mean? [Other voice in background] Go ahead.
- Q: They would like to have as many, as much eyewitness testimony as possible about what -- things that you saw in the camp. So if there is anything else you can talk about that you saw while you were in the camp?
- A: What? I said so many things. What the witnesses. I can tell all the girls who were with me
- Q: That's not what I meant. Just if there's any more things that happened that you haven't mentioned yet.
- A: The only thing what happened in Villestadt where I was working; one lady, her name was Margot from Berlin. She moved where she was, she jumped in the river and she disappeared. The oberau _____ the chief of the soldiers, they say if she not coming back, ten of you, they will be killed. For one, ten. She pick up so many and one of us, Matilda Israel, was one with them. [More conversation with other person – not in English]. That was very important. For 24 hours, we was trembling, shaking, what would be from us. Why they would kill them, the ten for one. Finally they put the reflectors, the lights, boats, airplanes, they find her. They brought and then they put in – on the floor and everyone, they have to step on her. They have to kick her. We have to do the whipping. We have to whip to her, to that woman.

- Q: They made you do that?
- A: We did it because they gave us. She was crying and crying and crying. She used to talk in German because she was from Berlin. She used to say, I will never do again. I will never do again. Please forgive me, forgive me. She used to cry, all the lady I feel sorry for Margot. I remember that -- was very emotional. We was very depressed for that case. That was very important too. When I was working, my nail, the nail went down and then was broken. They say I do purposely and so they punish me for no reason. You know, it not the right way what I did it. I don't think so. Maybe she will change and she will put different way?
- Q: Oh, Sharon?
- A: Eh?
- Q: You mean Sharon?
- A: I say because when I start, for instance, my name is Miru and so, I was in the island of Rhodes and they pick me up from the Nazis and I spoke over here how many days I was in that building. But I should do before -- when I start in the beginning, no?
- Q: Well we went a little bit out of order because when you started, I didn't want to interrupt you.
- A: Yes, I know. Was not the writer.
- Q: They can rearrange.
- A: So how will she do?
- Q: Okay, well maybe if you just want to right now, just go over briefly the order in which things happened to make it easier so that --. You know what I'm saying?
- A: Because when I start the beginning, I should tell about the building where we was for three days and before they called the mens and after the womens. We brought all the money, everything, we should start, step by step. I don't know why I didn't. The last time, I did it but today I don't know what happened to me.
- Q: That's okay.
- A: I should do.
- Q: That's partly my fault too.

- A: No, no. Because the beginning I should --. When I start to say I'm from the island of Rhodes, Greece now. In 194 __, since July, 1913, they called the Germans camp to the Jewish quarter and they ask the men they should come with their license to be present in that building. That building was the headquarter of the pilots, the officer, the aviation. I should do that before. Then the men they went there for three days. After three days, they start to ask all the women and the children, they should come too and to bring all the possession they had, the silver, the money, the gold to bring in together. Then they would stay all day long there, they would stay long in -- they would be in one building, in one village. Your money, you will support yourselves. I should start like this. From there they took us after three days, they gave the alarm and we went to walking like a caravan like you see in the movie, they walking with all the belonging together like blankets, pillows, all the clothes, whatever they had. Luggage, together and we went to the boat and after five days we arrive in Pireo and from Pireo they took us to Athens where the camp was there waiting for the train, for the wagons. We stayed in that place, that camp they call Haidari. We stayed three days there in the Haidari and after they put us in the wagons. In the wagons, during the three days in Athens, three women they pass away because they was thirsty. After we went to in the wagons. When we reach in Serbia, three mens pass away. Manos S_____. The three men pass away because was thirsty and they died. They throw in one hole over there. After we start -- they hided us for many days. During the day, we was hiding. At night time, we was in the train walking. We didn't know what was the destiny of us. Finally we arrive in Auschwitz. Auschwitz was the end of the life of our parents. I should start like this.
- Q: Okay. So now you did. Your brothers and sisters as well, were they with you at that time?
- A: Yes, in the train we was with all my family; my father, my mother. My father, he used to read the perck, not the perck, the -- some part of the tehillin (psalms). He used to read continuously, continuously, continuously until we arrived. My mother, she was sitting there. We didn't have room to move. We didn't have no toilets. We didn't have nothing. My brothers, my sister, my brother-in-law, even we want to make our necessity and we say, turn your face. In the same train, in the same people, in the same where we were sitting because they didn't have no room. My three nephews, my sister-in-law, she was very young, twenty-five years old. Her little girl was a year and a half. My brother at that time was 28 years, I don't know. My father was 71, my mother 60, 61 when they arrive in Auschwitz. They promise us we will see every night. During the day, they will go to work. But was not like that. Only we heard by the French when we smell the meat, barbecue. They used to look like they have steak in the -- steak barbecue. We say, look they eating barbecue with the music and the French people what was over there before us, they say no. They are your parents, they are cremated. At that time, we didn't know what mean cremated. Because in our country, in our little island, we was very naïve. We knew what means cremation because in our Bible they say cremated, cremation is against the law We never thought they

would cremated those people. My brother, they took my brothers and my brother-in-law, they choose to work and also myself. But my brother Josef went to Mauthausen, Nissim was in Dachau, my brother-in-law was in Ridelow and those things I find out because I wrote to Red Cross. They answered me and they told me where they was dead. That is the reason I know where I lost my brothers. Myself, I was working in Villestadt before for two months, years. I was working in Auschwitz bringing barrels of food to the kitchen or bring water to the kitchen. After breaks, after they send us to Villestadt. Was factory of munition. My job was gleeov. I can't translate what mean gleeov. The only thing I know was a big trunk. I put pieces of metal. The machine gun I don't know. Put it there and then put it in the -- in one place, 500 mil kilowatt to make hard. Every 20 minute, I have to change the trunk and put the other. In the meantime, the 20 minute until they would be cool off. I used to help the other girls who they couldn't make it. We worked 12 hours daily for one week. One night, 12 hours. Tachi and Nachi they used to call. But we never saw when was daytime. When was nighttime because we was working under tunnel. We never saw sunshine. We never saw the time, what time, what day. We didn't know nothing. We was working like slave until the Russian they start to come and they move us in other place to work in pieces of assembly of airplane. We stayed there three, four days or one week. From there they took us another place. They put in the wagons, almost the end I think. They left us in wagons, closed of Villestadt, no Theresienstadt. They closed the wagons for five days. How many girls was dead and we didn't have no toilet, no air, only they was lucky with chan. After five days over there, you should see the cholera they have, the cholera. The Russian camp, they liberated us. They say to us, "kein arbeit, kein brot"; if you don't work for you, you can't have bread. The strong girls, they have to go to work. You have to go. To me, they pick up myself to work in -- to make bread. Another also to make bread. The other in the kitchen to cook so we worked just for us. Some afternoon, we used to go to the Russian commander to clean the rooms and to cook for them. Every time when I used to go there, I used to steal one knife, knife, one fork and one time I stole a little cushion. Until they sent us to Prague. From Prague I escaped twice. I went to Budapest to ask help for my friends who was very sick with this dysentery. We started all over.

Q: Where were you at the time of the liberation?

A: The liberation in Theresienstadt. I was liberated in Theresienstadt, in May 13, 1945

Q: Can you describe those events?

A: There I was working like I told you, working in the -- to make bread; the factory to make bread. Afternoon, I had to work in the commando of the -- the Russians' commando, to clean the rooms and to prepare food for them, to cook foods for them. After we used to go to our barrack. For a little bit, I don't know for how long. After they sent us to Prague. From Prague we went to the Italian consul.

The Italian to help -- they help us. They gave nice, nice place to live like --how do you say -- like a academy school. A school because the kids was on vacation and they gave us the bed. Then they gave us money and we can go for shopping or to see. We didn't pay the carfare because when we showed the number of our arm, they didn't say nothing. We used to run from one bus to the other, free. Free rides we had. Then after --.

Q: How long --?

A: I don't know how long.

Q: You don't know how long you were there?

A: I don't remember, I can't recall. The only thing they took us like before I say to Rattotine, Hungaria, but I went myself to Budapest to pick up medicine. Sha ____ for the girls who had dysentery, yeah. Also they gave me, 1,200 merangos, money. I bought apples, sugar, something to give nutrition to the girls. When I came back after three days and a half and two nights, by train because the station was tall, I arrived and I couldn't find them. After they told me where they are. I walked so many kilometers and I don't know. I can't describe how I arrive. Finally I met them. I gave the medicines. I gave what I brought so like that I did my best to save human being. But those girls they remember me. When is Mother's Day, when is Rosh Hashanah or Pesach, anyway they call me often. I call them because one she live in Vancouver, Washington; the other live in Miami, the other live in other part of Miami, one live in Johannesburg, the other between Switzerland and France. I am in contact with them, once in a while we see each other. We meet each other, we talk. That is part of what I went through with those Germans. How we should forget them. How they can deny that didn't exist Auschwitz, no Birkenau. Who put our numbers on our arm. My number is _____. That I have to learn by memory because I didn't know before. They used to with the whipping; they gave me so many -- they whipped so many times to me. I have to learn. We say no more Nazis, no more but the Nazis still they are around. We have here in California, so many. In fact, a couple of days ago I met somebody. You think it's enough?

Q: Yeah, I'm just looking. Okay. Can you tell, after you were in Italy, where did you go from there, did you say?

A: After many months, we was in -- so March, just a minute, May 30, we was liberated and we arrive in August, the end of August to Italy. We went to Bologna, Italy to the Jewish community. We are gombrudi number nine. Because over there is Milan, they didn't have room for us. Modena they didn't have room for us. I say the only place we should go to Bologna to see if we will find any place to stay there. Was -- the building was destroyed but they didn't have no windows; they didn't have doors. We used to sleep in the hallway, we was 52 between boys and girls sleeping in the floor. The Jewish community, they

gave us blankets and also they gave few mattresses and they used to give us three liras to go to eat once -- to hot kitchen. They call hot kitchen and we used to cook ourselves. They used to give few dollars, few liras to cook in our place, in our community. Like that until everyone they start to be settled. Some they went to South Africa and some they went to Congo Belgium, some they went to United States and some they stay in Milan. Some they went to Buenos Aires but we are in touch with everyone and some they are in Israel.

Q: From there where did you go?

A: Myself I came to the United States.

Q: Do you know what year that was?

A: But I had hard time because I didn't know the language and I couldn't find job. I had hard, very hard time. Beside with my family I was not so happy. They didn't -- we came -- I didn't get along with them because their mentality was different of mine. I decided to take one room in some place and I used to pay \$40 monthly. In the meantime, I wrote to Italy to send me money to friend of mine until I will find job.

Q: Do you remember what year it was when you came here?

A: Here I came in 1950; July 18, 1950.

Q: What type of work did you plan on_____?

A: From New York -- First of all I was, before to come to the United States I supposed to come with DP, displaced person from Germany. Because only I was Italian but Rhodes, the island of Rhodes. . . .

[End of Tape 1]

Q: Okay. You were saying displaced persons --?

A: I had Italian passport but Rhodes passed to the Greece in 1948. I didn't want to be Greek. I pick up, I choose to be DP, displaced person to come to the United States. I have to go to Bremen in Germany because the American, they used to send soldiers to Germany and the boats empty. The boats, the navy, they used to come back and bring refugees from Germany. I was in Germany again for three weeks to see those lousy face of Germans. But I never came out from there, from my room. I never going to eat out because I don't want to hear the steps of the Germans and I don't want to hear their voice. I came -- when the time came we went to the boat, to the navy and so I came to United States, to New York. From New York, I came to Los Angeles, three nights and two days by train. I came to Chicago, the train -- I missed the train. I have to stay another 24 hours there with

no food, no nothing. Because I didn't know the language. I didn't know what to ask to say give me tuna sandwich or cheese sandwich; I didn't know until I arrived to Los Angeles. When I arrived to Los Angeles, my aunt she say, you know, I was in the depot. She came to pick me up. She say, the first thing, you know, now you are in America. Your name is no Miru any more. We have to go and change to Mary. I say I'm very sorry; my parents they gave me Miru, I want to keep Miru. If you don't like Miru, call Mary. First of all I say, Aunt, I got your mother's name. I'm the only survive who got your mother's name. We had four Mirus in the family. I'm the only survive, why you don't like? I say okay, you call me anything you want and I did like this because I was exhausted from the trains with no food. I came and you start to give me lecture, to say not Miru, Mary! I stay a few months over there, seven months with my aunt. I didn't get along. I went -- I took one room with somebody. In the meantime, I didn't have no money. I brought with me \$500 but was easy to spend. I wrote to Italy. I say when I will work, I will pay you. They send me every month \$100. Like that. I can pay \$40 and the \$60 I can eat and take the carfare. I had more hard time in United States than in Germany. Because in Germany I know I was obligated, with no choice. But over here, I couldn't speak the language, I couldn't find job and I didn't have no place to stay. I had very bad life. For one year I was desperate until I decide to go back to Italy. I say I wish to find a job to make my ticket and to go back. A friend of mine, my cousin who I saved from Auschwitz, who got diarrhea, she say come to Seattle and I will find job for you. I went to Seattle; I start to work but I had hard time because I didn't know the language. I was working in _____ but very hard to explain to me. I took time from the other people to teach me, to tell me what to do and my time also. They fire me. Finally I look in the telephone book, Italian family, Italian place and I find Euro-city store and I start to work in Euro-city store. After five years, I became American citizen. I say, goodbye everyone. I'm going to Europe to see where will be my destiny. I was going to Israel and in Israel they have war after war. I say not for me. When I went to Italy, I find out the life was very hard to find job. I say, I will come back to United States. I will work more. When I will have more money, I'll go back to Israel. That is what I did. Now in the meantime, my health is no good. My health is very deteriorated.

Q: Is there anything else you can think of that you'd like to add?

A: Eh?

Q: Is there anything else that you can think of that you would like to add before we finish?

A: I don't know what to say.

Q: Okay, then I'll just say that this interview is recorded on August 30, 1992 in Los Angeles, California.

A: Yes.

Q: That's it.