United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Erika Kinel
March 8, 1995
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a taped interview with Erika Kinel, conducted on March 8, 1995 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

ERIKA KINEL
March 8, 1995

Q. If you could just begin by telling me your name, where you were born, when you were born.

A. My name is Erika Kinel. I was born a Reiss [she spells it] in Zagreb, Yugolavia, July 1st, 1926.

Q. Tell me a little bit about what you remember about growing up in Zagreb, your family --

A. I was an only child. I had a set of grandparents, my mother's parents. My mother, my father and I lived in the same house. My father was a merchant, my grandfather was also a merchant: textiles. My grandfather had the store in the house, in the building. My father's store was in the city but not far from home. We had a very nice apartment. We also had a maid and a cook and (laughing) a laundress. So we were pretty well-to-do. I went to a Hebrew private school for four years, I think it was four years, yes. And then I went to the gymnasium, the public school, till I was about sixteen. And that's when the trouble started. And I still went for about half a year to Catholic school for domestic whatever they were going to teach us but I wasn't there long because we had to leave our house at a certain time and I couldn't go to school any more, that was the end of my education.

Q. I just want to get some of the Jewish community in Zagreb and whether you were integrated with Catholics, or whether you went to the gymnasium with that --

A. That was public school, jah. The first four years was private school, the rest was public school. It was a public high school and I graduated from that.

Q. Was your family religious?

A. We were conservative, ------. We went to synagogue every Friday and Saturday. We observed all the holidays but it wasn't the way the Orthodox because there weren't any.

Q. Did you have Catholic friends?

A. Yes I did. Yes.

Q. Did you sense any anti-semitism before the War?

Q. In my German teacher. She resented the fact that I spoke German before she ever did, and I spoke German and she always corrected me. I said, "Lady, I knew first before you did" and that rubbed her the wrong way, because she learned it in school, it wasn't her mother tongue; my German was my mother tongue. And with the Yugoslav teachers, they didn't like me too much either because they were my mother's teachers, so I preferred the ideas they were my teachers and her teachers at the same time and they remembered my mother and they remembered me. But I don't know, it was just the feeling that they didn't like me; I don't know for what reason. The German teacher I know for sure she didn't care one way or the other. If I said one way, she would pronounce it the other way and she just got always my case because I the French teacher and the Hebrew teacher and lots of teachers different nationalities -- not nationalities, really, different points of view they had about different things. But there wasn't anything that you had to fear or that you had to be upset about. Maybe --------- to realize, I don't think there was any anti-semitism at that time.

Q. You didn't know it could come out agai.

A. No.

Q. In the Jewish community in Zagreb were there political organizations, youth organizations, Zionist?

Q. Yes. I belonged to Makabe (ph) gymnastics for as long as I can remember, from the day I could walk till the day we left. Gymnatics. I took fencing and gymnastics. I enjoyed it.

Q. Were your parents involved in any of thee things?

A. Not really, no. They were busy with the business and Mother was busy raising me, so there was not so much involvement. In the synagogue; that's about it.

Q. So you mentioned that things started to change. What happened, and when, about?

A. You mean about when the War came to the city? Well, we were thrown out of our house Thursday before the Good Friday 1941. The Germans came in and they told us to leave within hours with just our clothes ------ and that was the last we'd seen of our house, of our possessions of anything else. So that was it. And from that day on we started to go into hiding. So we hid in the

city from April through the following January. We hid with friends but we had to be on the lookout -- every time somebody rang the doorbell you had to go hide because we didn't know who was coming to get us. But the Germans that took over our house used it for a prison. That was the main object to do. A prison, and my grandfather had a fine cellar and they used that to kill people; to lock them up and eventually kill them. I don't remember any other soldiers going, they were in the city but they just had to pick on the house. It was conveniently located and they figured big enough to provide them and there were about four stories high. There were four tenants on each floor. There was a factory on the main floor and there was a store on the ground floor. So they needed the place, they took it, they didn't ask. So that was the beginning of the end and so they started chasing us around. You couldn't go out in the streets because you were afraid that somebody might catch you. They tried to catch my father several times to take him away. Sometimes they took him and retained him for a few hour and they released him again. Just plain harassing. Went on for months and months in this time. Finally we had some friends in Lublyana, they helped us to get out of Zagreb.

Q. Before you left Zagreb, who was the family you were hiding at perhaps, in Zagreb?

A. They were cousins of my mother's.

Q. So they were also Jewish.

A. Oh yes. I still can't figure out why they weren't after them. They just happened to be after us or whatever possessed them to do it but they hid with some relatives. I guess they were hiding too, more or less, you know -- you were sneaking around at night to go out if you wanted to go. If not, you just stayed in and hoped for the best that nobody was going to catch up with you.

Q. What about you? Did you stay in most of the time?

A. Yeah.

Q. What was going on in the streets? I mean, were there suddenly a lot of restrictions on the Jewish people?

A. Yes. We had to wear a star. Want to see it?

Q. You have it?

A. Yes.

Q. After this. What other kinds of restrictions?

A. Well, jah, we didn't go out much, so we didn't run into too much problems. But if you did go out and didn't wear a star and they caught up with you, then you might have been in trouble.

Q. Was there ----- presence in the streets?

A. I really don't remember. I mean, from that day on my mind just got kind of blank because I saw the soldiers when they came to get the house and we should get out, but then afterwards I can't remember what happened with the soldiers and I hung around in the house, more or less, not to be seen or heard of. My father had a German passport, so maybe it gave him a little bit of protection. From the year that we came to Yugoslavia till we left, he was always a persona non grata for some reason or another, because they only gave him six months of staying time and then he had to go to the police and sign up again six more months, and that went on from 1922 to 1942; for 20 years. He never became a citizen and he had to go every six months and tell them why he's still there. But then he got a German passport and that somehow helped us. I was little but we were stateless at that point.

Q. The people who kicked you out of your house were Croatians, military.

A. No, Germans.

Q. And prior to that you didn't feel any retrictions in Jewish, between '40 and 41.

A. No.

Q. Do you remember your family talking about what their plans were, what you were going to do?

A. Oh yes, we had plans and they were firm plans, too. We were going to South America, to Uruguay, Montevideo. We had passports and papers, everything made out in 1939. And we were going to Motevideo and my parents were going to start like a catering business. But then when the visas came up, my mother and I we could travel, my father was not allowed to leave the country. So we stayed behind and we didn't go. We had everything packed. I remember the suitcases, everything was packed for South America. Never got there.

Q. Why were you going to go to South America?

A. I don't know. My father one day decided he was going [tape glitch, loss of a phrase] for some reason or other said "Let's look at the map" and he put his finger on it and he says, "Montevideo, Urugay," and that's where we were going to go. Had the papers ready and the suitcases packed and the clothes for South America and everything. And we remained there because my mother said she wasn't going to leave him behind. So she left him behind -- he left us behind when he came to America! (she laughs) He just wanted to go away, I guess. Or he had a feeling, he had premonition because he had relatives in Vienna and they were already being chased around, so they came to America or they had to go somewhere else. So that was 1939 but it happened.

Q. Were you aware of refugees from Germany or Austria coming into Yugoslavia?

A. Yes. I had a cousin who was in Dachau in 1939 and he escaped Dachau and came to Yugoslavia and he was living with my grandmother for about six months or so. And he took his life. And a month before he was going to go to America, he had a sister that worked in Mt. Sinai Hospital in New York City and she sent papers for him and he was completely devastated. I still don't know how he managed to get out of it but he did, but he was completely [she trails off] I had that uncle that was in the army and he ran way from the army too. He came back but they went to Italy before us so didn't see him again for many years. Was my mother's brother. But the cousin, that really shook me up, because he was only, like, fifteen or sixteen.

Q. But you had information on what was happening.

A. Oh yeah. But I was never told because I was too young to realize what but I knew what was going on. They wouldn't even tell me that he killed himself, they hushed it up, they were afraid if they would catch us because we were harboring a fugitive from Dachau, the they would probably have give us the heave-ho much sooner. This was in 1939. My grandfather was still alive at that time.

Q. This period in Zagreb when you were hiding: were you able to get what you needed -- food or anything else?

Q. I think the food at that point was already rationed. I remember, like, getting one roll a day or something, you know. It was war already. Half of the world was already four years in war, so it

wasn't easy to get anything but we just didn't have that much liberty to go out and get it. So just somehow survived.

Q. Do you remember your parents talking about at that point where you were going to go next and what you would do?

A. We had some friends in Lublyana that had left Zagreb before us and they were trying to get us to cross into Lublyana but at that point it was under Italian, so finally in January of '42 we left Zagreb for Lublyana. That was a trip I never forget. We had to cross the border and it was so cold and we went in an oxcart. Grandma inside the cart and my father and I and my mother on top and we almost froze to death. My knees froze, my father's ears froze, it was horrible. But there were soldiers on us, it was like the front already. There were soldiers there and we didn't know if we weren't going to get killed. We had no idea what we were getting into. We crossed the river one night and I remember the only thing I took with me from home was pictures, family pictues, and I dragged those (laughing) for 40 years now. But that was the only thing I figured I could never replace. I could replace everything else but this I couldn't and I dragged that with me over hill and dale, over a river, across the border on an oxcart, and finally we made it into a camp some place overnight. And finlly we got into Lublyana. Friends were waiting for us and we found a place to live. We stayed there from January '42 till '43. But there again the problem started that they were picking up people. Every time somebody ventured out into the street they picked you up ad detained you for a day, for an hour, for good, then they let you go. Mostly men, because they were looking for recruits, for somebody they didn't look who the guy was, as long a he could walk. My father he got caught a couple of times. We told him not to go but he had to go. Any time he felt like going out for a smoke he went out, and he got caught. So he was quite tough but he made the best of it, and we just waited before we could go any further down the country.

Q. What happened when your father got caught?

A. They questioned him for a day and then they let him go.

Q. Were they the Italian authorities?

A. Yes. Italian Germans. I really don't know. They picked him up and they loaded him on a bus and took him some place for hours at a time and then they brought him back. And I told him many times, "Don't stick your nose out." (laughing) But they never learn; never learn, because they always got caught one way or the other. He got caught once, they were bombing a house in the city and he had to go back for a pack of cigarettes and a bomb fell near the house. So he learned, (she laughs) but it took him a few years. He likes the severity of the whole thing, to him it just was something that doesn't happen.

Q. What was your daily life like in Lubljana? How did things return?

A. Well, there were nice parks, go for a walk, go out with a friend and that was about it. There wasn't much to do. There wasn't anything to do.

Q. But you could do pretty much what you wanted?

A. Yes. I was always watching our back somebody wasn't after us, or -- actually there wasn't a war, there was a firing line going on; it was just, you know, it was state of war. But that didn't bother us, really, as far as -- once they got it over with, picking him up every other day, there was something like that, then it stopped. And in '43 we left; we got there in '42 and we left in '43.

Q. Now, you lived in the open there, you weren't in hiding really.

A. Well, hiding: we didn't know where to hide from or who. So we were watching ourselves.

Q. Were there a lot of other Jewish people in your predicament there?

A. I really don't know. They were themselves in a predicament, they were under Italian rule and here was Jugoslav country was Slovenia and they were under Slovenians but then the Italians came in and this was ours. They even wanted to give us an Italian prince to rule over the country when they came into Jugoslavia --anything, (laughing) just to get away with it.

Q. And people were fairly resentful of the Italians?

Q. Well, I think they felt better under the Italians than they did under the Germans because the Italians were in the war too with them, so --

Q. What happened next?

A. We left and we went down south and we wound up in Monbacelli (ph).

Q. Why did you go there?

A. Because we hoped that we would be liberated sooner than if we stayed there. We just couldn't stay, you know, too long in any place, so we went to Monbacelli, and there we were made civilian internees of war.

Q. How did you get there? Tell me a little bit more about the whole process.

A. We travelled -- you know, we decided it would probably be a nice place to be. We had no idea, we were just going. We were travelling south while the troops were coming north, so we stayed there and they caught us and we were under the the ----- and they put us in the house and we were ---- internees for sixteen months. We had to call every week to sign up, we weren't allowed to leave town, and in order not to stand out we went to church ever Sunday. So, there was not much to eat, they had a few chickens, a few geese, and my father started feeding those to fatten them up so we could eat something but we lived mainly on beans; eggs and beans -- bean salad, bean spread, anything beans; not even pasta, just beans. And we lived there with the farmers, with the peasants there, with not much to do, you know. I learned how to spend a little time and somebody taught me how to sew. There was not much to do, we just went from day to day and you ate what you could find that's where they make the good champagne, asta spumante, they were right out there. We weren't allowed into town, so we sat around there for sixteen months waiting for the war to come up, I mean for the liberate troops to come up so we could go down. You were never connected, we were always too far away from them and they were too far away from us. They came from Africa, the soldiers, and they went to Sicily and then to Italy, and then coming up and we were going down.

Q. You said you went to church every week --

Q. Yes.

Q. -- did anyone know you were Jewish?

A. We hoped they didn't but quite a few couples in the orthodox and I don't know how they survived. They couldn't eat anything. ---------- church ------ in one and going out the other door (she laughs) --

Q. ----?

A. Yes. They had to keep up appearances. And for a long time the grandmother wasn't allowed to speak any language for that matter because she only spoke German and not to get caught so she pretended to be deaf and mute, and only at night when nobody was around she was allowed to speak. My father didn't speak too well Italian but my mother and I did, so we'd get around. But the two of them had to kind of lay low.

Q. Did the people think you were just Croatian refugees? Or where did they think you were from?

A. I don't think they knew. We hadn't been retired, they knew where we were from. The authorities knew, I don't know if the people knew but the authorities knew. We had to sign up with them every couple weeks, we had to go in and register, and if we wanted to leave town we needed permission and we had to be back. There was nowhere to go, so they kept good track of us, they wouldn't let us go anywhere.

Q. Was your father working at all there?

A. No. There was nothing to work.

Q. You had your own place?

A. Yes, they gave us a house. It was beautiful furniture, there was nothing else and there was no heat, just somebody's house, they had a veranda, it was very nice located and ------- nice and warm, but there was no heat in the house or anything, you know, but at least there was a place halfway decent to live in. But no food, there was no food.

Q. Were you aware of other refugees in that area also?

A. Yes, they had quite a few people there in the same town. The same ----- with the government and everything but we became good friends, there was nothing else to do.

Q. I just want to backtrack a second: when you went from Lubljana down to --

A. Monbacelli? (ph)

Q. -- was that an arduous journey? How did you travel?

Q. (she laughs) I forgot, really, how we got there. It must have been on trains, because it's far. Near Florence, that's far, and I think we must have hitched a ride on a train. It's kind of slipped my memory, I don't know why, it's just something doesn't connect. But we got there.

Q. You just traveled, just your family, that was it?

A. Yes**,** just the three of us. Actually, four; 80-year-old grandma.

Q. It must have been something for her.

A. Yes. But she survived. But then she didn't make it to America.

Q. Do you sort of remember your frame of mind at the time and what you were thinking? Was it nervewracking, was it adventurous, was it --

A. When I look back on it now, it was nervewracking but at that point probably it really didn't faze me, I was (laughing) too young to think about, you know. It was imperative that we survive, because every day was a new story, a new beginning, you know.

Q. Do you remember your parents talking about the situation?

A. Well, it was hard to get through the war, you know, and we ----- as far as we could. And then they let us out in '46 and we traveled again further down and went to Empoli (ph) and at Empoli we were hiding again. There we stayed on a farm, in a barn, we slept in a barn, and we cooked where the used to be like a pigsty, the animals were eating just where our kitchen was. That was where -- then the bombs started flying around and it was bad. Bombs were coming down, Americans were bombing the city, and we got caught again in the bombs. We went down inside the countryside and they were shelling on either side of the hills. My father almost got caught with a shell. (laughing) And we never had anything to eat -- we took walnuts off the trees at night, and in the morning the farmer came out and said, "Show me your hands" and when hands were black, they knew we stole walnuts from the trees and we had to eat that. We went into the field and we took some tomatoes and some peppers, whatever we could lay our hands on. And Grandma was playing deaf and mute and the rest of the time she wasn't allowed to speak. But then again the Germans were down already and they were trying to catch my father again and he was sitting on a bench and one day a German passed by and he said, in German, "We're going to take this guy." And my father took off -- my father spoke German, and the ----- were Italian, so my father took off, "That's it, I'm not going to sit around and wait for him to pick me up again." Every day it was -- and then the soldiers were already up and there were mines in the fields every morning we we got out of the barn to go out and

get some fresh air, we had to watch the ground to see for land mines that they had left the night before. So that was already battleground, that was war already in full force. They were coming in -- that's what we actually wanted to get there but not being in between. Every day they bombed, one day they flew a mission over 500 planes we counted -- so low that you could count them and they kept dropping the bombs and they were always going further up. They were going to Germany, but there were some American bombs, not Germans, American, they were going to Germany. In the meantime once in a while would drop -- we never knew who was dropping the bombs, we never knew who was above, we just had to hide. When we heard the sirens go off then we had to run and hide. When the sirens didn't go back -- after the alert, then it just stayed like this forever, never stopped till the end of the war. Always on alert. And there was one place we slept, the four of us in one bed -- two of us this way and two across, like sardines in a pot.

Q. Who were these farmers who were sheltering you?

A. Italians, Italian farmers.

Q. Did they know who you were?

A. I imagine they would. Well, they gave us their barn to sleep in, with the straw. I think it was warm; never snowed.

Q. And again, were you Catholics now?

A. Nothing. There was nothing. I remember one thing that was so funny. It was Easter, Christmas -- one of the holidays -- and they were cooking and cleaning and doing their chores or whatever, and we said, "Where I came from, Jugoslavia, Christmas was a big holiday, Easter was a big holiday, nobody worked." And I said to them, "The closer you are to the Pope, the less religious you are." And they were just laughing. "Oh we work every day." Of course, in Jugoslavia we kept the holidays, whatever a person believed in we kept it. But in Italy they didn't seem to care whether it was Christmasday or Easter Sunday; whatever, they worked.

Q. And you stayed in this new place --

A. Empoli.

Q. You stayed there about how long?

A. Till 1944; another year with a second year in between each.

Q. You stayed mostly in the same ------- were you on the run a bit more than that?

A. Well, at that time the soldiers were coming up and they tried to help us to get where we wanted to go. To help us out there were soldiers from India that came and liberated that part of the country and they helped us out a little bit, and then they went further down south and then we wound up in Rome. In Rome we were in a camp that used to be old studio of Cinecita Roma and we were locked up there until they decided what to do with us. They had a few people there but not too many. Then they decided what to do with us, so they sent us to the camp in Bari.

Q. When you went to Bari it was all refugees?

A. Ja, it was a refugee camp.

Q. Who were some of these people in Bari? How big a place was it?

A. That was a letdown, the camp, 1500 people or something. In the beinning it was a -------- transit camp, so people came there, they stayed there for a few weeks or months till they were repatriated. There were Chinese, there were 20 different nations, and whoever was able to be sent back, and the ones that had no place to go, stayed. So we stayed five years.

Q. What month did you arrive, in 1944?

A. October 9, 1944.

Q. Were there a lot of Jews there?

A. Yes. There were Chinese, Japanese, Turks, Greeks -- a lot of Greeks -- all kinds of people from all over.

Q. What was it like? What did it look like?

A. Some of them were barracks. There were 12 barracks and there were some big room with walls between and everything else was open, cots around [?], everything was open, there was just a wall here and then there were 12 beds here and 12 beds there and all the way around. And then at the end was a lavatory at the end. And there was no privacy at all. So the Chinese were playing all might and they were gambling all night and you couldn't sleep. And then they were arguing, and

then they were fighting, and this went on and on and on. You couldn't sleep. And nothing to do. At least they fed us, but there was nothing to do.

Q. Your family all stayed in the same barracks?

A. Yeah, my father and my mother; my grandmother had left at the time, she found her son there and she went with him till she passed away a year later. She never left the camp. My uncle stayed in the city, lived in the city, he never left the camp either. So we three wound up in camp.

Q. Three days before she had gone to the camp, didn't they?

A. Yes, had no choice. Either go back home or stay in the camp and hope for the best. And the War didn't finish up until `45. We went there in '44, so there was still six months of war. The War finished in April 1945.

Q. What did you do all day?

A. In the beginning, nothing. Trying to get a better, some other barracks, like a room, family quarters or something, you know -- two wooden cots, two boards, and a piece of -------, whatever, to put under, like a horse, you know, with a piece of wood over the horse, that's how we slept. Five years. And we got fed. There was a big room where you'd get your meals and when you got in they put us in showers. Do this ------- whatever they were afraid we mmight bring -- then we were body-searched. And then we were assigned to our barracks and we stayed there. And over the years we improved a little bit -- we had our room, and we could do our own cooking if we wanted to. But the room wasn't bigger than somebody's bathroom.

Q. Well, fill your story before the War ended. Were you allowed out of the camp, could you go into town --

A. With a pass. You needed a pass to get out. And there was no bus, so you hitch-hiked with soldiers into town. In the beginning it was hard, because there was still war and you know we were afraid to go, but later on there were buses that took us down into town. If you wanted to shop or a movie or whatever, it made it easy but in the beginning it was very hard. And until they got rid of a lot of other people -- and people kept always coming and going, you know, you never had the same amount of people at any given time, they were coming and going. And eventually we got a job in

the office, my father, my mother and I got a job in the office. My father was the payroll clerk, my mother first she worked in the shower room, then she got a job in the office, and I was an interpreter for the commandant who was there.

Q. Was the camp under the control of -------?

A. No, the United Nations Relief Organization.

Q. In 1944?

A. Yes.

Q. If it was a liberated area.

A. Yeah.

Q. So your commandant was from the U.N.

A. Yeah, well, most of them were British. They were all soldiers that were fed up, so you know they got into camp.

Q. Was it organized -------?

A. Oh, you become used to, to get the hang of it. Until they were more settled and we didn't get so many people in and out, so the ones that stayed eventually stayed for five years, six years. The first three years were hard because were all coming and going in droves. They had brought them in busloads and took them out by busloads. If they didn't kill each other during the night or something, then they took them out (laughing) with an ambulances or something. So, it was quite a story. I wrote a little novel about it. I have it.

Q. Were there a lot of restrictions on what you could do or not do while the War was still on?

A. ----------. If you really wanted to go into town they let you in on the pass, you had to be back at a certain time, but there was nothing else you could do in town either. Not much you could do. And then everybody hoped and prayed the War would end soon. We wrote a letter to the President, there was a big to-do in the camp and the soldiers and everybody, there was quite a ceremony. But that didn't mean that -- wanting the end of one, the other one started. Because we didn't realize how long it was going to take us to get out of there. People stayed after I left in '49 there, until '50. I think in '50 it was closed up.

Q. Were you able to observe ----- your religion at all? Or was that just not important at that time?

A. No, it ---- as good as occurred. I remember one of the guys in camp he did the menorah for us out of paint cans. I brought it with me, I don't know where it is now. But you know we were trying but there was not much you could do. Not much.

Q. Was there any sense of community in this camp?

A. In which sense?

Q. Well, for example, the Jewish people band together in --

A. Yes, we were all working on our way out of it, so we were all like a group. Lots of people that worked in the office situation they all had relatives in America and were all trying to get out. We started doing it in 1945. It took years before we ever heard anything. The consulate in Naples was very forthcoming with anything. Visas or anything for that matter, we just had to sit around and wait our turn.

Q. Do you remember how you were aware that the War was over?

A. Well, they kept us informed, because soldiers were there and they kept us informed.

Q. How did you react?

A. Well, happy. We didn't know what was waiting for us at the next corner. We had no idea how long it's going to take us, what the situation was, who was going to help us out getting out. So we just hang in there.

Q. Did you feel liberated?

A. Well, yes, and then again, there's no place to go. How much liberated can you be if there's no place to go?

Q. What did you do? What were your plans?

A. Well, we applied for visas. My father had brothers in America and he applied for visas and we waited. For '46, however long it took, how many visas were available. They were only fishing them out in little batches, maybe five or ten at a time for certain countries. I was supposed to go and all of a sudden a guy comes up and says well, I'll have to go with this guy, and it was two visas, so I couldn't go and I had to wait. I was pushed back, you know. They had to pick preference quotas

and they had to pick preference couples or families, and I was on a a special visa, I couldn't go and I wanted to. You see, I was considered Czech according to the quota system because I was under age, I go according to my father. And my mother went on the Yugoslav quota, they were scarce too; and the Czech visas were scarcer, so many time when the quotas came around and visas came up, I was too old to go on my father's quota, so I had to wait another year. It took me three years to get here after my parents came.

Q. Bui your parents came first.

A. Yes. My father in '47, my mother in '48, and I came in '49.

Q. Families didn't come over together.

A. No. All depended on the quota.

Q. Because they had different nationalities.

A. Different nationalities. I was considered stateless, because actually in Europe you are what your parents are, not the country you're born in; like you're born in America, you're an American. END OF THIS SIDE, A

BEGINNING SIDE B

A. **(**cont'd) And if you're under 21, you go on your father's; and if you're over 21, then you're on your own. And I was considered most of the time stateless, I had no nationality, no nothing. I came on a Swiss passport.

Q. It must have been terribly frustrating.

A. Oh yes. It's even more frustrating when you wait for something and it doesn't -- every day you hope and pray it's going to come and it doesn't come and you go back again, and you write letters and you make phone calls. And "Sorry, maybe next time." Maybe next year, maybe next year. This is how it went, for three years.

Q. Were you afraid that you wouldn't get out?

A. No. Eventually we knew; it was just a matter of time.

Q. Did conditions in the camp change after the War was over?

A. Well, it got a little bit better. There was more food, thay gave us a ration -- military rations, some cigarettes and some candy. If they weren't stolen before we got to them. So, my father sat there watching them dish it out to make sure everybody got his ration, because if they didn't, it was gone before it came in. We knew who stole it but but I wouldn't tell. (she laughs)

Q. Were there any activities -- were there schools for the kids or any cultural activities?

A. Nothing. Nothing.

Q. So people just sat around.

A. Sat around all day doing nothing. Unless you worked in the office or in the kitchen or wherever in the barracks, you know, cleaning up or something; that was about it.

Q. Did people get paid for their work?

A. In the office, yes. They paid whatever but they were paid.

Q. Then after the War you were able to go into town and move around more freely, or--

A. Still with a pass, never without one. That was the rule. They went on a pass, if you wanted to go not everyday but you needed a pass. You went to town then you needed transportation. The town was outside, I mean, the camp was outside the town and it was quite far to get to and from, so you hitchhiked. ------- travel on a watertank, a military watertank, and one day I drove it (laughing) and I got the soldier in trouble -- I was just pulling on the wheel and he was doing the other stuff that I didn't know before, I never learned how to drive at that point. It was fun, though, come out on the watertank.

Q. Did you make friends in he camp in Bari?

A. Yes, a lot of friends.

Q. You had social life when you were a young lady.

A. Yes. Well, I knew quite a few young girls there my age, and, you know, but we knew each other from before, so it wasn't actually that we just met in the camp; we knew the families from my hometown.

Q. The --------- you ended up in the families.

A. Right.

Q. Did you have a boy friend in the camp?

A. Yes I did. (she laughs) Yes I did.

Q. From your hometown?

A. No, he was from England. He wound up in Australia.

Q. So there was some semblance of a normal life.

A. Well, if you can call it normal. (she laughs) Yes, you had to go on living. If you didn't give up till then there's no point in giving up now.

Q. Then how many --------- got over here in 1949?

A. On my father's ----- my uncle was working in Chicago and he got me an affidavit that I wasn't going to be a burden to anybody, that I had a job, and I came -- in March 14, '49, I left Italy. I was in the boat for 15 days and we landed in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and then we came to New York City.

Q. Did you have any friends on the boat?

A. I was sick for 15 days, seasick, and I thought I wasn't going to make it. I was up in bed the first night and that was the last time that anybody ever saw me until I got out in New York. I was so sick I coudn't --------. That was March and those seas are rough. Past Gibraltar it was a disaster.

Q. Were any people you knew that traveled with you, or --

A. No, I was all alone. Some of them on my ship, though, it was a brand-new ship, it was called the Su---- [proper name], a Polish ship, my mother went on it on the maiden voyage in '48, -------- '49, it was a beautiful ship, but the passage my mother said she was sick for 15 days and I was sick too ----. But ----------, and then my parents waited for me in New York City at the docks.

Q. Do you remember how you felt?

A. Oh yes. I saw my father standing there and he couldn't get near me because -- I had to wait until the whole ship was unloaded. My luggage was in the bottom of it. I came in first on the ship and everything was on the bottom and I had to wait until everything was unloaded till we got into New York City. And my mother and father were on the pier waiting for me for almost 12 hours till I got out. It was a beautiful sight.

Q. It must have been great to see them, huh?

A. (pause, then a strangled): Yes.

Q. Did you finally feel free?

A. Yes. "Free at last."

Q. What do you think helped you through all of this extreme difficult time to get through it?

A. Just faith.

Q. In what?

A. The Almighty.

Q. (after long pause) ----------important to you? When you look back, what images stick with you? This period of four years or --**A**. ---- the camp. Like I say, the best years of my life. The young years of my life. I had no chidhood, I grew up overnight.

Q. There were certain responsibilities that you had to assume at an ---- young age?

A. Well, when I was in ------- yes, I had to make sure ----- I took care of everything in order to come here -- paperwork and make sure that I was in touch with the consulate at the time that my parents were able to help me out to come. And they had to send me money for the passage.

Q. When you were hiding for those few years before you went to the camp, were there certain aspects of that that you felt were really demanding on a teenage girl?

A. I didn't know what "teenage" meant. (she laughs) There was no teenage. You were either a child or a grownup, I don't remember anybody being called a "teenager."

Q. But in fact that's how old you were.

A. Right.

Q. I'm trying to get a sense of what you say, "I didn't have a childhood," what that really means.

A. Well, you know, here the girls would go on dates or anything like this I never had that, never had any boy friends, I led a sheltered life and I wasn't allowed to go anywhere by myself until the War. I was -- somebody chaperoned, my mother, my grandmother, somebody always came along for the ride or whatever. I was never allowed to do anything on my own, and then I was pushed out into the world. It's like being born again. (pause) Well, this is the badge that we had to wear after the the Germans came to Zagreb. In the beginning there was armbands but they kind of mushed around

and after a while they just disintegrated, they had to nake sure that the stuff -- sowe used to hide it under the lapel so when we went out we didn't want to be seen, although sometimes maybe they knew who we were but we had to wear it at all times.

Q. But if you only wore it --

A. Like a marked person.

Q. And then once you got to ------ you didn't wear it any more?

A. No, we didn't wear them any more.

Q. That was a beginning for you.

A. Yes.

END OF THIS SIDE, B

Conclusion of Interview.