United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Regina Gelb
March 18, 1998
RG-50.549.02*0013

PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Regina Gelb, conducted by Regina Baier on March 18, 1998 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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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 Regina Gelb, conducted by Regina Baier, on March 18th, 1998 in Mrs. Gelb's home. This is a follow-up interview to a USHMM videotaped interview conducted with Regina Gelb on September 30th, 1991. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum gratefully acknowledges Jeff and Toby Herr for making this interview possible. This is tape number one, side A. Let us begin with your name -- your birth name and your name now and also when you were born and where.

Answer: All right. Well, my name is Regina Gelb, born Laks, L-a-k-s. I am also known as Renia, R-e-n-i-a. So you could refer to me as Renia and Regina, but -- but for all practical -- for all official purposes, I really am Regina, so you can only find me under that, but everybody else knows me also as Renia. Gelb, obviously is my married name.

Q: When you were born --

A: Oh yes, I was born in Starachowice and I'll spell that for you because it's a very long name. S-t-a-r-a-c-h-o-w-i-c-e. That was, at the time of my birth, also known as Wierzbnik, W-i-e-r-z-b-n-i-k. I was born on December 16, 1929. I just want to add that at time of my birth, I was really born in Wierzbnik, but Wierzbnik was combined with Starachowice into one town and now you would never probably -- you will not find Wierzbnik on the map, but you will find Starachowice. So, I sort of refer to the fact that I

was born in Starachowice because if you want to look me up, you will not find me otherwise, except in Starachowice.

Q: Whereabouts is Starachowice?

A: Yes. Starachowice is in central Poland, about two and a half hours by car from Warsaw, directly south. It is an industrial town and it was -- if we go a li-little back in history, Poland, as you know, was divided up to 1918, between Russia, Prussia and Hungary. We were -- I was born in the very heart of Poland, which was called in those days, Congress Poland, because when Napoleon went through Poland, he carved up a piece of free Poland and that was the -- the core of the -- the core -- the -- the center of Poland, where Starachowice is located. Now, th-the town, as I a-am fond of remembering -- reminding everybody -- the fact that the town was an -- an industrial town played a great part in my surviving the war. The reason being that after the first war, when Poland became independent in 1918, the -- the marshall pusitski who was then the -- the head of the Polish government -- it was decided that Poland has to arm itself, so they carved up a -- an industrial complex within the heart of Poland and they started -- there was ore to be smelted and big factories went up. How this historic fact relates to my survival is probably a bit farfetched, but it isn't, for the reason that the factory di -- me -- the factory in our town, which prior to the war, smelted ore and pro -- was -- produced iron of all kinds of locomotives and -- and meat grinders, from the big to the smallest, was converted to a munitions factory as soon as the war broke out. By virtue of which, the Germans decided that the entire area, which contained these different factories, which

were converted into munitions factories, would need le -- slave labor. Therefore, people who were living within that area, were first used as slave labor. Of course, in due time they would die out and they would be shipped, whatever. The numbers would always be supplemented by new people, who were either shipped out of towns or caught or whichever way. The number --eventually the number of slave labor people working for the -- in that factory, was constant, even though people were dying like flies. But of course we're -- are getting ahead of our story here, because this is only the beginning. I just meant to make the connection that Starachowice, the factory was -- before the war, the factory was in Starachowice proper. The bedroom of Starachowice proper was Wierzbnik. That was basically a town where everything took place, commerce and so on and it was a very sizable Jewish community, about one third of the people living in Wierzbnik were Jews. And they were generally, as they always were -- they were merchants and they were cobblers and carpenters and so on and they -- there also was such a thing as the Jewish intelligencia in those days. Of which my parents were part. But that was the town and -- and Starachowice did not have Jews living in -- in it, because the Jews were not allowed to work in the factory, strange as it might seem. Before the war, the Jews were not allowed to live or work in the factory. In -- and, as I said, eventually the two were combined so by then you couldn't do -- have these restrictions but that was the fact, before the war.

Q: I just have one follow-up question on that story --

A: Yes?

Q: -- before I would like to go to your -- your childhood and your family, actually.

A: Yes?

Q: What were the reasons? Were they anti-Semitic reasons or were they different reasons?

A: I could not tell you. You know, there are certain things which to this day remain a mystery to me, because I was a child. I just knew that Jewish people did not work in the fact -- in the plant and that there were no Jew -- Jews living there. And I'll tell you, actually why -- I'll tell you, I -- I almost know now, because I've read some -- some books on the subjects about Starachowice that were written actually the last 20 years. Starachowice was at one time, built in colonies for people directly involved with the factory. In other words, after 1918, when that factory went up, they started building colonies, one was called Roboneetcha, which is for the workers and another one was for the -- for the, I guess for the administration over there. But they had these colonies, they were what you call now, you know in America, you have a lot of these developments. You know, you have houses and the -- the -- but the -- the basic commerce was still in Wierzbnik. The reason Jews did not live in Starachowice, because to qualify, you had to work in the factory, you see? Yeah. And that was true up to the very war. And when the war broke out, obviously things got totally changed because the resettlement of Jews came into being and all this, but this is a story that we'll probably continue later.

Q: So maybe if you can tell us a little bit about your family now. About your early upbringing, your daily life?

A: All right. Well, first of all, we were a family of five -- father, mother and the three of us. My oldest sister, Anna, who is also called Hanya. Her last name now is Wilson and she's a Canadian. My sec -- my middle sister, Krisha, who's also called Kris, but her true name is Rosalia Kristina Lehrman. And we call her Krisha for short. And my name, Regina, which also is Renia. We were a secular type of family. The town was very Jewish in the sense that it had a very sizable Orthodox Jewish community. But my parents, of course were part of the Jewish community, but we were not Orthodox, we were not -- we were secular. And my parents were very much oriented to Zionism. But before we proceed that, let me just explain to you the other background. The fact that we spoke Polish at home, we were brought up in the Polish language. Both my parents spoke Polish beautifully, even though my father's background was really German. He came from Solsnoviets, which is western Poland, which -- Salesia, in Salesia. And he was brought up in the German language, because obviously he went to school -- he was an educated man -- he went to school pri -- prior to the f -- end of the first war, prior to 1918, which means that, depending on which sphere of influence you lived in, that was the language in which you were taught. Well, my pa -- my father was a German, in that sense, because he -- he spoke German beautifully. To this day I talk about his encyclopedia because that played a big part in the war, also. He had his encyclopedia in German, he -- he was subscribing to magazines and other things and he spoke German beautifully, but of course his Polish was wonderful. Mother, on the other ha -- hand, came from the so-called Russian part of Poland, so she spoke Russian in addition to her

Polish. But we were brought up at home in the Polish language. My parents knew Yiddish and spoke to each other only if they didn't want the kids to understand. Now my father was an engineer in the forestry business. That was a very big business in Poland. They employed people who had good education, a good scientific, what's that to say? Science background, which my father had from his German education. Assessing forestry for lumber and such. And there was a big sawmill in Starachowice -- in -- in Wierzbnik, Starachowice -- belonged to Jewish people, I think they were Austrians. And they were -- that was their ownership. And they employed -- it -- it was a sizable type of operation because th-the lumber was -- the -- the forests that were cut elsewhere, brought in, were -- were turned into lumber. And mother was -- as it was true in Poland, she was not what you call a working woman, not until 1938 or so and I -- I'll come to that. And we had a very good life. Of course we had a maid, as everybody else did and when I tell people how it was when -- we had a -- a seamstress come to the house, you know and people used to buy goods and they used to sew it for you, the -- you know, the seamstress would come and she would sew the sheets and she would sew the skirts for the kids and the blouses and all that. And this was of course another totally other way of life. And then you had the laundress, she came and she did the big laundry and -- and she took it to the mangle and I told somebody about the mangle and said, "What is that?" Well, the sheets were mangled. And there is such a thing and I know the machine. I could even describe it. But anyhow, we had a very good life, until the late 30's. We had a wonderful life, as you -- I'll show you some pictures in my albums. My mother has arthri -- had arthritis, so

she went for a cure to a place called Busco -- Busco's druey, which had sulfur baths and she went regularly, ev -- every summer for six weeks. And after that, of course, we used to come -- she used to come back and we used to go so-called country, somewhere in the -- on the farm to -- to recover. But sh -- this was a strenuous kind of treatment and she used to take us with her to Busco. Not all three at one time, but two, sometimes one and I remember -- I have even a picture from Busco with my mother and my sister has a picture from Busco that -- mother did that in the summertime, but other than that she was very involved with the Zionist movement in Poland. And she was instrumental in ope -- in opening a Hebrew school called Tarbud, which was specifically designed for children like ourselves, who came from secular homes, where Polish was spoken, for them to have the Jewish identity. We used to go after regular school. After the Polish -- regular Polish school, we used to go to Tarbud, it was called Tarbud. And Tarbud, they taught us Hebrew and they taught us Jewish history and the Bible and such. But basically, we were too young to know Hebrew well enough to study the Bible, so that was in Polish and the language, to an extent to which a child could manage at that age. And mother was also very instrumental -- first of all, she was president of Viso the women's international Zionist organization. Whether she was president of -- of the area, or whatever the area encompassed, I couldn't tell. Whether it was a county, or -- or southern Poland or central Poland or -- I don't know, but she was president of Viso. And these wom-women Zionist movements supported very much the pioneering -- the preparation of young Jews for Palestine. The pioneers for Palestine. And they used to be called Hag Sharah. And Hag

Sharah was the kind of a training center which was established even in Starachowice -- in Starachowice, Wierzbnik where these young fellows, that was mostly young men or very young women who were not married and had no children. Young people who wanted to go to Palestine and be pioneers. And they were trained in farm work and in communal living and all that. And the women Zionist movement, of which my mother was president, not just -- didn't just support it, but was running that Hag Sharah. Father was also quite involved with it, but of course he had to earn a living. But mother, this was her full-time job. All this changed about 1938 because the Jewish people who owned the fac -- the sawmill in the town, sold it to Christians. And -- I think they were Austrian Jews, if I remember correctly. Anyhow, after they have given up the -- the operation -- the plant, every single Jew was fired. From the top to the bottom. Whether he was an engineer or whether he was whatever. Pushed the tr -- the -- the -- the barrels or collected the -- whatever it was. It was completely staffed by Polish Christians. And that was also the very hard time, there was lots of boycotting done of Jewish stores and Jewish enterprises. And of course, studying history, I know that this didn't come of itself, it was germane, but at the same time, the influences coming out of Germany were also very much involved in this very open -- very open antagonism. You see, they wouldn't beat you, but they -- they, if you had a store, they would march around and they would say -- they would march and they would yell, "Don't buy from Jews," and don't buy from Jews and such. Now, my father was without a job now -- yes?

Q: Be-Before we really move into that time, I would like --

A: Yes, yes.

Q: -- one more time go back to your -- to your family. Tell us a little bit more about your relationship to your sisters for instance.

A: Oh yes, yes, yes.

Q: Were you close? Did you know your grandfathers other relatives?

A: Yes. Oh, yes. Yes, this is very, yes.

Q: [indecipherable] home life. What do you remember of -- of home?

A: Yes, yes. Well, we had a very wonderful life. That is not just in retrospect or nostalgic or in any way but to describe it, we really had a wonderful childhood. The parents were, as I told you, very progressive minded. And we were very, very close-knit, especially with my mother's side of the family, because they lived only within 20 miles or so of the -- or 20 kilometers, I don't know which, but very short distance from Starachowice. And personally, I never knew either grandfather. My father, as I told you, came from Solsnoviets and that's western Poland. I never knew that grandfather, he died before I was born. And I never knew my other grandfather. My mother's maiden name was Tannenblume, so I did not know my Tannenblume grandfather and I didn't know my Laks grandfather. However, I knew my grandmothers very well, both of them. The -- grandmother Laks used to come for -- you know like you, in the old days they used to come for a visit, was an extended visit, let's say for six weeks, so she lived with us. And then she would go to visit her other son, Alexander, in Radom. And then she would make the rounds and then she would -- she lived in Solsnoviets, but she would make these very

lovely, extended trips. But that was the time when I saw her, but the other grandmother, we called Babcha, is a grandmother for -- in Polish. The other grandmother, I really -- not just adored, she had great influence over me and I remember her dearly and I'll never forget her because of my childhood, my orientation to the importance of things. For example, she was the owner of a printing shop. I never tire of talking about it because she was -- she owned a printing shop with her two daughters. There were two daughters, unmarried daughters living with her. One of them was Regina, that's mother's sister, Regina Tannenblume and the other was Anja. Anja Tannenblume. Babcha was Sara Tannenblume. Babcha was officially, so to say, the owner of the printing shop because it belonged to my grandfather, but the three of them -- actually the -- th-the daughters were running it. And I would be invited -- grandmother was fond of inviting one child at a time. She was religious and she was kosher and she did not think my mother was doing the kind of job with the secular education, that we really needed this other something -- this other background. So I would go by myself on the -- it was a train, I think, or on the bus. And she would wait for me. You know, it was a very short ride, I mean really short. My mother wouldn't trust me to somebody there thasay Babcha's going to be waiting. Then she did. And my total fascination with the printing shop -- I fell in love with that place, totally. Not just that the man in the back, you know, that was a hand operated printing machine. They allowed me to touch it and go with them. And then they would cut -- they would cut the material, the lets -- they used to do for movie houses, they used to do posters. And then they had these big cutting machine and they would cut the edges

to be -- to be straight. Well, imagine a child -- seven, eight year old child having a bag of these cuttings. I mean, you know, you co -- th-this was paradise. Then, they used to make ledgers, you know, like ledgers for -- ledgers and they would punch these holes, they had a punching machine. So you had the confetti. So I had another bag of confetti. I even remember, they used to make stickers. You know, in Poland, there was a sticker on the bread. You know, when you bought a loaf of bread, there was a little, as big as a postage stamp. I forgot why it was there, I think it named the bread, whatever. Anyhow, to punch the holes for the stickers, that was another confetti, much smaller, sort of like a powder. Anyhow, my attachment to Babcha, of course, the grandmother Tannenblume started with this fascination of the printing shop. And of course, she treated me wonderfully. She took me to the park for concerts and such, which there was a big park there for that. But basically she wanted me to learn the -- the prayers. So I would say the prayer before breakfast and I would say the prayer before bedtime and I would say all these prayers and she also was ve -- very religious and I distinctly remember she had two sinks in the room and a stove with a -- she had like a metal partition and she would put a metal partition because one part that was for the meat wouldn't part -- touch the other part. In other words, with all her love and -- and -- and attention to me, she really got this -- this idea of -- th -- her idea of -- of getting something to the grandchildren that they weren't getting at home, very well. She got it across very well, because I never forgot it and of course we are very much -- we're very much -- not that we feel Jewish, we are Jewish to the core. W -- Just never became religious in the sense that Babcha wanted me to be religious. But

Judaism is -- is part -- not of the persona, but of the being, to the very core. Some of it, of course comes from -- 90 percent comes from the house, because that was the -- the identity with Judaism was so very, very strong. But Babcha's identity with Judaism was the other part that I didn't get. And she was very intelligent and very well educated for a woman of those days. She was -- she spoke and wrote French fluently. She knew German very well. She came from a very fine family. In fi -- in fact I remember her cousin had the bank -- the bank in Austrovietz belonged to her cousin, they came from Sundomiesh, a town south of Austrovietz. Babcha lived in Austrovietz, where the printing shop was, Austrovietz, which was very near to us. Sundomiesh was a little further south, both of Starachowice and Austrovietz. Old, medieval city. That's where Babcha was born and -- and this is where the -- her extended family was. The importance here of talking about the family is this, Babcha gave -- she was pr -- gave birth 13 times, but nine children survived. Nine of the 13. My mother was one of them. It was a very -- when I came on the scene -- it was a very extended family because all these sons and daughters got married. Out of nine, you can probably visualize how many grandchildren there were and how many -- you see? The point of it is this, that from that family, aside from the sons who came to America, everybody else perished from that family. The oldest daughter -- my -- my mother's oldest sister, who -- her name was Kronenberg, she had two sons who studied in Belgium, they were engineers. And I think they perished in the Holocaust in Belgium. We never found about -- out about them. Babcha and her daughters that were not married yet, the two that lived -- no, one of them got married during the war, so she

was already married during the war, but Babcha and the two daughter thers and the son-in-law from Austrovietz, they went. They went to Treblinka. And -- and my other aunt, who lived in Danzig with her husband -- nobody from that family survived, from my mother's family. Of course my parents perished. But in those days, the -- during the -- before the war, Babcha came to the house very often to us. But most of it, my major recollection of Babcha was that she was getting one child at a time and adoring it and spoiling it and teaching it to be religious. And she was a very progressive woman. I have a picture where sh -- you could see a family picture and she's wearing -- she's wearing a wig. She was religious, but the combination of her religiosity and her progressiveness and being so well educated is -- is a little hard to understand for a woman who must have -- I don't know how old she was. Well, she was born in the 19th century for sure. She was a 19th century woman. So I -- all these aunts and the cousins, I just absolutely adored. Now, nobody from that family survived. And one of my mother's sisters, the youngest one, who was also single, became a pharmacist. She studied pharmacy before the war and her first job was in 1939, in the summer. And she went to a place called Wamsha, which is northeast Poland, around Biawastock -- around there. We never found out what happened to her. You know, we know what happened to the others because people from Austrovietz who survived, told us what happened to the people from Austrovietz. Like I could tell you what peop -- what happened to people from Starachowice who didn't survive. They went to Treblinka. Austrovietz was the same. People -- some people who survive who knew when Babcha went and Regina and all the

aunts. This youngest sister of my mother's, whose name was Roosia, we never found out -- of course Wamsha was decimated as badly as any other city, as far as the Jewish population, so -- but we never -- I'm saying it for the reason that as much as we know who perished where, we have no idea where this one aunt perished. Now Babcha the other one, Babcha Laks, from Solsnoviets, she perished together with her family there. She had two daughters who were married and had children. The only person that survived from Babcha -- who lived with Babcha, was one of her granddaughters, Annjapatashnik, she lives in Israel. We see her and we keep in touch. Other than that, her son Alexander, who was my unc -- my brother -- my father's brother, Alexander Laks, with his family, they survived. So from the Tannenblume side, nobody survived except the three of us, the three sisters. From the Laks side of the family, only Uncle Alexander with his wife and the two sons who were in Russia and Anja, my cousin Anja. And we're talking about, if you add the numbers of these two families, it's an unbelievable number, like 200 people or maybe even more. You see, so tho -- this is the immediate family, not counting other cousins, you know, that were distant cousins and -- and my mother's cousins and such. We're just talking about the immediate family. Grandparents and uncles and aunts and cousins. And everybody perished, except as I told you, for the three of us. The three sisters, Uncle Alexander with his wife and the two sons. Of course they didn't go through the Holocaust. Uncle and aunt did, the sons went to Russia and they came out of Russia with unders army, with the Polish army.

Q: We will talk about Uncle Alexander and --

A: Later, right.

Q: Maybe you could just give us a little clearer understanding of the relationship between the three of us.

A: The three of us, right. Well --

Q: [indecipherable] your sist -- your two sisters and you.

A: All right. We were very close. First of all, as I told you, we all went to Polish schools. When the time came for my oldest sister to go to high school, she was always very brilliant, she was the brain of the family, the genius. And to this day, we -- we -- we treat her that way. She was not to be bothered with daily things. When she came in and she had to be served and she -- because she was a genius. Anyhow, she went -- she took a test in Radom. Radom is a town not far from us, where they had a -- a special high school gimnasium where Jews were not allowed, except the very smart Jews. It was a school and -- what was the name of that high school? I forgot, it probably come to me. Anyhow, she went to -- from Starachowice, with my mother, she took the test and then you had to go and find your name, she made it. There were 500 girls in that school and there were five Jewish girls. She was one of them and she was from out of town. So now it gives you an idea how bright she was and how -- how really sharp she was to be edout. So she -- she lived in Radom, before -- right before the war. She lived in Radom, went to gimnasium in Radom, had her Radom friends there. And she -- the tutoring, she was supplementing her income always with tutoring. She was tutoring French and she was tutoring Latin. And this is very important for my later part of the story. Because she was a tutor to others and

she always kept all these books and she was just -- she was the oldest and she had the most academic knowledge. That came in very handy later on during the war. But now we're talking about before the war. So she lived in Radom and came home for vacations. She was not to be bothered. My father knew nothing in the kitchen, he couldn't even set himself a ca -- top -- glass of tea, as they called it, glass of tea. When sh -- when Hanya came home, father served her a gl -- a cu -- a glass of tea, because you could not bother geniuses with things like that, you see. Now Krisha, the sen -- the -- the middle child, Lehrman, Krislerman -- she was always very beautiful. She was an exceptional beauty. And I'm not just saying she was pretty. She was a striking beauty. She still is, but in those days she really was a strikingly beautiful child. And she -- also she went to Polish schools, yes, I think I mentioned it, that Hanya first went to elementary school which was Polish. Th-This is the town school. And then she went to Radom to the gimnasium. Krisha also started the gimnasium in Starachowice. Mother's only problem about Krisha was, that because she's so beautiful, she will not be as smart as my other dau -- sister. So if they would pass in the street and somebody said, "Oh, she's so beautiful." So my mother said, "You shouldn't say that." People were always reprimanded to remark that she was -- my mother used to say, "She will never grow up to be anything, because everybody's going to tell her she's so beautiful and --", but she was. "She will think life is just nothing, I mean, she don't have to make the effort." But of course she was very, very smart and very practical. Krisha was always very practical. Hanya, the oldest one, was always on another, you know, somewhere else in the -- in -- in -- in the clouds, head

in the clouds. But Krisha was down to earth, she was smart, she was industrious, as of course life proved later on. In true life, she was the smartest, you know. And she did in school, she --very well. She did very, very good school work. And of course, then I was at th-th-th-the tail end, of course. I -- I wasn't what you call a ver -- I was sort of an ugly duckling type of kid, you know. I didn't eat much, but I -- I was sort of very curious about things, you know I -- they used to call me th-the -- the -- the information agency, because I used to go out and find this happen and you know this. There was a band playing fair and this -- I always was very curious about everything. I was extremely curious and I was very good in school. That is the one thing that -- from the minute I hit school, that was my life and I really had all th-th-the -- five was the -- the -- the -- like an A, you know, in America it's A, B you get in col -- in school. Well, I had fives, always fives, everything was five. And mother used to say the same thing, "You shouldn't talk in the front of the child about that she's so good in school. Doesn't mean anything. She's going to get an idea, she's --", this was the whole. And you know, the upbringing in those days -- yo-you -- you should never praise your child for being smart. Today, I say to my grandson, "Oh, I think you're the smartest child in the world." I always tell -- say to him, I say, "You know, I think you're so smart." Which he is. He's very intelligent. Max is now nine years old. And I keep telling him, I say, "I think you're wonderful. I think you're so smart." My parents always told us we're wonderful and everything, but every attribute that was outstanding was not to be praised. Like Krisha's beauty was taboo, you shouldn't say it in front of her because she's not going to grow up to be anything. You

should not -- Hanya you shouldn't touch because she is -- she's a genius, so she can't -- and as far as Renia's concerned --

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 Regina Gelb. This is tape number one, side B. And so you were just talking --

A: Yes, no, I was just saying that -- that -- as -- as a -- as a -- what you call a child who did well in school, I wasn't supposed to be praised too much because that would get in my head. But anyhow, we did have a very fine life, because as I already said, we had grandmothers visiting with us. We had a grand -- where we're going to visit with the grandparents. We went to Busco every summer. Then we went on -- as I said, on a farm somewhere for a week or two because mother needed to recover from the treatment. We went to Hebrew school in the afternoon after school and we also participated in the Polish -- in life of the Polish community. There were parades -- third of May, you know, is a national holiday like July fourth, this day of -- Constitution day. Or 11th of November, which is Armistice Day here, but over there it was Poland was liberated 1918, on the 11th. That was the end of the first war, that was a big holiday in Poland. So we would go and there were all kinds of things in school going on where you know, had the little -- the -- the speeches in the school and -- and speeches outside and we would recite poetry and then everybody would go -- you know, to -- to -- even to the church for whatever called -

- some kind of a celebration. And we would go in. We wouldn't -- you know, we wouldn't pray or anything, but we went into the church just like anybody else. And --

Q: So what was your relationship to your -- to your Polish neighbors?

A: Very fr-friendly. Very. We were part of the Polish neighbor -- of the Polish community, but we were part of the Jewish community. It's just that we did not live the same type of life as the Hasidim did, you see. Because as I said, we went to Polish schools and that made all the difference. Be -- we spoke Polish at home. That made all the difference, you see? And the fact was that my parents were better educated and -- and more, I use a vernacular -- plugged in to the bigger world. You see, the Hasidic world was very insular. It isn't that they didn't -- they hated the Poles or they loved the Poles, it doesn't matter. They lived their own lives. They were parallel to the lives of the Polish community, but they didn't mingle, you know. We were being invited for Christmas celebrations to other people's -- the Christian homes. Our -- my mother's dear, dear friends came for Passover Seder sometimes, for Jewish holidays, for whatever. To eat the Jewish foods, however it was. So ours was a sort of part of the overall community, whereas the Hasidim lived their own life, very much along the -- the religious lines. And they were not plugged in to the larger community and this was true throughout Poland. Starachowice was not in any way different, you see, from the prevailing -- not conditions, the -- the -- the prevailing living standards, you know? This was one community that sw -- we were sort of in between.

Q: How did you become aware of the -- or did you become aware of the rising power of the Nazis? Since your parents were plugged in to the larger world --

A: Yes.

Q: How did it filter into the house?

A: Yes. This is the one thing about which I know nothing. As I told you, my parents wouldn't allow us to be praised for -- they always wanted to protect us along the lines that they thought were proper -- not proper, but important to bring up children. I personally am the youngest -- that I knew nothing about anything. I didn't know about -- I knew that there was Nazi movement -- that there was some bad men in -- in Germany, but that the German Jews were being sent out of Germany, but this was -- this was far, Germany was God knows where and -- and it had nothing to do with me personally. My parents never spoke about it. As a matter of fact, in later years, way later, when we were already in -- in the ghetto, they never told us anything. And I am quite sure they knew a lot. So, to this day, I question. Did they know and didn't tell us or didn -- maybe they didn't know. But it's not possible that people like this wouldn't know. And when I reflect on my background, how we were always so protected. You know, you shouldn't tal -- you shouldn't tell her she's smart and you shouldn't tell her she's beautiful, you know, because it's not goi -- well, why should you tell children those horrible things, if they were true? Maybe people didn't believe yet -- that what was happening was true. So coming back to pre-war and the Nazi rise to power and how it affected my life, maybe it emboldened the Poles to open boycott, because I do remember distinctly -- to this day we

have an anecdote, the family anecdote. My father was coming home and there was a store, a Jewish store in -- in -- up front on -- in the street level where we lived, we lived in the back. And he came and there was this whole group of Poles walking around and saying, “Beat the Jew, beat the Jew, beat the Jew.” They were walking -- picketing that store and my father came up on it and one of the men was a very good friend. And when my father passed by, he said, “Beat the Jew, economically.” So to this day when th-the issue of Polish anti-Semitism is descri -- dis -- discussed, I say I do remember when my father came home laughing, he said, “In the last minute when he saw me, he says, “Be jer da economeetchnia.” He kept saying, “Be jer da, be jer da,” he saw me and he said, “Be jer da economeetchnia.”” You see? And this was open. Now there were other things that went on prior to that, that were maybe a little more subtle, a little more hidden. But when I -- I remembered the boycotts, only because my father is relating that incident. The last minute -- he says be jer da, he stops, economeetchnia. He saw my father passing by. You see? And that was a true economic boycott, which really didn’t get anywhere, in the sense that the -- the Jews were very good traders and they good stuff and -- and the Poles still shop, so they shop sort of quietly, through the back door or whatever. But -- Jewish population was being squeezed, no question about that, you know, no question about it. In the -- just before the war, they were getting the -- squeezed constantly, worse and worse. That’s before the Germans.

Q: When -- when were you yourself, personally more aware of -- that something was changing? How did it manifest itself? There was the anecdote from your father, but did you see something, did you hear something yourself?

A: Well, I really have one recollection and that was around Passover. What year that was, I don't know. Could have been '38 or maybe '39. A new family moved in -- into the neighborhood and there was this little girl, Kiya. A very lovely, blonde, little girl. And she was placed in the same grade as I was, so we became instant friends. She was my friend, not the other -- not Krisha's and not Hanya's friend. And then was Passover -- Passover rolled around, could have been right before the war and I told her to come in -- no, she used to come all the time to play with me, we did homework together, you know, we read poetry, such. And I told her to come and -- to come to the house. And she says no, now she won't come. I said, "How come?" She says no, she is not going to come for a little while, like a week or two. And I said, "Why is that?" She says because it's Passover and the Jews grab children for -- that they take blood from the children for matzahs. That was my first shock. I did not hear it from the children, my -- from the town, but I did hear it from that child. And she never came during Passover. And then I think eventually the war came. So it had to be 1939, you know, in the spring, yeah, I'm sure that's how it was. And she says no, she wouldn't come and she didn't come. And I think my mother said sh -- that I don't need such friends anyhow. So, whatever it was, that was the end of the relationship. I think the war just came, then the summer came around and then summers we went -- you know with we're here and we were there, we

went to Babcha. By the time September came, I never went to school again. You know, 1939, the war broke out the first of September, so -- she was in my class so that was -- that was the end of the relationship. So that was one that I never, never forgot. And another one was in school, it happened to me and I -- I always look back on it and think to myself, what motivated this man to say that? I had a new teacher and he -- was first day of school and again, could have been 1938 -- yes it had to be 1938 because I didn't go to school any more in '39. And he says, "Could every child please stand up and say his name?" So everybody got up and then I got up and I said, "Regina Laks." So he -- and I sat down and so he tells me to get up, he says, "No, your name is not Regina. You are Jewish, right?" I say, "Yes." "Your name is not Regina." I said, "Yes, it is. I can prove it, I can show it. I mean I -- I am surely Regina." "No, you go back to your mother and tell her that your name is Rifka." And I went home and I cried and my mother said not to bother about it, because we can prove that my name is Regina. It's on the papers, it's on my birth certificate and if he doesn't like it, that's how he doesn't like it, but my name is not Rifka.

Q: When he said that, what did it mean to you? Did -- how did you interpret that?

A: I interpreted by the fact that he did not like Jews. He absolutely had it in him to -- to -- to belittle me. I mean, you know how it is in front of a class, to be -- I mean you are a seven, eight or nine year old child and somebody says something like this to you in front of the class. And of course you know they -- the -- in the -- in the child is exposed to all kinds of other antagonisms and not necessarily out of anti-Semitism. When I was a kid,

th-th-th-the Christian boys used to beat up the Jewish girls. But that isn't what you call anti-Semitism in the true sense. This is just, well they're Jews, we don't have to bother with them and you can beat them up. So, however it was, I was afraid as a girl, of these Christian boys, but some of them were friendly and others us-used to beat us up coming from school, so we used to go home in a group. But this was very specific, this calling me out in the class, very specific and even as a child, I could feel that he wanted to belittle me, that he wanted -- one way or another to belittle me in front of the class. You see? Because when I was beaten up by a Christian boy, that was just part of the way things were. You know, you beat up -- the boys were rambunctious and well anyway. But this was different. So that incident -- that I never forgot. Never, never, never. Like my father's anecdote about Be jer da economeetchnia, I didn't forget that and I didn't forget the fact that -- that my name is not Regina, but Rifka, which of course wasn't the case. So th-this -- to answer your question, this was about the extent of my awareness. You see -- the extent of my personal awareness of things around me. As far as the larger picture, I don't know what my parents knew. My father had to know. I'll tell you why. There was an -- a magazine or something called, Ost une vest. Something like that. There we -- he used to -- he used to subscribe to -- used to come. I don't know where it came from, whether it came from Salesia or from Germany, but he used to subscribe to that. That had to have something in it that would give them an idea what's going on. But I -- I really don't know. I only knew that as far as the preparation of the -- the young pioneers for Israel, did not have to do with anti-Semitism, you see, because that was strictly

establishing a Jewish homeland type of thing, with no connection. That's the way I understood it, with no connection to other things that were going on. That was a program and there was a whole thing of collecting money and doing this and the other thing and training and shipping and there were kinds of Jewish leaders who used to come to our hometown and give speeches and so on. But that had nothing to do with the official recognition or condemnation or -- or anything. Anti-Semitism as such, no. That was another aspect of -- of Jewish life in Poland. In the 30's, as I understand it now, a lot of young Jews, pioneers, went to Europe -- to Palestine, settled there. You know, I translated Kolchuk, Yanoush Kolchuk and I did a lot of work on him -- about him. He -- his children -- so-called children, who got to be 16 and -- and -- and left the orphanage, resettled in Palestine as did his own assistant, Vincheeska, Stefania Vincheeska. And Kolchuk was -- absolutely begged -- begged to come to Palestine. He went to Palestine in 1936. I mean, I know it now from history and from the research and the translations that I do. He went to Israel. It was not for him. He was an older man. He was totally -- he was a writer. He could not fit into a framework of another language. And he came back. And he was -- he was dismissed from the Polish radio in 1938. You know, he was the -- the -- the famous old doctor who gave advice, like Dr. Spock here, gave advice on child rearing to everybody. He was removed from the Polish radio in 1938, yet he didn't go back to Palestine, you see? And in my -- I used to hear Kolchuk read children's stories -- you know, I used to -- in school we had the books, Kolchuk's. Maybe not in school, at home. But the point is that -- coming back to how aware was I. I was aware in my small, little

world, but absolutely not in connection to anything on a larger scale. And my sister in Radom, Hanya, who was in the Polish gimnasium -- I don't know that she suffered much anti-Semitism, for the reason -- or maybe she did -- for the reason that she was so smart, you see? So you -- you couldn't attack somebody who was just top -- tops -- tops, you see?

Q: But -- but then the war broke out.

A: Yes.

Q: And living conditions changed somehow [indecipherable]

A: Very. Yes. The -- it's very important to say -- again you see how the factory -- the plant, the -- how that fits into the -- into the progression. In -- on how much my life is tied up with it, even though I really, frankly, I mean I had no connection to it, but how -- what a big part of my life that factory was. And it wasn't -- and it wasn't part of my life, but how it influenced my life. When the war broke out and there were -- the bombings started and they -- they started digging dren -- trenches, you know, for anti-aircraft, my father became the captain, you know, they -- like they designated. We lived on the street -- the main street, it was called Putsaskago -- connected Wierzbnik and Starachowice. It was the nicest street. Less commercial -- least commercial. Not where the -- all the stores and so on. My father was designated the captain, you know, for the anti-aircraft. And -- so the factory was in Starachowice. The Wierzbnik town was on the other side and the -- in between was the s -- the street Putsaskago that connected. So my father came, he -- there was a briefing, he was called in to the headquarters there, whatever it was. And my

father came and said, “The town is being evacuated, everybody has to get out.” “Why?” “Because the factory is going to be blown to pieces. Just like in the first war.” The first thing they attacked was the factory -- the factories that produced metal things and such. So, immediately we all go out and we -- we -- there were forest not far from us and the whole town was evacuated. The closer we got to the forest, the more there were people with cows, you know, the farmers and the -- the Jews and the religious Jews and the non-rel -- and the Christians and the farmers and the cows and the dogs and everybody going into -- into the forest because this -- the factory is going to be blown up and this town is going to be blown away, so that’s how it’s going to be, right? Because you learned from experience, that’s what happened, okay. We got caught in the crossfire of the worst kind. Because we were in a valley and on the two hills -- one was the German artillery and the other was the Polish. They were shooting at each other, we were in the middle and the German planes would come down with reflectors at night and shoot with machine guns at the people on the ground. Anyhow, then a few days later, after this horrend -- there was one horrendous night during -- where we were caught in the crossfire -- that there was -- I thought nobody would come out. This was my first thing, I didn’t yet know who was who and who was Germans and who wasn’t, I just couldn’t imagine what people look like, to do -- to do things like this. Anyhow, then it got quiet and everybody said, “Now we’re going back.” We went back. The factory was not even touched. There wasn’t a b -- one bomb fell somewhere in town, but nothing was damaged. Nothing was damaged. The factory was immediately -- they must have had spies in there or something. The factory,

within one week was operational for war production. Okay? So now, we all came back and we started seeing Germans in the street. And they all -- they all started -- we came back to our own apartment and everybody came back. Our apartment wasn't damaged. In fact, I remember we were eating quickly and we left the dishes and everything and by the time we came back three or four days later, there are flies around it and everything, because was so hot. Was a tremendously, terribly hot September, you know, when the war broke out. However, we dragged ourselves back and the town was not damaged. The factory was not touched and the Germans were marking -- marching in formation and singing. They were always singing, marching in the street. They wore boots -- high leather boots and they were marching and -- and my parents, you know, my father, being a German himself, you know, he -- he wasn't German, but you -- as I explained, he spoke German and he identified with German culture. He thought th-th-that's nothing, you know, nothing. Well, before we knew it, they started coming around with dogs and catching people in the street -- the Germans, and they caught my father, my father was passing and he went and he wasn't coming back for hours. My mother got very -- my mother got very worried. They kept them somewhere cleaning something. So she went -- somebody said, "Oh, they took all these Jews, they took them to the railroad station to clean up." So my mother went over to the railroad station, there was this German guard. And she said to hi -- she spoke German too, she said to the German soldier, she said, "Vasin th-the herren." And he said, "These -- these aren't herren. These are the yuden." And he kicked her. And this was maybe second day after they arrived. Th-That was --

nothing happened yet. This was already -- they took -- they made them clean with toothbrushes, you know, they made the Jews with the beards, they had to clean st-steps with beards and -- the most -- and this -- and -- and nothing was yet happening on a larger scale, only those small things. Then they started coming around the how -- homes. They would come with a big dog. I told you my father had an encyclopedia that was -- now I know it was very valuable, because it was leather bound, with gold lettering. I mean, I say it's very valuable in terms of antique possessions, but in those day, this was my life, because it was all handpainted, like butterflies and birds was all handpaint. When I used to read -- not read, I couldn't read German, but I used to look at the pictures, I had to wash my hands. I had to have -- my father expec -- inspected my hands to see that I didn't leave a stain. The most beautiful butterfly pictures, the most beautiful bird pictures, flowers, it was all handpainted. Was very valuable encyclopedia. Well, the first thing, I don't know, maybe three days after the war started, very early. As I said, before anything bigger was happening, they came into the house and the German looked at that encyclopedia. My father had it in a, you know, like a breakfront with glass doors, th -- because they were under a key. God forbid, you couldn't touch the stuff, you know, it was sacred. So it was always under lock and key. He said to open this. He opened, then he kicked my father, he said to give him boxes. They didn't have boxes, I don't know how they came back with boxes. They load it in the boxes and they took it away. That was the first insult. Between the fir -- time that my father was taken to clean the station, where he wasn't herren, he was just a yuden and this act of vandalism that hit to the core.

Of course later on, when -- with the gas chambers, who would even know that person would take such an insult so personally? This taking away of the encyclopedia was such a blow to the family, to him. Was no questions asked, you know. They burst in, “Where’s the key?” Put it out and they took it. And they went around looking for something, they would take a bayonet and s -- and shove it in the car -- in the -- in the couch or something. Just for the fun of it. Those were personal insults for which nobody was yet prepared. They were terrific blows. And we’re talking -- in retrospect, you’re talking about nothing. If you consider Auschwitz and all the other things, for heaven’s sake. And -- and the Holocaust and the genocide and here I’m talking -- but at that time, even I as a child felt that insult when my mother came and cried because he -- th-that man, that soldier said these were not men, they -- gentlemen, they herren, you know. He -- these were just Jews. That was the one insult and then the encyclopedia was the other insult. And who even know -- knew that this was -- on the scale of things, it was nothing. You know, but this was a tremendously sh -- a shake-up of the -- this was the first blow. Very severe first blow. Anybody who would listen to me now, talking about the Holocaust, would say, what nonsense is that? This is how it was, you see? Right away we were -- there was no food, they wouldn’t allow us to buy food, we had to -- oh, no -- I -- I am really yet getting ahead of myself, because this is right after we came back. And very soon -- this was a daily occurrence, that the Gestapo would come around with dogs, so you couldn’t be outside, you couldn’t go -- you couldn’t because if th -- you were of age, like my father, they would take you to labor somewhere or just to -- to maltreat you. And

if you were a child, they would sic the dog on you or something. So immediately we had to be very, very aware of -- of -- they were very brutal, that was Gestapo. And there was especially one man -- what was his -- Altov I think was his name. I think it was Altov. He came around with the dogs and the children were petrified. Anyhow, my parents found a way to have us stay home. Now, you understand, this is now September, we're not allowed to go to school, because this Polish school, you're not allowed -- it was very hard. We used to swim in the river -- was a river there, Kamiena -- can't swim in the river, can't go outside because God only knows. At least if you're around the house, you can run in when he comes around with the dog. So what happened was that my sister decided -- Hanya the genius, she had all the books, she was a tutor anyhow, she said she's going to teach us at home, that will keep us busy. So she opened a little school. I was in her -- in one class with my friends, there were four of us. She was a very strict taskmaster. We had French, we had Latin. I didn't even finish elementary school and we started on a much higher level, because first we finished the books that were home and then she proceeded -- that's, by the way, through the ghetto -- what I'm starting telling you now is still as the war broke out and we're facing the new reality. So this is how to keep the children out of trouble with -- I studied with my sister and whatever it was -- was a regular class and very strict and there was homework. And she always kept telling me that I -- she expects from me more than from the others, because she knows I can do it. And I was very resentful because I had to really -- I mean she lived in the same house and she saw that I had to do the homework. Little did I know that my basic education

really came -- that was th-the -- the -- the building stone of my f -- later, you know, higher education. But anyhow, so life became very hard. First of all, we were now very impoverished in the sense that we had -- we started selling things, you see. Whatever you could sell, there wa -- first of all, my father did not have a job and we started selling things to suppor -- to su -- not we, I mean I -- you know, I -- I had very little to do with that. I was 10 years old. I -- you know, I wasn't much, but I'm just telling you how things were. Mother was an excellent cook, so she started doing things like baking cookies with white beets, sugar beets, which she never did before, she learned that, she -- she cooked th -- she put together whatever was possible, but life was basically now -- after the first trauma of the -- of the -- of the -- the -- the -- the -- the -- the encyclopedia and th-this -- the little things, so called. What -- what set in was hunger and fear, you see. It was so -- everything was permeated with fear. If father had to go somewhere, even to exchange something or sell something. To -- to -- to -- to dispose of some possessions, silver or crystals or whatever. You never knew if he was coming back. If -- if mother had to go buy some food somewhere, you never -- the fear was a gripping kind of fear. This is why the children, we were at home, just locked in -- no-not like prisoners, because life was wonderful and you read books, you -- I read Tolstoy. I mean, I was 10 years old, I was reading Tolstoy. Not that I -- I probably understood some, but I read War and Peace when I was 10 years old. Because all the books were, you know, whatever was home, I read it. Was in Polish, obviously. The thing is that the fear was probably the most crippling until we got -- we didn't get used to it -- until we learned how to call -- to -- to

fit it into -- into th-the-the -- the life, you see. Of course I don't have to tell you, they were -- they were shooting people right and left. Then they started -- the factory was already going, still Christians only. They started picking Jews -- able, you know, able Jews, send them in the factory and very soon it became apparent that they have some plan. Now, nobody knew what plan, but people said, "If you can have a job, you'll be safe." Safe from what, we didn't know. We were thrown out of that apartment, the street was cleared of Jews, because that was the main street. Probably in 1940, early in 1940. So we lived a few more months in the apartment, but we were already very poor and -- anyhow, then we got moved further into Wierzbnik, you see, I told you we were between Starachowice and Wierzbnik on the main thi -- on the main street. We got pushed into Wierzbnik. There was no ghetto or anything like that yet. It's just that this was the number one street to be cleared of Jews. And the Jews lived wherever, but they lived further down. And by which time my parents had to sell some pieces because I'll -- the apartment we moved in wasn't the same size, so that was, in a way, better that they -- you know, they could get some money and we could live on that. And as the word got out that people were -- able bodied men might be of use. And they started taking Jews into the factory there, you see? This is the first time that any Jew ever worked. But by now this was a munitions plant. They were producing shells -- cannon shells. You see, they discontinued -- I understand you can convert such plants. They discontinued all that pre-war, consumer kind of goods into warm -- war production. And of course there was a Jewish council set up. My father was not part of it. We were not part of any -- anything

like that. Not that this was bad, good or in between, my father just wasn't. He was basically a guy who -- who -- he was not a merchant and he, you know, he -- he was not rich by then, because by 1938, we really, I mean we lived such fantastic lives and then everything started changing when he was booted out of the job. Anyhow, during that period, from the time that we were eli-eliminated -- expelled from that main street, until such time as they formed -- the Germans -- the Nazis formed a specific area for a ghetto, we changed apartments three times. Every time we got into this apartment, then this was off-limits. So then we were in another apartment and that was off-limits. And finally -- there was never -- this is a very important distinction to make. In Starachowice -- by the way, the -- the ghetto was in Wierzbnik, you see. In Wierzbnik or Starachowice -- I should really refer to it as Starachowice, there was never a ghetto like a Warsaw ghetto or like a Lódz ghetto with a -- with -- with a gate -- with the fences, no. The Jews were being cleared constantly, from this area -- as I told you, we had to go three times from one apartment to the next, to the next. From this area here and then from this area, until they picked an area where the Jews could live, but no other area. In other w -- we couldn't live on Putsaskago any more, you see? We could only -- we now lived on the street called Yuzhetska. But the Christians, who lived there prior -- before us, also lived there. You see? So I remembered there was in Starachowice, Wierzbnik had this -- two cemeteries, the old cemetery and the new cemetery. After -- past the old cemetery was a little house -- a teamster, a man with a horse and -- and -- he -- he had a wagon and a horse, he was a teamster, had a little house with two room -- two, like two apartments,

back to back. So he rented this one apartment to us, was a kitchen with a big room. And they lived in the similar -- in this -- this, and he was Christian. This is our last -- this was our last apartment. And it was within the confines of the ghetto, but the ghetto was not separated or segregated. People went from the ghetto to work in the factory and back. From the work and back. At that time, as I was telling you, my sister was my best teacher. Not my best -- we were continuing. As we moved, we were continuing, cause the kids that were studying with me, were also --

Q: [indecipherable] still for one minute while we change the tape.

A: Yes. Okay. Good time for me --

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 Regina Gelb. This is tape number two, side A. And you can take up where you --

A: Yeah, I -- I do remember that when we dropped off -- that when the tape ended, that I did want to specify the dates, to more or less put it within a framework. The first phase of the occupation was the time when we lived on the main street, I -- up to the point at which we were thrown out of there. Meaning September 30, 1939 is the war started. By early 1940, it -- we were cleared -- we were thrown out of the -- our own apartment. While we lived in that -- at that -- that stretch of time during the war, as I was saying before, we -- children, of course had to watch out because of the dogs and the Nazis and such, we were terrified of them. I think I spend at least 10 hours a day studying. Absolutely didn't go anywhere. And when we were rees -- when we resettled, within the confines of an area, which was designated as a future ghetto, we had three more apartments before we ended up in the last one, which was our last home in Starachowice, before the alseelung, before the town was cleared of the Jews. What I meant to say is that that entire period -- that entire ghetto period, no matter where we lived, in the stretch of these resettlements, the object was to keep the children ins -- indoors. We were kept -- I was kept indoors. My sisters were kept indoors because they were my teachers. The oldest one, Hanya was -- was conducting the class and so on. That lasted up to the minute when the town was cleared of Jews, no matter where we lived. Life was still -- my parents tried to keep it very -- as -- as normal as possible, which was totally impossible to

-- to live a normal life. But to protect us the best way they could. To have us continue studying and -- and reading and -- and feeling that there is this other world, with which we don't have for the time being, but eventually we'll still have it, type of attitude. I also mentioned in the previous tape that some people decided that they would sign up for the work in the factory, because the word got around that this might be a good thing to do. My two sisters, very late -- I don't know whether it was -- could have been early 1942 or late in 1941, signed up -- they went and were signed up and they were -- they were sent to a brick factory, also in our hometown, not in the major -- the munitions factory. So they went to -- there were three shifts and I think they rotated, however it was. The point of it all is this -- that when the town was to be cleared -- when the town was cleared in 1942, in October, my two sisters were on the night shift in that brick factory. They were not released, as none of the workers were allowed to leave. They were kept back. Whether it was the munitions factory or the brick factory, the workers were kept back, because meanwhile there was a round-up in what has now become -- is very small area of a ghetto, still not surrounded by wire or anything like the other ghettos that -- we know about Warsaw ghetto. So that, by this time, there were only a few streets where the Jews were allowed to live and those Poles, Christian Poles who still lived there, lived there, but other than that, there were very few Poles. We were all squeezed in, I can't tell you how many people to a room, but it was crowded, it was crowded. Meanwhile, there were shipments coming in from Lódz -- from the Lódz ghetto, people were shipped in and from other areas and -- and we were all being crowded in and crowded in until the day of

October 27, 1942. As I said, my sisters were in the mun -- in the brick factory and five o'clock in the morning, maybe six, I don't remember -- early in the morning, we heard the knock on the door, eiler rouse and we weren't allowed to take anything, just to get out. And -- as fast as we could and the -- the Nazis were there with the rifles and the guns and the dogs and with -- they had sort of like a -- you know the type of thing that you hit a horse with?

Q: Whip.

A: A whip, yes -- with the whips. And I -- I was used to the whips because whenever they marched by themselves, whenever they walked the -- the streets in the town, they always carried a whip. They always had guns, but they also carried whips. And we were ordered out very quickly -- out of the house and point -- said we have to walk to the main square. Of course, we meaning -- was my father, my mother and myself, because my two sisters were kept back and we absolutely had no idea what was happening. I certainly didn't. Maybe my parents did, but they didn't say and we didn't know what the people in the factories are going to be doing. Meanwhile or later, with -- anyhow, when we came to the main square -- the distance between the house and the main square was maybe about three quarter miles, maybe a mile at the most. But the sights between the house and the main square were the most horrendous. That was the real brutal -- naked brutality, as I was forced to -- to -- to see en masse, the first time. Because, you know, I saw shooting here and a shoot -- beating there and all kinds of things I did see, but I didn't see so many acts of brutality up to that point. We're talking now about 1942 in October. I have never

seen such brutality with -- in the -- the numbers involved. The infants thrown against the walls and -- and the old people beaten and kicked and shot as they couldn't walk, or if they could walk. The whole scene, between the house, which we had to leave and the square where we had to line up, was one horrendous bloodbath. The most brutal sight I have ever seen up to that point and of course, I've seen plenty. I've seen all kinds of cruelty prior to that, but nothing in such concentrated form. And we -- on the way we picked up -- my mother had to -- my mother didn't have to, we were walking, they were -- my parents were holding me by the hand and -- I was a skinny child. My mother padded me up with all kinds of rags, to make me look like I was developed, which I was nothing. She put rougema on my cheeks, so I would look more grown. I was tall, so I could sort of make myself look older if I tried. And on the way, mother noticed a friend of hers, an elderly lady, Miss -- Mrs. Kazimerzka, who couldn't move and so m-mother took her by the -- under the arm, like and my father took me by the hand and the four of us walked together to the square. And of course when we came to the square, the acts of brutality has only -- had only in-intensified, because it was a real -- like a butchery. You know, it was the killing and the kicking and the -- and the -- th-this was already after the walk toward the center. The center was you had to line up and not everybody knew how to line up and where to line up and people were frantic and people were crying and people were praying and the Germans wouldn't stand for any of that, they would kick and they would said, "You move fast." And then you didn't move fast, whatever it was, it was a terrifying scene and as we were approaching it, they pointed people to different

directions. There were groups all around. Well, I was pointed in one direction, my father was pointed in another direction and mother, with Mrs. Kazimerzka, who -- Mother was holding Mrs. Kazimerzka, to another group. No-Nobody knew which group is which or which group was going where. We had no idea, by then, that there were trains already waiting on -- at the siding, because as I said, we were in the ghetto, meaning we were not allowed outside of that area. And the railroad station was outside of that area. So very soon -- it was also very hot, I remember this was very hot. My group was driven one way and I noticed that we were driven toward th-th-the -- toward Starachowice area, where the factory was. And I found myself in the -- in a place called Shellneetsa, which translated means fir-firing range. This was at one time a firing range and now there were barracks built there. I've never heard of the place, I've never seen the place, I had no idea. I knew I was still in Starachowice because it wasn't far from the -- the -- the plant, from the factory. Well, when we found ourselves there, I realized that my sisters weren't there, my mother wasn't there and my father wasn't there, not the way I saw it, but later on it turned out that he was, but I didn't know it yet, be-because he was with a group of men who were lined up and brought to Shellneetsa and -- and put -- their group was pointed to another place where I couldn't see. Anyhow, I was absolutely petrified, I was -- I -- I was out of my mind with fear, with total -- I always compare the feeling of fear for the duration of the war and I think the fear most acute was that fear, that time when I found myself alone. I was so alone and I absolutely didn't know what was going to happen. And people were always very kind to me and these were people from my

hometown, say, “No, don’t cry, we’re going to get together with everybody eventually and everything will be fine.” Anyhow, I did find out father was in the same unit -- the same Shellneetsa camp and what transpired -- what we found out, the extent to which I found out about these things that I knew what happened. That some people -- among who my mother was -- were put on trains and sent somewhere. Resettled was -- was the euphemism, resettled. Didn’t mean anything -- but didn’t know any -- I didn’t know direction east, west, south or north, somewhere resettled. Father was in the Shellneetsa camp. He became a scribe. He always kept books and typewrite -- you know, typing and all this, so he did that and the two sisters, I -- we understood, were now in another camp that was called Mioufka and that camp housed the people from the brick factory, because it was closer to the brick factory. Shellneetsa was very close to the munitions factory. Well, I cannot remember the dates when the -- the date when the two camps were combined, but they were combined and we lived -- I met my sisters and the camp became my ufecach. Shellneetsa was empty, because Shellneetsa itself, I -- I -- I never know the reasons why things were happening, I just know that life in Shellneetsa was dreadful, everybody had typhus. I worked in the laundry, in the camp laundry. I had typhus. I had what they called a mild case, because I said, they say if you are a child, you have a milder case. Because my sister had typhus, the oldest one, Hanya, she was stricken by the severest case of typhus. She had hallucinations, she was out of her head, she was burning out with fever and she was talking out of -- out of proportion to anything that -- that -- that would mean anything. And, you know, the -- the -- the camp guards made selections

while the f -- the epidemic was going on, so you had to come out and line up and however you stood up, they could see that you are another case to be disposed of. So one way or another, Hanya was propped up and -- and -- and he-held up and she didn't talk and -- and so you couldn't see that she was out of her mind completely. I went into the laundry room and there were these older ladies who took pity on me and they opened the big cauldrons with the steam and I stood behind -- this -- this was not the same time as Hanya was sick, because this was in -- you know, whatever the -- th-the -- the -- however it was one was sick. Now, three weeks later, or for whatever. But when my time came to have typhus, and there was another -- course the selections were always going on. Didn't only have to do with typhus, let me just finish this about the cauldron. I stood behind the cauldron with the steam, so that you saw me all burning up, but of course I could have been burning up from the steam from the cauldron, from the laundry and this is how I -- I -- I survived typhus selection. But basically, the -- the slave labor camp in my hometown had selections all the time, typhus or not, because they were using these Jews, able bodied Jews, as long as they could. And once people got sick -- and of course there was no medication, there were no doctors and there was nothing. One people -- once people got sick, you had to dispose of them, you see? So in Shellneetsa, they d-dug a pit in the forest and they shot the people over the pit. In Mioufka the same. So it really -- you didn't have to have typhus to fear being eliminated. Because if you had to line up before the barrack and they didn't like the way you looked, one way or another, typhus or not, you could be shot there -- right there on the spot, anyhow. And they still needed an

operational number -- number of people to do the jobs, because this was a factory that was around the clock, 24 hours, with three shifts and so they were shipping in new people all the time. Wherever they got these people, we don't know, but they were getting these people, shipping them in, to supplement those numbers that were needed for the factory work. And I don't know whether I mentioned it before, but the -- probably not -- that the administration of the camps was -- the highest echelon were the Germans, the SS, I think and the Gestapo. And everything u-under them were the Ukrainians and they wore German uniforms. The -- wasn't the same color as the German, but it was a German uniform with Germany insignia. Now, they were the primary overseers. They mow -- they manned the towers -- the watchtowers, because you know, these camps were now surrounded by barbed wire. And of course you had to walk still, from the camp to the factory and back. And that was three shifts a day. So they were the ones who counted the people going and marched them out of the gate and marched them back. They were the ones who were lining people up for the ind -- inside selections, which were conducted by the Nazis, the German Nazis. With -- as I told you, the selections did not wait for typhus to -- to -- to be rampant, they just had selections, at any time of the day or night, if they please like it -- if they pleased, if they felt like it. They chased you out and they -- this -- here and here and there and pointed you this way and before you knew it, you ended up in the woods being shot. So the Ukrainians were very brutal. Sometimes I felt they were worse than the Germans. They probably tried to prove themselves, or whichever it was, they were horrendously cruel. There was cruelty be -- above and beyond the call of duty,

you know, the type of cruelty, the spitting, the kicking, the -- they used to use rifle butts to hit you over the head if you didn't line up exactly right. Anyhow --

Q: Was there sexual cruelty against the women, too?

A: Oh, yes. Oh, absolutely, absolutely. We were separated from the men, you know. The women lived in women's barracks, the men in the men. But for the line up for the factory -- in fact, at one time, I also went to work in the factory and I don't remember how long I worked there. I think before the two camps combined, while I was still in Shellneetsa, I think they were short or something like that. They put me up to working in the factory and I actually worked on one of the machinery, on the machines. The job was -- you know, I was already a 13 - 14 year old girl and it wasn't a job that a 14 year couldn't handle. Because what it meant is that the -- the artillery shells, you had to put it on the machine and put a type of knife to it, that was part of the machine and the knife scraped the first layer of the -- of the -- of the -- no, not cannon, the shell -- the shell, cannon shell. And then you took it off and you put it on the one end and then you reached for the other. Of course you were being watched all the time and you had to deliver a num -- a certain number of these shells had to be peeled. Peeled is the w -- it's not the word, but if you know what I mean. That outer shell had to be peeled and that was the job. And I worked for a time -- that was brutal work and I saw the men -- th-the Jewish men work at the open ovens, you know, where the -- the smelting was done and where -- that was in-incredible -- that was just incredible. And when they were shaping these cannons and they were taking them out from the hot oven with the -- like big pincers, you know, and

putting them down. Anyhow, I worked there for a very short time, because when the camps were finally combined -- and I -- I can't give the year, but was between October 1942 and end of July 1944. So I don't remember exactly how long I lived on Shellneetsa and how many months I worked in the factory, but I do know that when we were transferred, the two camps were combined and we all lived on Mioufka. I went back to the laundry again. So here we were able, again, to see my father, but we never talk -- couldn't -- you know, here and there, we could maybe say something as we were passing, but we knew he was there, he knew we were there and the men's barracks were on the other side, but we still, there was a way of waving or seeing or -- not touching or whatever, but he knew we were there and -- and most families that ended up in the camp could one way or another communicate. The life was very, very hard. Very, very hard. We -- you know it's so hard to come back to talk about the hunger, because hunger was as present as -- as -- as the blood runs in your -- in your -- in your veins, you know? From the day the war broke out, we knew nothing but hunger. But there was always a way of scraping together -- of -- of selling some things and getting money and getting some food, but when you finally ended up in the camps, unless you really had big money, there was no way that you could survive on what was given to you. We were very lucky, because we had -- my mother -- my parents had very dear Christian friends and before we were thrown out of the original apartment, Mother begged them to take s -- to take -- to -- to -- to save for us, some of the more personal things like little silver Passover drinking cups -- I'll show you, I have one. The candlesticks, some crystal, some other things that

were inscribed, my parents wedding gifts and silver that had inscriptions and such. So they took all of that, those -- sh -- they absolutely wouldn't want to do it. Th-they -- they said, "What do you mean, you don't give it to us." Mother says, "I'm not giving it to you, I -- I'm asking you to just keep it for us." Well, it so happens that husband of -- this was my parent's friends, there were a few sisters, married. One of the husbands worked in the munitions factory, Christian. And he was able -- they were -- started selling -- they started selling -- because w-we send word that we need money desperately -- they started selling some of the things they had, valuable things. He would bring us and he would buy stuff and bring it to the factory and he would send it through people who worked in the factory, so that -- in the Shellneetsa camp and even in the Mioufka camp, we still lived on stuff and money that they would -- they would send in the money or some bread or whatever. And we could not have probably survived without that. And --

Q: Where -- where could you buy those things? In -- in -- in the camp, or --

A: Yes, there was -- there was always barter, because people -- you see, in the factory, the Jews mixed with the Poles, you see? The Jews were slave labor, but the Poles were the workers that -- the Jews, obviously were not the only ones working there. The local Poles worked in the factory, so some of these Jews who -- who had a way of mixing with the people in the factory, had a way of bartering and sending, or -- you know. So this is how we were able to really not die of hunger in -- in that -- in Starachowice labor camp.

Q: I'm sorry, can I just ask you one question?

A: Yes.

Q: What was the -- the daily -- tell us a little bit more about the daily routine. How -- what -- what did you do every day?

A: Yes. Well, specifically, the people who went to work, went on an eight hours shift. They were taken there by the Ukrainians, they were brought back. There was soup being doled out for them. After that, you had to stay in your bunk, because there was no place to go and you were absolutely petrified to go outside, because if you showed yourself, the Ukrainian or the -- the -- the Nazi German could kill you or decide to -- he wanted you to -- to do some other job. The worst way was to hide. So the labor in the factory was very hard. When you don't eat and you work so hard, all you can do when you come home is just drop and you just stay until they call you again. I personally worked in the laundry, where it -- everybody brought in the stuff that they wore, that was full of lice and everything, put it in the cauldron and we would push it with sticks and cook -- boil it. And then, after it dried, everybody would come and -- and be handed out. I mean, if you were size 12, you got size 95. If you were size 14, you got size six, whatever th -- you know, so what you had, you had and what you didn't have, you didn't have next time or you did -- anyhow, this is how things were. The camp itself was, as I said, with barbed wire. It had th-th-th tower guards. There was no mixing of -- of men and women. Father was a scribe again and he -- we saw him. We saw him because he worked in a little office, like a place. So sometimes if there was business to go in that barrack where the office was, we saw him. And people who went to work, as I told you, were absolutely ex -- exhausted beyond words when they would come back. There was no way of staying

clean, you see. That was the bad part. In the Shellneetsa camp, there was a little brook running through, so people would go and wash themselves, even in the winter. Men would undress and wash their bodies in the win -- but in Mioufka, there was -- you have to scrounge to get a -- a basin of water and everybody would wash up at the same time, you know. It was -- lice -- lice were -- i-i-it w -- it was a plague of lice that was even maybe not as bad as in Auschwitz, but it was very bad. Those were the two major things, hunger and lice. Of course, sickness too, but you didn't know, because once you got sick, you -- that was the end of you anyhow. No matter how -- and I'm not talking big sicknesses, typhus, but even an infection, if you -- if infection went an-any higher than an arm and got you into a body infection, forget it. So th-they said they didn't have doctors. They had little infirmary, I remember, where was that? In Mioufka, I think. That was -- I think for show, because nobody who was really sick ever made it anywhere, except a gun to his head, so.

Q: How did -- how did your sisters or women deal with menstruation or other kind of [indecipherable]

A: Well this, I really -- you see, I think some women stopped menstruating. I personally never started. Of course I was too young. I never started. I wasn't developed, I was flat like a board and I never menstruated, not til the -- two years after the war. This -- I don't know, they used to say -- I'm sort of getting ahead of myself, but you asked me the question. Wom -- I heard it said in Auschwitz that they put something in the -- in the food. They used to call it brum -- brum. I really don't know if that's what it wa --

whatever it was. That they -- women in Auschwitz didn't menstruate as far as I know, because they said that that was brum that was in the food. This is -- could be he-hearsay and could be -- might not be in any way part of the truth. I'm just saying that this is what I remembered because everybody was saying that I had nothing to worry about, since I never started, I wouldn't start it in Auschwitz for sure, because there was brum in the food.

Q: Who was it -- who put that in, according to what you heard?

A: I don't know who could -- whoever -- the -- the food was cooked -- in Auschwitz, this was community cooking, whatever it was. The same was here. This was community cooking, you see? And people here, in the camp, in Mioufka camp or Shellneetsa camp, still had that little piece of bread from here or there, from the town Polish people, who -- who bought stuff and brought in and wa -- that. But, no, those were the two major problems. Not -- not two major problems and only a million others when you feared for your life every second, but the daily hunger and the lice, that was like a -- something never left you, never for a second. And still living -- living in Starachowice camp with local women and some -- really newcomers, but it really was still a homogenous type of group, you see? It wasn't like later on in Auschwitz when you were mixed with the world, nobody knew who you were then, couldn't care less. I personally owe my survival very much to people who -- who looked after me. Not just my sisters, you know, which they did. They are responsible for my survival, but other people because there was always the connection, they remember me as that skinny kid or whatever. They took pity

on me. They always helped me, people always helped me. Always. I don't know why, I must have been a sorry sight. I must have been, you know, an undernourished, skinny kid looks like a devil probably, like a skeleton. So, I don't know. But this was still a homogenous group that made you feel that you are still attached to some kind of life that was your own. You know, at that t -- before this life, because in Auschwitz, you already doubted yourself, that you came from another life, because how could that be? You were a million years away from something that was normal. And here there wasn't anybody who even knew that you -- who you were or whatever, you see? So life in Starachowice labor camps -- I said camps because you know, the two -- was still very much normal. And this lasted til 1944, where the camp was loaded onto trains into tr -- into Auschwitz. That was end of July or early August. And we didn't know why, because obviously we never knew why anything was happening, nobody told us and they certainly kept it from us on purpose. But a rumor was that the Russian front was nearing from the east and of course later on, we found out in Auschwitz that all these labor camps that were situated in this heart of Poland, that did war production for the Germans were liquidated about the time we were. And so we're talking now about 1944, end of July.

Q: Be-Before we move on to that --

A: Yes?

Q: Just maybe one [indecipherable] question. How did you keep your strength in all of this? Yes -- yes, you were close with your sisters?

A: Very.

Q: Wha-What was -- what did you think about to keep you [indecipherable]

A: Well, well, would you believe it, we were singing. We sang songs, we remember a lot of poetry, Polish poetry, it's true. To this day I remember Polish poetry. Not just Polish, I remember Shakespeare in Polish. "Midsummer Night's Dream," I remember. "Diz bed biedna sheetem shezak nie." You know, I remember these hard pieces to this day, a million years later. Well, anyhow, no, we were -- we knew mother did not get resettled. That was finally brought back to us one way or another. That the train that left Starachowice during the ulseedlung, during the vished lenya, or whatever, clearing of the Jews, did not get resettled, it got sent straight into Treblinka. So mother perished and we knew it. I mean we -- that much we -- because everybody knew that nobody from that -- from our home people survived, that went on that train. My sisters and I were very, very, very close. We told the -- talked about old times, we recited poetry, we sung, we were hungry, we were terribly, terribly hungry. We saw father every now and then. He got very aged or very old looking. He wasn't an old man. He broke -- his spirit was broken, you could see that. He was gray and he -- he was a cigarette smoker and now he coughed constantly, you know. He had this bad cough and -- but the fact that we were around and he saw all these other people, you know. We were, after all -- probably 80 percent of that camp was still people from our hometown. So that more or less kept his spirit up, in that sense that people were trying to think back to good things and -- and -- and -- and -- and rehash and rehash. I used to dream, there and in Auschwitz, about the way the table -- my mother set the table. I don't know, I -- I must have had the hang up about -- hang up

about cooking or whatever, serving. I remembered the beautiful way the table was set. So I used to dream about it, you know. She had that artistic touch of setting the table. And I s -- we talked about it and we -- we talked about it 50 times, all the time of the same kind of this con-conversation. And of course father was around, that was a great consolation and when we came to Auschwitz, that was the last time we saw our father.

Q: We take a break and just change the cassette now.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: This is a conintin -- continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Regina Gelb. This is tape number two, side B. And we just talked about --

A: We talked about the liquidation of the camp in Starachowice, when we were loaded up on the train and on the way to Auschwitz. Now, there is a very important point here I wanted to bring up. You know, people say, well why didn't anybody do this and they didn't rebel and peoples went like sheep to the slaughter. When the two camps were combined, Shellneetsa and s -- and Mioufka and people were still employed by the factories, living was sort of made to -- to -- generally speaking, people should be able to sleep and -- and -- and have a place and because they had to work next day. Just before -- toward the end of July, just before we were sent to Auschwitz, we were moved out of the last camp, which was Mioufka, into something that was sort of like a camp, but it wasn't, because it was people just shoved into some kind of barracks and there was m-many more guards with towers. And this particular enclosure was very near the siding -- the

railroad siding, because you know, a factory that operates, has to have a railroad siding. Well, that was a siding that was right adjacent to that third place, which was a camp, but wasn't a camp. It was like -- I can't quite describe it to you. Well, what happened is, somehow the word got around that this is the end -- this is the end. Now when we're getting shipped, we're really going to go like the people originally went -- wherever it was they went -- we're not being resettled, this is for sure. We're just going to be killed. So the same night, some young fellows and strong young women, tried to break out. The ca -- that place -- I'll call it camp again, but it was a place, a -- like a -- a pen -- type of a pen, you know -- had a wooden fence and behind it, wire -- on top of it wire. No, barbed wire. That night bef, -- the day -- th-the night before we were actually shipped to Auschwitz, some people decided to run away and they pulled out a few of the planks from the wooden fence and as soon as that happened, whoever felt this was the opportunity, started running that way. The German guards were shooting out of -- no, th-these were Ukrainians, probably. Ukrainian guards started shooting right into this -- th-the moving bodies, the reflectors, you know, they started sending them. Before you knew it there were dogs, there were -- all the Germans were out. Some people made it out, the rest didn't and there was a heap of bodies right at that opening. Whether everybody there was already dead, or whether he was just d-dying, only a few people made it out. And one of them was my brother-in-law and he made it out, the Canadian brother-in-law, he made it out. But the others, I don't know how many people made ou -- made it out of that -- thr -- because th-the hole was very narrow and by the time they got going, it was

already too late. And there was a woman that was shot in the legs. She -- they let her die all night long, in the middle of the -- of that area and her agonies -- cries of agony went on all night long. They did -- they -- obviously they weren't going to shoot her to kill her, because they wanted that to teach other people a lesson. And she was begging to be killed. She was in -- in terrible agony. She kept yelling that her legs were shot off, I don't know. Because she was laying in the middle and we heard her. Well, next morning, we were put on the trains, there wasn't -- probably not even any marching to do because the train was right there. We were put on the train. Again, we had no idea where we were going. Women in separate cars and the men in other cars. And it so happens that the last car where the men were, had my father in it. And the first car where the women were, had us in it. So that when we arrived in Auschwitz -- and we had no idea where we were going and we were unloaded on the platform, we saw my father in the group with the men. Because they were, this was the tail end of the men th -- contingent. And we were first in the women's contingent, so we still saw him, he saw us. And that was the end. We never, ever saw him again. People from my hometown who did survive Auschwitz told us that after he arrived in Auschwitz, he totally gave up. He was -- he was a man that was lost to the world. He got very sick, his legs were swollen and of course he was killed and cremate -- I mean he was -- he went out like everybody else, through the chimney. And we were told this was in October. You see, we arrived in August in Auschwitz, early August. So he lived maybe not quite two months. He still lived, but of course we never saw him. But we were told what happened, that he was -- h-he -- I think his spirit was

gone and th -- everything just went after that and he -- he gave up. I don't really, truly know what was his work assignment so to say, because you know labor in -- in -- in Auschwitz was not labor, it was just work to make you -- to exhaust you, you know.

Q: Did he see you too, when you saw him?

A: Yes, on the platform, yes. He saw us, we knew he saw us, because you know, we sort of communicated. And -- you couldn't wave, obviously, but he saw us, because he was at the tail end of that group, that -- from which we were separated. So he knew that the three of us were together and that was the last we saw him. So, you see, my mother was -- my mother went to Treblinka in October '42 and my father just lived two more years and -- if you call that life -- so he perished in Auschwitz.

Q: What -- what happened when you arrived there? What -- what went forth?

A: Well, the first thing obviously was to be tattooed. You know, they wouldn't let you anywhere without being tattooed. So we decided that we were going to line up one next to the other, because we knew by then that, you know, numbers are in sequence and if you have numbers in sequence, you have a chance to -- to -- to be within that number -- group number. So my oldest sister Hanya, Anna had the first num -- whatever the number was. Kris, Krisha, the second, had the second number and I had the third. So we had a sequence of numbers. And it proved to be lifesaving because at Auschwitz, as you know, there were no names any more, there were just numbers. If they needed a contingent of people, they would call numbers, let say from 15 to 95. You see? So -- it so happens, whenever we were sent somewhere, we were called by that -- we were lucky enough -- of

course sometimes you can be cut off at the num -- end of the number too, but it so happens that our numbers were always in that nu -- group number. And after we were tattooed, we were told to disrobe and go into what was called showers. Nobody knew what that was and there was one chimney going, you could see fire coming out. One crematorium, because by then, you know, this -- this is 1944, August and the war isn't going so well for the Germans, so I understand that they have destroyed some of the crematories. One was still belching fire when we came. The smell was incredible, incredible. And of course, at night, you could see the fire against the sky. And I don't know, I must have rationalized that fire somehow. You know why? Because in my hometown, when they used to melt the ore -- smelt the ore, they used to -- my hometowns was sort of hilly. They used to bring the lorries with the hot s -- the leftover from the -- from the ve -- the ore that was smelted out of it. The leftover was called jujer, lighting it's cauks or whatever it was called. They used to pour it out from those lorries, over the -- over the embankment of the hills, so that you saw a -- like a long -- now what? Like a belt, you know? Pass, what is the word? Just escaped me. Anyhow, when you saw the -- the -- the -- this -- this -- this lava type of a fire pouring down and I knew this was just melting -- this was fire. It looked like fire at night, you see, if you ever saw it. When I was in Auschwitz, maybe I -- I always thought of it. Maybe I rationalized. When I saw that flame going out of the chimney -- they said to me, "You know they're burning people in there." But I said to myself, "Maybe that's -- what is there is that what I saw as a child when I saw that flame in the dark. The stuff that poured out of the lorries, you

know -- of the -- of the -- the byproduct of the smelting." But of course was a big -- as they say a pipe dream, because this was the true burning flesh, which you could smell. You could almost touch it, that's how pervasive it was. And we -- I don't know how much I knew, if anything, that the -- Auschwitz, the name or the -- the -- the whole -- what it was all about. Except that now, having been shifted so many times, you know, from the ghetto to a camp, to another camp, to another holding place, you know, this was just another place, you know. And when we came in, we were held on what was called quarantine. The situation in Auschwitz was different too, you see, because by now, the -- some of the crematories were -- were gone, but they were still burning and they were still eliminating people as fast as they could, but I don't know what the projection of time was with them, how they were going to do it all. They put us on the -- what you -- what is called quarantine, which meant nothing. It meant they give us wo-work to do that was meaningless. There was a pile of rocks here on one end and there was a pile of rocks on the other end of the camp. You had to -- very heavy -- you carried the rocks from this end to the e-end, to the other. And then you went over to the other side and carried them back. In fact, in one of those rock carrying ex-expeditions, we saw my aunt, Uncle Alexander's wife with the Radom group. They were -- the Radom ghetto was eli -- of course, as I told you before, all -- with the Russian offensive coming from the east, all these camps w -- and ghettos and whatever, were being shipped westward. We didn't know that Uncle Alexander survived. We just knew that his two sons ran away to Russia at the beginning of the war, but we didn't know about Uncle or -- or his wife. Sure

enough, there we saw her, in Auschwitz, going the other way with the rocks, and we were going this way. We lived in a barracks, nine people to a bunk, nine women. We slept head to -- head to foot, because nine women is totally impossible to fit into this kind of an area. It was just wooden bunks. As you know, Auschwitz stories -- we had to -- we were counted. We had to line up for role call every morning. During the quarantine, we had to do it more than twice a day. Later on, when we worked outside, we had to once. In the morning once, in the evening, but during quarantine, whenever you went indoors, they called you out again and you had to line up. And if they didn't like the way you stood, or whatever, they could just shoot you, which they did. And we were still very much with the original group. Now, when we first arrived and we were -- you know, everybody's hair was cut -- I don't mean cut, you know, they grabbed alil hair and chopped it off. My oldest sister Hanya spoke back to the women who was cutting her hair, who was a Czechoslovak woman. For that, the Czechoslovak woman called her, "You Polish pig," and she shaved her head to zero. Totally zero. And they gave us clothes that of course didn't fit. I don't have to tell you because they were throwing it at you as you were passing out of the -- where the -- where your head was -- where your head was cut. And you just took it, whatever, big, small or in between. Whether it fit or not, you had to change with other people to fit you. And wooden shoes. And the barracks, that was another thing. I mean, lice -- when we talked about lice in Starachowice, that's one thing, when you talk about lice in Auschwitz, that was already beyond description. There was a l-latrine behind the building. You had to wait your turn. Of course you had to sit with at

least 20 other people. They had sort of boards with holes in them -- awful. We're not talking here in any way privacy or anything, believe me. At the lowest level of human existence, you probably do not encounter this type -- this type of existence. This is below -- below what human mind considers as -- as human. This was exhausting work and it was no work. It w -- we were -- we knew we -- we knew that we were expendable, because we weren't -- you know, in the factories you knew, "Oh, they need us." You know, "Maybe we'll survive the war because they need us." Here they couldn't have needed us, because what we were doing is we were taking the rocks from here to there and my aunt was bringing the same rocks when we saw her pass by with the other group, bringing the same rocks back there. So they didn't really need us. You see, that much you could figure out. The barracks were run by Czechoslovak women. Very, very cruel -- extreme. One day -- this -- this subject should really be analyzed. What makes collaborators more cruel than the perpetrators? This is a very important philosophical question. Because my encounter with the Ukrainians and with the Czech women and with all the other collaborators or functionaries of the Nazis, actually exceeded, sometimes, the brutality and the total disregard for the person. And I have an anecdote from that period, which is -- which compares to the fact when my father was first time caught to go and c -- to clean the -- the railroad station, the -- the insult that it was. You know, that -- at that time, that the insult that he was called a Jew and not a gentleman and that he had to s -- clean. When we were in the barracks in Auschwitz and this woman, this Czech woman -- big, hefty, strong, sort of like an animal type. Aronka was her name. I was

going to the latrine, or coming from the latrine and she stood there, she saw me and she calls me over, she always calls me Polish pigs. She always says, “Polska schvina.” She -- she -- she called all the women like that. And she put up her foot, she had boots, leather boots and told me to clean her -- to polish her boots and I didn’t have anything and she says to spit on it and polish it. I took it as such humiliation. I mean, it’s like my father’s humiliation at the railroad station. In the scheme of things, in this -- in thi -- in this whole picture of what was happening, why was I so upset about this? I guess because it was person to person, you know? And she wasn’t a German. She was not supposed to be a Nazi, she was only the block altester. The supervisor of the barrack. So, why I should have thought that she would be more human or what -- expect -- whatever it was, it was a terrible personal insult to me and believe me, I was already beaten up in Auschwitz by an SS man by that time. He hit me with a ring, had a heavy ring on the mouth and I was bleeding and I -- I was suffering from hunger and from every -- and here, out of everything, I should get upset about that. I cried over that. I didn’t cry over the others things. And then of course she kicked me and she -- she didn’t even -- you know, when I was down she kicked me and she told me to go in or whatever. So, th-the first months, that’s -- that was the first very, very disorienting --

Q: What was the relationship between th-the prisoners? Was there --

A: Very good, yes.

Q: Was that di-different from the camps, or was it equally [indecipherable] supportive?

A: Yes. It was very supportive. I'll tell you that -- as I told you, we are s -- we were traveling still with the same group. We are still with the people from my hometown or even if they weren't from my hometown, they were sent in, but they were -- they were already in that group that came from Starachowice. And the relationship was family like. Each one was looking out for another. And then I remember, that barrack of ours received a shipment of people from Salaneeka. Jew -- of course we couldn't -- Jewish women from Greece. We couldn't speak to them. I don't know that -- whatever. But we felt a kinship, I remembered -- I remember that. I remember that we felt a kinship because we were a group, we were still a group, you see? Even if -- if -- if you didn't sleep with the -- the nine people, or not all the people, you know, you still were a group. And I -- you know and I analyze it, I always said because they knew you when, you know. These people were still a connection to your old past and you knew them as these other people, you know? Because the rest didn't seem human in any way. And after this one month of quarantine, we finally were called on the job, what is called gainful employment, which was -- this could have been the end of us, that's for sure. It was to cut twigs in the marshes. This is now August, Sept -- something like early October. We had to march out so we would be counted. Now it's strictly roll call twice a day. They count us out, we had to stand -- whoever didn't look right got shot or got send out, because you couldn't go to work any more. We would march through those gates, you know, are bike markt fry and out to the marshes, we would cut marshes. We would stand in water, cut the marshes, they would bring in cauldrons of -- of soup that's -- you know, the

Auschwitz soup. We were fed that and then we would come back at night, count, go to -- to -- to sleep and get up in the morning and start again. And we worked there I think for a month. And this is also in my mind, you know -- sa -- th -- always there is -- always say a snippet of a remembrance that -- that comes out of every horrible experience that sticks in your mind. Just like Aronka with the shoes -- why I should cry over having to -- to -- to be humiliated like this, I don't know. But then there was another aspect of this kind or remembrance -- this kind of remembrance, the -- you know, from the general to the particular, we were marching to the march -- to the marshes. And there were these private dwellings, private homes around it -- alon-along the route. And I think the German guards lived there or whoever. Because it was so near Ausch -- near the camp that you couldn't possibly have strangers. I don't know. Whoever lived there had to know everything that was going on. So I don't know who lived there. But anyhow, those were normal houses, they had geranium boxes in the window. They had pillows airing in the windows. And it broke my heart to see that people were actually living a life from which we were -- we came, too, but it was nothing in any way to compare to -- how to judge our own existence. You see, there was this life, these people got up in the morning, it was a beautiful day, cold or hot, was beautiful, dry. You put the windows u -- put the windows open, you put the pillows in the window. That's what people did in Poland, you know. And people had geranium boxes in the window. And of course our own assessment of who we were, wer -- was -- was already far away from what we really thought we were. Because we were in -- so dehumanized in the process of all these particular humiliations

and the group humiliations and the murder and the -- and -- and watching. Of course I -- I could go on and on forever to talk about all the -- the -- the -- the unnecessary brutality, you know? Okay, sometimes you explain to yourself that you see a man si -- seeing a pair of boots and -- and running out of the line-up and grabbing the pair of boots, well -- the g -- Nazi guard ha -- says to himself, “Well, I have to do it, because this is a criminal, right?” But aside from that, when you saw the brutality and the cruelty of people to other people for no reason, it dehumanized you to the point that you yours -- your own assessment of yourself was -- is that other person that you were, is that pers -- is that you or is this, that you don’t react the way you really should react to seeing those horrible things? Of course when you are in it yourself, you are forever preoccupied with survival because that is a very strong instinct, you know. The instinct of survival is so strong, no matter how old you are -- I don’t know how it is when you’re really older, but when you’re a young child and you haven’t lived yet and you -- and -- and then of course in the back of my mind, I always said to myself, “Gee whiz, I know my mother used to say not to say I was smart, I was good in school, but I think maybe I am, you know, maybe I really, you know, I could -- I could beat this.” But then of course I realized that I was undernourished and all this and I didn’t have the physical prospects of survival because I really -- I don’t know how long it would have taken for me to -- to -- to just fall by the wayside there, because the jobs were -- the job was extremely, extremely hard. And again, to talk in a historical perspective, I s-subsequently found out that there were some women who ran away from Auschwitz and that the Germans decided -- because you

know, the marshes that were around the camp -- the Auschwitz - Birkenau camp, were sort of protective. They didn't show what was going on. But by the same token, they could hide people. So some people made it out. Some people were, as a matter of fact, did run away and they were caught. You know, there were executions in Auschwitz that even I remember. But the point was that when we were sent to cut the -- the brush from the marshes, that was -- the reason was that the women who ran away hi-hid in there. So they wanted now cleared. So we had this specific idea in mind, that they really need us -- not -- not that we knew why they want to cut it, but if they wanted to cut it, that was a job and it was going to take a long time, because there was plenty of it. So, by virtue of being needed, we had a chance to survive. Now the question in my case was, wa -- did I have a chance to survive, physically? Even if I outwitted myself and worked hard and ev -- would I be able to survive? Well, Auschwitz -- life in -- up to that point -- it was no prospect of any kind of getting out of there. We knew by then that they were burning people, because we inquired about the flesh -- the smell of the burning flesh and by then we knew. There were other transports coming in. The Gypsies -- lots of Gypsies were sent in. The Hungarian transports. This is all -- you know this is -- we're talking now August, September. And we just -- anyhow, we -- we meaning my sisters and I. I personally was thinking about all this time, but I was letting myself go with the -- with the -- with the -- the flow, you know, however I was -- I was trying to accommodate myself and of course my sisters were always protecting me. Because you know, when there was a roll call and I was exhausted, I was always propped up, you know, they

propped me up. I was the worst case of the three of us, really, because my oldest sister Hanya, at least she was tall and she was already developed, it was a g -- nice girl, you know, but she -- Kris was good too, but I didn't fit any picture of any kind of -- although there were kids who came from our camp in Poland, they were younger than I am. There were six and five and six and seven year old children who were in Auschwitz, who came from Starachowice camp. They were smuggled into the camps, in Starachowice by the parents and they were shipped with us and they lived in Auschwitz. Some of them -- a few of them survived Auschwitz. But no I -- I -- I couldn't in any way figure out how that was going to end. And of course there was -- it was a stroke of luck, we found out that they were looking for -- we didn't find out, we were called, the numbers were called. There were 30 women -- 30 women were called by num -- you know, to -- to go to another place, you know? The most intelligent way of putting it -- an-another place. You know, cause there was one place and there was the other, it was just one more place. Well, the other place happened to be a area called Brejinka, it was called Afectencomer. And there were Polish women who worked there -- only Christian Polish women. And apparently they were either involved with the Polish underground, or suspected of involvement with the Polish underground. Whichever way, they were shipped out. And they needed other people, too. So the number that came out to supplement them, to -- not to supplement, to replace them, was 30 and we were in the 30 and the three of us were in it cause we had the number. And this was a godsend because we now had to work indoors. You see, we were packing that -- th-that stuff that was hanging there from the

political prisoners. We had to work indoors and do a lot of packing which was -- which was child's play by comparison to the marshes. October, November, cold water, you know. And at first we used to go back to the camp to sleep, but then that was discontinued. For whatever reason nobody told us. So they had barracks there and we slept. That was another godsend, it wasn't nine more people. It wasn't nine any more. There were facilities to wash because we were handling things so I guess -- we didn't have so mu -- many -- I mean the lice somehow -- however we controlled it. We could bathe now. Of course we -- they gave us clothes, because there was so much clothes in -- in the -- you know, what was left behind. So we helped ourselves to clothes, to be -- to -- to, you know, to dress to -- to size. Dress to size. We had -- they gave us shoes also, by measure, we could pick a pair of shoes to measure and we did not mix any more with the larger camp, because they didn't want us mixed.

Q: What was the actual work --

A: Yes.

Q: [indecipherable] to do?

A: The actual work was as follows. You know that Auschwitz was an extermination camp and a slave labor camp, at one time, combined. The extermination camp was basically for Jews. The slave labor camp was also for political prisoners. Now, there were a lot of Polish political prisoners who are in the underground or whoever. The Christians that were suspected of anything were called political prisoners. Some of them were political but not everybody was political, but they weren't Jews, you see? So they had to

be called something, they were called political prisoners. When they were sent into the ca -- into Auschwitz, I understand their clothes was put in a bag. Like when we came in, we just dumped our clothes on the -- on the heap and we were given whatever. We never saw our clothes again. These people had -- you know the German ob-obsession with -- with -- with keeping records? Well, they -- their clothes was put into bags, sort of like sacks. Each one had a number and it hung, it was -- you know, like in a butcher shop, with the hooks? And it hu -- these sacks hang on sh -- on -- on hooks. Every time a prisoner like this died, the bag of -- with the number had to be crossed out and the bag was repacked into a package and sent to the haw -- to -- sent home. Or, if he was resettled, the bag went after him. Of all the stuff and h -- genocide on an -- on a scale -- unprecedented scale, here you talk about shipping the little sack of leftover clothes. I mean this is -- this is a macabre picture to draw, but that's what it was. So this is what we did. We had to repack. I learned to pack there, very well. We had to repack these things. We had to re-hang them again by numbers, you know. And heaven help you if there was ever anything missing. I mean, for that you could pay with your head. If you decided, while you were packing, that you were going to take a glove, or something that you thought you want to take for yourself -- well we were smarter by then, than that. Besides, the Polish women that were still left there, not all of them were shipped because obviously you cannot staff a -- a -- a -- a workplace with brand new people. You have to keep some of the old ones. They told us they were -- they were very intelligent women there, very. I -- some of them were political prisoners. So they told us the do's and the don'ts and we surely minded

everything they ever said. Life there really brought us around. Living there brought us around physically. I don't know if we slept two to a bunk or three, but it wasn't nine and we didn't wear the same raggedy, t-torn rags that weren't even fitting. Here, if you -- it's sometimes found that you -- your -- your -- you tore your dress, you went over to the supervisor and she would say, you come with me, I -- you pick a dress. You see? So that that was also very important for later on, the fact that we were dressed properly and we had proper shoes when we went on the march later on, the -- the -- the death march. But that -- I'm anticipating. It -- what I was trying to say is this -- we worked in that place, which was part of the Auschwitz complex, maybe for two months or something like this. Because you see, the general evacuation from Auschwitz was Jan -- about mid January, 1945. January 15th or so. And I would say that we worked there through Feb -- through December, surely. Some of November, maybe. Some of November, all of December and up to that point. At which -- which gave us a very good -- our bodies a very good chance to recover from the cold and the -- we were counted here, too and everything, but it wasn't any more like it was. And by the way, we were now separated from our hometown group. This was a totally different -- they -- these were people -- different people and there the -- the Christian Polish women. Of course, we had a very good relationship because -- maybe it's not nice to say, th -- in the way of bragging. Our Polish was really very pure and very, very lovely. So, people could sort of -- could peg you. They could figure out who you were by the way your Polish sounded, you know?

Q: What was the -- what -- what -- how did you talk to people before you went there? I mean here, obviously you spoke Polish with --

A: Right. No, in the barracks?

Q: Always?

Q: Polish and we knew some German, absolute. M -- Krisha studied German in high school. Hanya studied -- you know, in Poland you had to study Latin. They both studied Latin, but Hanya was -- Hanya's language was French. She was wonderful, that's what she tutored in. And we knew German because my father -- and during the war you heard it. So, we knew German, but basically it was Polish.

End of Tape Two, Side B

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Regina Gelb. This is tape number three, side A. So now --

A: So now we're up to the general evacuation of Auschwitz. The time is mid-January, 1945. Historically, to put it in perspective, the Russian army is -- offensive is moving ever closer. In fact, the part of Poland where Starachowice was -- Starachowice camp was located, was already liberated in January 1945, when we first started. But they were already liberated the year -- you know, at the end of last year, so after Starachowice, when we were still going through living hell and worse, that part was liberated. Meaning, you know, the Russians were there. So we found ourselves in that march -- that was the so-called death march. I don't know that I need to -- to dwell on it, because it has been very well documented all around and that was a horrendous experience. The camp was being evacuated en masse and people were being driven to a railroad station and people were just -- it was winter, it was snowy, snowy winter. And people were just falling by the wayside because we had to walk da-day and night and people were shot and killed right along and groups were now totally -- you know, things were just getting mixed up because men and women, you know -- th -- th -- it was -- it -- people from different parts of the camp -- anyhow, the -- the most outstanding recollection for me of that period, is not what I remember, but what my sisters remember, is that I fell asleep on that march and I could not distinguish reality fr -- I was hallucinating and they were dragging me. And really, if I ever was going to perish, that was the time. They dragged me, they

physically dragged me. I was totally, completely swallowed up by the dream. I just didn't know -- I just thought I was in some house and then we were told to stop on the road and everybody was relieving himself and my sisters told me to squat down an-and I wouldn't do it, cause I thought I was dreaming and I wasn't going to do that. Well, anyhow, that was another -- it was a horrendous experience, except I slept through it. And what I know about that is what my sisters told me and the fact that I was finally awakened with a big h-hit on the head when -- when we were to move on after a night's sleep in a barn, that I real-realized who I was and where I was. And we ended up on open cars -- on open railroad cars. Not covered, open cars. Snow -- snow was falling and we were going somewhere. Now we were sitting on the floor of these cars, all kinds of people, wi -- speaking all kinds of languages. Women, again, we were not mixed with men. You could hear Greek and Y-Yiddish and Polish and Russian and French and Hungarian. You name it, it was all one big -- we were really by ourselves on that march, the three of us. I don't know how -- this is -- we'll all -- another subject. How it was, that knock wood, that we were -- like that -- we were s -- always together.

Q: How long did that last march?

A: Th-Th -- I -- I think we marched maybe four or five days. The march. Then we came to those trains and I still don't know where it was. Th -- There were -- there were -- these trains were waiting, it wasn't a station, it was some kind of a siding or whatever, you know. This is all -- I was going to do research into it, but w-what will it give me if I fi -- do -- do know this? I don't need to know it and -- anyhow, we came from there

eventually. We came at night to a place, the sign was lit uf -- lit up -- Ravensbrück. Just like in Auschwitz, we didn't know what it was, what -- it was another place, you know? So they unloaded us and we had to stay where we were on the snow, because there was no place -- th -- just -- you know, they just said, "You just stay here."

Q: Do you have any memory of that trip, because Ravensbrück is in northwestern Germany --

A: Right.

Q: That is a long time away from --

A: Yes.

Q: That was --

A: I tell you what it was, it was -- we had with us a little sack of sugar, which was a luxury above luxuries, when we were leaving, the afectencomer last place. The snow was very -- falling very heavily. We were covered with snow. We ate a drop of sugar and we ate a drop of snow. You see? Mixed with -- everybody was eating snow. They scraped their coats or whatever they were wearing and how long -- you see, that's another thing, I don't remember how long the march was. I don't remember how long we traveled to -- to -- to Ravensbrück. All I know is that when we came to Ravensbrück, it was worse than anything else before. Now, if that is at all possible to say that, then -- that -- to say that you came out of Auschwitz to something even worse, that's probably like a total exaggeration, which it isn't. The reason being that Ravensbrück was now a gathering point for all the camps that were being evacuated. Now, in Auschwitz, they counted you,

they gave you a number, you were nine to a -- a boar -- to a -- the bunk. If one was missing, the rest got th-th-th -- shot or killed, for whatever. You had to be accounted for and you had to do or not do exactly what you were told. And you got that -- that -- that slop of the soup that was nothing, but you got it. In Ravensbrück was nothing. It was overflowing with people. There was no room even for nine on a bunk. They built tents. They kept us there because there was no room. They finally threw us into a tent. They told us to get up off the snow and everybod -- the snow was all stained with urine, because we sat there, you know and everything and feces -- into that tent. There was no room in the tents, there was like herring people next to each other. You know, like laid out like sardines. It was -- it was an incredible s-situation because you didn't have food. You didn't know if you were going to get even that meager nothing, that -- that slop, whatever it was. A piece of bread. You didn't -- you couldn't sleep, you couldn't undress. You -- you -- that was the end of the road. It was just bodies shoved into a tent, period. There was no organization. There was no counting, there was -- you know what I mean? Whereas they were obsessing about having the last -- the -- the number exactly to the last digit, here they couldn't care less. So finally the word got around that the trucks would be coming, that there would be shipments going out. That they were going to liquid -- not liquidate, they were going to reduce the number of people in Ravensbrück. So my sisters decided that anything is better than this and frankly, you know, I -- I didn't participate much in the decisions, because really I didn't consider myself very much aware of -- of -- of -- of -- that -- to plan it, to think it through. I -- I had a certain instinct

of -- of self-preservation, but I didn't really know -- I didn't have the life experience to -- to -- to -- to do any planning type of -- you see? Of -- o -- any planning of any kind. Anyhow, they said, "Wherever we go is better than here." They said they were -- they need people for some other place. And this could -- other place could have been another chimney, you know. That was to be taken into consideration. But my sisters said, "Any place is better than this place, because this place is -- is -- what's going to be here?" So we got on those trucks, the first trucks that came.

Q: What -- how long were you staying there, roughly? Because it's --

A: Maybe three weeks at the most. Two weeks, maybe. Two or three at the most.

Q: But all this time in tents, in the cold, nothing?

A: In the tent -- in the tent -- and no, there was food here and there. You know, they would come around and they would dole out some soup, but it wasn't like in Auschwitz. You went to the marshes, you came back, they bri -- brought you the food there or they -- they -- you -- they give you the one piece of bread in the morning for the day. You knew you -- it was coming. You didn't know what was coming here, what wasn't coming. You couldn't figure it out. And -- and then when you did come with the food, who was going to get there before you, t-to -- over your head, you see? Because this wasn't anything in any way organized to -- for any number of people. Certainly not for this number. This -- this was thousands upon thousands more than the camp could ever absorb. So when we finally got on those trucks -- and surely we didn't know where we were going and surely we could have been going to another -- t-to be burned like they were burning the flesh in

Auschwitz. So, by now we were smarter, we were already -- we knew a lot of things now, you see, because we knew about what Auschwitz was doing before we got there and all that. So we came and the place we came to was Radsoff. A small camp, I think it's in Mecklenburg, right?

Q: Near Hamburg?

A: Yes, right, exactly. And we came there and this was an empty camp. Small size, nothing like Auschwitz, nothing like Ravensbrück. It was just a small -- sort of the size of a Starachowice labor camp type. Apparently that camp was near an Air Force base. There were aircraft around, you know, in the -- not far and there was a base and the camp had barracks and it had SS women running it. In uniform. And talk about women being bestial. Well, as you na -- can see, the world was opening to me all the time. All the assumptions I once had about how women were a little kinder than men, forget that. How they collaborate as they enslaved could not be as -- as horrible -- as brutal as the originators of the -- of the -- the planners and the originate -- forget about that. You see? So, coming back to Radsoff -- when we arrived, I think there were only two or three trucks of us. And what they wanted -- they staffed, they used us f -- to staff -- as -- as staff for this camp. I ended up being a maid to one of the SS women. My sister Hanya got a job cleaning her office. I was personal maid. Sister Hanya got a job in the office, cleaning the office and I forget what job my sister Krisha had. But she reminded me and I totally forgot about that. She had a bad job and one day this SS woman, she took a liking to me, even though she wouldn't come within 10 feet of me, you know. Dirty Jew, I --

you -- you know, and -- so, she asks me if everything is all right and I said fine. I'm -- I me -- I was scared of -- to death of her. I used to bring wood in and to her fire, you know, to heat the -- wash her laundry and iron and you know, all personal things. So, she asked me if everything was all right and if I have enough to eat, I said, "Yes, all right." So she says, she left me bread -- crust -- she used to cut away the crust from the bread, but she would never give it to me, because she wouldn't touch me, but she left it on the table. So she says, "From now on, whenever you come, there'll be crust here, so that's yours." "Fine." And then said, "And -- and -- wh-what else? Do you have anybody here?" I say, "Yes, I have sisters, one who works in the office, the other one has a bad job," I said. So she said, "All right, I get her a good job." And Krisha got a job in the kitchen. I didn't even remember that, but she reminded me about that. And so the first transport that came out of Ravensbrück, into Radsoff and we are now talking about end of -- end of February or something like that, 1945, something like that. We came into Radsoff and we were first distributed as the maids and the kitchen help and all this. And then the pe -- other people were sent in -- prisoners. And they had to dig ad -- anti-aircraft, because -- no -- trenches and -- and work at the air base. And the fact is that we didn't really know what was going on, but we sort of had a feeling that things are not -- as far as the war is going on, that things are not the same, things are quite different now. And life there, for us personally, was not as harsh as anywhere else. First of all, because we were in direct contact with the SS women -- in other words, they had to -- to -- to have us in their house to clean, we had to be clean -- not to mix with the general population. So underneath the

barracks was like -- like a cellar-like thing -- or under the offices, I don't know, it -- they let us sleep in that basement type of thing. Also on bunks, but we were not mingling with the population, you see? But we -- it so happens we had some friends there from other places. So -- so we had, again, indoor jobs. I -- I don't know if that -- how impressive that could be, but if you think about the time of the year and what we went through and -- anyhow, we had these indoor jobs and -- and they looked, the SS women, cruel as they were -- and they were really horrible types -- it was for their own benefit to stay with the people that they picked, you know. And i-if you turn out that you -- they liked you, which -- she liked me, what do you mean liked, how could she have liked me when I was a nothing Jew? But I did -- I washed her laundry and I ironed her laundry and I washed the -- cleaned the floor and I did the dishes and I brought in the wood and I -- I had the stove on for her and I -- you know, I did all the things that -- that -- polished her shoes and I did the best I could. So one way or another she couldn't hate me, because you know, I was doing. I was doing things for her. We were in that camp -- I'm trying to reconstruct, you know, I -- di-di-di-direct -- d-dates like this are hard to come by, but this has to be mid -- mid-April or so. Mid- April, 1945. And all of a sudden, we hear bombing. The allies were bombing, you see? So that was very good news, for us. We heard the bombs falling and they were scared to death and we didn't care any more, because just to see them scared -- and they were running down where we were. They were also running down into that cellar where we were sleeping, you know? They were petrified. But to us, it was just one more. Besides it -- we knew it was English. The

English or the Americans, we didn't know, but we knew somebody was bombing and that's good. Because one way or another, this has to get resolved now. So after some very heavy bombardment a few times, by the allies -- obviously they must have been bombing the airf -- air base, you see? Because we were in the middle of nowhere, but there was an air base. So after some of these bombings were over -- and again, I can't tell you exactly, but it had to be about middle of April -- or early April, I don't know, 1945, they told us we have to evacuate the camp and they were going, too. But of course, they weren't going to ki -- schlepp -- carry their own things. So each one of the maids had to carry a rucksack. A -- a backpack with her things and we were march -- we were formed in a formation and I think either the -- the -- the servants, meaning myself and the others, either were on the end or at the front, but we weren't mixed in, we were in a place all in one group, because we were carrying that -- that -- the belongings, you know? And then -- I'm sorry to say, I'm totally ignorant of the area, but I know that we found ourselves -- I know it's in Mecklenburg, but we found ourselves on the highway -- major highway and I don't know which it was, east -- west highway or north-south highway or whichever highway it was -- it was a major highway because it was completely covered with people. You had soldiers in uniform and soldiers out of uniforms and tanks and horses and -- and cows and people and Jews from camps and Christian Poles from the neighboring farms, you know, the Christian Poles worked slave labor on farms. And POW's and all languages and -- and uniforms and not uniform. And you know, we walked in formation, we had -- our clothes was marked with a big X -- with a -- like a -- you know, shiny kind

of painting -- paint that was on both s -- you know, to mark us. So you could tell who we were, but we were carrying these rucksacks -- these knapsacks for them and we were in a group. There were 12 of us. And before long, there was no place to go. On the side there, there was a -- there a -- the Swedish -- Swedish Red Cross was giving out -- was giving out parcels. Not parcels, food rations. I don't know -- o-out of nowhere, it's like, you know, i-i-it's -- it's -- it's a total like -- it -- it -- like in a dream, you know, in a dream things do not connect. One -- you dream that you are in school, but the school happens to be in the middle of the ocean or something like that, you know, it doesn't connect. In this melee of people, of -- of soldiers, of civilians, of -- of airplanes flying over, you don't know which way you're going, north or south or whichever. You don't know -- and then you just see rations given to you because they see that you're a prisoner, you see? Of course these German women, they grabbed all the cigarettes and everything and they stuck it in the knapsacks. Finally, we had to stop, because there was no place to go. Nobody was moving, nothing was moving. There was -- it was total traffic jam, period. No place to go. And there were embankments on both sides of the road and there were -- further out was like a forest and on this side -- on the other side was also an embankment and a field. We were all sitting together, the -- the -- the servant girls, us with the knapsacks and one of the girls, her name was Hel-Helena, she was blonde, looked German, spoke German beautifully. She had an idea that we could now make our way out of here and nobody will know the difference, because it was the commotion. Not commotion, th-the mixture of everything was -- you couldn't tell who was who and who

was going where and what was happening. So she says, why don't we sit down. The SS women were all together, they were hanging around where the rations were given out, because they could, you know, they could get their hands on things. So we're sitting on the embankment and Helena says like this, "You know, I can get dressed," meaning her -- she can get dressed in one of the things that are in the knapsacks and we will move on the side and we will sit there and if later on, after everybody moves and they find us, she will say she's minding us. Which we did -- she took out a cape, a black cape out of one of the knapsacks and put the head, th-th-the -- the hat on, the German hat and we moved down the embankment, into the field and we walked very quietly. There was haysa -- stacks, in the field and we hid behind the haystacks and before you knew it, everybody started moving and -- and we got left behind. Nobody even knew we got left behind, because who could even know? Who could even count? These German women, maybe they themselves wanted to get away from us. If you think about it, you know?

Q: How many girls were --

A: 12, there were 12 of us. Th-The -- ma -- two sisters, myself and the others. This is all from -- from the Radsoff group that we came with. And I am thinking that they could not have been all that stupid to see that we weren't together with them, but they maybe didn't want to be together with us. However, it really worked to our advantage very well, because we found ourselves behind the h-haystacks and then a Pole came -- a man came over and he spoke Polish very well and he ask who we were and we said we detached ourselves, we were prisoners. We were Jewish slave laborers and such and prisoners.

And he says, “Well, if you want to, there’s a villa not far from here, you go there, there’s a woman and you tell her to feed you.” And he said there were Polish workers around, still on the fields, you see. So we went over, there was really a nice villa and there was this woman and she fed us, was really just like he said. And we said, “Oh.” We still didn’t -- we -- then we started hearing from them that the war is ending. But this is the end of April now. And we really didn’t know who -- who was doing what and how is it ending and where are the Germans? And we just saw by the way the highway was that things weren’t so hot for them, you see? That they were running away somewhere, I don’t know where. Anyhow, when we came to that villa and -- and we stayed overnight and lo and behold, next morning or next day, the Russians -- Russian soldiers arrived. They arrived in -- like a -- a truck or something and they wanted to know who was who and we said who we were and we spoke Polish and there was a Russian woman with us too, because that was already out of Radsoff. And he says, “Great. He says, “You know, you are here, wonderful, because we’re going to be here and we’re going to need girls to work for us.” So, he says, “We’ll be here tomorrow and then you can go with us, we’ll really make it -- and make it good -- I mean you’ll have -- you-you’ll have a better life.” After they left, the Russian women said, “Don’t trust them.” And the women -- Polish women said they were raped, that the Russians were raping women. So we took off, before they came back, we took off and we didn’t know -- w -- the only thing -- we didn’t know what to do or where to go. We didn’t know anything. I-Is the war ended? It’s not

end, it's still going on, but it was already very late April and they said th-that the war was over. But we didn't know what over means. What does over mean, you know? So --

Q: I -- I'm just going to have t-two quick follow-up questions.

A: Yes?

Q: Th-Th-The villa you -- the villa you went to, was that a German villa?

A: Yes. That was a German villa, w-which belonged to lan -- German landowners, who were employing slave labor -- Christian slave labor camp from Poland and Ukrainians -- Ukrainian women. They worked the fields while the Germans were in the army. They worked the fields. So that -- that's who it was.

Q: And the other question was, what kind of physical shape were you in, the three of you? How did you --

A: Much better. Much better. First of all, you know, the last months and a half or two in Auschwitz were already restoring our health. As I told you before we left, we were given shoes and we were given clothes to fit, warm clothes. So that was already -- that saved our life in the march -- in the death march and riding into Ravensbrück. We got out of Ravensbrück with -- a short time before we were defeated physically and mentally. In Radsoff, we had an indoor job. And Krisha was in the kitchen, we always had food to eat, you know? She was leaving me the bread crust that I was giving out to other women because I don't even need it -- this, any more. Because you know, we had -- we still were wearing the same clothes that we came out of Auschwitz, that were fitting. This is a very important point, that you have shoes to wear and it wasn't wooden shoes like, you know,

like in Auschwitz that we wear -- wore wooden shoes. So that if you add it all up, Radsoff being -- did I say about two months or so? Something like this. That restored our health. So by the time we were out of Radsoff, we are still wearing Auschwitz clothes, which I told you, which were fitting. Our health -- not health, but we were restored. And we had the energy, we didn't know which way we're going to be heading, so we were -- decide to go back home to Poland, because you have to find out who remain, who -- what happened, even though we pretty much knew, you know? In -- we didn't know what happened to father, but -- but we more or less -- things were begun to fall in, because we started asking around, the people, if they knew and then nobody knew and so on. We decided to go back to Poland, not so much weesaw, most of us, of the 12. And we started walking, we got on the train and there were transports, so they would dump us at the next station, then we got on another train and went all the way to Bitgosh like this, on and off the train and by that time, people saw who you were. First of all, you couldn't -- you could not mistake us for anybody else, because we were marked with the -- with the X's on the back and the front, so -- and of course we had numbers, but you didn't have to go around showing your number. Anybody who looked at you close, knew who you were, you see? Didn't have to introduce yourself. So, they knew -- where you going? "Well, we're trying to go back to Poland." "Okay." So they would say, "All right, now a new transport is going to load up soldiers here. You stay on this platform, next train comes, they'll take you." You see? So this is how it worked out, that eventually we were on the train, off the train, on the train, off the train. Fi -- It was if we didn't know where we're

going, but we'll thought we'll go back to Starachowice, you see? And we were -- got on the train and finally, on our last -- we came out of Bitgosh, we were just heading to Poland, w-we didn't know how we were heading. There was a -- a Russian soldiers in -- soldier in the train, heard us speak Polish and of course he saw who we were. As I told you, we didn't have to introduce ourselves. So he says, "You're one of those camp people?" So we said, "Yes." "Where you going?" "We're going back to Poland." "Where in Poland?" We said, "Starachowice." "What kind of town is it?" He spoke Yiddish. "Is it a big city, is it a town?" I said, "No, it's not a ci -- big city, it's a town," you know, the town had 30,000 people, so it isn't what you call a city. It was a city, but it wasn't a big city. Not like Kraków or Warsaw. He said, "Don't go back to Starachowice, if that's where you came from. It's not safe for Jews to return to -- to small towns, because people are now -- they feel you come back for your property, they are killing people around there. Don't go. You have to go to a big city." Warsaw, Kraków or Lódz. He said, "Warsaw's all bombed out. Lódz has a very good Jewish agency set up. Best thing for you is to go to Lódz." "Okay, we'll go to Lódz. Where are we going to go to Lódz? Who do we know?" He says, "I have a sister there," he says. He gave us the add --

End of Tape Three, Side A

Beginning Tape Three, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Regina Gelb. This is tape number three, side B.

A: The soldier whom we met in the train, coming out of Germany, I mean af -- when the war ended, who happened to be a Jew -- a Jew in Russian uniform and who asked us on the train where it was we were planning to go to -- in Poland and we told him that we're going home to Starachowice and he asked us what size town it was. Whether it was a big city, which of course it wasn't, because the population was 30,000 and that's no big city. So when he found out, he says, "No, you should not be going back to the small town, because they will not welcome you. They will think you're coming to claim your property or whichever it is and a lot of people returning from camps are being killed now, so you are better off going to one of three places. Warsaw, Kraków or Lódz. Warsaw is all bombed out -- unless you have somebody there, other than that, Kraków or Lódz." And we decided, "Fine, so we'll go to Lódz, but where do we go?" And he says, "Well, I have a sister there," and he gave us the address. He says, "You go to her. Ring her doorbell and tell her that I send you and there's a Jewish agency and you can register and -- and from there on, you'll be all right." Which is exactly how it was and this is my -- May, 1945, now. We came and she had a lot of people -- lot of people sleeping on the floor, sleeping on the stairway, all over the place. And next day we went to register. Of course we knew where to go, because she told us. The agencies, Jewish agencies that were running the place, that were running the registration were HIAS and the Joint Distribution Committee. I think both, together or separately, however, but they were international Jewish organizations. There was also Red Cross in Lódz, that was registering people, where we did register, but we were told that they are basically

interested in the Christians. And it's exactly how it was. So we -- as I said, we were -- after we registered, we had to go and check our names. Not just our names, check the names of people who were returning -- whether relatives or neighbors or whoever. And before long we found out that Uncle Alexander, my father's brother arrived. Alexander Laks and he was from Radom. He had two sons that went to Russia when the war broke out and they eventually joined the unders army and went through to Herron and Palestine. And that's another chapter of the Holocaust, but we'll stick with this part now. Uncle Alexander and his wife, Rose - Roosia, went through camps. We saw her in Auschwitz, as a matter of fact. I mentioned at the beginning when we were carrying the rocks one way and she was carrying the rocks the other way. Anyhow, he did not yet know where she was, if she survived, but he was in -- in Lódz. He was a man of means before the war. He had real estate, a lot of real estate and property and a big business and so on. So he decided he would go to Radom and see what he could claim. He -- I think he had some hidden assets too, hidden. The agency, the Jewish agency not only provided food rations, but they also gave us a place to live in, which wasn't a place, it was more like a -- the post war bombed out discard, but it was a place. And before we knew it, we met Adrian, my s -- Canadian sister's husband, who was already in Lódz for quite awhile. He was with us in the camps -- not in the camps, he was with us in Starachowice camps, up to the point where, on the eve of being shipped to Auschwitz, he broke out with the other prisoners, most of whom did not make it. He did make it. He made it out and he stayed with the Polish partisans. And of course, that was Au-August, 1944. He fought

with the partisans and then when that part of Poland was liberated, and that was way before we know of liberation, because that was almost like -- like -- like almost a year before we were liberated. We first went to Auschwitz. He found his mother, who was left behind in Auschwitz, as human refuse, because she was totally on the verge of -- the crematoria didn't work and they didn't -- they weren't going to take the time to kill her, for whatever reason. So they didn't kill her, but she was left behind and she was liberated in January of 1945 by the Russians and somehow or other found her way to Lódz and found -- he found her and they established a household. So when we were in Lódz, when we just arrived in Lódz, we found Uncle Alexander and then we found Adrian and his mother. And we had a little -- a place to live in and we -- in fact we had this friend of mine from Israel, who also was the one, Hanna Tenser, who was in the gas chamber and was left behind, also. She joined us, she called herself the fourth sister. So she -- she joined us and we tried to organize a kind of a life. Uncle Alexander was a man of means, so he was able to secure some money. He had a lot of hidden assets, liquid assets, money and such, but he also had real estate. And he rented a very lovely apartment -- large apartment, so now we lived in the apartment, both my sisters, Hanya - Anna and Krisha - Kris went to work and I signed up for school and I was the one to keep house. And was a very interesting period of my life, because you see, I actually didn't finish elementary school, you see? But, because I was taught, right through the ghetto tie -- time, which was seven days a week, 10 hours a day, I knew French and I knew Latin and I knew grammar and I knew history and I read Tolstoy and -- and I did all these things, which I

would never have done, except the books were in the house and that's what we studied from. And my sister Hanya, being the best teacher I ever had, which, it's a fact. I had this fantastic education, which I -- it wasn't even qualif -- qua -- classified, you know? If you ask me -- so I went to high school and ask me, "What grade?" So there was this high school, so everybody said, "Well, you're 15 now, 16, you have to go to high school, but," -- so I came and say, "What do you know?" And I told them I studied this and I said -- they said, "Fine." They put me in the second grade of high school, you see? And I was keeping house. We lived very nicely because of Uncle Alexander. And we can still registering, but we found out there's nothing for us any more, to hope for.

Q: Was that a school established by a Jewish agency, or was it --

A: No, this was a Polish high school in Lódz, Polish high school. There were a lot of kids in my situation who were -- whose education was interrupted. And they had all kinds of professors who were floating around, university professors and everybody, who was willing to teach. And we lived -- yes, I picked up as if not -- as if I really belonged there. I really, truly fit right in. I really fit right in. And my two sisters worked and we lived with uncle and Kris met Miles, Miles Lehrman, her husband and very soon my older sister, Hanya was -- she got engaged to Adrian and she went to Warsaw to study diplomac-diplomacy in the school of diplom -- Polish diplomacy. And she left for Warsaw and he left with her, soon after. And I stayed on. Kris got married. I went to high school. We had a very good life in -- in Lódz, in the sense that it was sort of like catching your breath, you know? First of all, we really, finally were able to find out -- to make

connection as to what happened, who -- we knew that the family perished, but we still didn't know who or how or when or what or anything. We found out for sure that mother went to Treblinka. We found out for sure that father perished in October, in 1944, in Auschwitz, for sure.

Q: How did you find that out?

A: Through -- because we met people in Lódz from our hometown, who were together with my father in Auschwitz. They even gave us October as the date, you see, in Auschwitz. October, '44. And we tried to find out about Babcha Tannenblume and about Babcha Laks. And we did not know about my cousin Anja. But we know that Babcha Laks family -- her family was gone. We just didn't hear about Anja and then one day Anja showed up in -- in Lódz. And she stayed with us. And that was wonderful. And then we didn't know about the Tannenblume side of the family, where they were. As I told you, nine children. So, we found out specifically that Babcha Tannenblume and her daughter Regina, with her husband whom she married during the war and the daughter Anja most definitely went to Treblinka with the Austroviets Jews, no question about it. And my aunt from Danzig, who was shipped to Austroviets with her husband. Rachella. She and her husband were together with Babcha, they all went. Now, my aunt from around Lublin, the one that had those two -- two sons, engineers, they studied in Belgium. Whether or not they came home before th-th-the war, because the Belgian Jews were killed just as badly as the Polish Jews. So the two cousins -- the two engineers, either got killed in Belgium or they got killed in Poland. Either way, they didn't survi-

survive. Their mother and father, Kronenburg, Aunt Fella Kronenburg and her husband. They were very well-to-do, they lived on an estate around Lublin. They -- they perished. The only question was always that pharmacist. My mother's youngest daught -- sister. The pharmacist who went to Wamsha, who got the job right before the war. And that is a mystery to this day. I mean, the others are also a mystery, because how can you really tell? But we know that they went with the general auseedlung -- with the general shipment of Jews, so we know to place them that way. But my aunt who lived, who had those two sons, whether they perished in Belgium or whatever. They would have found us, or we would have found them, but nothing happened after the war. And they never registered anywhere. And the one from Wamsha, that pharmacist, that we never knew what happened to her, so this is what -- we made the connection, sort of to finalize it, you know. Because you cannot go through life forever being surrounded by mysteries. Now things were coming out in the open, about what really, truly happened. And it was incomprehensible. And to look for individuals, that was totally out of the question, but to look for people who were part of a group was easier because genocide was predicated on mass murder, you see? So if you were in the Austroviets group, you went to Treblinka. If you were in the Starachowice group, you went to Treblinka. You see, if you were in another group, you went to Majdanek or Beljets. Like Miles Lehrman's family. They perished in Beljets, because he comes from that part of Poland, you see? Near Beljets. So, you could actually bring it to -- not to resolve it, but to bring it around to a finality where it puts your soul at ease, that this is what happened, you see? And so the -- the war turned

out th-that of my mother's family, the only survivors, except for the brothers that were in Canada, were the three of us. Of all the cousins and the aunts and everybody else, the three of us. And of my father's side, only c-cousin Anja and Uncle Alexander and with his wife and the two sons, of c -- who of course survived, but not inside th -- inside of Poland. So, but life in Lódz was very interesting, because we kept running into all kinds of people coming back. And we lived -- Uncle Alexander saw to it that we lived a good life and I -- now we lived in a nice apartment and -- and we even had a maid. And I still did the marketing and I still did the cooking and I went to school. And Kris was working and Hanya was in Warsaw. And Kris got herself engaged to Miles and then we had a wedding in -- in the apartment and with -- I did the catering. We did the whole wedding ourselves. It was good fun, I -- to this day when I talk about it, people laugh, because oh, we had all that stuff bringing in and shipping in and all kinds of -- with gild -- geese and we had the roast goose and we had the -- all these thing -- was a very, very lovely wedding. That was Christmas time. And right after the wedding, Uncle Alexander went to Sweden, because his wife -- while we were in Radsoff, after Auschwitz, she didn't go our route. I don't think she went to Ravensbrück, I don't know. Anyhow, she winded up in a small camp not far from Radsoff. And she was so deathly ill when the war -- war ended, that the Swedish Red Cross was taking all these terribly sick people up to Sweden. And she was in the hospital and when she got well, she stayed on as a -- as a nurses m -- help. So, Uncle Alexander went to meet her there and they found out that the sons survived, went through Palestine. My aunt -- my uncle's wife had family in Isra -- in

Palestine. So, when the two sons came via Russia in the unders army. And the unders army, you know, was traveling through the Middle East. When they came out of -- this is also a historical framework. When Stalin made the pact with Shikorski -- what year was that? During the war, whatever. And he agreed to let Polish military leave to -- to join the allies, the western allies. The -- Jews were not alla -- left out, but some Jews did go out. And they traveled through Teheran into Palestine and from there to England, you see? So, my two cousins met in Palestine, because in Tel Aviv was my Aunt Rose's sister. And they met there, quite by chance. And then they went to England, then they both were in British uniform, fighting for the allies, til the end of the war. And Uncle Alexander stayed in Sweden and we eventually, in early '46, left Poland for Berlin. We meaning Krisha and Miles and myself. Because Hanya was already engaged to Adash. And she's live -- she was waiting to finish her -- her studies. And we went to Berlin and --

Q: Why to Berlin?

A: You see, that I cannot tell you, but Miles was now my guardian, you see? He married Krisha and I said, "Well, now you have a wife and you don't need a fifth wheel into the -- to the wagon," you know? He said, "No, no, no. That's not how the way it's going to work." In fact when he got engaged to Krisha, he gave me a present, a fountain pen. I loved plants, so he gave me a plant and to it was attached a fountain pen. It was -- in fact, was my birthday and he was just engaged to Krisha, whatever, so this was my birthday present, a fountain pen with the plant. He said, "No, that's the way we're going to work it, that until you get married, you'll stay with us." I was trying very hard not to be a

burden, you know, in any way. But they were both very busy. He was working, she was working. Somebody had to run the house. I knew nothing about cooking, but I learned. So when somebody, you know, I'm supposed to be a good cook, so they say, so when they say it in front of Miles, says, "You know, Renia is a pretty good cook." He says, "Sure she's a good cook, she learned on my stomach." To this day, he says, "Thank me, don't thank her. She learned on my stomach." Because I really don't know any kind of cooking, much, you know. So was -- was from the imagination, but I did learn to cook, because I was trying very hard. I did the marketing, you know and I -- so I truly, I -- I -- it's apropof marketing, no but that's a sideline, [indecipherable] keep it. That's another story. Well, anyhow, when we went to -- coming back to the question. Miles was very much in touch with all the eng -- returning refugees, the people from the camps and friends. I think he had some kind of a cousin in Berlin. And somebody said, "If you go to Berlin, there's a DP camp." He said, "Where am I going find a DP camp?" They said -- he said he has a cousin. "You have the address, you go to the cousin and then you --." So we did go to Berlin. We left Poland and that was a surreptitious kind of an operation, cause you're not allowed. Was called th-the green border. Because you know, the old ernissa border was not yet established in 1945. No, this early '46. It was sort of fluid, because it wasn't Germany, but yet it was Germany, and whatever. We went from -- we went to Stettin and from Stettin to Berlin. And in Berlin, we found his cousin and before long, we moved into the DP camp. And of course from my viewpoint, this was just the happiest of all happenings, because here in Berlin, the DP camp was run by -- basically

by the Jewish agencies again. However, I think it had a big -- well, Palestine was involved a lot in this whole set-up, because we had Palestinian -- you had Jews from Palestine, from -- which is Israel in British uniform and I think they were trying to find out how reset -- how people were going to be resettled. Anyhow, the school was formed very shortly before I got there. I got there in March or so of 1946. There was a school form -- how do you form a school when you have all ages and all backgrounds and educational backgrounds. You know, there were kids 13 years old who already had a high s -- college diplo -- college equivalent and there were kids 13 years old who didn't even finish second grade, you know? This type. I will have to show you the picture, because I still have a group picture from that school. They went -- whoever they were, whether it was the Jewish agencies or the Palestinian who -- pal -- they -- they -- Jews from Palestine, they -- they -- whoever it was, the camp was absolutely set up to rescue the children from their experiences, you see? It was about education, no question about it, but it was also about restoring childhood, you see? That was the crux of the program. We had our own mess hall, for bre -- for lunch. We had break from school. Now, let me backtrack. This was a school in the Hebrew language. Everything was taught in Hebrew. I had my little bit of a Jew -- Hebrew background from my Tarbud school as a child, but certainly not prepared to study Hebrew in -- in -- chemistry in Hebrew, you know, because this -- this is like -- I had a -- a -- a distance of a million miles. But one way or another, we all fitted in. They had the little kids together, little kids and I was assigned to what they called the high school group. That was the oldest group. And of course the

little kids had special treats, but we were totally s -- treated like -- like teenagers with a life, whatever that means. We had a separate mess hall. Our food was much better. You know, there were mess halls for the community. Our food was much better. We were given special rations of chocolate. We were having a very, very tender, considerate supervision of life. We had dances, we went to dances. I have pictures to this day from dances. We had excursions into Berlin proper. Went to the opera. We had likebaumer, we had picnics. Out of the camp, we had performances, we performed and we went to performances. Mayor LaGuardia -- mayor of New York, LaGuardia was the unrah. This was an unrah camp also, you know. Mayor LaGuardia came to visit and we were sa -- reciting poetry for him, you know, the -- all the group. And I foun-formed many friendships, some of them lasting to this day, from that period.

Q: Where in Berlin was that?

A: Schlackenza.

Q: And how many children, about, in that camp? [indecipherable]

A: Well, I have the album. When I started, the group was maybe 40, 50 people, when I -- and by the time I left, it was more like 300. I'll show you. I have two pictures and this is only within one year, don't forget. And after I left, there were more friends of mine that were left behind, and the school really grew. And we had all kinds of -- we had th-the soccer games being played, that we were watching or playing, you know, whatever. Every effort was made to bring us around. The other -- the grown-ups didn't do much, but there were dances, we all went to dances. And I used to do a lot of things privately

with Kris and Miles Lehrman. We used to go down to the opera, we used to do other things. Went to see -- to the theater.

Q: Wasn't it difficult for you to go back to Germany, in a sense?

A: Well, you see, I was in Germany, but I wasn't in Germany. I was in camp. I didn't know anything about Germany. You see, I -- to me the German language in Poland was the same as the German language in Radsoff or Ravensbrück or Auschwitz. Except Starachowice was in Polish territory and Radsoff was on German territory. I didn't have any -- either access or -- or connection to the outside, except to the guards, to the SS and to the Gestapo. And then to the women. Most of the time -- most of the time my connection was all to the sold -- male. But Radsoff I had th-the women. But that was really dealing more with the language, you see. They represented Germany, but I -- I was in Germany, but I didn't know I was in Germany, I could have been on the moon. In a camp on -- you know, a camp -- a concentration camp on the moon. So that when I came to the DP camp in Germany, I was again, sort of, in but not in. I was physically in the camp, but there was no connection to Berlin, except we -- I have all kinds of pictures I'll show you, from Berlin. Berlin was bombed out, we used to go out to Couferstindam. I have the church, the old church in Couferstindam that was demolished, I have it in the back of my head there, when I have a picture taken, but th-that Germany was nothing in the context of what we're talking about, cause this was post-war Germany and there were people from all over, because -- don't forget 1946, you still have droves of people passing through. The -- the -- the movement of people west and east, because everybody

was dislocated. So the Berlin that you talk about isn't really Berlin, a German Berlin. It -- it was German, but it wasn't German, but as far as the camps are concerned and as far as the DP camp is concern, I wasn't in Germany. I was, but I wasn't, really. You see? And then we left th -- January, we left the DP camp. And I have to show you my report card, all excellents. Top to bottom. You know, I reread it in preparation, I wanted to show it to you. I s -- I see the subjects, literature and chemistry and one is geography of Palestine -- is the entry, one entry. I have excellents top to bottom and I was given that gift, here, with an inscription. This says, "Speak Hebrew." And this is a silver pin I was given and it says -- inscribed with the date on the back and says, "As a souvenir from class keetadialit." And signed Berlin and the date and I keep it to this day. It's a precious gift. I was given this and th-the certificate, the report card and we left for Bremenhafen.

End of Tape Three, Side B

Beginning Tape Four, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Regina Gelb. This is tape number four, side A. Before we move on, I just have one follow up question to the experience of being in the DP, in the --

A: DP camp?

Q: DP camp, yeah. That was sort of the first time, really, that you were together with your peers, girls and boys, or I mean -- in a relaxed -- in a normal kind of -- of interactive way. Was that difficult for you to relate to boys, for instance, or was it --

A: No, not at all. Because you see, I have already lived a kind of a normal life in Poland. As soon as we got settled and -- and uncle was around and then Miles Lehrman came on the scene, we had a life of -- of seeing people, meeting people, going out, going -- you know, doing things th-that I -- I found myself to be a grown up, though I knew that there was a big gap left yet, to be filled. But it didn't bother me, because you see, when you live with so many people, though the circumstances of the camps, the -- the -- the shifting, the going and th-the mixing up with nationalities -- it makes you, or it made me very free with everybody, you see? I wasn't shy and I wasn't reserved and I wasn't suspicious and I wasn't cynical. I haven't lived yet, I wanted to live, you know? Anybody was wonderful, everybody was wonderful. Everybody I met was great. And -- and no matter whether it was a lady or a man or a boy or a girl and that attitude, when I came to Berlin, of course th -- in Poland already, I went to high school, but you know there, I -- probably in that high school, I was more set on the academic achievement because I

really needed to place myself academically, you see? To -- to -- to -- to categorize myself, to see how do I fit in academically? But once I came to Berlin and everything was so mixed up and I didn't have to prove myself academically and ev -- and they were going out of their way to -- to -- to make us feel that we're children still, you see? That really did it. That really did it, because I was sort of pretending I was grown up when I was in Poland and I was accommodating myself and I was adjusting, but here I was just a child and it was perfectly fine and I got chocolate for it. So, you see, that really was the so-called smoothing over. And when we came to America, now then my child -- not my childhood, but my young life really started. And as I told you, we -- Kris and Miles decided they were going to be my guardians until I get married. So, obviously, when they had their papers made, Miles had an old aunt living in New York, who left Poland at the turn of the century, you know? And she was a very old lady and she lived in -- on the lower east side. So Miles secured papers for us to come to America. They were going to be our sponsors, meaning this old aunt with the husband. And Krisha and Miles and I went via Bremenhafen on the marine perch, which was a converted transpor -- trans -- troop transport that they used for refugees living -- leaving Europe. We live -- arrived in America February 11th, 1947 and they picked us up on the -- on the -- at the boat and they took us to their home and they were living on the lower east side and I -- I nev -- in a walk-up, it was really amazing, you know, cause this was still the old Jewish section. The old immigrants. And they were totally amazed that we were sort of dressed well and we had cameras and we spoke languages. And they left Poland, they ask [indecipherable]

you know, they left Poland at the turn of the century. The old lady showed me how to put on the electricity. And there was a little toilet with ush -- with the -- no -- chain. So she took me in the toilet to show me how to flush the toilet. And, of course I was very appreciative, I didn't really want to show her that really Poland -- the Poland I left is not the Poland she left, you know. And anyhow, we stayed on the lower east side, maybe day or two and then we moved to Brooklyn. And again, we did what we did in -- in Lódz. Kris and Miles went -- they -- they got jobs and I went to school. And I did the cooking and the shopping, we lived together. And again I was learning on Miles's stomach. And I went to Thomas Jefferson High School in Brooklyn. Lived in Crown Heights, Schenectady Avenue. I think the number was 241, if I remember. Well, whatever. It was a walk-up and on the second floor. We lived in Brooklyn and again, by a very, very lucky chance, I found myself in Jefferson High School, even though in those days, you had to go to a high school that was in your district and this was a little bit out of my district. But apparently there was a group of refugee children, that was being organized into a special program. And the Jewish agency in New York, the Joint Distribution Committee, for which we were also, we were -- we registered with them. In fact, Kris and Miles found an apartment by going to the Joint Distribution and they gave them an address. They had organized that group, the Joint Distribution Committee, or whoever. I -- the Joint Distribution didn't organize the group, they send me to Jefferson High School, to -- telling me that there is a group there and indeed there was. The principal of the high school was Ludwig Karpen. His wife was president of international ORT, O-R-T. He -- I

don't know how the project was set up or whatever. By the time I came, there were a total of us, about 35 kids, war survivors, fr -- fr -- of every background, academically and otherwise, from Hungary, from France, from Poland, from Germany. You name it, they were there. And we were going to be tested and incorporated into different grades, but we had what they set up to call basic English class. Basic English class was basically a orientation class. The head of the department, who ba -- who I'm -- was very fond of, she became my best friend, til she died a couple of years ago, Agnes Hay. She was head of the English department and she was the head of this project. We met every day, one period in that special class, for orientation toward Americanization, toward life, towards ha -- customs, see what customs, how do you greet people and how do you don't greet people and how you shake hands or you don't shake hands and -- and you know, and we were placed, for example, I was placed in two English grades. For example, they gave me the test in history, they saw that I knew history up to the first war, like I know my name. Napoleon and all, I knew it, this was all stuff. I go-got credit for it. I don't know -- know American history, so I had to study that. I had to study speech, definitely. I had to take economics and this, you know, th-th-the s -- level was very much higher than in the high school. And I met all these wonderful kids who were from all over and who were like I was -- eager to do well in school, eager to -- to excel, to be ac -- they were accepted into the academic background, most of us had an idea of going on to college and of course Dr. Karpen saw to it that we were propibliat -- properly assigned to classes, so that when we finally graduated, we absolutely had the -- all the requirements covered, you see?

Q: So it was basically a special program within an ordinary American high school? That's what it was?

A: Yes it was, right. And when we did graduate, eventually -- in fact I got a scholarship from the educa-educational foundation for Jewish girls, because I was heading for college. I graduated with honors as a matter of fact, from Thomas Jefferson High School, as many others did as well. We were excellent students. The reason is that we really knew it all -- we didn't know it in English that well. You see, my English was sort of shaky, but when we first came to America, we started going to night school, Kris and Miles and I went to night school. I went to Jefferson in the day school -- in the day time and we came in February, I went to high school. About March I went to summer camp, you see? By recommendation, again. To summer camp in the summer, by the time I came back from summer camp, my English was good enough to be in high school. So that I had no -- you know, my la-language was not a problem any more. And we were mixed in with the high school population and that was a very fine, very academically high, very good school and a lot of kids went to college from that high school. Now, it's really very bad, this high school is very bad, I'm telling you. There are a few very bad high schools in New York, this is it. When I -- Jefferson -- when I tell a few people that I graduated from Thomas Jefferson High School, they faint. They faint. "You went to Jefferson?" Well, when I went to Jefferson, Jefferson was not what it is today. It was a very fine academic high school. Danny Kaye went there, way before I did. Shelly Winters. To this day she's very -- this was -- the Gershwin lived around the -- the perimeter of Jefferson High School,

this was east New York, which is near Brownsville, in Brooklyn. And that was a -- a blue collar Jewish neighborhood when I came in and the school had very high academic level because all these kids were what you call eager beavers, you know. To get out of the -- of the working class, you know, Alfred Kazan and all the writers and all kinds of important people came out. They went through this -- living in that area and they broke out to greater things. Now, when I came to Jefferson, that was more or less the tempo of it, you know, you carried on.

Q: Let me ask you one more question, maybe. Were you encouraged at all to speak about your war experience, either in that particular program or even in -- in [indecipherable]?

A: No, no. As a matter of fact, if I showed you some of these ar -- newspaper clippings, the head of the Hebrew dep-department was Dr. Horowitz, Edward Horowitz. He was, as a matter of fact, you know the Jewish matzah people, the Horowitz matzah people? He was one of those Horowitz's, very well-to-do family. He had a PhD in Hebrew or whatever. He was the head of the Hebrew department and I took Hebrew as a foreign language, because I came out of a Hebrew school and his class was the very good class for me to get oriented to other things than Hebrew lessons. To the way the school runs, the requirements, all these things I could get from hi -- from -- in that class in Hebrew, you see? And he took a great liking to all the -- he had a few of these kids. He took a great liking to me. I was in his school and when they found out that I had a birthday coming, my 18th birthday, they gave me -- he gave me a party in his house. He invited that Hebrew class. And somehow or other, he got these newspaper people to come and

interview me in -- in Jefferson. And one of them -- he told them that I have a number and the other -- one of the -- from the New York Post, I think, he told me to show me the number -- to show him the number and for me to sit there while he took the picture, which I have to this day, pointing at my number. I found it very stupid. What was this thing -- what was so important about the number? You know, I -- I don't -- ah, he wants to know, probably Horowitz told him, but I didn't care, you know? And over there, nobody talked about those things. That was past and that was then and now is now and we were very busy. First of all, the idea of -- th -- Americanization was a totally different concept than it is now, you know? The ethnicity of things did not -- was -- wa -- wa -- did not take priority. I'm telling you, when he told me to pull my sleeve up and point to the number, th-the photographer from the Post, I did that, but I felt [indecipherable] this guy's stupid. I mean, why does he need that for? Ah, he want it, let him have it. And I had a wonderful party and they gave me presents and we sung and I was so moved because that was really the first time that I was really celebrated for myself, you know? And by then I was rather well established in -- as a good student in the school, in Jefferson, you see? So that I -- I didn't feel below anybody -- anybody American or otherwise. I really felt on the level. I felt I -- I could just stand very proudly about -- feel that way about myself. And, as I said, came time to go to college, you know? The school helped us to -- we didn't know about applications and things and such. Dr. Karpen saw to it that most of us picked Brooklyn College, because that was the next step, you know. From Brooklyn, to go to Brooklyn College, since that was that free institution, we didn't

have the funds. So he -- the school helped us, applications and our records went in. We were very good -- I say we, that group, were excellent students. In fact where -- when I first walked in to Brooklyn College, to one of the class, somebody cracked a joke, “Oh no, she’s here again. We have to work.” I mean in an outburst, you know, because they knew that I worked so very hard. I really did. But, anyhow, the Jefferson High School saw to it that all the kids that wanted to go to Brooklyn College did so. There was no question about going out of town, because who had the funds? I lived with Kris and Miles. Meanwhile, I did go to Brooklyn College, but Kris and Miles -- Krisha and Miles decided to move to New Jersey. But I did not want to miss the opportunity now, you see? So I stayed behind and I had a scholarship from the educational foundation. I stayed with friends, I lived with a family and they moved to New Jersey. And I was in Brooklyn College, about a drop over a year and I had, of course the -- some of these Polish, one of my very good friends, Sonia, who is no longer alive -- she committed suicide, as a matter of fact, I told you, at age 39. There was a woman whose life was -- she had a PhD in English and everything. But the war really made her a very unhappy person and totally unfit for really living. But that’s another story. Anyhow, Sonia and I were in the -- together in Brooklyn College, we came together out of Jefferson. She came to Jefferson a few months before I did. And she was an orphan, left without any family at all. And she lived in orphanages and such. She had a rough life. She lived in the woods with the partisans and -- anyhow, when we found ourselves in Jefferson High School with -- in Brooklyn College together, we took about the same courses. We had such fun, because

we had to take all the requirements, which there was more of them -- then than now. Political science and we had a fantastic time. But every time we went home together, we spoke Polish. And I had a professor, his name was Felix Gross and he taught European theory -- European political theory and I loved that. I -- I was very interested in history, always and I was so -- now I was eager to find out -- you know, I was in the war and I was -- as I always keep saying, in the eye of the storm, which is how it was. But my knowledge of the war was strictly on personal experience, but the wider picture was eluding me, because I really didn't know and then I got so busy living, I didn't have the time to find out. So now I said, "I'm going to really go after the historical aspect of how the things happen." And he was teaching political -- European political history, or something like that. And he had an accent, but a lot of professors had accent, because there were a lot of Jewish professors who left Europe in the 30's and this was only the 40's, you see? Actually, this was '49 -- 1949. So one day -- so we saw him on the subway, Sonia and I would go home and talk, you know, girl talk on the subway and talk away and talk. And then I used to notice that he used to sort of look at me peculiarly, but he didn't say anything. He heard me in th -- I mean I -- I didn't know who he was. So one day, I'm in another class and I get a note, Professor Gross has to see me immediately. I said -- in his office, he's waiting. Excuse me. I absolutely didn't know what happened. Immediately, out of the class, I have to go to see him. So I go to see him, I said, "I received your message." He says, "Yes. I know that you speak Polish very well and you are going to accept a job teaching Polish at the Indiana University." I looked at him like

he fell off a tree. So I said, “How did you know that I speak Polish and that I speak Polish well?” He says, “I hear you talk to your friends on the subway. On the --.” Well, I practically wanted to kill myself that minute. I thought that was the end of everything. My embarrassment, because you know, we were talking all this girl talk and the boy talk and he sat there and I didn’t know he knew. Well, after I got over the embarrassment and I said, “I -- what do you mean?” He said, “I know you can do it and I know you’re Polish, so you absolutely are the person, because they look -- they are looking for an instructor who is a native and who had a back -- good -- very good, thorough European background. And you have that and you have the ability and you’re going to go. And you have to go downtown Manhattan to be interviewed.” It was like a ton of bricks, and I said, “Well, you know, I -- I can’t go have a job there, I -- I got into college, I want to finish college.” He says, “Don’t worry, I already spoke to the -- to the head of the department that they will adapt their schedule to your hours so that you could graduate chut.” I said, “I don’t -- I don’t want to put over my graduation.” I said, “I have already lost so many years and now I’m finally catching up and fitting in and I wouldn’t want to leave Brooklyn College and get dragged out again for how long.” He says, “No, no, no. Everything will be arranged. You have to go.” I called my sister and Miles and I told them, “Listen, I have this offer, what do I do? And he’s pira -- he’s pushing me here and I already have an appointment.” I went and I met this Professor Seebeeac. He was ahead of the linguistics department at Indiana University. And he told me that they have now established a language center in Bloomington -- Bloomington, Indiana. And they -- this is

now the Cold War, you know, this is 1950. It's -- the Cold War is on. They need higher military personnel. H-Higher ranked military personnel behind the Iron Curtain and they have to know -- they have to be taught. And so I told him the same thing, I said, "I can't take a job, because I have to finish my studies." "Don't worry. You'll teach three hours a day and in the summer if you want to stay, you'll teach six hours a day." I said, "Fine." I said, "What about writing -- what about the textbook?" He says, "We'll write a textbook." I said, "That's going to take m -- ." "No," he says, "don't worry." Lo and behold, this is what happened, I went downtown, Manhattan, the old Barbizon Pla-Plaza Hotel on Central Park West -- Central Park South, I was hired and within -- with a week I was packed and he s -- waited at the railroad station for me. When I came -- I came by railroad, Penn Station to -- to Bloom -- to Indianapolis. He was waiting for me. He got me into the housing office for regist -- I was asked whether I want to live alone, or in the sorority or what -- I said, "None of that, I want to live in the -- in the dormitory because I really want to mix with people. I -- I am a people pe -- person." They asked me my religion, which I was amazed about. They asked me if I would mind to live with a black girl and I was practically fell through the floor, I -- how dare they ask such a stupid question. I said, "No, I -- I would live with anybody." I mean, listen -- look -- look where I came from, you know? I should now have prejudices yet, on top of where I come from? So everything was arranged exactly as I wanted, meaning he helped me register, transfer my courses, which were applicable because it was all academics. I didn't have any bean bag courses, you know. I had to -- he arranged housing. I -- I lived in a dormitory. He

arranged courses. Transfer of courses. I went -- I picked the courses that would fit. I taught three hours a day and one professor from the linguistics department de-de-decided to write a book. And wa -- he -- I helped out with the exercises and such. And who -- the people I was teaching, I had -- how many people did I have? Six or eight in the class. These were Air Force officers. They were older than I was, of course. They were fantastic people and to this day I'm very friendly with them. We correspond through the years. They were trained to be attaché's and such and you know, they had to know the language. We taught grammar too, but basically there was -- half of it was conversation. And I had to write the conversation patterns. In other words, I picked the subject. And they had to follow what I had to say and tell me -- we had a real conversation. In other words, I had to judge how much of what I was -- I could pick any subject. I could talk about the railroads, I could talk about love, I could talk -- I never talked about camp. Never, never, never. This was a totally different picture now. Meanwhile, before I left Brooklyn, I met Victor, my husband. And while -- he was drafted into the army, because this was the Korean War -- he was drafted and meanwhile I got that offer. And so, when I was in Indiana, he was in the army. And so he would come and visit me in Indiana. And that's another very interesting story, because in those days, the dorm were not integrated. So when Victor co -- used to come and visit me, he sat downstairs in the living room. You know, the dorm had many rooms. When I tell it to my kids -- and there was curfew, I had to be back at 12 -- they said, "You allowed yourself -- you allowed them to do it to you?" What did they do to me? You know, this is ancient history. So Victor used to come

-- he used to come in the uniform, because that was cheaper to travel as a uni -- you know, as a -- as a military. He was stationed in Watertown, New York. No, not far from St. Lawrence, which was by coincidence turned out year later as a school for Paul. But Victor was stationed there and I was in Indiana and I would stay on. We would meet. If I took a trip, let's say for Christmas, to New York, then we would meet in New York. He worked in the headquarters in Watertown, New York, so he somehow managed to -- to get the time when I was there or he'd come to Indiana and we had friends in Indianapolis, from Poland. So he would come to Indianapolis, I would come to Indianapolis and there -- he would stay -- we would visit with the f -- with our friends. And I had a very wonderful time in Indiana. That is really a very special time in my life, you know? I was already academ -- I was first of all financially independent, totally. Because I was paid. The courses I took, I did not have to pay the regular big fee, because instructors always had a discount. I was earning enough to be truly independent, fully and enjoy and loving it. Loving the job, loving the company, loving the dormitory, loving the class, loving everything, including Bloomington, because New York I thought was Europe. You know, it was like Professor Gross used to say, "New York is the last city -- when you come from Europe to America, New York is the last European city. After that is America." He used to say that. And I found it very true. So when I came to Bloomington and that was the midwest. And believe me, that was a different kind of place, too. As I told you, I was asked to fill in my religion when I registered and I was asked whether I would room with a black girl, with a Negro girl. So you could see those were different

times. And -- however, this -- the -- the -- the whole ambiance of the place -- I took the courses I loved and by the way, I took -- I ma -- I majored in social work. So my degree from Bloomington, from Indiana University is in social work. Even though I was an instructor at the same time. And I met many wonderful friends, of course, again to this day. I keep on with everybody from -- you -- as I call my connection, my Indiana connection or my Berlin connection, you know, my Jefferson connection, my Indiana connection. I have a lot of friends. And it was a very exciting time, because I finally -- I think it equalized for me, you know. My academic, my emotional, my physical, my all, it all came together, finally, you know? And I was beginning to feel very much at ease in America. I knew English very well, I've done a lot of good things. And I've traveled to Canada to visit my sister a lot and I was very attached to the Lehrman's, you know. Very -- I mean, we're such a close family, knock wood, to this day. I mean , we're just one. And the kids -- our kids are now their kids and -- and our kid's kid's and all the cousins, that's just one, to this day. But Indiana was fantastic, it was rewarding, emotionally. It was rewarding intellectually. It was most rewarding as a final -- it's a trite word, Americanization -- but I was taken in to -- to what this life was. In other words, now -- not that I was done with Europe. You know, I can't be done with Europe, is like I can't be done with my right hand, you know. But I finally got into the spirit of the country and of -- oh, I got involved and -- and -- and I already had my ideas of politics and all this. It really, absolutely coalesced. It really got together. It -- it -- it formed into a -- a unit. And so that when Victor -- we were planning to get married, we got engaged, meanwhile. And

when Victor was discharged from the army in January of ‘53, I was supposed to graduate in February, you know. In those days they graduated classes twice a year, February and June. I was slated to graduate in February. So, Victor came for my graduation, I have lovely pictures from that time and all the girls friends that I had there. And we came back to New York and we got married in March of the same year. Because he was now free, too. He was free of the mel -- military. He certainly didn’t want to be a military man, but he had to. He was drafted, so he had to serve -- serve his time. And so we -- we got married and I didn’t quite know whether I wanted to go into social work any more. You know, I went -- I applied to Columbia for social work degree, PhD. But just about that time, things began to be a little different -- or maybe it was different, New York was different from Indiana. Over there, everything -- social work was still like -- they used to call it welfare, you know. Welfare was very shameful. I remember one day in the class -- I used to atte -- I used to -- I had cases, casework outside of my class. I had field work to do. I had two cases. One was an old lady, was called Mrs. Wheeler. And another case was a abandoned someb -- child or something like that. Anyhow, while they were discussing cases and I made a mistake and I said when I -- that Mrs. Wheeler -- I was stopped by the professor right then and there. She said, “Never, ever, ever, ever must you mention the client by name. Never. Because this is very shameful to her to receive welfare. That if you discuss cases, you have to keep on the professional level, without reference to name.” I -- that was the -- th-the philosophy of welfare in those days was that you can -- you are to help the person to help himself, but nothing -- not -- not to -- to

provide for him for a lifetime. I came to America and I went to Columbia to apply. I came to America -- I came to New York and I went to apply to Columbia and they started b-briefing me on how the school is oriented and I said, “It’s not for me.” This is a handout. This is against my own principles, forget what I was taught at Indiana. You know, this -- I remember Mitchell Ginsburg, I think was the name of the head of th-the social work school. I told acur, “I don’t think I belong there. I don’t think I’ll be happy there. I can’t see running programs to -- to -- to make people di -- di -- to -- to -- to live on handouts.” I mean, you know, I was poor enough in -- that we -- we didn’t know where the next meal was coming cru -- from, if ever the meal will come from. And all the so-called schnoring, you know? It wasn’t pit -- it wasn’t shameful to -- to schnor for bread when you were starving. It was pitiful. And I would now work for an agency that’s going to sa -- to -- to -- to -- to supply all the schnorer’s of the world? Not for me. I decided I’ll wait a few years. I wouldn’t go back to -- right away to social work. Then they offered me jobs at the UN, I didn’t want that. I really wanted -- really -- I was most interested in setting up a life -- a married life, you see? I was so knocked around with so many places and so many people. You know, after the Lehrman’s moved to New -- to Vineland, I lived with three families before I went to Indiana. I lived with one family and then I moved to a girl’s club. And that wasn’t very good for me either, because there was too much commotion, I couldn’t study. Then I moved with a -- another Jewish family from Poland that I knew, so that was okay. And then I moved to Indiana and I didn’t yet have, you know -- like when I lived with the Lehrman’s, sure that was home, but it still

wasn't what I really wanted -- to have a place of my own and to -- being self-supporting and doing -- being productive in a way that the life prepared me for. What was the use of all that education and everything, if I were not going to apply it to a normal life that would finally go back to what I understand life to be, which is now a very old-fashioned concept, you know. But to me, that was very important.

End of Tape Four, Side A

Beginning Tape Four, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Regina Gelb. This it tape number four, side B. C-Could you maybe elaborate just a little bit more on the difficulty you had with the concept of welfare or social work that you encountered at that time?

A: Yes. Well, you see, having been orphaned during the war, I had one idea in mind. I must never be a burden to anybody. Not even to my sisters. They were my protectors, they were my surrogate parents, they were my everything. I still was not going to be a burden. And it was so ingrained into me, that when I lived with the Lehrman's and I did the cooking and the cleaning, I was thrilled. Because they were so good to me, they were supporting me, but at least I was not a schnorer. You see, I was not somebody -- and later on too, whatever it was that I did -- I babysat. I had a job one summer when I was in high school as a governess, 25 do-dollars a week. Five weeks job, I bought myself a mouton fur coat, a warm mouton, it was a fur coat, quote unquote. I had jobs in -- in summer camps as a governess, as a counselor. I babysat, I -- I worked -- when I was in high

school, I worked. I forgot to mention that. Dr. Karpen's wife -- or maybe I did mention it, was the head of the ORT organization. I got a job in ORT, in the ORT office, main office in New York. 23rd Street and Madison Square and I was in Brooklyn. I used to go from high school, from Jefferson High School, on the subway an hour and a half to go to ORT to work and back, after school. And I came home and I had to cook and clean and I was more than happy. Because -- and then I babysat and I s -- and I did everything I could -- not that the Lehrman's ever, ever, ever brought it up to me. If Krisha got a coat, I got a coat. If Krisha got -- I was -- like Mile's said, I was going to be their charge and -- until I get married. And it exactly was like that. But before I was married, I already had this thing, because I was in the war and things were so hard and we were so poor and -- not poor poor, but we were so deprived of everything, that I said, when I'm finally -- when it finally happens, never will I be a burden. So, to connect all this -- this is personal philosophy, that precedes anything before America, even. Then I come to America and I see what the Jewish agencies do for people. Put them on their feet and let them go. I go to Indiana and it's about the same idea. You help people along, an old lady who is an old widow, who must never -- nobody must -- should ever know her name. She's being held by a young intern, myself, to go and find out what she needs and so on and so forth, but everything is -- not in secrecy, but it should be done with dignity, you see? And then I come to New York and I bump against this new concept, that they are explaining to me what this school idea is, of -- of educating social workers and how I'm going to fit into it. And I see I am not going to fit into it.

Q: What was it, though? What was the concept?

A: The concept was -- you see, we are now talking about the mid -- th-the 50's, you see? That there are too many poor people in this wor -- the America and they should be put -- they should be given things. There's so much goodness, because you know, America in the 30's had the Depression. During the war, America brought itself out of the Depression, after, you know with the help of Franklin Roosevelt. In the 50's, this was a land of plenty. There was no war, there was prosperity and yet there were very many poor people. And the idea was to re-organize the society. I mean in schools of social work, such as the New York school. Which I later found out he was a lidding -- leading liberal, I -- this head of the school, gee whiz. Well, anyhow, the idea was that now you have to provide for the poor. But for me, to provide for the poor is not the way I saw social work. To me, helping the poor, is a way, but not -- it was more like Indiana, you see? Where everything should be kept within very dignified -- welfare was a dirty word, you know. Welfare in those days was -- they say, "Oh, she was on welfare." This type of thing was derogatory. In Indiana we had it pounded into our heads, you don't use word welfare, you don't use the client's name. You -- you keep it as dignified, so that the least people should know that this person is getting helped, which was aid to aged people and so on, you see? So, to answer your question, I did not think that I was going to be very happy in this school. Of course I could have applied to any other school of social work. But I was really, basically interested in starting my own life, personal life. I said, "Gee whiz, I already put in time for all those other things that were of importance to me. I

finally have the education, I finally feel myself equal to everybody else. I finally caught up within my own inner self, between the emotional and the intellectual and the m -- the mature. I already -- you know, because on one level I was very mature after the war was ended and on another level I was totally ignoramus and stupid, probably. I was a kid and -- and it -- it just wasn't -- it didn't mesh yet. When I came out of Indiana and -- and we got married, I really knew that I was already a person i-in my own right and it was time to really make a home for myself and -- and whatever I felt was going to be my family.

Q: What kind of home and what kind of family did you want to have, did you build? Did you want to have children? Did you want to --

A: Oh yes, eventually I shoulds -- definitely would want to have children, but at first I was just interested in not having another roommate. Like everybody said to me, "How does it feel to be married?" I says, "You know what? You just live with the same roommate. I -- I've lived with so many roommates now. This is just one more roommate, so I have no problem with that." Because it's true. By that time you have no idea, since we came to America, how many roommates I had, you know? So I said, "No, Victor's just another roommate, so I don't have a problem with that. And we get along very well, we love each other. So it's great." And it was, you see? And the type of home was to -- to establish -- you know, I love company and I love to see people and to -- to have people over and to visit with people. Yeah, I'm very people oriented person, so this is how I visualized it and that's more or less how we started out.

Q: Where did you start out? How --

A: Well, we actually -- first we lived downtown in a hotel, for about two months, three months and then we moved up into this neighborhood in a smaller apartment. Victor worked downtown and we -- we lived here, on Cabrini Boulevard. On that street that faces the river, but further down. And oh, we didn't -- now -- now we really lived a good life. We traveled, we went to Bermuda for sort of a honeymoon, we went on vacation. We went to places, we -- of course New York, to me, you know, I was away from New York also. So now it's -- you know I -- I -- I couldn't have enough of it. Go to the museums and join this and do that and -- and it was -- we didn't have kids yet, not for three years. So life was very good. Very, very good. And we eventually, when I became pregnant with the first child, Victor said, "You're not going to live in one bedroom apartment and we're not going to wait til -- til we have to move after the baby's born, then it's going to be much harder than it is now. And this building here was going up in those years and he says, "Why don't we stop and take a look?" So we stopped and take a look and we found this apartment, because it was just being finished. You know, the building was just being ready for occupancy. So we moved in, I was still pregnant and the first child was born -- not in this apartment, but you know, in the hospital and we lived here. Our older son Harry. And he -- he was born here when we were -- I don't know, we moved around Thanksgiving and he was born in May, so we were about half a year here when he -- and I used to go to -- Victor's family had the business and they had industrial -- industrial cottons and I used to go to work in the business, before the babies were born, because the children were born. So I helped out in the business for the first

three years. It was nicer to be around Victor all the time anyhow. And -- and I wasn't going to -- I didn't want to work at the UN. And I didn't -- certainly didn't want to go to -- to social work, not yet, until I really saw my way clear.

Q: Why not the UN?

A: You know, they were dealing with all kinds of things that I really didn't want to be -- you know, I broke away from everything, you, know? From the problems of wars, of resettlements, of all -- I wanted to live an American life, you know? I really wanted something, you know, like use the expression, "Been there, done that." I've been in Europe, I've done that, I've done all the -- I had enough, I had enough of that. No UN for me, no. Yo -- subsequently, you know, when I became an -- and -- a translator, they wanted me. I could have had that job, because I have a lot of friends working there. No, but going back to 1953, when we were married and we moved here, to Cabrini Boulevard and then we moved to this building, which is also on Cabrini, but one block up, next to the park. And Harry was born.

Q: When was your second child born?

A: The second child, Paul, was born in -- four years later. So that in the first four years, I actually had a little hard time the first two years. I was so conscientious about everything, I didn't think I was doing a good job with the baby. I read a lot about -- I read about Dr. Spock in yesterday's paper, you know he died? So I read a lot Dr. Spock and he put me at ease, because I didn't have family here, you see, and Victor's family wasn't in town either, they moved out. So, I was very -- I wasn't -- I wasn't well, physically. I had a hard

-- hard childbirth and so on. But once I got over that, everything was fine and I started taking courses. You know, school and me, that's one. I took -- first I took courses in the neighborhood. I studied Russian. Was a Mrs. Cherniak, she was a -- a retired teacher, Russian teacher, so we got together in group again, like in Poland during the war, there were four of us, we're studying with Mrs. Cherniak. Then I went to the new school to continue the studies, the Russian studies. And of course we started having more friends and more going out and more, you know, a young couple. But after Harry was born, I started really more con-concentrating more on the -- on the personal fulfillment type of thing, you know. So I started taking courses. I went to Barnard. Then I took French cooking lessons. Then I did, you know, I took translation courses and all these and of course I would not leave the children to anybody, so I decided, until the children are talk -- older, I am not doing anything except bringing up children.

Q: Did you have any particular ideas about how you wanted to bring these children up?

A: Oh, yes. Absolutely. Had -- I had -- didn't have much to do with my war time experiences. Basically, I wanted them to feel happy, that -- every mother wants that. I wanted them to ex-excel in school, which they did. By the way, I did a lot of volunteer work while the kids were in school. They went to an public school, P.S. 187, which is next door to us here. I was -- 11 -- for 11 years I was a head librarian, volunteer librarian. And then in Bronx High School of Science, when they both went to Bronx High School of Science, I was also very active. I was vice-president -- I never wanted presidency, not here, not at -- nobody was going to get me to be president, nobody. And they tried. Vice-

president and chairman of the executive board at Bronx High School of Science. And we did a lot of good things there. During the teacher's strike, you know, that protected the school from being reorganized, but this is all academic stuff that is very important, but I don't think it -- that it's very pertinent here. The point is that while the kids were growing up and we were very involved in the community, Victor was committee chairman for the Boy Scouts, both boys became Boy Scouts. Both are Eagle Scouts, by the way. Both Harry and Paul are Eagle Scouts. Harry, to this day is scoutmaster, every day. That's how he comes here on Fridays, because he has a troop Boy Scouts here. Well, anyhow --

Q: Is -- is your husband a Jewish American, or --

A: Oh, absolutely, Jewish American, yes. His family originally came from Austro-Hungary, but his father was already born in this country, so you know that he's third generation. His grandfather came to America in the 19th century, when he was a young man, I mean teenager, I think. And his mother's side, he has a grandmother who is buried on Staten Island. As I told you, we go to cemeteries there. She was buried in 1886 in Staten Island. She was buried in '86, you see? So they go way back -- way, way back. But -- no, w-we always were very compatible, no question about that. And he's Jewish and he's also of the -- not of the religious, which was important.

Q: That was another question I had, you grew up in a very -- in a secular Jewish household and that is still true for your own --

A: Yes, we belong to the Reform Temple here. Our children were Bar Mitzvah and all this and we -- we are still very good members of the Temple, we su -- we support the

Temple financially, always, always. We go to -- we go to services dirs -- definitely on the high holidays. And Passover is very important. By the way, Passover is our community dinner again. We have the whole family get together. We have always the Lehrman's, everybody, all the kids and the grandkids and everybody, we have. That's annual. So --

Q: Did you ever have that desire to go to Israel, since your mother was involved --

A: Well, I was there just for a visit, as everybody else would go. It's another type of life and by the time I went there, you see, I was so swallowed up by American -- by America, by this new life. I imagine I would have been swallowed up in Israel too, because I was ready, you know. I -- I couldn't wait to start normal living. You see, I -- normal -- whatever I call normal. To -- first of all, to be plugged into academics. And then to -- to do the things that stimulate the brain and the -- you know, that -- and the thing is that -- when I came to Israel, well, we already had grown children and I was already an American in more ways than one and I have a lot of friends there, we visited all the friends. Of course we went to Israel to visit Israel, which we did, too. But then I -- they were so smart, one friend says to me, "I didn't want you to have dinner in everybody's house every night, so that you wouldn't see Israel, so I invite --", she invited everybody. So I saw ev -- all the friends from camp and such, all at one time and we traveled in Israel and saw a lot and was -- but I couldn't see my life away from this life any more, you see? I -- I'm really -- this is really -- this life is what I really want and what I -- you know, as -- when the kids grew up, kids went to college, you know, both went to college and Harry's

a lawyer now, he went to law school and he's married and has two children, one is nine year old and -- Max and then a new one was just born, last December.

Q: Congratulations.

A: Thank you. His name is Joseph. Lovely. And they gave him a middle name, Adrian, my sister's -- from Canada, you know? Her husband just died last summer, so they gave him a middle name. And the younger son, Paul, lives in Albuquerque. Remember I told you he lives in New Mexico. And he had the -- a degree in geology and went into landscaping and so he has a landscaping business. Real outdoorsy man. He's coming for the Pa-Passover holidays, as he always does. We'll see him a little, you know, a few times a year.

Q: If you don't mind, I would just like to ask you a few --

A: Yes?

Q: [indecipherable] few more questions. One of them would be, to what extent did you talk to your husband in the beginning about your experience? Was that an -- an issue? And how did -- later on, with your children, did they ask? Do you -- or do you --

A: Well, you see, with my husband, it's like this: he married me when I -- he knew I went through the camps. When I met him, not very m-much was known about all these things. He knew I had a number and he knew I ca -- he knew my background. He -- I told him as much as I could, but th-the -- only as a -- as a fill-in, like I wanted to find out about his family, where they came from and what they did and how they did it. When the children were born, I wasn't -- I was never -- I never wa -- intended to hide my background,

never, never. They -- and when I was in camp as this counselor, they said, “You know, Red,” -- they used to call me Reggie, they said, “Show me your number. Why did you put your telephone number there?” Th-The kids in -- in -- in camp -- in the -- this was here in the New York state, in a camp. And so later, when the -- my own kids were young and they used to say, “What is this?” I used to say, “That’s my telephone number,” when they were two years old. But later on, of course they knew everything, but I never sa -- burdened them with, “Sit down and I’ll tell you.” Never, never, never. First of all, they were both smart children and very read -- they read a lot, like I do, so they always used to find out a lit -- so tell me about it. Any time they were ready to tell, I told everything. And Victor, too. He knows my life inside out and sideways, because he’s already heard everything. And you know, as time evolves, you know, eventually I became a translator and interpreter and I did all kinds of jobs. And a lot of work I’m doing is really dealing now, not so much before -- I did a lot of commercial interpreting and -- and translating. I’m a member of the National Association of Translators. Cr -- Accredited so I get calls from all over. Now I -- my husband is retired, so I don’t want to take as many jobs as -- I could, if I wanted to, because I always get calls for jobs. But you see, when -- the last 10 years, the majority of -- of -- I’m a free-lancer -- of work, is -- deals with the Holocaust. And it’s a -- you know, I did -- did you ever see a -- a -- a film or did you ever read a book called the Lódz ghetto? Okay, you see my name in that, I did the interpr -- the -- the -- one third of that book came from Polish. I did the -- the translations and I worked on it a year and a half, because I got, used to get the material on a -- in and out by pieces. You

know, they used to get the -- all the Lódz ghetto book and the film. Kolchuk, a lot of Kolchuk, all of Kolchuk material I used to do way. Somebody wrote a play in California, for which I did translations of Kolchuk. I just translated a book about the Kraków ghetto and of course, I was given a lot of mat -- other material about the Gypsies, about -- sa -- I'm telling, the last 10 years, I do still commercial work, you know, legal work and the positions and such. But somehow or other, because I know the background, you see? It's very easy for me. I get phone calls, see? I get -- belong to this organization, so my friends in New York call me every now and then, they have work to do, what does this mean, what does that mean? To me, I don't even have to look it up, because if it deals with the war years, I really, truly have a better understanding, because you don't translate words, you know, you work within a framework of a -- a concept. And the underlying concept, anything to do with Holocaust, not everybody, even in the language, you know language deflects very much the times and word that could mean one thing 50 years ago, couldn't mean the same today. So, what I'm trying to say is that, somehow or other, because I'm working, I always have some Holocaust material. Victor is in -- one time, if I wa -- had too much work to do, I ask him to -- I -- I translate by hand, sometimes he would type the material for me, you see? If it -- because I had to submit it in typing and if I was overwhelmed, he will help me out a little and sit at night, after he came from the office and he would -- he would help me type. So he -- he knew what I was working on and he would read it, you see and now he du -- doesn't, I mean I don't do these jobs any more, because our life is too busy and he's retired and I -- I -- I should not be tying him down to

-- you know, i-if I start getting jobs, even though I'm a freelancer, that means he has to hang around, too. You know, we can't take a trip, we can't do this, we can't do that. So, this way, if it's a short job I take it. Last job I did was a book, took me a year. And I told the person, I said, "I wouldn't do it less than a year, because I -- absut -- don't -- I mean, you want it? Fine. If not, that's fine." But I did it, so was one year.

Q: What are -- what are other events in America in the 50's, 60's or 70's, that were really important, that have affected you somehow? There's so much that happened.

[indecipherable] civil rights movement.

Q: Well, I'll tell you, the McCarthy period affected me very much, because I just couldn't see -- anything that had to do with persecution or that had to do with hounding other people, I -- and of course I came from a much more structured political system than American democracy. To me it seems a guy like McCarthy should have been kicked out the same minute. But it took all that time to go through the courts and to do this [indecipherable] the other. Meanwhile, people li -- people's lives were ruined. And I basically had never any love for the Communists, that, believe me, because we left Poland because -- before the Communists got there. You know, when we left they weren't yet established. Poland was not yet a satellite country in the way that it became later. I had no love for them, because to me this was -- this was another kind of repression, plus the fact that I did find out, through the Jews who were in Russia, or even -- I had very wonderful Christian friends, who -- who also suffered. One of my very dear friends, her father was killed in Cutting. You ever heard that name, of that place? Yeah,

Cutting is a place where the Polish officers, the Christian officers were killed in a ravine in -- in -- in, by Russians. But they said the Germans did it, but it really was the Russians. So -- no, when I added all this up, what I heard from the Jews who went into Russia during the war and who came out -- and through the Christians who suffered in Russia and through all those other things that the -- the Communist regime was doing, I -- I had no love for them. So when I saw that McCarthy was pursuing the so-called Communists, and -- and fellow travelers --used to be called in those days, a lot of it was not factual. You know, because as I understood American history, in the 30's, there was a great liberal movement in this country, that felt for Russia, you know, that -- that -- but of course that turned out to be a whole bunch of -- bunch of lies. The Russian, so-called, you know, the -- the Russian, th-the trials and the -- I mean, this was -- now you're finding out that Stalin was as big a murderer as Hitler, you see. So I already had a good inkling in the 50's and in the 60's and when the McCarthy came, that -- it was absolutely painful to me. That was one very drastic awareness, shake-up in my head. The second was the 60's, not the Civil Right Movements, because I didn't know the extent to which the -- the blacks were being oppressed, prior to coming. I knew I was in Indiana with blacks and I was in Jefferson with and I -- it di-didn't make any difference to me and I didn't acc -- understand the extent of everything. But you see, I did very much object to the so-called revolution, the hippie revolution in the 60 and 80, 60's -- in the 60's, because that was already tearing at the fabric of society, you see? And I went through very hard times in -- in the 1968 school strike, when I was so involved with the school

board and the -- the library and all these school things and we had factions of people who were ready to tear down the system and -- oh, a lot of energy and a lot of tribulations, I assoc-associate with that, plus the 60's as an -- a revolt against the culture, American -- you know the hippie movement and the free love movement and the living in communes, which everything now comes out to be that it really wasn't, you know? Th-This -- this -- th-th-the flower children and all. It was only a sort of a -- you know, their numbers were greater, because they're the boom -- the boomers, the baby boomers, so they could really show force in numbers. But what they stood for wasn't very much. It was something that didn't pan out the way they expected it, which of course everybody knew from the beginning that it wasn't going to pan out. As I knew in City College had -- they had open admission and we are predicted 30 years ago, they took 30 years to come to the point, after they ruined three generations of students. I predicted that open admission is going to kill the standards, the academic standards. That there was no reason why children could not learn, as -- as I saw with my own eyes. Children can learn if they are motivated. You don't bring them down to a levels of -- of whatever, you take them up. And now you see -- now they are to -- trying to re -- re -- in my days, Brooklyn College and City College were as good as Harvard any time. You see, in high schools and everything. But the -- in the 60's, where all this movement started toward liberalization of everything, so they threw the baby with the bathwater together, out. And I know what we went through here in the schools. Bronx High School of Science was threatened to become a neighborhood school, not a specialized high school. We were instrumental, through Albany, to take it

out from under the auspices of the brook -- of the -- no, in Brooklyn, it's a school -- school administration for the city of New York. Place it under the state administration. I was instrumental in it, because Senator Zaretski from Albany lived in our neighborhood. And we had a meeting with him -- science parents and he told us we will need a sponsor a bill. And we had two parents with children who went to Bronx Science. It's Hirkt and Colundra bill was put through the senate -- state senate and Science was -- five -- five specialized schools were taking out from under the jurisdiction of the Board of Education in Brooklyn and pay -- placed under the state jurisdiction. And that was Bronx Science, Stuyvesant, Brooklyn Tech, Music and Art and Hunter. We saved those schools, because that was -- they were saying this --these schools were elitist, so they don't belong in a democratic country. They belong as neighborhood schools. Well, every neighborhood school, which I told you Jefferson High School -- when I tell somebody Jefferson High School, they give me a double look. They say, "You couldn't have gone to Jefferson High School." "Yes, I did." It was a fantastic school, it was on the highest level. And these school, luckily, the bill was passed, we went to all the new -- attended to it. And we had all these, we had very strong parent's association in Bronx Science, so that was accomplished, but all this ties in with that movement in the 60's, everything goes. In other words, you could tear everything that you don't think is at all valuable. Of course, when you're young, nothing is valuable, because you want to rebel. You rebel against this and that and the other, but then give you 20 more years and you look back, you say, "Why'd I do that?" You know? And all these -- these yuppies today, called yuppies, you

know? When they were -- they were the yippies, when they were -- look at how many of them ended up in -- in ne -- th -- the -- the -- the -- the what do they call that? Th-The -- Industrial complex? What was the name? Military industrial complex. I mean, look how many of these went into big business, they are on top of all the big corporations and things and they left all that nonsense behind. And I am sorry to say that now things are turning back, because what was -- it was really that it wasn't any good. You asked me before how I wanted to bring up my children. Well, our emphasis, as you could see with my involvement with the schools, was tremendous. Both of us, but -- in fact, Victor, when it started to getting very hard to get to Bronx Science at night, I was afraid alone. So Victor would come from work and take me there. Because you know, it's a trip by subway. So they said, "What are you --." He said he would just sit there. So they said -- used to meet in the library -- used to say, "Why is Victor sitting on the side?" I said, "Well, because he has to ring me, I'm afraid to come in now." "No such thing." So he became treasurer. They pulled him in, hook or crook. They say, "We don't care what you say, you sitting here, you going to be treasurer." So he was trea -- he was treasurer everywhere, all the time, but anyhow, Bronx Science, he said he'd just take me there and he'll sit and he'll read his pa -- newspapers, whatever there, on the side and they said, "No, you're going to be treasurer." So, no, the kids were very much oriented to -- not so much to succeed as to broaden their horizon. We traveled a lot with them, we -- together. We did a lot of very interesting things. Kids used to go to summer camp, to the Boy Scouts for a month. And then we used to go traveling together. Nova Scotia, Prince

Edward Island, Canada very often. All the way to Indiana to re-visit my school. It was very interesting and interesting trips and we wanted them to excel, very much and we wanted them -- we never pressed, you know. Harry, the older one, always knew that he wanted to be a lawyer or something like that and Paul knew always he could not be a lawyer or anything that would keep him at a desk, you see? He's a very successful, lovely, lovely guy, but he's all outdoors. He cannot -- you would not put him -- he's --

Q: What is he doing?

A: He has a landscaping business and he is very happy being outdoors, all the time. He runs a business, he works on the site, with -- he plans the landscaping, you know, he draws projects and he does big -- you know, big jobs.

Q: What does your other son [indecipherable]

A: That's Paul. No, Harry is a lawyer and he's married to Cheryl and she's -- she works in New York for the arts. Used to work for 10 years to the -- she was director of development for New York City ballet and now she works for the 42nd Street Development Corporation. You know, the people who are the -- who are developing -- you know the Ford Theater and the New Victory Theater, that's -- that's the arts that she's working for.

End of Tape Four, Side B

Beginning Tape Five, Side A

Q: This is a coninti -- this is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Regina Gelb. This tape -- this is tape number five, side A. When -- when you think back about your life after liberation, is there anything in particular that we haven't mentioned yet, that was very important to you or to your family that -- that we should simply mention?

A: Well, I think I did elaborate on the fact that certain lessons learned, through the bare experiences, benefited me in a certain way. Number one is the importance of family. We are -- we were, the three of us, the three sisters, were extremely close. Each one of us married, we were extremely close as six people. Each one of us has children and grandchildren and we are extremely close. This is no exaggeration, even though my oldest sister has been living in Canada. They could not make it to America, you know, because by then the quota was closed or whatever, by the time they came. So they went to Canada, sponsored by my uncle, who lived there then. And the importance of family, of being there, of being there for those whom you love and who love you. This is the sum and substance of what I took out of my bad experiences. The reason being, that my parents were torn away from me, as was my extended family. Torn away in a way that you don't even have a grave to go to, you see? Therefore, the idea of the family unit, which, as I'm getting older, I find even more important, because society is changing so quickly. People are scattered. In the old days, there was always a -- a nucleus and a f -- and a -- an extended family within one geographic area. Now, even in our own case --

you see Paul, our youngest son, lives in Albuquerque. Of course, we see each other two or three times a year, he comes to every important ceremony or celebration. A bris and the Passover Seder always and unfortunately last summer, we lost my brother-in-law, he went to -- came to the funeral. And other than that, he comes to New York too and we're on the phone five to seven days a week. I mean, we have to find out where the weather is like and such. That is the most important thing of all. And as I say, it is being reinforced as I see the culture in America changing. And the people getting alienated and scattered. So, for that, I am grateful that I was able to achieve that. That was really my number one thing op -- uppermost -- to create a family and to stay within that unit. I have achieved that. I have always been extremely attached to academics, as I said. And I was forever grateful that I could get my education -- higher education here. To the extent to which an education opens your eyes on things that you could do on your own. I didn't have -- I was going to get the -- more degrees, but it -- it didn't turn out with degrees, but it turned out just the same that through the years, I was either involved in courses, or I was giving courses, or I was engaged one way or another with the schools or whichever. Very grateful for the fact that I could accomplish that, so that I could develop my mind and now at my age, have all the resources. If I'm interested in this, I know how to find it, I know where to look for it, I know what I like, I know which museum exhibit I will go to and which I don't. I don't go to the movies just because it's playing. I know what I want and I wa -- that I don't want. I read the same way, selectively, always selectively -- so that I'm very grateful for that. And other than that, you know, I feel for the world that is

suffering. The way things have not -- have not really come to a conclusion after the Holocaust on -- in the larger sense. It's still the same thing is going on. Not to the same extent, but -- you read the papers and there's Ireland and there's Bosnia and now you have Kosovo and you have -- so one way or another, I don't think that this -- in my lifetime, that I have seen a resolution of that bigger problem, which is humankind. Of course, nothing would ever -- I can't imagine a thing would ever compare to the genocide done by the Nazis to the Jews. That, I think, is in a category all it's own. And much as people are trying to use the word Holocaust, which is now -- I -- I noticed this in the papers, the Times writes about it a lot, that the people are acquiring the Holoc -- the Japanese Holocaust. This is totally without comparison. No experience -- no experience compares to the Hol -- Jewish Holocaust -- the European Jewish Holocaust. Not in history as I know history and not the present time in anywhere, does that compare. The systematic, technological destruction of people, with a plan, that is a separate -- totally separate event. As events in history go, that must always stand on it's own. And I -- I feel for other people, I sympathize with the Japanese, but I know what Holocaust is. I've been there, I've lived through it. I lost most of my family there and I can tell you that nothing ever -- nothing ever happened to compare. And I hope it will never happen, which we don't know, because technology now is even more advanced than it was in Hitler's time. He could gas and -- and -- and -- and burn them in the chimneys. Today, maybe they cou -- they could just nuke them, if they wanted to. You know, you could throw one bomb and th-the -- nuke the whole world. But this is -- those are the things that -- in the larger

scale about the Holocaust. But on the personals -- on the person -- coming down again to the specific from the general, I can tell you I consider myself extremely lucky. I survived, not because I really was clever or smart or anything. It just -- just -- that was that chance. I married Victor, who's a wonderful, wonderful husband and a wonderful father and we had a -- had a very peaceful, wonderful life. I probably could never go through life again with any upheavals of any kind. We are both sort of, we're -- you know, we like quiet and solitude -- not solitude, but we don't like the excitement. I mean I -- when we were younger, we'd -- we did a little more, but absolutely I -- I -- I'm very grateful that -- that we are -- you know, we're married 45 years now and we've gotten along very well and the kids are very attached to us, we're very attached to the kids and our grandchildren and everything and -- you asked me about how much I told the children. I mean now they're grown men and I talk freely. I gave them the cop-copy of my show and everything. So I told them, look at the tape and ask me, ask me. Really, ask me what you want. Because now they know history and they know everything. They ask me and we talk like -- as I do with you now and Max, too. Max is our little nine year old grandson, Harry's and Cheryl's boy. And I -- I tell him, I say, "You know why I have this number? Because I was -- you know, I was in a concentration camp during the war, you know, when -- when I was in Europe." "Oh, yes, I know all about it." I said, "Well, any time you want to know more about that, you ask me and I'll tell you." In other words, I always leave the door open, you see. Th-The kids, they know everything, because I am very free to talk about it. I don't cry, I don't break down, in the sense as other people get terribly

emotionally disturbed. That was a part of my life and as I think I told you before, I was so lucky to come here and to be a young girl in America, you know? I was just so lucky. And -- and a lot of people who came, who weren't that much older, maybe 10 years older, they already had to go to work and they already had to struggle, they could never go back to school, you see? Or maybe they came with a child and it was dif -- I came a young girl, like a -- like a young horse, you know, ready to get out of the stable and run. I was just like that, you know? I was like an eager beaver, I was willing and ready and everything was a lovely, nicest experience. Even if it wasn't so nice, I thought was great. Everything I did. Everything -- every summer camp, every baby-sitting, every this and that on the other, everything was wonderful, cause was a new experience, you see? And it really took me away from -- not that it took me away, it was something I didn't yet experience, you know? I came here, I hadn't lived yet, so everything that I lived was great. And it -- in true fashion, it -- it really was. I mean it was not an exaggeration because all these things that happened to me, everything was sort of by chance, people -- you know, I got a job to support myself by working in the ORT. I didn't look for it, they looked for it. I got a job to teach in Indiana, I didn't look for that. You know, you know, you see what I mean? Every time I do something th -- I was asked to do it or something and it turned out a fantastic experience, so that's fine.

Q: Did you ever go back to Poland?

A: Yes, I went back w -- twice. Once with Victor, to show him around and -- by which time, I wasn't so eager any more to go the route of -- of nostalgia or anything. I -- I'm

very much interested -- I love Ch-Chopin, Frederick Chopin's music and I did some interpret -- translating for Chopin biographies. So we traveled the Chopin route, that was one aspect. We went wherever he was born -- where he was born, where he live, where the concerts were and so on. That was one route. The second was to go to my hometown and visit with the old friends of my parents. And then we went to Auschwitz, of course. We went to visit the camps, Shellneetsa and Mioufka. Mioufka does not exist, they're housing projects now. And Shellneetsa is back to the firing range. They still -- now they put it back into a firing range. That was a very touching experience, going through my hometown with Victor. But you see, I was already with Victor, so that was an -- I was already in another frame of mind. Then, of course, we went to Auschwitz and while there, w-we also went to Vialeetchka, which is a salt mine. They said all the salt mine in Europe and they take you down on a tour. From the 11th century, all the way below, and I -- so I -- there was a combination and we went to Zarchoparna to visit the reserve. In other words, it wasn't all Auschwitz, you see? It wasn't -- it wasn't all Auschwitz and it wasn't all Shellneetsa. Sure, we went to Shellneetsa, th-the -- the -- the taxi driver that took us there and we got there, it was after a rain, was such big potholes and he was driving into the camp and I said, "Don't go, you're going to ruin your taxi." He says, "No, no, you told me there was a camp here," Polish taxi driver, "I'm going to take you in there." I said, "I don't want to be responsible for a broken taxi." He insisted, he drove in and the old friends of my family's granddaughter, she was a young woman, 25, she took us there, we walked around. There was nothing except that little brook where I

remember people used to wash themselves in. And she told me, now it's back -- Shellneetsa is back to a shooting range. And the camp -- then we went to Mioufka. And absolutely nothing. I mean, it's another world. Modern buildings and -- and the -- the bus runs through there and so on. So that's it. And the old factory was converted to trucks, they do trucks. Star -- you know like Ford, Chevrolet, Star is the name, because Starachowice is the name of the town, so they named the trucks -- pickup trucks and such, that's -- the production was -- after the Russians -- by the way, the Russians dismantled the factory and took all this to Russia. And when it was rebuilt, it was rebuilt as a auto plant. So they do cars, th-the trucks. So that's the -- so nothing remained of that, you see? So, as they say, you can't go home again? You see, but the old ladies, they were very -- I have pictures from that trip. None of them are alive any more. Of course, this was in 1980. So that was one trip and the second was as an interpreter for the Holocaust Memorial Museum for -- when the archives were being released, f -- actually, that was the -- the negotiations for release of the archives, so I did that and that -- I went without Victor. And that was very interesting.

Q: I know that you started a cemetery renovation project of sorts --

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Maybe you could talk a little bit --

A: Okay, I'll tell you quickly about what happened. When Victor and I were in Poland in 1980, we went to visit the Pole -- the Jewish cemetery and it was in horrible condition. You know, the Germans have removed a lot of tombstones and made them for a -- for

sidewalks, but -- but we found -- and I have pictures to prove it, we took -- Victor took many pictures, houses were being built on the half of the cemetery. Well, I came back and I made a very big to-do about that. We meet once a year -- the Starachowice people, we meet in New York, as they do everywhere, for the so-called Yurtside, which is October 27, thereabouts, we meet. So, the prayer is said for the dead and then we discuss. So when I came back in 1980, with the pictures, I send the pictures to Israel and I said -- I gave the pictures here, in st -- and I told them, we've got to do something, because there is still more building going on and we will lose that one last vestige of any -- anything that shows that there was Jewish life there. We must do something. And -- I'm sorry to tell you, that not everybody was on the same opinion. I was highly criticized. I was highly criticized that I would have the nerve to say that we should pour in thousands of dollars for people who wouldn't care one way or another out there -- that they would ruin it anyhow. But there were other people who saw the problem otherwise and it took quite a number of years to get around to the fact that we could do it. Those that will want to do it, should do it and not to have the naysayers negate this project. I personally have nobody in that cemetery. You know, w-we don't have anybody there, however, I kept saying, "How would ever -- how would anybody ever know that there was a Jewish community, except for that piece of a cemetery? Whatever is there, let us save it. Let us save it." We -- so, not long ago, we got together honestly and truly, because in Israel, they found somebody who goes to Poland to restore the cemeteries. First of all, I was instrumental in registering it. Here, in New York, a good 15 -- 10 years ago, with a

Jewish agency, that had a list of Jewish cemeteries to be protected. They could not do anything about it, but just put it on a list of historic what do you call -- his-his-historic sites. So, maybe eight years ago, the Polish government -- Polish government put up a sign, historic -- okay, fine, historic area, what-whatever. Something was already done. Then we got, as the expression goes -- got on the stick. I collected money here, we made a -- you know, personal, everything personal. Got on the phone, I had a list. People who -- whom I knew, who already expressed their opinion and great criticism, I didn't call. I called people -- I started from myself, I told everybody I gave so many hundreds of dollars, give me what you want, I don't mind. Send me a check, it should be mailed out -- made out to such and such -- Jewish projects or such. I send a few thousand dollars to Israel. Canada send a few thousand dollars to Israel. Israel connected a few thou -- collected a few thousand dollars. Now the cemetery's a -- protected by a very beautifully designed iron fence with a beautiful gate. The sign is there, says this is to be preserved. No more buildings could be built. The cemetery was a terrible place to see, whatever was left. Stones were overturned, garbage was thrown on it. Gr -- Growth -- overgrowth of greenery. First, the people who went from Israel to Poland arranged for people -- caretakers to clean it up. Then, a Mr. Yarley from Israel, who is also a -- restored already a Jewish cemetery in Tomashavma Sovietski -- went to Starachowice, contacted people who are artists, this -- the tombstones were righted, the lettering was restored, the place was cleaned up. Now it's behind a beautiful fence, now we have people who will be paid monthly or y -- annually. Th-The person who is going to do it is a young artist. He's a

sculptor and he's too thrilled to have this job of caretaker. And there is even going to be a book put out, with pictures, which -- I just had a letter from Israel. But I feel very proud of it, because the few years that we didn't do anything, we almost lost the project and the reason was that -- part of it was that I -- I didn't want to create bad feelings and I -- I just let it -- ya -- so, when I first brought up and I was very highly criticized. They say, "I'm surprised at you Renia, that you should t-talk about it. We don't want to pour money in there. They going to ruin it," and all this stuff and I -- I -- I just couldn't fight it, but I should have, but I didn't, but anyhow, cooler heads prevailed and we decided to work with the people who are willing and who are -- wh-who don't look at it that way. Now, we have a beautifully restored cemetery, it's registered with the Polish government, it's registered in the -- in America, which I did with another lady, in New York, when we registered with this Rabbi Hyatt was his name, when the project was first started, we were very lucky to get in our name on that list. I don't mean my name, but the -- the community's cemetery. I'm very proud of that accomplishment because as I said, having lost my parents in -- and family in a way that I never knew how they perished or where they perished, that little bit of the Jewish life that was left under that soil, should really be honored and preserved and I don't care if it takes money or if -- whatever. If they ruin it, let's pay again an-an-and keep it up. Of course now it would not -- there will be no more buildings. That's for sure because you can't press on the -- on -- on the -- on the iron gates. And the design was approved, who had approved it here, architectural designs. So it's really worth -- it -- I -- it makes me feel so good and you know, I had the money in no

time. As soon as I called up, everybody says, “Yes, of course.” I -- I think I send two -- I send the check twice, the first phone calls, I had one envelope with checks and then the second envelope. And before I know -- I mean it was o -- it was nothing. Of course I knew whom I should call and whom I shouldn’t call and likewise in Israel. So there are people that -- that -- my friend in Israel wrote me, one of them got up and made an awful row about how dare you. The same thing. How dare you want money for this thing when they not going to respect it. But I do know it was an important thing to do. I’m very glad I got involved in it, even though I really felt that it was going to come with a fight. It didn’t come with a fight, because once we eliminated the naysayers, the coast was clear. And money -- it’s only money, so -- you see, this is how it turned out and I’m very pleased about it and if there is a book, I might show you someday. I don’t have it, but he said -- they told me in Israel that there will be a book, so --

Q: I have only one brief question left.

A: Yes?

Q: You mentioned your -- the -- the number you --

A: Yes.

Q: [indecipherable] in Auschwitz. Would you mind telling us what the number is?

A: Sure. First, the thing I told you -- first let me give you the number. The number is A and then it’s 14178. As I told you when they were tattooing us, we lined up, my sisters lined up wi -- I lined up according to age. So my oldest sister Hanya or Anna, her number is A14176, Kris, the middle one, has 77 and I have 14178. As you could see, there is an

A letter preceding the number and a lot of people ask me, “Why is there a letter?” Th-th -- you see, they ran out of numbers and they had to start a second -- in Auschwitz., they start a s -- what do you call it -- d -- a -- s-s-s -- a serial, an second serial and this is -- this is why there’s A. You know, there was a number like this before, 14178, but the A is -- yeah. And also, you know, it’s very easy now to tell, that this is from the later numbers. You see, as I told you, we came to Auschwitz when the Russian offensive was nearing, meaning it was already late in the war. So now -- and anybody who is knowledgeable, when they see A, they know -- they can place me, so to say. To know that I wasn’t there in 1942 or something like that, when the original people came, you see? And as I told you, I’m never, ever ashamed of it. I never want to remove it and I had an offer many times. I knew a plastic surgeon. In fact, when I had the job in the summer -- in a -- as a governess to a child in -- one summer, I was still in high school. He thought that I would be afraid I wil -- can’t afford it, so he said, “I’ll remove your number and I won’t charge you anything.” I said, “No, I have not interest.” He said, “But I wouldn’t charge you. You don’t need it.” I said, “I don’t need it, but I -- it doesn’t bother me.” Was a Jewish doctor. I was a governess to his child in the summer. I went with the wife to a hotel in the Catskills and I was, you know, I was the baby-sitter. And he didn’t see why I shouldn’t remove it, but I certainly wouldn’t, I go to my grave with it.

Q: Is there anything that you would like to say in concluding the interview?

A: Well no, it’s really nice of you to have put in all this time. I know it’s an -- a big effort. And I don’t mind talking about my experiences and I don’t mind pointed questions

either and it's a long interview. I know I've worn you out. My voice is going, too. But no -- I'm very glad to share this and to have it for posterity. For whatever reason. Certainly I ho -- if I have a copy, I'll be very happy to give it to my kids, even though they do know the story pretty well by now. Because in bits and pieces they found out, as they asked. Again -- as they asked, you see? So I really thank you. That's very nice of you. Thank you.

Q: Thank you very much. And this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Regina Gelb.

End of Tape Five, Side A

Conclusion of Interview

Interview with Regina Gelb
August 27,1998

Beginning Tape Six, Side A

Question: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jeff and Toby Herr collection. This is an interview with Regina Gelb, conducted by Regina Baier, on August 27th, 1998 in Mrs. Gelb's home. This is part two of a follow-up interview to a USHMM videotaped interview conducted with Regina Gelb on September 30th, 1991. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum gratefully acknowledges Jeff and Toby Herr for making this interview possible. This is tape number one, side A. This interview, as I said to you before, is a little different from the one that we had last time, because it was really important to not interrupt your narrative too much. We covered, really, a lot of ground and I didn't want to intercept with too many questions. This time, it will be slightly different. We are trying to fill in and clarify a few aspects, and to make that easier, because it is not quite so -- such a comfortable conversational mode, really, I would like to do that in a chronological manner. So let's start with a time when you were in Berlin, in the camp for displaced persons. And you wanted to -- before I ask my first question, you wanted to talk a little bit about something that we didn't mention in the first interview, which was the situation of Berlin at that time.

Answer: Certain-Certainly, yes. Yeah, well of course you can guide the interview however you wish, because I -- I don't mind if you stop me, if you don't stop, if you just let the narrative go. Either way you decide is fine with me. Coming back to Berlin, perhaps it would be good to mention the years again, so that we have it within a certain

framework. I arrived in the displaced person's camp in Berlin, in the early part of 1946, probably around March or so, in the company -- actually my sister, Kris was married to Miles Lehrman at that time and they were my guardians. So the three of us arrived in Berlin, in the DP camp, which was located in the American sector. Now, this is 1946, the war is over not quite a year yet. And Berlin is now divided into four sectors. One is the American, in which the DP camp was located. One is the British, one is the French and one is the Russian. Now, a lot of people do not understand the concept of a DP camp and they say, "Well," that you were in concentration camp and with barbed wires and, "Was this another one like it?" Well, obviously a DP camp was not a camp surrounded by barbed wire. It was an area designated for gathering up the people who were now shifting -- the people who were moving from place to place for all kinds of reasons. And it was just an area where there were barracks for people to -- to -- to -- to live in. Everybody had a room in a barrack. It was very, very decent. There was a -- a -- a mess hall, where people went for lunch -- breakfast, lunch and dinner. There was an area which was set aside for -- for dancing, for there wer -- they had dances. And there was the school, of course to which I went. That was a building separate from the others. We even had our own dining room, because a lot of the children, including myself, were highly undernourished. We have never yet gotten our development, fall into the -- the range of devel -- of physical development, so that we actually had better food than -- not better, but probably more substantial, including chocolate. I'll always remember that, including chocolate. They had bars of chocolate for the children all the time. Well anyhow, Berlin

itself, the city itself, was like any other post-war city, parts of it were bombed out horribly, parts of it were not bombed. And the sector -- the particular sector always reflected the occupier. In other words, in the Russian sector, it was very, very difficult to be around, because we were taught -- even the kids in school, we used to go on -- on these outings and we used to go to the theater with the class and so on. We were told we can go very freely to the three sectors. One, the American, the British and the French, but once you go into the Russian sector, you really -- if you have to, absolutely -- and sometimes we did have to, because the -- all city -- Berlin city, that had all the theaters, was within the Russian sector, so that you really had to just mind your surroundings. The Russian soldiers were always asking for IDs and such. The presence of the four occupiers was very visible. You could always see American soldiers, in Jeeps, on foot, in the American sector. You could always see the British in uniform, all over. You could always see the French, so that Berlin, which is a German city -- and it was way before it was divided into south and west, we're now talking at the period of time when I was there, which was from about March '46, til the end of January or so, in 1947. And the city was vibrant, but it was first really emerging from the horror of war, which you could see. I have pictures, as I mentioned before, where the -- the famous church on Coffersendam is all in rubble and I'm standing in front of it and I have a picture with it. So that was the -- that was the reality of Berlin. It was not what you would call a German city, as such, because German presence was -- if at all -- little visible to the naked eye.

Q: Did you have any particular feelings about the Americans?

A: Well. I was thrilled, I was absolutely thrilled, because you know, to me -- I did not know American history, but I just learned, during the war, that America was this great, fantastic country and President Roosevelt was God. And that -- that is all I knew at -- at that time. And of course seeing Americans in uniform was so reassuring. Having seen German uniforms around me for the duration of the war and fearing a uniform, even when I saw it from 10 blocks away, shaking in my sh -- boots, this feeling now, of -- of seeing these friendly Americans, you know, they were sort of a little boisterous and they were smiling. And -- and you know, the idea of just passing somebody in the street and somebody smiling to you, didn't say anything to him, he didn't say anything to you, they just passes you by and he smiles. Well, that was a -- that was a sort of a healing kind of a fee-feeling. You know, I -- I'll be talking in rhymes, soon. The fact that my idea of the uniform, don't forget I was still a young girl, my idea of the uniform was always connected with fear, always connected with fear. I thought that I would probably go to my grave, sh-shaking over a military person, which of course is not the case, I mean, because you know, once you get over the original fear. So, to answer your question, yes, I was absolutely thrilled to see them.

Q: Among the American soldiers were also black soldiers --

A: Yes.

Q: -- [indecipherable] the American soldiers?

A: Yes, I'll tell you, as a matter of fact, you know, I have never seen black people before in my life, because Poland was basically a white country and of course, predominantly

Catholic. And then, being in camps and so on, I -- I've -- I've met people -- Europeans, only. Whether they were Greek or Italian, whoever, but I have never seen a -- a black person until I was in -- in Germany. And my first black person was a American soldier. And I was absolutely fascinated, because he again had that smiley face, you see, he again, like the others, you know? He didn't know me, I didn't know him. I just saw this -- this man, this black man in a -- in a American uniform, with a big smile. And of course that -- that was totally disarming and I -- I always remember that, because when I came to America, of course, then I realized that this a multi-cultural country and multi-racial and certainly not the kind of background that I came with, where it was predominantly Catholic and a min-minority being Jewish, so that it didn't compare and that was another sort of eye opening experience.

Q: And then eventually -- eventually you left for Bremenhaven?

A: Yes.

Q: And the question would be, why did you go and how did you go?

A: All right. Well, as I told you, we -- I -- Miles Lehrman and Kris Lehrman were my guardians. Miles had a -- I think I mentioned it in the other tapes, but I'll repeat it just to give it context. He had an old aunt living in Manhattan on the Lower East Side. She sent out papers for him, but wherever he went, his wife went and then I went. As I was saying, I was the fifth wheel, but they didn't think so. But, in any case, he received papers to go to America for the three of us. Now, in those days, because we were registered in the DP camp, we were sent to an American agency in Berlin, which was in the American sector.

Whether it was a consulate or the embassy, I couldn't tell, but I do know that we were fingerprinted there. That we were f-fully registered, our visas were processed. In other words, our papers were completed at that spot. From there we were given a date when we should go to Bremenhaven, where we are going to meet a ship, which is going to take us to America. So, we left Berlin for Bremenhaven, and I think we stayed in Bremenhaven two to three days, because the ships that were taking the refugees to America were converted military transport ships. And our ship was called Marine Perch and I couldn't tell you the exact date when we boarded the ship, but we did arrive in New York Harbor on February 11th, 1947. And, I might add something that's -- that might be interesting. A lot of people ask me, "Oh, so you went to Ellis Island?" Well, I didn't go to Ellis Island. Even though Ellis Island was still functioning as a whatever you call it, transfer point or whatever, we were processed -- our papers were processed fully in Germany -- in Berlin, I mean, within the American embassy, let's say, or wit -- or consulate. So that when we arrived in New York and these old folks were there, this old aunt, she was I think in her late 80's with this old husband and they were waiting for us. We just presented our processed papers and we got off the boat and there we were in a taxi, going to the Lower East Side. So, we have never been to Ellis Island. And I think that -- that might be of interest, too.

Q: Let me ask you just -- before we move on to the next part of your life, one quick follow-up question, you mentioned fingerprinting --

A: Yes.

Q: -- during your processing. Which is sort of another way of -- of counting people in a sort of somewhat mechanized way.

A: Yes.

Q: Was that -- did -- did that have a different impact on you than others that you had experienced before, or was that slightly scary to you?

A: Quite the opposite. You know, having been tattooed with a number, in -- in Auschwitz, this fingerprinting was like somebody was opening the gate for me. Because I knew that they are making sure that I will be secure, you see? However I -- that I -- however I explain that, it absolutely had the utmost wonderful connotation. It had nothing to do with fear, it had everything to do with a sigh of relief. Finally, they will know exactly who I am, because they did, you know, when I looked at my -- the -- that card, the ship card which I -- well, that I still have. They have my height, my weight, my -- the color of my eyes, the color of my hair, the fact that I have a number. And of course I knew that -- that the fingerprints were there too, meaning they couldn't mistake me for anybody else. And I was going to America and that was fantastic.

Q: So now you were in America, in New York and you would go to Jefferson High School, and the next questions are -- will be about that.

A: That's fine.

Q: That's fine?

A: Yes.

Q: The -- the first question is, you went to a special, or there was a special program associated with your group?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Holocaust survivors would go to special classes?

A: Right.

Q: Do you happen to know whether or not that was the -- the only program of it's kind in the United States?

A: Well, I wouldn't know for sure, but let me just again put it in the context of things. This was in Brooklyn. We moved to Brooklyn. We lived in Brooklyn -- we meaning Miles, Kris and I, we lived in Brooklyn and in those days you had to be assigned, when you go -- went to high school, having come from the DP camp where the high school -- it wasn't a diploma, but a certificate that I was already of high school quality, so to say. In New York City, in those days, high schools were what you call neighborhood high schools. In other words, you lived here and you were assigned to that high school. Well, in east New York, which is Brownsville, there was this high school, Thomas Jefferson High School, which was out of my so-called district, because I belonged in Tildon High School. But the Joint Distribution Committee advised me that I would belong -- I would find my place better in Jefferson High School and they could see to it that I was allowed to go out of my district. It really wasn't so far out of the district, I mean, was maybe six or seven stops on the subway, you see. Jeffer -- Thomas Jefferson High School had a class especially for refugee children. The reason being that there was a great influx of

refugees to Brooklyn in those years. When I arrived, I was really among the early arrivals, except for a friend of mine who came as an orphan, by herself with a transport in 1946, in September, I don't think anybody came to Jefferson before September or October of 1946, is when my friend -- I know, because she was there six month when I arrived, and she was among those very first -- she did live -- she lived in the district, you see? But anyhow, by the time I arrived, there was already a group formed that was called -- we were ca -- we weren't called refugees in -- it was called basic English, yes. It's sort of a --- well, euphemism, but it really wasn't far from the truth, because they did try to accommodate us to the English language in the first place, before they even tried to expose us to the American culture. And as I mentioned before, the pres -- the principal of that high school was Dr. Ludwig Karpen and he -- whether it was he who had the original idea, or whether by virtue of the great influx of these children, that class was formed, I could not answer you this question. I only know that by the time I came to Jefferson, and that probably was March or April, I met about -- there were about 30, maybe 35 of us in that class. Now, how was the program arranged? The program was arranged that the first thing you did -- like you know, the -- wi -- they used to be called homeroom -- other people had homeroom, you know, you came to class -- you came to high school and you had homeroom, whatever that meant. We didn't have homeroom, we had basic English. We used to meet with the head of the English department, her name was Miss Hay -- Miss Agnes Hay. She was the one who was to be not only our guiding spirit, she was to be our mother and father and surrogate everything. She -- and she was the type,

extremely warm and outgoing and soft, you know, she didn't have any of that martinet kind of personality, she was a rather soft spoken woman. And, so the in gathering of these different children -- the ages first of all were different. They were something -- anywhere between 14 and -- and -- let's say 19. Some of them were 19 and didn't -- and belonged to -- with -- you know, missed the education. Some of them were 17 and had a lot of education, more than the high school and so on. So all this had to be sorted out. This class was, in the first place, also an orientation class as to how the educational system works. Who is the principal and what are the rights of the students and what are -- what you cannot do and what you shouldn't do -- what is expected of you. And another fact was brought out -- that of course I wasn't used to, the teacher is your best friend, so you can always go to the teacher and talk to -- about your problems. In Poland there was no such thing. The teacher was the teacher, the student was the student and after class, that was it. Here we were taught in the basic class, you can always go, if you have a problem at home, if you couldn't do your homework, if you don't understand, if you find it hard. Whatever problem, personal or otherwise, the teacher will help you. Obviously the teacher was not going to be the only one. He was going to be the one who was going to direct us -- direct us to other people who were also in place. You see, everything was very subtle. I didn't understand a lot of it, but it -- it seemed like paradise. But obviously there was a lot of planning put into it. For example, lunch was 25 cents. Now, you could not make a child -- they want -- not every child could afford 25 cents to have lunch, from the refugee children. They wanted us to have a free meal, but you could not make a child

feel inferior for not having to -- a quarter for the -- for the meal. We were given tokens the size of a quarter and I remember the ladies name was Miss Frankel, or Mrs. Frankel or Mrs. Frank, something like this. She was Dr. Karpen's personal secretary. And all you have to do it once a week goes to Miss -- go to Miss Frankel, or Frank. She s -- handed you a little envelope, nobody knew what was in the envelope. And when you went on line in the school cafeteria, you handed in that token that looked like a quarter and no child next to you or behind you, in front of you, could see that you were actually not able to pay for your lunch, you see? Those were the subtle arrangements. I mean, you never, ever had to say why you went to see Miss Frankel. You just went into the office, you said, "I want to see Miss Frankel." You came in, she saw you, she gave you that little envelope, you see? Everything was done with such dignity. But of course this has nothing to do now with the education itself. The -- the basic English class was the orientation class. As to behavior, as to proper conduct in school, as to what was in-involved in American education, how th -- what things were expected of you, what was about higher education and we met every day. In fact, they were telling us -- Miss Hay would call a child or two up front and say, "How do you greet people in Poland?" You know? Because I told her that I once re -- ex-explained in the subway when we had -- wh -- i-in the class, when we had -- the subject came up, I said we were in the subway, Miles, Kris and I and somebody we knew from Berlin or from Poland, saw us in the subway and came running over. He kissed Kris's hand and he kissed my hand and of course everybody in the subway gave us a -- I mean, people were astonished. So when we were

talking about proper greeting in basic English, I told Miss Hay how this thing happened and how peculiar that was in the subway. So those were the a -- the things that were discussed and that class also helped determine the level -- the lev -- the educational level of each child. So, for example, my English was rather poor, so I was put into -- in addition to basic English, which of course we also used to -- not memorize, but avail ourselves of phrases -- of every day phrases, how you greet people, what you do when you go to a supermar -- to the store. What do you do when you want to ask a question in the street and so on. That was from basic English. But, to catch up with the English language itself, I, for example, used to take two English classes at one time. Now, I was all -- by then I was already 17 and I was in a class with the 13 year olds, who were first entering high school, you see? Because that was my first eng -- the -- the -- the -- the English course had to be covered, A to Z, four years. Now, as for other things, such as physics or chemistry or math, we were tested on that and we were placed accordingly. Same went for history. Nobody was exempt from Civics, which was taught in those days, American History, American Economics and obviously English and Speech. And the strange thing was that after awhile, it really equalized, you know? That the people who didn't have much background in English came up and people who had all this background in History, got on the same level with the others and we were not -- we were scattered in between different classes. We had to take foreign language and as I also mentioned, I took Hebrew as a foreign language, because I just came out of Hebrew school and that was another bonanza for me, because Dr. Horowitz, who was the head of

the Hebrew department, and taught my class, was another source of -- not advice -- you see, we're talking basically about Americanization, about acculturation. And I could tell you, that from my viewpoint, Jefferson to me was the acculturation for -- for all times. They saw our needs, they knew how to meet them. Everything was done with such discretion and with such dignity, that to this day I cannot -- absolutely cannot get over it. You know, especially in the -- in -- in this more permissive time of welfare handouts and such, it was just a totally different scene and -- and aside from all of that, Jefferson was a very, very good academic school.

Q: Can I ask just one or two more question with regard to the basic English classes?

A: Yes.

Q: You said Americanization was --

A: Yes.

Q: -- one of the -- or was the overarching goal, probably. Could you give maybe one or two sort of more specific example of what -- what that meant? How did they teach you? What was -- what di -- what did they say was expected of you in America and did something of that strike you as odd or different, unusual?

Q: Well, really the -- the underlying premise of Americanization was really democracy. You see, a lot of us came from countries which were regimented, which -- I mean you didn't ask questions, you were told and you obeyed. And of course, having lived under the Germans, not only did you obey, you -- you feared for your life every second and you had to obey. So that coming from a structure -- a political structure of pre-war Europe

into American democracy could really be a shock. Because I mean, you can get up and tell jokes in the class and I had a -- a -- apropos of that I have tell a velly funny -- a very funny thing I always -- this an anecdote, I always tell it. I had a Mr. Jaffe for -- he was a very elegant little man, you know, with a vest and pinned up and really proper. And Mr. Jaffe was sort of -- he liked being humorous, but to an ex -- to just with bor -- with -- with limits. And we had a sort of a -- a wise guy type of fellow in the classroom and every now and then he would pipe out -- of course I was offended. I mean, how can you stop the class? But Mr. -- Mr. Jaffe once said to him, “Don’t be a wise guy. I threw out Danny Kaye from my class and I can throw you out any time.” Now -- of course, Danny Kaye did go to Jefferson High School, but way before I got there. But the -- because he lived in that area. But, basically, you see, I was not used to this total freedom; freedom of expression, freedom of -- of -- of -- of the being what you want and associating with wh -- with whoever you wanted to associate with. And the basic English class was really you -- our introduction to democracy, on the very simple level. I -- we’re not talking here theories and big things, we are talking every day living, just like not kissing somebody’s hand in the subway, is one of them, you know? And -- and being -- feeling free. Having a paper that doesn’t look like everybody else’s newspaper read in the subway, you could do that. Didn’t have to hide it -- you don’t -- you know, you don’t have to look behind you or over your shoulder to see somebody spying on you, because this is not the type of country. And you’re not going to be arrested by a policeman who will come and say, “Who are you?” And, “Show me your ID.” That can never happen here without cause.

So, this was part of the -- of that basic English, which was acculturation, introduction to American democracy, but I -- I -- I am really -- it -- it isn't all that formal, you know. I'm just giving you the overall idea, because it was really rather loosely presented to us, not as a rule, with a -- wi-with a question -- with an exclamation mark at the end. It was just simply put.

Q: This is the end of side A of tape one interview with Regina Gelb. We're going to stop now and switch over.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning of Tape One, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Regina Gelb. This is tape number one, side B. The next question would be -- I remember you saying -- and it also comes out in the way you explained just the -- the things before, that you were very hungry for life and you were very excited about the opportunities offered now. But in mingling with other students at the school or with other refugees or Holocaust survivors, did you talk about the war experiences at all, or was that put aside?

A: If I remember correctly, I don't think we did. Because, you see, first of all we assumed that -- each one of us assumed -- one was Polish, one was Hungarian, one was French and whatever it was, we knew we re -- I personally was not interested in any other stories. I knew everybody had a story to tell. I had plenty of stories to tell. I didn't want to live those stories, I didn't want to hear the other stories. Besides, I didn't have the time. We were kept so busy. We were kept -- don't forget, lang -- fa -- English was a foreign

language to us and we had to study subjects such as history and others. Economics, which was -- I never studied ec -- American economics, or economics at all in Poland. Or Civics. And this required a lot of work. Plus the fact that each one of us had some other obligation after school. You know, I think I mentioned it before, I lived with Miles and Kris, I kept house, I shopped for food and so on. I also had a job in the ORT organization's office on Fifth Avenue, where I had to travel after school. And then I had to -- I -- I -- I did absolutely stupid things there, I did filing and you know, but again, this was a kind of a job that they gave me because Dr. Karpen's wife was the head of the office. She was the head of the ORT, American ORT organization. Her name was Gertrude Karpen. And for me to earn this extra little money, I cannot imagine that I could do any more then than file. But I was a filing clerk, I knew the alphabet. So that was fine. And all the other kids had obligations as well. Don't forget they were more or less in my shoes, so to say. They had either families and they also had to scramble around to do a little something to sustain themselves so that we basically compared notes pertaining to the education and to the school. And also, we got to be friendly with the Jewish kids -- Jewish kids, a lot of Jewish kids from the area. That was a blue collar Jewish section in those days. So we made wonderful friends among the Jewish kids who were normal, so to say. Amer -- Jewish American kids. So, all this really t-to just sum it up, didn't -- this life in Jefferson did not fit with sitting there comparing notes, "Did you go to Auschwitz? No, I didn't go to Auschwitz, I went to Ravensbrück." That was past, that was water under the bridge, you know? Here we were, all these things were required of us, we were

all willing and as I also mentioned before, a lot of these kids became academicians. They taught all over the United States, professorship here and professor -- and everybody -- one wa -- most of these kids went to college and graduated from college. So that you see, we were more or less on that same level of -- of trying to get on with life in an -- this new way, excelling educationally. Find a place in this new world and who wants to talk about this old stuff? You know, that was then and so this is basically -- for example, Miss Hay used to invite us to ca -- to tea. She was a sort of former -- I think she was Irish by -- by -- from the fam -- anyhow, she used to invite us to tea, served beautifully, elegantly, with beautiful china cups. Not all of u -- them, but she had her favorites. So she had about four or five of us and we used to go to tea in her house, properly served with the napkins and the napkin rings and it was fantastic. You see, now those are all these extra things that these teachers went out of their way to -- to -- to -- to -- to do for us. But also, I might add, since I was so friendly with Miss Hay for all those years after -- til af -- til the time she died, she told me, “You know, Regina, I never, ever had a class like yours after your class left -- after your class graduate.” She said it so many times and that is a fact, because this was a very special group and -- and I must tell you that -- that there must have been some kind of a spirit in these kids, for everybody to be so -- not just winning, I mean they -- everybody went out of his way to -- to accommodate us, to do for us, to -- to find us jobs. To -- to -- so this is really -- this was a wh -- what is called a lucky break.

Q: Well [indecipherable] eventually you moved on to Brooklyn College?

A: Yes.

Q: And I would like to quote something back to you. You said in the first interview, that your knowledge of the war until then was very personal, because obviously you were sort of in the eye of the storm. But now, when you went to Brooklyn College that you were quote, “Really ready to go after the historical aspects of how things happened.” So that you were interested in the broader context of the war. And the question, how did you do that? Did you get formal education, did you talk to people about things? How did you learn about it and -- and what did you learn? Was there something surprising? It’s a big question, I know.

A: Well, everything was surprising, for the reason that I, for example, didn’t know that the -- that the eastern part of Poland was evacuated before the -- before German occupation -- no, I -- I’m not expressing it correctly. After Germ -- after the Germans occupied Poland, Stalin -- th-th-the Russians occupied eastern Poland. I knew that, but I did not realize that a lot of the natives -- not a lot, the majority of the natives, Jews or Christians were evacuated deep into Russia. I only found out about it in Berlin when people came to live in the DP camp, having come from Russia. “What do you mean from Russia? You speak Polish. You come from Voofe, you come from Vilna, you come -- how did you?” Well, they came out of Russia because they were evacuated en masse. Apparently, the Soviets were planning to -- to get rid of the native population in order to -- to -- to resettle it with their own, or however. So you see, that was the first thing that -- I started finding out these things. Was very easy, of course, to -- to -- to read books. I started also taking courses that pertained to -- to -- to history that -- that wasn’t -- you

know, like I knew everything after the first war, I knew all that stuff. But after that, I didn't know much, you know. So I started finding out. And then I found out that the Polish government -- there was a Polish government in exile, in -- in -- in England during the war. And then I started finding out all the other things, the atrocities of the Russians. And being -- I'm always very curious about things and I know how to get -- how to find things in books, I always knew that, so it was always very easy, even if I studied something else. I did take history courses in college and European political theory and all this. I took it, but while I was doing my homework, I always knew how to go after that one s -- one something that I just discovered. For example, the -- the Cutting Forest massacre I just discovered. I went to look for it, I found it, you know. And -- and -- and little by little, the -- the -- the invasion -- the Normandy invasion, the -- the Pearl Harbor. I did not know those things. I did not know about Pearl Harbor. I mean, I knew it, but it was so sketchy, it was just an id -- something I knew, but -- so -- and -- and how -- how the allies cooperate, I knew how to find it and of course I started reading papers. In fact, in Brooklyn College, the tea -- the political science teacher told us -- she rec -- she expected every one of us to read the New York Times, every day. And she didn't mean in a jokingly and she said, "Another thing, before the course is over, every one of us has to read the American constitution 12 times." Now, I am not talking about refugee children, I am talking about the regular course in Political Science. Those were her two requirements. One was you must read it 12 times to be able to understand it and before the course is over, you will have to know it sideways and upside down. And you have to

read the New York Times every day. And I did. So, I -- I -- I was always curious, you see, I was always curious. All of a sudden I found out another detail about the war and then another detail, then of course the Nuremberg trials, you know. That sort of opened a whole -- a whole new field to me that -- that I really didn't know. And then of course I didn't know too much about Italy, Fascist Italy and I wanted to find out about that. And I -- so, little by little the puzzle got put together, because I searched, I really searched and I -- and I filled it in and --

Q: I -- I meant to ask you the question, did you learn anything that changed your understanding of the war, but that would be wrong in a sense, because you just began to really learn about the political framework, right? Or was there anything --

A: Well, you know, the idea of war, to me, when I -- when I -- when -- when second war first started, was that this was just a military engagement, you know, that soldiers fight and soldiers get killed. And of course all this was based on the first war, not personal experience, but my knowledge of the first war, from books or from my parents, who lived through the first war. Second war was a totally different thing, because it wasn't just that they were bombing civilians, but it was -- it came to pass that they were exterminating people for being Jewish. And that -- that was something that -- I mean, not only incomprehensible, but unbelievable and people wouldn't admit it and I don't know if I've mentioned it in the other tapes, but I always talk about it. To this day, I had no idea what my parents knew, how much they knew, what they knew, but I do know that they did hide a lot from us. In fact, they hid everything from us, because they nev -- I never knew

the truth of -- and I suspect that they knew a whole lot of things. Of the atrocities that were going on. You know, my parents perished in the Holocaust, but even during the ghetto years and all this, I am sure they knew a lot, because there were people coming and going and reporting what's happening here and there -- never, ever was I let in on what was happening. And of course I saw with my own eyes, plenty, so maybe they felt it's bad enough for a child to see and experience here, but not yet to live with the fear of what is really happening somewhere else, which is probably not true. That was the attitude. It couldn't be true, because such a thing couldn't be true, you know, that you take groups of people and you burn them or you gas them. So that's just gossip and during the war, there's so much gossip, so why burden a child with this type of talk? So you see, my idea of -- of war, after it was o -- after the second war was all over, was really that it brought out the beast in the human being. It had nothing to do with land, you know, reclaiming your land one way or another. It was nothing to do with fighting for the -- for your culture or for your moral standards. It was just the opposite. It was just a beastly expression of a human nature, which unfortunately fell within the new technology and it found it's expression in annihilating by the youth of new technology and not the armed conflict of countries, but of just people being eliminated. So this was basically my understanding of -- of -- you know, after all was said and done and I start -- started reading history, it go -- just confirmed what I have already experienced, that this was not a war like any other war. That I knew Napoleonic wars and Franco -- the German war and this war and that war, that -- those were wars that th -- the Crimean war -- this war

was nothing like it and of course the -- having confirmed it by studies, further studies, it -- it just reinforced by so many more ho-horrendous details of things that I really didn't know. History f -- the -- that I got -- the history of the second war, that I got out of books, really built on my own understanding. So it sort of rounded it out and I came away with -- precisely with the same concept as I had originally, before I read all the books and filled in the gaps, you see.

Q: Now, amidst all of this personal growth, expansion of -- of knowledge -- being busy all the time, did you ever allow yourself to mourn for your parents, for those who have gone, or did you make a point of -- of not doing that?

A: Well, I didn't mourn very inwardly, and of course --

Q: You were still very young.

A: Yes. First of all, we observe the Yourtside. This is -- Yourtside is the -- you know, the commemoration of the people who passed on on the day when they passed on. Obviously I could not have a date for the -- for the -- for the mourning -- official mourning. But I did join the group of people from Starachowice who were in New York. And they established a Yourtside service and a -- a gathering of all the people from the hometown. Why? Because -- I think it was in Israel that a day was picked for a Yourtside for all the people from Starachowice, to be observed on the same day, meaning the day when the town was cleared of Jews. And before -- because my father died in Auschwitz, sometimes in October, two years after my mother died with the owseedum -- with the -- when the town was liquidated, we decided that -- I decided -- everybody else decided that we still

stick to this date, that's October 27th. So I light a candle all the time on October 27th and we have annual gatherings of that Starachowice society. So we get together and prayers are said and in those days the group was much larger, I don't have to tell you. Kris and Miles, when they were in New York, they would go and prayers were said and then the morning prayers were said and then there was coffee and cake and so on, a little socializing. So we did that once a year. And so that was the official mourning, but of course, I missed my parents a whole lot. But you know, I was thinking about it. If I were still in Poland, I probably would have missed them much more because they were -- they fit into the -- into the setting. Here, I was sort of on my own, you know? I had Kris and Miles, of course, but after they moved away, I was really on my own and I knew that I absolutely cannot depend on having my mother help me out or my father help me out, you see? I always missed them, you know, I always missed them. I grieved for the fact that there was no cemetery that I could go to. That bothered me and it bothers me to this day. That I had -- if I had a place where I knew they were, I would -- of course in those days, I couldn't take trips, but eventually I would get to that place. But mother went to Treblinka and father perished in Auschwitz, so where is the place? There is no place. And the fact that we do observe October 27th -- I do, to this day, as the mourning for -- for my parents and for my hometown. And you know, here and there, we -- I donated money in Israel to have the -- my parents name inscribed on a monument in the cem -- Jewish cemetery. Also in Canada, my sister showed me when we were in Canada just last year -- and she showed me on the Jewish cemetery, there is a monument with names inscribed of

the Holocaust victims who perished in the Holocaust. And this was done by the survivors, so my parents names [indecipherable]. I'm just very glad about that. So we have the name in Toronto -- my parent's name on the -- on the monument, and also in Israel. So that is -- that I feel good about. And the fact, of course that the observance -- that we observe, with the -- with the commun -- the survivor's community, of whom there's -- as you know, the ranks are thinning, so --

Q: Before I go to the next period of your life, which will be Indiana, of all places --

A: Yes?

Q: I would just like to ask you a quick, personal follow up on this one, because it just occurred to me that at that time, you seemed to feel quite strong and that you really wanted to move ahead. Did you allow yourself moments of weakness, or of rage even? Did you feel --

A: Rage? Probably not. I am, by nature, very optimistic and I'm sort of serious, but I -- rage? No, that's not an expression of -- no. Things are more internalized with me, so that if anything, I grieved, you know, I think a lot. I think a lot, I mean, I probably, if I had a -- if I had a terrific problem, I would probably have sleepless nights, because my head would be running and running and running. But that -- whenever -- I wouldn't go break a chair or hit somebody or -- or curse. I -- it's just in -- not in -- it's not my make-up, so to say. I always wonder if that could be because I was the youngest and I was always spoiled, so I sort of -- you know, I was sort of singled out by my parents and oh, you're

so good and you're so this, so may -- maybe that stayed with me. I don't know, I can't say, but I'll tell you no, rage is -- rage at what was? No.

Q: Well, maybe rage is not a good word, I guess. Let me rephrase this.

A: Yes.

Q: What I also meant was -- did you ever feel -- it's -- did you feel f -- that you wanted -- with regard to Germans, vengeance -- feelings of vengeance or --

A: No, no, no.

Q: Or anger?

A: Yes anger, but you know, vengeance -- first of all, vengeance doesn't accomplish anything. What was done was done and what you do now, as a vengeful act, does not undo what was done. So that's -- that's a fact. Second is that if you are analytical and you really follow the thread, you -- in my case, I could never accept the fact that what happened was going to determine the entire course of my life, which I haven't lived yet. So, you see, I -- probably that was a kind of a determination, not that I didn't have nightmares and -- and sleepless nights and all kinds of physical the -- th -- manifestations of an inner conflict. But on the outside, I most certainly did not dwell on any vengeance. I just felt that the Germans will probably eventually come around to understanding in their own way, what a horrible, horrible thing they did, that was unprecedented, that was unimaginable, that was beyond and -- above and beyond the human un -- human understanding, you know, that -- because, as I was saying before, this wasn't a war like the other wars, like the Crimean war, like this war, there -- where there was shooting

between soldiers and there was armistice and the war was over. This was something that I was not going to allow to destroy my life, because my parents were -- my home was destroyed, my parents were killed, we were lucky enough to survive. And -- and there was life to be lived and -- and I wasn't going to worry about the Germans -- what was I going to take a gun and go to Germany and shoot somebody? On the other hand, what was I going to do, sit home and brood and -- and ruin my life and get more nightmares and more -- I couldn't do that either. So thinking very logically and realistically, I imagined this is the conclusion I reached. And the fact that I really was very busy. I was very busy, so that I rather took it as an excuse, you know, I'll think about it tomorrow. Not about my parents, but about the whole idea. And, as I told you before, that when I finally got the -- the book knowledge about the war and put it all together, it did not change my original understanding, which was personal and on a lower level. It just enhanced it. But my conclusion concerning the Germans was still the same. I wasn't going to get a gun and shoot them. I wasn't going to get myself sick, just immobilized by -- by the kind of fear I used to experience every single day of my life. I haven't lived yet. I wanted book knowledge, I wanted to have fun. I wanted to be a girl and go dancing and do things and I wasn't going to allow that to f -- to -- to -- to -- to get in my way. And that -- that is really how it was and -- and -- I -- I was grateful that my personality was such that it allowed me -- not to forget it, you don't ever forget it. You don't -- you don't forget anything, especially I don't forget anything. I mean, I have everything under a zipper in the back of the head. I have all kinds of things stored in there, but that doesn't

mean that I need to go around and curse God for what happened. Shoot the Germans for what happened. It already happened, so --

Q: Well, let's go to Indiana -- Bloomington then.

A: Okay.

Q: It was kind of an interesting situation, because the cold war era sort of came along --

A: Yes.

Q: You did say in the first interview that you were quite affected by McCarthyism --

A: Yes.

Q: -- because it just didn't seem -- after your own experience, especially --

A: Yes.

Q: -- you know, the right thing. But at the same time, you were going to Bloomington to teach Polish -- Polnish?

A: Yes, Polish.

Q: To people who were s -- going behind the Iron Curtain or just --

A: Right.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Air Force officers, right.

Q: Yes, so I would like to talk a little bit more about the -- the overall --

A: Yes.

Q: -- situation you found yourself in. And sort of -- questions that are hopping a little bit --

A: All right.

Q: -- all over the place, but -- but bear with me then. You did say, first of all, that you were asked in the first questionnaire whether you would be willing to room with a black girl?

A: Right.

Q: And that you found that quite shocking.

A: Right.

Q: Did you room?

A: No, I didn't, because I was assi -- I told -- I told them assign me however -- wherever there is a vacancy. The fact is, I did not come in September, I came in October, by which time the school was already -- you -- everything was settled and I told them wherever there is a vacancy and you can place me there, please do. Of course, the way it turned out was that they -- had I had a black girl, I would have thanked God, because the one that I had was the messiest girl ever, that I ever, ever, ever lived with. And it was so horrendous that she used to have papers on the floor and you couldn't enter the room. So, I always said, "For heaven sakes, why didn't they give me a black girl?" And of course, I couldn't live with her any more than one semester -- through the end of that semester and then I requested a private room, because I couldn't take it. I had all that work to do, the library closed at 11. I never, ever -- we had curfew in the dormitory, so I could only be in the library to 11, but I couldn't work -- you know, I couldn't work in the house, because I just couldn't be in that -- in that -- it was a tiny room, with -- you know, but she was on

the upper bunk, I was on the lower, you know, bunk beds? And the piles of dirty laundry, of clean laundry. I mean it was horrendous. She was a girl from Gary, Indiana. We got along very well, because we were sort of cordial, but I -- I absolute -- I mean, anyhows, to answer your question, I took what I was assigned, because that was October and it was, you know, the school was on already. The first part of your -- oh, yeah, of the McCarthy era. Yes?

Q: Maybe we can sort of --

A: Yes --

Q: -- come back to that later, because I do want to ask you to -- they also asked you what your religion was?

A: Right.

Q: Did you -- you too -- you -- you -- you said Jewish?

A: Yes.

Q: And the follow-up question would be, did you feel any particular responses among your students then, to you, as a -- as a Jewish person, or --

A: My students?

Q: No, not -- did they know?

A: No, no. First of all, the housing was -- religion was import -- in the housing, for the housing application. Those were the two questions asked on the housing application, not the school application. Whether I would room with a black girl and whether I was Jew -- what was my religion? Apparently they did not mean it the way I took it, because they

meant, if you're Catholic, maybe you'd like to be with a Catholic girl, go together to mass. Or if you're Jewish, you might want to observe Yom Kippur when the others -- that was a very innocent question, but -- you see, in those days I was drunk on American democracy. You see, I felt that everything here was -- not that it was permissible, but all those restrictions, all those qualifications, are you this or are you this or were you -- is your father Jewish, or -- that all that didn't apply here, you see, so my shock was based more on my misunderstanding of their -- of their real purpose. They wanted you to be compatible with the person that you were going to be with. I took it on the other hand as an expression of something from the past, where I always had to say that I was Jewish, where I always -- you see? Where everybody was differentiated, you were Jewish so you were this and this was a Catholic and there was the other thing, so that it shows you that once in America, I -- I probably -- this -- this idea of democracy probably wasn't yet formulated will enough for me to understand that this was not a very personal question.

Q: This is the end of tape one, side B and I think it's the garbage truck in the back.

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning Tape Seven, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Regina Gelb. This is tape number two, side A and we are still in Indiana. You mentioned in your earlier interview, that you could, in -- in your own teaching process, you could choose any conversational topic that you wanted to. Is there an example? Did you pick anything --

A: Well, let me just tell you this. The program was run by the linguistics department. The students were all Air Force officers. The languages taught were Serbo-Croatian, there was Polish, there was Russian. If I remember, Ukrainian possibly. Now, we had a syllabus that we followed. We wrote our own textbook, with the head of the linguistics department. And of course grammar was taught, Polish language you know, has declensions and conjugations, so there's plenty of grammar to learn, much more than there is in the English language. But in order to make it more accessible to these people, who were after all going to be stationed in a foreign country, where they would have to go and buy a container of milk and then be on a bus and overhear a conversation of people who are talking about wheat and baking bread, or whatever. Therefore, the conversation slot, that unit of time that was devoted to conversation, was to be as if you -- from the teachers -- instructor's viewpoint, meaning myself, as if I was talking to somebody n -- to another native, on any subject. Of course, I like to make it interesting. As I probably mentioned, or maybe I didn't, I never, ever discussed the war -- the -- they knew I was Jewish, they knew I had a number, I was in Auschwitz, they knew I lost my

parents. They knew th-the general information about me. They knew I came to Indiana solely because I was given this job. And to make the conversations interesting, first of all I had a unit of time specifically designated for conversation and of course, now that I'm a translator, this was the so-called Monterey rec -- Monterey system was -- Monterey, California had a language school and they were just developing this new idea, that learning a language is best to -- to hear the music. You see, language is based on an intonation, so that if you are attuned to the music of the language, you will absorb it faster than learning all the -- the -- the irregular verbs and the -- the -- the what -- whatever. So I was told to pick a subject, to tell them a story. Not in a simple language where I would have to go overboard finding simple. Simply as if I were telling anything to somebody else who is native, after which time, I should just have -- what do you think -- let's say I was talking about a goat that got lost, whatever, something like. What do you think would happen after this was over? What would you think was -- would happen to that goat that got lost on the ro -- in the same pattern of speech which I delivered my little story. And they had to answer me, however ridiculous the answer was -- in their own way, for me to judge how much understanding of native -- of the native speech pattern they had. And that was very interesting because I was free to pick subjects, you know, so if it was something interesting that came up in school, I told them about that. If there was something -- of course they knew that I was engaged to Victor and Victor was in -- in the -- in uniform and he used to come and visit me, so one day I told him a -- told them about Victor and I wanted to double check whether they remember -- and they, you

know, so that was -- that was also a way of -- I had to report, you know, to the department there -- the absorption level of the language. And I was told later -- of course I'm in touch with these people, they're very nice people, especially one of them, through years and years, we visit, we write. Anyhow, I was told that those were very good, fun things to do. Because basically, that's what they had to do, they had to go behind the Iron Curtain and they had to be -- they were charge d'affairs for this and all kinds of other things. And they had to deal with natives. And I apparently had yet, the natives music in the -- in -- in the -- in the speech, so that that was worthwhile and I thought that was a very good part of the -- of the program. Of course, that wasn't my idea, you know, that was all included in the syllabus and decided by the linguistics department, because this was done for all these other languages, you see, that were taught.

Q: But -- but speaking of native, you were a native of -- Poland was your birth country?

A: Yes.

Q: And at that time, it was becoming, because it was the Cold War era, sort of stereotyped many times. Did that reflect in any way back on you? Talking now not about the people you taught, but about the other people you might --

A: You -- you mean stereotyped during the Cold War?

Q: -- as a -- you'd be, as -- as a -- as a Polish?

A: Stereotyped during the Cold War?

Q: Yeah.

A: Well, not among the people that I came across with. First of all, you know, Poland was never incorporated into Russia. They were a satellite country during the 50 years of Russian regime. The Poles were fiercely opposed -- by then I als -- also knew history, you see? They were fiercely opposed to the Russian government for years and years and there was no such thing as Poland being willingly in the satellite orbit. The people that I -- I live and de-dealt with -- I never came across an expression that the Poles are Communists. You see, because basically they were not. The Poles were basically, fiercely independent and they expected to be liberated, period, after the second war. But they were not liberated, and that is -- of course it's all historical, convoluted chain of events, between Yalta and --and Stalin being who he was and -- and the Yalta agreement actually enslaved Poland for 50 years, but that's another story. The -- the point is that the people that I knew never, ever held it against me that I repre -- I was representing some -- that this was a Cold War and I was representing any kind of Communist type of thing, because basically, i-if I may just venture a guess, the reason that the American government was interested in sending people in there, was to really determine, are they turning Communist or are they staying quietly, but -- but fighting it? And this is exactly how it really was. And I -- I even knew it much later, when Victor and I went in 1980, when we went to Poland and I had friends and I was visiting. So one friend told me, "Don't speak in the hotel room to your husband, about anything." I said, "What do we think -- what do we wa -- what are going to --" She says, "Don't do it. There are microphones in the walls there. Don't speak to your friends, don't speak in the taxis,

don't speak --" I mean, they put the fear of God in me, because what I knew and I was in Indiana was still true in 1980, before Solidarity, you see, that there was all pervasive Communist -- well, what would you call it, a -- the -- the Communist grip on Poland was very strong, but underneath, it wasn't, you see? This is how the warnings came. And -- and I knew that when I was in Indiana, because the Cold War was -- this wasn't just the 50's, so the war wasn't over even 10 years yet, you see. And -- and there was still hope maybe Poland would sneak out from under, but of course it never did and then Czechoslovakia and all, so basically that was not at -- or -- an issue, ever. Not from people who I dealt with, not from people whom I met and referred to me as Polish native, or whatever. Never, never.

Q: You were intoxicated by American democracy --

A: Yes.

Q: -- at one time, in your own words. But did you also become aware of some particular, peculiar American prejudices maybe, for the first time, or --

A: Well, I, for example, did not realize that the blacks were oppressed in this country. I really didn't know it, I must admit. I knew that they were slaves at one time, that they came on ships from Africa. I knew that they were freed by Lincoln. And I knew that there was still discrimination in the south, because I knew that there was such a thing as bathrooms for blacks or whites, separately -- public bathrooms. And water fountains, public water fountains, but no, I -- I really didn't see it, or maybe I didn't want to see it or maybe -- you see, I just didn't know enough of -- of America in that sense, because I was

still circulating in another sphere, so to say. I was still in the academic world, you see? And I had no access, truly. I heard that there was an incident in Indiana once, but I -- wi- with a person in my class, that we experienced discrimination in the restaurant, but I -- I just didn't feel that that was America, you know? I had an idea of America, ideal America. So I -- even if I did see a -- a little expression of something or other, I didn't take it as the expression of -- of America as I wanted to see it -- as I saw it. In fact, I saw it that way, because that's how I saw reality in those days.

Q: You did give a -- a good impression of what -- or you have started to give a very li- lively impression, I think, of what America meant for you, but could you be -- maybe just give one more example of what you meant with the ideals of America? What was -- was it -- what -- how was it different from being Polish?

A: No, it wasn't different from being Polish, it was different from where I came from. And that includes my war experiences in Germany and everything else, you see? Being Polish is something else. It's very much connected to my childhood and to very wonderful life with my parents and my family. That is what I mean by being Polish. But being European is what I was, really. Being European in the sense that I felt the brunt of German culture and I experienced the bestiality. So that was now part and parcel of Europe for me. And, though I know it wasn't, but it was, because that was my personal life. So when I came here, and I told you I found out all these things, that you are free to read the paper and you are free to express yourself and you can get up and disagree with your teacher in the classroom and all these things that you could do that were absolutely -

- that they had no repercussions. That they were -- you weren't going to be shot or killed or sent in the prison, or whatever. That was -- it's a -- like a -- like an explosion of the mind, to me. It was not directly connected to my being Polish. It was connected to my overall background -- European background until I came here.

Q: Now we will be jumping ahead again, for quite a few years, I think, or quite a few years. You had a family, you were having a family now at this point that we are jumping to. And I do remember that you very vividly expressed sort of dislike for the counter-culture of the 60's.

A: Yes, I did.

Q: And there was some concern with regard -- were you concerned that your -- that your own children might go in a similar direction and if so, how did you teach them limits? How do you teach, how di -- did you try to counteract that?

A: Yes, okay, let me start from the general and come to the specific. I came out of Europe from chaos. From everything being turned upside-down, from everything being torn up for an idea that the Germans had of -- of -- the hedanfolk and -- and all that. And I came to America, I was intoxicated with this idea that this can never happen here. And all of a sudden, in the 60's, not that it in any way compared to Nazi Germany's planned and -- and organized -- and -- and -- and -- and specified the -- horrible deeds. This was all -- this was all in flux, but I suspected that the culture, as I have come to understand it, was being torn apart by this kind of an expression, which I took to be the other extreme, you see? Whereas the first extreme was the organization -- no, perfection of the Nazis, here

you had a total disruption of everything, without a central idea, nevertheless, disrupting. You asked me how I did wi -- how the children -- yeah. I have -- since my husband was working and I was sort of call -- the mother at home, I had the idea that I wanted my children to have self-discipline, and I stuck to it. Wi -- They knew they were loved, they knew they were -- they weren't indulged to a point, but everything was very logical. In other words, if I said to a child, "You know, you have to put on your shoes, these shoes today, because the radio said it's going to be stormy later." Whatever quote unquote order I gave the child, there was always, immediately, why. I always explained why you need to do it, why you must do it. You went to a restaurant, there are other people there, you cannot be disruptive, you cannot be loud, you cannot be in and in and under the table. We went to a hotel -- French hotel in the Catskills. People used to get dressed for dinner. The children had to be dressed for dinner, with their little bow tie. They knew it. Came dinner time, they had to be dressed, that was it. Otherwise we don't go there. If you want to go there, you like it there? Yes, I do. Well, if you do, then you have to do what is expected of you. And I wasn't shy about punishing. And I punished the child if he disobeyed and the consequences were bad. I would take away the bicycle for a week, you can't ride the bicycle for a week, you see? You were supposed to do other -- something or other, that was canceled. So that eventually the discipline -- our younger son Paul always tells me, cause he's a free spirit, he says, "You know, that was really very good." Also the fact that the homework, when they were submitting homework, the -- public school. I would tear up the homework if I thought it was messy. You know, it was a

homework assignment, a page and a half, so he -- 10 o'clock at night he scribbles out the homework and it looks like a dog wrote it. So I would say no, I was a teacher once, too. I would not accept homework looked like that. Even if it was the best homework in the world, the smartest, you don't hand in anything that looks so sloppy. Was torn up, he had to write it again. And there was always the reason, you see? There was always a reason for doing things. It wasn't the imperial, "I said so." It sounded imperial to the child, but he had no -- and because I was with the children most of the time, what I said, went. And the fact is that they had many, many friends and they went to school next door, so every child was allowed to bring a friend for lunch. And I had assignments, Wednesday was Melanie and Tuesday was Willy Popper and everyb -- you know, so there were -- the house was always open to friends, always. And that -- I told you, by appointment, every Wednesday belonged to another kid that they brought from school. Black kids, white kids, Jewish kids, any kids that they chose to bring. So they never felt deprived of something that they wanted to do. They knew that we are there and they knew that we are very reasonable. You see, that we don't order things without a basis for ordering it. And to this day, my older son, who now has children, you know, he disciplines the older -- the boy -- the older boy, the nine year old. And apparently something stayed with him, because I do believe in self-discipline. I believe that you know you have to discipline your mind to -- to -- for it to find the expression in your daily living. You know, if you have to do homework, you have to do it. If it's already too late, you still have to do it. You have to do it, you have to be on the job at nine o'clock. Can't be there five after

nine, you know? If somebody expects you to do something, it has to be done. This is self-discipline and the parent isn't around forever to tell you so. If it's ingrained, it stays.

Q: Your husband just walked in --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- which gives me the -- the key for the next question. Was good timing on his part, actually.

A: Yes.

Q: Victor, you husband, we didn't talk very much about him last time.

A: Yes.

Q: How did you meet -- who is -- who is -- what did you talk about? Did -- how did he learn about your past?

A: Yeah.

Q: Your war experience? [inaudible]

A: Well -- well, we met in a very casual way, that there was most -- most ordinary way. I used to live, as I told you, when Kris and Miles moves aw -- to Jersey, I used to live with different families and then I lived with another family in Brooklyn, in Brighton Beach and the person -- th-th-th -- it's a friend, my fr -- sh-she was our friend from Poland, she was there and her father and I lived with her and her father. She went to Brooklyn College at night for courses, psychology, this and the other thing. And she had a friend who was a secretary to Victor's father. Victor's family had a textile business. So one day, the secretary in the office told Victor that she is going to Brooklyn College to see -- he

graduated from Brooklyn College, but way before. He graduated in 1949, when I was first graduating from high school. Anyhow, so she said, there is this fantastic course she is taking and they are going to show a certain film, if he wants to go. So he went with her, he drove her to Brooklyn College and after the film was shown, where this friend of mine was, Victor drove both ladies home. So he first dropped off this one woman, Cecile and then he came to drop off Fella. And Fella said to him, "Why don't you come in and say hello? I have -- my father is there, I have a friend living with us." So he came in and there I was. I didn't look for him, I didn't chase him. He was -- I was there and he walked in. And so we got to know each other. And I used to have a lot of friends, male friends, boy friends. I used to love dancing, so I used to go dancing with one boyfriend. I had all kinds, really. I had a -- a rogue's gallery album full of these guys. And then Victor walked in and then he lived not very far from that. So, every now and then we used to meet. We went to a -- to the opera, we went to -- his family had a subscription to the Metropolitan, so we -- we had tickets. Anyhow, we -- we did a lot of cultural things, we went out to dinner and -- he knew about me, I mean as much as -- as he want -- as -- again, like the way it happened with the children. I told him some and I told him, if you're interested in anything else, tell me and I'll tell you. I -- not going to sit here, bore you about things that -- if you want to know, I'll tell you anything. Well, this is how it happened. And then he was drafted in 1950, in the Korean war, he was drafted and went to -- upstate to Watertown. And that same year I went to Indiana. So he started coming -- we used to meet in New York. He started coming there or we would meet in New York

and then we got engaged and when I graduated, he came for the graduation and then we got married, in New York. Of course we came back to New York to get married.

Q: How did you feel -- just mentioned that he was in the Korean war. How did you feel about that war and about Victor being in it?

A: I was really -- I mean -- as far for -- I was worried about him, of course, but I just couldn't understand, in those days, I just -- because, you know, this is 1950, this is only five years, five short years. Of course now war has this other connotation in my mind, you see? I said, "For heaven sakes, there is another war and nothing has been learned? Nothing? It's --" I -- of course I didn't understand about the war, anyhow. But I -- I absolutely did not understand the war, Korean War, I didn't understand. Of course, Korean War now, as I know it, was really the -- a -- a piece of the larger picture of the Cold War. But in those days, I absolutely didn't understand it. But I -- I worried about him an -- a whole lot, I really did. But finally, he had a very good assignment, he's such a precise man and he's so good at thing that are -- that require organization and precision, that the -- he was placed in the headquarters in the Camp Drum, that's upstate New York in Watertown. And every time a sh -- and -- and of course the -- his boss was a general and the general loved to play golf. Once he found Victor, he could go play golf all day long and Victor would -- everything would be perfect. So, whenever there was a -- because this was a transitional camp for -- for -- before people were sent to -- to -- to Korea. So actually what happened is this, Victor was drafted and he went to -- in Massachusetts, what was the name of the camp? It will come to me. He came for basic --

went for basic training and after that he was sent to Camp Drum. And once he got settled in that headquarters, where he was the secretary to this general, the general didn't want to get rid of him, because he needed him to play golf. So Victor was sitting in the office and for that he was never shipped up. As a matter of fact, whenever he requested a three day pass to come to Indiana, he got it too. So, if I came home for Christmas to New York, he requested a pass, and he got it, to come to New York, you see? So, that was very, very lucky, but the overall picture of -- of the Cold War and Korea, as it was in -- evolving, was so far -- no, it wasn't foreign to me, but it was a -- I just could not comprehend it.

Q: Did Victor feel slightly different about it?

A: About the Korean War? I don't know how he felt about the Korean war, except for the fact that he was drafted and he had to go and he -- he was sort of brought up in a well-to-do family and he never experienced anything like the six weeks of basic training. What was the name of the camp in Massachusetts? Whatever. So, after that, he came back, he was hard like -- you know, hardened by the push-ups and by all that stuff. And in those days, American boys still -- still felt very -- this was before the 60's -- strongly about doing for the country that was asked of them. Well, he was drafted -- he didn't ask for it, he was drafted, he was taken in. He put in his two years. He discharged at honorable discharge. So that's how it was and that was not questioned in the 50's, such things. I can't imagine that he would ever try to wiggle out of it, because he probably have -- never would think of it. This is how it was and he did it. He was just lucky, knock wood,

that because he is so efficient in an office setting, that the guy knew whom he had, him, and Victor, by virtue of that was -- wa -- never went to Korea.

Q: What was your actual wedding like? You mentioned it, but --

A: It was very private, just his family and Kris and Miles and their little daughter. That was it. And we were married in the rabbi's study. The ra -- the family rabbi. His father was quite ill, in fact his father died the same year that -- we were married in March, he -- the father died in November. The father was after seven strokes and it was just even questionable if he was going to make it to the wedding, but he did. It was -- the marriage was in the rabbi's study in Brooklyn. They were supporters of the Temple there and everything, so the rabbi accommodated us. And then we went out to dinner in a restaurant and that was it. It had to be very low key for hi -- for his father's sake, but it was also very low key by -- I would have pre -- I -- I preferred it that way, you know. I never would think of having a big mar -- wedding for myself, never, ever.

Q: Why not?

A: I don't like to be the center of attraction, that's number one. Number two, not having my parents, I didn't think that I was going to feel good about being married. But the way it turned out, tha -- this didn't even come up. Because the question was, how to have a wedding where the father -- Victor's father can still make it. Well, he made it and that was the best -- was very beautiful in that rabbi's study. You know, we had the [indecipherable] there in the -- it's beautiful, book lined study with oriental carpets. Was lovely, lovely and the family -- immediate family. And that was just the way I felt

comfortable about, because without my parents, I did not think I really would ever want to be a big -- in a big wedding. And for me that wasn't -- it's not my bag to place myself at the center. I don't like that, so --

Q: Eventually you went back to Poland?

A: Yes.

Q: Twice, actually?

A: Yes.

Q: And I would like to ask you about the first time, how did you feel? How did it feel going back there?

A: Well, I'll tell you frankly, before we went, I was scared. I was very scared. I did a lot of reading, of course I always do before I go on a trip, I read this and I read that, because we ha -- I -- I didn't want to take Victor to Poland -- this was my trip with Victor, to burden him with -- to go and cry in Treblinka and the Holocaust and the -- and Auschwitz, I didn't want to do that. I wanted to make it a two prong thing. One part would be that and going back to my hometown to see the very lovely Christian people who were my parents friends and who really were instrumental in -- in pulling us through the war, survive it -- helping in the surviving. And so we organized -- in fact I went to a Polish travel agency here, rather than American travel -- we went on our own, you know, not with any group or anything. And I thought Victor ought to be exposed to Polish culture a little, because I'm so -- you know, I -- I have it in my blood and -- and I -- I'm still very much attached to Polish music, Polish literature and such, so I felt this is part of

my life that he's not part of at all. I mean, he hears me speak Polish, h-he doesn't know what it is about, but at least if he went with me so he would have a connection to where I come from, even though he's by now half-Polish in the sense, because he's been exposed -- he goes with me to all these sympo -- the symposium here and a concert there and the -- and the Polish theater, there he goes and he loves it. But in those days -- now, this was 1980, we were already -- 1980 we were already married many years, because we got married in '53. I still did not want to make it a crying kind of experience. However, I really feared for myself. I really, truly was scared the first time. I just didn't know how I was going to react, because my memories were -- I -- I -- I felt maybe my childhood memories all gone and what I will just remember is the horrible, not the good. But it didn't turn out that way at all. I had no need to worry. I had everything arranged through a Polish travel agent, exactly the type of itinerary that I wanted to have and it so happened that once we got there, since I peak -- speak Polish, was very easy to have a taxi driver take us to our -- to my hometown and do all these other things, plus go on a to -- take tours, you see? So that th -- the experience was wonderful. We do -- did go to Auschwitz, it was a very painful thing for me because -- well, we were part of a tour, so it wasn't very personal, you know? We were there with eight other people, or -- no, there were eight all of -- the total was eight. We -- we took that bus from Warsaw to Kraków. We stayed in a Kraków hotel, this was a group, see? And when we went to Auschwitz, this tour guide -- we were the only two Jewish people, they took us to all these places, except to Birkenau, where I was. You see, I was in Birkenau in the camp, in -- in the

barracks. And she cracked some anti-Semitic jokes on the bus. You know, she was joking. And I did not feel that that was tailored to me. This was tailored, this [indecipherable] in fact, just before we left, I said, "I understand --" we were done with the visit. We went to see where Father Colba died and all this. And of course -- so I went out in a tower to see where the barracks were, but I never went into the barracks. So then we were ready to leave, I said, "I understand there's a Jewish museum here." She says, "Oh, yes, there is." I say, "Aren't we going in there?" She says, "No. If you asked, we would have gone." I said, "Well, I'm asking." So she took us to that Jewish museum and there was Anne Frank and all the other and there was a book, so I signed the book and I -- and I said that my father perished there, that I survived. I wrote it in -- I think I wrote it in Polish and English. So that was not a very satisfactory experience. We did see a film before we went, you know, the -- you come, so this was an -- because this was an English speaking tour, so we saw the film. The film gave me more than the tour itself. Course later on I made up for it, but we're talking now with Victor, 1980. And a much more rewarding feeling was when we came to my hometown, because the old ladies were there and they prepared lunch for us and there was no -- there was such poverty there and there was no -- there was no meat to by had for anything, why they needed meat I don't know, but anyhow, she stayed at the -- one of these old ladies stood in line seven hours to get a piece of meat to make pirogue for us when we came. And of course I brought them stuff. I brought a whole suitcase there, you know, which I emptied. Full -- filled suitcase and they stilled lived in the house that was -- had a crack from the bombs. Anyhow, we left

them money, so subsequently she moved to a better apartment. Was a very touching experience because they saw Victor and I -- I was like a -- suppose like a Ping-Pong because they spoke and I told Victor and he told me and -- and there was a granddaughter that I got to know that was -- she was lovely and she helped us and I -- so we had lunch there and the taxi driver who -- who brought us, I told him -- we gave him some money to go have lunch, because I wasn't going to invite him with us, this was such a personal meeting. And then of course we visited the town, which was totally different. The camp one -- I already mentioned that one camp didn't exist any more, it was just built up new development. The other is now a shooting range, so that was very touching. The railroad -- Victor saw a beautiful locomotive from the 19th century at the railroad station, so we took a picture of that. He -- you know, and I -- we walked around and I showed him -- that was -- but that wasn't the type of experience that broke me up, you see? I thought Auschwitz would, but because the Auschwitz was such a cold, impersonal thing, it just passed me, you see? The thing that I really fear turned out nothing, because it was so s -- poorly arranged, you see? Whereas the going back to my hometown was really the absolute heart of that trip. And of course, then in the ci -- yeah, w-we did other things, we met other people in the hotels, they came to visit us in -- but that was on another level, that was already on -- on level of 1980, people -- grownups meeting grownups, but that visit to my hometown really did it and of course, as I think I mentioned, we went to the cemetery and we took pictures and -- that -- all this had meaning and it was touching and

it was lovely, but it was not the kind that broke me. It did not break me and Auschwitz couldn't break me, because it was too cold and too impersonal.

Q: We will continue a little bit with that.

A: Okay.

Q: I just need to finish this side now. This is the end of tape two, side A.

End of Tape Seven, Side A

Beginning of Tape Seven, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Regina Gelb. This it tape number two, side B. And I have two follow-up questions with regard to Poland, and one is, did you feel while you were there, especially in your hometown, did you feel entirely, wholly American, or was there an essence, a core left that was Polish?

A: Well, I tell you, I still feel very Polish, so there is no getting away from that. I still love the language, I love the music and I am very much part of what I was,
so I felt very much at home, on one hand. On the other hand, I did not feel that that -- that Poland that I saw -- and that was Communist Poland, that's another thing, it's very important. At the height of Communism, if -- in fact, that very August that we were in Poland, they started having strikes there. That was the Solidarity movement just started. But when we were there, as I told you, everybody was warning me, don't talk here, don't do this and don't do that and the -- the whole -- the ambiance, the -- the -- the -- the -- the atmosphere was strange. Whether it was because it was Communist or because there were

just no more Jewish people around. Much as I considered myself part of it, I already felt that I was an American with another -- besides, having Victor around, I already -- this is my life, this was -- this was one time and tha -- it's now so different. But, by the same token, all life is different after 50 years. And as I was telling Victor, because we saw my -- part of Starachowice, which was called Wierzbnik, was very dilapidated now, in 1980. So I told him, when I came to America, I went to visit somebody -- Huntspoint Avenue in the South Bronx. A -- a friend I had, and it was a very decent part of the city. If you tell somebody now that this was -- South Bronx was lovely, I mean -- so I told him, this applies to -- to Wierzbnik, this part of Starachowice that was so dilapidated. I said, "If you want to south -- went to South Bronx 50 years later, that -- you have that. You come here and you have this." So the resemblance to things I knew wasn't there physically. The Mioufka camp was gone, was a brand new development. So except -- aside from that Jewish cemetery and the visit with the old ladies, my parents friends, was the only true connection. Other than that, we just went as tourists, we went. I told you, the shopen route and we went to the salt mines and we went to zarcoparna and we went to Chancetahova. We went to see the -- the holy picture, you know, the -- you know the Chancetahova? No, Chancetahova is a very famous Polish monastery that has the Madonna -- the famous Madonna, the black Madonna picture? Okay, I had to see the black Madonna, because I was brought up about that and I knew about it and I -- so since the tr -- group was going there, we went to see the black Madonna. And we went into -- was just before a mass, we were brought in through the room where the priests were

being robed in de -- and we stood right in front, against that -- against that -- the -- it was like a fa -- barrier, you know, and we were the first row of the pilgrims -- that was pilgrimage time, too, there was thousands of people in the church and we saw the black Madonna, so I did that -- which was interesting, because you know, this fitted -- this fit in a vacuum that was in my -- my brain that I was -- I -- I was brought up on this thing, this is the holiest picture in the Christian -- in Christian faith in Poland, is the black Madonna. Now, I've seen the black Madonna, so -- so this was basically the trip with -- with Victor and of course, he got a good feeling of what it was about. But it -- as you could see, it didn't turn out to be scary, as I expected it to be. It was on another level, at another age -- my personal age, with Communism all around, with the -- all places having changed physically, too, so it just wasn't -- it -- it -- anyhow, it was to my benefit, because the way it turned out. The second trip that I took with -- for the Holocaust Museum, that -- for the interpreting, that was a little more personal and much more worse. Well, because we went to Auschwitz and I was at the ba -- in the barrack and the -- and the bunk where I slept and you know, that was all very personal. But by then, since I was already in another capacity as an interpreter, I couldn't allow myself to be breaking down, you know, like when we came to Majdanek, and there was no interpreter, English in -- we were supposed to -- the group was supposed to have an interpreter. So they only had the Polish interpreter, so I stood there and I was the -- I was the interpreter. So I -- I had to process the language and I couldn't -- I could not feel the meaning of the words that I was saying, you see? So that -- but that was much more worthwhile, the second trip. But

still, I have already been through that first hoop of -- of facing up to Poland, so it -- that went -- that wasn't bad.

Q: I would like to tie it together and then have a question, two episodes that were very painful, but resolved themselves in a sense. You mentioned much earlier in this interview, that it was very painful for you to not have a place where you could mourn your parents.

A: Yes.

Q: There was no cemetery, there was no place, really.

A: Right.

Q: Then later in Poland, you saw this cemetery, this Jewish cemetery and it became your mission, in a sense, to --

A: Right.

Q: -- have it restored?

A: Yes.

Q: And it was a painful episode for you that there were op -- reservations?

A: Right.

Q: From the Jewish community --

A: From the --

Q: -- from -- for different --

A: -- the town community.

Q: From the town community?

A: Yes.

Q: But also from American Jewish people you knew here, who -- who weren't that interested in raising money for it?

A: Right.

Q: Yeah. So my question would be, was it so especially painful you -- for you to have that rejection here in America in a sense, because it prevented you from having a conc -- a resolution a little bit of -- of something? Do you know?

A: I'm not sure I understand the question, but I could tell you --

Q: Was it important for you, in a sense, to have that cemetery restored -- to have a place restored, because --

A: Yeah, that was one part, definitely that was one part. But the other part, the predominant part was that having been to Poland twice, to my hometown twice and having found nothing of the old Jewish life in ei-either time, first was 1980, then was 1987, I felt that any way of commemorating the former existence of a Jewish community in Poland was to save that cemetery. There wasn't much left of it, but whatever was left, that that was now a mission, in a sense, because when I was in 1980 and Victor made all those wonderful pictures and I brought them back to the Starachowice Society at the time when I told you, in October, when we meet for the Yourtside? And I was really sort of told off and -- and I didn't want to create waves and I didn't want to make enemies and I sort of never liked to push myself, so I let it slide and I sent the pictures to Israel and nothing came of it and I had correspondence going on, whatever. After I was able to just

register the cemetery in New York, with this other lady, who was -- she happened to have been my -- Polafunk is her name, she was my religion teacher in Poland, she happens to live in New York. She's an elderly lady now. We discussed it, she also was really v-v-very much on the -- on -- on my wavelength, so to say. We're still around and we must do it. If they -- whoever doesn't like it -- the Polish community will not do it. A, they're poor, B, they're not interested, C, they would rather have houses built there than have a Jewish cemetery, because who's here? There's nobody around, nobody will know and such and such. So we did this one thing that we accomplished, we registered the cemetery here in New York, just before the list was closed for the Jewish cemeteries that were going to be given to the Polish government. So we got that done. After that, when they -- I have already spoken about it, when the idea of them -- collecti -- thing the money was -- came -- it was the easiest things, I just didn't call the other people and called those that gave and they gave and money went to Israel, then the man was sent to Poland and things were done and it's done. And it's -- it's easier than -- th-than pie, as they say. Had I known, I would have -- or maybe you know, on the other hand, maybe 1980 people weren't quite ready yet for that. That's -- you know, you really have to be in a special frame of mind to undertake a certain -- a certain obligation. I saw this in 1980 because I saw it with my own eyes. The houses were being built, the cemetery was neglected, it was overgrown, it was -- the -- the -- the monuments were knocked over. The Germans took out a lot of the monuments and they paved streets with it. And I said, "If you allowed what's going on til now, another year or two, there'll be nothing there." This

granddaughter of this -- these old ladies, they -- she came with us to the cemetery. And through her, you see, after I left Poland and I was constant correspondence with her. She went again and then she wrote me a letter, she said -- three years later, she says, "Whatever you and your husband saw, there is less of it now." When I had that letter, I hit the ceiling. And so this, I think, was the final -- the final push that I needed. And I got in touch with Israel and I got in touch with everybody else and I said, "We do it or we'll never have it and let's forget everybody else." So this was a fulfillment, not -- to answer your question, it wasn't only because I had no place to grieve. I have nobody in that cemetery, we never did have anybody there. This was to preserve a token, that this is a token, to preserve a little bit of sacred soil, so to say, to show that there was a vibrant community here at one time and is no more and -- and if it takes money to do it -- to perpetuate it, that could be done. There are a lot of survivors whose children are interested and there's no reason why this cannot be perpetuated, to be -- to have a caretaker and to just keep that little bit of whatever was left. I personally don't even need -- read Yiddish. I couldn't even read the -- the monuments. Victor took close up pictures, I brought it to New York and I asked some people to read the names. But that's not -- that doesn't mean anything. This is a Jewish cemetery and -- so that was the project that really was -- i-it -- it was good for me, personally. You know, however i-it wa -- whatever good it did for others, it was good for me, personally, very fulfilling.

Q: There was some -- there is something else that is very -- or was very -- or is very important for you to talk about, and that has to do with your profession as an translator. You did work about Yannish Korchuk?

A: Yes.

Q: Who was a very important --

A: Yes.

Q: -- impressive figure. Do you want to say a little bit more about that?

A: Yes, well actually, my translation does not have much bearing with the Korchuk -- you see, I -- I used to write and publish articles and such and those are two separate issues, so maybe I will start with the Korchuk, okay? And then with the translation, cause those are separate issues. I was -- and still am, for many years, a member of the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences. It's an academic institution of -- i-it was organized by Polish Jewish -- Polish Christian -- Polish Jewish scholars during the war, when they ran away from Europe. And this was an academic institution and it has always done things that pertain to Polish academic life. And culture, too, but Koschushka Foundation, which is another organization, Polish organization, deals more with the cultural aspect, but the Polish Institute was always part of the academic world. American fit into the academic world, cause a lot of the people there were the professors, professors in American universities. Anyhow, in the early 80's, a dialog was started, a Polish Jewish dialog, you know. There is a Polish Jewish dialog in London, there is one in Chicago. There -- there are Polish Jewish dialogs forever going on everywhere, but not much progress ha -- some

progress has been made, but not as much as it could have. Anyhow, there was an idea arose that because Ko-Korchuk was a humanitarian, who was a great educator, philosopher. He was also, you know, a doctor who organized the famous orphanage, the Jewish orphanage, who had this new idea of child upbringing and he was an assimilated Polish Jew, who also suffered anti-Semitism while he lived in Poland. He was a -- a 19th century man who lived under the Russian occupation. Well, Korchuk was a humanist of men of the highest moral and ethical standards. Of the highest devotion to -- to -- to humanity. And because his considered himself a Polish Jew and a Jewish Pole, it was decided, whoever it was, Polish organizations and Jewish organizations decided to use Korchuk's name as a core, as a central piece of a Polish Jewish dialog. I was nominated from the Polish Institute to become -- to join the group of people who were organizing this dialog. And this was in the nine -- early 1980's, '81, '82, '83, '84. Anyhow, we would meet at the ADL, at the ameri -- Anti-Defamation League. The -- the whole idea was -- because he was also a great writer, he wrote books for children and about children. Books on psychology about children, but fantastic books for children. I -- he also had a radio program and every child -- he used to read books to children. So every child who grew up in the Poland, in the inter war years, would know Korchuk's stories. Anyhow, he was used as a central figure for the dialog. And in a competition -- international book competition was established, where books would be submitted for children -- books written for children, or about children -- two separate categories. And, when the prizes were going to be given out, then it would be a gathering of Polish and Jewish -- Polish

Christian and -- and Jewish Polish group meet and we would have ceremonies and so. I became a what you call reader, because I do book reviews a lot. I ri -- I do book reviews for the American Translators Association and anyhow, since I wrote a lot of book reviews, too. So I became a book reader and I -- because I also worked in the Children's Library here for 11 years, I picked the children's books. So I would have 20 - 25 books to read. And I had an outline, how to mark that. We would submit it, then the judges would decided and then there would be a ceremony. Now I really am very much interested in reading you the names of the organizations which participated. Unfortunately this is now all past tense, because this whole thing fell apart, this whole ca -- dialog. We had it for about four or five years and then it didn't terminate, it petered out. There was never an official notice, we no longer do it, we -- whatever. All of a sudden -- I didn't get a notice, there will be a fo -- there will be -- I was never notified that they're going to send me a boo -- box of books. I never heard from anybody, nobody ever heard from anybody and the thing just thinned out into the air. So I thought if I read you some of this -- these participating groups, which was a mixture of Polish Christian and Polish Jewish. So there were the anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith, the American Council of Polish Cultural Clubs, the American Federation of Jewish Fighters, Camp inmates and Nazi victims, Federation of Polish Jews in the United States Holocaust Library. The Koschushka Foundation, which I told you before is a cultural Polish organization. The North American Study Center for Polish Affair, also called Studium. The Polish American Congress, that's -- they -- their -- their home office is in Chicago. The Polish Institute of

Arts and Sciences of America. That's this organization that I was a member from. Polish Judiciary Organization. Vargro, which is the Warsaw Ghetto Resistance Organization and the World Federation of Bergen-Belden -- Belgen Associations. In addition to which there was also the head publisher and chief editor of the Polish Noveegenyeek, which is a very substantial, very high level Polish language newspaper in New York. His name is Bola [indecipherable]. He was also part of it as a member of the institute, not as a representative from his paper. He cannot be a newspaperman and be listed, yeah. Well anyhow, this, as you could see, was a very well integrated type of a group. People on very high level of -- of achievement -- organizations and such. One of -- we met -- a few of these award ceremonies took place in [indecipherable] here in New York. One took place in Washington, I remember traveling -- in the Kennedy Center. One wa -- had the Cheswafmeewash, the Polish Nobel Prize winning poet, as keynote speaker. Once they had Governor Keene from New York -- from New Jersey, a -- he was the governor then, a keynote speaker. They had very interesting keynote speakers -- was lovely get together, the prizes were handed out. First prize I think was thousand dollars, second prize -- and there were two separate categories, as I told you. One was books for children, one was books about children. And the books actually were submitted internationally. That means, the books from Israel, from Poland, from England, from France, from the United States and of course the judges picked -- had -- they picked the first, second and third prize in both categories and this was sort of a -- like a very good quote unquote excuse. It wasn't an excuse, but it was a very good -- th-the joining point, to -- to have something

like this go on and much as these -- this group was in agreement that Korchuk personified the very essence of what humanitarian d-deeds should be about, as much as he personified the Pole and the Jew, all one, as -- as the humanist, you see? As the -- as the person of -- of the highest ethical standard. He personified humanity, so he had to personify Polish Christians and Polish Jews all at once and because he was assimilated and he was a man of both worlds, you see? Both the Christian and the Jewish. He was not of the religious type of Jews, he -- they were -- there was an assimilated family. His father I think was a lawyer and his grandfather was a doctor or som -- he himself was a pediatrician, by training. So, you see, this had such great possibilities. And this had such very major aspects of reconciliation built into it. Because he was that thing that we were trying here to build up. We already started with a model, you know? Not a role model, with a model of what we are after. And it somehow -- it fell by the wayside. It just -- I don't know if I mentioned it, I had open heart surgery in 1989, so after that my ho -- personal situation change, I stop -- I stopped publishing and I stopped accepting invitations to do this and join that, because you know, I had to slow down physically. And now of course I -- I am much better than I was in the first few years, but I still am not of the same -- on the same physical level that I was before the operation, so that it petered out just about the time I got sick. And I wasn't going to be bothered, because I was too much involved with -- then two years later I found out that it -- it isn't that they didn't notify me, they just didn't -- they just -- it just fell apart, so -- but there are other dialogs, you know, going on, Polish Jewish dialogs that are going on. There is a very fine

group in London and there's one very good -- good group in Chicago. At this point we have nothing here and I don't know if -- it's a very thorny problem, because there's two steps forward, one step back. And there's a lot of animosity and misunderstanding and there shouldn't be. Absolutely should not be, and --

Q: I meant to ask you something else first, but in a sense you have prepared the grounds for something that I wanted to ask you later, but let me ask it now then. The -- some of the key words were con -- reconciliation, that is very important to you? And thorny issues --

A: Yes.

Q: -- that's another. There are some -- what one might call hot button issues.

A: Yes.

Q: Or divisive issues --

A: Right.

Q: -- in the Jewish American community, but also in -- among survivors.

A: Right.

Q: I think maybe we can talk just briefly --

A: All right.

Q: -- about -- about a few of those. The Arafat visit --

A: Yes.

Q: -- earlier this year, turned out to be very difficult in many ways, of course, but also the incident with the invitation, it was at first given and then withdrawn and then given

again from the Holocaust Museum in Washington. How do you -- how do you feel about that?

A: Well, I don't know what the reasons were for what happened. From my personal viewpoint, if I were to decide, I would welcome him. Because you cannot resolve issues if you are not willing to talk to your en -- to your enemies. You don't have to talk to your friends, because you know that they are on your side. But you do have to talk to your enemies. And there are always viewpoints that are wide spread -- spread very -- very far apart. But, bringing them closer, you don't have to attempt to bring them together the first time or the second time, but you have to allow time for a reconciliation which finalizes a point that is mutually acceptable to two sides. Therefore, I -- my personal -- that is nothing to do with what the politics of the matter are or how the Jewish community feels or how the Arab community feels, had it been up to me, I would have invited him. That is all I can tell you. And -- and I think that was an opportunity missed.

Q: In slightly other terms, what -- what do you think should the role of the Holocaust Museum be and the -- the leadership? Are there things that they should not be doing or that it is important to do as much as possible as an educational museum? How do you kind of feel?

A: Well, I'll tell you frankly, I am very much impressed by the work they're doing. I think the museum, as an educational institution cannot be compared to any other body of -- of -- of -- you know, cause any -- not to any other museum, because museums don't deal with education, really. This is a combination of -- of resource center, educational

center and museum. And that -- and the way it's run and the way they have it all, is so impressive. I'll tell you, I went to the -- the -- the Holo -- not the Holocaust -- the Jewish museum in Lower Manhattan, Battery Park? I liked it. I can't say I didn't. It's -- it has three approaches and you know, before the Jewish experience, it's a -- encompasses the entire Jewish experience, whereas the Holocaust deals primarily with the Holocaust. I was more impressed by the Holocaust Museum concept and I think it hits you much stronger than this museum, because when you go to this museum, here in New York, you feel that you've been to a museum. When you go to the other museum, it's an experience that shakes you up. And that, you need. I don't mean you, the visitor, but anybody, you know, who even -- never went there, but knows what this deals with specifically. It is sort of like a reminder, you know? Which is the par -- purpose, I imagine, of the museum, not to forget what happened and to learn from that experience. And I'll tell you, I told Miles about it. This is -- I met somebody in New Hampshire, he was an -- very simple man who does road work, you know, one of the bulldozers and -- young fellow, maybe 35 years old or so and he noticed my number. And he told me -- he says, "Oh, you one of those?" He -- he said it like that. And I say, "Yes." I say, "Why did you say that?" He says, "Oh, you know, I must tell you about a place, you must go there," he tells me. I said, "What place is it?" He says, "You know, my wife and I and I -- our 13 year old kid and my -- my mother-in-law, we went to Tennessee and we decided -- we were in Washington, they said there is this museum, we'll go to see it. You have no idea what kind of place that is." This is this man telling me. So, he says, "You must go there." He says, "You

know, it's all about the war and what the Germans did to the Jews, and," he says, "I can't get over it." Well, I told him, "I'm so glad you saw it, because I do happen to know about it." I said, "Yes, this deals with the kind of experience of --" cause I didn't go into details with him of anything. I said, "What did your young chil -- young boy think?" Oh, he says, "Oh, he was very impressed with -- even my mother-in-law couldn't believe it. She didn't want to go there," he tells me. Well, as soon as I -- the conversation was over, I called up Miles and I told him, "Miles, this is one thing you have to hear, because coming from this man who -- who lives in the provinces, in a village, who happened to be in Washington on the way from Tennessee, they -- where they visited fa-family, who never had any intention of going, but somehow or other he heard something and he went to see. And for a man -- a Christian man, obviously, to be so impressed and so overwhelmed, that when he saw me, he couldn't believe that -- I -- he should tell me about it to go there immediately. And I told Miles, I said, "Spread the word in the museum, that whatever it's you're doing, you're doing it very well, because it is reaching the kind of people that should be reached." See, that is the point, that the museum -- the Holocaust Museum reaches people in a way that nothing else would reach them. I mean, for me to go to the museum, well, I go. But for somebody who didn't even know the story of the Holocaust, to go with the -- the three generations of family and everybody was impressed and he himself, couldn't get over it. Now there is the sum it up. They are doing the best possible work that could be done to educate, to keep the memory and to stay within the historical framework -- you know, without. There is very little commentary there that would make

you feel that it is slated -- that the -- one way or another, because I feel it's a very well balanced -- the Holocaust Museum, I think is very well balanced in con -- the content is very well balanced. So, I have the highest regard for what they are doing and I'm very, very pleased that it has run so efficiently and so well. And as I told you, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. If this man, of all people -- I mean, if I met in -- somebody in New York City and he told me, well, you know. But over there? A man lives in a hole in the wall in a village somewhere and works on the -- works for the state, digging, you know, the roadwork. To be so impressed as to tell me 50 times, he repeated, "You must go," until I [indecipherable] "I went there, I wa --" He says, "Why don't you go again?" I said, "I know the place." I didn't want to tell him much about it, you know? But I found it so interesting, I'm telling you, I called Miles immediately. I told him, "This you've got to hear." Cause there is your answer about -- not that he asked the question, but this basically illustrates how I feel. I feel that it is reaching the kind of people that the New York museum probably will not reach.

Q: Since you have a scholarly background yourself, let me ask you this. There's sometimes difficult issues with regard to research -- Holocaust research, which has in a sense developed -- in effect developed into a very specialized field, in it's -- for the last decade, I guess. Some people are a little bit worried about that, because they -- they -- they are concerned with a-academicizing --

A: Right.

Q: -- with a certain jargon that comes into it and -- and -- and sometimes people are invited and disinvited again because they have controversial issues they are dealing with.

A: Yes.

Q: H-How do you feel about scholarship -- specialized cholarship -- scholarship with regard to the Holocaust? Is there --

A: I don't really quite understand the question. How should specialized scholarship be conducted or how should it be -- how should the conclusions be promoted, or -- or -- I don't understand the question.

Q: Do you -- do you feel that there is inhe-inherent danger in specializing in the Holocaust in s -- in some way? Have -- or -- did -- did you come across controversial issues with regard to -- to scholarship? Certain gender issues are sometimes problematic for some people because --

A: Well, I'll tell you -- to give you a general ex -- answer, as you know, within a society there are a million -- million people with million opinions. There are issues that don't get resolved for many, many years. There are issues that -- that will never be resolved and I think an institution that is open to the larger public -- I mean, everybody goes to the Holocaust Museum, you know. It isn't that only academics, or only university students go there, but this is open to the larger public, Christian and otherwise, from all over the world. I understand there -- they have attendance from all over the world. That issues have to be presented, but not as a final conclusion, you know? There are issues, like the Polish Jewish dialog. It is inconclusive, it is ongoing, it is forever evolving and there is

no answer. There are a trillion such issues in the world now. There is Ireland, that unfortunately has been going on for years and years within the same people. So there is no such a thing as preventing some viewpoints and -- and excluding other viewpoints. I have always been for reconciliation of ev -- of every kind and I've always been for inclusion. In this case, inclusion has to mean -- even if not resolving certain issues, presenting certain issues. It's -- it was like with the Jewish cemetery, you know? I was discouraged by the criticism that I was planning to do something. I should have overlooked it. I should not have been bothered. But my natural instinct was, this is controversial, I don't want to make people feel bad, I don't -- this and the other thing. Meanwhile, the issue was being dead and buried in front of my own eyes, until it came up and we seized the opportunity. And this is just a -- a stupid example, maybe, but it basically applies in life. You cannot close the doors on anything and you cannot consider anything as a final expression of whatever it is. Because everything is evolves -- everything evolves and you leave -- if you leave it breathing room -- you know, if you're leaving a roo -- if you leave it the room -- breathing room, you -- you could be all inclusive for every viewpoint, without having to ara -- arrive at the specific, final determination or conclusion. Those aren't always called for. Determina -- final determinations, nothing is final. You know, you grow older, you find out. Everything is changing, always, everything. So if there is an open door type of approach, there's always a chance. We'll be gone years and years, God only knows, there will be reso -- resolution to Ireland and to -- to Middle East and -- and everything else will be -- would -

- would resolve itself, you know? So this is personally my -- my feeling, but I have the highest regard for the museum's work. And as I told you, I consider it much superior to the museum in Lower Manhattan. Absolutely. Others are no comparison. This is interesting, in New York. The other is profound, stimulating and it shakes you up. That is the difference.

Q: Well, it's -- do you have anything that you would like to say?

A: No, really, I'm -- I'm really very grateful to you for taking the time and for coming back and -- and all this and it was really very nice. But this is an awfully -- that's going to be part of the other tape, I imagine. So it will be an awfully long interview. I don't know who will ever want to hear it.

Q: Oh, I think there are people out there who would love to hear it and this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial --

End of Tape Seven, Side B

Beginning Tape Eight, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Regina Gelb. This is tape number three, side A. And, although I had already tried to conclude this interview, since your name got cut off from the side before, I thought I may as well sneak another two questions in. And the first question is not related to anything that we have talked about so -- so far, but in a sense, it may be. What do you base your Jewish identity on?

A: Well, you know that your -- your -- your group identity, so to say -- let's put it in a bigger framework, relates basically to your childhood. This is the way I see it. I do not -- excuse me -- I do not come from a very religious family, observant or strictly religious. Our parents were Progressive Jews, very much interested in Zionism and also attached to Judaism through religion, but certainly not of the Hassidic type that was prevalent in Poland, in between the wars. And of course, this sort of rubbed off on us children, the idea, the -- the very strong idef -- identification with the Jewish people, but not through religion. Not -- no, not through religion strict observance -- through religious observance, but rather on a -- on a -- on another level than the Hassidic, that the prevalent observance was -- was known for at that time. Consequently, obviously, I had -- I did go to -- to Hebrew school, as I told you, which was -- dealt with Jewish religion and it had dealt with the Bible and Jewish history, but that was sort of more secular, by nature and so was our life at home, even though my grandmother was very religious, which I also mentioned prior to this ex -- to this interview. I seem to have continued in that vein. It

was lucky when I married Victor, that his family was affiliated with a Reform Temple in Brooklyn -- a rather well-known Temple, with -- Rabbi Steinback was his name, he was a poet and a writer and an army chaplain and he was also a very inspired type of clergyman, you know, he talked poetry and he -- even when he married us, it was, “What a -- what two beautiful names, Regina and Victor. Can you imagine a combination of two names like --” you know, he made a whole to-do about it. Those were his sermons, that was his approach. That was Victor’s background, this Rabbi Steinback. When we got married, we discovered that we more a -- we are on the same level. My identity -- Jewish identity was stronger than Victor’s, because of the Zionist connection, number one and of course the fact that I was singled out during the war for being Jewish and nobody ever let me forget it. You know, for the fact that I was going to be a victim any second, just because I was Jewish. So that most certainly, if nothing else, would remind me that that’s what I am. So that when we got married, we also joined a -- a Reform Temple, in our area. And our -- both children were Bar Mitzvahed in that Temple. We -- we don’t have a kosher home, you know, we observe the Jewish holidays, we are members of the Temple all these years, the same Temple. That goes back 35 years at least and -- we are not active in the Temple, even though they were trying to get us in, somehow or other, I don’t know, we never got involved in the Temple, but we are certainly very much interested in supporting the Temple financially and seeing that it’s viable then. And we enjoy going there to services. We go -- th-they have a Kristallnacht observance in Novembers, we go to that all the time. We go to the Shoah observances, we go to -- in between the Jewish

holidays, but we do not go regularly, like weekend services. We don't go regularly, every now and then we do go, so that to this day my religious orientation is within those bounds of -- of an inner life that does not need the reinforcement, but it needs the connection, you see? The connection to -- to -- to Reform Judaism is very fine with me. It -- it keeps me within the frame that can accommodate my inner self, you see? Whereas if you put me to be with the Lubavitches, I would probably be rebelling to the point where I would deny that I'm Jewish, because I probably could not accept it as part of who I am. You see, there's too na -- th-th-th-th -- their -- their focus is too narrow and so on. The Reform Temple has a wider focus and -- and that suits us very well. So, to that extent, we are good Jews, so to say, not religious. And certainly, as far as identity is concerned, not only hundred percent identity of Judaism, but a million percent, if there is such a thing, you see? So, I -- I -- I hope this answers your question.

Q: Had your war experience an impact on your faith in any way? And had America?

A: Not really. You see, I -- since I did not come from a background where religion was the answer, I did not seek the answer in religion during the war, obviously, you know? And I don't know that I -- I -- I -- I ever followed this idea of everything being preordained or predetermined. I -- I believe in -- in free will, you see, and -- and so when I bak -- was in America and I became old enough to appreciate the philosophical un-underpinnings of religion, I rather liked where I came from, you see, and I was happy with the way I was and I'm happy the way I am. And obviously we would have -- we

would have changed one way or another, but obviously we carried on, in -- at the -- in the same vein, right through, so it has to sit well with us, otherwise we wouldn't do it, right?

Q: Right. And one last question, one final question. You mentioned in our first interview, that you tried to be in touch with as many old friends from all different --

A: Connections.

Q: Connections, yeah. Could you mention, maybe, just a -- a few people, a few persons?

A: Okay. For example, I told you I know the students -- I mentioned before from my -- the Air F -- Air Force officers. He was a colonel. Now, we have been in touch for all these years. They came to visit here, we went to Boulder, Colorado to visit them, we correspond all the time. He sends me pictures, I send him pictures of the grandchildren and children and we tell each other, Christmastime, all the time -- by the way, I am a letter writer. Other people don't write letters any more, I do. Now this is one old connection I -- people from Berlin, from the DP camp. My very dearest, dearest friend from the DP camps -- DP camp, are still here. One of them is George Schwab. Another is Roma Lichtenthal, she's also -- she lives in Scarsdale. My friend in Argentina, I'm very close with her. W-We write to each other, we see each other at least once a year, because she comes through New York once a year. And that's from the DP camp. Of course, from high school -- I still have my friends from high school. One lives in Albany. We still are -- we're still in touch, Toby. My very best, dearest friend committed suicide. She was from that connection, but that's an whole other story, because she was very dependent on me for many years, so she was more like friend because she -- she was psychologically

damaged and she was part of my family as long as she lived, for the reason that she was a needy person. I don't mean financially, you know, she had a Ph.D. and everything, but she was needy, very needy. Then a friend from Poland, who lives in Brooklyn, who -- with whom I lived for awhile. She's another connection. From Indiana University, certainly -- certainly, I have Nancy, who still lives in Montreal, retired now. She was Professor of Biology. Now, with Dr. Karpen, Jefferson High School, going back to Jefferson High School, when Dr. Karpen was alive and his wife was alive, I was with -- in correspondence with them all the time. They had a summer home in Chichester, New York and whenever we used to go to the Catskills -- that's also in the ca -- upper Catskills -- whenever we used to go to the Catskills, we used to go visit them, with the children. I have lovely pictures from that period. Miss Hay, who was alive, while she was alive, she lived in Seetawket. Also went there, with the children, with -- for lunches, for dinners, we used to invite her, she came here. I had another very favorite teacher from Brooklyn College speech class, Professor Lawson, she was a lovely woman. Also, she died in California. Unfortunately, all these people I'm talking about, who, through the years -- they were first here, then they were maybe very nearby and then they were moving away. So, most of it remained as contact by correspondence, and I'm just trying to think, although I'm sure I wouldn't do justice to most of my friends, to whom, I mean, th-th-th -- on Israel, well, of course, Israel is Poland, you know. Israeli connection -- friends in Israel, with whom I correspond to [indecipherable] and see each other. We go there, they come here. That's -- that's more like family than friends. That's people that I

went through -- we -- through the camps with and such. And of course, I'm very much in touch with the Jewish organization, the Starachowice organization, which now, as I told you, also, unfortunately people are passing on and the thing is not what it used to be, so -- you know, we used to be invited to their Bar Mitzvahs and we used to go and visit and have these meetings once a year. That is now -- most of it actually is thinning out. The group is thinning out because of age -- they move away to Florida or they die. Most of us now are getting on in age. I -- I can't begin to -- to think, from Bronx Science, when the kids were in Bronx Science, we made connections there, we had friends, neighborhood people. I mean, the fact remains that I write letters and I -- I like to write letters. My friend from Poland, who is now in Chicago, we're in constant correspondence and I haven't seen her maybe eight years, Irene. But we -- and of course, the telephone helps, too. And family, I -- family -- I'm very much attached to family, to cousins and such, so we -- that telephone takes care of that, all my -- my nieces and my nephews and my -- so that -- that goes without saying, but as far as friends are concerned, I can't quite now remember off hand, but I can tell you, I have all these friends whom I call my connection. This is a Berlin connection, this is a Thomas Jefferson connection. This is Indiana connection, you see? This is Bronx Science connection. So I already have these categorized, these people categorized. They are friends of equal importance, otherwise I wouldn't have to -- stayed in touch. It's just that they are from different periods of my life and I will be very sorry to see when -- when writing letters is no longer fashionable, you know, because that will be a very great loss to -- to human contact, I can tell you.

Because I have Christian friends whom I don't see for 10 - 15 years at the time. Comes Christmas, I get a full letter, I write a full letter. And that is -- that's in fr -- friends from Indiana, from wherever. I have -- and of course Poland. I write to Poland a lot. But I can just tell you that it's like clockwork. Comes Christmas, I spend two weeks writing letters, because I know that everybody's going to write to me as well. And I think this is just wonderful. That's -- that's the way I love it. And people who are going to dispose of -- of correspondence, will probably be very much poorer for it. I -- I really feel that way. I really, truly -- I adore receiving letters. Not le -- not mail, not bills, letters.

Q: Well, maybe this concludes -- I think this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Regina Gelb. Thank you very much.

A: Thank you.

End of Tape Eight, Side A

Conclusion of Interview