United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Rene Slotkin
September 18, 1997
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Rene Slotkin, conducted by Regina Baier on September 18, 1997 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in New York, NY 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.

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Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jeff and Toby Herr collection. This is an interview with Rene Slotkin, conducted by Regina Baier on September 18th, 1997 at Mr. Slotkin's home in New York City. This is a follow-up interview to the USHMM videotaped interview, conducted with Rene Slotkin on April 24th, 1995. The United States Holocaust Museum gratefully acknowledges Jeff and Toby Herr for making this interview possible. This is tape number one, side A. Let's start with what your name was originally and what it is now.

Answer: My name originally was Rene Guttman and today I'm Rene Slotkin, my adopted name.

Q: And when were you born and where?

A: I was born December 21st, 1937, in Tepledseshanof, Czechoslovakia.

Q: Where -- whereabouts is that?

A: That's north -- north of Prague. I understand now that that was a barbel Jewish community at the time. And then my next rec -- my only recollection -- I don't have recollection of Tepledseshanof, I do have recollection of Prague, as where we spent our time before the war.

Q: This interview will focus on your life experience after liberation, through the present day. However, would you tell us, just very briefly, a little bit about your family before the war?

A: My memories are very, very hazy about family before the war. I just have little vignettes of happenings, that happened with my sister -- us playing on the porch, a storm, a staircase, me falling on a staircase and hurting my chin, requiring some kind of very burning ointment to -- to heal it. I honestly don't remember my mother. I remember our surrounding, somewhat -- the apartment, or -- I do not remember my mother, my father.

Q: But how large was your family? So you had a twin sister?

A: I ha -- I had a twin sister and there was my mother and my father. All this is now confirmed by the pictures that we have. We were very, very lucky to be able to obtain pictures of the four of us, of the three of us, of the two of us, in that way.

Q: What happened then, when you were forced to -- away from your home? Where -- where did you go?

A: First time away from home was we were taken to Theresienstadt. That was with my mother only, my father had been taken away from us months or maybe a year before. Time, to me didn't really register too well. But we were taken to Theresienstadt, my mother, my sister and myself. That's my first memory of being away from -- from our apartment in Prague.

Q: And do you know now when that was, roughly?

A: I now know, yes. It was at the beginning of ‘43 or the end of ‘42. That’s roughly the time frame. And we were there almost a year, before they took us from there to Auschwitz.

Q: In Theresienstadt you were together with your mother and your sister?

A: Yes, we were together as a family, we lived as a family.

Q: Did you go through the Auschwitz experience also together with both of them?

A: Well, what I know now, is that we were taken to Auschwitz. It was the winter of ‘43, December ‘43. We did live together for a couple of months until that Czech lager was disbanded and must have been exterminated, except for the exception of some twins and some people that they needed for either work or experiments. So, up to that point we lived together, after that we were separate. My mother was gone at this point. My sister and I were separated because we lived according to our sexes.

Q: Tell me a little bit about the -- the days or the time leading up to liberation. What -- in what kind of state were you, in ph-physical, mental state. Can -- do you have any recollections?

A: I can’t really tell you what I looked like or what I real -- I felt like -- it felt the same to me all the time, but externally I could tell that there was an activity in the camps that wasn’t there always before. The soldiers were much more lax, there were more numerous air raids. There was arterler -- artillery fire that you could hear in -- in the -- on the horizons and they we -- it was not as orderly as it was just bef -- during -- it wasn’t as orderly as it was before.

Q: Do you remember any -- any particular sounds, or any particular intense images from that time?

A: Sounds -- just a drone of the aircraft and artillery, but nothing else, sound-wise, no.

Q: And when liberation came, what happened? What happened then?

A: Well, liberation to me specifically came while we were on the march and we were being marched out of the camp, destination who knows and people were having a very hard time. It was -- it was winter, snow was on the ground and anybody that fall out of line or couldn't keep it up, they ju -- they would just kill. They were shot or pushed overboard and that was the end of them. That kept up for a very long time, I can't tell you exactly how much, but it was on for a very, very long time and all of a sudden the -- our German guards disappeared, they were gone. And we were surrounded by Russian soldiers dressed in white and that was -- that was the liberation.

Q: Do you remember what happened then, how they treated you?

A: Well, the Russians -- the memory that I have, they marched us off into a -- into a food warehouse and there was a general stampede for -- for everything that you could get your hands on and I being very little, I couldn't really get through to anything, except I do remember very distinctly, being able to grab a hold of a gold can of something and -- and rolling it in front of me. It turned out to be sauerkraut when we opened it afterwards.

Q: Did you eat it, did you taste it?

A: I don't remember. I must -- the smell of it I remember, but I don't remember really tasting it, no.

Q: Do you remember how people responded to -- to this food intake all of a sudden, after so --

A: It -- it was frenzied. That's the only way I can describe it. I don't have any real visuals about people fainting from or dying, but it was a frenzy of -- of getting at it.

Q: How old were you then?

A: I had just turned seven. It was -- my birthday was in December and we were liberated in January.

Q: What happened then? What is your next memory? Where were you taken?

A: Next memory is -- is a hospital setting in -- in -- and I know now it was -- it was pra -- it was Bratislava in -- in Slovakia. And I do remember being under doctor's care and having x-ray work done. Roentgen, I think, was the name that they used a lot. And I understand that I -- I was a bit sick. From there, my real clear memory is in -- I was sent to a orphanage in -- in Kosheetza.

Q: How was it -- do you remember what it was like being there, in the orphanage?

A: I -- again, I just remember events that happened to me -- not so much my feelings. I felt -- no, I-I really should say, I -- I was -- I felt loved, taken care of. These were nuns that took care of me. And we felt -- we felt that we were being taken care of. I remember at on point in time, one of the nuns gave me a very big hug -- I've mentioned this before -- and she gave me such a strong hug, she actually loosened one of my teeth. It was about to fall out anyway, but it happened at that point in time and I do remember that, that's a memory I'll take with me.

Q: What was your -- sort of your relationship to the other boys? I -- th -- yeah, what was your relationship to the other boys, did you talk about things, did you --

A: In the orphanage, no, no. I -- I really -- I really don't remember. I suspect that I wasn't there very, very long in the orphanage setting, because the next memories that come up -- and this is where I now start to become a person and I do communicate with people, was when Dr. Kalina, who was one of the administrators of this hospital/orphanage complex, took me into his home. And I -- I -- I suspect that one of the reasons why he did that was because he and his wife were childless and that was a nice experience while it lasted. Subsequently, they did have a daughter born to them, Mimi was her name, the mother's name was Helena and he was Dr. Kalina. Nown Dr. Kalina. I can't remember his first name, though. Could be Frank or could -- that could have been his brother, but I'll tr -- Dr. Kalina is a sure thing. And I live with them.

Q: Did you remember at that point, did you think back to your parents and to your sister, while you lived there?

A: I honestly did not connect to the past in any way. I just lived in the present. My sister was though, however, constantly on my mind. I knew I had a sister and I knew that somehow I was going to meet her and whenever things got tough, I said to myself, "This is -- I'm going to do this for my sister." Whatever it was, whether it was a small problem or a big problem. But I lived in the present and I must say that the people really treated me very nicely. We lived in an apartment building and I do remember there was a courtyard in the back and I don't know if they bought this for me or for their daughter

that was born, but I suspect it was more for me, because she was really a baby. They bought a little goat. This story I don't think has been told ever. A little goat and I had sort of responsibly for it, it was in a sort of a gardened off or a fenced off area. And it was a very sweet sort of little thing and I fed it. I remember it pulling lettuce from my hands. That's a very sweet experience. He also -- Dr. Kalina, now that I'm thinking about it -- he was -- he had an -- obviously an important position and he was somewhat well-to-do. He -- he had one of the few cars that private citizens owned at the time. It was a green convertible and I guess as a boy I would have -- I would have loved to have driven that thing, but I enjoyed riding in it tremendously. There are other things about that experience with the Kalinas. They allowed me to do things and I especially remember Sundays. I don't know why I think of it as Sundays, but I'm sure it was a Sunday, they would always give me a couple of coronas -- money -- Czecho -- Czechoslovakian. And they would let me go to -- to the local butcher store and I was able to purchase 10 decagrams of salami, which was the delicacy bar none for me. Once a week I was able to do that -- that little bit of pielites living with the Kalinas also. There were other things I recollect. It's the first time I think I've ever heard a phonograph. And they had a very fancy phonograph combination bar set, that opened up, the lights went on and there were glasses and played beautiful waltzes, music. These just -- little details, little details. Ho-Ho-Home with ka -- with the Kalinas.

Q: You mentioned salami. At that point, you were not educated in the Jewith -- Jewish faith?

A: Mm-hm. No, not at all, I had no idea about the laws of Kashrut or anything like that. I think at th-that point in time -- I -- I don't think they were observant to any -- a great deal either. At that point in time, food was more the important thing, rather than yo -- than any of the restrictions on it. Kashrut was -- I don't think I've ever -- in Czechoslovakia -- I've heard the term, I've seen the -- in Kosheetza, I went to slaughterhouses even -- not slaughterhouses as such, but places where they kill chickens. So -- so I know there was a ritual to it, but I -- as far as forbidden foods, no. I -- I had no idea of anything being truly forbidden, no.

Q: Did you go to school?

A: Yes, I went to -- to school in Czechoslovakia, in Kosheetza. And that was quite an experience. I think I was the only Jew, besides one other, in my whole school and I'm really sad to say and til this day I -- I find it so difficult to understand why we were really so disliked. W-We looked just like the rest of the kids, we didn't publicly appear -- I mean we did not appear Jewish in any way. We didn't wear hats or yarmulkes or had long hair or anything like that. My only mark was my number. That branded me a Jew, however. And this other fellow, his name was Sobol, I don't think he had a number from any camp, but he was Jewish, they knew he was Jewish. Maybe he looked more Jewish than I did, if there's such a thing. But th-the boys, even the -- at that age, we were like eight, nine, 10, they were -- they were out there to beat us. Every day they could catch us after school, they -- they actually waited for us and we had to run. Run for our -- not for

our lives, because we were not old enough to really do that kind of harm to each other, but we had to run, because we were going to be beaten.

Q: Do you think they knew anything about what that number meant or does it just -- number, Jewish?

A: I think they just thought it was Jewish -- Jewish and -- Jewish connotation, I think, even -- even while the war was right there, still hot. And the e-extermination, I'm sure, was known about, but the hatred, I don't think was wiped out of the people. Or of this innate insensitivity to Jewishness, or anti-Semitism, whatever you want to call it, people were brought up with this sort of thing and even though the war was over and done with, it was still there. I think the Germans most probably had -- looking back now, part -- part of that is -- as -- as their plan to -- to make -- make their actions seem -- seem plausible, reasonable, even likable. So they had this propaganda machine and I'm sure that they spread very not nice things about the Jews. So it just carried on.

Q: Did you tell anybody? Did you tell Dr. Kalina about the persecution at school or the beatings?

A: Well, Dr. Kalina and that beatings at school, that did not quite overlap together. Those beatings at school came a little bit later. Dr. Kalina -- I was with him -- out of the -- my entire stay in -- in Kosheetza, not very long. I would think maybe about a fifth of the time that I was there. He had to run off because somebody in the organization of his administration had something against him and they spread some news about him -- he was Jewish also and somehow he had to flee. So he left me with his sister, the Maun

family. Edith Maun, here -- that's Frank Maun. Yes, that's the name, Frank. The Maun family. And they had two children, Otto and Beebe and they lived almost a -- just a block away or maybe even less than a block away from the school. This is the school that I'm referring to, where these -- where these things took place. And so it was with them, not the Kalinas that -- that this -- these chases and beatings and whatnot took place.

Q: Was it difficult for you to so quickly change, after you had just found people you liked in Dr. Kalina and then move onto another family or was that more like the extended family of --

A: It was -- it -- it -- I -- it didn't seem to affect me. L-Life had so many changes in it. I'm -- I'm just trying to philosophize, now looking backwards. It did not seem to phase me. Things happened quickly, differently and it was just -- it was -- I think I just lived more or less for the moment, for the very immediate future time -- a day or two. I -- it did not bother me, no, no.

Q: Do you remember anything else, any particular impressions from -- from that time that are important, that have stayed with you?

A: Oh. That's a four - five year period there, there are lots of things -- lots of things. My wife being a school teacher, I'm a little bit of -- of -- sort of into school authority kind of thing and I do remember, in -- in -- in Kosheetza, when you misbehaved in school, in class, that was a very -- very difficult thing to deal with. Teachers actually had permission -- in fact I think they insisted that they hit you. I do remember, we used to carry our own sticks with us and when we were bad, we'd call -- be called to the front of

the room in front of the teacher's desk and we would hand him the stick and he would dish out on our hands, which we extended, you know one, two or whatever the punishment was. And I do remember that -- that as boys we had the discussion -- did we bring thick sticks or very thin sticks? Because the thin sticks would sting and the thick s-sticks would sort of, you know, just hit you flat. But I must say that order was maintained in the school. There was none of this that you hear today, in 1997, where you -- where a teacher looks at a kid the wrong way and the teacher runs -- and the -- and the child runs home to his parents, then the parents come to school and the teacher's in big trouble and so is the administration in big trouble. This is like -- it's so absurd to me, that things like this happen today and when I think of what happened then. And nobody really -- was really hurt by this -- by this punishments. It was -- it was scolding in a way that kids understood, I think, at the time. And that's one of the things I do remember of the schools.

Q: So, for you the punishment in school was more -- yo-you took it to be an -- an act of just normal discipline in certain ways --

A: Oh, absolutely, after --

Q: [indecipherable] it did not bring -- it did not make -- you did not make a connection to mistreatment in your earlier life in any way?

A: No, no and in fact it was -- there was a ca -- it was almost an orderly thing to be happening, just to be hit and then be told to go back to your seat and behave, rather than being shot and never getting up again. I mean, you were taken care of properly, in a way,

properly. Schooling, since -- since we're on the subject of schooling, the last two years that I was in Czechoslovakia, in Kosheetza, the Russians began to take hold and we had to take Russian language as a -- as a language, that was a re-requ-requirement that we all had to do. And so I learned the Russian alphabet, we -- this is -- this was a must, we had to do all this. Things that I didn't want to do in school, that was one of them. Another thing that sort of -- I had trouble with in school was religious instruction. We had priests giving us instructions and they even took us to -- to church many times. I don't know how, but I always ended up at the end of the line and many times I didn't quite make it into the church itself, but I do remember having to have to go at times and crossing myself. Which was -- I know not the right thing for me to do. Don't ask me how I knew, but I knew this wasn't the right thing for me to do. But it happened.

Q: Were there aspects of it that you liked?

A: Hm. That's a very interesting question. I -- I've never focused on anything that I liked in school, other than I did enjoy playing soccer, yes. Yes, we did -- we did devise games of soccer and that was -- that was a very -- that was very exciting for me, but it was also, it was -- it sort of got all that extra energy out of me. When you were able to run -- yeah, running was always -- seemed to be the thing I've been doing, either to good things or to bad things or for bad things. Yes, playing soccer was a very enjoyable kind of a activity in school -- school grounds or away, because they were lot -- we were not far from fields -- from out of town, anywhere you were in Kosheetza at the time, so we pl -- wherever we could, we set up a soccer thing.

Q: Did you have any relatives anywhere who were looking for you in the meantime while you were there?

A: Well, it seems yes, I've had some relatives left in Germany. They were looking for me -- this is my father's brother. And there were other relatives alive, but I don't think they were actively looking to -- to -- to get me -- to get a hold of me. My -- my mother had a sister alive in London, so I had a cousin there and an uncle. And my -- the Slotkins were not my relatives yet, but I have a feeling they were starting to look for me, too. They were looking for me, I think, much before I even heard of it, because I think that Irene, my twin, when she told them that she had had a brother, not knowing whether he's alive or not alive, I think they started to wonder about it and they being the kind of people that they are, I think they made some inquiries about it.

Q: Before we go ahead with your life, could you just tell us very briefly what happened in the meantime to Irene, because wh-where was she?

A: Well, after liberation, I know now that she was taken to -- to Poland to live with a family and as the years go by now and we start to hear about some of her experiences, and I'm going back only to 1985, because before then, Irene and I never talked about it -- and I mean never. [ringing]

Q: We will stop the tape. -- '85.

A: Right.

Q: So you just mentioned that you never talked to Irene about the -- both of your experiences until 1985.

A: Mm-hm, mm-hm. So then slowly, in 1985, she let us know, even though we knew -- I knew from records that she had been taken into Poland and she spent some very, very unpleasant, indeterminate num-number of months with a Polish family that -- right now I can almost surely say abused her, in terms of her being a child who was taken into a home to be taken care of. I think she was more like a servant, made to do things. Some of the things that she tells me are -- later on were to -- were to really go back, return to the site of Auschwitz and -- and hunt for the -- for some valuables in terms of gold -- gold teeth or what -- whatever. But not -- not the kind of home that you would expect a child would get. So -- and the stories that she has, I think are locked in her and perhaps one day I'll find out myself, more about it. But then -- then she was rescued from there by -- by a rescue organization -- rescue child organization from United States, that actually made it a point, because they knew that a lot of the Polish families would grab -- grab children and a lot of the Polish had hidden children that really didn't belong to them, but -- they were Jewish children and this being a Jewish oriented organization, they wanted to extricate the Jewish children from there and they went into a lot of trouble in terms of checking birth records, birth certificates and so on. And when something didn't quite match up in a family, they would know that they had a Jewish child and they took the Jewish child out. And from there she went to -- when she was taken out, she was taken -- as far as I know, to -- to France, to an orphanage in France.

Q: This organization was rescue children?

A: Rescue child. Herbert Tenzer was an active member. There's a rabbi that lives and still -- Rabbi Fourhand, that I've met here on the West Side -- I've gone to his little synagogue a few times, he was also very active and he remembered me and he even has a picture of us kids and he's a very sweet man and obviously there were a lot of people involved in this organization and this is how Irene got here.

Q: How did your two lives come together again, how did you meet again?

A: Well, I'm living in -- in the -- with Maun family in -- in -- in Kosheetza, and I have to just mention a few things about them. Mrs. Maun, Edith Maun was a -- was a wonderful woman. She somehow had the understanding of what a boy should be or what a boy would like and there in that home, I first saw candles -- Friday night candles. And from that home I was also, for the first time taking in -- taken into a synagogue. I don't know if it was Orthodox -- it most probably was, cause Conservative and Reform were not born yet -- I don't believe were being practiced publicly in the little town of Kosheetza. And I remember being there on holidays, being dressed special. Not being inside the synagogue all that much, but I do remember having a lot of fights with the boys outside in the courtyard, we were throwing the chestnuts at ea -- at each other. But Mrs. Maun, getting back to her, cause I -- I have to just say some things about her that she understood so well. She knew that I wanted to play -- be a boy, be a real boy. And she managed somehow to -- to -- to get a bicycle for me. And it wasn't a child's bicycle, was a man's bicycle and I was smaller than a normal child, even for my age. So, to learn to ride this thing -- I don't know if you've ever seen a child riding a man's bicycle. The foot goes

underneath the bar and holding on for dear life and you're peddling just totally sideways, but I managed to do it and she knew that this was important to me and she -- she -- she trained me and she made me learn how to do this and I did it and I was very proud of it. With her and her other children, I also went ice skating on the river, where -- when it was frozen. And it -- it was a river, I knew that, because many times you could see the water flowing underneath, perhaps the ice wasn't thick enough for us, but we went on it anyway. What I do remember about the ice skates was that you would just screw these things onto your normal regular shoes, because we didn't have special shoes for skating, we just -- those were our -- our shoes and we just forced them onto our feet and there was a special key and they would just lock onto the shoes and we'd be skating. I don't think I ever told that story to anyone, but it's wa -- some of the things I remember from there. Also, somewhere along the line, after this bicycle episode, somebody obtained for me, a very fancy -- they call it a jek -- there's a kolabeshka, but I think it's a -- I don't even know what the English word for it is here. It's -- it's some wheels, it's -- it's a platform, a wheel on the back and the front and then there's a stand, what do you call that, a -- I'm at a loss, totally at a loss. It's -- it's got a wheel on the front, wheel on the back and handlebars coming out from the bottom of it.

Q: Is it a scooter-type?

A: It's like a scooter kind of a thing.

Q: Did you push with one foot?

A: One foot, yes. You push with one foot. But this was a very fancy model, so I suspect somehow America had something to do with it, because it had a spring on the back, spring on the front and a brake on -- in the back, which you just press and it would just sort of hold against the rear wheel. That turned out to be my means of locomotion in -- in -- in Kosheetza. And I was seen through the streets, I mean I was really fast with -- at least I thought I was very fast, I was -- was my -- my vehicle to -- my escape wagon, my little scooter. Was red, chrome, beautiful little thing.

Q: So that was the first time that you could really play and -- and be a boy.

A: Probably. Probably the first time, probably the first time. And thanks to Mrs. Maun, I have to give her that credit, she -- she knew that I needed this -- something and i-it was wonderful. She -- she -- she gave it to me, it was wonderful.

Q: I would like to stop here, this is the end of tape one, side A.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Rene Slotkin. This is tape number one, side B. I would like you to say a little bit more about the two children in the Maun family. Did you get along together well, or was there some jealousy on their part, maybe or -- what was the -- the feeling?

A: I don’t remember. They were younger than I, much younger and I could tell that from the pictures even now. So we didn’t really play as equals. We played as children would play with each other, living in the same home. I do remember Otto being sort of a -- he

wasn't as sports oriented and as outgoing and -- and as devilish as I was. He wouldn't -- never try that bicycle that I had tried and there were a lot of things that he wouldn't do. So that factor and the fact that he was much younger, didn't allow us to really play a lot together. And then there was Beebe, she was a little baby girl and -- what does a te -- nine year old, 10 year old have to do with a baby girl? Nothing. So there wasn't much there, but duf -- I did feel a real family there, because Mr. Maun was a -- he's a very quiet but very strong man. He was a dental technician, yes. And Mrs. Maun was an outspoken lady, but very strong also and together they -- they ruled this family and I felt some structure, real structure there.

Q: But eventually you did meet Irene again and you were still thinking [indecipherable]

A: Well, it was while I lived with them, that we start to get communiqués from -- from the States, that there were people looking for me. And also, at the same time, we were somehow connected to the people in -- to my uncle in Germany. And there was sort of talk, letting it known -- be known that I might be going to -- to one of these places, that I'd be leaving them. And I -- there wa -- it was just talk and it didn't really phase me one way or the other, it was just talk. The -- the first thing that did happen, though as -- as a movement away from the Maun family -- at one point in time, I do remember going with -- I'm not quite sure now whether it was both of them or just one of them, the parents -- they were taking me to the -- to the border of Czechoslovakia and Germany, where I was to be met and taken to Germany. But we got to the border and somehow it never happened. We came back. I suspect now, from what I can gather, that at the same time,

the Slotkin's somehow came on the scene and they, at this point had Irene, who was my twin sister and I guess it seemed much more sensible to try and unite the two twins into a home or just unite them, rather than keep them apart. So I came back into Czechoslovakia, back -- I mean I went back to Kosheetza with the Maun's and there we waited until some move was made by the Slotkin's. And that -- that this happened, it happened -- they had sent a Mr. Enright, who I think on his own right worked for -- for the children, possibly for this organization, but he was specifically sent out to see if he could find me. And he spent quite a few months -- over a year I think, maybe even two years, looking for me until I was located. But there are lots of coincidences that I'd like to mention -- I should mention -- that happened, which made this possible. In -- in 1947, Life Magazine ran an issue which depicted my twin sister Irene as sort of a poster girl from -- from France, with a boy, Charles Karro and somehow th-their publicity was to raise funds for this organization and for the orphanage and for the children's welfare care. The Slotkins somehow got a hold of Irene, cause they were actively involved in helping war orphans and they were very close friends to Herbert Tenzer also, who lived in th -- in the same area that they lived in. And Irene came -- came to them. And that wasn't a -- quick as I make it sound, she went through a couple of homes, but she ended up with them and she told them that she had a brother somewhere. And so they started to look for me, realizing, I guess the importance -- as I think as a father now -- grandfather, I would do the same thing -- I -- I -- I -- if I knew that I had in possession a child who had a twin, especially from -- from that kind of a background, I would see if I -- if I could do

something, especially since they were able to do this. So they started looking for me. Now the Life Magazine that I mentioned before, this Life Magazine was obviously read by more than just the United States, but it -- it was read by people in Europe and in Israel, where Dr. Kalina was at the time. He saw the article and he realized that Irene Guttman, who was mentioned, I think, in the article as Guttman, maybe even Renata, I'm not sure now. Renata or Irene, but Guttman was the -- was the name which I was under and the twin story and all that. So he made the connection and he said, "I have this twin, I have the brother. I know where the brother is." So contacts were made and I was located in Kosheetza and then came the -- the red tape of getting me out, getting a -- I -- I look at it now and I laughing, I wa -- that little orphan, took them two years to get me out and even once I got here, I still had to go back once -- back into Germany, but that -- that's just a side issue of mine. But it took two years of red tape to get me out. I must say that in the time I spent in getting ready for it and the travel and -- and in France and -- I went to school in Switzerland. Went -- had to go to Frankfort and then once I got here, I had -- was returned back to Frankfort again. Was a red tape kind of a thing, I had to appear just for a weekend in Frankfort and then come back. But each one of these is -- is a little story by itself. My s -- my stay in France, my -- my trip to France. My stay in -- in Switzerland. They're all little stories and I'll be glad to tell you if you'd like to hear about it.

Q: Let me ask you one question --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- before we -- I would like to hear those -- those stories.

A: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

Q: Why was it so difficult? Was it because Czechoslovakia then was under Communist rule or how -- do you know now?

A: I don't really know why. That could have been it, possibly because I was a Jewish displaced child and I was oriented to go or my -- the easiest way to get me out was to get me -- get me a visa to the newly created state of Israel. And since I was headed for Israel, America was not the way to go. It wa -- would have been a stopover, but it wasn't the final destination, so the -- these things didn't quite match, so they had to make them match. I think that's what made it so difficult. There are other difficulties too. They weren't legal, political maneuvers, but I -- I think that's truly -- the Mauns really cared for me. I mean I -- I think I spent -- I ha -- I'm guessing, but I think I spent at least three years with them. And I think that, in that time frame, I could see me falling in love with a child that I took care of three years, even if the child wasn't the best child in the world. Which I'm sure I wasn't, but I guess I was cute enough, judging from the pictures. I seemed to get along and obviously she showered me -- they showered me with their -- with their caring and I -- I remembered it's -- obviously there was a good relationship. I mean, so there are other things in play, but I think they realize that -- that my place would be -- I'll be better off in the long run with my sister in America. So, that was one issue. I -- I think that the Kalinas, who were in a -- who made the connection and originally took me out of the orphanage also weren't quite sure whether to send me into this unknown and they had some say, because I was staying with their sister. So, I guess there was a

little bit of negotiation going on there, on -- on an -- on an adult level, which I wasn't privy to, so I -- I really can't tell you about that. As far as I was -- I was ready to go. I had some things which I unfortunately had to leave behind. I was an avid book reader and if I remember correctly, I don't think there were any libraries in Kosheetza, so whenever I wanted a book, I had to save for it and I had to buy it. So they became my personal possessions and I had quite a few of them and there were a few that -- they were American, or at least you'd recognize them. James Fenimore Cooper, "The Last of the Mohicans" was one of the books that I had translated -- that was translated into -- into Slovak and I was able to read that, so I was totally familiar with -- with the story. There was one word I -- that comes to mind, which I could never understand in -- in the west, it was greenhorn. The word greenhorn, I -- I just didn't know what it was. I know it wasn't a complimentary sort of a thing, but I could never understand it until I came to the States many, many years later, I learned what the true meaning of the word greenhorn was. There were other books that I loved. Jules Verne was my -- one of my favorite authors, science fiction. There's another man, Carrol May. I don't know if that's -- hits anybody, but I mentioned it to a few people and apparently it hasn't, but I read some of his books. "Robinson Crusoe" was also one of my most favorite books.

Q: Carl May is a very famous German popular literature writer who was read very widely by -- by teenagers.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: And he wrote -- never having been to the wild west in America, he wrote extensively about the wild west.

A: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

Q: And he created --

A: Uh-huh.

Q: Innertwo and Orcheddarhand --

A: Right, right.

Q: -- and no -- noble savage and the -- the noble white person.

A: Right, right so --

Q: That's him, right? Carl May.

A: Carl -- Carl May, yeah so maybe that's -- that's what I'm talking about, but then I -- these we -- these books, these were my treasures and I was told that I couldn't really take them with me. I remember I could take only very little. And I don't -- can't understand why, but I -- I didn't even have a suitcase to take, I only had a briefcase that I could fill up and the books were not the most important thing, even though I tried. I wanted to really take some books with me, but it just didn't go. So that was one of my losses. Took awhile to get used to.

Q: So you made little excursions of sorts, into Switzerland and into France. Why and what happened?

A: Right. Well, my first -- when I first left Czechoslovakia, it was -- I was alone on a plane to Paris. I was met by Mr. Enright -- his secretary, a lady, don't remember her

name, but Mr. Enright played a real big role in my life for the next -- oh, at least half a year. He -- we -- we were in Paris together. I remember we stayed at the Grand Hotel and now we were sort of closer to the Slotkins, away from the Mauns and I'll never forget the first time they made a telephone connection with the Slotkins, I -- I hid under the bed. I didn't want to somehow respond or talk, even though I knew about them, I knew who they were. I mean, didn't know about them, but I knew they were the Slotkins, who -- where my sister was. But I was just totally shaken up by this. I'm not even sure whether I talked to them that one time. But we lived in Switzerland together and -- I mean in -- in Paris together and there he would carry on during the day, doing his thing, whatever he had to do to get clearances for me and whatnot. And he engaged a teacher for me at the time, to teach me -- start teaching me Slovak. And part of the education was to go ahead and see as many foreign movies -- American movies, also English movies, so I would get used to -- I'm sorry, I have to take all that back, not to teach me Slovak, to teach me English. And part of this whole thing was to take me to see English movies. And one of the first movies that I remember was "Lassie Come Back." Elizabeth Taylor, she was a girl at the time, a very beautiful girl, blue eyes, black hair, white skin. And there was this beautiful black horse. No, no, that's "Black Beauty", that's another one that I saw. But "Lassie" was the first one. Also, there were cowboy movies I saw -- if I can try to remember some of those old names. That was way before Hopalong Cassidy came on the scene, it was -- oh, maybe I'll remember later. But that was part of it, Laurel and Hardy was certainly part of it. Abbott and Costello. These were movies I went to see, just to get

the feel of the language and -- and with the help of this tutor, I sort of somehow got myself started in English. I don't know how -- what I really achieved other than I was exposed to it. It seemed that though, that Mr. Enright didn't have much luck in getting whatever papers were necessary to get me over here right away, so -- there was -- and he couldn't spend any more time or something like that, so I had to be brought somewhere, put away somewhere -- who to leave we -- me with. So it was decided to send me to -- to Switzerland, to a boarding school. Institute Usher, in Balaban, which was Jewish oriented I'm sure, because the headmaster of the school had a beard and a yarmulke and I do remember Friday night services, now that I think about it and we always stood up to La hoda di lacross kallor, which is one of the prayers that we say in our Friday nights also, but we sit down, where we always stood there. Now I know why I stand. I always stand, for some reason, La hoda di lacross kallor, sa -- sa -- about two pages responsive kind of reading on Friday night. But most people sit down. I always stand. There are a few other people that stand, but now I know where I got it from. They always stood over there. That was Switzerland. And that was a -- that was a really, really wonderful experience. I went skiing there. I do remember going skiing. We would get on to buses, which would take us, even though it was a rainy, cloudy day, would take -- they would -- the buses would take us into the mountains, above the clouds, into bright blue skies and sunshine and we would ski. The school also has other -- lots of good memories. At this point, I had the funds, now I had the backer -- a rich backer in America, my sister and her -- her future adoptive parents. So I had some money, I had some credit, come to think of it, it

wasn't even money, I had credit at the school office where I could buy candy. I remember it was a very specific kind of a marshmallow chocolate covered candy, very delicious. One other thing about the school, which I remember very, very clearly. We lived in a dorm -- in dormitory -- rooms and every morning we went to the showers in another building, while it was still dark and cold sometimes -- very, very cold. So we ran through whatever yard there was in our nightclothes and into these showers, which were somehow automatically regulated. You get into them -- they lasted only so long, the water started from lukewarm to warm and then it slowly start to cool. So you had to do your thing. You had to get soaped up and you had to get clean and still try and enjoy some of the warmth that was left after you've done what you had to do. But, that it ran cold and if you were brave enough, you stayed in. And it turned out to be a lot of kids did stay in, most of us did. And it sort of -- it was a very healthy thing to do, because I don't ever remember being sick. None of them ever got sick and we ran wet -- half wet into our -- into our rooms from -- from the bathhouse. I do -- that was something I remember again about my stay in Switzerland. There I learned also -- there they put me on a program to learn Hebrew. So I started writing, copying things in Hebrew, even though I had no idea what I was -- what I was saying, but writing, copying things in Hebrew and trying to pronounce some of the things, Hebrew started then for me.

Q: How many languages did you -- did you learn by then in this -- in a rudimentary form? At least Slova -- Czech?

A: Well, I'm sure that my parents spoke German to one another. Czech will be the other. Oh definitely, Czech definitely. As a matter of fact, when I -- when I came to the States, I did manage to sneak out one book -- yes, I had one book called "Oatsa lubby luge." I don't even remember what it -- actual -- it's -- it's a ray, some metallic ray, was a ship of some kind. But I did my first book report on a -- in the United States, on a book that I read in Czech and I guess the teacher trusted me that I wasn't going to distort the story too much and I wrote a book report on it, in English for my first school book report here. So, Czechoslo -- Czech was the other language, Hebrew, of course, start to come in very strong and English, which I had to communicate in. And Russian, which I took in -- in -- in -- in Czechoslovakia and Kosheetza, which I had to take. So -- and whatever language was spoken in -- in Auschwitz, which was many, many languages. They're --

Q: So five -- five languages? [inaudible]

A: Probably -- posht -- at least five languages.

Q: So what happened after Switzerland?

A: Switzerland was my last stop, I think, before I came here. On the way, we went back to -- to Paris, I think that's where we boarded a plane to come to the United States. Was a big, big plane. I think it was the double-decker -- propeller driven plane, but it was a double decker, was one of the first. And we landed at Idlewild Airport, which is now Kennedy Airport. Idlewild Airport was nothing but a long Quonset hut with -- with dirt on the ground and you just had sections which designated the different airlines. I remember the night, it was a night -- March -- March 29th, 1950 and my mother came to

pick me up -- my mother -- Mrs. Mey -- Mrs. Dinah Slotkin. It comes very easy to say my mother to her. And came with Mr. Enright and it was evening, it was raining -- misty rain. And I don't think I saw my sister that evening, yet, because it was -- must have been too late, she must have been asleep already and I remember that we were told to sleep in the master bedroom and M-Mr. Enright, like we slept in the hotels, he slept in one bed, I slept in the other bed and the following morning I met my sister in front of the house and no words were spoken, none. Just looked at each other. I knew who she was, she knew who I was, that was it. We were reunited in 1950, in Orange, Long Island, New York.

Q: Had you communicated before with each other in some way until you -- until you met?

A: We wrote some letters, but th-they were newsy kind of things. Well, as I said, we truly communicated -- we didn't even communicate truly til 1985, when we touched our parents, our backgrounds, our past. We communicate yes, superficially, on the level that, you know, what -- where you going, what are you doing. We went to the same school together. We -- we grew up together, we took dance lessons together, we -- we ate at the same table f -- we had the same family, but truly, truly, to find out what she's really, really thinking, what really went on, we -- we didn't start to really do until 1985 in Jerusalem.

Q: Let's go back to the beginning of a new family. The Slotkins, what -- what was the -- that family like? What was the house? Do you remember the first time you felt really at home there?

A: Well, they were -- the Slotkins were fairly well-to-do, I guess, so they had a home. I had my own room, which was different than the -- what I've had before, although I had privacy in -- in the slo -- in the Maun house. They -- they recognize that I needed the privacy. Here I had my own bedroom, my own furniture, my own desk, my own chair. One of the first things that they did was to get me a bicycle. Again bicycle. Pretty important, I guess, to a -- to a 12 year old. And they were giving me everything that they thought I didn't have -- physically, materially. I think that they -- they both were very intelligent people. They gave me everything they knew how to give me. How -- what -- their best of ability, they gave me whatever they could. Whether they were like real parents -- because this question I ask myself, I'll never know. I'll never know what it's like to really have a real parent. What do you owe a real parent? What sort of honor you owe a parent when they're -- when you know that they're not yours, really, when you meet them first when you're 12 years old or when you -- when you know that they're your real blood? That's the question I -- it's a question. It'll remain a question, I don't know. I don't imagine it's the same thing, because I -- otherwise I wouldn't be asking why -- all these questions. So there must be some difference, but I -- I must say that they did everything to their maximum ability -- capability to make us happy, even though I think that -- looking back now, that they made some mistakes, but the -- for example, at one point, German government was -- was ready or somehow in the news to -- to -- they were ready to give some reparation to -- some financial aid to -- or -- or -- make some reparations to Holocaust victims. And yet -- or even -- but they didn't want to have

anything to do with it, they totally shielded us from the fact, protected us. They didn't want us to associate the facts that we had that sort of a background and -- they just didn't want to. There were people who wanted to write books about, very famous Jewish author, escapes my -- my memory right now, but he wanted to write a book about us. But they didn't want to dig up any of the old memories and they totally shielded Irene and myself from anything. So they sign -- signed away some of the rights that we might have had and I think that was a mistake, in a sense, because sooner or later, we would grow up and we did grow up and we do question these things and -- and we feel that we have a responsibility to our past and therefore to the future. And we have a responsibility to our own children and these things should be known. It's not something to hide, to be ashamed of. It happened. It happened and -- and you have to admit it that it happened and we have to bring it to the forefront if you want to learn something from it. So, I think they made a big mistake in that -- in that sense.

Q: So that was a subject matter that was sort of taboo in -- in -- in the Slotkin house? And it was also not talked about between you and Irene at all?

A: Right, right.

Q: Did you talk to others? You went to school, right?

A: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

Q: Did you talk to -- what kind of education, I guess, did you have and did you talk to your new friends or to schoolmates about this?

A: Well, I -- I -- I -- we did go to Hebrew school, Yeshiva schools. My sister, as I recall, covered her number with a cosmetic at all times. It was not talked about. I -- I don't think the Jewish community on the whole was ready to even talk about it. They were still in a state of shock. I mean historically speaking, it just happened and -- and they were not ready to talk about it or to discuss it and I think that, in the very beginning, my sister might have even felt ashamed. Incredible as that may seem. I -- I think I felt a little bit of that, too. I did not always expose my number freely. It was always a sign of a Jew and in -- the sign of a Jew in Europe was not a good sign, it's something to -- a low sign, something to be ashamed of. It wasn't something that you were proud of. Today I -- I'm very proud of it and I feel very lucky that I'm a survivor of this thing. But at that time, it -- it was not. So in school, I think the teachers knew about us. I think the community knew about us. But very few really discussed it with us. I think they treated us gently because of it, but I don't -- nobody ever talked about it, it was not -- it was a taboo subject and I think Slotkins most probably made a contribution to that, but they were just like the rest of the people. They would not want to talk about -- this is something -- let's -- let's -- let's give them what they missed, let's shield them, let's -- let's forget about it. And I think a lot of parents did this to their children that were linked closely to the Holocaust. I think they did it to their offsprings. Why should they -- why should they suffer, why should they know about this? Just looking back, I -- I don't think that was exactly the right thing, but it was understandable.

Q: Did you feel at the time, I mean wh -- you were now becoming a teenager, getting to be 14 - 15 years old, did you feel that you fit in? Did you feel that you were truly Americanized, slowly, or was -- were there other feelings that were more complex, difficult?

A: No, I -- I -- I felt -- I had no trouble. I really had no trouble getting to like the American things. The television -- I played basketball -- I was high school basketball, I learned to drive the day I turned 16. I had always a car that I could borrow from my mother or my father. I didn't have my own car, but I mean I could always borrow a car and there were parties and I was a very social and outgoing -- it wasn't though, with -- with the public school crowd, it was with the -- the Jewish crowd. But that Jewish crowd wasn't anywhere -- the Yeshiva crowd wasn't anywhere near as observant as -- as the Jewish Yeshivas are today. In other words, the Jewish high school then, there was nothing -- nobody thought very badly about having dance classes -- social learning, how to do social dancing with boys and girls together and in those days social dancing meant touching one another. Now this I think would be totally looked upon as a no-no in today's age in -- in the high school -- Yeshiva high school. Because I know my -- my daughter goes to a high school -- a girl's high school. [telephone ringing]

Q: We will stop the tape for a minute. This is the end of tape one, side B, of the interview with Rene Slotkin.

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Rene Slotkin. This is tape number two, side A. And we just talked about the different atmosphere at the Jewish schools then and today. Maybe you can pick up on -- you talked about dancing and touching.

A: Yeah, dancing would have been a real, real difference that I recall. We did sort of have classes with the girls. We did social things with the girls, we attended parties. Dating, in my circles was a allowed thing. Today in -- in -- in the Jewish world, Jewish high schools, even though boys and girls have contact, it's not for the purpose of dating and having fun with each other. Because that is not really looked upon as a -- as a serious relationship which will go anywhere, at this point. I mean, how far can it go when you're 15 - 16 years old? So, there's -- I think, a lot of wisdom in what goes on in -- in -- in -- and obviously my background is showing -- in -- in what the Yeshiva world of today expects from their kids and I -- I agree with it 100 percent. But I think at the time, I fit in very well. I think looking back now and having met survivors over the years, I think -- myself personally -- I'm not even going to speak for Irene, but I think my thinking and I turn out to be as -- as normal, if there is such a thing as normal, as one could be. Much more so than some of the others that I've met and I've met most of them, especially in Israel in 1985, when we had a -- a convention to have a mock trial for Dr. Mengele and I met -- were twins from all over the world and I must say that maybe five percent are what

I would consider normal at the time. But again, I'm speaking for myself and how normal am I? So I think my adjustment to American life was -- was -- was easy.

Q: Specifically, what schools did you go to?

A: I started out in the Hebrew Institute of Long Island. This is in Far Rockaway. They then, as we finished the eighth grade, they built a high school and so I was the first class of that Hebrew Institute High School. And it was a very small school, because we were the first class and there were, I think, only 11 of us, inc -- my sister was one of them -- first senior class. But that was a good thing, because we were always the seniors, we were always the eldest. And we got to do everything that needed to be done for high school. We always managed to play basketball. We were the first string. I mean, we played against seniors I remember distinctly, in the Yeshiva High School Leagues and we were trampled. But we had a good time. We had all the American things that the other high schools had. We had a basketball team, we had a coach, we had uniforms. We had cheerleaders. My -- Irene was a cheerleader. She had a cheerleaders uniform on. She was dancing around, she was a cheerleader. And it was -- it was a fun time, it was a easy time. It was -- no, it wasn't easy, because we were growing up and growing up, I guess, is not an easy thing to do. You're facing the future and here I was, in a -- what seemed the lap of luxury. What do I have to worry about? I remember my father saying, "You have to pick a profession. You have to become a professional." And I was fighting it. "What do I have to do this for?" I remember. "I don't have to be a professional. I have -- we have everything we need. What do I have to be a professional for?" So it was -- it was growing

up, I think with the similar problems that all of America grows up. It was not -- it was only clouded in the back scene by the fact where we came from. And I guess my parents kept that in mind. I didn't really focus on it. I was too busy having a good time.

Q: So what kind of professional did you become, then?

A: I did not become a professional. I won and maybe lost. Well, the -- the problem was that -- again, here I have to -- and I hope I'm not faulting, pointing at my father, but he -- to him professional meant you were a doctor, a lawyer or an accountant. That's it. I would have loved to have become a math teacher. But that wasn't the big three. So I settled for things in between. Accounting courses, this kind of courses, business, bachelor of this and -- so I never be -- really became a professional. But I was -- I was having a good time. Even while in college, I was having a good time. Whereas my sister was a student. I'm sure that she would agree now, that she should have maybe had a little bit more fun than be a student, but here we were, living in the same house, twins, somewhat similar backgrounds, yet, because of who she was -- and maybe she was -- she was shyer, more introverted. She would turn to her books for -- to occupy her time, study. That's how she gained her strength. Whereas I got my strength through dating, playing ball and doing all the things that young teenagers do.

Q: Did you have trouble at all to have intimate relationships with -- with people, period? Did you have close friends? Was it difficult to have intimate relationships with girls?

A: I -- I -- no, I never had any trouble with people. I've always had close friends, both sexes. Girls -- very close girlfriend, not the kind that you take on a date on, but very close

friend. And I had very close boy friends. No, I -- I never had any trouble. I -- I consider myself -- even today I consider myself a very personable, friendly sort of a chap.

Q: What happened after college?

A: Well, after college -- this was like 1958 - ‘59. ‘59 is more I think the year. There was a war on that the United States was involved in and th-the draft was still in full swing. And I was seriously seeing a girl. I was, I think 21. 20 - 21, something like that. And my life at home, I think because of this friction of, “You will be a professional or it’s not going to work for you too well.” I -- I have to admit as an -- as an ol-older person, like 19, older teenager, there -- there was friction in the house, because -- and I think that’s a normal kind of a thing, I think kids want to -- tend to get up and do their own thing and -- and f-fly out on their own. I -- I -- I was married. I got married to this girl, despite objections of my parents. Now, she came from the same community, but not on the same observant level as I was. Her father was an attorney. I mean, intelligent people, but they were just not on the same observant level. Now this was very important to my -- my family, my -- the Slotkins. I -- I didn’t realize -- I don’t realize until today how important something like that really is to parents. But I also know -- and I think he realized also, that there’s not all that much that he could do -- if these two young people wanted to get married, they were going to do it. So, it happened, with everybody’s blessings and we were married. But, at that same time, I was -- I notice -- I -- I was notified by the draft that my turn had come and at the time, I think the only way you could be excused, exempt from service was if -- if your wife was pregnant, you were about to become a father, or some

of the other usual things. If you were the sole caretaker of somebody, your family, whatnot. But none of these things applied to me, so they were going to draft me for two years, send me over somewhere and -- to fight in a war. Now, when I told my family about this and my friends, they all said, “You? In a war? At this point in your life? What are you -- there’s no way -- no way you can go. There’s no way they’ll take you if you even -- if you tell them what your background is and that you can’t do it.” But I -- I never -- I listened to what they said, but I never took advantage of that -- sort of -- of that situation, in -- in the sense that I would use it as an excuse. I didn’t want to go into a war or anything like that, either. To me, at the time, the only thing that was really worth dying for, was maybe the Jewish state. But I -- I wasn’t going to fight the United States -- I wasn’t going to fight being inducted or anything like that on the basis of -- that I’m a survivor from Auschwitz and I have this and I have bad this when I really didn’t. I didn’t want to go, but I -- I was going to submit to it. So I did the next best thing, I joined a six months -- which for me was the best thing -- I joined a six months active unit and then I was in the reserve for the next seven years, which means going to meetings throughout the year and every summer for two years I had to go to Camp Drum, upstate New York to train and whatnot. So I -- I joined the National Guard and I was inducted into the army at Fort Dix, New Jersey, had my basic training there, went through all the bologna. But, I maintained a strict kosher Jewish front. I had the strength to do that. I wore my yarmulke, I refused any food, I refused to work on Saturdays. But I was a good soldier. I did everything I was supposed to do. And it worked. I was really -- I saw the difference that -

- between people, for the first time, I -- I got some respect from some people when I did the thing the right way. My commander was -- was very proud of me. Here, I had this -- they were talk -- I heard them talking, the commanders talk about their Jews that they had in their -- in their -- in their units, who were giving them trouble in terms of not wanting to work on Saturdays, not wanting to eat the food in the mess hall, wearing a hat which was against army regulations and so on. So, he was very proud of me. My Slotkin, he's a sharpshooter. I was a sharpshooter. But I went strictly by the laws, the -- at the time, in New Jersey, Fort Dix, they had a chaplain, chaplain -- a Lieutenant Colonel Angle, I think was his name. But he had made a set of rules for all the observant Jews. If they want to maintain their observance while they're in the army, they have to follow the rules to the letter, not deviate, they'll be no deviation. Everybody had to do exactly the same thing. And it worked. I mean, I was respected, I -- Friday afternoon the -- the truck came to the fields, picked me off -- cleaned my rifle and they sent me either home or I was put away into -- into -- into the chapel which was used on Saturday for the Jews, on Sunday for the -- for the non-Jews, but I was away for Saturday. And it -- it never ran into a problem, except for some of the unintelligent people who -- who didn't know what Jewish was or what a yarmulke was or what kosher food was and they almost -- some of the southern sergeants, they almost looked for horns under my hat, every once in awhile. I mean, there was a lot of ignorance, stupidity and whatnot out there and -- and outrage really. When some of them -- when they saw the number and this is now early fi -- late 50's, not that far from the war -- should know what -- what the -- nothing. Totally

ignorant and not sensitive to -- to the issues. But I went through the -- through the army and my first son was born while I was in the army. So, if they had had more sensitive tests at the time, we most probably could have proved that my wife was pregnant and I wouldn't have had to go through this, but I consider it a -- a valuable experience. So, when army jokes come up, I know exactly what everybody's talking about. No, army is -- is -- was a part of life and -- I'm -- I'm not all that unhappy that I had to go through it. It was a big waste, but I -- I recognize where -- where army has to be in readiness. You have to have defense forces, any country has to have defense forces and the only way to have it is to have trained people and the only way to train them is to -- even -- you know, is to train them. And you have to participate, so -- it's a given -- given. It's too bad that we have such things in the first place, but I went through it.

Q: Do you remember a particular story about certain insensitivities? You mentioned that your commander was proud, but is there another story that illuminates a little bit, the kind of comments that you got, or --

A: Well, as I -- as I said, the -- the mess hall sergeants, from -- from down south or -- I shouldn't really say south, they were from all over. If they were ignorant, they were ignorant and they would not have the sensitivity to -- to even understand -- yo -- it's just talking to -- to -- to a -- somebody totally out of this world, they would say, "What would you do if somebody was shooting at you?" Well, of course the answer is you'd most probably shoot them back, even if it was the Sabbath. And if you had to survive, to eat -- our religion teaches us you have to do anything to survive, so you'll eat non-kosher. But

this was peace-time New Jersey, not too far away from kosher hotels, where you could have -- and there's just no need for it. They didn't understand that -- this duality, that the -- that you could be a human being, you don't have to turn yourself into a total animal, even though this is what the army -- well, this is what the army really teaches. They try to break your spirit. They break your spirit when they br-bring you in. They give you a haircut, make you look like -- tot -- take your individuality away. They give you a number and they give you a tag and they ca -- you know, they -- they -- they -- they do this for a reason, so you'll stop questioning. But I think at the same time, when you stop questioning, you lose sensitivity. So, you have to be very careful with that. So -- it happened many times, I was -- you know, my hat was -- my hat -- my yarmulke. I wouldn't wear a hat, because that -- that would be totally against rule -- but the little yarmulke, knocked off my head by a sergeant. There was -- there's no need for that sort of thing. But, of course he didn't know where I was coming from. Maybe if he did, maybe he would have acted differently. But, my friends -- my -- that I -- that I -- in my unit, not necessarily Jewish, they knew about me, because we talked. I mean we saw each other in the showers, they knew I had a number and they asked about it. And when I told them about it, they were absolutely shocked. They were shocked that I was even in the army. They couldn't believe that I was in the army. But they took care and I took ca -- my care and we -- we did the thing that we had to do. I was fine.

Q: You mentioned your -- your son. When -- when was he born?

A: If I remember correctly, it was '61 or '62. I think '61 -- 1961 I think it was.

Q: What's his name?

A: I -- Zebbe. Actually, his name on the birth certificate reads Randolf, but he became known to us as Zebbe, that's what everybo -- and he likes to be called Zebbe and he's my eldest, my firstborn and he was born while I was at the army.

Q: And the second -- you have -- how many children do you have?

A: I have four. Three with my first wife, whom I divorced -- we were divorced seven years after our marriage, we had -- there were three children. Zebbe, oldest, David came next -- 20 months later. And then Corrie, my daughter, she came what -- two years later. So that's the first -- my first marriage and then I have Mia with my second wife of now 25 years. And I must say that when you have a child when you're a little bit older, it's a totally different experience, in terms of your output to her -- he -- your input from her to you, it's a totally, totally different thing. You -- you understand, you have -- you appreciate so much more, you have -- so much more sensitive to what childbirth is all about. And -- including the real, actual childbirth methods at the time, were totally different. In the early 60's, the husband spent his time in the waiting room, smoking cigarettes -- which I did too, and the waiting for the doctor to emerge from -- from some dark hallway, wishing you congratulations or whatever. And you had no -- no role in it. When my -- Mia was born in 1982, I was part of the operating team, I was in the room, I was helping my wife -- not with anything real, but just moral support and I was there and the doctors wanted me there to give her that moral support. And it was a wonderful experience, and a big difference.

Q: Sort of generally speaking, or in particular -- di-did you have -- did you develop a certain philosophy of how to bring up your children, or certain rules? Something that s -- s --

A: Well, it -- it -- it was difficult to develop something like this because when my first marriage start to break up, and the kids were still pretty young. After seven years, my -- the oldest was maybe six and down the line of four, sometimes two years apart and then two more years apart. So, when that split took place -- first of all, community looked at divorce differently than it does today. It was a -- almost a taboo kind of a situation, especially in Orthodox circles. And obviously there was going to be a -- there was a -- an actual separation from me and my children. I did spend an awful lot of time with them, though, while we were together and I think that always showed. And one of my stipulations to our separation agreement was that I must -- must have the children on -- on weekends. I mean, not every weekend, but there must be a time, I felt, when -- when the father and his children have to live together like a family. Because visitation for two hours on a Sunday afternoon, I felt was an absolute waste of time. Maybe better not to even have it. Cause it would interfere too much. In the long run with -- kids have parties, kids have this to do. Why do you we have to w-wait until he picks us up to take us to a -- I think life had to be lived together. An evening had to be spent, a -- a bath had to be given. Sa -- you know, you had to live together. So that was part of my sep-separation agreement, that I would have them at least two -- I think it was at least every other weekend and also in the summertime, I would have them for at least a month, full time.

So, my philosophy at the time, or what my goals were -- to try to make their lives as normal as -- or as -- without too much change, which is very strange now that I'm thinking about it. I had so much change, I tried to keep their lifestyle flowing, as it was before, when I was there. In other words, I tried to keep them in the same schools, in the same environment, with the same friends. That was my -- my goal to do and try to keep everything as normal as -- as possible. Even keeled with me and so on. And I don't really know, even now, to what extent I succeeded. I -- my two -- David and Corrie are married. My oldest son is not married yet. So I always wonder -- is he not married because something I did? Did I put some guilt or did he s -- is he suffering from the divorce, or is he suffering from second generation syndromes, which are very popular now, that everybody talks about -- I just wonder. But I -- I have to say that all three of them are totally different individuals, I recognized it early in life. They had different interests. They had to be treated differently, they were little, individual people. And when my oldest son I -- I mean even when he start to -- when he became an adult, which I -- I term roughly after voting age, you know, I gave him more free reign. You can no longer dictate what he's to do and how to do it. You can advise, I realize that -- which is something I -- I think I learned in a negative way from my father, Meyer Slotkin, which he didn't really allow me. But I allowed this, that it's his own -- it's going to be his life and I wish he would take my advice and this and that, but you know, you can't -- even today I can't -- I won't even get into a real hassle with my son about anything that he really wants to do. We can talk about it, but we don't -- we don't confront each other. I

won't -- you know -- they'll be no confrontation. And my -- my -- my Mia, the lo-love of my life, with the love of my life, June. I -- I -- I have to say about June, she is the best woman in the world, my wife of 25 years. She helped me raise those three children. I mean she's -- it wasn't a sacrifice to her. She had them with me and we had them in our house. Now here she is, a woman, three children -- my children, they were not her children and I must say she treated them, she treated them as well as she treats Mia -- like in -- I have a source for comparison. She treated them as her own, as much as that was possible under the circumstances, for the weekends that we had and the summers that they spent together. And I say they spent together -- she's a teacher, so they went out to -- to a resort -- Fire Island, specifically speaking -- and they had a wonderful time. The kids still talk about it. And I went to work most of the week -- I took a lot of time off also. I -- I worked -- actually I did everything in reverse. I worked three days and the rest of the time I spent out there. Right. I worked three days a week and the rest of the time I spent out there with them. We had a wonderful time as a family. We lived there as a family. It was -- it was wonderful. And just brings to mind, my daughter Mia, whenever we show pictures of -- of Fire Island and the -- June and myself and the three kids, she says, "Well, where am I? Where am I?" And we have to tell her that she wasn't on the scene yet, she wasn't even born yet. And -- but she -- she knows, she -- they were very close -- my daughter Mia is very close with the three kids. They -- they know that they're brothers and sister. They're related and they -- they talk constantly, they keep in touch. And that's one of the things that I -- now that we're talking about a little bit philosophy, I keep

telling my children, “In the long run, you only have each other to really depend on. You’re --” And here comes this blood thing, I guess. “You’re all related, blood related, you have the same father -- same parentage.” So, I keep stressing that and I -- and I think that they know that, they understand it. They’re all in touch with each -- with each other. And perhaps my son Zebbe was affected by that a little bit in a negative way. Maybe he felt responsible for the two others and somehow he lost something of his own identity in it. But, I really can’t worry about that, because that’s not a healthy thing to do. It’s his life, he had all the options -- he has all the options -- he still does. I mean, he can do whatever he wants, as long as he’s behaving himself now. He ca -- he’s -- he’s a free man, he’s -- he’s a free man. My philosophy basically was to let them do, know that they should depend on each other, stick together as a family. I never tried to push my -- my f -- my background into them. I never told them the stories, never force fed them. They -- they were starting to come out and ask. They started asking in 1985, when they first became aware. And my son Zebbe, especially now, he’s -- he’s truly into it. He really is into the -- he’s a photographer also, so he -- he does a lot with that. Somehow he manages to express, he -- he took all the photos that we were able to get from Europe and he arranged them, I have the albums here. And he sort of put meaning to them, I mean he -- he -- he’s very meticulous and he tried to s -- you know, put them in chronological order and he -- I think he made an album for Irene, a copy for myself and he -- he’s into -- he’s into it. He watches all the latest on -- on Holocaust movies, “Schindler’s List” for example, he -- he -- he must have seen it many times. I saw it once. Very good film,

credit is due there, both from artistic point of view and from -- from a point of view authenticity, even though some of the scenes, they were not quite real, as only I would know. But the idea was very authentic and what took place was -- seemed very authentic. But the scenes weren't quite as dirty as I remembered them and quite as bloody and -- but good movie, good movie, so -- that's -- that's my philosophy with the -- with the kids.

Q: I would like to talk a little bit more about the very important year of 1985, when you and Irene began to search a little bit more, but I'd like to backtrack just -- just a bit.

A: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

Q: Are there any particular events in -- that happened here in America, that were of importance to you? I mean, in the 60's, the Civil Rights movement, later the Feminist movement -- is there anything that affected you in particular, that was important to you, that reverberated in a special way?

A: Bu -- I -- I assume that you mean because of my background, that -- that somehow that would -- I would do a different take on it than a normal American?

Q: Not necessarily. Just generally speaking.

A: Just generally speaking? Well, I was always math and science minded and Jules Verne was one of my -- one of my favorite authors, so when America finally landed on the moon, I -- that was mind-boggling to me. I remember -- this is 1959 or '60, I'm not su -- quite sure, it was in that time frame, but -- was it that, or was it much later? Well, whatever the time frame was -- I th-think it was late 60's, now that I'm thinking about it, yeah, '69 was probably more like it, yeah. And that -- that was mind blowing to me. It

was a superb achievement, but at the same time, we -- we advanced so scientifically, I -- I knew there was so much -- so much suffering still going around the world. Even today, 1997, i-it's -- it's mindboggling that somehow our -- our -- our scientific achievement hasn't matched our social growth or m-moral growth or what have you. Politics included. So it -- as impressive as it was -- it was maybe a little disappointing also, that we had to -- but it was a race between Russia and the United States and we won.

Q: I would like to just do a brief follow up question. You mentioned that your s -- one of your son, the oldest, is a photographer?

A: Mm-hm.

Q: What -- what are the other children and what did you do for a living or do you do for a living?

A: Oh. My -- all three of the children, in fact all four of the children went to Israel. The three children went after high school, they went for a year to study in Israel. It -- it was a popular thing, I guess, for parents to do and I felt it was an excellent vehicle for them to spend a time, to mature a little bit, to orient themselves and to know a little bit more what they're doing. Which I didn't know what to do when I was finished with high school. I mean I truly didn't know what to do. And I felt it was a good maturing experience and also, I secretly -- I almost felt, getting the reports from people who spent a year in Israel, they never wanted to come back. I was sort of hoping that maybe something would -- would keep them there and somehow maybe I would end up there for -- going there. I -- that's still sort of a dream in the back of my mind, because somehow -- I know I'm

Jewish, there's no escaping it, there's just no escaping the fact that you're Jewish, no matter how friendly, how welcoming an environment is and the United States is the most -- probably the -- the friendliest country for a Jew to live in today, maybe even Israel. But home is -- is -- the homeland -- the Jewish homeland, which -- which was always in -- in my f -- you know, background of an -- or focus on and off, Israel is the place -- is the only place and it -- I'm -- I'm -- I'm glad I sent them, I'm glad they went. Even my daughter Mia, she hasn't finished high school yet, but she already went last -- two summers ago, for an extended stay of three weeks and she loved it. Of course loving it at 14 is differently than loving it when you're 16 or 17, but they all had a very good experience there. My son David is somewhat of a student. He studied there in the Yeshiva. And he eventually became a -- got a degree of rabbi, which is just like a doctorate in Jewish studies, but he became a rove, he got the smeeha, which is the equivalent of a doctorate in rabbinical studies, I guess, from Yeshiva University and he now is -- he's a teacher in Westchester, in Mamaranak. And his wife is also a teacher, she teaches handicapped people -- hard of hearing and unable to speak, she talks in sign language. So they're both teachers and they have three boys, which means of course I have at least three grandchildren. And they have a wonderful life together. They -- they have summers off together, which is -- which is something that I always encouraged my kids. My -- my secret desire to be a math teacher, part of that plan was to have summers off, so that I could be with kids. I love kids. So, as it turns out -- as -- I love children, I love to teach. I mean I could -- I just -- thought came back to me, which will throw me

back into the Slotkin house, if -- if I could. They sent me to summer camp and I became -- I was always athletic alee in class. I became a swimmer and I ended up getting a water safety's instructor's certificate from the Red Cross, which made me a lifeguard and -- so I did that for quite a few summers, late high school and -- no, actually college years and during that course, I taught. I became a teacher -- at least I was teaching something. Not math, but swimming. And it was a very rewarding experience, especially when -- when -- when I managed to teach a non-swimmer, who was totally afraid of the water, or a handicapped person -- to get them into the pool, to get them to relax, to gain that confidence, to be able to float and to move in water, which is so life-threatening to most people if they are afraid of it. So, it was a -- it was a wonderful experience and I think that teaching is something that I pushed a little bit on as a -- as a professional. I thought that was a good profession and my son David I think took -- took us up on it. I think June, my wife, who is a teacher, also saw the wisdom in that, so we pushed him, really. We re -- we really forced him a little bit. And he -- he took us up on it. He's very happy now. And my daughter Corrie also went to Israel… more of a secular type. She didn't -- wasn't engaged in the Torah and the Talmudic studies that the boys are -- are sort of expected to do in the -- in the -- in the Orthodox way of doing things. And I will con --

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

A: -- jeans, which is an Israeli owned concern and when she came back, she approached the Jordache people here and she got a job on that basis and she was in the fashion world

for quite a few years. Now she's married and … she lives on Long Island, she's very close to her family. She's -- she gave up working because she really wants to spend time with her children, even though she can afford to do otherwise. And she's very happy -- she's very happy. And my little Mia, well, we're going to wait.

Q: How did you meet your second wife and why did you marry?

A: Well, I knew, when I really divorced, that I could never live alone. I mean, I knew that th-there -- I would have to be, cause I'm that type of a person, I'm not a loner, I -- I need to be around people, with people. And so I knew I would marry, but obviously right after divorce I wasn't ready. I-It's strange. I met her through a coincidence of -- of the Slotkins again, believe it or not. My father, Meyer Slotkin was best friend with -- with a gentleman called Daniel Meyers, this is down in Lawrence, Long Island, who used to pick us up. My memory is -- of him is pick us up Friday afternoons, half wet from a Shabbas preparation shower, cigarette dangling out of his mouth, driving 100 miles an hour, picking us up to go to Shul Friday night. And they were best of friends and Daniel Meyers had a son who was younger than I, but we -- nevertheless, we knew of each other and this fellow, Jonathan Meyers, used to live one house down from here, where I live today. He married a girl and they used to spend summers out on Hampton -- in the Hamptons -- Amagansett, Long Island. And my wife, being a teacher -- teachers all have summers off. They also spend time on the beaches, if they like beaches. So they met up there. And then when my separation came about, Jonathan and his wife -- Jonathan and his wife and I -- f -- I'll try and remember her name later -- they thought that -- that June

would be a excellent match for me, because they knew here very well, she lived with them for awhile and they knew of me. So they introduced us. And so we actually met for the first time, a few hundred yards from where I sit now. And this was 1970, I think. '69 -- 1970. And our first impressions -- I remember I didn't want to come into the city, but he said, "Oh come, please, we --", I said, "Look, I know you want to meet -- you want to make us some kind of a shiddock, you wanted me -- me to meet some girl, or this," said, "please, I am not interested, I don't want it, I'm not ready for any of this. You want me to come in for dinner, I'll come in for dinner, we'll talk," and this and this, wi -- I walked in and there is June. And I was pretty disturbed, in a negative way, I didn't want any part of this. I found out later -- many years later, that when June saw me walk through the door, she said to herself, "There's the man I'm going to marry." So first impressions is what sometimes work and sometimes they don't work. But they're a valuable tool for some, I guess. So that's where I met June. And we started dating very, very slowly. I must admit, she was first much more aggressive than I was. But I saw the value of her -- she's a wonderful person, just a marvelous person. Then, after a couple of years, I turned to -- I turned to be more aggressive, because she was going away every summer and I started feeling lonely and this and that and so once we made up our minds, we -- I proposed to her. I tried to pick a spot -- a romantic spot, because I'm that way in my heart. I tried to pick a spot that would always be here. So I picked the Metropolitan Museum. They used to have a pool garden around them, with fountains and the cafeteria -- café around it. It was magnificent. The pool was huge and it had statues and water was flowing out. It was

a beautiful setting there. The piano bar and this -- this is where I wanted to get engaged because I wanted to always be able to come back to the place and -- and somehow celebrate. By the -- just by the way, on the side note on this -- this same location was used I think, by Sybill, the picture Sybill -- if anybody knows about that. But that's where it can be seen. So, we were engaged and married three weeks later and happy. Happy, happy, happy. I don't think we ever had a real fight. Disagreements, yes, but not any real out and out fight, ever. And she's been a mother to the three children. [phone message machine]

Q: We're going to stop the tape for a second. How -- how old were your children when you got married again? They were fairly young?

A: Yes, yes. I remember we -- b-before I even go on to that, I just have to say, in the context of what we were talking before, that as -- as wonderful as June was and what a wonderful contribution a woman can make to a -- to a -- to a husband, to a family, to a man like me. It required, I guess, special understanding, because she is very special. But it -- it's -- it's been wonderful. For me, life has been wonderful since I met June. And the con -- to contrast that, it could be the worst thing if you have the wrong mate, which I also had before. So -- I sort of -- I'm just saying, I know what I'm talking about. A wife -- a true partner, can make or break you, is -- is my whole point. And when the -- the children, when -- when I got married to June were quite, quite young and I think in their idealistic way, they still sort of hoped that somehow things would go back to where they were. Even though they spent so much time here with us, so they knew that this was the

right way. I -- I have to mention at this point also that at one point in time, the two oldest ones, they actually left their mother's homes to come to us -- to live with us. And we made provisions here for that. Corrie, my ol -- the youngest, the last one left, didn't have the strength or didn't want to -- or didn't -- couldn't leave her mother alone or something. So that never happened. But -- at the -- when the marriage took place, it was still -- feelings were still very raw. There was a lot of animosity and there was -- was a new thing. So, we wanted the kids to come to the wedding, but we couldn't announce it freely to my ex-wife, because that would not have worked. So -- and the children were so young, that we couldn't even tell them, the wedding is going to take place at a certain time and we had to have them dressed. So I remember, very distinctly, we --we went to buy them suits. We purchased them at J.C. Penney, I remember that very distinctly, they were the suits -- we tried to guess their sizes and dress and whatnot and that weekend that they came -- we were married on a Sunday -- we told them about this and it was quite a shock for them to realize that we were going to get married, cause -- I mean they knew us as being together, but this is a different ball game. This sort of made it irreversible or whatever. But it -- it was hard and I even at the -- at the wedding, I have a few pictures where I see Zebbe sitting alone and some photographer caught me tal -- trying to talk to him, his head down and -- he wasn't upset about the food, he was upset about what was taking place. So I think it was a hard thing for them, but I think that now they realize how happy we are and they -- they constantly want to come here. My -- Corrie wants to be h-here every Shabbas now, even though she has a house which could house all of us on

Long Island, but this is where she wants to be, on the living room floor here. She would rather be here with -- with the family. So I think I -- I managed to get a certain point across to them. [telephone ringing]

Q: We will stop for a second. Let me go back just -- just for one second. Do you think the difficulties, without necessarily going into detail, but the difficulties that you experienced during your first marriage -- marriage, had to do with, in part at least, with who you were because of your particular experience?

A: No, not really. I think it was simply having the wrong partner. Also, when you're young -- well it's the wrong partner, because you married, as a course of event at the time. You finish school, the next step is marriage and you just stepped into it without too much thinking and perhaps there was a little bit of pressure from -- a negative pressure from my house to get out and I just wanted out. But basically I think it's because it was the wrong partner. Because the difference is unbelievable.

Q: When did you begin to talk to your family and to Irene about the earlier experience again? Or for the first time.

A: For the first time, Irene and I, although we lived in the same house, under the same roof, we had the same friends, we had so many common interests -- the first time we talked about it was in 1985, in Jerusalem. Two years prior to '85, there was a convention in Philadelphia, a Holocaust convention, which I never really paid much attention to by -- by Mr. Mead and his wife and they had these annual get-togethers, but it never interest us, because we were protected from it, we were -- we're just not part of that scene at all.

But we had a special invitation from a lady, Eva Core, who formed a twin organization. Now this was more our speed, because we knew we were twins and -- and it sort of hit home a little bit. She was a very forceful lady and she said we -- we -- we owe it to ourselves, we owe it to our children, we owe it to the future, we owe it to mankind period, just to talk a little bit and let them know what -- what happened. Whatever the result of that is, is -- is up to history to judge, but we owe it to the people. We owe it to ourselves. And being that I and a -- I and -- and my sister and we never talked about it, it -- it was just -- seemed like might be very interesting to hear it from somebody else, even though we knew that we were there, 100 percent, because we had some pictures, we had the numbers. We wanted to, I think, make contact with others who were in the same -- same situation. So, we -- we've -- we made contact with them, we joined the organization and in 1985, Eva Core made this -- was the head -- head of this mock trial for Dr. Mengele, to which all the twins in the world were invited. She searched them out and we were all there, that -- that she could get. There were scores. There were scores there. I think maybe like 80 - 85 twins or something like that. And -- some single twins, because their partners, their tw -- other twins didn't survive. But -- there were some small people -- what do you call them? Not pygmies.

Q: No. Dwarfs.

A: Dwarfs. Dwarfs, yeah. There were -- and I think they're might have been one or two Gypsy, but I -- I don't believ -- I -- I don't think -- I don't remember seeing them in Jerusalem, but there were definitely some dwarfs there in 1985. And the -- the -- the

mock trial of Dr. Mengele took place in Yad Vashem and in -- and it was given a lot of publicity throughout the world. Dr. Mengele came on the scene because that was his trial and the -- the testimony given by eyewitnesses against him were -- were -- were just unbelievable. We talked -- not so much during the trial itself, but after the trial, in our hotels, we talked to the other twins and they told us what had taken place with them and some of the stories were just unbelievable. Even to us, even though we were there. There was just -- horrible. But it -- we made contact, for the first time and this is where I saw the effects that this war had on -- on -- on -- on people, on -- on -- and this is where I came to the -- to the realization that I am so lucky, because I think I -- I sort of escaped it, relatively unscathed. I -- maybe because -- maybe I'm hiding it, maybe it's repressed, maybe it's in there somewhere. But I felt -- I felt so much more at ease with the world.

[phone answering machine]

Q: We'll stop for one second please. -- with the world?

A: Yeah, I -- I -- I've -- I've looked around me and I saw all these people that were hurt, some actually, physically, were on -- on kidney machines. Emotionally, I saw 50 year old girls, twins -- they were dressed alike, they had the little ponytails, braided tails and they're holding hands together and walking around like this. Now, these people obviously were hurt, emotionally, spiritually -- there -- there's something wrong with them. And they all had this look in their eye. This -- this -- a certain look that -- a wild, you know, a hurt look. And only maybe 10 percent -- less than 10 percent, five percent of the people were people that I could relate to, speak to normally and -- and not be afraid

that I would offend them in any way because certainly we -- we were talking to each other much more openly, because we all knew who we were. We were saying things that we wouldn't normally say, but we're still being very careful and had to be careful, except for a handful. Truly maybe five percent of the people that we could really talk to freely. And I think, as a result of all this -- this -- this created a -- a -- an environment for my sister and I, cause I think one of the evenings, we sat down in our room and we just started. It just poured out. We started talking and this and -- and you know, recalling our memories, our this -- slowly at first, but g -- and we felt so much, so much relief. I don't know what kind of relief, but just relief that finally we were able to talk. And I guess i-it was time. It was just time t-to unload all this and only to ourselves. We still did not feel free to talk to the Slotkins. Now, my father had passed away already. He passed away in '81 - '82, but my mother was still around. She was still from the old school and even though she now knew that we were public with it, and we appeared on shows and Irene lectures and this and that, she still -- it wasn't something that was good for Irene to do, because she was totally protected. For me, she -- she knew I was a little flightier and maybe less easily hurt or more extroverted or had it more hidden in me, or whatever. But, so in 1985 -- 40 years after. 40? Yeah.

Q: Were you recognized by somebody at this -- at this conference in Jerusalem?

A: Yeah. Yes, there were a couple of people that -- that recognized me as that little boy, because I was truly one of the youngest blond-headed kid, they recognized me and they -- they let me know that they remembered me. And that didn't do all that much for me.

Well, of course you remember me, I was there, you were there. But in the negative sense, Irene wasn't recognized by anyone. And this hurt her, I think, even though she's now an adult and I think she still would have liked to have been remembered by somebody -- created enough of a -- an impression. But I'm not all that surprised, because from what she tells me, she was mostly always in the background. Nobody took care of her. As the men seemed to have -- for some reason they took much better care of -- of their -- of the younger twins. They somehow had an organization and they -- they -- they took care of the younger ones. That ladies, for some reason -- and I can't understand why, but they did not have the same sort of a set up.

Q: So when you and Irene talked together for the first time, you pieced your memories together, what -- what -- what -- give me -- what happened?

A: I -- I don't think we bothered really to piece the memories, cause we -- we had them. What we -- what we tried to -- to do is to -- for the few -- one specific example I can give you -- when we were in Auschwitz, after we were separated and we were -- like she was in the women's camp, I was in the men's camp and we were taking to the doctor on an individual basis, even though I guess they knew who I was -- I was a twin to the other one. But we saw each other once, through a fence, a barbed wire. And at that eye contact, no words, nothing was spoken, but we both remembered that. That one moment, that one instant. And I think that's the instant that -- that gave us the -- the -- the -- the impetus to -- to say, "He's alive. He's always going to be alive -- or she's alive. I'm going to find her, I'm going to do --". So we talked about that moment of recognition, cause I knew it was

her, but I wasn't sure that she knew that it was me. But we got that straightened out very quickly. So we talked, but even though we talked for the first time and we were as open as we could, Irene still held back a lot of things. And I guess I held back a lot of things, too and I'm only saying this empirically speaking now, because I know how much more information we let out since 1985. But we talked about it and it felt good. It was a relief. It really was a relief. And for -- I think from that point on, we realized we're going to have to talk about it. And that it -- good will come of it. And it -- it has to be. Because questions are asked by people close to you, by your family. They have to be answered, they can't be -- you -- you can't put them aside, they have to be answered. And they -- in order to answer them, they have to be answered truthfully. As fully and as truthfully as we can answer them.

Q: What happened in your family, when you begin to talk about it? Did you do on your own, or did it --

A: No, no, here I -- I have to say that I allowed the Slotkins to -- to -- to -- to manipulate my mind. Not manipulate by my -- but th-they -- I was always sort of in the same framework. I didn't want to tell the kids about my horrors. I never hid anything from them, conscio -- but I never wanted to either tell them. So, as they grew older, their questions became more intense and I tried to tell them whatever I could gear to their age. You know, at -- at six, seven, eight years old, when -- you know, you -- you can tell a kid something, but you can't -- so but now it's ou -- all out and they know everything and whenever there is something that's happening, they want to be part of it. And I think they

feel sort of an honor that their father survived it all. I -- I really do. I think -- that's how they make me feel, anyway, so it's good. I mean, I don't mind.

Q: You began to speak publicly about it as well, in schools?

A: Yes. I don't know how you knew that, but it's true. In addition to the media exposure that -- when we were hot, in 1985 and Mengele was on the front page and we were flown out to California once, I remember, to a show -- we were on the Good Morning Show here and this and that, but, you know, this was just few short questions, answering to the people and -- and, you -- you know, you were prepped for this, basically. You still answered truthfully, but you were prepped for it, for -- but to really get the message home, I thought -- and Irene, whenever she speaks, you can't do it as a factual thing. "Oh yes, we went -- we were -- so many were killed, we saw people getting killed every day -- where they kept marching them to the ovens, and there were piles of bones." Everybody has seen this. But we thought, to bring it home, really to -- to -- to bring it home, is to personalize the message. To -- to make you as real as you possibly can make it. So Irene does it in a way -- she's a wonderful speaker, I -- she really is, she -- I've -- I've heard her speak to congregations and to gatherings and people are absolutely spellbound. When she finishes, they -- they just look at each other and there's nothing to say. I'm not that way. I like to go to schools. I -- I would -- I remember twice -- on two occasions, I went to schools. I actually put the kids on the floor, in a circle around me and let them touch me, let them ask. I didn't start telling them. I tol -- they were prepped by their teacher, knowing that here is a man from concentration, comes from a -- and I just let them -- let

them loose. And, you know some of them ask questions about -- kids -- some ask, you know, “Did they -- did they feed you? Did you starve?” And did you this and that. These are youngsters. But older people -- much more intelligent, much more sensitive questions, they really want to know. And they know so little from the history books. There’s no history out there of this. History doesn’t teach this, the Holocaust. It’s just something that happened. And the Bronx High School of Science, that was the last one that I a-attended a class there -- a -- high school students. And there were -- they’re studying the Holocaust and they have a very extensive Holocaust exhibition down in their basement as part of their library. Very, very intense, one of the best. And they -- they really wanted to get into it, because they ju -- there was just no way they could get it from history. So getting to talk to them, I got them to really feel -- I try to make them feel that I’m real, you’re real, it really happened. And I think they believe me and that was one of my greatest rewards, because today there are a lot of people out there who say it never happened. What -- what their motivation is, I don’t know. But there are people listening.

Q: There is concern, or there -- there is concern among the Jewish community to not put so much emphasis, all the time on the Holocaust as not to take away from other Jewish experiences. Is that something you are sympathetic with or that you have feelings about?

A: There is, unfortunately Jews, like all other people, we’re -- we’re somewhat slaves to the current markets and -- and if the pop -- the topic is popular, people get on it. There’s some people who -- who actually force a living out of the Holocaust. Very few, but there

are some. So, all I'm really saying is that -- th-that a lot has been done, a lot has been said, because it's timely. It seems to be the thing. Whether you were -- you can ever totally overkill the issue, I -- I -- I don't know, I -- I don't know. I don't think that you really can, I think it's a very important part of the Jewish history, but certainly it's not the happening. I think the happening happened a long time ago, when God took Moses and children of Israel out of Egypt. And I think that was the happening. And if all Jews focused on that, they would get a little better understanding of what really is worthwhile -- or what they should concentrate on. But, certainly history -- and this is the same, it's historical, you have to look at your history in order to live today and prepare for tomorrow. You just have to do that. You have to do that and the -- the Holocaust is what happened to us, unfortunately. And it's my life, I was turtle -- totally immersed in it for awhile and I'm still immersed in it many years later. The -- the just -- you just don't forget about it. You know it every day. You know that you're different. How different, I'm not sure. I honestly don't know, but I know that my background is different than -- just as I'm different from any other person living.

Q: You have obviously managed to lead a very fruitful life, a rich life -- still leading it. Are there nightmares left? Fears that lead back to that time? Tra -- memories that get triggered at certain moments?

A: I have to disagree with you a little bit. A little bit. Yes, I have a fruitful life. I've -- I have grandchildren, I have children. But somehow I -- I feel that all this -- this -- all this coincidence -- I can't even say luck, it was sort of my destiny, I feel somehow, to escape

and to come here to the United States. To be in the army, to be divorced, to -- to find June. To -- to work for a synagogue. To -- to do whatever I've done. But somehow I don't quite feel fulfilled. I don't feel this richness of having lived a truly fruitful life. Maybe nothing to do with the Holocaust. Maybe if I would have been a math teacher, it would have been fulfilling. But I haven't done that and there's something still missing. I don't know what to attribute this to. There is something not quite -- it seems that I've escaped something that was so horrendous that I -- I feel maybe I should have done something unbelievable, but I haven't. Even though, some say an ordinary life -- a -- a rich life or children and education, this is -- is an achievement of it's own, but I -- I just -- I wonder. I wonder about this. I feel that maybe I should have -- I've been destined for something -- maybe still to come, I don't know.

Q: Is there something that you would like to say in conclusion to this interview?

A: I think I just said it. I feel very, very lucky that I escaped. I'm very fortunate with what I -- what I have. I have what I think are the true riches. I have a wife that loves me, that I love. I have a family. I belong to a synagogue, I'm a member of a community. I have good friends, I have -- I seem to be healthy, which unfortunately my sister doesn't have the health. But then there is this -- still this -- there's a little bit of emptiness. Unfulfilled something in me that -- that I haven't satisfied yet. But perhaps I will, perhaps -- maybe this is one of the means by which I -- I do this, is when I do an interview like this, or when I expose my emotions like this, it takes a few days to come back -- to sort of get back into total norm. Perhaps this is something -- perhaps these comments, perhaps

the tapes that I've done, perhaps the shows that we've recorded, perhaps in the future, maybe that is the thing that's going to count and -- and -- and serve, which I don't feel right now. Perhaps.

Q: Thank you, Rene. This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Rene Slotkin.

A: Yes.

End of Tape Two, Side B

Conclusion of Interview