Interview with Blanka Rothschild
March 16, 2001

Beginning Tape One, Side A

[music]

Question: Can do it a little louder, maybe?

Answer: **[inaudible]** because it gets louder later.

Q: But if you want, you can tell me a little bit about what -- why -- why do you like this one, or what is it, actually?

A: This is a **Chopin** concerto, and I grew up in **Poland**, and **Chopin**, of course, was of Polish origin and I grew up on his music. I -- my background was -- my parents loved music and they cultivated music in the house, and most of it was classical music, with a sprinkling of some new music, not to the extent that today's music, but for instance, **Gershwin** was -- "**Rhapsody in Blue"** came out in 1938 or '39, and -- just prior to the war, and we loved it. It was diff -- but -- it was different. That was the first time that I listened to **Gershwin.** And -- but **Chopin** was just part of my upbringing. **Tchaikovsky, Cacciatore,** and **Rachmaninoff,** very romantic.

Q: Okay, good. That was -- that was nice, very romantic, that was nice. Good. Okay, let me see. Let's not make it extremely formal, let's just go right to the difficult subject matter. Tell me -- us a little bit more about the time either just prior to liberation, or the moment of liberation. What -- what happened, what -- what -- wh -- who were you, where were you, what kind of state were you in, what -- what was that?

A: Well, prior to the liberation we were in barrack. We were --

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Q: I'm sorry, yeah, could we -- could we do that again? There was the **[indecipherable].** I have to find a way of holding the microphone.

A: All right.

Q: So at **[indecipherable]** prior -- prior --

A: Prior?

Q: Let's see, it's the little -- let me see.

A: Prior?

Q: Yeah, that's better.

A: Prior to the liberation, we were locked in a barracks and the windows were shut and they were supposed -- supposedly trying to kill us, but there was not enough time, they had to escape because the Russian forces closed. And the sight through the locked shutters, we could see that the towers were empty, and the **SS** was gone. And this was the moment that we realized that they abandoned us. And that was April the 26th, I believe, of 1945. Since I was badly hurt, my friends were holding me, and broke the doors and ran to the kitchen, brought some margarine. We stuffed ourselves with the margarine, and we decided to leave the camp. Went across the street, there was the house that the commandant used to live, with the garden. There were several of us, one girl had her mother with, and somebody brought two eggs and two potatoes, and at that moment the commandant came back with a gun. And we were frozen stiff looking at him. And the poignant part was that he was afraid of us. And he disappeared. And we decided to leave.

My friends were helping me. We went through the fields, there was a great deal of firework -- not firework, fire stemming from the war. They were being bombarded, and we ran. We joined with two Polish men who worked there in the fields. We reached the front line and first -- we saw the first Russian, and this was the -- suppose our liberation -- supposed liberation. Pretty soon we discovered that this was not the freedom that we were dreaming of. Freedom was very different. We thought of the normal -- normal life that will come of finding the family. It was very difficult period of time.

Q: Could you -- could you say a little bit more about sort of the first impressions of the -- the liberators that you had? What was the condition at the -- at the fe -- you -- you went to the actual front line?

A: Yes. It was actual front line because the war was still going on and the shooting was on both sides. As a matter of fact, one of the girls was hit. We just didn't have time to look, we were running like an animal. The first Russian was of **Asiatic** origin because his face, the features were **Asiatic**. And he was very dirty, I remember his big, black leather boots, filthy uniform. He was the liberator, and we thought we should kiss his boots. He told us -- he motioned to us to go back, and the Russians gave us help. The help consisted of a barrel of herring. And we ate the herring, and of course the -- we be-became very thirsty, there was no water, the pipes were broken. And they told us to leave, my friends held me. We reached the first house in the village, the roof was gone from the bombardments. We went to the basement, the basement was very well prepared with food

and sleeping equipment. We lay down -- we ate, we lay down, and the very same night, two Russians came, and raped two girls. So --

Q: I want -- I want to ask you --

A: Yes?

Q: -- something else before we -- we go on. Did you get any medical attention? Say a little bit more about th-the shape that you were in. You said you were badly hurt, but --

A: I was --

Q: -- did you get medical attention, anything?

A: Well, you have to understand the circumstances, the Russians were fighting, it was just unbelievable. I didn't see anything there of -- of nor-normal food ration, or even **[indecipherable]** Red -- Red Cross. But they had some bandages and they gave me the bandages and I was bandaged around my body to hold my ribs. That's all I remember. And when -- once we went to the basement, it was some sort of a trapdoor going down, which I wasn't familiar with before. We went to the basement and one of the Russians was drunk. Wi -- he started to shoot at the jars which were lined on the shelves, and the pieces of -- pieces of the glass embedded in my left leg, and I was lying down on one of the two cots, and I ask one of the Polish men, please protect me. I -- when the times will be normal, I will give you -- my -- my mother, my family will give you anything in the world if you will help me. He covered me, and he sat down on me. And I was lying there and my leg was bleeding, but I didn't make a sound. That was the night that two girls --

one was taken out, one was -- they blew the candle out and they raped her, and the other one came bloody back. This was my liberation. Very bitter. We wondered if this is -- i-if this was worth it, to survive to see this. The next day we left for the village, to another house.

Q: You -- you stayed -- you stayed in that village for a little while --

A: Yes.

Q: -- and you met other people there, and there were other episodes, but y -- it was -- it was still a dangerous, difficult situation. But did you experience any sense of -- of -- you had a little bit to eat, you had two Polish protectors, if you will. Did you experience any sense of -- of -- of freedom yet?

A: No. The freedom was very bleak. I was petrified of the Russians now. So, after a couple of days, next house to ours was occupied by the former French prisoners of war. And I talked the them and they decided that they will take me to their house and protect me, and I stayed with them for quite awhile.

Q: Now, after awhile then, things changed, people started moving back to their native countries. Did you go to -- well is -- let me not ask as -- as such a question, what -- what happened after awhile then?

A: Well naturally, I thought that my family survived. I was unaware that everybody was killed. So I wanted -- my first thought was going back to **Poland**. And there were some Polish people with some sort of equipment that they were going towards **Poland** and they

had carts, and they took me -- they had Polish flag, and we went through **Lignitz,** I remember, and then -- the names escape me, but I know that we were in **Lignitz,** and we were in another city big, and that city was already organized, and people already had ration cards, and we slept in a place that we were assigned to. But I still wanted to go to my native city, and there was -- there was a train already, on one of the tracks, and I went with this train to **Warsaw**. And in **Warsaw** I got off the train, of course everything was without money and no possessions. A human being is very strong, unbelievably strong. And in **Warsaw**, I was just standing there with nothing and I saw a man with a s -- truck, and I ask him where he is going and he said he is going to **Lódz,** which was my city. And I ask him if he will take me, and he agreed. And that's how I reached it. **Warsaw** was completely destroyed. There was -- I -- I had uncle and aunt, but I couldn't find the streets. Everything was in ruins. So I was very glad that I was getting the ride, without money, which I didn't have. He went -- we stopped in **Lublin**, I believe and he went out to eat and he left me in the car. And he came back, I think he brought a piece of bread, but I'm not too sure. I was hungry. We reached **Lódz** and -- of course, **Lódz** was not destroyed because it was occupied very quickly. And I tried to go to the place that we lived. I was not let in. The Polish people occupied our place.

Q: Could you -- could you be a little more specific about that? You lived in a certain street --

A: Yes.

Q: -- and the house was still there?

A: All the houses on our street were absolutely in perfect condition, because **Lódz** was occupied by the Germans, I believe on September sixth, maybe fifth of 1939. So the city had only the first day of bombing and it was not destroyed. And our house was standing, and the so-called superintendent was still the same one. And when he saw me, he thought that he -- that he saw a ghost. He said in Polish, how come I survived, why did I come back. This was the greeting I have -- received. When I wanted to go upstairs to our place, our apartment, the **Lódz** place, the people wouldn't let me in. And I went down and the super said that the Germans own -- took everything out. The carpets, and whatever there was there, they took it out. So I went to -- two streets further. There was a -- some sort of a bureau that had information, people who came were putting down their names. And I looked through their list --

Q: Was it **HIAS**?

A: I am not too sure if this was **HIAS**. Something to do with displaced person organization, but I -- I don't remember. And I don't want to say something that I'm not absolutely sure. And I looked for the names, there were no familiar names with the exception of one, which was my girlfriend. And my girlfriend survived in **Lódz** in hiding with -- with her husband. Her address was there, and I went to her. And I stayed with her for couple of weeks, and I decided since **Poland** didn't want me, I don't want **Poland**. And I decided to go back west.

Q: Could you s -- so nobody from your entire family survived, at least at that time you -- that's what you knew.

A: At that time I -- I didn't think anybody survived.

Q: Say a little bit more about your decision to -- your feelings about **Poland** and about wanting to leave it. A little bit.

A: My feeling about **Poland** was very bitter. The Germans started the war, the Germans were the enemy. However, Poles were my countrymen. I grew up there, I loved the language. I loved the literature. I was, you may say patriotic. I had Polish girlfriends, and I thought on coming back that I will meet some people. I -- I was bitterly disappointed. That stems already from before, because when the war started, my friends didn't come to see me. They could have in the beginning, before we went to the ghetto. But not having family left, and not wanting to contact any of my Polish ex-friends, my -- my idea was to leave **Poland** forever and ever. I didn't want to have anything to do with **Poland.**

Q: So you made your way, with a friend, to **Berlin.**

A: Yes.

Q: Do you remember how long -- oh, do you remember, by the way, how long, roughly, it took you to get from the place you were liberated -- that was **Ravensbrück**, was it?

A: I-I was liberated in **Bittenberg**.

Q: In **Bittenberg**, of course, I'm sorry.

A: I was in **Ravensbrück** prior to it.

Q: Yes, yes, i-in **Bittenberg.** How long did it take you on foot, on horse cart to get to **Lódz,** that's such a --

A: Well, no, we -- we went to **Lignitz** first from **Bittenberg,** that was not that far. From **Lignitz** we had a train to **Warsaw**. From **Warsaw** I was in that truck to **Lódz.** I cannot tell you exactly the frame of time that this occurred, but after two weeks being in **Lódz**, and my friend was with her husband, and I -- I just didn't feel welcome. My po -- my **Poland** was not my **Poland** any more. I wrote -- I wrote a poem about it here in the **States,** that the fatherland didn't love me. So I **flaunted.** I don't want them any more. And I decided to move to **Berlin** because I was told that they had displaced person camps, run by the allied forces, and I thought maybe somebody survived there.

Q: So you made your way to **Berlin --** you don't have to go into -- into the story, although it is an interesting one, but for this purpose -- and sen -- so you arrived in **Berlin**, what was it like? What was **Berlin** like? What did you see when you arrived? What happened?

A: It was very strange. We came -- we came with -- previously I told this story, that the Russian smuggled us to his cr -- train compartment, and we arrived in **Berlin** and he let us off at the station, and we were standing there, and sort of sizing people. And we saw two people, two young men who didn't look -- appear to be Jewish, and we approached them and we asked them, and they said yes. And they gave us some fare in **fennix,** I don't remember how much. And they put us on bus and they told us to get off ha -- was

this **Rickenstrasser,** I don't remember the first camp before **Schlactensee.** This was the very first one, it was in the Russian sector.

Q: You mentioned in the last interview, you said **Oranienstrasse.**

A: **Oranien -- oran --** I don't remember the name. I don't remember. But this was the very first camp, displaced person camp. And I was grateful for the help, but I didn't want this type of -- I wanted privacy.

Q: But what -- what did -- what -- what did it look like, what -- what happened there? What -- what --

A: We were given places to sleep, we were given food, and I don't remember too much about it, maybe because I'm getting older, mi -- things are sort of slowly blending and disappearing. I'm trying to remember the good things, and I'm trying to, maybe subconsciously forget the sad things. Maybe this helped me to live. The camp provide us with vital things that we needed to live. The two of us, my girlfriend and I, didn't feel comfortable. We wanted some sort of a more normal life, so we were given a room by a German war widow. I still remember her name, **Frau Beans**. And she **[indecipherable]** and we were give a room, it was -- it was cold, I remember. We had a little stove in the middle of the floor that we made of coal or anthracite, to warm up. And we were given ration cards, and some Russians started to come to visit this aunt, and this -- and -- and the woman and her aunt, because they -- they -- they were given some food from the Russians. What did they do, I have no idea. We were very unhappy about that situation.

Q: Why?

A: It wasn't normal.

Q: What was normal? What -- what did you want? What is it that you wanted, that you most needed? You were given the **[indecipherable]**

A: I wanted warmth, I wanted --

Q: Could you -- could you say that again?

A: -- I wanted warmth. I wanted the -- the personal life, not to be in somebody's room and behave and -- and make that piece of bread on this little stove, heat it up, and go for the ration with the card and stand on a line. I didn't -- I didn't expect my freedom to be of that sort. I -- I wanted to disassociate myself with all this. It was very bitter. To top this all, I saw in this German house, a **Menorah**, which her husband, who was killed in the war, sent her from one of the occupied countries. The woman had no idea what it was, but I saw a silver **Menorah**, and this broke my heart. After that, we had a little incident, we went to a movie house, which I described before. I did not want to stay in the Russian sector at all. My friend was a little bit enterprising, she got herself a boyfriend. I was petrified of everybody and everything. I just wanted to run away to American sector. And I went to the -- I think this was the Jewish **HIAS**, some Jewish committee in **Cheplin**, and I told him that I wanted to move, and he says I have to be registered. So I got from the -- from that organization some coffee **Bonne** café, and the Germans were crazy about **Bonne** café, so I took this **Bonne** café and I went to the German police station -- I really -

- I -- I'm wondering now how -- how I could have done this, because I wasn't well. And I asked the policeman if he would -- because everything, it was very organized already, you had to be registered, and live in this place, or this place. And I wanted desperately to leave the Russian sector and be in the American sector.

Q: Why specifically the American sector?

A: Not specifically American, could have been English, or -- but I had some sort of relatives in **America**, so I felt that this would be maybe the closest. And that's what I was advised also by that **Joint**, or **HIAS**. And I gave him the **Bonne** café, the German policeman took it, and put my name on list, and I got the room by **Frau Pegiloft,** town of **Strasse [indecipherable]**. And **Frau Pegiloft** was a very old lady who at night locked her room because she was afraid of me. But after couple of weeks she warmed up to me, and I said, **Frau Pegiloft --** because I could speak German, **Frau Pegiloft,** how was this the -- she said, "Ah, **kvotch**. I am the only Nazi left," she said. "I was a Nazi, they all were Nazis. But now nobody says he was a Nazi and I'm the only one. I'm old, I don't care any more." So I stayed with **Frau Pegiloft** until the -- I received **avonderong** papers -- that means the paper to go to -- I think it was **Bremenhaven.**

Q: Did you not stay a little while in **--** in **Schlactensee**, and -- and --

A: Oh, excuse me.

Q: That's all right. Let's --

A: Excuse me. Yes, I was -- before **Frau Pegiloft,** I was in **Schlactensee,** you're right. The policeman registered me in amer -- amer -- American sector and I went to **Schlactensee.** And I was in **Schlactensee** very short time, that's why I don't remember. I did -- I was not happy in **Schlactensee**. It --

Q: What -- what was it? What was **Schlactensee** [**indecipherable**]

A: **Schlactensee** was again, they give you the basics.

Q: No, I mean, you -- you should -- you should say that it was di -- display --

A: It was a -- **Schlactensee** was a displaced person camp. And they had a lot of people already and people were very enterprising, they were used to the conditions, they had friends, they were going to **Poland**, they were bringing goods back and forth to **Breslau**, and **Brotswaf**. I could not partake in any of this, and all to me was very strange. I couldn't eat the way people were buying something, sitting at a table and talking about business. I was lost. I didn't feel good, I wanted to be in an -- in a room of my own, I wanted privacy. And that's why I left **Schlactensee**. I went back to that police, and at that time I was getting, every month, some sort of ration from the Jewish committee. Coffee, some cigarettes, sometimes they had, sometimes they didn't have it. But whatever I had, I swapped with this policeman, and I got the room by **Frau Pegiloft**. That's how **[indecipherable] Schlactensee**. Pr-Proud to it. But a very short time, **Schlactensee.**

Q: And then eventually though, you did --

End of Tape One, Side A

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Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: And then eventually though, you did think about emigration. Say a little bit about that, how -- what -- what your thoughts were and where you decided you would have to go.

A: Well, at this time **Israel** was not an **Israel** yet, it was **Palestine.** I was -- my health was precarious to say the least. I was slowly healing. I did not feel that I -- I was not really brought up as a Zionist. I had the deep feeling, I still do, but I didn't think that I would fit in that surrounding. I was unable to work. People had to work physically starting **Israel**, to build the country. My thoughts were about **United States** because I knew that I had some sort of relatives here. And that fact was brought to my attention by the chaplain, and one sergeant in the American army, in that Jewish committee. And they asked me for the name, and I said the name is **Posalski**, and after a few months I received a letter from **Detroit** and the name was changed from **Posalski** to **Soles,** and they located them. And this was my grand -- maternal grandmother's sister, and there was a half-brother in **New Jersey**. And that family sponsored me to come to the **United States**.

Q: What -- what do you -- when did you leave -- so you left from **Bremenhaven**, I guess, when did you leave, and what do you remember about the boat trip?

A: The boat trip was a nightmare. I wanted to die right on that boat. Strange. I was liberated, I was free, I was coming to the best country in the world. We were on **Marine Marlin**, this was an troop transporter. We were put down -- the people -- the displaced person people were -- having visas, they were sponsored, were put at the bottom of the

boat. The top of the boat, the better deck, was reserved for German war brides. So there was another injustice done to us. We encountered very, very powerful storms, and our boat lost part of the bow. It was unbelievable, that trip. I don't know what harm came to the boat, but I know that even the crew was sick. I was getting -- I was getting injections because I couldn't eat. I was throwing up constantly, and it took us -- I don't remember exactly, maybe 15 or 16 days on the boat to finally reach **New York**. So the freedom was -- it was something that I dreamt about, hoped for, envisioned, and it was so different and so bleak and so heartbreaking, that on that ship I said, I survived so many years under the German rule, concentration camps, I lost my family, I'm going to die in the middle of o -- the ocean. It's ironic. But I didn't. I reached **New York**, and I was met by --

Q: How -- say --

A: -- some family member.

Q: Say -- say -- that was a very -- in the last interview, a very moving way you described that when you arrived, what -- what -- what happened then. This whole thing --

A: Well, when we arrived, and we left the boat -- and we didn't go to **Ellis Island**, we went to a pier -- there were benches, long benches and there were letters above, alphabetically, **A**-**B**-**C** and they told us to go to a letter that was corresponding with your last name. Since my name was **Fisher**, I went to letter **F**, and I was sitting there. And people were coming and picking up their relatives or friends. And I was sitting and sitting and sitting. And finally I saw a gentleman, a very distinguished looking gentleman

walking by with a photo, showing that picture. And when I looked at the picture, I said, in Polish, "This is my grandmother." So he knew that he found the right person. He was my grandmother's half-brother's son-in-law. He was an attorney in **New Jersey**. The people from **Detroit** couldn't come to pick me up, because that day that our ship finally docked, my grandmother's sister died, on the very same day. And they had funeral to attend to. So they wired or called the people in **New Jersey**, and they -- that half-brother of my grandmother, and this son-in-law came to pick me up. And we could not talk to each other. My -- my cousin, so-called cousin, was a very bright, educated man, but he spoke only English. I said German? No. Polish? No. French? No. Okay. Come. And I followed him, and there I saw this gentleman, gray haired with pink cheeks and the bluest eyes. And I saw my grandmother's face, and that was my grandmother's brother, and he spoke still some Polish and German. And I went with them. I remember the ride in the car, alongside the west side highway, and I saw all these lights at night, snake lights, like. And the **Hudson** River, and we came to the bridge, huge bridge, which was **George Washington** bridge. We crossed the bridge. I was sitting with my uncle -- great-uncle, and we reached his place in **Patterson, New Jersey**, it was **Patterson**. And his wife also spoke Polish and German and was the most wonderful, wonderful lady, who made me feel good, warm. She hugged me, she kissed me, and that's what I needed. That's what I needed, I didn't need any material things, I just wanted to be loved, to -- to belong. And that was the beginning.

Q: But then eventually, you also visited the other relatives in -- in **Detroit**.

A: Yes.

Q: Could you say a little bit about that experience, what happened?

A: Yes, yes. Well, since I was sponsored by the people in **Detroit**, and the funeral postponed my going there, they communicated with this family that I should stay there for two weeks and come to **Detroit**. They send a ticket for a train, and I was put in a train in a very nice car. I remember that I had to -- a very nice chair facing the window, so it must have been first class, I guess. And they told the black attendant, a very nice man, to take care of me with food and so forth, because I couldn't speak English. And he really took care of me. It was a long trip. And I was dressed very decently, because before I left **Germany,** all my accumulated coffee that I still had, I exchanged for a nice coat. It was with fur, I remember. And a scarf. And I looked decent, fairly decent. And when I arrived in **Detroit**, the people at the station were mighty surprised. I don't know what they expected, but they thought that this will come somebody from beyond the moon. Well, I -- sure, I didn't speak English, but I had brains. And I looked all right, because I -- I had the rations already in **Germany** to eat, and I had that couple of weeks with my aunt -- great-aunt and uncle. They fed me and they -- they were very, very nice to me. And I spent some time with the people in **Detroit.** The parents were nice, but their daughter was -- I must say she was cruel to me, because I took away the limelight away from her. And I again was unhappy. So it was decided that I will move to another brother they had. The

brother was an old bachelor, who must have been at that time in his 60's, and I was in my early 20's, and they thought that I should marry him. So I -- I went to a Polish part of town in -- in **Detroit**, that is Polish. And I got myself a little job working on camera cases, and I -- I think I was paid 18 dollars a week, maybe 20, I don't remember exactly. And I saved the money. They didn't like that I got the job, because its -- it hurt their pride. But I couldn't walk around without penny in my pocket and -- and if I would want to spend five cents I would have to ask for it. I wanted to be independent. So I got this money and I saved -- they didn't want money from me. So I saved for the trip back to **New York.** And --

Q: Did -- did -- did they ask you where you -- what happened to you? Did they have any understanding of where you'd come from?

A: Well, as a matter of fact, yes. I was learning English rapidly. I went at night to a night school, and they have classes for -- m-m-most of the people at night were people who worked here for many, many years, they did not have time to learn the language properly. So I learned very quickly, and I wanted to lead a normal, independent life. I didn't want to be dependent on every -- anybody. And I didn't want to stay with them. And the idea of marrying this old man was just horrific. So I wanted to leave.

Q: Did you get any medical attention when you were --

A: Yes, they took me to a doctor once, and th-there were several things wrong with me, but unfortunately they didn't have that type of help for the spine as they have nowadays, so nothing could be done.

Q: What was -- what was wrong?

A: I had -- some ribs were damaged, broken, and the spine s -- it didn't show when I was clothed, in clothes, but when I was undressed you could see sticking parts of -- and I was very self-conscious about it. No, I didn't get the proper medical care. If I would have gotten -- if they would have put me in corset in those days -- but I guess that compassion is one thing, and money is another. And maybe it would be costly. No, I didn't have proper care. And I came back to **New York** and went back to the great-uncle and great-aunt. I took a course, three months course to become a baby nurse, newborn babies. And then I was recommended from one family to another, and became great friends with all the families. I -- I have three babies that I took care of, that they are three doctors now. A long time already. So it -- it -- it -- it's -- it's interesting, it's unbelievab -- I'm talking about my own life, but this is -- seems to me that it's some sort of a strange book.

Q: So you earn -- begin to earn your first and earn your own money, how did that feel?

A: Oh, it was wonderful because when I got my first check, I gave it to my great-aunt, and I said, this -- this -- this is the sweetest day that I can help you for all you have done for me. Now, she didn't have to depend on my money because she had three daughters, and all three were married well, they were all educated. And -- but I felt independent, I

paid. And we spent many hours sitting in the kitchen, she was an elderly lady. Now that I'm elderly myself -- we were sitting -- she was sitting making her homemade noodles, homemade, and cutting them. And she said, "Well, when you are old you have to sit then you do these things." So the little things that I remember with great li -- forgot this word, but this is such wonderful feeling I have when I think of her, the -- the compassion that she showed me, and the -- the warmth. I -- I felt that I belonged. And all the people that I worked for became my friends. I loved them all, and I hope I was loved there, too. So I was independent of this family in **Detroit**.

Q: Did you talk much about your experience, di -- what happened? Did you feel that people wanted to know, were ready to hear? What was sort of the situation there?

A: In the very beginning it was very strange. Some people didn't believe that this was possible, some people didn't want to hear, and I decided for awhile I won't be talking about it. I didn't want to scare people away from me, because I thought, they don't want to be surrounded by sadness and a teary story. But as I accomplished my -- my goal, and improved my English, I decided that my mission was to survive in order to tell the people as much as I can, wherever they will listen to me. Because thing -- such a thing as Holocaust, it was of gigantic proportions. It never happened to this extent and it has to be told. And that's what we promised each other, my family. And I was the one that was left. So it will -- became my goal.

Q: In the early years, ho -- did you feel that people viewed you any certain way?

A: Yes. There were two kinds of people. There were people who felt that by the very virtue of being born here, and living here for many years, for some reason I was sort of inferior to them. I disregarded this, because I felt well -- I feel that this is -- I don't want to lower myself to their level. And there were people who were very sympathetic and very loving and I was drawn to these people. So I had to be very careful in the beginning not to overstate my feelings, not to -- I had to be very careful. People were critical of certain European ways, and I could not get used to some of the American ways. We ate differently, we -- we -- we behaved, very often, differently, but I didn't dare to say it. I kept this to myself. It's very unimportant, because each culture has its own way of dealing with things. And that's what makes us different and that's -- an intelligent person can or -- adapt or learn from each other, or disregard. It's not important. These are -- these are very secondary issues, because after all, we are all human beings. If we try, we can get along, if we'll only try. And that is one of the issues that I approach when I speak.

Q: Do you think that people looked at -- at a displaced person in a certain way?

A: In the beginning, yes.

Q: Cou-Could you say that in a sentence? Not -- I ask you the question, but could you make that into a sentence? You should maybe tell your husband not to **[indecipherable]**. I want to ask you now about what sort of -- so you wa -- you -- you were back in **New York,** or **New Jersey**, you had t -- you had a n-new job, you began to feel a little bit

more comfortable, you had some money. What was sort of the goal, what was it that you wanted next?

A: What I wanted next was to have a child. I wanted to have a -- as I said this -- and you will see this on -- hear this on the tape, that I wanted to show **Hitler** that the seed survived. And I wanted a child the worst way. It was very unconventional those days to have a child without a husband. I got married to a man who is a very nice man. But this would not have been my choice if the times would have been normal. We are very different people, intellectually. And we are both honest, we both are of the same religion, we are both very honest, we are both civically minded people. And we both love music -- different kinds of music, but music. But we are very different. I needed more stimuli, which I couldn't get from my husband.

Q: Intellectual stimulus?

A: Yes.

Q: Cou -- could you say it?

A: I needed more intellectual stimulus. I tried to find this in reading, I became voracious reader. Financially I was not in position to -- to do things that I would have liked to. I would have liked to go to a good university. I thought that I had enough brain to do it, but my health was precarious. I got married and I immediately, the next month, I got pregnant. I wanted it, and I was afraid that I won't be able to because I didn't menstruate

for about four years in camps. But I was fortunate enough, and I wanted a daughter, because I always felt that the daughter will be close, closer than a son. So I was lucky.

Q: Did a doctor s -- t-tell -- say that -- mention it again that the doctor -- you got medical advice and you were basically advised not to have a child.

A: The doctors told me that it would worsen my condition, it would throw me off. But I felt that it was worth it. The -- if you put this on a scale, there was no comparison, I wanted a child. And it was worth it, and it worked out beautifully, because I do have a daughter who is very close to me. We are very fortunate. We nourish each other. And she has a daughter, and she has -- this is perpetuating. She has the same -- the same relationship with her daughter. She has a husband who is British, and he was very reserved when she -- he got married, but he sort of softened by our surrounding love. He became a ver -- much more relaxed. He's still reserved, but not to the extent that he was before. He calls me Mom, I'm very happy about it. Most of all, I'm happy that he's a wonderful husband to my daughter, and wonderful father to his child.

Q: When was your daughter born, what is her name, and how did you feel when you've -- when you got a daughter, how was that?

A: My daughter was born on March 22nd, 1951 and her 50th birthday is coming up. And I'll be there next week, and so will be my granddaughter, she will be flying. From the very beginning on, my entire life centered around this child. I lived on a fourth floor walk-up apartment in the **Bronx**. I had only one bedroom, and the bedroom belonged to

her. We had a **[indecipherable]** in the living room. I tried to dress her the best I could. I tried to read stories, sing songs, teach her, expose her to music. I -- I delighted in bringing her up. It was my -- my life changed. I was very grateful. And I acquired friends. We decided to form groups. I belonged to a -- a book reading club. Friends who shared interests with me.

Q: You -- did you have s-survivor friends, or di -- s-say a little bit more about the kinds of friends you had, or w-was it -- s-say --

A: No, no, no, strangely enough, I lived in the building that I was the only survivor and I formed friendships with my neighbors. This was 1950 - ’51, you have to understand that it -- the conditions were absolutely different, it was safe. When the baby was born, I used to -- it was hot, we didn’t have air conditioning. **New York** can be very cruel in the summer. The humidity. So we used to go downstairs, the carriage was in the basement and we walked to the park at night, nobody was afraid. It was a local park. And all the other mothers with their babies were there, and we’re -- we’re sitting at night, not being afraid. So we formed very close friendships. Not one of my friends there was a survivor, strangely enough. One was Italian, **Connie**, adorable. And three others were Jewish. We played **Mah Jong**, I remember. I learned how to play **Mah Jong** tho-those days. And then in the summer, when my husband started to make a little bit more, in the summer we were leaving **New York** for the country. We used to rent a room. And the husbands were -- my friends to my -- the husbands were coming on a weekend. So that ch --

Q: Wh-What was your -- what was your husband doing as -- as a job, what did he --

A: My husband worked as a inspector first. He -- he -- he had -- he went to University of **Rochester**, but he did not have his actual degree in engineering, so he worked for General Dynamics for many years. They went bankrupt, that part that he worked for, so he switched to a smaller place, I believe **Sequential.** And then he was hired by **Union Carbide.** And he worked in **Union Carbide** for six years, until his heart -- he had a small heart attack and I told him I don't want him to work any more. I don't need the money, I can live -- I saw worse things. Money was not everything, so I talked him into retiring.

Q: So he was an engineer of sorts, though?

A: Yes.

Q: And say a little bit more about life in **New York**, then. You didn't have that much money but you were not unhappy.

A: No, I was not unhappy because I had friends who were in the same circumstances. If you don't have much, and your friends don't have much, you -- you're not unhappy. You have food, you have clothes, you -- w-we were going -- as a matter of fact we were -- when we played once a week, we -- we used to -- but I don't remember, 50 cents, or 75 cents on a side. When we had enough money, all the couples went to the theater, because we loved theater. So we packed two cars, and we went out. And when there was enough money we went to **Lindy's** for cheesecake, too. And I've -- later on I found especially one friend that she had my interest in museums, and we used to go to **Metropolitan**

Museum of Art twice a month, and became members. And I loved that, I loved that museum. And --

Q: You also went to libraries, I **[indecipherable]**

A: Oh yes, the library was part of my -- my learning process. I learned a -- a really -- in the beginning by myself, sufficiently to be understood, and I took great care to be correct, to be fairly articulate. And I couldn't get rid of my accent, which the American people after awhile, they saw that I spoke well, they -- they -- they were changing. I was -- I was nice and -- but these were different people from the ones that -- in the beginning, in **Detroit**, who said, well, what's she know, she comes from **Poland**. That was different. And --

Q: How -- what kind of aspirations did you have for your daughter, how did you bring her up?

End of Tape One, Side B

Interview with Blanka Rothschild
March 16, 2001

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: How -- what kind of aspirations did you have for your daughter, how did you bring her up? You talked a little bit about -- already about -- about education and you want her to have a cultural background, she liked music, or something, but how did you think in terms of education, values that you wanted to --

A: Well, values -- the -- the morals and ethics you teach the child from the beginning. About education, I felt that in -- I'm not going to push her in one direction. I want her to pursue her own road to the -- the kind of education that she wants. She wanted to study **Shakespeare**. My husband used to laugh, he said, "What do you want to do with **Shakespeare**?" He said, "How about a little typing on the side?" And she said, "But I love it." So I said, "Well, she loves it, so she has to do it, she has to be happy, to do what she likes to do." And once she was in high school, she went for a junior year abroad to **England**. And that, of course, changed her life, she became an Anglophile. And she want -- she dreamt about going to graduate school for her masters in **England**. And we sent her to **England**, to Shakespearean Institute. And whatever you learn, it's your gain. It's a wonderful thing. And --

Q: Was -- was that difficult, to let her go?

A: It was difficult, but I had again to outweigh my personal feeling for her happiness. She chose this path, she wanted, and this was the best school. Once she was accepted, to me this was an omen, she has to go. And she went and she loved it, and she graduated. She

has masters in English lit -- literature. As a matter of fact she went also one summer to **London,** University of **London**. That was before she went to the Shakespearian Institute. She doesn't do anything with the **Shakespeare** now, but she works twice a week in **Santa Monica** College, and she also has students who apply for colleges, she does work with the essays. **[indecipherable]**. She is a superb wr-writer.

Q: Did you talk to her about -- about your experience? How did you impart -- how did she get to know about that? How'd -- how was that handled in your family?

A: She always knew that I was a survivor. Her father was not, her fa -- father lived here through -- through the war. But I was a survivor and I never made secret out of it. I did not tell her in the details, the gory details of what went through, but I wanted her to know because this was the legacy. She was entitled to know where her mother came from, my background, I wanted her to be proud of it, and what she is. At the same token, she resented the people who caused my I -- my affliction, my being disabled as a result of the tremendous beatings that I was getting. She could not ga -- accept it. And I tried to temper her dislike -- more than dislike, her hatred, into -- it was very diplomatic, into understanding that people are people. There were people who were good. And we -- she went to the museum, she saw how many people saved people, at the risk of their own imprisonment or even losing their lives. I myself was surprised to see many Polish names on the wall of the museum. I was not aware that that many Polish people helped, I really wasn't.

Q: Which museum?

A: The Holocaust Museum in **Washington, D.C..** I was surprised. I knew about the Danes at that time. My surprise was complete when I first pers -- once only, I went to **Israel** to visit **Yad Vashem**, and I saw that street of the Righteous Gentiles, and I -- I just broke down, because this was a very revealing thing to me, and being aware of the goodness of some people. People who did not lose their humanity, who -- who are giants. Because everybody now has to say to himself, how would I act under these circumstances? Could I have done it? Could I have hidden people at the risk of my life? There was one 17 year old girl. 17 year old girl who had 13 Jews hidden in her house, and they all survived. So this is -- this -- this is heroism -- heroism, that's -- that's -- that's wonderful. So this is always what I point out, the -- the bad and the good.

Q: All right, let's go back to **Israel**. When did you go to **Israel** and what was the experience like? What -- what did it mean to you?

A: I went to **Israel,** don't remember the -- the -- the year. It was the year after the Six Day War when **Jerusalem** was returned to **Israel.** Going to **Israel** was -- I was not as excited as I maybe should have been, but once I was there, it was the most incredible feeling that occurred when I was at the Wailing Wall. And I am not a very religious person. I -- my husband has -- had a sister who passed away. She left for **Palestine** when she was a youngster, she was in the Zionist movement and she got married, and she really worked the soil. She was a real **sabra**. Her children were born there, her grandchildren,

everybody was in the army. So we went to visit her. Once we went to **Jerusalem**, and I went to the wall, and I stood in front of this -- this -- this plain wall, and I touched -- touched the stones, something inside me changed. I cannot describe the feeling, it was like the history of the millennia came through my body. I reminded myself that my grandfather had on the wall of his room, some sort of a picture and there was saying, Oh **Jerusalem**, if -- can't quote it. Something about losing a hand. I don't -- I cannot be verbatim, I cannot, but I know that it's very well known, and I know that existed in many homes. So this came to my mind. **Jerusalem**, walking the streets, the historical cobbled streets, which led from around the wall, through the 14 station of **Jesus** were of tremen -- made tremendous impact on me, because I walked on history. **Jesus** did walk there. **Mary Magdalene** was there. The Roman soldiers were there. The Hebrews were there, and here I am walking there. Tremendous impact. I went to the mosque, to the blue mosque. I took my shoes off, I saw the people -- very few people in there. I went downstairs where the rock is, and this is allegedly the rock on which **Abraham** was supposed to sacrifice his son, and God stopped him. I don't know -- these were legends, but to me this was something that history repeated in all the hundreds and hundreds of years. So I sort of became a little part of the history, touching the whole thing. It made tremendous impact on me. Going to **Yad Vashem** was another story. Going in there and standing at the gallery, looking down at the slabs of stone with the names of the camps, I broke down. I thought I am immune to it, that I will not, but I did break down, and I

cried. When I walked out, it was one of these beautiful s-sunny days in **Jerusalem**, and you're coming out from this dark chamber of remembrances of the tragedy that human people suffered at human hands. And you go out and there is this street with the trees. The street with the trees of the Righteous Gentiles. The contrast is so startling. It is so eye opening. I -- I will never forget til the day I die, my feeling when I saw this. At that point I was not aware of all the Gentiles who did help. I knew smattering of things, because I was always interested reading the books. I knew about **Denmark**. I knew about sporadic things, but the names that I've seen this, and the trees. The whole idea was so special to me that it was the highlight of my trip.

Q: Going back to -- oh -- oh no, let's actually -- you -- you -- you -- you s-said a little bit about you're not very religious. Speak a little -- speak a little bit about your relationship to Judaism, and about your faith.

A: Well, I grew up in a family that was -- my mother and father were non-observant Jews. However, the tradition was kept up. We went for all the big holidays to grandparents, who kept th-the -- Judaism alive, and they were religious. They were not Orthodox, but they were religious. I will never forget the **Seders**, the warm feeling of being with all my family, and with strangers, because we always -- my grandparents invited strangers, this was a tradition, from orphanage, soldiers who were of Jewish origin who did not have place to go to. We always had strangers at the table. And th -- we were only two grandchildren there, I was the older one, and mother's sister boy was the

younger one. And they had a cook, and a serving maid, and there was a long, long table laden with this food, and the people, and the happiness, and the lights, because my grandfather always said let there be a lot of light, it's a holiday. So all the lights in all the rooms were on. It was such a wonderful, happy feeling. New Year's we used to go to the temple to pick up my grandparents because they were going -- my parents didn't, and we always brought a -- white flowers with us, a bouquet of white flowers, I don't know why. So the memories and the -- the -- of the tradition were very strong with me. I -- I believe in some sort of supreme being, but I couldn't define it. I did not have Hebrew education, neither did my mother. I -- I'm av -- extremely good Jew at heart because I believe in the commandments, and I feel if y -- you don't have to be Jewish to follow the commandments. And if you follow the commandments, you're religious. My father's idea was more philoso -- philosophical, he thought that God surrounds us, that God is everywhere, in every huma -- i-in every human, in every living tree, in the nature. And I sort of adopted this. However, in camp, I was questioning, where is that supreme being? Where is God? What's happening? These are human beings who are doing this to other human beings, therefore, is there a God? The questioning. Long time. I slowly returned to the faith. I'm not a temple goer, but I feel that I am a good Jew because I observe the commandments. I will not steal, I will honor -- unfortunately I don't have parents, I'm an old lady myself. And I tried to bring up my daughter in the spirit, and my daughter did not have **Bat Mitzvah,** but my granddaughter did. So it's like coming back. The circle is

repeating. And when I spoke at my granddaughter's **Bat Mitzvah**, I did say it, that the seed survived after all. To me this was very, very powerful statement. In view that so many members of my family were killed, and I felt that I was the weakest link, and I survived, and I was able to produce the next pr -- generation. It was very strong feeling, and this brought me back to the faith.

Q: You implicitly -- you seemed to imply just now that there was what is now coined or termed survivor's guilt, a little bit. Is there --

A: Definitely.

Q: Did you feel guilty --

A: Definitely.

Q: -- could you say something about that?

A: Definitely. I lived with that sense of guilt all my life. I felt that maybe I wasn't the one deserving to survive. I -- maybe I wasn't worth it. There were so many people in the family who were much more deserving to survive, and I was chosen to be the one. You live with this guilt always. I will never get rid of this guilt. And my daughter tried to get this out of me, but it's down deep somewhere there, the guilt is there.

Q: Did you feel that you have this -- that you have or had a special obligation in some way, then?

A: Definitely. To speak. To leave something behind me. I'm sorry that I did not write a book, but this was such a trend, everybody was writing books. I said maybe by spoken

words to people, maybe I will reach people by the very virtue of being in flesh in front of them. It was not a book, it was not a page, it was not a printed word, it was me, in flesh. And I tried to convey this to my listeners, you are looking at a survivor. I was there. You will be able to tell next generation, I spoke and listened to a survivor. To me this was so important, maybe more than books. Sometimes I'm sorry I didn't write, but it's too late for that, so I have to be satisfied with what I did. I tried my very best.

Q: Wh-When did you start speaking, and was it on your own impetus, or did somebody else urge you to, or --

A: Nobody urged me. I felt -- first of all, the family said, when we saw that we are doomed, that if someone survived, some -- that one should speak. There was no question about it in **Poland** or **Germany,** I would not dream about it. In the beginning in the **States**, my English wasn't good enough, and it was absolutely negligent, I didn't speak the language. When I learned and I became fairly fluent in English, the obligation started to come back. I said, I promised, I have to start. And I started with some of my friends who were American born, and little by little it grew. People listen and they said, oh, you know, we have a group of women, this will be interesting to invite you. And since I live in **San Diego**, I did this for over 20 years here. And I was always recommended. I never put my name in the papers that people did. But -- especially the Catholic school. They invited me three times. And I said to the teacher, "But I'm repeating myself." They said, "What do you think we do? We repeating our lessons, but each time is a different class,

different people." So I fulfilled my promise and my obligation, and I never wanted to profit by it. I did this because this is my absolute responsibility to the people who perished. And if there are some individuals who do profit by it, I'm sorry they do. I'm happy that they do some good by speaking, but I feel that it's almost unethical to profit by it in any way. There is no glory in it, to -- to -- to be invited guest of honor here and there, and -- and have pictures. It -- it doesn't apply to me.

Q: Let's see, I just had a question that I forgot to ask. Sometimes -- where -- where else did you go? Yo-You mentioned Catholic schools, there were other places?

Q: Oh yes, I went to schools, I went -- I spoke before high schools, I spoke in **Santa Monica's** high schools, I spoke before **Hillel** groups, I spoke in churches. And I liked to go to churches, because I felt that Jewish people, and Jewish organizations and Jewish groups that invited me, **Havorah** groups for instance, some people were there who were genuinely interested, but they knew about it. And some people said enough, it's enough and they did not want to hear this any more. So I thought if I would speak to non-Jewish audiences, and I will reach just some of them, then I did something good. And I did. I -- I spoke in few churches, especially there is one church here, United Methodist, that I was invited -- that was a year ago, I think, and the lady who invited me -- I went with her and she said, "Do you mind there is a German lady in the wa -- in the church?" I said, "Of course not." And this German lady listened very intently. And she tried to tell me that she and her whole family were never Nazis. I didn't -- I did not question her -- and her

grandfather would like to help people. I'm not interested in her story, and if they did that's wonderful and she doesn't have to explain this to me. I am there on one purpose only, to tell people not my personal story, but to spread my message. And my message always was one, let's tolerate one another, let's learn about each other. And I always say that people take this with a grain of salt, you don't have to love one another, but tolerate one another. Learn how to live together, because otherwise we jeopardize th-the en -- the entire -- the population is growing fast, the earth is getting smaller. We're flying from one place to another in few hours. If we won't learn how to get along, we will perish.

Q: I-I know that this not something you want to get into detail necessarily, but let's speak just a little bit about the price that you pay for this though. I mean, it is not -- it is not easy for you to keep talking about this. What -- what -- what happens when you do it? What -- what is the price you pay?

A: I would deny if I would say that I don't pay price for it. The price is my health. My innermost feelings, my -- my dreams, my nightmares. But you have to decide, is it worth it? I know I'm getting older, I know that I am winding up my da -- my speaking days. I'm glad that I'm doing this for -- for the museum, that this will be on the tape. I will leave something behind it. But I'm weaker. I'm getting older and my **[indecipherable]** are greater than before. Aside from the fact that I went through a -- a lot with my daughter, who had this terrible surgery, it took a lot out of me. And it was for me a big decision if I should do it -- this. But I said, I did the first part, I have to follow it up. I'm glad that you

ask me, I'm glad you came. I'm glad that this will be in archives. I hope that it will be of some use, and it will do some good by reaching the right people, and the wrong people.

Q: Can -- can we go back to your life in **New York** for just a little while more? We spoke about **Israel** as being a very important thing that happened in your life, had a great impact. **Yad Vashem.** Your daughter, obviously, being born was -- was an incredible thing. What -- what else when you think back? Anything in the 60's or 70's that was sort of -- an event that sticks out that was important to you as an American?

A: Well, a -- a ba -- the very important event that happened to me, that touched me very much, strangely, it is the creation of **Israel.** It -- it -- it was an unbelievable impact. Of course, I remember **Golda Meier** came to **New York** to speak at the **Madison** Square Garden before it was razed. And I was there with my girlfriend. And **Ed McMahon,** who was the man for -- who always introduced **Johnny Carson**, he was the MC. He introduced **Golda Meier**. And **Golda,** the -- the elderly lady, with the swollen legs, with the big, heavy stockings and big, black shoes, I remember -- will never forget. Ugly woman, speaking in the most beautiful English, speaking from her heart. And I remember the place was packed. I don't know how I got in, I don't remember that, but I was inside, and I remember they -- down the aisles, young people were holding four corners of Israeli map with **Magen David**, white with the **Magen David** and people were just throwing money into it. And I threw whatever I had in my pocketbook. This was a tremendous thing. Jewish people will have their homeland. It was something that I think only some

sect of fundamelis -- fundament -- fundamentalist predicted that **Israel** will come back. And there it was. Now, I myself was not the material to go to **Israel** and fight and -- however, it was magnificent. That day will stick out in my mor -- memory forever. Incidentally, there is one person, I don't know if that museum would be interested in, non-Jewish. The lady is in her late 80's, lives he -- here in **San Diego**. We became great friends. We met in a writing club, because I was going to writing classes, I love to write. She and her husband took part in the creation of **Israel.** Her husband came home in 1945, or '46, I don't remember when, when the war was over, he was a veteran. And he didn't have a job. He was recruited, not knowing for what and for where, by somebody by the name **Al Schwimmer**. They took him -- she didn't know where he went, they took him to **Czechoslovakia**, they got few planes there, he was airplane mechanic. He was fixing planes so **Israel** could get six planes. This was when they -- before the war started. She didn't know for a few months where he was, he was not allowed to let her know. And eventually he went to **Israel, Israel** was created, and she followed him, and she spent two years in **Israel** with him, working as an English steno -- some position there. And she saying -- said -- she wrote a book about it.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

A: She wrote a book about it. I have a copy. She said what -- what was supposed to be our work became our cause. This lady spoke about it, I invited her to some groups to

speak about it. Her husband was one of the heroes, unsung heroes who helped **Israel** into being. Non-Jewish, young man, he died last year. She's about 89, she still goes to writing classes. I wonder if museum would like to have her story. If you have a chance, tell them she is an extraordinary person.

Q: I will. And now it's on tape, too. Is there anything before -- I want to also talk a little bit about **San Diego** later, but is there anything in **New York** in your life, you stayed there for 20 years, that -- that sticks out as an -- as an important event or something?

A: Th-This was one of the most important events. The other events were my friendship with two ladies, especially. Especially the one, she came from **Vienna** originally, we went to museums together, we shared interests. I loved M-Metropolitan. And we went to concerts. There was nothing of tremendous impact there. I was always the class mother. I always went on trips for the school. I -- when the teacher needed a helper I was ready, because I didn't work. I supervised. I loved being with the children, so -- I always stayed in touch with the people whose children I was working for when they were born. I --

Q: You could say something about your husband and you being very civic minded. I mean, you really --

A: Yes. My husband I were always -- we shared the idea that once you become a citizen of this country, you owe something to this country. And we are both civic minded. In **New York**, when my husband worked and I didn't, I volunteered for **Albert Einstein** Hospital, and they ask me -- first they put me to count pills in the basement, which blew

my mind off. I thought that I -- I will get crazy there, I couldn't do it. So I asked them to transfer me to the library cart. And I was walking with the library cart, and people who were able to read magazines and books, I did this. I had a uniform and then I talked my friends to do it, and we did this for quite awhile. And my husband wants me -- came to **San Diego** when he retired, this is 21 years that he volunteers in three hospitals, four days a week. And he is -- he has all kinds of awards, you can see it on the wall up there. He was always civic minded. He is appreciated in the hospital and it makes -- it makes our life easier in the way that we are not two elderly people sitting on top of one another, but we have some different interests. He loves his hospitals, I do not like hospitals. I like to stay away from hospitals. But there are some people who are needed there. And he fulfills this need. He's in charge of volunteers for the emergency room. He stays in the emergency room, and the lady that I met today when I picked you up, worked for him in the emergency room. Which shows you how small this world is.

Q: Have you ever associated with co -- with survivor groups, or with survivors?

A: There is a survivor group in **San Diego**, and I went to one meeting there. But at this particular meeting -- the people are very active, and they do a lot of things, and there are a couple of them that do speak. One of them wrote some book. What bothered me was that he always peddles this book wherev -- every store you go to. He sits there, I will sign it, I will sign it, and this turns me off. And sometimes a lot of them were speaking Yiddish, which I didn't. So I decided that I can be a very good civic minded survivor

without being in the group. I will do my part without being a part of the group. The group is very nice, very good, they donated m-money for the wall, I believe, that this -- and they have a monument, some sort of monument. And I sent my money to -- as much as I could to Jewish American Congress, and to the **Shoah** Foundation and to the Holocaust Museum, 36 dollars, which supposed to have some significance because it's twice 18, which 18 is life, **[indecipherable]** which I learned.

Q: I have only maybe two more questions. One is just a -- a quick follow-up question on your daughter. Could you maybe say again that -- it was very hard for her to hear details about what was done to you, right?

A: Yes.

Q: She didn't -- cou -- could you speak to that a little bit?

A: Yes. When we lived in **New York** and my daughter was already a teenager, and -- and -- and even tw -- 19 - 18 - 19 -- and they were forming groups of second generation, my daughter did not join it. Now, I asked her about it. She said she lives with it, seeing my body, it reminds her enough of Holocaust. She could not associate with a group and speaking about it, it hurt her too much. She wanted us to have a normal life without m-mentioning. It -- it -- sometimes it was a -- wa -- she wondered how could I go on and on. She said, "Mommy, I would like you to stop, you are torturing yourself. I want you to stop it." She meant well, and she does her civic duty. She contributes to it, but she could

not speak about it because she -- in her heart it is a feeling of tremendous pain, seeing what has happened to me during the war.

Q: And she also had a hard time hearing exactly what --

A: Well, I did not tell her details. I told her, I never made secret of it, how I survived the war, and -- but nothing that -- the gross details. She had to know, but at the same token I didn't want to go overboard, because this was a child. I didn't want to poison her mind. I had to find the middle road, for her to grow up to be a bright, open-minded person. And I hope that I achieved this.

Q: Let's talk about your granddaughter a little bit. You did have a -- you do have a granddaughter, and when was -- when was she born, and what is her rela -- what's her name and what is your relationship to **[indecipherable]**

A: My granddaughter's name is **Alexis Danielle**. She was born in 1978. She's the joy of all our lives. She is beautiful in and out. She's bright. She graduated **Duke** University**.** She had a lot of friends there, whom she misses terribly now. She is in her first year of law school, wants to study environmental law. She's romantic. She wants to save the world. She wants to contribute to the betterment of the world, the human race. She's an advocate for the animal rights, trees, water. Save -- save -- save the trees, save the water. She is not one of the crazies, she's a very normal young lady. And we are very proud of her. And we hope that she will achieve what she set out to do. Her father is an attorney too, but in a different area, not criminal, he's a litigator. And she has very happy home

life. Her parents are very loyal, wonderful couple. I was very lucky that my daughter married a man who's a wonderful husband and father and provides cultural background. They do go to theater very often, my daughter loves theater, and she exposed her daughter to the loves, as I did her, even when I couldn't afford it, my daughter can afford it now. So **Alexis** is very well rounded young person, as is my daughter.

Q: T -- only two more questions.

A: Yes.

Q: One, you refer to your age that you are getting older. What does -- what does age -- what changes with age, or what has changed for you particular with regard maybe to -- to memory or also to events, the impact of -- of -- of the Holocaust to you.

A: Well this is a -- this is a serious question. I am aging and I feel this with every minute, more so. And sometimes I rebel, because I lost so many years when I could have been doing things and learning, my -- my young years in the camps. Each year could count for 50. So I rebel that in my older age I have -- I have a big baggage, not only physical, but I have this -- this -- in the back of my mind, the -- the guilt feelings. I live with it. I will never get rid of it. So old age is -- it's not so sweet. The only sweetness is the family.

Q: Is th -- is memory -- is memory fading too?

A: The memory is -- I found out that short term memory is fading, but I was reassured that young people do it too. So when I will see somebody, I say how are you, without mentioning the name. But the long term memory, there certain things that are blending

because it was so fast. When we were running, for instance. I don't remember some of them. I don't remember -- and I mentioned this many times, the face of my torturer. I erased his face from my memory because I didn't want to be haunted by it. I don't remember the faces of the **[indecipherable]** and the **SS** women who were so cruel. I don't want to remember, I don't want to see them in my dreams. So subconsciously this is gone. I know the fact, but I don't remember the faces. Some of my friends who survived, they remember the -- the smallest details and yet when we were invited to **Ravensbrück, Sachsenhausen,** I received invitation. I could go free with my husband, pay fare, and pay three days stay. The program that was sent to me had a concert, visiting the **SS** barracks and something else. And I very politely denied -- I mean refused. I did not want to go back. I am not anxious to see **Sachsenhausen** or **Ravensbrück**. I don't want to see the barracks. I don't need to see this. I never went back, I never went to **Dachau** or **Auschwitz**. I know about it, I don't have to go to see it. People who went during the war, if they go, it's good. Let them perpetuate the memory of it. I don't need it. And th-the invitation for three days paid to fly, well it was to me almost an insult.

Q: Six years, roughly, of the Holocaust, the war years, almost 55 years after. Is -- is the -- is there a weighing? What is -- the 50 year -- the 55 years after the war, are they as strong as the six years? Is there -- can one weigh this -- this -- have you --

A: They are two different lives. There is no comparison. There is nothing that I can say -- I can weigh one against the other. The six years of imprisonment were -- German word, **ewigkeit.**

Q: Eternity?

A: Eternity. These years now, especially now that I grow older, passing by very quickly, too quickly. I want to live long enough to see my granddaughter graduate, to see good things. To see her get married, and then I'll be completely happy. To hear from people again -- I have listened to you, and I appreciate it. I learned something from you. I adopted some of your ideas. I hope that somebody sometimes will read or see my tapes in **Washington** and will let me know. It would be a -- a tremendous thing to know. I -- I received a lot of letters from schoolchildren, from people who listen, even from the sisters in the Catholic school. I send them -- not all of them, but a -- a lot of them to the Holocaust Museum, but I would like to know in the museum itself, if teachers who come for information, or somebody -- if somebody stumbled upon one of my tapes, or visual, or oral, and that I made some impact, that would be wonderful. It would be something -- fulfillment.

Q: I think this is where we should stop then. Thank you very much, **Blanka**.

A: You're welcome.

End of Tape Two, Side B

Conclusion of Interview