

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Gittel Jaskulski Hunt**  
**November 9, 2008**  
**RG-50.030\*0552**

## **PREFACE**

The following oral history testimony is the result of a recorded interview with Gittel Jaskulski Hunt, conducted by Stephanie Blyskal on November 9, 2008 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Alexandria, VA and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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.

## **GITTEL JASKULSKI HUNT**

### **November 9, 2008**

Question: This is the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Gittel Jaskulski** –

Answer: **Gittel**.

Q: **Gittel**, okay. Sorry. By **Stephanie Blyskal** on November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2008 in **Alexandria, Virginia**. I apologize for mispronouncing your name. Thank you for being interviewed – agreeing to be interviewed. Can you tell me where you were born, and when?

A: I was born November 5<sup>th</sup>, 1942 in **Berlin, Germany**.

Q: And what did your parents do for a living?

A: My father was a buyer. Not sure what that means, I've heard different versions. I've heard that, you know, it could be a bookkeeper, it could be, you know, a buyer [indecipherable]. My mother was a seamstress, as her mother was, my grandmother. So –

Q: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

A: No.

Q: No, you were an only child.

A: I'm an only child, yes. My mo – I'm told I'm a lot like my mother, and – which means I'm stubborn. But she decided she was going to have a baby at a particular age, and no matter what the world situation was, she was gonna have that baby. And

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she thought, well, if something happens, they get taken away, her mother, my grandmother, would take care of me. And then they'll come back and take over. It never occurred to her that they may not come back. So –

Q: So, did your – did your family all live together, did your parents and your grandparents live together in a – did they live in the same neighborhood?

A: No, my parents did forced labor, so my grandparents took care of me. My grandfather was Catholic, so my grandmother was protected while he was alive.

Q: Right.

A: Anyway, so every evening my parents would come to visit me, and one day my former landlady came running up and said, **Frau Cheever**(ph), they're taking them. And she stood on the balcony and watched my parents being taken away by the Gestapo. And I was three months old, they were taken to **Auschwitz**. I have – I finally found a permanent – let's say a definite death date for my father, and that was March 28<sup>th</sup>, 1943. And for my paren – my mother, it just says the end of March. And just within this last month I got a lot of documents about myself and my grandmother, and my parents. And is – it da – so I say, now I have absolute proof that I'm a survivor –

Q: Right.

A: – because I – it shows, you know, everything.

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Q: So you had a birth certificate, or –

A: Yeah.

Q: – or some sort of documentation, yeah.

A: Well, that's not what I just got.

Q: Right, but you had – you had had it –

A: But this is [indecipherable] the camps.

Q: Right.

A: So **Auschwitz, Theresienstadt**.

Q: Mm-hm. But you had a birth certificate when you were born.

A: Yes.

Q: That – that –

A: I – I got a copy years ago I needed [indecipherable] to prove my age, so yes.

Q: Yeah. And so your – your grandparents were taking care of you at this point.

A: Mm.

Q: When a – you wound up in **Theresienstadt**, how – how did you get from **Berlin** to **Theresienstadt**?

A: Well, evidently my grandmother knew she was going to go to **Theresienstadt**.

She had a family friend that worked for the underground. And the lady said, well, I think – well, they called me **Gitta**, which was my German name. The **Hitler** regime

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didn't allow me to keep a German name, so it was changed to **Gittel**. So she says, oh, I think it is best chance for survival was to go into camp with her, so I went to **Theresienstadt** with her. And I was in the nursery, and I was, you know, a toddler at that point.

Q: Mm-hm, right.

A: And my grandmother would scrub the sidewalks and the steps with cold water, and every winter her hands would turn blue, because of that experience, the rest of her life.

Q: Right.

A: It – that affected her that much.

Q: Do you have any memor – any recollection of **Theresienstadt** at all?

A: No. My husband thinks I'm blocking it out.

Q: So what do you thi – what do you think your first memory is, that the –

A: After – in **Berlin** –

Q: In **Berlin**.

A: – going to services every Friday night, and no matter who my grandmother met, she would tell my story, or our story. And I guess she didn't realize little pictures have big ears, and that I knew everything. And by the time we came to the **U.S.**

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when I was 13, she finally told me about my story, which I had known all along, but didn't say.

Q: Right.

A: And she used to say, if I'd asked about my mother, you know, where's my mother, oh she's in **America**. And I have – I'm in two books now. In the first book, that's entitled, "My Dear Mother is in **America**," and – my grandmother did an interview before we left **Berlin**, and that was the title of the story.

Q: Right.

A: And she just didn't want me to know. And I – I'm thinking logically, when I came here I would say where she was, and I must have blocked it out because I don't know the answer.

Q: Right.

A: You know, how did she, at that point, cover up that my mother was not here.

Q: And what happened to your grandfather?

A: He had tuberculosis and cancer and died. And that's when –

Q: Mm-hm, in **Berlin**.

A: – yeah, and that's when she lost her protection and we went –

Q: Right, right.

A: – to **Theresienstadt** at that point.

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Q: Now, was – was your grandmother practicing her faith while – or – or – before the war, was she practicing her faith, or –

A: I think so, yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: Just from what my uncle said, because his attitude was, religion's not important, least of all judi –

Q: Right.

A: – least of all, Judaism. And we would go to services every Friday night, and high holy day service and everything. And then she'd say to me, well, there can't be a God if He let your mother die. So I grew up with mixed messages, in my opinion.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: You know.

Q: Being taken to services.

A: I don't how much to elaborate, so I'm going to let you just lead the story. I – I could say more –

Q: No, I mean, feel free to con – I mean, it's – it's – it's a question that we ask a lot of our survivors because there is such – almost a struggle between their reality of what they experienced, and their faith. And so it's why we ask the question.

A: No, we – I mean, we went to services very – you know, every week.



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Q: And so, when you – when you came out of **Theresienstadt**, you were three?

A: Almost three.

Q: Almost three. And you – you went back to **Berlin**?

A: We went back to the **Berlin**, to the same apartment we lived in before, and waited for my parents to come back.

Q: Right.

A: And she – you know, she just expected they'd be back.

Q: Right.

A: And just before we left **Germany**, she got copies of their death certificates.

Q: When did you leave **Germany**?

A: In '51.

Q: '51?

A: I landed the day after my ninth birthday in **New York**. So it's a very easy day to remember.

Q: Yeah. What – while you were still in **Germany**, I assume you started going to school again – or started school.

A: Yes, I did – I did start school.

Q: And you were speaking –

A: I went there for like two years.

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Q: Right.

A: I learned some English, so I knew, table, door and chair. Lot of English to get started in a new country.

Q: Well, it's better than nothing.

A: Yeah.

Q: So you were – you were starting school, you were learning a little bit of English.

Di – was – was it always your grandmothers intention to take you to the **United States**, or – did she want to stay in **Berlin**?

A: There was a compensation for having been in the camp. And my uncle didn't talk to my grandmother for three years. She would bake every week in case he would come, he didn't come. I – I think I suspect why he didn't come. I have no other –

Q: Why is that? No –

A: She befriended a – a gentleman, for lack of a better word, and he abused me, and I think that's why he stopped visiting his mother, because he was so against this man. This lady that worked for the underground, boo – we went back, after my grandmother died, I went back to **Germany** with my whole family, my husband and my three sons. And this lady that worked for the underground, I met her, and she said something to me, and I said, how did you know, I never told anybody, you

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know, that I was sexually abused. And she said, I suspected by the way he held you on his lap. And so, I would think, you know, my uncle probably did, too. And, you know, now I think, well, why didn't somebody do something to protect me from that?

Q: Mm-hm, yeah.

A: So –

Q: So this is while you were still in **Berlin**, or this is when you go to –

A: While I was in **Berlin**.

Q: Do you think that influenced your grandmother's decision?

A: I think that's why my uncle didn't come around –

Q: Right.

A: – and since he didn't come around, she thought my best chance for survival was to come to **America**. And like I said in my documentary, I love my children, I don't know if I could give up my country for them.

Q: Right, right.

A: You know? So –

Q: Wow. And d – you – you never talked to your grandmother about the abuse? Did she – do you think she knew about it?

A: I don't know.

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Q: You don't know.

A: There's always, you know, like you hear, don't tell –

Q: Right, right.

A: – don't tell, okay, I won't.

Q: So you leave – you leave **Berlin**, and you come –

A: That part really shouldn't be in [indecipherable] this is – you know.

Q: You leave **Berlin** and you come to the **United States**, and you're nine years old.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: And you come to –

A: Well, I was eight on the ship [indecipherable]

Q: On the sh – when you landed you were nine.

A: Turned nine the day before we landed, right.

Q: And you come to new – did you stay in **New York**, or where did you go after that?

A: My grandmother had a dot – somebody had to sponsor you.

Q: Right.

A: So she had a document saying she's gonna be a housekeeper for someone in **Hackensack, New Jersey**.

Q: Okay.

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A: And on the ship someone said to her, you might as well use that for toilet paper, because nobody is going to wait that long for domestic help. So we come to **New York**, and they said, you can't stay in **New York** because the population is too great, so choose someplace to go. And she had relatives in **California**, she didn't want them to feel obligated to take care of us, so she decided against **California**. She had old family friends that lived in **Chicago**, so we came to **Chicago**.

Q: Okay. And so you spent your – your youth in **Chicago**, your American youth in **Chicago**.

A: Right, right.

Q: And did you go to public school, did you go to private school?

A: Public school.

Q: Public school. And what was your grandmother doing for a living at that point?

A: She was, you know, she was a seamstress, so she – but I mean, it was like a word of mouth type thing –

Q: Right.

A: – it's not like she worked for somebody. Didn't earn Social Security like that.

Q: Right.

A: I mean, she didn't earn like a regular paycheck, but that's – you know, and there was compensation money, she got [indecipherable] and some money for me until I

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was 18, so that's what we lived off of. And we qualified for public aid, or whatever you called it at the time.

Q: Right.

A: And being strong, or – I'm – I'm – can't think of the word right now, but they would come every month and ask the same questions, like how many rooms do you have, and how many bathrooms do you have? And she'd, that doesn't change, you know, from month to month.

Q: You're living in the same place.

A: She didn't – so she decided, no more, and she stopped the money.

Q: Wow. Oh my.

A: I know, just –

Q: So you graduated from high school?

A: Right.

Q: And did you go on to college?

A: I went into nurses' training.

Q: Okay.

A: Met my husband.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And we were being transferred, so I never finished nurses' training.

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Q: Mm-hm. And where were you transferred to?

A: He went to **Texas** to go to school.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So.

Q: And you wound up – did you wind up staying in **Texas**, or –

A: And we came back to **Chicago** –

Q: Okay.

A: – and we went to **Minnesota**. You know the military, you ge –

Q: Ye – oh, okay, he was in military.

A: He was in the army at the time.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: So –

Q: And how many children – you have three sons?

A: Three sons and five granddaughters, so –

Q: Oh wow, wow.

A: I would say the best part of being a parent is being a grandparent. You can hug ‘em, kiss ‘em, I love you, goodbye.

Q: Mm-hm. I’m – I want to – you say you don’t remember a lot.

A: I don’t have any memories.

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Q: You don't have any memories. Do y – do you think you have – well, I mean, you were so young.

A: Yeah.

Q: But –

A: But you – what's interesting, and my husband has found this too, when I'm among survivors – first of all, I don't have to explain myself, and I think just like they do, I fall right in with them, in spite of it. So I don't know if it was like raised into me, or what. But I am, you know, very comfortable i-in this type of situation, or with a group that we had, you know. And so, we think the same way, you know you – I have a stack of food, let's say, you know, so I never – even though we were both unemployed for a long time, I never worried about food, because I have that stock.

Q: Right.

A: That's my security blanket.

Q: Right.

A: So we – we all fall into that.

Q: And when you – when you were – well, you were too young to remember what it was like in **Theresienstadt**, but when you were in **Berlin**, did you – do you remember being hungry? Were you –



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A: No.

Q: No? It's just an innate quality that you have now, that you have to stockpile food?

A: I don't know.

Q: Yeah.

A: Can't pass up a good deal [indecipherable]

Q: When you were in – when you were back in **Berlin**, do you remember, after the war is over, do you remember anti-Semitism at all? Were you experiencing that?

A: I – you know, I think I was too young to know that, and as I grew up in **Chicago**, I knew people didn't like me, but I didn't know why. When I started working is when I really experienced anti-Semitism, I had to quit a job because of it. I was threatened, and I was harassed. One of my kids in particular says the Holocaust has really affected him. For instance, when the series “**Holocaust**” was on **TV**, he came home with – somebody told him a joke that I don't remember, but it ended up with, all you need is an ashtray for six million Jews. And so, what I say to the audience, how do you respond to that as a human being, as a Jew, let alone as a survivor?

Q: Right.

A: And so now, I talk about the different things that have happened in my life that has affected me because of the Holocaust, you know?

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Q: Yeah.

A: So that's really where my story is coming in, because everyone says oh, well, you're lucky you don't have memories.

Q: Right.

A: And I said, well – and now what I'm emphasizing, doesn't mean it didn't affect me.

Q: Right.

A: And how it's affected me, my children and my grandchildren. And fir – I mean, first of all, you don't have, you know, family get-togethers, be it for holiday, or my graduation or whatever, you know? And even my grandchildren are missing out on all of that.

Q: Right.

A: Because the family is not there. So last **Rosh Hashanah** weeke – we've got one congregation we belong to that I absolutely love. We never used to go to services, I belong to two congregations over 13 years, and people didn't even say hello to me. And now, if I'm not going to be here, like this last Friday, don't worry about me, I'm fine, I'm going to be out of town, you know. So, the second congregation, Holocaust survivors are free.

Q: Right.

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A: It's a congregation that broke off from another congregation. So they have what they – are called a pitch-in dinner for **Rosh Hashanah** eve, eve **Rosh Hashanah**.

And, you know, I never had a family holiday dinner. I'd like to see what that's like.

Q: Right.

A: Let's skip **Rosh Hashanah** services, you know, we're there all day long, we – you know, we'll miss that. And I got woken up the next morning, I didn't see you at services last night, are you okay, is **Vern** okay? Missed you, and – you know, because my husband had two lung collapses and lung surgery this year. So, you know, people, of course, are – are very aware of what's going on in our lives. So, it's a totally different – so I've had – even like this year, some very new experiences. I n – I had – I've had so many people say, oh, forget about the Holocaust, put it behind you. Lot of – from different people –

Q: Yeah.

A: – comments like that. Or there's no more **prejudism** in the world, you know, and we all know better than that. So yeah, there's more and more – obviously my – I don't feel my life is normal –

Q: Right.

A: – because of it has been affected in spite of my age, an-and no memories, you know?

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Q: Do you – I mean, do you have – I don't know, did you ever find an organization, especially when you were younger, did you ever think that maybe there would be something out there for other Holocaust survivors? Did people talk to you about it, did they ask you questions about it?

A: Okay, I – I used to say, my parents didn't survive the Holocaust, and my grandmother did. And I never put myself in that picture. And in 1981 was the world gathering of Holocaust survivors in **Israel**, was the first event I attended. And my son was on a work study program in **Israel** at the time. He's now, of course, you know, almost Hassidic, I mean, he's ultra-Orthodox. He was on a work study program, quit the program in order to join me for the gathering. We went to kibbutz comprised of survivors from **Theresienstadt**. And the man, among the racks and racks of documents found my name, and my grandmother's name, wrote down for me what transport I was on, how many were on the transport, and how many survived. And at that point it hit me, that this happened to me, and I'm a survivor.

Q: Right.

A: And my life changed a lot after that.

Q: How did it change?

A: Well, because now I'm talking about it all the time, and I'm realizing it did affect me, you know?

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Q: Was – was – did you make a connection between things that you – behaviors that you had, that once you found out all of this, and found paperwork and saw proof, did you make the connection between that behavior, and oh, it's because I'm a Holocaust survivor.

A: Yeah, now I – I've – certainly I see that, because as I talk to other people – like one of the guys from my group said, look it, I have all this fruit, because I didn't have that as a child, and I know I have so much it's gonna spoil, but that's just because of the war. And like, you know, we talked about I have a stack of food –

Q: Right.

A: – that I'm not gonna worry. But when we join our present congregation, the rabbi was hemming and hawing and he says, this is very awkward, and I don't know how to say this, I just have to come up with it, we have a food pantry, and, you know, I can get food every week. And I said, just ask my kids, I've got too much – and I said, I have too much food. Nobody has – has too much food, he said. I says, just ask my children, I have too much food, you know. And we just had like flooding in the basement, we had terrible rain, we had to throw out a bunch of food. I'm not worried about it. I've got food that's way outdated, I'm sure, you know.

And –

Q: It's just –

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A: – you know, so I'm not worried about it, it's – it's there, it's there.

Q: Did he – when you – when you discovered all this information, I mean you said your – your grandmother told you a lot of this when you came to the **United States**.

A: No, just about my –

Q: Just about your parents, but not about you?

A: – my mother –

Q: Did you – what did it feel like to learn about all of this?

A: See, I've known all along.

Q: Right, but di – did you have –

A: Cause I ha – her – just – I don't remember it really affecting me.

Q: Cause it didn't have like a –

A: Sh – well, because she kept telling everybody, and I'm standing right next to her, you know? Hello? Little pictures have big ears, you know. So – no, I mean, it was just something that I always grew up with, you know. But I did – I had to do like an autobiography in eighth grade, and so then she had to tell me some things, to do my homework.

Q: Mm-hm, right.

A: So then she elaborate a little bit more, so –

Q: And you didn't feel –

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A: I always knew I –

Q: Did you feel awkward in school because of that? Because of the autobiography –

A: I always knew I was different, but I didn't know why, you know? And everybody had parents, and it just – I don't know. I hi – why – I mean, I made different friends and this one girlfriend, I spent weekends with them, and I called her parents mom and dad, and so I had a little sense of family there.

Q: Mm-hm. Do you think that ri – you – it sounds like you're close with your si – with your children and your grandchildren, do you think you've created that to – to find a family that you didn't have –

A: Well, family is important to me –

Q: Right.

A: – you know, obviously.

Q: Right.

A: Cause I – you know, grew up without family, so it's – you know, when I hear about family problems, I – I dislike it. And I have it within my own family.

Q: Right.

A: I have a daughter-in-law who constantly cuts us off at her – her whim, and my son goes along with it. She t – he told his mother-in-law, I don't – I don't want to make waves, cause I have to live with her. And she cut her own mother off for over

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three years, and her mother was also a survivor. And so now she's starting to get involved a little bit with the Second Generation. It's very difficult, you know, we just had ano – I mean, that cookbook –

Q: Right.

A: – the Holocaust cookbook, okay? And – so I ge – all I ever hear about is I can't deal with the subject, okay? So, I did not give my son or my granddaughters a choice. So I gave them each a book and I wrote something in it. I didn't give her one, it didn't occur to me. Like I se – you know, and she's never let me explain what my thinking was. They don't have a choice but deal with it, they have to deal with it, because I'm here.

Q: Right.

A: But she doesn't, okay? So then, that caused another rift. And my other daughter-in-law, 'why would you improve me' attitude. In fact, they don't even have a copy of the book yet. So, it's were – they changed the book now for s – both – twice, and both times was because of me. Well, the first time my Orthodox family that cuts me off all the time, their pictures weren't in – in the book, so they had to add the pictures.

Q: Right.



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A: And then th – then ca – **Rosh Hashanah**, at **Yom HaShoah** time, **Joanna** came in to talk about the book, and she told my story, and she introduced me. And so she re-read my story, and she was looking for a special connection. And she s – she found it, because in our congregation we have a Holocaust tour that survived the same country I did. She says, that's the connection I was looking for. So one of our members took a picture of me with the Holocaust tour, and that's going to be in the new book.

Q: Oh wow.

A: So, I just tol – I was telling my neighbor about it, says, I'm just a troublemaker, you know. So –

Q: So what's the recipe in the book?

A: Sweet noodle kugel, carrot mold, and economy matzo balls.

Q: Economy matzo balls?

A: It's only one egg, instead of like a dozen, you know?

Q: That's fantastic.

A: I don't like the fluffy ones. Just want it to be – bite in something, you know you're biting into something. I don't like those other ones.

Q: An-And it's just a few you've learned from your grandmother?

A: No, it's –

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Q: No?

A: – ma – it was mine. I didn't, I guess, quite understand what this is all about, and I don't have any recipes from her, so this is just stuff that I make every year.

Q: So you've made your own traditions?

A: Yeah.

Q: That's fantastic.

A: And nobody makes matzo balls like mom.

Q: Nobodys – nobody ever does.

A: My kids like my matzo balls.

Q: That's great.

A: Yeah.

Q: That's great. So is there anything that we didn't cover, that you were interested –

A: Well, I don't know, you know, I've never go – I haven't done this.

Q: I know.

A: Other than the documentary, so –

Q: Yeah, yeah, I know. So I – I wa – I want to make sure I've – I've got everything from you.

A: You know, I'll probably think of something afterwards, I'm just –

Q: Oh, I'm sure we will, we're never going to get everything, but –

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A: Yeah. Well, you're more experienced at this than I am.

Q: Yeah, well, for now I think we're good, and I'm going to stop the interview, so –

A: Okay. Okay.

Q: Thank you. This is the conclusion of the interview.

**Conclusion of Interview**