

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Rochelle Slivka
October 22, 1998
RG-50.549.02*0026

PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Rochelle Slivka, conducted by Arwin Donohue on October 22, 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.

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.

Interview with Rochelle Slivka
October 22, 1998

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jeff and Toby Herr collection.

This is an interview with Rochelle Slivka, conducted on October 22nd, 1998, by Arwin Donohue. This is a post Holocaust follow-up interview to a videotaped interview, that was conducted by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum with Mrs. Slivka on June 15th, 1990. This is tape number one, side A. Okay, even though, in the first interview that the Holocaust Museum did with you, we got a pretty good sense of your Holocaust era experiences, let's go back to before the war and just pick up on some things and clarify some things that -- that -- that we could get some more detail on, before going on to post-war experiences. And the first thing that I wanted to ask you about is, is a little bit about your family life in Poland --

Answer: Poland.

Q: -- before the war and you did say some things about it in the first interview, but we didn't get your -- we didn't get the names of your family, your parents and your sister. And also, if you could say how old your sister was, relative to you, and something about your relationships within your family.

A: Yeah, we hav -- we were four people. My father, mother, and my sister and myself. My sister -- I was -- when the war -- in -- I was born in 1922, in April and my sister was born in 1925, in September. We had a pretty good life. My father was working as -- in

the Jewish kaheela -- that's like a federation or so -- so-social worker, there. My mother was a housewife and we were normal children and when we started school, we went to -- to -- we didn't go to public schools, they didn't accept -- we went to private elementary school. Th-They didn't -- elementary was compulsory, but high school wasn't and they didn't expect too -- a-accepted too many Jews to the public high schools. And my sister and myself went to private, Hebrew speaking schools, because my father was a Zionist. And, I hear --

Q: What was your -- what was your sister's name?

A: My sister's name is Sarah and she lives -- she survived the war with me and she lives now in Israel. She has two daughters, ta -- also. One lives in Israel and one lives in California.

Q: Were you very close with her before the war?

A: Yes, we are. We were very close. We -- especially during the war, we kept very, very close, because that's all we had. And because, the rest -- we had a lot of relatives, cousins and my mother had another brother in Lithuania, but it -- between Poland and Lithuania, there was a conflict and we couldn't see each other. But, during the war, in -- when they opened the borders, we met my uncle and my mother saw hi -- her brother for the first time.

Q: Can you say a little bit more about your relationships in your family, before the war.

Were -- What -- Did you -- and you -- you had a sister and your mother and your father.

Were you particularly close with -- with -- I --

A: All [indecipherable]

Q: -- your mother or your father, anyone in particular?

A: No, we were c -- a close family, we were close to the mother and father and we had a very -- a very nice fam -- life ma -- life. We -- We never experience any fighting in the house, we never heard about it. And the -- In the summer, we used to -- in the winter, we used to go to school, like here, and in the summer we used to go to -- on -- to summer homes. We used to rent an apartment in a sum -- in a -- some village in summer -- i-in the summer home. And we in -- we used to enjoy a life, we used to have a lot of company. We had a lot of relatives. My father didn't have any relatives in -- in Vilno, where I was born, because he was born in Poland and he had a sister in Poland, in Zamusht. And th- the rest of his family were in the Soviet Union, that we never met them, we never saw them and I don't know them up to -- up to date, even. And -- But we were very close with the other relatives, with the cousins and aunts. Specially cousins, because we didn't have any aunts.

Q: You mentioned in the first interview that some of your family was in the United States.

A: Yes.

Q: When di -- When and how did that --

A: Well, I had -- three of my mother's brothers, they came in early 19 oh si -- between 1906 and 19 oh -- and 1910 or somewhere around there, they came to the United States, three of her brothers. Then, in 1920, before they closed the borders, the -- the

immigration to the United States, he -- they brought over my grandparents, their gran -- my grandparents, my grandmother and grandfather, two sister -- two aunts and an uncle. And this uncle lived for awhile i-in Canada and then he moved to Syracuse, he got married and he lived in Syracuse, New York. And my uncles lived here, in the United States. I never knew them until I came to the United States. When I came here, in 1949, my grandfather wasn't alive any more, but my grandmother was still alive and my two aunts and -- and three uncles. One uncle died in 1941 and I never knew him.

Q: Why did your family come to the US? Did they have some understanding of what was going ha -- going to happen?

A: I don't -- they -- they were in Lithuania some and the situation was very bad there and it was right with the Soviet Union and before the first World War, and life wasn't good in Europe. And they decided, the three brothers -- the three older brothers, decided to come to the United States, and the rest stayed. They couldn't afford at the time to come and they stayed in Europe. And when the other families came -- the rest of the family, my mother was pregnant with me, and she go -- just got married and they couldn't come to the United States. And my uncle from -- from Lithuania, couldn't make it either. They didn't get a visa or something. I don't remember exactly what it was. There was another brother in the Soviet Union, but we don't know what happened to him.

Q: What were your parents names?

A: My father's name was Israel and my mother's name was Chasia, a -- C-h-a-s-i-a.

Q: And her maiden name?

A: Her na -- maiden name was Schusta, but here in the United States, they changed -- changed to Schuman.

Q: So, was it co -- I mean your -- your family, it seems that almost your entire family had an interest in coming to the United States.

A: They -- My father wasn't interested. My father was a Zionist, he's always wanted to go to the Israel. And during the war -- in 1939, when the wor -- war broke out, he got a certificate for three people to go to Israel. But we were four people. Whom do you leave? Then he gave up his certificate to somebody else and we stayed home and they were perished, my parents, and -- my mother died in the ghetto and my father was burned alive in Estonia.

Q: Back in -- Back to the war time. There was just one thing I -- a question I had about the -- after Lithuania was -- after Vilna became part of Lithuania and you described in the videotaped interview how the non-Jewish children who you used to play with, all of a sudden were pointing out the Jews -- the Jews and -- and -- and -- and after the German occupation, they were pointing out the Jews and that these Jews were then being --

A: Being taken away, yeah.

Q: -- taken away. Was that shocking to you? Did you have close relationships with your towns non-Jewish townspeople before [indecipherable]

A: Yeah, we were very close. We used to play -- we -- we lived together. We -- It -- We did -- there was a Jewish section, too, but the ghetto was later. But we lived in the section that it was mixed, non-Jews and Jews. The majority were non-Jews and we lived very

quietly with them. We played with them in the yard, and out on the street. You know how kids play after school. And we never talked about it, but when the da -- Germans came, I guess that it was entirely different. They used to sell a Jew for a pound of salt, a pound of sugar, of -- a pack of cigarettes, they used to point out the Jew. And the Germans, with the help of the Ukrainian police, and Lithuanian police, used to come in and take them away. It was entirely different. We didn't -- we'd never expected that, but look, life changes. You can see it now, how countries change. It's still going on, they -- they still didn't learn from the fir -- the second World War and it's still going on in Bosnia and previous Czechoslovakia and in th-the African countries, they kill each other. For what? For a piece of land? Does it pay to kill people? Does it pay to -- to starve little kids, what is their fault? It hurts very much when you see those things on television.

Q: I'd like to talk more about that later, but just keeping with the pre-war or the war time --

A: Yeah.

Q: If -- I'd like to get a sense of your -- you're a young woman at the ti -- at the time that the war began, what were your dreams and hopes at that time for yourself? What did you imagine for your future?

A: Well, I'll tell you, we went -- when the war broke out, I was 17 years old. I didn't finish high school, I was in the lith -- last year of high school. And then I -- we were planning -- our parents planning to send me to the university, but they didn't accept Jews into the university in Poland. They accepted a very small amount. Then all the --

practically the majority of the Jews who went to college, went to other countries. Went to England, it was -- a lot of went to France, to Italy, to Germany -- to Germany you couldn't go. But before the war -- bef -- in -- ba -- in the early 30's, in the 20's, the -- a lot of Jewish people went to -- to Germany to ca -- to the universities. And -- But, didn't turn out this way and we did the best we could and that --

Q: Did you want to go to school -- to university, to study something?

A: I think I did wanted to do something, but I -- I -- I didn't know myself what I wanted to do yet. Because we were in a turmoil, we didn't know what's what, what's going to be, because in '38, a-already, the anti-Semitism was very high in Poland and they were talking about the war, what's going on and Hitler was taking Czechoslovakia at the time. And we were expected to be taken by the Germans also. And, when the bro -- when Germany attacked on September first, th-the Jews -- the -- Poland, it didn't last long. In 17 days, Po-Poland was defeated. And that was the end of our lives.

Q: So, really, your -- your own development as a young woman, imagining your future was very much interrupted even before the war started --

A: Before the war, yeah.

Q: -- that you-your -- your mind was --

A: We didn't know what to expect of our lives. We lived from day to day. Cause we didn't know what's going to be next. And in Poland, anti-Semitism was very, very high at the time. They were killing Jews, used to beat us up for -- without any reason, specially before Christmas or before Passover.

Q: Were you beat up, personally?

A: No, na -- not me, but especially they used to beat up boys ma --the most. But once in awhile, when we used to go to school, they used to call us, "Dirty Jew, where are you going?" Because they knew we are Jews, because we were going to school and they were going to school, but we had uniform -- we had to wear uniforms to s -- when we were in Europe. And we had numbers and they knew that th-this and this is the Jewish -- we were Jews. Here are some pictures from high school, the uniform.

Q: I also wanted to ask about the Vilna ghetto.

A: Vilna -- Vilna ghetto, yeah.

Q: You mention -- you told in your first interview how you had -- how it happened that you and your other -- other members of your community were gathered together and put into this -- this ghetto, after -- after the pogrom at -- at [indecipherable]

A: The ghet -- Right before the Jewish holidays, about a month before the Jewish holidays, e-everything -- it ha -- they used to kill and -- or round up Jews, but they tried to do right before the Jewish holidays. And they decided to make a ghetto in the -- in Vilno. There was a section in the city where a lot of poor Jews lived. The syn -- The biggest synagogue was there. The Jewish home for the aged, the Jewish hospital was there and the orphanage -- Jewish orpha-orphanage was there. And one night they came in in -- in this place and they took out all the Jews from this -- this part of the -- of the city and they drove them to a place, Ponari. And we heard some screaming during the night and yelling and -- but we weren't allowed to look out to the window what was

going on. Those who did, they were shot. And -- But the next day our neighbors told us what happened, that they took away all the Jews from there and they drove them to Ponari. And we -- And couple weeks later, they round up all the Jews from the city and around the city, suburbs and they put us all in this place and surrounded us with walls and a gate. And we lived two to three families in a two room apartment. We didn't have any bathrooms, we had to go outhou -- outhouses. One kitchen for two families, three families, can you imagine? And -- But we did the best we could. We lived -- my mother, when we got into the ghetto, she took sick and she was in the hospital. We took her to the hospital. She died on October first, in the -- in the hospital. We were right there and my father worked in the Jewish Judenrat, in the ghetto. He was still working from -- from before and he was still working there.

Q: What was his role with the Judenrat?

A: Whatever they gave him to work, but he -- he -- he used to work in the social department -- Social Services department.

Q: Did you know much about what his activities were?

A: No, no. I know that he took care of poor Jews and some Jewish soldiers, from before the war in Poland, they used to help them out. Before the holidays, they used to give them packages, food -- and for Passover, they used to make them the seder, you know, they used to -- the special holiday supper. And the -- they used to help out a lot that -- for Jewish people.

Q: Did you all live together, you and your father and your sister in the same apartment?

A: Yes, we lived in a four room apartment. It's a -- a -- the -- a dining room, living room, one room. Two bedrooms and a kitchen. A kitchen was counted as a room. We ha -- We a -- We were lucky to have a bathroom and a bathtub in our house. We had to use coal or wood to warm our houses [inaudible] oven -- in the ovens, but we were lucky we had this.

Q: What did you do on a day to day basis? What was your day like in the ghetto?

A: Well, I was already 17 - 18 years old, something. And I didn't go to school. Of course, there -- th-there were -- had schools for younger children. I was working in a store and selling some hot water or selling some other things in the store I worked for awhile. And -- And that's all. My father had a suppl -- helped us out. My sister didn't do anything.

Q: She wasn't in school?

A: No, this -- the younger kids were in school. And one day when the ger -- the Lithuanian and Ukrainian police came and took away all the kids from school. Those kids never said -- had a chance to say goodbye to the parents. We were -- never saw them again. We used to have a theater once in awhile and they had our own police, our own fire department in the ghetto. We had concerts. Some people had good voices, they used to put up a concert to entertain, not to make life miserable, a little bit cheerful. We were hoping that someday maybe, maybe we will survive that. Cause we couldn't believe that Germany, the most so-sophisticated, the most wonderful c-country before the war, before Hitler came, was Germany. And this should -- could happen, they could do those things.

Q: Did you have any knowledge of the resistance movement in the Vilna ghetto --

A: Yes.

Q: -- or contacts with?

A: I didn't have any contact, but I -- I heard about them. There were a lot of -- a lot of young people. During the night they used to sneak out and they used to go. I didn't, because I didn't want to leave my father and my sister. And there were a lot of young people. The head of the -- this was Aba Kovner, maybe you heard about him. He was the head. He died a couple years ago, in Israel. He went to the same school that I went, a few years -- he was a few years older than I was. And there were quite a few young people who went out of the -- of the ghetto and went to the woods. They resist -- and they resisted. They were fighting. But it wasn't easy for them either, because the Poles were fighting Germans and they fight -- wer f -- and -- and they were fighting the Jews, too. They were killing Jews also. The Poles, the Ukrainians, the Lithuanians. Wherever they could find a Jew, they used to kill a Jew.

Q: Was there a discussion in your house, in your family about that -- the contradiction, the difficulty in -- the difficult decision of resistance versus trying to get -- do the best that you could under the circumstances?

A: No-Not that I can remember. I can't remember, to tell you -- tell you the truth. Maybe my father was talking to some other friends between them, you know, but I can't remem -

-

Q: And -- we're jumping around a li -- a little here, but still, just thinking of -- of filling in some of the gaps from the first interview, since you do talk about your -- how the --

well, I wanted you to -- to talk about the day that you -- that -- or the time that the ghetto was liquidated, that that order came in and that you were separated from your father and you and your sister went --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- towards Kaiserwald. Do you remember the moment of separating from your father?

A: A day before, it was right before the high holidays, a day before, they o -- they announced over the loudspeakers that we sh -- that all the Jews from the ghetto should be concentrated in front of the gates and will be resettled. We can take only what we can carry with us. We all segregated, it was the -- it wasn't a nice day, it was a rainy day, cold, Septe -- in the September. It was a rainy day. And the next day, we're all segrega -- we're all -- we're there at the gates, all went together. We were holding hands together. And we were driven to a field. They took away the men -- sa -- when we came, the first thing we saw, three people hanging in front of us. Two young men and a young woman, I can s-s-still see them in front of me. And they told us, in case somebody has in mind to run away, will be caught and killed in front of us, or hanged in front of us. They took away the men separately, a different part of the field and women and children somewhere else. It was a miserable, cold night. We said goodbye to our father and he said to -- kissed us both, wished us good luck. And that's -- and we went to the field and he went to his side. He was taken to Estonia and there they burned them alive. Put logs -- people and logs and burned them alive. Quite a few years ago, we were in Israel and in a kibbutz, Lachaima agetta ot, there is a s-survivor's kibbutz. All this -- a lot of the s-survivors live

there. And there is a museum about the Holocaust. And we were walking around. Our daughter and her husband and two children were with us. And we were walking around there, we were looking and I saw pictures from this concentration camp. And we saw how the men were lying on the logs. And at this -- on this side were handwritten, beautifully, beautifully handwritten, their names and their number, and I found my father's name there. My t -- My daughter had a camera, she took a picture of that. And --

Q: What was the name of the camp where your father was killed?

A: Klooga, I think. In Estonia. And we were sitting the whole night in this field. It was a miserable, miserable cold night, rainy night. Whenever a child cried, they -- one of the soldiers used to take away the child from the mother and take it for their feet and tear them in half like this and throw them back to the mother. And some mother, from fright, used to kill their own children. Didn't know what to do. They'd kill -- some mother killed their own children, in fright. This was going on like that, the whole night. And the next morning, we had to stay in line and be sorted. I was lucky enough, with my sister, we went to the right. And some other of my cousins went to the left. We never saw them again. I don't know where they went, to Majdan --

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is tape number one, side B, of an interview with Rochelle Slivka.

A: And then we were sorted and we were put on -- on the cattle cars, 100 women to a car, without food, without bathrooms, without water. And taken to the -- and driven to the

concentration camp in Latvia, Kaiserwald. Some women tried to escape, they tried to sneak out through the windows -- th-the small windows. Whoever -- some got killed, some got shot. Nobody survived, whoever tried to run away.

Q: When you said a little earlier -- you were talking about your father and -- and how h -- how he had been burned alive at this camp, did you -- when did you learn about this?

A: I learned in the -- before they liquidated -- i-in -- I think in Stutthof, I learned. I met a women there who was in this camp, but she survived somehow. Or sh -- I don't know how she did and she -- she told me. She knew my father and she told me about it. That's how I knew. In Stutthof.

Q: Had you -- Did that -- I -- You described how much your -- your outlook was disrupted from very early o-on, before the war even started, but after you heard about the death of your father, did that change your -- your outlook? Had you -- Had you been hopeful, or were you still hopeful at all? Did you think there were --

A: I -- We lived from day to day. We didn't know what's going to be tomorrow. We stuck together. This -- My sister and myself. We met a girlfriend of ours, she used to be our neighbor, years, years ago. And she didn't have anybody. She came over to us and she says, "I am alone. I would like you -- to be a third sister to you. You -- Maybe it will help me to -- to overcome some things." I says, "Sure." We said, "Sure." And we all stuck together. And we all liberated together. And -- And we lived from life to li -- from day to day and we were ho -- I -- I was still hoping that maybe someday I'll survive and I'll be able to tell the world what was happening. And not to let that happen again to

anybody. Doesn't matter if you're a Jew or a -- a Pole or a Gypsy or a f -- whoever you are, we are all human being. Doesn't matter the color, you are green or blue or white or gr -- or black. We are human beings. And treat everybody like a human being. At the time we didn't know about the gay people, you know, we were -- it wasn't so popular at the time and we didn't -- we were young enough not to know about those things. But, we are all people. It's their lives, it's up to them how they live. And it wasn't easy. Some women couldn't take it. They used to sneak out during the night to the barb -- electrified wires and touch the wires and kill themselves. And some -- We were like animals. We were happy that somebody died in front -- near us. We could have their clothes, their rags to cover our feet, not to be -- we didn't have any shoes, to keep warm. We were like animals. The Germans treated us like animals. They treated their dogs better than us. It wasn't easy.

Q: And then -- You describe in your other -- in your first interview of course, how you went from Kaiserwald to Stutthof and then there was a -- a forced march.

A: [indecipherable] long march, yes.

Q: Let's go ahead to -- to the time that you were liberated and you described seeing a truck full of Russian --

A: Russian soldiers.

Q: -- soldiers coming along. C-Can -- Can you go into that moment and recall what you were feeling then or what the atmosphere was on that day?

A: I'll tell you, as far as I can remember, we were so numb, that when they told us the war is over in this part of Germany and we can go wherever we want -- we want to go, we couldn't go anywhere. We were skeletons. We had the fr-frostbitten feet, frostbitten hands. We couldn't do anything. And they saw that we can't do anything and they send in a truck and they took us into a village and where we came into the village, they let us loose. Nobody was in the village, because it -- the Germans went back -- th -- retreated with the other ger -- with the German army, they didn't want to fall into the Russians. And we were like animals. We grabbed anything, whatever we could find to eat. We grabbed any -- any clothes, whatever we could find and some women overate and some died from overeating, because they couldn't take it any more. Our stomachs couldn't take. We were sick there for awhile, but after awhile we got better. We had to wash ourselves in kerosene every day, to get rid of the lice and change our -- burn our clothes. And after a couple of months later, my sister, myself, decided to go back to the city of Vilno. I didn't want to go back to Vilno, because I didn't know -- I knew that nobody's alive, but my sister insisted to go back. When we came on the bo -- to the border between Poland -- it's Soviet Union then -- and Poland -- Lithuania was under the Soviet Union, and -- and Poland -- we met some people who are coming out from -- from Russia there, they told us, "Don't go, it's no -- the situation is no good and it's very bad," and everything. I decided I wouldn't go, but my sister insisted she wants to go and she wants -- maybe she can get from our Polish neighbors, some clothes, or furniture, whatever we left with them. We left a lot of things wi -- you know, a household, you had a lot of

things in the house. And when she came to their houses, they didn't give her back anything, they threw her out. And I -- meantime, I registered in the Jewish paper, in Poland there, in Bialystok. And I put an ad in the paper that I'm looking for my relatives in Boston, by the name of Schuman. I didn't remember my aunt's na -- last names. And my grandmother used to li -- read the Jewish paper every day and she found my name and she notified all the children that I am alive. And a couple weeks later, I received a letter from one of my uncles, who lived in Pittsfield, Maine here. He was the only Jew there. And he encouraged me to go to west Germany and from there, they'll -- to the American zone, and from there they'll try to bring me to the United States.

Q: What was his name, your uncle?

A: Schuman, Joseph Schuman. He was -- He was very close to Margaret Chase-Smith, if you remember Margaret Chase. It's before your time. She was a senator here, in the United -- here, in Maine. A Republican.

Q: Did you feel any sense -- any shift -- did you feel that you had been liberated?

A: I felt I was liberated. I felt I -- I -- I was guilty that I was liberated and the rest of the family not -- nobody survived. I felt very guilty. I -- I had problems with that. But I couldn't help anything. They had to be like that and specially with my sister left and I was all alone. And I went -- and I wrote back to my uncle that I am -- he wanted to know if I am this and this, the same -- the same Rochelle Blerchman, my first name was, at the time. And I wrote him exactly my mother's name, my father's name and th-that I remembered my grandfa-father's name, my grandmother's name. And I remembered the

-- some other uncle's names. And I identified myself who I was and I wrote him about what happened to us. And -- And then we tried -- I tried with other groups to go back from Poland to Germany. It wasn't easy, but we went back to -- we had to cross the borders illegally. And we went to Czechoslovakia, from Czechoslovakia, we went to west Germany. There, I took sick And I was in the hospital, in the sanitorium for awhile. And I got in touch with my uncles again and they helped me. My aunts used to send me clothes, they send me cigarettes, I started to smoke. And they send me to sell it -- you know, they didn't know that I smoked or not, but they send me cigarettes. They couldn't send me any money, but they send me clo -- a lot of clothes. And th-they send me a lot of stuff. Some canned goods.

Q: How did it happen that you and your sister separated? She wanted to go to Vilna?

A: She wanted to go back to Vilno, to get from the Po -- from the Poles. They didn't give her back anything, they threw her out of the house. And at the time, after while, they closed the border between Poland and -- and the Soviet Union, she couldn't get out any more, and we lost contact all together. We didn't hear from each other for -- for a long, long time, unti -- from 1946-'47 -- '46, '45-'46, until hit -- Stalin died. After Stalin died, I wrote a letter to Vilno, to the Jewish Community Center and I asked them that I'm looking for a sister by the name and this and this name. And -- And I'd -- can't find her address, will they please try to look up to find her? And they did find her and they gave her my address and si -- we started to write each other. And at the time, she wa -- got married a-and she had a child and I encouraged her to get out of there. I couldn't tell her

get out of pol -- to go -- get out of Russia. I used to say, "Go to visit Aunt Pauline" -- that Poland, "and from there, you'll go to see Uncle Israel" -- to -- to go to Israel. And when she came to Poland, I spo -- I called her on the pay station and she had to go to the post office there and she waited for my call. I wrote her when I -- when I'll call her. It's the first time I got in contact with her by talking to her. And believe me, it was a very hard time, because I started to mix in English words, and -- and it was our ho -- but we talked, a little bit. And from then on, she went -- she went to Israel. She didn't want to come back here, she didn't want to go anywhere else any more. So she said she had enough. She wants to go to Israel and settle there, her husband, too. And they went to Israel and she lives there now. Her husband -- about five years ago, he was killed in a car accident. And she has two daughters, grandchildren. She lives in Israel.

Q: Are you still very close?

A: Oh yeah, we s -- we talk to each other on the telephone. And whenever we go to Israel, we see each other very often.

Q: Do you go to Israel --

A: Yes.

Q: -- fairly often?

A: Yeah, we go practically every year, sometimes twice a year -- we used to, because we have that -- we have a daughter there and we have si -- four grandchildren. Don't have any choice, have to go to see. And the last time we were there, last January, our grandson was bar mitzvah there, we went there. And this year, we're not going, because our

grandson, in Louisiana, in January, is going to be bar mitzvah, then we are bringing them here. I don't know if my older granddaughter will be able to come. She is registered to go to the army and I don't know if they'll let her out or not, but they'll try to and they're coming to the bar mitzvah for two weeks. And we're looking forward to see them again. We are going to Florida the 11th and then we're -- for Thanksgiving, we're going to New Orleans, to our daughter. Usually they used to come to Florida for Thanksgiving and Christmas, but this year their daughter is going to DisneyWorld, or she's going to New York, I don't know, with a group from school, then she won't be back on time, then we decided we'll go for Thanksgiving there and for Christmas vacation, they'll come, probably, to port -- to Florida, to visit us.

Q: You travel around a lot, it sounds like.

A: Not an -- not as much as we used to. You're getting older, you don't have the strength any more. We used to drive to Florida. We used to drive to -- to New Orleans all the time, but it's getting harder. We used to change drivers all the time. Couple hours my husband will drive, I'll -- will drive an hour or so. Used to take time, but we do the best we can, try the best we can and that's all, to live a normal life. Believe me, it wasn't easy. When I came to this country, I didn't know anybody, didn't know my relatives. They did -- They were very, very good to me, specially my aunt in Brookline, Massachusetts. She opened her house for me. She was like a mother to me. And her children -- when I came to this, they were sitting and waiting on the stairs for me to come. I came by boat and the parents went to pick me up. And my cousin, he says, "Oh, I have another sister to beat

up. You will be my cookie.” He used to -- He didn’t call me by my name, he called me ‘Cookie’. He was a very nice boy. Then graduated, got married, moved to Chicago. But unfortunately, he died very young, of cancer. They didn’t diagnosed him right. He was 51 years old when he died, cancer. But I’m -- We’re still close with his wife. She remarried, but we are close. They are cousins.

Q: You lived in Germany before you came to the United States.

A: Well, we -- I lived -- I was in the sanitorium for a couple of year -- for -- for awhile. After I got better, I got a letter from one of my uncles from Dover, New Hampshire, I had a-an uncle, too. And he told me that his son -- he was a doctor, he was in the same hospital where I was, in the army there. When I went -- When I got the letter, I went to look for him and -- and a day before, he left for the United States. The letter came a day too late. Anyway, after I got better, I decided to go back to school. I learned a profession, nursing. I liked always, nursing. And after I graduated the nursing, I worked in a -- in Landsberg, in Germany, in a DP hospital.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit more about what it was like to be in school again? Was this a --

A: It --

Q: I-In Germany, especially.

A: I-I-It -- It wasn’t too bad. It -- We took courses. They taught us how to give injections, how to -- I don’t remember exactly how -- how exactly it was. My memory’s not as good as it used to be. And I -- But I took up and I worked in the hospital there, in Landsberg, in

a DP hospital. And then after awhile, I went -- moved to M-Munich and I worked in a office there, because it was -- and from there, they -- I got an affidavit from one of my uncles that he is taking all the full responsibility of me, that I won't be a burden to the United States and to come to the United States. When I come to the United States on affidavit th-they sent me, I was interviewed by the CIA. Everything went fine. They told me in a couple of weeks, they'll call me to go to the doctors and from there, I'll go to the -- to -- will be sent to Bremen and from there, I'll go to the United States. I was waiting and waiting and waiting and I never -- they never called me. I went to ask what was happening, why -- they told me I was crossed off the list that I'm in the United States already. Somebody else probably bribed somebody, they sent away somebody else. Anyway, they didn't like that, because they were afraid that the -- that I'll make a -- sue them or something. Then they told me that -- the next day to go through some doctors and in a couple of days, there was a transport going to Bremenhoffen -- to brem -- to -- and from there, I'll go to the United States. And when I came to Bremenhoffen, the j -- American consul couldn't make up his mind if I am a Polish citizen or a Lithuanian citizen. Then I had to stay there again, for weeks -- for six weeks and waited. I got tired and I didn't feel like staying in the barracks any more. People were going away and I -- every day some other people used to come. Then I sent a telegram to one of my uncles -- to my uncle in Pittsfield, that if I can't go to the United States, I'll turn around and I'll go back to Israel. Two days later, I get a call from the Joint Distribution in Bremenhoffen, that the next day, two boats are going to the United States, one to Boston, one to New

York and I'll be ba -- I'll be on the boat to Boston. Sure enough, the next day, the -- th-
the next few days I went on the boat -- to the boat to Boston. They asked me, "Are you
going to Massachusetts?" I says, "No, I'm not going to Massachusetts, I'm going to
Boston." I didn't know the difference. How would I know where -- I saw on the map
Boston here, and Portland here -- I had an aunt here in Portland -- and I saw por -- this
was Portland, Oregon. I didn't know Portland, Maine or por -- Boston, Massachusetts or
anything. I says, "Oh, my God, they live so far away from each other." That -- I had an
aunt here in Portland, Maine, around the corner.

Q: Before you -- we get on the ship coming to the United States, what was it like to live -
- I mean, did you have contact with German citizens in your day to day life?

A: I tried not to. I -- I ha -- I associated with -- with the refugees, like me.

Q: And when you were in school, were most of the other students refugees?

A: Yes. Of course, it was a fort -- is a -- this is -- was a hospital, a sanitorium for people
from -- refugees from the concentration camps.

Q: So, were the doctors Jewish?

A: No, some were German doctors, but they tried to help everybody to do some --

Q: So you -- They were not -- Did you feel comfortable working with them?

A: In -- In -- In the DP camp, there were Jewish doctors, but in the -- when I was
learning, there were some Jewish, but majority were German doctors, but we didn't have
any choice, we had to do it, if I wanted to -- to learn something.

Q: Did they discriminate at all [inaudible]

A: No, no.

Q: There was just no discussion about it?

A: No discussion, no nothing. We were people. They tried the best. I don't know how in the pr -- other, private -- their private lives was, but right there, they tried to be very helpful. Not all the Germans were with Hitler, don't forget [indecipherable] everybody agreed with him.

Q: What was the name of the -- of the ha -- school that you had --

A: Saint Autiliad.

Q: And how long were you at Landsberg?

A: I was there fr -- since 1947 sometimes, to 1948, '40 -- beginning '49. Because -- no, before '48, because then I moved to Munich and from Munich and -- and I came to this country 1949, May 18th, I was born again.

Q: How were your spirits? I mean, wa -- you're working in -- in Germany, at this Displaced Persons camp, with so many people who are in between. Did you feel that you're in between everything still, or were you -- or were you able t -- did you feel that life was getting back to normal?

A: I-It was -- We were trying to get to normal, to -- like, to be like normal people, but it wasn't easy. There were a lot of sick people. They're all DP's, Displaced Persons. That was a only for Displaced Person's hospital. And it wasn't easy, but we did the best we could, we tried to do the -- help th -- each other, the patients and the nurses and everybody. And it wasn't easy, because we were all mixed up. We didn't know what's

what, what's -- if -- if it's the right thing, or the -- not the right thing or what. People were on the boat and we were going on the -- on the boat. They said, oh, they are lucky, they are going to relatives and they will be so good, and this and that and they were telling how wonderful and everything. I didn't say anything, because I didn't know my relatives. I'd -- couldn't say if they will be good to me or not good to me. I -- I couldn't say. How would I know? You know, people change. And I never knew them, they ne -- they ne -- they didn't know me either. But it turn out that my relatives were very, very, very good to me. My cousins, my aunts, my uncles were very good to me. And I was in contact for awhile with the other refugees when -- with whom I came to -- they were very disappointed. The relatives weren't good.

Q: Can you say more about that? Wh--What -- What was it that -- I mean, it must -- did you know before -- you're describing how before you came, you -- you didn't know what to expect. Were -- Was it frightening?

A: It was frightening, yes.

Q: Did you have a sense that some people --

A: It was frightening, very frightening. When I wa -- when the boat stopped in Boston and one of my uncles from Dover, New Hampshire was walking around on the -- there -- what you call it there? On the si -- on the walk there and yelling my name and I started to wave that tha-that's me, a-a-and he waved back, I started to cry. I didn't know what to do. I didn't know -- I -- I -- I couldn't picture anything, I couldn't see. If it's true or not, I couldn't -- I couldn't realize that. But came -- they took me off the boat and I went to --

went through all the thing -- you know, they ask me what I have with me and if I am sick or not sick. You know, if -- all -- all kind of questions [indecipherable] went by.

Everything was fine. They took me to the -- to their house -- my aunt in Brookline and I lived there for awhile. In the summer, I used to come to Portland, to Maine. I had an aunt and uncle here. My -- My uncles used to come to visit me and take them to their houses. My uncle [indecipherable], he was a rich man, but other ones weren't too rich, but they made a living, they had -- but I'm still close with my cousins from port -- and my aunt from -- from Massachusetts. My uncle -- she is still alive, he is not. And one son died and then one daughter, she sta -- still is -- 65 years old now, she had a stroke and she is in a home, she can't talk. And it's hard when we go to see her. Every time we go to Boston, we go to visit her, she's in a home -- nurs -- in a nursing home. 64 years old, that's a young woman.

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is tape two, side A, of an interview with Rochelle Slivka. You -- How long did your boat trip the United States take?

A: 10 days.

Q: What was it like?

A: It wasn't a good boat -- I was si-sick all the time. Even I see now a -- a waterbed, I get seasick, nevermind now a boat. I'm afraid to go on a boat. I get seasick. There is a restaurant here, u-up -- on a boat, on the water and I -- it was a long time I didn't go there. I was afraid to go there. But I went, couple times and it wasn't bad, it was all right. Because it's standing, you know, it's not moving around. But if I si -- I -- even when I see a sa -- a -- a waterbed, I get seasick.

Q: Was the crew American --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- of the ship?

A: Yeah, all Americans, yeah. It's a -- It was a -- a ship for the soldiers and it was -- we slept on the floor, some -- some on bunkers. Had enough to eat, but I couldn't eat too much, because of s -- [inaudible] seasick. But, we survived and we came and I'm happy I came. And November 11th, 1954, I became a cisi-cisi -- citizens of the United States, here in Portland.

Q: Was that an important occasion for you?

A: Yes. I was the most luckiest girl in this world that I am a citizen of the United States and I can tell you that -- that I never, never missed a -- a voting. Never.

Q: Did you ever feel homesick for Vilna?

A: No. You know, I wanted to go back to Vilna and -- to see -- to pay tri -- there is Ponari, where 80,000 Jews were killed there. And I would -- wanted to go back to pay my respects to all my cousins who were killed there, but I never had an occasion. Two years ago, my husband decided to go back to Ukraine -- he'll tell you about it -- to put up a monument for the Jews who -- for his parents and all the Jews from this town. And he organized a group of people to go to the -- to Ukraine -- to Poland, to Ukraine and to Vilno. To Vilno only, it mi -- when -- we all went to Ukraine to put up a monument for my husband's -- the Jews for the -- from this ci-city. He'll tell you all about it. And then we went to Warsaw. We w -- to -- to Warsaw for awhile, one day. And so the cont -- the ghetto -- here he is -- and then, other people went to Auschwitz. I didn't want to go to Auschwitz, I wanted to go to Vilno. We went to Vilno and for the first time, I went to Vilno, to see --

A2: Hello.

A: Hi.

Q: Should we pause?

A: Can we wait for a minute? And I did not recognize the city. We went to a hotel there and I asked her where this and that. It was entirely different, very, very run down. And after dinner, my husband and my daughter took a walk. I knew where the -- the hotel

was, because it was o-on -- on the main street. And we went, looked around and looked around. I didn't recognized a lot of things, but after awhile, everything came back to me. I saw my father's -- where my father's office was, but there wasn't a building any more. Then there was a park. Then mise -- where I si -- lived, the street was all blocked up and yi -- broken up. The house where we lived, it was not there any more. They warned us not to go too late, it's too dangerous to go at night. Then we came back right to the -- back to the -- but the next morning, right in the morning, right after breakfast, we went to look ta -- look around. And I went -- where I went -- where I used -- where -- went to the street, to the school where I went to school, to the high school. There -- There was the Jewish Community Center there, there wasn't a school. But it was very run down. The streets -- it was run down, it -- and then we went t-to si -- the st-street where I was born, the houses. It -- It looked horrible. It hurt very, very much. We -- We had a guide th-that was my brother-in-law's nephew, he still lives in Lithuan -- in Vilnius and he took us around everywhere. He had a car, because he worked for a oil company.

Q: Is he Jewish?

A: He is Jewish, but he was married to a non-Jew. And he lived there and he took us around, i-in places. We went to Ponari, it was very, very emotional. I was so -- we were there for two days. I was very sick. The ghetto where I was -- the ghetto -- where the ghetto was, it's so broken up, it's so horrible. I saw the signs -- the street signs, jihd -- that's jihd -- that -- Jew Street.

Q: Still?

A: Still there. You know, it -- it hurt so much. It hurts so much. But we did the best we could. We walked and we saw a lot of things. The synagogue -- the main synagogue wasn't there any more, it bombed. There is another synagogue, but it was b-boarded up. Was in bad condition, but I understand there is -- they're going to rebuild, fix it up. We wanted to go to the cemetery where my mother was buried, but they told us there isn't a cemetery there any more, there's a park. But there is coming a man, th -- head from the Jewish Community Center says to me -- told me, there is coming a man -- he didn't tell me the name and he didn't tell me from where, he is coming and he is going to put -- put up a big monument. They found some tombstones. [indecipherable] tombstones and another monument right there, near the -- near the park now, they'll put up that it was a cemetery and all the Jews -- some Jews were buried there, who lived from before the -- before the war. It was a very, very, very emotional. Very e -- I -- I was sick for -- for weeks afterwards. And -- And we hope -- our older daughter from New -- New Orleans was with us. We want our other daughter to come with us next time. We hope to go maybe next summer, to take our other daughter from Israel and maybe my two granddaughters.

Q: Did it have a big effect on your daughter, to see that?

A: Yes. But -- And I wanted to -- my granddaughters to see it, too -- to go to see it.

Q: Did you speak to any Lithuanian people while you were there?

A: No. They don't s -- I don't speak Lithuanian. They -- A lot of the people, they speak Russian. They don't want to speak Polish any more. There a lo -- There was a Polish city,

Vilno. They speak Russian. Some of them. they speak Lithuanian. I don't know how to speak Lithuanian, because it was a hard language and I didn't learn, even. They wa -- in Vilno for a couple of months only, then the Soviet Union took over again. And, it was very emotional, but it was worthwhile going and I would like to go again, to show my other daughter.

Q: But you didn't -- I gather you didn't feel that it was -- that it was really home, that --

A: Not at home. I felt very cold there. It was in ma -- i-it was in July, I think. June or July. June, I think. Anyway, it was a cold, it -- it's -- I -- I felt very uncomfortable there. I -- I -- I was amazed how it looked. It was such a beautiful city. It was a cultural city. It had a university. It had high schools, it had private high schools. It had a Polish pa -- to -- Jewish Polish high schools. A hebe -- two Hebrew high schools, a Yiddish high school. Had a Russian high school. I-It was a very cultural city. It has a seminar for teachers. A- A-And now it was nothing. It was hurting very much. It was -- this -- the main street, it was such a beautiful street, called Mitskaveetcha at the time. I don't know -- I don't remember how it's called now. And when we were in the hotel -- I knew there was a hotel, but this wasn't the hotel I -- and I asked her, I said, "Ther-There was a hotel in here, but I don't think this is the hotel, sh -- a-and -- there was," -- she says, "No, this was a high school. My father owned the high school, it was a Russian high school." This secretary told. I-It -- You know, it's -- it hurt, a lot of things, you know, how it felt. But, we did the best we could. And we came back, stayed in Poland another day and we came

ho -- came home. And I'll tell you one thing, as soon we came to -- back to -- to the United States, I said thank God.

Q: So you feel -- Do you feel at home here?

A: Yes. That's my home.

Q: Did -- How long did it take you to feel that this was your home?

A: After I came, I started -- I did my best to make up my mind this is my home. It is my home, because I lived in Poland only for se -- for 17 years. I was born, then I was in the concentration camp. And since 1949, I am here. This is my home. It's the longest time there ever I -- I lived, that the United State, that's my home, my country.

Q: But you made up your mind even soon after you arrived here that that's -- that this was where your home was going to be?

A: Yeah, yeah. I didn't think about anywhere else.

Q: How -- So your fa -- you lived in -- in Massachusetts then, for --

A: I lived in -- from 1949 until 1953, we lived -- I lived in Massachu -- in Boston. In -- I lived with my aunt and uncle until 1952 -- until I was married. I was ma -- I met my husband in 1951, on a blind date. The kids ask me, after I si -- and finish speaki -- an ta -- and telling them about my troubles and all my life history, they says, "Where did you meet your husband?" I tell them on a blind date. They laugh. They can't believe that older people had th-the blind dates. Anyway, on a blind date and in 1952, we were married. And we lived in Boston for awhile and then we -- he got a job here, as an accountant.

Q: Who set you up in -- on your blind date, with --

A: My sister-in-law's aunt, at the time. She -- I knew her from Germany [indecipherable]. I had -- My girlfriend's mother-in-law and she, they were in the hospital together. This -- Bed to bed, they were lying there. And I used to go to visit my girl -- with my girlfriend. Then I met her there and when she came to the United States, and me -- I saw her a couple times and then she introduced me to Jerry.

Q: Do you remember anything about that first date? What you talked about?

A: No.

Q: Did you talk together in your early days about your experiences during the Holocaust?

A: No.

Q: Did you know that about each other?

A: No. I started to talk about the Holocaust, in -- when they showed the first time, the movie "Holocaust". After that, they called me -- a girl -- a -- a friend of ours, ca -- they called her, she should speak about the Holocaust. She says she never was in the Holocaust, but she knows somebody who speaks ab -- who was in the Holocaust, I never spoke at the time. And she says, "I'll call her and I'll ask her if she could talk to you." She called me, I said, "Fine." It was, I think, in 1978, or something like that. And when I came to the school, the principal says to me, "You talk as long as you can, because there won't be any questions." I says, "I'll talk as much as I can." And that -- When I fin -- First of all, when I was talking, it was so quiet, you could hear a fly go by. Th-The girl -- The kids were sitting like this. And then I says, "I'll take some questions," and I'll -- I

answered as m-many as I could questions. If I had more time -- I had 250 kids at the time. If I had more time, they would ask me more questions, because I had to wait another half an hour or so -- another session, 250 kids to talk about -- to talk about the Holocaust. Kids came over to touch me, if I am real. And since then, I'm talking -- didn't stop talking yet.

Q: I -- I imagine it would have been very difficult to talk that first time.

A: It is -- It was. I was shaking like this. But, I got used to it. I talk -- It hurts, it -- everything comes in front of me, but I told you, I used to get a cigarette. Now, I don't smoke. But still, I do my best. I talk to schools, I talk to teachers. In Bates College, they have every year some teacher's conventions. I talk to them -- I talk to -- teach them about the Holocaust. And I spoke a few years ago, in Caribou, for 900 students. High school and university and wherever they ask me, I go.

Q: Why did it happen that you didn't talk until the late 1970's? Were you not ready, or were people not interested?

A: They never asked me. I don't think they -- they -- they kn-knew about. They knew about the Holocaust, but they never were interested, I guess, until they saw on television and they st -- de-decided to teach the kids, to let them know what was going on. Not to happen -- what the hatred means.

Q: Was it difficult for you, those years of not talking about it?

A: I didn't think about it. I did -- never thought about it.

Q: So, your family didn't -- didn't ask you about it, either?

A: They u-used to ask me a question here, a question there, but they weren't interested so much. The people weren't interested in the beginning. Now, they are more interested than it used to be. Especially -- you know who are interested? Junior high school kids. They are more interested than the high school kids. They ask a lot of questions. High school kids are afraid to ask in case it's the wrong question, the other kids will laugh at him. They will make fun of him -- of them. But the junior high, they don't give a damn. They ask -- whatever it comes in -- in their mind, they ask. I do my best I can and I try. Spoke to churches, spoke to university.

Q: So you said that during those years before you started speaking, that your experiences weren't so much on your mind. What was on your mind? What was important to you then?

A: Life, from day to day, to bring up the kids. I was busy with the children. They were small. And I'm a -- I was a housewife. And that's all. And then, after they went into school, last year I spoke to -- in -- in the -- in a high school where my kids went and the teachers kno -- knew my kids.

Q: What -- What did you want your children to learn? Did you have ideas about them -- something that was -- you really wanted to pass on to them?

A: To be human beings, not to hate anybody. We are all the same. And be kind to people. The same thing I say to the grandchildren, too. Don't hate anybody. You don't like him, you don't agree with him, don't have anything to do with them. You don't know them

and that's that. But don't take advantage and don't hate. Don't -- Don't discriminate anybody. Don't me -- be mean to anybody.

Q: Did that -- Do you -- Do you think that your experiences during the Holocaust made you particularly aware or sensitive to dis -- discrimination that was happening in the United States --

A: Yes.

Q: -- and what did you -- what did you witness about that?

A: Yes, it made me very, very much -- it hurts me very much when y -- when I see on television the discrimination of people. And the -- the hate [indecipherable] to other people, especially with the lesbians and with the gay people, how they discriminate them. You saw what happened in Wisconsin, that boy. Why? Why did they do that to him? He was a -- a nice boy. What did the -- We have here, a Black neighbor, very nice. There was another neighbor here, he says, "A Black neighbor is moving here? I'm going to move out." Move out. Go ahead. He is very nice, I wouldn't change him for him anyway. Keep quiet, nice, very educated, keep ki -- children. Why? Why discriminate? We are all human beings. There are poor people and there -- there are rich people. But give them a chance.

Q: Did you experience any discrimination in this country?

A: No. There was, couple weeks ago, in another part, in upstate, they desegregated a synagogue before the holidays. They marked down swastikas on the road down. Burn all the Jews and did a lot of damage. Couple days later, they did it near -- somewhere in

upstate, too, in a church, in a Baptist church. Why? Kill the Jews, burn the Jews, and put swastik -- what does it have to do with the -- with the church? And why? Why do they do?

Q: When you look back over the -- over the years since you've been here, and -- and thinking on that issue of discrimination, there -- there have been some --

A: Oh, yes.

Q: -- major eras in the United States that we're the, you know, this land of the free is struggling --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- with those issues. Do you remember during the Civil Rights era, for example, were you particularly aware of what was happening with the struggle of -- of the Blacks to -- to have equal rights?

A: Before the wa -- Before the war?

Q: In the 1960's.

A: Yes, I remember, with what's his name, King. Yes, I remember it.

Q: When you were involved in -- in issues with voting and d -- yo-you said you were very aware of your -- your rights as a -- as a citizen. Were you -- What -- What was your pl --

A: Did I ever voting against discrimination?

Q: Wh-What were your voting practices? Did you -- Did you -- Did you have an opportunity to vote on key issues like that, or do you remember being involved?

A: No, we didn't have those kind of questions around here. They had it t-two years ago, they had it about the gay people. Naturally, I voted the [indecipherable] the -- ag-against it. Because they're -- they're people. They're just as -- It's their private life how they live. It's their life, not my life. I can't tell you what -- how to live. Or you can't -- you can't tell me how to live. If you would have a brother or a sister, a gay, would -- could you tell him how to live? Or her? You cannot. You can't tell a -- a nor -- your own child how to live, and to te -- what to do, after a certain age. They -- The -- Soon, they become teenagers, they do what they want, not what you want them to do.

Q: Did it surprise you that -- that such things would happen in this country?

A: Look, it happens everywhere. It's happen -- happens all over the world. You see what's happening all over. It's still going on. They didn't learn anything about -- about the second -- what was happening in the second World War. They're still killing people by the thousands. And kids. You s -- didn't you see on television how the kids in Africa, how they look? It hurts. You see a kid -- the eyes are bup -- bulb out, because he is so hungry, he is so thin. Only bone and skin. Tha -- It -- It -- I -- I could see them, I -- myself like that. I saw m -- and it hurts. What is their fault? What? They didn't do anything wrong, those kids. And I'm sure their parents didn't e-either, some of them. They wanted a decent life, to make -- to make a living and live quietly. S -- It hurts to see those things. The wars, the fighting. But, you won't change people. There always will be something.

Q: What is it that -- that made you feel at home here, in the United States, then?

A: I was secure here.

Q: You feel safe?

A: Yes, I feel safe here. You never know what -- what can happen yet, but so far I am safe. Have a family, thank God. Good husband, children, grandchildren. I feel very -- I'm -- I feel very lucky that I am alive and have a good life. I won't say I'm rich, but rich -- depends what you -- what you call rich. You can be rich without money, too. Have a good life, it's ri -- you are rich. And th -- I'm not complaining. We have some more to eat, we have clothes, we have everything. Thank God.

Q: Do you have a -- a strong sense of your spiritual life, or r-religion and is religion an important part of your life?

A: I was very disappointed when I came out of the concentration camps. Very. I'm still disappointed. I keep a kosher home, I'm Jewish. I go to the holi -- to -- for the holidays only, to the synagogue. You can be a ve -- a good Jew and not to be so religious. I try to be a good Jew, try to help, try to do my best I can to others. Thank God, so far I di --

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of an interview with Rochelle Slivka. This is tape number two, side B. Okay, we were talking about your trip to Vilna.

A: Yeah.

Q: And I wondered if you traveled at all to Stutthof or to Kaiserwald?

A: No. No, I did not. Stutthof, at the time, we didn't have enough time. We had only for 12 days -- and not even 12 -- yeah, about 12, maybe -- maybe 10 -- fo -- I think for eight days now. And we want -- we had to cover everything. We didn't have the time, but I hope when next time we'll go, I would like to go to Stutthof, to see the concentration camp. Kaiserwald is in a different country all together. It's in Latvia and it's near Riga. And th-this -- Stutthof is in Poland now. Then I would li -- when I'll be there, I would like to go to see.

Q: So you're planning on going back to Poland?

A: To -- To Vilno, I'm planning to go. And well, we ha -- when we'll go to Vilno, we'll be in Poland too probably [indecipherable] in Warsaw and then I would like to go to see -
- to Stutthof concentration camp.

Q: When did you first go to Israel?

A: The first time we were in Israel, in 1965, we went to Israel for the summer. And in 1963, my sister and her two children came to the United States. And we didn't see each other for 18 years. We didn't recognize each other, but we went to the boat to New York to pick her up, but we had a cousin who lived in New York and she was in Israel before and she met her. Then she came with us to the boat and she pointed out who sh -- who is that, and she stayed with us for the whole summer. And in 1965, we were -- the child -- Je-Jerry couldn't go away for the whole summer, but th-the children and me went for the summer and he came there for three weeks, he had the vacation.

Q: What was it like to see your sister again after 18 years?

A: It was very emotional and it was -- it was hard, it -- we had a lot to talk, we talked about old times and -- and the time in -- in the Soviet Union how she was and she told me a story. My f-father had he-her -- his mother -- my grandmother, and he had some brothers and sisters in the Soviet Union and they were all intermarried. And one brother was coming back from the war and he stopped in Vilna to look for -- for Blechman family and he saw my sister. It's my br -- my father's brother. And then she went to this - - to Leningrad, at the time, the sain -- it's Saint Petersburg now, to see them and they were very cold, they were afraid to talk to her, because they ask where I was, and she told them that I am in the United States, they were very afraid. Because Stalin's times, it was different. And they -- they were -- they didn't let her go even to see the grandmother, because they were afraid. And sh -- we never heard from them. I don't know what happened to them.

Q: When you went to Israel then, did you -- were -- you were visiting your sister?

A: My sister, and we had some relatives there. My grandmother's nephews and a few nephews who came from Germany. My grandmother was from Germany. My -- And her nephews came -- Ute aleamae -- I don't know if you heard about it, that -- that they brought some children in from Germany to Israel and they came -- they were in Israel and I went to see them for the first time. It was emotional, you know, to see your relatives for the first time, you never knew them and all the rest perished in concentration camps. But, it was a nice reunion.

Q: Was that when you went to the kibbutz, where you found out about your father?

A: Not this time. It was about three years ago, when we went there to our granddaughter's bat mitzvah, in -- she's now 16, going to be 17. She's -- It was about three -- four years ago, three or four years ago, we went to Israel in -- during the summer, the whole family. The -- From Louisiana the kids and -- and we -- we went to Israel for the bat mitzvah, my granddaughter's bat mitzvah. And while we were there, we went to the kibbutz, Lachaima agetta ot. And then when I saw the pictures.

Q: Was that -- Did you -- Had your sister known about those pictures?

A: Pictures? Yeah, she knew that, yeah. But she doesn't talk about it. My sister doesn't talk about her experiences, nothing about. Her children didn't know anything about her. Nothing. And the first time they found out, one of -- her -- one of -- her younger daughter, after she finished the army, she came to the United States on a visit and she came to visit u-u-us. And we were sitting and talking and she asked me, "Can you tell us about your family and how it was in the concentration camps, because my mother doesn't want to talk about anything." I told her a lot of things. She says, "I wish our mother told us about everything, we would understand her better." And she still doesn't want to talk about it. Sometimes I tell her about -- is -- i-is -- you know, it comes out, to talk about. She doesn't want to talk about. There are a lot of newcomers in this country, they don't want to talk about it.

Q: What do you think made you different from them?

A: I don't know. You know, a mother can have 10 children and every child is different.

Q: I'm imagining you seeing your sister after 18 years and you spent the war together being so close, I mean, you were the closest thing --

A: [indecipherable]

Q: -- people -- person you had was each other.

A: Yeah, that's right.

Q: And was it really -- was it hard for you to not talk to her over those years?

A: It was hard. I was always thinking about her, where is she, if she's still alive, if -- I knew -- I knew she was in Vilno, but I didn't know where and what, what she was doing, what -- what happening, I -- n-nothing, because when Stalin was in power, you couldn't get in touch with them. We couldn't -- We didn't know anything what was going on there. And -- And after Stalin died, I got in touch with her and then I -- I started to be after her to get out of there. I told you, go to see Aunt Pauline and then Uncle Israel. And that's how they went.

Q: And when you finally saw her, did you talk together about -- what did you talk about, what --

A: About life in Israel, about the life -- about the children and that -- sh-she wouldn't want to talk anything about the concentration camps, nothing. She wouldn't want to -- she didn't want to mention, like -- like it never happened to her.

Q: About the children and -- in your first interview, you mentioned that it was hard for you when your children were born.

A: It was very hard. I didn't know how to deal with that. And I had problems, you know, nerves, depression. And -- But, got -- But, we managed and we did the best we could and thank God my children are wonderful. Never were on drugs. Never were into alcohol. Never smoked. Turn out all right. The older one graduated high school. She wasn't the best student, but sh-she had a lot of personality -- the fat one. And she was accepted in Leslie College, in Massachusetts, teacher's college. She was even accepted in New York, Stern's College, too. That's a -- But she didn't want to go there. She wanted to go to Leslie College. And she went to Leslie College and she was a -- a student, a regular. But the last year in the schoo -- in college, she made the Dean's list and she was one of the best students graduated. And she's teaching and then she went -- teaching grammar school, she wanted. And then she went, got a Master's in New Orleans, went to University of New Orleans and she got a Master's degree in reading and now she supervises reading in a few schools. She like there -- picna -- the parents, bef -- when she was teaching, the parents were -- had the -- her chil --their children in her class and then they were -- they had siblings, you kn -- younger children, they asked the principal to put their kids in her class, she was such a good teacher. She has -- She's a very good -- she has a lot of personality. She is a very good -- she's only too fat. You can't do anything about it. Tried, but we can't do anything. And my younger daughter, graduate -- she always was a good student, she always wanted to compete with somebody. And she always competed with another girl and they always fought with each other because of that. But when they went to college, one went to Clark and she went to Brandeis, then

they became very good friends. And th -- since then, they are very, very good friends. She is in Israel, my daughter and she -- the other one is in New York so-somewhere. She's divorced now, bitter divorce. But they're e-mail -- they -- they're in tou -- they're still in touch. Our daughter, she graduated Brandeis University and it was in the 70's and she didn't know what she wanted from her life. She worked for a year in a pharmacy store, CVS in Boston. And then she decided to go to Israel to see what's what. She wanted to go in the beginning to law school or journalism. She couldn't make up her mind, to go to Arizona, to go to California, to go further away from -- from here. Then she decided she'll go to see what's going on in Israel. She went to Israel, she liked it there and she was teaching English as a foreign language, but she didn't like teaching. Sh-She couldn't take it. And she met her husband there. They got married and she's working now with Anglo-Saxons refugees. And she likes it very much and they like her, too.

Q: Had you ever wanted to live in Israel yourself. Your fa -- You said your father was a Zionist, right?

A: Yes.

Q: And did you ever have Zionist feelings?

A: Yes, I did and I still do have. I still think -- I'm a member of Haddassah, if you've heard about it. I am past president. But, if I would go right after the war there, I would live there, I would get used to it, to th-this life, this kind of life. Now, I wouldn't want to go. M-My husband now either, wouldn't want to go. We don't approve what's going on

there. We don't approve the -- I don't like the government there now, what's going on there. I would wish they would make peace, but it's not up to me. I can't say anything, I can't criticize, I am -- I live here. I don't live there.

Q: Do you have ideas of how that peace can be made?

A: I don't -- They have to give something and da -- and Arafat has to give something. But nobody wants to move. And it's up to them, I don't know exactly what's going on there, what's what and I can't criticize them -- the Israelis. I don't have the right to do that, I don't live there. I can help them financially, as much as I can -- do whatever I can, but not going to mix in in their politics, it's not my business.

Q: Is -- Is nationality an important issue to -- to you. I mean, do -- is the -- we talked a little bit earlier about how you had become an American citizen and -- and how -- what a proud --

A: Yes.

Q: -- moment that was for you --

A: Yes.

Q: -- and, of course, many Americans are not so aware of their nationality, or --

A: They don't appreciate -- they don't appreciate, because they -- they live here and they take for granted everything. And I don't, because I went through -- I know what it is t-to live in a country that you're not appreciated and you are persecuted and you come to a country -- to a free country. You can criticize th -- your president, you can criticize anybody and nobody will arrest you, nobody will beat you up for it. I don't agree on a lot

of things here, too, but it's not -- I am not -- I can't do anything. I -- I vote f -- that I think that's the right person, that's all. It's my duty to vote for -- to vote. And those people who don't vote, always criticize. Those who do vote, not -- don't criticize.

Q: You lived in Portland since the -- 19 --

A: 1953.

Q: Will you talk about your life here, the community here, what it's been like?

A: In the -- In the beginning, when I moved here, I didn't like it. I was -- we didn't have a car, we didn't have a television. We were sitting and wa -- listening to the radio, evenings. We couldn't go anywhere. And it was a -- it was -- it wasn't easy and I didn't know anybody. Excuse me. And life wasn't easy here. My husband was working, he was making a living. I had, at the time, one child. I was pregnant -- I had started to be -- then I became pregnant with my other child and -- and I didn't like it here, because they were very snobby here in the beginning, the Jewish co-community. If you're not born in Portland, you're a stranger. Not only in the Jewish si -- in the -- in general, in the general community it's like that. But after awhile, after my daughter started to go to school -- my older one, I became active in PTA. I became active in the Haddassah organization and then I started to make friends and -- and since then, I wouldn't want to move anywhere else. I love it here.

Q: Do you have friends or interactions in the non-Jewish community as well here, or has that --

A: Oh yeah, we have friends. I have neighbors here, wonderful neighbors. She's cr -- She's Catholic and she goes to church twice a day and she prays for me every time. And we are very good friends, now I'm joking only. And across the street I have neighbors, too, very, very good friends. And there were another friends here, too. They moved away, but we are still friends. We send each other Christmas cards. We have non-Jewish friends, too. We are active in the Jewish community, try to do as much as we can.

Q: What do you do?

A: Not -- Not as much as now, because I -- in the beginning, when we didn't go away to Florida, I used to do volunteer work at the Jewish home for the aged. Used to go every -- once a week. Now it's seeders, I don't go too often -- I -- I don't go now, because in the winter we are not here and this year I didn't feel good, I had some problems, I did-didn't go. And then a lot of Russians came into this count -- into this city. We were busy with the Russian Jews and Jerry was busy with Russian -- with Poles, not -- not even Jewish Poles, Polish people. And the -- I wasn't busy with them because he -- he was their interpreter, but they used to come to the house, we used to talk with them. I came back to me to pol -- to talk Polish again. What I forgot, it came back. And we were busy with volunteer work. He used to [indecipherable] volunteer -- he'll talk to you about it.

Q: So you don't live here year round then?

A: No, we go to Florida in -- in November. We are going November 11th this year. And we will come back probably by April 15th or some like that. Cause my husband is busy with his flowers -- with the garden.

Q: I was wondering, before I knew that, whether it was difficult for you to be in a place with such cold winters, after what you experienced during the war and the coldness.

A: It's cold -- It was cold, I had problems with my feet because they were -- they are frostbitten. And before it gets cold, I get -- it hurts and then when it's -- in the spring, the frost -- it defrosts and it hurts too, but I do the best I can, I can't do anything else.

Q: Is it difficult emotionally to be in a cold place?

A: No, not -- no -- when I was here, I got used to it, I th -- and I used to be in -- before, in Poland the same -- the same climate was practically, Poland. Win-Winter, spring, summer, fall, like here. I was used to it, but now I don't like too much cold, I got used to the warm weather -- to Florida. But, if I would have to stay here, I would stay here, and that's all. Do the best I can and that's that.

Q: I wanted to go back to something that I m-missed asking you before and that was just in -- in the immediate years, right following the war, when you're sp -- you're spending those years in Germany, were you -- what was your predominant feeling at the time?

Were you just trying to get the -- get things done so you could come to the US? Did you feel -- or did you feel angry, were you emotional? Did you have desire for revenge? What -- What was going on inside of you?

A: No, revenge I wouldn't say, but I -- I was angry, very angry. I didn't like -- you know, I didn't like to live in Germany. I -- Especially, I ha -- I had the anger, the resentment of the older people. The young people, I didn't have anything against them and I still don't, because it's not their fault what happened. And I am su -- and they have a lot of problems

now to accept what had happened in Germany, what their fathers or grandfathers did.

And I don't have anything against them. I am mellowing a lot. But still, when I see a -- the -- the st -- the -- hotencrites -- I don't know how to say in po -- in the --

Q: Swastika?

A: Swastika, yeah, the swastika or I hear about what's anti-Semitism, I shiver. Sa -- well, the skinheads in Germany, something. They have a lot of them there. And I read of some -- I don't know why, but I still read about those -- I got a magazine from Wiesenthal get it and I -- sometimes I see on television we see -- we see things. It hurts very, very much, but I don't have anything against the young people. I wouldn't go to Germany anyway. I wouldn't -- I try not to buy German stuff. I'd rather buy American stuff than German or Japanese or any. Like to buy American stuff, made in America. But sometimes I don't have any choice in clothes.

Q: So was there a point where you and your husband started talking about your experiences and you -- it sounded like in the beginning, you really didn't know about your --

A: In the beginning, after we met and after we were courting each other and we were -- we talked about it. I told him where I was and what happened in my family. He sac -- told me about his family and we talked about it, yes. And when -- then, when I talked to my children about it, too, when they became older enough -- old enough, te -- 12 years old, about this age. You can't talk too early to them. Then I spoke to them about -- told them about my experiences and where I was and about my parents, about the ki -- all of my

life. And encouraged them to read books about the Holocaust and encouraged them to see, if -- if there was a movie about it, to let them know what was going on -- I tried to.

Q: Was it important to you to marry a Holocaust survivor?

A: No. Didn't -- Didn't matter to me. Only a decent, honest person. You take a chance anyway. You never know. In the beginning, they're the best and later in life, some people change. And -- but I am lucky.

Q: And when you talked about having children and the difficulty, did you -- do you think that the -- did that have to do with having lost your own parents? What was the -- do you know what -- do you have a sense of what the cause was of your nerves and the trouble that you had?

A: Yes, I knew the -- the Holocaust had a lot to do to my nerves and depression. I had a lot of problems depression. Sometimes I used to drive the car and used to say, "Oh, I wish I would get in an accident, get killed." For no reason at all. I was -- I was happy. I had children fine, they were very good children, didn't have any problems with them. My husband made a good living, but depression and nerves. But, I'm getting over it. I still have depressions, but I -- I try my best to get over it and -- and handle this as much as I can.

Q: Which reminds me, I meant to ask about your -- you were talking about how you felt about Germans back then. How do you feel now about Germans and Germany?

A: I would -- I told you -- I wouldn't go to Germany, it doesn't appeal to me at all. And I don't have anything against the young people, nothing. It's not their fault. They're -- have

a hard time to en -- adjust themselves, some of them. And that's that. And the older people are getting older, or they're getting out of this world. But, they have a -- they have problems too, to get through all these things, Germans. I'm not mad at them now. I don't wish them anything bad. [inaudible]

Q: What did it take to -- did it take time to get over the anger, or --

A: It took time, yes, took time, but you get over this after so many years, slow, slowly.

Q: Is there anything that you do regularly to memorialize your parents, or any kind of thing that you have in your daily life?

A: Well, I think about them. I sometimes look at pictures and think about them. And -- And that's -- what else can memorialize -- burn a candle for a memorial [inaudible]. And I go to the synagogue for the high holidays only. You can be a good Jew without that. Don't have to go -- to be too religious. I keep a kosher home, because I started -- my grandpar -- my grandmother and my aunts and uncles all kept kosher and they liked it and I wanted them -- they were so good to me and I wanted them to come to eat in my hou --

End of Tape Two, Side B

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: This is tape number three, side A, of an interview with Rochelle Slivka.

A: Well, I wanted my children to know that they are Jews and it's up to them if they want to keep a kosher home or not. I'll love them anyway. My older daughter does keep a kosher home. She wants her children to know about that. And my daughter in Israel keeps a Jewish home. They don't have any choice, they have to buy kosher meat. They don't -- But, they are good Jews and that's all. Try my best. I don't have to go to the synagogue every single day or every Saturday and pray. But, I was very disappointed in the -- God. But, I do the best I can and that's all.

Q: Did you have a stronger -- a di -- a different sense of faith before the war than -- than after?

A: Well, my parents were not rel -- they were Jews, but not fanatical -- not religious. My father -- We used to write on s -- on Sabbath. My father, he smoked on Sabbath. We had a kosher home -- a Jewish tr -- Jewish home, that's all. Used to go to the synagogue for high -- high holidays, for the hol-holidays.

Q: Did you feel that you had a personal relationship with God, that you could talk to God, ever?

A: No, no, no. Especially now, for sure not. My husband says that I have problems with God.

Q: And you agree? Is there anything else you want to talk about?

A: No. That's all.

Q: Thank you.

A: Unless you -- you think about something, you can ask me, later or tomorrow.

Q: Well --

A: -- mix in.

Q: Go ahead.

A: This is a picture, I found it here in my aunt's house, in my grandmother's house. I was eight months old.

Q: How did your aunt get this picture?

A: That -- We send it to them. We used to se -- We used to correspond. I have letters that my father wrote from 1939 and then 1940, right before the war, during the war, to the United States, to my parents here -- to my grandparents and my aunt. This is my sister and myself when we were younger.

Q: Which one is you?

A: This is me and this is my sister. It was -- we were about seven, eight, something around there and she was younger, two years, three -- two and a half.

Q: Is that in your home?

A: No, in a photographer's house. We didn't have any pic -- ph-photographs, there were -
- not at home. We used to take pictures in a -- we used to go to a photo-photographer.

And this is when we were in school, we had to wear uniforms, see?

Q: You have little triangular badges of some sort --

A: Yes, yes --

Q: -- on your hat.

A: -- our hats. We had to wear uniforms to school. And on our arms, we had to have numbers and they -- they -- the non-Jews knew who is a Jew, who is not a Jew, yeah. And here, this is my father, my mother, my si -- me and my sister.

Q: Mm, these are all photographs that you sent?

A: Fi -- We send them here. I -- I -- We couldn't have -- if -- we didn't have anything when I came out of the concentration, because they took away everything. We had to go in through baths and they shaved our heads. We didn't have anything. We couldn't have anything. And this is a cousin of ours. My father's sister's son. They lived in Poland, in Zamusht, and he came to Vilno for awhile, he's went to school. Then, we took a picture about the same time. That's me and my sister.

Q: What happened to your cousin?

A: He perished. He was killed. He wa -- right bef -- when the war started, he was killed. He went to a different town and he was killed there. I never saw him again, 1939. And I have another picture I found here, I'll bring it out [inaudible]

Q: Say that again.

A: That's my sister and my brother-in-law. He was killed in Israel about three, four years, five years ago, in a car accident. He was ran over by a car. And here, this is a picture in -- it was taken in 1937-'38. There was a Zionist convention in Lithuania and my father went to Lithuania and for the first time he'd met my mother's brother here. And this is all some cousins. This is my mother's brother.

Q: What's his name?

A: His name was Schmuel -- Samuel. And --

Q: And his last name?

A: Schuster. And here in the United States, they -- they have changed it to Schuman, but th-th-their real name was Schuster. This was his wife, Esther.

Q: So, he's over on the -- in case any members of your family are listening and they want identification, he's over on the far left, Schmuel --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- i-in the back.

A: Schmuel, yeah. And this is their little girl, Mi-Mina.

Q: Mm-hm, in the lap.

A: Yeah.

Q: The woman's --

A: Yeah.

Q: See the blue [indecipherable]

A: They had on it a little boy who had too, but I don't remember his name. H-He is not on this picture, I di -- because he was born later. And this is all cousins. I don't -- I didn't know them too well. Some cousins, relat -- I --

Q: Is that your father --

A: This is my father.

Q: -- third from the left. Uh-huh.

A: Right here, this is my father and he took a picture at the time, he f -- the first time he met them there. He never met the other -- the relatives.

Q: You mentioned in the video interview that you met a guard in one of the camps --

A: Yes.

Q: Who knew your uncle who was Lith-Lithuanian?

A: Yes. When we were in Latvia, in re -- in Kaiserwald, there was a ga -- a guide -- I -- I worked in the field at ni -- I don't know how we got to talk, or what. I don't remember exactly. And -- And he asked me from where I was, I says, "From Vilna." And I asked, "And from where are you?" I asked. And h-he was not tha -- he was a Lithuanian. He says he was from Lithuania. I says, "Well, Lithuania," he -- I says, he says, "Wilkavish -- Wilkavisk." I says, "Oh," I says, "my mother comes from there and I had an uncle there." He says, "Who was your uncle?" And I tell him, sh -- he says, "Sure, I knew him. We went to school together."

Q: And then he told you that he had been killed, didn't he?

A: He told, yes. They -- Tha -- that he killed all the Jews there. But --

Q: And how did he say this to you? I mean, did he say it very casually, without any si --

A: Nothing. Like that.

Q: Na -- Did he say I'm sorry or any --

A: No, nothing. He said, "Yes, I knew him very well." he says, "We went to school." He di -- remembered my mother even.

Q: It was -- Hearing you -- Hearing you tell that story and just I'm trying to imagine how he was --

A: Ho-How I felt. Can you imagine? Well, I don't know if he's alive or not, I'd wen -- couldn't care less, but he was there.

Q: Thanks. This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Rochelle Slivka.

End of Tape Three, Side A

Conclusion of Interview