

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Nina Kaleska  
January 3, 1990  
RG-50.030\*0101**

## **PREFACE**

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Nina Kaleska, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on January 3, 1990 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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

**NINA KALESKA**  
**January 3, 1990**

A: [Born in Grodno, April 11th 1929 (phrases missing)] ...small town considering in con...in the context of American cities, it was a small town. But a town that had a lot of educational uh establishments and the opera would, for instance, come and perform. Uh I never traveled very much as a child except for the in into the immediate outskirts and I came from a family where there was a great deal of love and a great deal of concern and a great of care and that continued until our total separation which came actually in 1940... in 1941 for me.

Q: Tell me a little bit about your, about your friends, growing up? What was school like? What kind of schools did you go to?

A: I have attended a number of different schools, probably because my mother and father were looking at what was the best educational outlet rather than a particular school. I went to a Hebrew school uh which I didn't like terribly much. and then my sister and I spent about a year or two in Catholic school. There were only five or six children and we had, strangely enough for Poland at that time, uh Hebrew instructions. But there was an excellent private school and then after that I attended a gymnasium (ph) and my formal education per se actually was abruptly stopped in my fifth grade level.

Q: What about friends?

A: Well, I was - my sister was a great hot-head (ph). She was a champion - champion skater, champion swimmer. She was very musical - played a number of instruments. I was given piano lessons, ballet lessons. I was particularly interested in the theater. And during the Russian occupation from 1939 to 1941, uh the Russian authorities go after talent and recognize it or want to recognize it at a rather early stage. So they said to my parents, we're not interested in how well she will do academically. We have discovered that she has a very lovely voice and she's very musical and she dances well and she does very on stage - we are going to overlook her theatrical career. And so I sang as a soloist at the age of ten with all the major choirs. I designed and choreographed some ballet without knowing anything about it. It was just a natural outlet, you know. Uh I played with a lot of my friends. We would invent some wonderful plays. It wasn't a store-bought toy. We would play house. We would play uh I remember reading a great deal in addition to Pushkin and in addition to the other authors a lot of the movie magazines, and so we pretended that I was greta Garbo and my friend would be Marlena Dietrich and we would just go on that way and get some carrots and potatoes from our kitchens and pretend that we were homemakers and children and all that. So we really had a very kind of a free, delightful uh existence, in spite of the fact that the anti-Semitic climate was very strong, very strong, and I was, we were all rather blue-eyed, blonde, fair-hair, so that no, people who didn't know that I belonged to a synagogue, that my parents did, that I was Jewish. But there were pogroms, quite a few of them, and I kept asking why, what's what what's going on? It's very hard for parents to explain because we believe in a different religion or we belong to a to a synagogue rather than a church that

people don't like you. And so I grew up both on one level uh happily because I was loved and protected and got the best possible education that I could through my parents, and family life was very important and I imagine that kind of upbringing and that kind of rooted embedded uh understanding of my parents that they gave to both my sister and myself, probably helped me a great deal later on to have that base, that strength of knowing who you are. Without understanding it, without going into other philosophical discussions about that. And so that I grew up like I suppose like I - we did not live in a ghetto. We lived in a perfectly beautiful apartment near the river Niemen (ph). Uh my mother was more religious than my father and we were religious I suppose like everyone else without being fanatic about it. And my childhood was really quite free of any worries except for the fact that I started to recognize that there were stones being thrown at our windows towards 1938, 1939, and uh I was also told that on Passover which was very beautiful in our home, and my father would, I'm sure to the dismay of my mother invited half of the people who had nowhere to go to our home so they could share that special evening with us, that the Christian children were told that the Jews drink the blood of Christian children during the Passover Seder. And it was just something that a child, even as an adult I cannot quite comprehend. But that's the kink for archaic teaching that essentially, eventually with ignorance led to the disaster of the catastrophe of the Holocaust. So when you ask me what was my childhood I can describe it in terms by saying that it was a pleasant, delightful, carefree surrounded by a lot of love and a lot of attention and the hand-writing, even as a child without understanding, were already lingering in the in the background.

Q: When did this change? When the Russians came, what else happened to you, to your life in addition to the special school? Were there any other changes from '39 to '41 that you noticed?

A: Yes, as a matter of fact not understanding what Stalin stood for, not understanding political uh politics per se, I loved being there at that time because the pogroms have stopped. I was inducted into what they called the Pioneer, the Young Pioneers Group. They showered a great deal of attention on the children because that's the way they get them. My parents probably were dismayed and couldn't do anything about that. My father I believe was imprisoned for about three or four months because he must, he was, he must have said - I didn't really know why, but it was obviously for political reasons. He may have said something that did not please the Communist in.. uh people. Now you have to understand Grodno is about, I'm not sure that I'm being accurate, but it's about sixty miles from the Lithuanian border, or maybe less. So that entire area uh was a changeable area geographically. It was first, my parents were born there or close by and then it was Russia. When I was born it Poland, and in 1944 it was Russia again, and it is Russia now. So that uh I did not speak Russian until 1939. I speak Polish...I spoke Polish. We did speak Yiddish but my Yiddish was not terribly good. We spoke basically Polish and when my mother didn't want me to understand something, my sister and I would go get furious about that, and she would speak Russian or French to each other. And of course at that time I still didn't speak either one of those languages. Well, uh Russia, the Soviet Union occupied that part of, well, Germany in 1939 as we know, Germany, Poland was divided. Half of it went to the Nazis and the other half, the eastern, the traditional

northeastern part went to the Russians. And Balystok and Grodno and that entire areas became Russian. I went to school. I loved it. I learned White Russian because that is really Bieloruss and Russian and did a lot of dancing, a lot of uh gymnastics. My sister was the one who really was known gymnast and I had won quite a few competitions in singing and dancing and they encouraged that sort of thing. And life seemed perfectly alright. And then in September of 1941, uh everything broke and we were hiding in the bonders because the air the air raids were pretty severe. And uh very shortly the following day somebody walked up out of the compound and said we've just seen German tanks. Now again, you have to understand I did not understand the idea what German tanks, what kind of ominous clouds that would sweep around Europe and what it would mean, that the German tanks are in front of your door.

Q: What did you do when you heard German tanks, when your family heard German tanks? What did you and your family do?

A: They were very frightened. They recognized because we had known, we did hear terrible stories coming out from the other part of Poland, people who may, who escaped uh what was happening to the Jewish community. But again I must say that maybe because I was playing with dolls one day, and the next day I was asked to be a grown-up, it hadn't quite sunk in, what the tragedy of the entire period meant. I could only reflect today as I have post-Holocaust. When I was in it I didn't really know what was going on. I was we were in a vacuum. I was in a vacuum. I can only speak for myself.

Q: That's what we want to talk about, of course, is what you did and thought then rather than now. Then what did you do? Did school continue for example?

A: No, no. Not in '41. Right. In 1941 school did not continue. It was actually not even the beginning of the school semester. Very shortly after, uh we were still in our apartment, within a matter of a few months if I remember correctly, they had two ghettos in Grodno. The upper ghetto and the ghetto in, not very far from where we lived. And very shortly the entire the entire Jewish population of Grodno was being uprooted from their home and that I remember very distinctly and with great pain. We had some beautiful china. We had a very lovely home. Wasn't rich but it was beautiful. The Germans would come in and simply at the whim of a wisp, just like that (fingers snap), remove the most beautiful china and just throw it against a wall to break it, for fun, and started to taunt and tease. And you didn't really have to be all that young to recognize that this was the devil in the flesh. We were evacuated to a to the ghetto uptown, my both my father and my mother and my sister and I. Uh my mother was one of three sisters. One had come to this country and the other was married to a prominent professor with three children. One of my cousins was a uh young man who I believe was only 23 but he was considered to be a genius, so much so, electronic, that the Germans used him for two years as what they called a *Einutzliger Jude* (ph), a useful Jew, and when they have extracted what they needed, they killed him. His older sister, my other cousin, was a, completed the Warsaw Conservatoire and was a concert pianist and somehow managed to escape to uh to Alma Ata in Russia [NB: Kazakhstan]. The younger of the three

cousins uh stayed with her mother. Because my uncle was considered in High Intelligentsia they have, they rounded them up and they killed them. When were in the second ghetto, I believe my cousins, my cousin, just my aunt and my, my and her younger daughter were with us. We had improvised schools meaning that we still believed that the world may not have gone altogether and that we will need an education, and so we continued with our studies on an improvised basis by having the teachers who were there get the children and get them together. Uh I'll tell you something rather interesting. My father worked as a forester. That means that he was a specialist in wood and primarily worked with peasants. Poland is known for beautiful woods. He was extremely well liked. He was, I remember my father more often on a horse in a leather cap in a leather jacket and leather boots riding on either - we had two horses, a white one and a grey one. My father came home on day and said that some peasant families said let me have your children for you. They are both very light. They don't look Jewish. Why don't you let us have them. We will hide them for you. And I remember having a little conference and both my sister and I said no. If we cannot be together then we're not going to be without you. In November of 1942 the second ghetto where I was with my family got split up. They were obviously starting the evacuation process to the many camps that we didn't know anything about.

Q: Can we hold it for one minute, (Sure) and I'd like you to describe the life in the first ghetto. What was your daily life like? You mentioned school. What else was going?

A: With all due respect I cannot be absolutely clear and remember it to that extent except that it was bearable. It was bearable to the fact that my parents were with me. My sister was with me. We tried to improvise and play. I had no idea. I'm sure my parents felt differently because I was so young. And because I was so young I didn't stop to think what is going on except that somehow we were not at home. We shared a room with many other people. Uh life was no normal, but we were still a family. And then very abruptly, as they usually do those things, and for me - I don't know what go what went on with the with the other ghetto where they the first ghetto - as I said we were in the second ghetto - they probably started to, in fact I'm sure they started to evacuate because this was already in 1942. No doubt that the Jews who were in the German part of Poland had already been evacuated. But this is the eastern part and they you know they had to start a whole new program. Excuse me. Uh they rounded us up. We had no idea why. I had no idea why. Maybe the others did. My parents and I, my sister and I and my parents were separated. My sister and I were taken to, by trucks to ghetto number one. We had no idea what happened to our parents. I had subsequently learned that the transport, that was, went to Auschwitz and they were in a way entered the camp as most of them of course did not. My sister and I remained in the first ghetto. That was already very difficult. It was it was wintertime. The selections were, in other words the evacuation process began quite earnestly. We work in a in a tobacco factory. My sister and I would share a kind of little cot in somebody's house and \_\_\_\_ the house the house belonged to a friend of mine who, they were no longer there, and we were, we managed to hide every time, like maybe three or four selec...uh not selections because they weren't all called selections but the raids - in other words to find the Jews to send them to wherever they were sending them - we didn't know where - we managed to escape. And we

continued to give ourselves some kind of moral support by saying look, we'll probably leave here and I'm sure we'll be with our parents again. But, on January probably the 18th or 20th, somewhere around there, 1943, we hid behind very heavy snow behind the synagogue which is where they would run, round everybody up and we could no longer hide. We were found and walked to the to the to the station and what was so dreadful and I remember that - I did not see Shoah but the told me about that. The people were standing and watching as the people, as their neighbors - I don't know, I didn't recognize anyone but were being obviously dragged without too much clothes, without any necessarily private possessions, to the train station. And then we saw the cattle cars. And that's when the reality set in but I still had no idea that a place like Auschwitz existed. That they were still doing the actually burning people. We didn't know that. My sister gave me my mother's coat. A long coat, and I think that coat may have been responsible for my going into the camp rather than to the crematory right away. My sister was very bright. She was very clever. She was absolutely wonderful, tremendously liked. Her name was Sala (ph) and the train ride was probably one of the worst things that I can possibly remember. The train ride was utterly horrendous. People died. There was no water. There were no sanitary facilities. There was no food. Whatever was had gone very quickly. It was about three and a half days. And then we stopped and we saw Auschwitz. And we said I bet you we're going to meet our parents. Well, we were right to some extent, except that we didn't meet them. During the time that we were that we came down, in other words we were at disembarked or let from the train, Sala said to me, don't speak, don't move, let me think for a moment. We were about twenty-five hundred people. I have a book by the way, from somebody from Grodno who had just published the entire history of the Jews of Grodno and it's the most incredible thing is that even my number is mentioned there, so that I learned something about - I mean as I said, there are (ph) these are documentations that are there because there was a trial of the Nazis of Grodno. Maybe I was very dumb or just very young, but I didn't understand or knew as much as many other people did. When we embarked my sister noticed that the majority of the people from the train were being pushed to one side and a rather small group was being pushed to one side, both men and women. She said don't ask any questions, just walk over to that small group, and she followed me. And the guard the guard said, Genoch. There were eight-five women and a hundred and twenty men out of something like twenty-five hundred who were then brought into Auschwitz. The rest went directly to the crematorium. Now we didn't know about that. But after one day you did know because the, at that time uh when I came to Auschwitz which was January, January 24th, 1943, the chimneys were very high and the smell of flesh was very prominent, and you no longer could pretend that this is the place where we're going to meet our parents. So this was my introduction to Auschwitz. And I suppose you want to know what happened and I will tell you briefly...

Q: Let's slow down a little. (Alright.) Uh tell me when you arrived into the camp, where were you taken and what did you do?

A: I was taken, we were taken to a block, I don't know exactly where. We then were asked to undress completely. Naked. I had some photographs of my family which were torn to shreds. Hair was completely shaved. And a rather painful tatoo was put on my left forearm. My

sister knew my terrible fear of doctors as a child, I don't know why, and she kept whispering to me, be brave. And my number was 31386, and her number was 31387 and in those days they gave the numbers smack in the front of the left forearm, not inside. I think they ran out of space or ran out of numbers or maybe they recognized that perhaps it is not such a good idea to be quite so prominent about that. For your information I had it plasmically removed uh in London. Not because I don't want to remember but because I don't always wish to talk about it, or to talk about it perhaps in an interview such as this where it has meaning and it has a realistic archival uh value for the future. Alright so we were stripped and the hair was shaven and the number was tattooed and we were given clothing of uh dead prison...uh Russian prisoners of war and taken to some block and that was the beginning of two years.

Q: Tell me, who was...

A: I have no idea. They were speaking all different languages. I did not know German. I did not know Hungarian. Actually the Hungarians came later. Mainly I think the people at that time were from Poland. Polish Jews. Uh possibly Czechoslovakian but I really am not totally sure so I can't tell you. Of course later on you know, day and night became, time had no meaning at that point. But it was dreadfully hard because the winters are very difficult. Uh the mud - when it rained it was just muddy. Uh food was unbearable if you were - you eventually learned to eat that but it was uneatable really.

Q: What did you have to eat?

A: I think, you know the fact is and I, my sister and I used to joke because my mother and my father would make me eat like so many parents you know, drink your milk. You know, here's a piece of chocolate. Uh I'll take you here. The bribery aspects because I was very thin. In fact I was the youngest of everyone and the mo..the sickliest of everyone. Finally they thought I had some kind of a heart condition which may not have been true but my parents were very protective of my health so I wasn't allowed to plant trees which I wanted to do and all that sort of thing. And this is the irony that I am the one who survived and my sister who was never sick in her life died three months later. Uh and I was glad that she died. And I will tell you in a minute why I say that in such candor. Uh we were going to work - these were probably the most horrendously difficult months, the first three months. If you survived the first day, maybe you survived a second. If you made it through the week, chances are you might make it to the second week. Time had no meaning. We were very shortly put to work outside the camp, carrying very heavy stones. But the most horrendous part of it all, there was a man in Auschwitz who name was Tauber (ph) and I eventually asked uh Wiesenthal whether he knew what happened to this pretention of a man. And finally he was caught and or he died anyway. But I remember him very well. He was in charge of the selections as people would come back from a very long and a very difficult and a very hungry day. You were made to jump five feet over a ditch if you, and many didn't. It you made, if you were able to jump across, about five feet or maybe more, I don't know, then you were OK. If you didn't then you never went back to the camp. I mean this was a little play. Cruelty in its most perfect form. And that went on for quite some time. During that

time my sister once put her hand in her pocket because it was freezing, and I never will forget that. I heard the tremendous slam of a whip on her back. Uh the officer, uh one of the guards said don't you every do that again. In other words you're not allowed to put you hands because you were frozen to death in your packet. Uh Sala one day complained of not feeling very well, and she says I don't think I can get out. It was a Friday, and I said I don't care whether you can get up - you've got to get up, because if you don't they will take you to Block 25. You know, you become very wise very quickly and you learn to know what Black 25 is because when you would pass by you would see dead bodies. That was a daily sight. Nobody you know, you don't even cry anymore. There are no tears left. (Cough) Excuse me. But Sala couldn't go to work. She probably had typhoid. We don't know. I mean it took - Sunday night she was dead. She didn't go to work on Friday. I went to see her in this Block 25 or hospital - whatever that was, sad as it was - on Saturday. On Sunday I came to see her. That was April the 10th. So here is a beautiful, brilliant, talented, healthy, athletic eighteen year old girl, delirious...with fever looking at me and she says I have to get up because tomorrow is the birthday of my sister and I didn't get her anything and I held her in my arms and she died in my arms. Watching this incredible drama was I woman that I did not know she...came up to me and she said in German, which I did not understand very well then - she said I don't have any children. I'm not married, but if I had a little girl, I would like her to look just like you and be just like you. Come. Martha had been in Auschwitz three months before we had arrived there. She was a nurse by profession, an operating room nurse, but in Auschwitz at that time she was carrying dead corpses which was - she witnessed this incredible little drama and she said \_\_\_\_\_(ph) - don't worry little girl. I will take care of you. Martha was about twenty years older than I was. And take care of me she did. She saved my life about four or five times. Four from the crematoria and others when I was deathly ill with typhoid or God knows that else, and she would steal injections and save me that way. So Sala died and I cried very bitterly that day. And then years came and went by before I cried again. I just did not cry. I couldn't. Once you let your defenses down, you're done. People say you know, you're very strong and I said that's bull. What does it mean? How do you practice the art of survival anyway? It's not a question of strength. You don't even know what's happening to you. What it is a sort of self, self-discipline by saying if I'm going to make it, I'm going to retreat from all that and emerge in a way into my own fantasy world. And it's very healthy. I have subsequently done quite a bit of reading in my studies, in my undergraduate and master's programs in various psychology books, a lot of which by the way I do not agree with, and Bruno Betelheim idea was something that I really could not agree with. The survival, the guilt of survivors - I don't have guilt for surviving. I was guilty - I said why am I the only one but can one question God or nature or fate? I don't know but this whole idea that one is guilty because one survived - it's not guilt - it is something else, and I don't think it's guilt at all. But the idea of fantasy is a very healthy idea, even today when things become a bit difficult and I am alone - I am at home everywhere, and I'm home nowheres. It's my, my life has been so totally uprooted at such an early stage that I have never been able to say this is the only place I feel home. I can feel home everywhere, or make my home anywhere and be perfectly comfortable about it. But to come back to your original question, uh Sala's death was very painful because she was a tremendous moral support for me. She was my older sister. She and I recognized that we will never see our

parents again and I knew exactly what happened to my parents and I still am to this day don't want to know or think that hopefully they were not conscious when they were thrown into the crematoria. And I had worked there for three months uh sorting the clothes of those who went there. Uh I continued to work and then eventually uh I don't know how - I really can't tell you - I transferred to another camp. It was, this was Birkenau. When I talked about Auschwitz, Auschwitz is Birkenau the way we know it. Auschwitz is a town where some of the medical experimentations were done etc. but the camp where or where, I don't know, I think two and one half million Jews were slaughtered, some were Christians, but for different reasons - and that's just as terrible. I was transferred I think to Lager C and then I was made what they call an \_\_\_\_\_. There were no children in Auschwitz by the way when I was there. There were I think five children because they only took the healthy, like say from eighteen to about thirty-five and so on, and I was really not. As again how I made it I don't know. That's something I can never understand. When I was in selections, which were all the time, and Mengele looked at me because I was so very fair, but anyone who came from the north whether you were Swedish or whether you were Norwegian or Polish, if you just happened to be light then you were light whether you were Jewish, Christian or anything else. He looked at me and I remember his face. He says are you Jewish? And I said yes. What, first of all, not only my number but I had a little triangle that indicated that was even, you know, put salt on the open wound. Were your parents Jewish? Yes. I says Umeglish (ph). Someone said shut up. Don't you know this guy conducts experimentation of all kinds, experiments of all kinds of things. He may want to do something to find out what, whether your blood is different from that of a Christian child. I didn't ... but I was exposed to a great many and again without having any kind of understanding whatsoever why I was spared, I don't know. On on four occasions I was not. But I was very very ill. I couldn't walk and I was hidden. And again uh Martha uh smuggled me into the Christian hospital - when I say hospital I mean the block where only the Christians were - the Jews and the Christians were often not together. And put about seventy-five different dresses on me because they all worked in the cre...you know in the crematoria where you could get those things. But I couldn't walk because I had probably typhoid or whatever, and they would inject me with glucose or whatever else they could their hands on to keep my strength up. I was fourteen by then, look like ten, and one day kline (ph), Dr. Kliner or whoever else was there came in, took down my number. Now we knew, we knew that once your number had been taken - that's the kiss of death. And there wasn't even a question of crying - you sort of accepted the fact that you are going to die. And you lived with that death. I have to interject something right here. Later on in my professional life as a singer, I studied for one of my concerts a beautiful song by Franz Schubert (ph) to the poetry by (ph) Klaudius called \_\_\_\_\_(ph), death and the girl. When death appears as friend, he says come, give me your hand, you sweet and lovely maiden - don't be afraid. I am your friend and I will take care of you. Well, later on when I studied that song it became extremely meaningful because I was praying for that kind of a friend. During one of these, during that time when I knew that I was not going to be here tomorrow, the woman who was in the next bed was a student of Sigmund Freud, somebody who was a well-known psychiatrist and she was also a she died...

Q: Excuse me. This is now in the Christian hospital?

A: This is now in the Christian hospital. (Thank you.) Alright. And I went to sleep. And I dreamt something quite incredible. And I told her about that later. I dreamt that I was walking on a very high precipice. I had very long blonde hair that mother used to do like you know Shirley Temple style and I was wearing a white and pink dress that was that was like a it was purely, it was a dream - I was walking and it was kind of moving around and I knew I knew that when I would that I was walking towards the end and there was nothing there. I would have to fall and die. And I kept going anyway. Now I couldn't walk in those days mind you, but I was sort of running. And as I approached that enormously steep precipice somebody jolted me and I woke up and there was Martha standing in front of me with tears in her eyes and she said my Kindchen (ph), little girl - a miracle just happened. We have been able to erase your number from Kline's list and you are not going to the crematorium. I told it I mean I didn't understand what psychology was. I had no idea who Freud was you know I mean. Uh I thought reading Anna Karenina under the table was something forbidden you know because uh and she said that was a very revealing dream. She says you are you have predicted your own future without even knowing it at that time. That happened a few times. I was made \_\_\_\_\_ meaning messenger. And because of that, because I was young and because at that point you sort of I don't know - they just accepted me there I guess...

Q: We are now back in Lager C...

A: Oh, we were in Lager C all the time, but there were different aspects of the "life", quote, unquote, in Lager C. During Lager C times there was a woman by the name of Irma Grese who was very frightening to be around. She was extremely beautiful, dressed as cleanly as you can possibly, you can see you could see your face in her boots. She was always with an enormous German Shepherd and a whip. And I was really very frightened of her. Everybody was. She would sick her dog on a poor inmate for no reason at all. And the dog would just about demolish that person. Very peculiar things kept happening to me. One evening, well evening - I don't know - one late afternoon after, we were never allowed you know we had our great big meal - stale bread and maybe a piece of salami and some horrible smelling coffee, then you could not go out. That was curfew. Someone, the head of the block\_\_\_\_\_ of the woman who was in charge of our barrack who was always an inmate, came up and she said uh Grese wants to see you. Now I did not know that and I didn't even know what homosexuality was but apparently she was a lesbian and because almost everyone there was five or six or seven years older than I was, and she and people said, oh boy, shall we kiss you goodbye you know. God knows what is what it is that she wants to do. I walked into the that little office and there was this Irma Grese standing in civilian clothes and I must tell you she looked like a vision out of another world. She was wearing a yellow coat. Her hair was blonde and usually she was it was always very tightly pulled back. Her hair was long, let loose. She wore perhaps a little lipstick - I don't remember. But she was wearing a yellow coat and she smiled at me. Imagine! I was frightened to death, and she looked at me and she said, I'll never forget that conversation - you know, I have forgotten a great deal purposefully because you can't live with all the memories, but there are some things that kind of stand out - and she said uh, come her, come here. She took my little cheek and she said, ah ha. She

said they tell me that you look a lot like I, and I wanted to be sure that was really true. And I in my total naivest said, oh I said, I don't think there's any, I've never seen anyone more beautiful, and I meant it. I mean she was like a vision. You know, you have to understand we haven't seen anything like that. The woman took a liking to me. Thank God she never did abuse me, but she made me stand guard in front of the barracks while she would make love to the most beautiful Jewish girls there. She also gave me an extra piece of salami and made me uh do her boots or something like that. In other words, she sort of took a slight liking. I then found out to my horror when I was already in London and bought the book called "The Belsen Trials," which is really the Auschwitz trials, Kramer and Hoess, that she was one of the five people who were actually executed for her crimes. She was twenty-three years old.

Q: What did you know of her role in the barracks? She was SS...

A: Oh no, she was (or did you know?) she was more, yes, I don't know whether SS - I don't know - she probably were. This was a, the concentration camp guards, such as Grese and a commandant like uh Kramer (ph), they were of a different breed of people. They looked human, but these were not human beings. They, you, people, humanity as we know it, even in the worst possible way, cannot behave that way. There's a predisposition, there's a pre-election to the kind of evil. They must have been chosen for the very fundamental and the mental qualities that these people possessed to be able to perform and do what these people did, because "normal", quote and unquote, people who are, who have sensitivities and uh and human qualities per se in the smallest quality cannot possibly behave in that manner. She was one of the those. Now she could be perfectly lovely. She was nice to me. But it may have been a little toy to her. I mean you know, that I didn't have a relationship with her. Uh she was in charge of Lager C. She was, she had total power. She could do anything she wanted to anybody at anytime because she was the, I forget the German word, ober... something or other. Head, head guard person, and that's all documented, and I as I said I bought the "The Trials" after the war when I was in London and read it studiously in horror - to read my own my own history so to speak, because I lived in a in a little vacuum, not really knowing that in another camp other things were happening.

Q: What did standing guard for Irma Grese?

A: I beg your pardon?

Q: What did standing guard for Irma Grese?

A: You mean as far as I was concerned. Well I was told that she that she was a lesbian. I did not know in those days what that meant. And that she was making love to another woman and would I stay guard to see that maybe other Germans would be coming or other guards of her caliber would be coming along and she wanted to be alerted. That's what it meant. Not all the time - sometimes.

Q: To your knowledge, did she injure or kill the women that she made love to?

A: That I don't know, but she injured and killed an awful lot of women period. She had close to - I mean thousands of people that she had tortured, but I don't know whether that was done during her uh tryst or not. I doubt it but I don't know. That I can't I can't tell.

Q: Did you, can you describe any other indicates with Irma Grese, her behavior with other people?

A: Yes. Yes I can. When we would have what the called the Zel (ph) appell, that means that in the morning the roll call would take place, and because I was \_\_\_(ph), that means that I would be there to deliver messages to the central off...to the central block, to the commandment, or to anybody and bring it back to the people in the camp. Uh she would make us stand for hours at a time in freezing horrible weather or very hot, depending \_\_\_\_ I was one of the - I still don't understand - I was there for two years. Uh I have told people when the they used to ask me what my educational background is, I said I have a Ph.D. from Auschwitz. That covers a lot of ground doesn't it. Not really. The world really doesn't, the world is not really that interested from the human end. There are always those who are. The majority still have really no idea what happened. It's too painful to grasp and they can't be bothered. But Irma Grese would let us stand for hours. People would faint. She would trod on them. She would beat them. She would sick her dog. She would punish people very badly. She was very cruel. She was extremely cruel. They did not execute, Nuremberg did not execute many people. A great many people were put into many different sentences, prison sentences, but they executed her, so they must have had far more evidence than I'm giving you here today, documented but from my own personal experience that is precisely my recollection, except that she was, I didn't realize that she was twenty-three. I don't know. Age at that point didn't really mean terribly much, but she was twenty-three years old which seems pretty extraordinary to have reached the power of such depth of degradation at such an early age and so she was executed Nuremberg. Yes.

Q: You have mentioned that you were in selection with Mengele. Can you describe one of those selections for us?

A: Yes. What was so striking and in fact everything that I'm saying to you today is sort of in retrospect how weird those events were. Mengele never raised his voice. He would simply stand there with this finger, and this meant one thing and this meant another thing, and he says, you know you've really lived long enough. I think its time to go on. In that kind of a manner. I never heard him raise his voice. He didn't have to. He relished and enjoyed every moment of his glorious power. So you see, when you think of Mengele, which is unbelievable, this is a monster. This is a medical doctor. When you think of Kline (ph), when you think of the great minds in a sense, educated people, the crematoria as I've mentioned in some of my speeches when I, the few times that I do speak subjectively, and this is one of the few times that I do, the crematoria were built, were designed and built not by idiots, not by people who didn't know what they were doing. But by highly educated, trained Ph.D.'s who knew exactly what they were doing. And they designed that whole "Dant'es Inferno" -

you know, there's a line in "Dante's Inferno" that says Lachate Oni Speranze Voiche (ph), that means abandon hope all ye who enter here. Now when Dante wrote this in his inferno, he must have been thinking about Auschwitz or places like Auschwitz. Or people like Mengele or like Kramer, like Hoess, like Grese and like so many other whose names I don't exactly remember - we were not formally introduced. The other thing about Auschwitz that I remember that helped me is to have a sense of humor. Some people say how can you do that? If you cannot laugh at yourself, you die. By the way, that's true of today too. People who take themselves very seriously are bores (ph), but when you have to, when you do not have a sense of humor during that time, and you really recognize the depth of the tragedy around you, you can't make it. You see the mind can still function. It can overcome all kinds of extraordinary circumstances. So \_\_\_\_\_ say, he, I'll see you tomorrow on the soap board. And that sounds horrible doesn't it? But the truth is that as you know, they would make all kinds of, I mean the Germans, the Nazis I should say, were very clever as to what they were doing. They wast...wasted nothing. Everything was a must for fortunes of war, and the fat would be used for certain productions including soap. Now it sounds horrible today. It sounds depraved. But at that time it was a way of saying we know what's going to go on. There's nothing we can do about it. So let's laugh.

Q: On that note, let's hold it for a minute. Let them change tapes.

A: Good. I need a break.

**Tape #2**

(Tape snag - technical conversation)

Q: Uh you had described several times that Martha helped you a great deal. Can you describe other incidents uh other than the one in the Christian hospital where she helped you?

A: Yes. Well I was first in the Jewish hospital. Well, I, the hos...the word hospital is incorrect. It's fallacious. There were no hospitals. There was a block where you went if you were sick and if you were Jewish which that means you never came out of there. Martha worked with the doctors because she was a nurse and somehow she was able to man...to get medicine, injections which she uh was able to administer to me which kept me alive. Uh the Christian inmates in the in the Christian hospital were allowed to get packages from home and would share some of the goodies from home with me because I was the child you see. I was that little girls. Uh and then on a few occasions Martha actually was able with the help of someone else to remove the number that was written down for me to go pastures is the only way you can put it. Uh something that the normal mind and I say, when I say normal mind I mean people who thank goodness, thank God have not experienced my adolescent years, would find it extremely difficult to grasp. Maybe people who were in Viet Nam might to some extent understand that when you walked out in the morning for the roll call, you would literally see hundreds of emaciated bodies still warm, piled up in front of the barracks, and you didn't cry. That was it. It was like you are in hell, and that's part of hell. When I think about it today I said how is it possible. It's beyond me. It is a question, when people say how did you survive, I haven't got the foggiest idea. There is no earthly reason in the world why I was chosen to talk to you today. I don't know. Maybe there is some plan that the heavens, God, whatever, that I'm here. Maybe to bear witness, and that is why I have set my own feelings aside, which is not easy, to uh to share with you some of my own remembrances so that perhaps those, the people or the children or whoever is going to perhaps hear what I have to say today, will recognize that the madness that is in our society today Neo-Nazis who say that the Holocaust never happened, that this is the pure imagination of the Jewish community, will know that uh theirs is a dangerous pack, and the Holocaust did not only happen but it's a very living reality.

Q: I there anything else about Auschwitz, before we move on, anything more Auschwitz, that you want to add or to tell us?

A: The only way I can describe Auschwitz is it wa the de...de...de...deepest dissension of what we considered in our wildest imagination, for hell to be. Auschwitz was the final the final apocalypse. It cannot be described really. Even I who was there for twenty-four months, have difficulty, and I'm sure that I have deliberately forgotten quite a great deal. I don't think I could function as a as a human being and be as an accomplished in many way and continue on with life if I had to live and remember what happened to me there. And I think again here the mind works some miracles. It was, you remember what is essential, but you sort of forget all the other - it's like having a baby - you remember the beauty but you don't remember the

pain, because otherwise no woman would ever have a baby. Uh and Auschwitz was something, it was the cradle of death. It gave people who were deranged the absolute perfect opportunity to exercise their wildest macabre behavior.

Q: Under what circumstances did you leave Auschwitz?

A: Actually I didn't leave Auschwitz. I was evacuated. I was there until the last bitter moment, excuse me (cough). Before I answer you that question I just want to say something which I find very important. Yes, there were many other people in Auschwitz, Christians, political prisoners, uh prostitutes, homosexuals, uh murderers, but I want people to understand one very important thing - it was primarily an extermination camp of the Jews of Europe. Because the Christian inmates were not subjected to the same treatment. They were not subjected to uh to crematoria. If they "sinned" (quote, unquote) according to them, they were hanged. I don't know that there were any selections for the Christians. They were there were any selections for the Christians. They were there as criminals and treated as such as though it was a prison. A terrible prison for them. But Auschwitz and the concentration camps of Europe were made for one reason and one reason alone and that is to - I don't want to use exterminate - it was, you exterminate cock roaches - for the murder of Jews. And six million died, not just in Auschwitz - in others. I think that's very important to understand. (Thank you.) And I have primarily spoken to Christian groups in my short few years that I have decided that I had a responsibility. I wanted to speak to the Christian community, to make them understand that. Now, I left, or I would say I didn't leave - I was evacuated from Auschwitz on January 24th, - I came to Auschwitz, excuse me, I came to Auschwitz on January 24th, 1941, and evacuated on January 18th, 1945. That was another terrible time. We actually went through Berlin and saw a leveled city. By that time I spoke fluent German, fluent - you see I did go to school there - fluent German, fluent Hungarian, fluent Czechoslovakian, and fluent Italian I mean - there were so many people from all over the world, and I wound up in a dreadful place called Ravensbruck.

Q: How did you get from Auschwitz to Ravensbruck?

A: By train, I don't know how many days it took but counting was not one of those things that we did there. It was by that time the end of January, maybe two weeks later, maybe ten days after - I really don't know, but it was in January. Ravensbruck was built for x amount, like maybe thirty-five hundred people, and at that time there were something like fifteen thousand people. It was dreadful, horrible, and extraordinarily - I met Martha there, and she said to me at that time, if anything happens and either one of us is alive, I want you to meet me in such and such a city after the war. And she's still alive. She's in Brazil, and I went to see her in Brazil. She's quite ill. She has never recovered from Auschwitz. I guess she must be about seventy-five now perhaps - I don't really know. Uh but anyway after Ravensbruck of which I have a blur because it was terrible, and like typical Martha, she shared her slice of bread with me and still reprimanded me because I, I mean she sort of imagined herself that I was her little girl, and then...

Q: Do, don't don't go by Ravensbruck even if its a blur quite so quickly. How long were you there?

A: I would say about three weeks.

Q: What, through the blur, can you remember, of the camp?

A: Masses of people, death, terrible starvation, no work. We didn't work there. It was, there was there was some chaos at that point, and don't forget this is January '45 and I think Auschwitz in fact had already been liberated by the Russians, and we were just, kept going on. I can't tell you too much about it because as I said I remember being uh praying let's get this out, I don't want to live anymore. I mean, you know, you can't go on like that. I knew there was no one left as far as my family was concerned. I knew there was no way. Uh I don't know what happened to Martha after that because we were separated. And then again we were put on trains and ridden further into what was still the remaining of the Third Reich. And I wound up in a camp called Retzof-am-Richlin (ph), which was apparently not originally a concentration camp. It was a camp that was built for the men or the women who worked adjoining uh there was a very large factory where they I was told they manufacture the uh the missiles that eventually devastated London, and so that it was a much more relaxed camp. There were no crematoria. Uh it was already confusion. I mean this was already like you know beginning of February, end of January, February, March, April - I was there actually until, perhaps I was in Ravensbruck longer than that because I think I was in Retzof for about three and a half months.

Q: Can you describe the camp for us? Where were you taken first?

A: I don't remember. It was not the same procedure that was both either at Auschwitz or Ravensbruck. Uh we were brought on trucks in fact, not on a train, to my knowledge. We were on trucks and we were quite sure they were going to shoot us because Retzof is surrounded by many woods. Uh what struck me about that camp was that it was relatively nice, meaning that it was not, the barracks were different. They were much more, they were much bigger. Uh it was smaller. There may have been maybe two thousand, twenty-five hundred people, mainly women. I don't remember seeing men there. It was much looser in discipline.

Q: OK. How did that manifest itself?

A: How do you mean?

Q: You say it was looser in discipline. What did that mean?

A: It meant that uh they'd fill up, the behavior of the guards was not as obnoxious and as scary. They were primarily men, German soldiers, rather than women. Women could be terrible, by the way. The women in Auschwitz were horrendous, the German women. There were to my

recollection no women. There was a women's camp, but there were mainly men who were the guards. The commandant was not as scary as I remember say Hoess Ora Kramer. The majority of the pe...the workforce, we worked in the woods where we would uh chop wood for the war production because again this was around the woods and we never felt by the way that we would get out of there. Never. We were quite sure that we were going to be shot, that they could not let, not everyone had a number - not that many were out of Auschwitz, but some of us were. In fact the majority really. There really are not that many who have that kind of a number as I do because uh - don't ask me why. Providence. Je ne sais pas. I don't know. So that Retzof particularly after Ravensbruck was heaven. I mean you could, and again they asked me what did I do - I mean what, everybody sort of did something if you survived that long, my God, you know, what did you do? Said I was a loifering (ph). Oh good, we need a loifering (ph) here. So immediately they gave me that bandanna with the gothic letters and I became a loifering (ph). That means that I could go to the kitchen and sometimes they, the German woman in charge would throw me an extra piece of bread. I didn't need very much in those days. I think that may have also, I really think that may have contributed somewhat to my survival. As a child I didn't need much food. I didn't, I did not eat very much there, and so much so that when I eventually came to this country and my aunt was very concerned because I could go three days without eating, and she took me to the Valley Hospital for some tests. They found that my stomach had shrunk very considerably. I simply was not accustomed to sitting down and eating a normal meal. I still can't do seven courses in on in one evening. I have tried to justified, to justify why I and why not somebody else, and it's not the guilt in me. It's the questioning, why, and I have no idea. I don't know. It is absolutely against all odds.

Q: Can you tell me, what did you do in Retzof? Did you work and what was your work in addition to being a loifering?

A: Primarily I was a loifering which means that I stood in front, inside the gates of the camp, and be ready to be at any body's beck and call from the main Block Fuhrerstube (ph) or the guards who needed something, or bring their supper or whatever. And then I worked for a while in the woods with the other kommando chopping woods which was a little heavy work, and that's basically what was going on there. There was, there were other things there. There were mis...uh seamstress who were doing some clothes correction I remember. As I said this camp had different things but you have to understand again, I wish I could be more descriptive to you as to what, how and when, but I really can't because I can only tell you from my memory what I did when. I really don't know - there were so many other aspects. And we didn't exactly share the information on what was going on five blocks away, so that a great deal of my information about, not about my own subjective experience, but about the entire tragedy of the catastrophe I learned by reading about other peoples' accounts and by reading historical and documentation of that nature.

Q: We of course are going to focus here on you. (Right.) Uh, can you tell us of uh, do certain things that went on in the camp or in your experience, stand out in your memory?

A: Yes, It does. In fact, what stands out in my memory even in Auschwitz, was that humanity was not lost among the among the survivors, among - I shouldn't say survivors, among the inmates. People did care for each other. People did give each other moral support. People did commensurate with each other and tried to help. There was very little because people were dying and the suffering was so intense that it was very difficult to give strength to someone else, but Martha is a perfect example. There were a few others who extended a helping hand. But the one incident that comes about me is a very unusual one. and a very far-out sort of an incident because it came from a German soldier in Retzof-am-Richlin. There was a young nineteen year old guard who very shortly after I arrived there, started look at me very differently, and I didn't know why. He, eventually we spoke, we met. He was actually from Luxembourg. He was a medical student. He was brought in there. He said to me, what are you doing here, the first time I saw him. He was a guard standing on this scaffold with a gun, and I was down here standing and he started to sing me a little, a little German song. And I thought boy, this guy has a real sense of humor, you know. And he said listen, what are you going here? And he didn't say it in an angry way. And I thought to myself, he's crazy. I said, well, I am Jewish. And he apologized and he said, he was obviously very green. He didn't realize it. He said look, I knew what was going to the, I knew what was going on in Germany with the Jewish community, but I am, I was a medical student until just a few months ago, and I had no idea to what extent the brutality went on. I am only now learning from the older guards who talk about it with relish, and I go out and I vomit. This young nineteen year old medical student, SS guard because they needed new people to they brought anyone in, Rumanians, Bulgarians, eventually within a few months, was willing to risk his life by saying to me, you are not going to survive because they will kill you. This, the rumor goes around that they will shoot everybody here. They can't, they don't want to whatever is left, they can't let, leave that much evidence. I have contacted a woman in the village who lost her husband and two sons and is very bitter, told her about you. She says she will give me civilian clothes and I will take you there when there is a break. I promise you. And I said why are you doing it. He said because I love you. Now you have to understand that here was a Jewish girl, sixteen years old, speaking to a German, to a man wearing a German uniform saying I love you and I'm not going to let you die. I'm going to help you. I said we can both hang for it. Don't say a word to anyone. It's a long story which I will not go into now, but I was very...

Q: Please, do go into it.

A: Well he was very, well, he was very, he was incredibly tender. He asked me to join the kommando because he wanted to tell me more about it and the he says, speak to the commandant. Everybody eventually winds up going to the woods and working there, and he'll let you, which I did. I was scared to death, but the commandant knew me and he said OK. You can rotate with other girls. As I said, this was a little more human. You simply didn't go to a commandant and stay, do you mind if I go work some place else. This is just not the way it was. And Lucien had all the plans. He was incredibly tender. He was incredibly beautiful, and I said what is going on with me. What is happening here? How, you mean there is still a heart beating under somebody who is wearing a German uniform? Here

was a Christian boy and a Jewish girl caught up in hell, and this, and I must admit I didn't know, I mean I knew that nature was beginning to play havoc with me, but I didn't know what the word love is or anything. I mean I didn't know that one does, that there are normal emotions which nature was letting me know were happening. One night he said, very abruptly and very angrily, while he was there, he says I want my supper in my in my Block Fuhrerstobe tonight. Bring it to me. So I brought the tray, and I knew there was something wrong, and I walked into the Block Fuhrerstobe. There was bedlam there. This was already April - I don't know maybe April 20th, maybe April 25th. And uh I opened the door and there he was standing without a gun and without a tie, the white shirt opened slightly, without his cap and I knew something was terribly wrong. He said put down the tray. He said we've just got we've just got word that we have to evacuate like immediately. Tomorrow morning. I cannot help you. I cannot bring you out of here. But I pray to God that you're going to live, because I'm going to find you. And he gave me a magnificent poem and a photograph of himself in civilian clothes. It was the most bizarre thing - it was like a like a icing on a on a cake of some kind that was just, what's going on here. Well, to cut a long story short, we were evacuated, and then I found out that he was killed in action on the Russian front. But he made an impact on me. He made an enormous impact on me because he, people say to me, I have been asked, do you hate the Germans? No. I don't like to hate anybody. I hate the Nazis. I hate the people who have perpetrated that disaster on people. But you cannot simply say everybody is rotten. No. They're not. People are people. There are rotten people everywhere. But this incident, having just spent forty-five months in camps and ghettos, to have a, somebody in a German uniform with a gun supposedly guarding me say to me I'm going to risk my life for you. I'm going to let you escape \_\_\_\_\_(ph) will kill you. And I may be killed with it but I love you, was an inkling that maybe there is after all another world of which I knew nothing about.

Q: Quite a story. What happened to you next?

A: We were evacuated in the middle of the night, just as Lucien had predicted, and we were quite sure that we were going to be killed. And we were not put on trucks. We were walking. No idea where we were walking. That was May the 2nd. Mind you I'm really coming to the end of the war. Everything, or at this point here, Germany was combined of a tiny little spot where the Americans and the English and the Russians and the French on all sides. They kept going with us. Of course, they the guards were much more relaxed. They knew that this is the end. There was just no way, but they kept walking us, for week...for what seemed like endless...a lot of people couldn't make it and went by the wayside. In fact that's when I asked one of the older guards, I said by the way, you know that young fellow, Lucien, who was at the gate, whatever happened to him? And he looked at me. He said, ah Buby (ph), we got word that he was killed in uh at the Russian front two weeks ago. Well I thought, I'm the one, he didn't feel anything, I did. We went on and on and on finally we couldn't really walk anymore and this was already like May the 4th and I say May the 4th, because May the 5th I was liberated, so I knew that it had to be. We hi...there was a terrible bombardment. I mean we heard and we \_\_\_\_\_ to see planes, hear the Americans...what I don't know whether they were American but they were certainly Al...uh Allied planes and tremendous uh fires

from tanks and stuff, and we hid during one of those terrible raids in a bunker and never went out. Nobody looked for us anymore. And that was it. The next day, we slept in a, that night we slept in a barn we found with the cows and the pigs on the bottom, and the next morning very early - the sun was still shining - I looked through a crack and I saw a Russian soldier. And I jumped out, woke everybody - there were about twelve of us out of the girls who were with me or I was with - and he must have thought I came from another world. Well, I did. I did. And I spoke fluent Russian, so I recognized, and I'm very sorry to tell you that eventually when we went to another town, we wanted to be repatriated so that we could find out, because we were completely isolated - this is now East Germany - the Russian commandant, who whoever he was, who was repatriated, and I mean people had no idea yet what was going on. People did not digest the horror. Maybe the Russians did because of uh because they liberated Auschwitz, but the generally speaking the May the 5th was not yet a day that people knew what was going on, even Dachau which was liberated by the by the by the Americans, and Buchenwald and all that, the general public so to speak didn't yet know including some of the Russians, and uh he says you mean to tell me that there are some Jews still left through all that. But he said it in a way and I thought here I was in all the Pioneer as a child you know, being taught about the greatness of Russia - I believed that garbage - and here is somebody throwing that anti-Semitic remark to me right back in my face when I haven't even gotten out from the stained, blood-stained clothing. That was quite an awakening to me. That was an I was jolted into another kind of reality from which I never quite recovered meaning that, and this is why I have contributed some of my time - what had happened then can happen again. And unless you and I, people like you and many like you and the Holocaust Memorial Committee and the Museum, do not keep an absolutely alert vigilant eye, we may all be in trouble again, and it may not necessarily be the Jew. It can be anybody who has green eyes and dark hair. Anything can happen. I hope I have answered some of the questions you wanted.

Q: Tell me how you got, very briefly, from there to here. Uh what happened after liberation? Where did you go?

A: Very briefly, I will try to do it, but as briefly as I can, because I want I was in the I was first in the repatriation camp in Germany. Uh since Martha told me to meet her in a place called ilina which is Slovakia, not Czechoslovakia but Slovakia, and I spoke fluent Slovakian and fluent uh fluent Hungarian which everyone apparently does there, and I knew that I had absolutely no one left in Grodno and I mean there was nothing to go back to - I had been completely alone. That was a reality that hit me very quickly in the face. Now what? Uh, I told them that I was born in ilina, and that I was going to Czechoslovakia. The only trouble I had to convince them is that I really was sixteen, because I looked like ten, and they were going to put me with the orphans uh program and I didn't want to be with the children's program. I wanted to go on my own. And so I convinced them and told them I was two years older than I really was, which they didn't really believe me, but somehow I managed. Uh and I went to Prague. That's another story, not for today - that's quite an incredible story all by itself...

Q: Encapsulate \_\_\_\_\_.

A: Encapsulated is that I was supposed to, I came, I went on a four-day bus from Breslau (ph) to Prague and most of the people on that bus were people... (phrase missing)

**Tape #3**

...and completely alone in this world. That hit me as if to say, now what. But I didn't, I mean if you go through an experience like Auschwitz you sort of don't become philosophical and say well now what. And I was determined to go to \_ilina and I was given, I had no money of course - they gave us a ticket. They told us where to go. Said get a ticket - you don't have to pay for it, and then you will sleep at the Jan Maszaryk House, so I went to the thing and I got a ticket but on the way back I didn't know who Jan Maszaryk was and I forgot where I was supposed to be and I couldn't remember the name of the house. So I sat down and \_\_\_\_\_ (ph) where all that stuff was just going on there, and I sat down on a bench and I said OK, I will sleep here tonight. It was a lovely night, it was July. Had a little tiny white sweater and a little tiny bag like that - that was my whole belongings. And I said I'll wait here until tomorrow. I didn't know what I was supposed to do. I was alone but a young man comes up and sits next to me - starts talking to me in German. My German was very good at the time. He says what are you doing here, and I explained the story. Her says well do you know your friend is in \_ilina? No. Do you have any relatives? I have an aunt in New York. Well, I could help you maybe write to her or do something, but I can't help you if you are there. Why don't you let met help you? OK. It was like (snap fingers) - life and death decisions made at the spur of the moment. He could have raped me, he could have done anything, right? Took me to a Catholic convent and I stayed there for three months, and his father worked for a rather famous typewriter company called Schvetka, and I worked - he got me a job there and I learned Czechoslovakian, not Slovakian - I spoke Slovakian you know - within a very short time I was earning a little money and living in a in the convent, and he was quite a remarkable man, and I have just given you a little tiny medallion which he gave me at that time. And eventually uh the American Joint Distribution Committee found me, through my aunt I suppose. I wrote by the way - that might interest you - I wrote five letters in Russian, identical letters to my aunt, and I wrote on each letter on the bottom, if you should get all of these letters, please don't think I've lost my mind. I'm fine. I'm giving it to an American soldier, and I don't know which one of them will forward directly to you, and she got all five, and she said thank God you wrote that because I would have said poor child is really not right. Then I went to London, and instead of being...

Q: How?

A: Through the American Joint Distribution Committee the with the with the orphans uh program, and I uh instead of spending a year in London or six months which they told me you don't know English - I think it's a good idea that yu go there before you go to the States because you're under Polish visa or quota uh, why don't you go to London and you can at least learn a little bit of English. And I said well, very well and I knew three words in English at that time, thank you and peace. And it turned out to e four years. And I loved it. Uh and so I came from Breslau to Prague, from Prague to London, from London to New York, etc. etc. and now I'm in Washington.

Q: Nina, is there anything that you would like to add?

A: Yes, I would like to add by saying that the archives that are being collected and documented for posterity, articles, video-taping, lectures, books, are of unbelievable importance. Not, the Holocaust you see I never looked at the at the Jewish issue - it's not. It's an universal issue that affects each and every one of us and the more the American public, the European people, anyone, the Arab world, the black community, the children who feel very slighted for many good reasons, understand the historical, the soci...sociological, the philosophical aspect of the Holocaust, the better off we all are because this is the greatest lesson that we can learn about humanity in any form or shape that you want. And I think that this kind of a preservation of history, not those that are that write their own to change their own times, is what might save the world so that we do not repeat that. Because history has an ugly way of repeating itself and we cannot allow that to happen.

Q: OK. Thank you very much.

A: You are very welcome.