

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Ira Segalewitz  
November 7, 2008  
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## **PREFACE**

The following oral history testimony is the result of a recorded interview with Ira Segalewitz, conducted by Ina Navazelskis on November 7, 2008 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Alexandria, Virginia 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.

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## **IRA SEGALEWITZ**

### **November 7, 2008**

Question: This is a **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Ira Segalewitz**, conducted by **Ina Navazelskis** on November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2008, in **Alexandria, Virginia**. Mr. **Segalewitz**, thank you very much for agreeing to speak with us.

Answer: Oh, it's my pleasure, you know, I want to convey as much information as possible, so you know, future generations would at least know about what happened to the – the people like me.

Q: Well, we're grateful for that. Can you – can we start the story, like they've always does, at the beginning? Can you tell us a little bit about your history, where you were born, what – in what family, in what town and so on. And when.

A: Okay, okay. I was born in **Sarny, Poland** in the year 1936. My mother's family was – was known as the **Bagg(ph)** family, and they were quite a large family in – in **Sarny**. And actually, they came from a town nearby, which was **Dambrowicz(ph)**.

And my mother was one of 11 children, and so it was quite a large family. And when I was born, my mother, you know, l-lived with her family close by. And when I was about three and a half years old, you know, the war started, you know, and the German occupation of **Poland** began. And at – as most of us – most people know, there was an agreement in the **Ribbentrop-Molotov Act**, which kind of divided up **Poland**, you know, be-before the war even started. And so, soon as the Nazis

occupied **Poland**, the Russians moved their borders as well, and consequently we came under Russian occupation.

Q: Can you tell me a little – let's back up a little bit, before we get to that part.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

A: No, I don't, I'm an only child.

Q: You're an only child.

A: I'm an only child, mm-hm.

Q: And, can you tell us a little bit about your father, and who he was and how that fit into the picture?

A: Well, I – you know, I – I really don't know much about my father, you know, in – the last time I saw my father was in – well, I was gonna –

Q: Get to that part, okay.

A: – tell you what – get to that, but I –

Q: What kind of family did he come from?

A: – yeah, he – he – he came from a town nearby, from **Pinsk**, and he was a barber. And don't know much about his family at all, you know. My mother and I kind of never talked about that. And consequently I just don't know. I – you know, I – and I've tried very hard, you know, to try and find out more about his family and I've been unsuccessful at this point.

Q: Do you have memories of him?

A: I – I – you know, I don't know if it's an original memory, or – or you know, pictures and stuff, but I seem to remember – or – or stories that my mother told, but I seem to remember very well, when – when the war started that he – he was putting us on a train, that we were leaving **Sarny** for the Russian – you know, that – the – deeper into **Russia**, I seem to remember him waving goodbye. And that image of him is the only image that I have, you know. The rest I – I just don't remember. But that's the only image that I seem to be ingrained in my mind, and I'm not quite sure if that's a true memory, or something my mother said to me, you know, at one point when I was – was young or what, you know.

Q: How old were you when that – when you were on that train?

A: I was about f – I was five and a half – I was – yeah, it – about five and a half at that point, yeah, five and a half, maybe six.

Q: So, a very small child.

A: Very small child, right. And that is my only memory. I mean, I've – I – I have some pictures of my mother and – and my father together. And I have a picture that we found here in the **United States** of him, you know, that my mother had sent to his sisters here in – in the **United States**. But I, you know, don't have any independent memories other than that.

Q: Can you tell – the – then let's go back a little bit. I mean, one of the reasons I ask this question is particularly when people were children, really small children during the war, we're talking about fragmented memories.

A: Right.

Q: Can you tell me your earliest memories, regardless of what they would be? Can you recall that? What are the earliest episodes, or things you remember from –

A: That – that being – being pushed into the cattle train a-and my father, you know – an-and that image of my father, that – that's the only memory that I seem to have of then, you know. I have no prior memories. I can't remem –

Q: Of being in **Poland**, of growing up in **Sarny**, or – or anythi –

A: Yeah, well, I – I didn't – you know, I was only three – three and a half when the war started. And – and then, of course, fin – you know, the occupation, we were living in – in – under the Russian occupation for almost two years until the – the Nazis began the war on – on **Russia**, you know, so –

Q: Did your mother ever tell you about what that was like? What her life before any – all of this was like, and then during those two years?

A: I'm afraid not. You know, we never – never really discussed that period at all, you know. As a matter of fact, we talked very little about the war or the Holocaust. My mother was – you know, every once in awhile she'd say something, but very seldom that – that discussion. Th – really, I began to realize that what I'd missed, is after my mother passed away, you know, that I didn't have a history, I didn't have the information of my father, and I didn't have – know at all – don't know at all what my father's family – anything about my father. Don't know whether he was an only child, or he had brothers and sisters, and just have no knowledge.

Q: Do you – did you ever have any contact with the 11 siblings that your mother had – or the 10 siblings that she had, if she was the 11<sup>th</sup>?

A: Yeah, she – my mother, two of her sisters came to the **United States** before the war started. So my mother always knew she had two sisters, you know, during the Holocaust, you know, she knew she had two sisters here in the **United States**. She just didn't know where they were. But there was – you know, but they were the ones that we got to know. But I – no, we – I never had that discussion with them, unfortunately, you know.

Q: So when your – when your father pushed your mother and yourself in the train –

A: Mm-hm.

Q: – and that was when the **Soviet Union** was already attacked by Nazi **Germany**?

A: Exactly, yeah.

Q: That was your – the last time you had any contact with your mother's relatives, is that so?

A: That's the – that's right. With my mother's rela – no – well, yeah, the last ones –

Q: Aside from the two sisters –

A: Sure.

Q: – the ones who were in the town, is that correct?

A: That's correct, mm-hm, that's correct.

Q: And how come none of them went east?

A: Don't know. Don't know the reason, you know, but there – they all perished in – in – in – you know, they were all taken when the Nazis came into **Sarny**, they set up a ghetto, and they rounded up all the Jews in the area, and of course then they slaughtered them all, they murdered them all. So, you know. The only survivor of my mother's family that – I have a picture that I, you know, quite often carry with me, I happen to have it here. And – and th-the only survivor is, besides the two sisters, you know, from this family – this is a 1914 picture –

Q: Oh my.

A: – and, you know, is – is my mother, and th – she's that little baby over here – I mean, she's a little child over here, and – and this niece, you know, who –

Q: Her name is **Marthe**(ph)?

A: – **Marthe**(ph) [indecipherable]

Q: And her name was?

A: My mother's ma – name was **Rochel**(ph), yeah.

Q: **Rochel**(ph).

A: Yeah, mm-hm.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah. So she – she is the only survivor that we know of, and I did meet her and we – we went to **Israel**. She lived – she ne – she survived the war, and she came to **Israel** and we did – we did get meet – get to meet her [indecipherable]

Q: Was she able to tell you anything about the fate of the rest of the family?



A: Well, yeah, I mean, everybody kind of knew with the fi – what happened to the rest of the family. We all knew that they wound up in the – in – in that ghetto, and – and never left, you know.

Q: Oh, so the ghetto was liquidated –

A: Oh, it's like –

Q: – it wasn't like they were – it wasn't like they were transported to a camp outside or something.

A: No, they were – they were murdered, you know, right there, you know, the machine gun – you know, the machine guns were set up from – from the – there's a – a couple of years ago it was a book written about the escape from **Sarny**, from the **Sarny** ghetto, and according to that book, you know, it said they set up machine guns around them, you know, and murdered 14,000 people that were there, you know, so – so –

Q: D-D-Do you – did they survive the 1941, or was this ghetto liquidated pretty early on?

A: It was 40 – 40 – th-the Nazis came in into the – into **Sarny**, it was '42, I think, and – and, you know – and they liquidated it after about six months. It wasn't – it wasn't very long. I'm not sure about the dates, though.

Q: I remember you said – you said –

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: So, in a – in – in many ways your father wa-was very prescient, if he was the person who convinced your mother to – to – to go on the train.

A: Well –

Q: Tha-That was the right thing to do.

A: Well – well, what ha – really happened is that my father was drafted into the Russian army.

Q: Okay.

A: And because he was in the army, he was able to get us on the train, you know, because –

Q: Otherwise they would –

A: – you know, otherwi – no way, yeah, you know. That's – that's how we survived, you know, is that – the fact that he was able to get us on this cattle train, and that's only because –

Q: He was in – yeah.

A: – of his – the army connection, yeah.

Q: Let's go with your father a little more –

A: Mm-hm.

Q: – but we'll return to your mother. So, he was an army recruit?

A: [indecipherable] yeah.

Q: And do you know what happened to him?

A: No, the only information we have is this – you know, and this is anecdotal information, that somebody saw him on the Russian front. On – on – on – not – on no –

Q: Yeah.

A: – on the **Stalingrad** front, I'm sorry.

Q: On the **Stalingrad** front.

A: Right, that somebody saw him there.

Q: So wi – that big battle.

A: The battle to – you know, the battle of **Stalingrad**, right. And that was the only information that we ever got, you know.

Q: And so, were there letters that were every exchanged between your mother and himself afterwards?

A: Not at all, no, no, no letters at all, you know, she – she – he evidently perished kind of early in – in – in the war, you know. And there was never any correspondence between the two of them.

Q: What was the na – what was his name?

A: His name was **Shiman**(ph).

Q: **Shiman**(ph)?

A: Yeah, **Shiman**(ph) **Segalewitz**.

Q: **Shiman**(ph) **Segalewitz**.

A: Yeah, that's –

Q: From **Pinsk**.

A: From **Pinsk**, right, yes.

Q: Have you ever been to **Pinsk**?

A: No, no, haven't made it back to **Poland**.

Q: No. A-And you haven't been back to **Sarny**?

A: No.

Q: No.

A: No. Well, you know, a couple of times I – I tried to get information on **Sarny**, and it was just nobody – you know, a couple of letters that I've written – as a matter of fact, a gentleman that I know that went to **Sarny**, he couldn't get any information because you know, just there were no records left, you know, that – that were available, so he couldn't get any information, you know, so – yeah.

Q: That's – that's more than frustrating.

A: Absolutely, yeah.

Q: That's more than frustrating. As you were going east, what was – what happened then? Where did you and your – end up with your mother?

A: Well, we were on this cattle train, and it kept getting bombed, and I remember jumping out of the cattle train, you know, people, you know, the – the – the train would stop every once in awhile, we'd jump out and you know, and airplanes would be flying over, strafing the train, and that kept happening, shortly after we left the station. And that went on for –

Q: Were you afraid, or were you too little to be afraid?

A: You know, I – I – I – I'm not sure. You know, I – I think I was, you know, five and a half, you know, and – but I – I – I remember one time, this one time we jumped out of the cattle car and we were running, and my mother and I were running, you know, and I remember, you know, that she fell and I kept running ahead of her, you know. And she finally caught up with me, you know, and – and she – she was so upset with, you know, that – that – that I let go of her hand, you know, she got – a-as a matter of fact, one time – we had that discussion one time, my mother and I, and she kept saying, I kept hollering, you know [**speaks Yiddish here**] She kept saying it in Yiddish, you know. Why did you let go, why did you let go? She was so upset with me. [**indecipherable**] But yeah, that was – that – you know, until we got to **Ryevka**(ph), well, we – we he – we were on this cattle train, and – and finally when we got close to – on the **Volga** river, ma – we got off, and my mother found a job in a farm, she was helping out a farmer. And we were there for about oh, six or seven months or so.

Q: Where is **Ryevk**(ph), on the **Volga**, you say?

A: No, this is – yeah – no, **Ryevka**(ph) is way up in the – you know, in the **Ural** mountains. But before that, we were on a train, we – we came up and you know, we – close to the **Volga** river is where we got off, and we went up on some farm close to the **Volga** river.

Q: Do you remember that? Do you have any im-images from the farm?

A: I-I remember – I remember my mother, yeah, my mother working, you know, she – she milked the cows, she helped out – you know, and – and that's about the only **smegelings**(ph) of memory a – that – that I have.

Q: What was – I mean, what – was your f – was her family a farm family back in **Poland**?

A: No, no.

Q: So this was all new stuff for her.

A: Well, yeah, you know, I mean, I don't know how she knew that, you know, but – or how she learned it, but I – it was – yeah.

Q: Survival.

A: Survival is right.

Q: Survival.

A: But – but yeah, then when – when the – th-the ac – Nazis began the **Stalingrad** campaign, that's when we left from that area, because we were pretty close to **Stalingrad**, you know, an-and we wound up – well, demobilization was – had started, Russian were mobilizing, moving everything up, away from – as far as possible and setting up factories. And so they were getting – trying to get as many people into the **Ural** mountain areas, you know, to – to work on – in war factories.

Q: Effort, yeah.

A: You know, you know. And that's how we wound up in **Ryevka**(ph), you know, which is by **Ufa**, you know **Ufa**, you know.

Q: What memories do you have of that time?

A: Of – of – of **Ryevka**(ph)? I have – you know, I have quite a few memories of – of **Ryevka**(ph), you know, I – I – that's a – I remember very distinctly that the barracks, you know, and stuff, that we were put in, you know, and the – the tiny room what we shared with this other family, the – the **Gorky**(ph) family. So, the – the five of us were in this one tiny room, you know, and which is – was completely bare. And we had the straw mattress –

Q: Total strangers?

A: Total strangers, we never, you know, never met them before.

Q: Were they from **Poland** as well?

A: No, they were Russians. Why they wound up, who were they we – I don't know how they wound up, or why they – but they were Russians, you know. I mean, there was the **Gorky**(ph) family, you know, and – and the – they – you know, I think there was the mother, a daughter which was about 12, I guess, and – and a boy about my age, you know, the three of them. So the five of us were in this one tiny room, you know, and –

Q: And what language did you speak with one another?

A: Well, at that time, you know, since the Russians had occupied **Poland** for –

Q: Couple years, yeah.

A: – ye – you know, that – two years before too, and also the two years during, you know, we had picked up quite a bit of Russian. My mother, you know, could speak

Russian and Polish or Yiddish, and – well, there was the – as far as I know there were no Jews in – in – in that area, you know, I mean the – you know, so Yiddish never came up until somebody found out that I was Jewish, you know, and then they started teasing me and stuff, you know.

Q: We'll get to that – to that point. When – when you spoke alone with your mother though, was Yiddish your – the language that you spoke with one another in?

A: Oh yeah, yeah, that – that was our –

Q: Not Polish.

A: Not Polish, no.

Q: Not Polish.

A: Yeah, Yiddish was the language – my first language was Yiddish, you know. A little bit of Polish was spoken in the house, I understand, you know, because I – I knew some Polish, you know, but I didn't –

Q: It wasn't the language of conversation at home.

A: Exactly, you know, it was Yiddish. And you know, of course later on was all Russian, you know, so –

Q: And you picked up ru – you know, a five year and a half year old will pick up a language fairly quickly.

A: Right, mm-hm.

Q: Yeah. Did you go to school?

A: Yeah.



Q: Yeah?

A: Ye – well, in the – in – in the camp you're talking about?

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah, sure. You know, the – the work camp in re – in **Ryevka**(ph) was – everybody had to work, you know, they brought in all the people and of – all the kids attended school. So I was – I was attending the school, you know, while my mother was working, you know. And –

Q: So your first class is actually your beginning school –

A: It was Russian, yeah.

Q: It was Russian.

A: Yes.

Q: It was Russian. And is there anything that stands out from that time, when you were –

A: No, the –

Q: – a little kid in school in **Russia**?

A: No, the only thing that I – really stands out, you know, i-is – is I – the distinct time then when I first – the kids found out I was yid – Jewish, you know? And they started teasing me and – and beating me up, and –

Q: In a mean – in a mean way?

A: Oh yeah, you know, they – as far as we knew, we were the only Jews in there because my father had, you know, was able to get us on the – on this train. But there

may have been other ones, you know, the camp was so big, you know, there was thousands and thousands of people [indecipherable] over there.

Q: So you – so, early on, as – as a little kid who's a refugee, you – you get it twice?

A: Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Q: And, was your mother able to help or protect you, or – or pretty much you were on your own?

A: On me – on your own. She worked, you know, she'd come back from – from work, you know, they – they'd work 10 hour days at least, you know. And she'd come back, you know, and we had this tiny little room, you know. An-And the **Ural** mountains are so cold, you know, my memory of my mother for all those years is – is frozen, you know, you see – you see the icicles coming down her eyebrows and – and, you know, her – her fingers and hands frozen. She'd come in – she'd come from work an-and she'd sit down and she'd be shivering for, you know, a period of time where we'd cover her up with the – with the – the straw mattress that we had, and whatever we had we'd cover her up. She'd sit there shivering and then finally after awhile she would –

Q: Warm up just a little.

A: – warm up, you know, an-and she'd go an – you know, the barracks was set up, there was a kitchen all the way on the other end of the barracks, you know, and it was a common kitchen and when she finished warming up she would go to the kitchen and try to prepare whatever we could to eat, you know, so – so, yeah. But

my memory of – of my mother from all that period is that picture of her, you know, frozen, sitting there. She lost – she – one – her finger was frostbitten, she had – had to be amputated. So, yeah.

Q: What did she do? When she was working there, what did she do?

A: I – from what I understand, she was making some kind of ammunition, you know. I – I guess, you know, th-they weren't supposed to pass on any information, but she was making some kind of mi – ammunition. She was – it was a fact – it was a factory, you know.

Q: Did she have any energy left over to give to you as a little kid?

A: Not at all, no, she – you know, I mean, the day was basically – her day was basically she'd get up in the morning, go to work, you know, come back from work, you know, after many, many hours, tired as, you know, make something to eat, you know, and then fine – and fall asleep, and –

Q: The same thing repeated in –

A: – same – exactly, you know. That wa – that was –

Q: And when you – what was your day like? When did you get up? Did you get up before her, after her?

A: Yeah, we were all up at the same time, you know, because everybody – the barracks emptied out, you know, everybody had to go out either to school or to work, you know, and the – the barracks were –

Q: And did you walk to school by yourself?

A: No, th – well, there were other kids that wi – you know, but yeah, and we'd walk to school, you know, and –

Q: So, in other words, when she went – she went to work and you were on your own until she came home?

A: Exactly, yeah, yeah. That's all.

Q: Were you hungry?

A: Oh, I was – that was the big thing, you know, that was, you know, as I say, my – my two major memories of – of that period are – are first one, it was the cold, and the second one was the hunger, you know, I mean tha – I was always hungry. My mother – it – now, you may not be familiar with the way they operated in – in the – in the work camps, but basically the people would – who worked in the camps would get paid basically in potatoes, and flour, you know, that was – that was the staple. And – and once a month they would, you know, deliver this sack of potatoes and you know, sack th – a small sack of flour, and that was what you had to live on, you know, with – with the exception of if you exceeded a quota – you know, everybody had – had a quota to perform. If you exceeded the quota you got s – an additional staple, you know. And my mother, every couple of weeks she – she'd bring, you know, back a – a black bread that she got for –

Q: I was gonna ask you, yeah, did you get bread, did you get any cheese ever, or –

A: Occasionally we'd get cheese, you know. Every once in awhile the Russians transport would be – transports would come in and the Russians would distribute it

throughout that camp, and then they would distribute it. You know, they – they tried very hard to – to provide the pe – food for the people, but the war was raging, and I guess the – the front got the first aspect of it, you know. But yeah, whenever – you know, I – I remember very distinctly every once in awhile these trucks showing up, you know, and everybody got a piece of cheese, or everybody got a piece of salami, you know. and yeah, yeah. And that – that – that occurred. But for the most part, my – you know, as I say, my mother, she was very industrious, you know. She would find roots, and – and – and leaves you know, and she'd make root pancakes, or leaf pancakes. Every once in awhile she'd chop up a root, you know, an-and leaves, you know, so – yeah. We – we –

Q: I mean, the poor woman had to keep herself and you alive.

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: It's – it-it's a – it's really quite amazing.

A: Yeah, that's right. Now this, you know, as I say, I – I – I – when – when I – somebody asks me about this, you know, a-and I'll say, I'll tell you my story, but it's really not my story, it's my mother's story, you know. She's the one that – without her, I would have had no chance whatsoever. She's the one that – you know –

Q: How long did this go on?

A: For almost four and a half years, throughout the war.

Q: So from – from – so it's not more than – i-if you got there in 19 – what – what'd you say, '42?

A: '42 to '45, yeah, you know, so yeah. Wa – it was three years. Yeah, three years.

Q: So you were in – so you were in that camp for as long as the war lasted?

A: Throughout the war, yes.

Q: And when you were there, do you recall your feelings as a child? Did you feel fear, did you feel any safety, did you feel – yeah, i – was it when she came back in the evening that somehow or other, okay, things are best again, she's back, or – can you recall anything like that?

A: I don't – no, I can't recall that. I – I just – just don't remember any, you know, great times, you know. The only – the only good time that I remember from the – from the camp, you know, was – was when the camp commander would turn on the ra – the loudspeakers, and the radio would come on. And that was, I – I remember the best – the best of a – of everything that happened in – throughout the camp, you know, as radio –

Q: What would come on there?

A: The what?

Q: What would come on the radio there, what was there, music, or –

A: There'd be the – the – well, yeah, for the most part there would be – first there'd be the news, you know, of, you know, the – the Russian front is moving, you know, and the Russians are winning and all that kind of stuff. And then – then there would

be patriotic songs and melodies, you know, and that wou – that always made me feel good, you know, the – the – the songs and the melodies, you know, and –

Q: Did you make any friends in the camp?

A: Yeah. The – you know, it – well, I had that incident with – with – you know, when they first discovered I was Jewish, and they – they started teasing me and – and beating me up, you know. But that didn't last too long. You know, I mean, it – it dissipated and I – I had a couple of friends, you know, they were –

Q: Was this the first time that you realized there was something different about you?

A: Yeah, I didn't know what was going on except for the fact, you know, when they started teasing, you know, I – you know, as I said, my memories of Judaism – although my f – my grandfather was a Orthodox Jew. And the picture in here, you can – you can see, is – well, some place I've seen that he is wearing a yarmulke, you know, so he was an Orthodox Jew and – and my mother told me that – that they were Orthodox, that her parents were Orthodox. My father was not, you know, from what – what she told me, he – he was not religious. But, you know, an-and – and but I had very few memories of a young child, in th – you know, a –

Q: Yes.

A: – attending a – a – a event of some kind yet. And so when – when they first started teasing me and calling me, you know –

Q: **Jude.**

A: – **id**(ph), **zhid**(ph), **yefrai**(ph), you know, and all – all that you know, and – and started poking me and making – you know, beating me up and all that, I-I – I just didn't know what it was, you know, what was – what – what did I do? I mean, what is this?

Q: What's – what for, yeah.

A: Yeah, what – you know. A-And I – I remember that first night, you know, asking my mother [**indecipherable**] you know –

Q: Why?

A: – tell me, yeah, why is this, you know? And so she i – you know, I don't remember her exact comments, but I – I remember her trying to explain to me, you know, so – but yeah.

Q: What did she try – do you remember anything of – of what her explanation was?

A: You know, th-that something – you know, I – I – I remember her saying – saying something about anti-Semitism, but she didn't use the word anti-Semitism, but I – no, I can't really recollect the exact, you know, what – what she said.

Q: Do you remember – do you remember if it comforted you? I mean, the – the telling her, and her having some response, did that somehow or other, at least for that moment, okay, put it in a frame, gave you some – some comfort or anything like that?

A: Yeah, I just don't remember. You know, that – that – that –

Q: You don't remember. I know, these are – we're talking 60 years later –



A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: – seven – you know, almost –

A: Yeah, just don't remember it, you know. And I never, you know, never really thought about it in that way.

Q: Was there any sense at that time – or maybe she told you later, that there was something particular going on with Jews, that – either in **Poland** or in **Russia**, was – was there a sense that there – there's – there's a particular danger?

A: Oh yeah, you know, I mean when – when – right after the war ended, you know, the – and we came back to **Poland**, to – to **Sarny**, you know, th-that's –

Q: Oh, so you returned?

A: Oh yeah, yeah, we came back to – to **Sarny** after the war.

Q: And how were the a – so – but I mean, still in that work camp –

A: Mm-hm.

Q: – while you were still there before the war ended, and during – you know, when the – when this inci – did it happen more than once, this incident, was –

A: Oh yeah, yeah.

Q: A lot.

A: This went on – when it – when the first – I don't know how they found out that we were Jewish, but somebody – you know, somebody –

Q: Yeah.

A: – must have told the kids, and – and they started picking on me. And that went on for a period of time, and – you know – you know, it got – first couple of days was pretty bad, you know, and then – then it dissipated as time went on. And, you know, after awhile it just was – stopped, you know. So –

Q: But during this time, in the – in the work camp, there was no sense, or no talk that you could recall amongst the grownups that there was something particular that was happening to the Jews? Or do you recall that?

A: No, we th – for one thing, we really didn't know what was happening. We were, you know, all the way in the **Ural** mountains, you know, where – a-and the only information we had was that – the radio that would come on, and of course, that wouldn't be on there.

Q: The **Gorky**(ph) family, were they – were they easy to be with, even though they were strangers, or was this difficult?

A: Yeah, yeah, they'd – you know, the mother worked hard, like the same as my mother, and – you know, the – the boy was my age, so we were friends, you know, and we had chores that we would do together, and we would do ye – you know, like, for example, we had the buckets, the waste bucket in each room. And in the morning, you know, he would take the ba – waste bucket up one day and I would take it out the next day, take it to the pits, you know, and get rid of it, and so yeah, we – we were friends, you know, yeah.

Q: Did – did anybody ever steal your food?

A: No, I don't remember of us – an incident stealing food, but that was, you know, punishable by death.

Q: Even in a work camp?

A: Yeah, you know, you steal somebody else's food, you know, you –

Q: You're not going to survive.

A: You're not going to survive, you know, so yeah. No, I don't remember of us ever have any incident at all, you know.

Q: So how was it that you could return to **Poland**? Once you were in the **Ural** mountains, what happened after the war –

A: Well, when the war finished, everybody started – you know, they didn't need any more workers in the – in the – you know, th-they – so everybody started going home, and took us months and months of walking and catching rides, and – and – and –

Q: So, you had no train transportation, you – was all on your own energy?

A: Yeah, pretty much so, because you know, you got – I don't know, the camp was so gigantic, I would say at least 50 - 100,000 people there, you know. And everybody was going their own way. And, you know, of course you couldn't do it in the winter, you know, but su – as soon as the spring came, you know, the – a couple of months of sist – of summer that occurred in the **Ural** mountains, everybody started going home. You know, and of course, you know, there's – just

weren't enough trains, or I don't know, there weren't any trains that were taking people home, you know, but yeah, people started walking home.

Q: So, do you remember that, do you remember when you left the camp?

A: I remem – I remember wal – well, not exactly when I left the camp. I remember walking and I remember, you know, places we used to – some places we stopped, I remember, and you know, and I remember, y-you know, like the – when we – when we got to the – to – to certain places, you know, we'd stop a-a-an-and go to bombed out houses, or – or destroyed places, and go into those and sleep in there, and try to, you know, and walk the next day.

Q: Did you –

A: And there were –

Q: How'd you feed yourselves?

A: The what?

Q: How'd you feed yourselves on such a long journey home?

A: Yeah, and there – you know, as I say, there was always – there was always some kind of a barter system that was going on. You know, people kept bartering, you know, and I don't know if there – it was – it was the nearby farms, or what, you know? The – the nearby areas that there – but there was always – so I remember, you know, every once in awhile we'd – we'd catch a ride, you know, or if – you know, and – and I remember one time we were on a train, on a cattle car, and we'd stopped at this station, and there was a – another train, th-the next – the next

railroad track, and were all Russian soldiers, they were returning from – from the – you know, from the war, basically. A lot of them were, you know, bandaged up and etcetera, but they – I remember that distinctly, but th – at that point my mother and the Russian soldiers were selling cans of fat, you know, that chicken – you know, I mean, animal fat. And my mother – and it would – they weren't closed cans, they were cans that were – they filled up with fat, you know. And my mother somehow bartered with one of the soldiers for this small can of – of what – lard, I guess, you know, it was – and she you n – gave up whatever she had and she bought this small can of – of lard. And you know, soon as the trains left, you know, my – my mother started making – she had –

Q: Something with it.

A: – grabbed it – with – started – and it turned out there was only an inch of – of lard, and the rest was all potatoes, you know, pota – you know, mashed potatoes, that stuff.

Q: Oh.

A: Yeah, that was a disappointing event. Very disappointing.

Q: To be tricked like that.

A: Yeah, yeah, you know. But, you know, it was rough times, rough times.

Q: And was there much contact – I mean, aside from finding a place to sleep, and a place to – a-and something to eat, do you have any memories of people that you – whose paths you crossed on this way home, on this way back to **Sarny**?

A: No, everybody was so anxious to get home, you know, everybody, you know – you know, you walked, you [indecipherable]

Q: You were crossing through **Ukraine**, weren't you? Wasn't it the **Ukraine** that you were going through? Isn't that –

A: Well, no –

Q: – the route? Or, how would you get – how were you going?

A: The **Ural** – you know, from the **Ural** mountains, you know, we – we wound up going – yeah, I guess it may have been the **Ukraine**, I'm no – I'm not quite sure that – of the route, you know, what routes we took.

Q: Because, I – I guess what I'm leading up to is that, if it was the **Ukraine**, then you were passing through some of the worst ravaged areas, where – where the war was, you know, had been particularly brutal.

A: Yeah.

Q: And of course, the massacres of Jews –

A: Yeah.

Q: – were particularly brutal.

A: Right.

Q: And I wondered if you ever came across any of that as you were coming home?

A: You know, I must have, but you know, I – so much got blocked out that I – I – you know, most of – most of the horrible events, I just don't remember, you know. Just don't remember.

Q: And it took you – do you remember the month that you left the **Urals**?

A: Had to be in the spring, because it was just too cold

Q: And th – and – and the war ended May n – May ninth, I believe it was, so –

A: Right, yeah. So, yeah, it was shortly after the war ended. Must have been jul – June or July or something like that, that I would say, because we were there for a period – the little period longer after the war ended, you know, s-so –

Q: And you were already nine, right?

A: I was nine, yeah in – it's right, yeah.

Q: And – and there was no problem about returning to **Poland**, officially, in other words, because so many people couldn't.

A: Yeah.

Q: Once they got to the sovi – then they couldn't leave the **Soviet Union**.

A: No, we – we got there, you know, an-and yeah. I – I remember very distinctly my mother scouring, looking the streets, you know, says, well, something's on this street, but the buildings were all destroyed, so she couldn't tell where the house was, you know. And she kept running around you know, and – and you know, she was in very disheveled and upset, you know, that she couldn't find the house. And you know, I guess finally she got oriented and came to where she thought the house was, but it wasn't there any more, it was destroyed, everything was destroyed, you know [indecipherable]. And – and that's when we learned about what happened to the rest of the family, she –

Q: Do you – did you – were you part of that, or did you hear it from second telling?

I mean, how she learned and – and – and from whom?

A: Yeah, I – you know, I – I heard some of the stuff from – from you know, whoever she talked to, I would be with her, you know.

Q: Okay.

A: And –

Q: Do you have any particular memories of that?

A: Not really. Not really.

Q: But you – but you – but you recall that the information sort of came, and it started to dawn that there was nobody left.

A: Yeah, yeah, you know, we'd get – you know, my mother kept running around from – you know, trying to find people, trying to do – find out what happened to so and so. And she'd run into somebody who – who knew something or told her something, you know, and that's how it built, you know. And –

Q: Did she find any people whom she had known before the war?

A: She must have found some, but none of them were Jewish, you know –

Q: Yeah.

A: – it's a – so, whoever she found, they were –

Q: There would have been distance.

A: – were not Jewish, yeah. right.

Q: They would have been more distant.



A: Right.

Q: And do you remember where you stayed when you came back there?

A: Yeah, I – I – I – you know, I remember that, you know, there was a bombed out building, and we found a corner in that building, you know, and there were other families all over, too. And we were there for, I don't know, for a period of time, I don't know exactly how long. There was – well, what was also happening at the same time is that, I guess some of the Zionists were trying to organize people to go to – to **Palestine**, to go to **Israel**, you know. And so, there was an organizing affect going on at the – at the same time, so we got – we got involved with those people, with those – an-and began our journey to – to **Austria**, you know, to the –

Q: So you – you first went to **Palestine** before coming to the **United States**?

A: No, no, no, no, no.

Q: No? Okay.

A: No, wha-what happened is that we – what – what these guys, these people, the organizers were doing is getting people into displaced person camps, into the **DP** camps. So a – then the **DP** camp for – for the – **Israel**, was in **Hallein** by **Salzburg**, near **Salzburg**, you know. And so we began the journey through to – to **Hallein**, and you know, that took months also, you know, I mean, there was **[indecipherable]** stops and walk, you know, some – some walking, some – but that was more organized, you know, it had – they would have trucks occasionally, and they would have trains occasionally, yeah. And there was fr –

Q: So there was no reas – yeah, there was no reason for her to stay in –

A: No, no, no after – you know, after a period of time, we were there, you know, she – she – you know, the family is gone, you know. But she – she – you know, she knew that she had two sisters though, in the **United States**, you know, so – but you know, it took a long time – well, until we got – when we got into – into south sp – into **Hallein**, we finally got involved with **UNRRA**, and th-the – you know, and the people who – who were trying to find others, you know, a-and so –

Q: It's – it's a – I mean, you went from one set of mountains, the **Ural** mountains –

A: Yeah.

Q: – to another set of mountains, the **Alps**.

A: Exactly, yeah.

Q: You know? The area around **Salzburg** is really quite beautiful.

A: It is, yeah, very nice.

Q: And – and – and yet, the circumstances are anything but.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: When did the food improve?

A: The what?

Q: When did food improve, that you would be able to have enough to eat, that you didn't feel hungry.

A: Oh, i-i-it – it – well, that – that never – well, until we got to **Hallein**, it – it didn't. You know, I mean, we kept getting more, but it was – it was always the

hoarding, you know, carrying whatever you could in your pockets, you know, and – and – and when we finally got to the **DP** camp in **Hallein**, you know, it was originally run by the – by the army, you – **U.S.** Army, and they had the – the gigantic kitchens, you know, and all the – all the food that you could eat, you know, and –

Q: That was the first time.

A: That was – that was the beginning, yeah. That was the good life, you know.

Q: How long were you there?

A: Almost four years.

Q: Oh my. That's a long time.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: And this was all – **Hallein** was by **Salzburg**?

A: Yeah, it is by **Salzburg**, mm-hm.

Q: So, did you go to school there too?

A: Yeah, what – what was happening in – in – you know, in the camps, you know, is – is – because we were in a camp that was designated to – for – for **Israel**, you know, everybody had to learn Hebrew, everybody had to learn a job. So, my mother, she was going to school to become a seamstress, you know, I was attending a school in – totally in Hebrew, everything was spoken in Hebrew, etcetera. And – you know, so everybody had to become productive, you know, and – to be ready for – to go to **Israel**. And, so yeah, that was – that was a tremendous improvement

compared to – to everything else, you know. The army provided us with clothes, they provided – I mean, the **UNRRA**, at the end provided us with cl-clothes and food and, you know. We had movies, I remember movies, you know –

Q: What were the movies?

A: Y-You know, the exact movie I don't remember, but I remember cowboy pictures, you know.

Q: Okay.

A: You know, you know. And something like, you know, I think it might have been a **John Wayne** movies or something like that, you know [indecipherable]

Q: But you know, it's really unusual, I don't know how many people would have been in a camp, a work camp in the **Urals** –

A: Mm-hm.

Q: – you know, and at the same time at a – for three or four years.

A: Yeah.

Q: And then after that end up in a camp run by the **U.S.** Army and **UNRRA** –

A: Right.

Q: – you know, near the **Alps** –

A: Right.

Q: – for another three or four years.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: So the 40s were basically spent in camps, and walking between those camps.

A: Exactly, exactly. Yeah, yeah.

Q: And what about – what about in – in this camp? I mean, clearly, because it was – it was more Jewish –

A: Mm-hm, only Jewish.

Q: – you wouldn't be picked on because you were –

A: Yeah.

Q: – you – but were there – was it friendly, was it warmer, was it more accepting?

Was it – or did it have its own difficulties as well?

A: You know, I mean like – like any bureaucracy, and there were buroc – bureaucracies there, you know, you had to follow certain rules and regulations, you know, but that was – that was a good life for me, you know. I – I remember e – attending school, and meeting a lot of kids my age, you know, and – and running around and doing pranks and – and en-enjoying myself, you know. Then, I was – that was

Q: And were the grownups talking about what had just happened in the war?

A: They – they – you know, they didn't talk much about it at all, you know, I mean they were just kind of tight-lipped, you know, very, very hard to get over. They would – you know, they would do a lot of, as they say in Yiddish, **khasen**(ph), you know, they would say – that sigh. They would sigh, and – and look at each other and say – you know, and say things that – they understood each other. They

understood what had transpired. You didn't have to discuss it, you know. And so, yeah, it's not – my –

Q: And so that yo – it wasn't like as kids you could pick up on some conversations that were transpiring and – and – and kind of hear it that way.

A: Yeah, wasn't much of that going on, you know, I mean, just they didn't want to talk about it, you know, as they – I mean, my mother very seldom talked about it, you know, so – you know, every once in awhile was –

Q: She must have had such a hard time.

A: Yeah, you know, every once in awhile you know, something what happened, and it's – would offset people, and say, oh, not that Nazi situation, you know

[**indecipherable**] and – but for the most part, that wasn't – wasn't discussed. So –

Q: When did you – where did – where did you go from from **Hallein**?

A: Well, while we were – we came to the **United States**, but actually we – we went to **Germany** first, you know, and we went out of – we took a ship out of

**Bremenhaven**(ph). But what had transpired is that my mother, you know, at

**UNRRA**, and that was able to find my mother's two sisters, and – and the – in – in the **United States**, a-and they immediately sent us visas, you know, and –

Q: Where did they live?

A: Well, one of them was in **Boston**, and one was in **New York City**. But I-I remember that day, you know, then – when – when – when we got that letter from the, I-I guess through **UNRRA**, you know, we got a letter from the **United States**,

and my aunts, you know, they found my aunts, you know. And my mother was so excited. I remember she was dancing, she was jumping, you know, she was so – that was the – the –

Q: Well, it was the first feast of – first piece of good news –

A: That's right, the first –

Q: – in years.

A: – that's ri – exactly. You know, I – I – you know, I have such a vivid memory of her jumping around and dancing, you know, I-I hadn't seen her in – you know, never saw her dancing and jumping around, you know. She – she was just overjoyed. But yeah, that was –

Q: Was she wa – was she normally – I mean, normally, what could one say normally? Was she a happy person?

A: You know, I th – th – she – she kept her spirits up, but I – you know, ha – there wa – there wasn't any occasion for her to dance, or – or –

Q: I understand.

A: – or – or to be happy about, you know, I mean, she was –

Q: Even – even in asking that question, I realize that the circumstances, ha – who would be happy during any of this?

A: Right, but –

Q: But you know, there – there are people who – who have an optimistic disposition, and people who are – have a sadder disposition. That was –

A: Yeah. No, she was more optimistic, I would say, you know –

Q: But, it sounds –

A: – a – you know, she's –

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah, yeah, she definitely, you know, I mean she kept saying, you know, this too will pass, you know, this too will pass, you know. Do-Don't – don't – don't worry, we'll have better times, you know.

Q: It sounds like she had to be so strong.

A: Oh, sure.

Q: I mean, how else could she have survived –

A: Exactly.

Q: – and with – and – and with you –

A: Exactly, yeah.

Q: – as well, you know, as a little boy?

A: Exactly.

Q: And so, from the time you got the letter, that meant then you also had the ability to get to the **United States**, and you didn't –

A: Well, they immediately sent us – well, immediately, I don't know how much time transpired, but they sent us a visa right away, you know, for the **United States**, and we said – we thought, well, next month we're going to – to **United States**. Of course, we di-didn't know about the quota.



Q: Okay.

A: **United States** had a quota, you know, for only a certain amount of people from each country of origin, you know, and the Polish –

Q: Quota.

A: – quota was in – very long, the list was very long, and we just had to wait, you know, **United States** was allowing a **smedgling**(ph) of people to come in from each country. And so – so we waited all that time to come.

Q: And ni – and so it was actually she got the letter fairly soon, and then it was another couple of years before you could leave, was that it?

A: Yeah, yeah, you know, there's a – well, we came here in '51.

Q: Oh, wow.

A: Yeah.

Q: And you were in that camp from '46 or '47?

A: '46 - '47 to '51 almost, yeah.

Q: That's a long time.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Going through **Germany** –

A: Yeah.

Q: – do you have any recollections of what that was like –

A: N-No –

Q: – to get to **Bremerhaven**?

A: Well, yeah, it's just – it's just – you know, ha – th-the – the horrible feeling inside, you know, I mean here – here is the country that destroyed your family, destroyed – you know, so – but there wasn't much discussion again, you know, and again, what happened is that we came out of **Hallein** by, I-I – I think was trucks, an- and got to another camp close by. And we were there six months before we could even get on a ship. You know, so you know, finally, we got on the **SS Stewart**(ph), and I still have my – my boarding pass and –

Q: Oh, really?

A: Oh yeah, still have all the documentation, you know, and with the picture of my mother and me, you know, and – and I left out that my mother got remarried in the camp, so when I was – when I was 13 I had my Bar Mitzvah in the camp, you know, and – and –

Q: Where was your stepfather from?

A: He was from **Tourettes**. His name was **Touretteski**(ph) and he was from **Tourettes**, you know. And he had lost – he had a wife and two children, and lost them as well, you know. And he – he was originally in a – in a camp, and I don't know the name of the camp, you know, but I have – a-and he broke out and he was with the partisans for about two and a half years or three years he was with the partisans. And as a matter of fact, I have a picture of him with a partisan group.

Q: What was his name?

A: **Aron Touretteski**(ph).

Q: Oh, I'm sorry, you just said ar – okay. And he was with the part – was it in

**Poland**, the partisan group, or do you –

A: I'm not quite sure, it's ni – I have the feeling it was more in the **Ukraine**, you know. That is, you know – but I'm not quite sure.

Q: Did he talk to you at that point about any of these experiences?

A: No, no, room – as I say, people –

Q: They didn't.

A: – people didn't talk, you know, they just didn't talk. Nobody sat down, you know, and like we were – you're doing right now and – and try to pull it out of – you know, of you, you know, and it just wasn't happening, it wasn't happening.

Q: So when you got to **Bremerhaven** –

A: Mm-hm.

Q: – where did you f – where did the ship take you? Where did you get to, to the **United States**, what part of the **United States** –

A: Oh, we came to the **United States**, to – to **New York City**, to pier 51. That was –

Q: So your first place was **New York City**?

A: Yeah, and my first vision of new yo – of **America** was the Statue of Liberty, you know, you – everybody was on the ship, you know, outside, looking at the Statue of Liberty.

Q: And you were how old?

A: I had 15 something, 15 and a half. Yeah, I was gonna be sixt – that's right, yeah, 15 and a half.

Q: How many languages did you speak by that point? It was quite a few, wasn't it?

A: Well, at that point, I spoke Russian, you know, and I spoke Hebrew, and I spoke Yiddish and you know, that was – that was –

Q: And so – and English was gonna be added to that.

A: Yeah, it took – took – took few months before I could communicate with it – with the kids over here. Yeah, the kids were, you know, when – when we got here, you know, and one of the – one of the major memories that stands out about the **United States** is my first day here in the **United States**, a-and, you know, we hid – yeah, I got a – my mother – we had gone to sleep and my – my aunts had provided me with – with clothing for the next day, you know.

Q: So it was the first time you met your aunts, too.

A: Yes, oh yeah. So that was a long evening, you know, but we were so tired and stuff, you know, and you know, first time at my aunts, and the rest of the family and all that. But – but the next morning, I-I got up very early, you know, and – before everybody else was up, you know, and I says, hey, my aunts had provided me with white pants, and white shirt, white sneakers, you know, and I – I – I – I went outside, you know, a-and nobody was stopping me, and – and I went and, you know, was – the sun was shining, it was just breaking, you know, and the sun was

shining, and I says, this must be heaven, you know? You know, it was – this is –  
that was a very distinct memory of mine, you know, so –

Q: What part of brook – was it **Brooklyn**, was it –

A: **Brooklyn**, yeah.

Q: Yeah?

A: Yeah, **Hopkinson**(ph) Avenue, mm-hm.

Q: I lived in **Brooklyn** myself –

A: Did you?

Q: – for 10 years.

A: Oh?

Q: Not – not – not near there. I lived closer to **Brooklyn Heights**.

A: Oh, okay.

Q: Yeah, and I also have those feelings about **Brooklyn**.

A: Yeah, yes, yes, I understand.

Q: It's a wonderful [indecipherable]

A: Right, yeah.

Q: And, well, did you stay in **New York** after you came to the **States**?

A: Yeah, yeah, we stayed, you know, the – my aunts in – my aunt from **New York**,  
you know, she'd had a basement, and then she set up a little apartment downstairs,  
you know, a little – and that's where we stayed. And my mother and stepfather went  
to work within – within the week, you know, and they started working in a garment

factory. [inaudible] And the summer yet, you know, so I – I had the summer, and then –

Q: Went to school.

A: – went to school, yeah, you know. I had a rough time because I wasn't speaking English yet, you know, and I had some – my – my – one of my cousins, she spoke Yiddish, you know, and I – so she took me to **Tilden** High School to register me for high school, because I was almost 16, you know. So – and we went to – to one office, you know, and then they kept talking, and – and they kept asking her, how old is he, you know. And she asked me in Yiddish the first time, you know, how old, you know. So I tell her I'm going to be 16 in February, and she would say it to them –

Q: Translate.

A: – translate it, you know. And after awhile they send us to another office, and the same questions came up, you know, she said again, he's gonna be 16 in February. And about the third office, you know, the same thing happened, you know. I mean, I don't know why we kept going from office to office, but they kept sending us from, you know, I guess different interviews. And finally I said, he's gonna be 16 in February. So, yeah, you know.

Q: So, a bit of bureaucracy to get into school.

A: Right, right, well they – you know, they didn't – they had [indecipherable] you know, they didn't know what to do with me.

Q: How did your mother's life evolve then, in the **United States**?

A: You know, she was – she was quite happy. You know, I mean, my father and I – my stepfather and I, rather a-and – no-not I, my fath – my gran – my stepfather and she worked all the time, you know, and they worked in the same factory, so they had common – you know, they – they – they traveled together, they came back together and they got along well. We – you know, all the cousins and stuff, you know, tried to give us moral support as much as – as possible, so we'd see them quite often, we'd go to different families, you know, so yeah, she di – she – she did all right, she –

Q: Did they stay in **Brooklyn**?

A: They stayed in **Brooklyn**, yeah, through the – you know, so I – yeah, and –

Q: And did – did the – when – did the question of what had happened during World War II every come up in those years?

A: Yeah, I guess the – there must have been discussions, because my mother, I remember all the adults sitting around the table, you know, in – in my aunt's house, you know, and sitting around the table, and they were asking her questions, what happened to so and so, what happened to so and so? And she wa – always, you know, from what I overheard, you know, I wasn't part of the conversation, but she always would say the same thing, you know, I mean, I don't know, you know. All I know is that they're not around any more. They're – they're not – you know, and – and whatever information she gathered, you know, from when we were in **Sarny**,

that there was no documentation or anything to – you know. The only – the only documentation, and the reason my mother was able to get remarried, is because there was the person that saw my father at **Stalingrad**, she was able to get ahold of – and – and he wrote a letter which was accepted by –

Q: That's she's actually a widow.

A: And that she's a widow, right, you know. So, that was the only – an-and – you know, documentation that we – I still have that, as a matter of fact, you know, in **[indecipherable]** the – the American government was kind of lenient, you know, on documentation at that point, because they – they knew the situation, they knew what was – was available, and you know, what was available and what wasn't, you know, so I mean – so –

Q: Did you get on with your stepfather?

A: Yes, yes, we – you know, we – we didn't have any problems at – at all, you know.

Q: Was he a – was – did he fill in at least some o – a role of somebody who –

A: Well, you know, it – you know, he was – I don't know. I seemed to be self-sufficient all the time, you know, I – I – I didn't have many – how would I say? The feeling requirements that some people have, you know, I – I didn't – I –

Q: Well, it sounded like you were forced to be resourceful from the time you were at the camp in – in – in the **Urals**.

A: Yeah, pretty much so, yeah, pretty much so, yeah, pretty much so.



Q: And how long – how long did your mom still live in **Brooklyn**?

A: She – she lived until she passed away 10 years ago, she –

Q: Oh.

A: Yeah, mm-hm.

Q: So a good, long time.

A: Yeah, mm-hm.

Q: Did she ever go into any detail about what had gone on?

A: No. Never did, you know, I mean s – I say – you know, after she passed away and we started doing a genealogy, my wife and I, and I kept saying, why didn't I talk to her, you know? Cause that link – and as I say, we started writing to people and trying to find out, and as a matter of fact, we took trips to try to talk to cousins who may have spoken to somebody, an-and try to gather as much as we could, and – and didn't get much.

Q: Why did – why did it become interesting for you? Why did it become important for you?

A: You know, it is – it's – it's like you're missing part of your – part of the chain, you know, you – you've – you've got history of some kind, you know and then all of a sudden it's broken. You – but specifically why did it become important? I don't know, it's just – it just **[indecipherable]** and I – just something in me that needed to find out more, you know, and still do.

Q: And is there anything that you did find out more? Even if it's not enough, was there anything that you did find out that you hadn't known before?

A: No, we had – you know, as I say to – just as a matter of fact, recently I had gotten the email from one of the people I've been trying to get ahold of. Really haven't found out anything about my father, you know, I mean I just haven't been able to make that connection. And all the people that I get ahold of nowadays, you know, seem to be second generation or third generation, and they don't know what happened, you know, so when you try to find out well, are we cousins, distant cousins or something like that, are you – how is the family tree over here? What is the – it just – it just –

Q: It – somewhere it –

A: – doesn't – it doesn't come true, it doesn't happen, you know. It just breaks up, you know, i-it just is – so I've been –

Q: Have you – has there been any – I don't know how the – the Russian services work, but do they have the kind of services where you'd be able to find out, you know, where was he stationed, or where –

A: Yeah. No, they – they – you know, they were so disorganized, and their documentation was so horrible, and – and – and they buried people wherever they could, you know, I mean – and there was no documentation, you know, I mean there were trenches, and buried in trenches and they didn't know who they were

burying, you know. So, yeah, no – no, I haven't been able to – you know – it's – you know, so –

Q: And no trips back to this part of the world?

A: Well, yeah, and you know, and – we went – three years ago we went to **Austria**, and I went specifically to find **Hallein**. See, my memory of **Russia** isn't that strong any more, you know, but of **Austria** and **Hallein** it still is, you know, and then the – and we went to **Hallein** and tried to find where – we knew the camp is gone, you know, I mean, but we tried to find where it was. And we kept going from – from one office to another, where was the camp, etcetera, an-and – and I – nobody knew, you know. And finally I went to this one travel agent, you know, travel bureau, and went to them, you know, and then kept talking to the people in – at the desk, you know, and somebody in the back, a young lady in the back heard our discussion. And she finally says, oh yes, yeah, it was an **Juden** camp. You know, she – she knew about the – Grandfather had told me about this Jew camp – Jewish camp that used to be here. And it was on so and so **strasse**, you know, and – and there's a little plaque someplace now, where the camp was. You know, so we went looking for the camp, we never – wen – or for this – for the plaque, you know, never found it.

Q: Well – you never found the plaque?

A: No, she – she wasn't that exact. She – she thought it was, you know, on so and so street, but it could have been on another street, you know, and –

Q: And so it's built over.

A: Yeah, totally, you know, it's all **[indecipherable]** buildings that 50 or 60 years later, you know. **[inaudible]**

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah, yeah, so – yeah.

Q: Is there anything from this that you would like to add from what I've – you know, from what we've talked about? Is there anything I haven't asked that you think is important to be a part of this interview?

A: Can't think of anything specific. The – you know, the thing that is – is – is – that the hatred, you know, to overcome all that hatred is just, you know, I-I – that people would do that to – to each other is just unbelievable, you know, and it's just hard –

Q: Is it something you had inside for a long time?

A: You know, I guess, you know, I mean th-the – the – th-the thing from the – from **Ryevka**(ph), the thing that still stands out in my mind is that incident with the kids, you know, of them taunting me and – and – and calling me, you know, **evra**(ph) – **zhid**, you know, and – and –

Q: Which is a terrible – in – in Russian it's a terrible epithet.

A: Yeah, you know, so th – that kind of hatred – and I – and I knew the kids were – didn't know what they were doing, you know, but somehow that was passed on to them, you know? Because I don't think they've had that much in – in – those young kids of – that had that much exposure to – to Jews for them to know what to – to

even know that they should hate me, or why they hated me, you know, or why they kept calling me names. And I think that's why it dissipated, because they didn't really know, didn't have the hatred, it was something that was passed onto them from – from their parents or – or – you know, from adults, that it's – it's all right to pick on Jews, you know, and that thing. So that's why I think it stopped after a period of time, because it wasn't something that came from them, it was passed on to them.

Q: But still, the circumstances couldn't have been – you know, you're five and a half, six years old, something like that. Your mother was powerless to try and help you, she's barely keeping alive.

A: Yeah.

Q: And in the middle of a war, and you know, and what is a young – what is a young kid to do?

A: Yeah.

Q: You know? You –

A: Yeah.

Q: What is a young kid to do to make sense of it? You – you can't not be vulnerable.

A: That's right.

Q: In – in future – you know, as you grow older, you can try and build a wall around yourself a bit, but at that age, it's just –

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Yeah, that's what – that's what that inexplicable sort of like he – what do you do with that?

A: Yeah.

Q: What do you do with that?

A: Yeah. Oh.

Q: Has – you said you were at another conference before –

A: Mm-hm.

Q: – the one in **Michigan**, and this is your second one.

A: Right.

Q: What did that give you?

A: You know, I just – the idea that, you know, I'm not alone. There are others that have the same thoughts, you know, and most of these people that are – you'll – you'll meet here, they're trying to find out what they've missed, you know, they – you know, they're trying to find out – you know, most of them – some of them were hidden children, they don't know what was going – didn't know what was going on, but they know they lost something and they don't know what it is, you know. And some of them, of course, are very damaged by it, because they were old enough to understand. And so –

Q: Do you have kids?

A: Oh yeah, I have –

Q: And – and –

A: – I have four boys –

Q: – and do they – are they curious, do they want to know, do they explore, do they – you know, are they connected to this story?

A: Yeah, y-y-you know. They – they – they ask questions, you know, much more than I ever did of my mother and father, you know. So – so, yeah. Yeah, and – and one of our – I guess, you know, some things ya – are kind of passed on whether you like it or not, you know. I-I remember – I have four sons, you know, and I remember **Eric**, my th – my third son, one day, you know, we were going out to buy a – a car, and he was a young child yet, you know. And I remember we – we were looking at **Volkswagens**, and he said, Dad, you're not gonna buy a German car, are you? He was so upset about that, you know. You know, so he knew – na – unintentionally I-I conveyed that feeling to him, which I didn't intend to, you know. So, you know.

Q: Well, some things are, you know –

A: Yeah.

Q: – they're kind of tough.

A: Yeah.

Q: Have you ever been back to **Germany**?

A: Yeah, I've been a number of times back, but not for – you know, just primarily for business, yeah.

Q: And was it difficult to be there?

A: You know, **Germany** has got some very nice places to – to visit, etcetera, you know, and I kept concentrating on those, you know, rather than – and – and I did go to concentration camps, and I did go – you know, we've been to a number of them. So, we got a feeling of the horror, and – and what transpired, you know, it just doesn't go away. It – it comes back to you regardless. But I – I – you know, I can't – I – I can't continue to – to have that feeling. I – I don't want to have that feeling, you know, I – you know, the young kids that are coming out of **Germany**, they had no part of it, you know, and so – a-an-and hopefully we're conveying enough information to them that they won't make the same mistakes, you know? So, yeah.

Q: And **Poland**?

A: The what?

Q: Did you back to **Poland**?

A: No, we've never gone – no, never went back to **Poland**, you know.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: I keep wanting to do that, but somehow, haven't made it.

Q: Well, these – the-these trips also, they take a lot out of one.

A: Yeah.

Q: Not only out of your pocketbook, but an awful lot out of one.

A: Yes, right, right.

Q: So you have to kind of prepare for them.



A: Right.

Q: But you know, thank you. Thank you very much for sharing today. I – I very much appreciate it, and if there are any follow up questions, I also appreciate that I might be able to get in touch with you –

A: Sure, sure.

Q: – and so on?

A: Yeah, any time.

Q: Thank you.

A: You're welcome.

Q: So, this concludes the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Ira Segalewitz** on November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2008. Thank you

### **Conclusion of Interview**