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# Sylvia Wien Richman and Marvin Halem oral history interview by Tori Lockler, November 6, 2009

Sylvia Wien Richman (Interviewee)

Tori Chambers Lockler (Interviewer)

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**Tori Lockler:** The date is November 6, 2009. We are with Silvia Wien Richman. I'm the interviewer; my name is Tori Lockler. We're in Tampa, Florida, in the United States. The language of the interview is English, and our videographer is Jane Duncan.

Okay. Ms. Richman, if we can start by you telling us your full name and your date of birth?

**Silvia Wien Richman:** My name is Silvia Wien Richman, and I was born on January 4, 1938 in Krakow, Poland.

TL: Thank you. And I think what we should do is start with your pre-war life, if you can tell us about your memories of the city that you lived in and what it was like there.

SR: Well, I remember very well—even though I was very, very young, I remember that we lived in a very lovely apartment building that had a balcony in the front and a balcony in the back. It was just a very comfortable place, and my mother and I and my father seemed to have a very happy life. I remember her taking me outside to walk in the park and to feed rabbits at the market. It was a beautiful life, and very comfortable. On occasion, my father took—when I was very small, my father took me back to his place where he was born in Lvov, or Lemberg, and I would meet—I met the family at one time. My father just took me by train, and we came back to Krakow afterwards, so it's just a smidgen memory of being taken to see the family in Lvov.

TL: And can you tell us your father's name?

SR: My father's name was Maurycy—Morris, Maurice; Maurycy in Polish—and his last name was Wien. Maurycy Wien. He was born in Lvov, or Lemberg—Lemberg, it was called, under the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and Lvov under the Russian occupation.

TL: And can you tell us your mother's name?

SR: My mother's name was Bronislava. Her maiden name was Ritter, and when she married my father in 1930, she became a Wien, too.

TL: Okay. Do you remember—you said you remember going with your father and meeting your family. Do you remember your grandparents?

SR: I met my father's father for the first time—I think my father must have taken me at the time because he—my grandfather—was ill. My grandfather was a widower who had remarried. So, I met my father's stepmother and I met my grandfather, but he was ill. And I never knew his [her father's] mother, because she died before, way before I was born.

TL: Okay.

SR: But my father did take me to see his aunts, and I met a few of them. He would put me in front of the door and ring the doorbell, then hide, and there I was in the front of the door. They would open up the door and say, “Who is this?” and then my father would peek though. Those are memories. I must have been around three years old.

TL: And do you have memories of school before the war?

SR: No. I started kindergarten under the Russian occupation, when we went back to—after we left Krakow because of the impending arrival of the Germans. We went to Krakow, because Krakow was still—I mean, from Krakow to Lemberg, because Lemberg was under the Russian occupation. I think Stalin still had a pact with Hitler, and they did not come in to Lemberg at the time. So, my mother and I and my father lived with one of my uncles, my uncle Henju. I went to kindergarten for a little bit, but not for very long. I guess there was a time that we weren't allowed—I wasn't allowed to go to kindergarten anymore, so we stopped. But I did start kindergarten at that time.

TL: Do you have any memories of friends from that time—children your age?

SR: No, I don't. I remember the only children of my age were two cousins. My mother's oldest brother had two girls, and those were my cousins. One was named Anita and the other was named Olga. Those were the only children that I really associated with. I don't remember the children in the kindergarten. I don't have very clear memories of the kindergarten. I remember doing activities, certain activities, but I don't remember them as playmates. But I do remember my cousins.

TL: So, you remember life being very happy?

SR: It was a happy life, until—really, the change came when we had to leave Krakow and move to Lemberg, because then we had to leave everything and my mother said that I would complain: “When are we going home?” and “Everything is dirty,” and “It's not the same,” and “When are we going home to our clean house?”

TL: And what was your father's occupation?

SR: Well, my father studied—when he was a young man, he studied in Belgium, business administration. He did not do anything in that business because of my grandfather. My grandfather had a business of producing baking powders and puddings, so my father joined the family business. When he and my mother married and they moved to Krakow, my grandfather established the business also—there was like a branch of the business in Krakow. And he—my grandfather—ran it from afar. My mother and her sister and their husbands were the ones that were in charge of the business in Krakow, but my grandfather would come in and check on it. And I met him one time. I remember meeting him one time when we went to a park, and he sat with me eating watermelon. That was the only memory of my grandfather that I had, because later on he died of an illness—typhus.

TL: So your mother worked in the business as well?

SR: Yeah. We had help in the house, and somebody took care of me, and my mother would go in. And my grandfather made her in charge of the formulas: she was the one who had the secrets of the formulas for the business. It was a family affair.

TL: Do you have any specific memories of when the Nazis came into power when the war started?

SR: That's what I remember when we had to move, and also—(clears throat) excuse me. Then, there was an issue of a magazine that came, a newspaper that came in Lemberg. I remember seeing the picture of Hitler on the cover of it; it was a color picture. And I remember seeing it, and I took a pencil and I poked holes in it, because I knew that this was bad stuff. But I was just a child, and I must have heard people talk that this was bad news.

Soon after that, the Germans came into Lemberg as well. And I remember my parents having to give up things, like my mother had to give up her wedding band. They had to give up radios; they had to give things up for the war effort because the Germans asked for it. And so, things were changing. The whole atmosphere was different. In the beginning, everybody came together. The whole family came from all over, and we were sort of trying to be a unit, so that we would face whatever was to come together. We realized that things were bad, but not really how bad they were going to become. But I was small, and I just saw how the adults reacted to it.

TL: And this was in Lemberg?

SR: In Lemberg, yeah.

TL: Do you have memories of other children, or of experiences there?

SR: No.

TL: Okay.

SR: No. In Lemberg was where I met my cousins, my two cousins, but I didn't know them for a very long period of time. We did not have much time to be together. In Krakow, I did have a cousin, a second cousin that I must have played with, because I have pictures of her and we are still in touch. She did survive, and we are still in touch. So, that is a memory that just now came to me, too. I must have played with her, but I don't remember that. I just remember seeing the pictures.

TL: Okay. Are you an only child, or do you have siblings?

SR: No, I'm an only—I was an only child. My parents planned to have more children, and my mother had a very sad—I don't know whether this is proper to discuss, but my mother did have to have an abortion in the ghetto, because she was pregnant in the ghetto. And she was very saddened by it, as she spoke about it years later, but it would have been a very difficult time to have a child at that time.

TL: How do you feel about that now?

SR: Now, I understood her. I understood everything that would have happened, and I realize what she had to do. She never talked about it until she was so elderly, and then she would be very sad about it. But she also felt that they had to do it. It was the right thing to do. It was either the family being enlarged, or all of us perishing because they had moments where they even—when things were so bad that they even thought of committing suicide.

TL: Wow.

SR: So, these were actions of people under stress and duress; this was not something that she probably would have done. She would have looked forward to having another child, and I would have been very blessed to have had a brother or sister.

TL: Can you tell us about the move into the ghetto?

SR: Well, the move into the ghetto was—it didn't seem to be a very big deal at that time. It was moving into another neighborhood and moving in with other people. It was like slowly [moving] from Krakow to an apartment living with my uncle, and then we had to move into another place and it was more crowded. But as a child, I only saw that we were crowded, we were living with a lot of people, and my father wasn't there every day. My father was being sent to a place that he was helping build a camp; it was a labor camp, eventually. But he would go during the day from the ghetto and then he would come back to the ghetto. And then one day, he did not come back. He stayed, and my mother told me that he was interned in a camp called Janowska. That was right outside of Lemberg. So, that's where he was while we were in the ghetto.

TL: And your mother was with you?

SR: My mother was with me, but she also went to work. She went to work in a factory that made pocketbooks out of macramé, and gloves and all kinds of handiwork that the Germans were running and paying the women a pittance for it.

TL: How old were you at this time?

SR: (clears throat) I must have been about four and a half or so.

TL: Okay. Do you remember anything about the other people that were living with you?

SR: I remember seeing a lot of families together. I don't remember being attached to them as far as being family. They were children and they were adults, and I seemed to have just—I saw them as if I was watching a movie. I did not—I have no memory of interacting with them. I have only a memory that I was living there and I had to do what my mother told me to do, and I was really on my own, a lot. Somebody might have been in charge of me, but I don't remember who it was.

TL: What do you remember from outside of the apartment, or the home, that you were living in? Do you remember the city?

SR: I remember sad things happening. I remember a man lying outside on the courtyard. It was a rainy time, and there was this person lying on a table outside. I asked my mother, "What's the matter with him? Why is he lying out there?" and my mother said, "He's sleeping." The man wasn't sleeping, he had died. Whether he had died from typhus or something, they didn't know what to do with him at that time. They took him outside and he was lying there on this table, and it was very upsetting.

There were a lot of upsetting things in the ghetto. Food was rationed, and I remember being told by my mother what I needed to eat. One day I ate a little too much of the food that was left and that was supposed to be our dinner that night, and my mother was very, very upset. I got a spanking, and she cried because she was so frustrated; she did not know how to feed us, and it was rationed. Everything was rationed and she had to make—that meager amount of money that she made had to go a long way. And it was a dirty place. We had lice and we had sickness, and—we did the best we could.

TL: Do you have any other memories from the ghetto?



SR: From the ghetto? Oh, yeah. My strongest memory is that we were always in danger of being rounded up. Prior to the ghetto, my grandmother disappeared one day—this was even before the ghetto. My grandmother was taken off the streets, and the family was very upset when she didn't come back from shopping. The story went that she was taken by the Germans, and we never saw her again. Same thing happened to my two cousins that I spoke about before: their mother Karola and Anita and Olga disappeared, and they were never seen again. And so we knew that bad things were happening and people were disappearing from our lives: my father's aunts, cousins.

But in the ghetto, we were—every once in a while there was going to be an *aktion*, or a rounding up of people, and my mother and I decided to hide. She decided we were going to hide in one of the buildings in the attic, and we went up there and there were other people in the attic already. They were very upset with my mother that she brought me, because they were afraid that I was going to cry and let on where we were hiding. But she held onto my hand; we had a signal that if she held on to my hand and held on tight and squeezed my hand that I should be very quiet. This was the signal that I observed, and I was very, very good.

But in spite of it, there were sounds of footsteps coming up. They opened up the attic, and in walked the Jewish police. The ghetto was run by the Germans with the help of the locals. It might have been the rabbi, or somebody who was a lawyer, or somebody who would have been in charge of the whole ghetto under the supervision of the Germans; and then there was a police force. They had their little uniforms and their hats, and their job was to keep order in the ghetto. But when the Germans gave the order for them to round up people, that's who rounded us up.

So they came into the attic, and my mother grabbed one of them and said, "I want to see the head of the Jewish police," because she knew who he was. And she told the young man, "I'm his sister. I want to see him." And when we got downstairs—we were taken down the stairs from the attic, and we met outside the rest of the force, the Jewish police force. My mother—the man came up to talk to her, the one who was the head of the police, and he said, "Today I may be able to save you, but I cannot save myself, maybe." And it turned out that he was my mother's brother's best friend. My mother had a brother named Henry—we called him Henju—and that was Henju's best friend. So, he knew us, and he sent us back into the building and we were safe for a little bit.

The other people were taken down. One woman—there was an arm that reached out from—as we were going down the stairs, a woman took a child and dragged that child, a little girl, inside, and that child did not go on with the rest of them. For how long that child was safe, we don't know. But people tried to help each other. But that day the rest of the people that were in the attic were herded down from the building and taken onto waiting trucks—around the corner those trucks were waiting, and they were not run by the Jewish

police, they were run by the Germans. So, they were gone; who knows what happened to them. Children were not—women and children did not survive more than a day after that, because they would probably be taken to camps.

My mother and I stayed in the ghetto for a little longer, but she must have heard from this Uncle Henju, because he was a lawyer and he lived outside of the ghetto. He never was inside the ghetto, but he kept tabs on everybody in the family. My mother came from eight. There were four boys and four girls, and he was the youngest. And he knew where each one was, where each of his siblings were.

So, he must have told my mother that there was a loose board in the ghetto. As they were taking people away from the ghetto, they had—they tried to make the ghetto smaller. They would move the walls, because this way they did not have to be in charge of such a large area. But one of the boards was loose. And my mother packed a couple of items of clothing, put them in a bag—it was a paper bag—and she took it to the place, and we went out of the board in the middle of the night, and [she was] also holding my hand. We squeezed out between the boards, and we were outside, and we saw in the distance the guards smoking their cigarettes. That hand was squeezed again, and we were out.

My mother knew the town well. She was born there. She knew the neighborhood. She must have been given a safe house to go to by my Uncle Henju, and she took us to the house and a lovely Christian woman opened up the door, and made us comfortable, fed us. She fed us an amazing meal, after being in the ghetto and not eating properly. We had a wonderful, wonderful split pea soup with dumplings in it. And then she put us to bed in a beautiful clean, down-covered bed, and it was an amazing feeling to be there with my mother in this comfortable bed.

We were about to fall asleep, and maybe we were already slightly asleep, when in walked her husband. He was coming into the house and I think he was a little drunk, and he was making noise and she was trying to tell him, “We have guests, be quiet.” And when she told him—probably—who we were, we heard him saying, “Get those Jews out of our house!” And she was begging him, “Please, tomorrow morning I’ll let them go.” I remember those sounds. And my mother later on really interpreted what had happened to me, because I might have not been aware of the whole thing. But I remember the voices, and I remember the yelling.

But the next day we were out, and we were out on our own for a long time. I remember sitting in places with broken glass, behind storefronts that had been bombed out. Walking in the streets during the day, my mother would tell me if we passed a church to cross myself, and to genuflect and to dip my hand in the water. And she would explain to me, “This is what you’re supposed to do. This is what we do in the Catholic neighborhood,

and this is what the other children do. And this is what you're going to do." But in the evenings when we would get back, we didn't have a home. We were like the bag people in some terrible situations, even in this country. We had no place to call home.

But one day, my mother must have found a place to live. She found a place with a woman who had a little apartment, and we were invited in. I'm sure my uncle was probably helping pay for it. This woman was also Jewish. By that time, we also had papers that we had acquired: identity papers, false identity. My mother was named Irena Hull, and I had a similar name. It was almost as if we had relations. One was Irena Haletska—no, my mother's name was not Irena. My name was Irena; she had a different first name. I may remember it later on.

So, we had identity papers, and this lady must have been speaking with my mother; they must have been talking about what was—we were not safe. Every day on the streets, people were being taken away, whether it was Germans taking the local people away or whether they were hunting for Jews. But my mother and this lady must have been speaking, because she must have told my mother about a social worker who might be able to help. And my mother went to meet with this lady, and she came back and dressed me and braided my hair and made me look me like one of the little local kids, and brought me to the social worker.

The social worker looked at me and looked at me, and then she said, "She'll do." I did not know what she meant by that, but she was looking me over to see if I would fit in where she wanted to place me. And sure enough, my mother asked her would she need to give me something to eat, and the social worker said, "No, she'll be fed very—she'll be placed close by, and she'll have a meal soon." That gave my mother a clue where I would be. My mother gave me a hug, she kissed me, and she whispered in my ear, "Behave yourself. Be a good girl. And when everything is better, I'll come back for you." I didn't realize it was going to be a long goodbye, but that day I was separated from my mother, and I did not see her for a long, long time.

The woman, the social worker, took me to a children's home, an orphanage that was run by the Catholic nuns. I was one of many children—the orphans—there, but I was a different child. I was a Jewish child who had to keep a secret. There was another little girl, who was also a little younger than I. She was about three or so. And she somehow or another—I don't know, she came up to me and said she was Jewish, and I told her, "Do not talk about that. Be quiet. It's not your place to talk." Didn't tell her that I was, but I told her to be quiet.

Things were okay for a while. But one day, about—I was there for a few days when a package came with my clothes. The nuns brought the clothes to me, and I looked at them

and I realized those were my things, and somebody from my family must have been there. It turned out it was my uncle who had brought the clothes; I found out much later as I grew up. But I didn't know that, and I wanted to see my mother. And all I did was cry. I wouldn't eat. I wouldn't go to school. I was going to kindergarten with the kids, otherwise, when I started in the convent, but I wouldn't do anything all. I was mourning. I was crying, and the mother superior did not know what to do with me.

So, she took one—she asked one of the nuns to take me back, and I—to this day, I still don't know how I did it. But I took that nun on two trolley rides, and brought her back to where I lived with my mother—with that lady. On the trolley, I even saw a conductor that had been a neighbor of ours in the neighborhood that I lived with my mother years before—I mean, months before. He was a Ukrainian man who would have recognized me. I hid in the nun's habit against the window so he wouldn't see me. She was sitting next to me, and I just covered myself with her body so he wouldn't see me.

But I did take the nun back to the place where my mother and I had lived. Upon the knock on the door, the woman opened up and the nun said, "This is the child that lived here before; where's her mother?" She looked at us, and said, "I don't know the child, and I don't know—there was no mother living here." And she [the nun] had to take me back, and I didn't say anything. I knew not to fight it. I knew not to say anything, and she took us back.

But we were not there very long. We were there for about two, three weeks before another problem arose. And that was—that little girl and I were taken by a couple of nuns and were put on a train to the mountains. It seemed that there was a rumor going around that they were going to have an investigation at the convent, and that the Germans were going to raid it. And that's why—I heard things were going on. I didn't understand what, but when they took the two of us, I realized it was because of us.

So, this nun took us to the mountains, and we stayed for two weeks with Franciscan monks. This was a very different place. We were the only children there. They were an order of men who only do things with men, and they pray all the time and they like to have it quiet. And as children, we might have made a little too much noise, and we sometimes got in their way, and they would use their little belts to make sure that we behaved ourselves, those little ropes that they wore around their waist. But, the nuns came back. And one took the other little girl—I think her name was Eva—and she was taken someplace, and I was taken by the nun and taken on a long trip to Warsaw, near Warsaw.

By the way, my mother's name was Stanislava Hull; I remembered it now. So, that was her name, with the false papers.

Anyway, the nun and I traveled, and I ended up in a convent—not in Warsaw, but right near Warsaw. It was in the country. It was also a children’s home. It was also an orphanage for girls, and the same kind of nuns were running it. But there, I became part of the community. I went to school. I attended catechism classes with the children. The only person that knew that I was Jewish was the mother superior, and that was a concern of hers. And so while I was studying for my catechism classes, eventually my First Communion was coming up, and they wanted to make sure that it was done in the proper order. So, I was taken in the morning prior to my First Communion and I was baptized in the church on the property. Very early in the morning before the rest the children were up, I was whisked off, and one of my teachers became my godmother and one of the priests became my godfather. So, I became legal for the First Communion.

I was part of what was going on. I wrote a story about when I studied my catechism how my favorite time was when I had done my lessons well. I would sit in a cherry tree and eat cherries, because hunger was something that we had even in the convent. Always, we were hungry. We would get into trouble looking for food. Older children would find some vegetables, and we would follow them, and we would get sometimes into trouble raiding the vegetable bin.

Things were going on in the convent. I went to school. I went to kindergarten there. At one time, I was up—a family came in and wanted to adopt me. They must have looked me over from the rest of the crowd; maybe they liked what they saw. But when the time came for me to be adopted, taken out, I refused. I put up a fight. I said, “I don’t want to be adopted. My mother’s going to come back for me. I have a mother. I don’t want to be adopted!” So, they never did that again.

And, as I said, I went to kindergarten, first, and second grade during that time there. I was a good student, and I did my work. And I was obedient, but I did get into trouble a little bit, as I said, with the food and being—you know, not wanting to be adopted, and things like that. So, I had my days where when I would go to confession I would have to say all my little sins. But I was part of the kids.

The convent had problems as far as bombing. There was a lot of shooting in the neighborhood, because there were bursts of artillery. And at the end of the war, I found out that we were right next to the front between the Russians and the Germans. So, things were going on. We had bombs hitting one of the buildings; that turned out to be a leaflet bomb, but it still hit part of the buildings. And we were—it wasn’t always safe. One day, the children were talking about seeing fires from a distance and saying, “Oh, something’s happening to the Jews in Warsaw.” It could have been the time of the uprising in Warsaw.

So we were close; things were happening. We were still feeling the war. The Germans would come in and out of the convent, because there was armies around us.

One day, there was a whole group of soldiers on trucks in the morning, and they were leaving. They were the Germans, and they were leaving. And later on in the day, another group of soldiers were coming in. They had different trucks, different faces, different uniforms, and the nuns said that they were the Russian soldiers. And everyone was speaking around, “What’s happening? What’s happening?” And the children were—the nuns were trying to keep us safe, keep us in the buildings. But the Russians came, and they tried to set up a good will area. They set up a little circus for the children. It was springtime, and things were changing. And we did not realize what was happening completely, as children.

But one day, I was called into the mother superior’s office. And I did not know—I said, “What did I do?” You don’t get called to the mother superior’s office unless you’ve done something. I checked my brain. I said, “What did I do? I’ve been to the confession. I had nothing. I didn’t do anything bad this week. What did I do?” I walked in and I had my head down, and there—I lifted up my eyes to see the mother superior. With her was another lady, and I knew her. This was my aunt, my mother’s younger sister! Aunt Beba, we called her. Her name was Barbara, but I called her Beba, my Aunt Beba. And oh, what a time we had, crying and laughing! She had lived with us, prior to us being in—when we were in the ghetto. That was the last time I had seen her. But I remembered her. It was two and half years, but I still remembered this was my aunt!

My aunt and the mother superior are speaking, and they’re trying to make plans and talking about taking me out, when’s the time we’re going to take her out, I said, “I’m going now. I’m leaving now. I’m not staying.” So, Mother Superior must have known me by then, that I did not put up with any of the stuff. And she let me go, but she said, “Remember to say your prayers. Remember to be a good child. Go to school. And remember what you were taught, and remember what you were taught in church.” I said, “Yes, ma’am.” And I went with her, and I was free. My aunt took me that day.

We sat and waited for the train, and she told me a story. She said that she had been taken off the streets. She also had false papers, and she had been taken off the streets of her town, of Lemberg. She was taken to Germany. And my other aunt, my Aunt Sidja—her other sister—was also taken to Germany, also with false papers. And then my mother had been taken to Austria, and she showed me a picture of my mom. I went and ran to my classmates to show my mother’s picture, because I had to pick some stuff up from the room, to get my things I needed to take with me, and I showed them the picture. And now that I think about it, these poor orphans! I’m showing off my mother—I didn’t know if she was alive or not, but I had a picture of my mother.

As I said, we were waiting at the train, and then she told me about how the three of them made a pact: whoever would come back to Poland and could go back to Lemberg, their job was to find me. And then she told them that there was—my mother had said there was a convent on such and such street, because she determined from the social workers, how she was talking that she was going to place me close by, so my mother knew where the convent was. So, she said whoever goes has to find me.

My aunt was the first one to come back, and she was very venturesome. She wants to go back to Lemberg. And she applies to go, but the Russians would not let her go. The border was closed. Only people who had business with the government could cross into the border. They closed the border. It was now under Russian occupation. So, my aunt couldn't go. She was very frustrated.

She's sitting on a park bench one day in Warsaw, and she sees a young man—he was an amputee—and she got into a conversation. It turned out he was Jewish; he had spent his war years working with the partisans and the Russian army, and he lost a leg during the war and he was going to be fitted for a prosthesis in Lvov, in Lemberg. And she begged him. She said, "Please do me a favor. Go to such and such convent and get my niece," never thinking that he would do it. But sure enough, he came back, and he told her that I was two stops on the train away from her. I was near Warsaw in the second Pustelnik—that was the name of the station—and that's how she came that day, because she took the first train that she could and she arrived at the convent. And that's the story that—while we were waiting for the train, she told me that story.

She shared her lunch with me. We had such a wonderful reunion. I felt so good. She brought me back to her little one-room apartment. She had a bed, a little single bed. And next to it, she placed a bench, and on the bench she put on some blankets, and that was my place to sleep. I was very little, skinny, but I was just so happy with her. She would go to the black market during the day and try to get food. She was always doing something to get me, and she would drag me along with her and she registered me. This was in the summertime, so she registered me for school, and the only place she could put me to school was a Catholic school, and I would fit there.

But there was also how to deal with me and my prayers. First day, I said my prayers before I went to bed. Second day, I said it also. Third day, I said to my aunt, "Do I have to do it?" And my aunt said, "Do whatever makes you comfortable." I said, "Then I don't have to do it anymore." I knew that I had not—it was not my faith and that this was not what I was used to as a child, and I knew that this was something that I had to do at the convent, but I did not have to do with my aunt. So, we had set up a life, and she said to me that even if we never found anybody else, she was going to be my anchor, like my mom, my special aunt, and I was happy as anything.

One night—it was really morning. Around four o'clock in the morning, there was a knock on the door. And it was scary, because we were—just a few months before that we were under German occupation, and we did not know who was coming. We thought maybe the war had come back the other way. You never knew what was going to happen. And so, somebody knocking at four o'clock in the morning is very scary. And I didn't know what made me do it, but I stood up on that little bench, and in my sleep I must have heard a voice or whether it was something, and I yelled, "*Tata! Tata!*" That's Polish for "Daddy." And sure enough, it was my dad! We opened up the door, and there was my dad!

He had another story to tell. I mean, the idea that he was there, where did he come from? What happened? He told a story about how the last time that we knew he was in the camp, at the Janowska camp, it was a labor camp, and how he had been working outside of the camp and working in a garage. He was keeping books for the Germans there, and he was doing business; his business education came into place. But he was in contact with my Uncle Henju, and there was another one of my other uncles was also in the camp. And the two of them wanted to get out. And then my Uncle Henju was trying to get them out.

My uncle Michael, the other uncle, he was the one who was the father of the two girls, of Anita and Olga. He already had no hope that they were alive. So, he did not make a big effort to get out. But my father said, "I want out." And so, my uncle arranged for a local person to take him to a train and get him away from that garage. But the man took the money and left my father stranded. And my father—there was coat and a hat. [He was] a thin man with a shaven head, and very skinny, put on a big coat, a hat, and he took himself to the train station, got on a train heading toward the Ukraine.

On the train were German soldiers who were carousing, having fun, having drinks, asked my father to have a drink with them. My father spoke German well. He joined into the conversation, pretended that he was drinking, but he was pouring the drinks down somewhere, 'cause he was afraid that if he would drink, he would maybe give away who he was, because when you drinking, you're not properly behaving. And he arrived at the destination in the Ukraine.

There, he networked. He was given a person, an address to go to, and he networked with some people who he knew also who had escaped. And he was working at a place where they were building bridges and roads. He was the person who had to send—he would—there was certain name for him, but I don't—it was in German: somebody who sends stuff out for where the things should be built, the equipment. My father would send it to the wrong place, so things never got to be where they were supposed to be. So, he was trying to stop the war effort on his own. But he got into trouble, because eventually things



were kind of—you know, things were getting hot. And he was going to be in trouble, and he ran.

This time he ran and then changed his name, and he became Tadeusz Jeleniewski. He ended up near Bucharest, in a place called Slatina Olt. And there he also networked and found a place that they were doing baked goods and stuff, and making coffee. And he helped make *Ersatzkaffee*, which was not real coffee but made out of chickpeas. And he spent the rest of the war year, before he was liberated by the Russians, there.

And he also went back—he went originally to Bucharest, and he started working with other survivors. People were starting to come to Romania because Romania was close—Romania had a port, so they could go travel to Palestine. And he was involved in helping some of the people do that. In the meantime, he had been writing letters and doing all kinds of things. And he got permission from his work to leave, and he went back to Poland. And when he got back to Poland, he was not able to go back to Lemberg because of the Russian border being closed.

So the next place he went was to Krakow, and in Krakow, he meets—on one of the trolleys, he meets a man who says to him, “Mr. Wien, it’s amazing to see you. I just spoke to your sister-in-law,” my Aunt Sidja, the other aunt—the three women: my Aunt Beba, my mother, and my aunt Sidja, the three women that were supposed to come and find me. She was living in Krakow. My father went to see her immediately, and she had news that I was with my aunt in Warsaw. That’s how he came to be at that doorstep.

He took the next train, but it was all a matter of—he had gone and seen the super [superintendent] of the building. He had gotten some pictures from the super. He went to all the different places where he had lived. He wanted to see what had happened to our home. But when he went to see my aunt, my aunt knew what was happening already, that I was safe with her sister, and that’s how he came. And we had a wonderful reunion. He told stories. All these stories that I am telling you now, he told us in great detail, and he decided to take me back with him because he had plans for us—

(phone rings) Oops. Shall we stop?

TL: Okay, I think we’ll stop here, and then we’ll pick up with the second tape.

SR: Yeah, just the right time.

***Part 1 ends; part 2 begins***

TL: Okay, I am Tori Lockler, and this is tape two in our interview with Sylvia Wien Richman. Ms. Richman, if we can take you back to the convent for a minute—if there are memories of celebrations or holidays there that you could share with us?

SR: Yes. In the first convent, I remember the children being entertained with gift-finding. We would fish for gifts. They would make up look like a pond with a sheet around it, and they would give us a pole. And there'd be somebody behind that sheet, and we would fish for little gifts. It must've been a holiday. At that time I don't know whether it must have been—it might have been Christmas at that convent. But the nuns really did try to give the children some fun times. In the other convent, I remember—because I was there much longer than the first convent—they had wonderful holidays, especially at Christmas and Easter time.

During the regular days, we were fed just bare necessities. Our drink for breakfast was this pasty gooey drink, but it was supposed to—it's like groats. It was, I guess, very nourishing, and we called it *zur*, and we would say, "Oh, here we go again." But that's what sustained us. And we had dark bread. Who would have known that that was good for us? Because at holidays, we would get white rolls and white bread, and the nuns would really make it special.

Easter was wonderful; so was Christmas. They decorated the place. They set the table beautifully. They would put hay on under the tablecloth, and late in the evening—it was a late evening meal; they would keep us up. We were so tired, but they'd keep us up because it was special. It was a very special time, and we would have a real celebration for Christmas. I don't know whether we got gifts, but we did get little things, like the wafers were beautifully decorated with ribbons. It was a fun time. Same thing with Easter. They did not have in Poland the Easter egg hunts, but they did other things, and it was just going to church and having a beautiful meal, and eating a nice, special meal. It was not the same as every day.

And the two and a half years that I spent in the convent were for the most part very—they went pretty fast, because we were busy. We were studying. We had work to do. We had to clean up, we had to clean up after ourselves, and we would have to be very responsible. I learned how to knit; one of the girls had taught me how to knit, and it's a skill that to this day I keep. So, memories of the convent—there were sad times, separation from my mother, but there was some very fine things going on there, too.

TL: Okay, thank you. And then, you had also left off with your father coming to your aunt's house.

SR: Yes. Well, when my father came, we made plans. And he and my aunt—it was very tough, because we did not know where my mother was. That was one piece that was missing out of the pieces. We did not know where some of the other family members were, but for us, finding my mother was the most important thing. And my father had written letters throughout his time in Romania. He was writing letters, thinking that she was in certain places, but nothing came back. And when he was speaking to my aunt, they made a plan that I would go with him and that he would try to find my mother, and she would also try to find my mother, because she had the other sister, and they were going to keep in touch. And that was the last that they were going to do.

So he took me with him, and we had a very long adventure. We went from Poland—to go to Romania, we had to go through Czechoslovakia. We had to go through the countryside in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania. It was a long trip, and traveling was very difficult. We traveled through—one time, we traveled in a limousine. One time we traveled in a truck. One time we went on a train. Whatever transportation my father could muster, we found, and we got there from point A to point B. It was a long, long trek. And we had lots of good times together, and lots of sad moments, too, because sometimes we couldn't find the right connection. It took us a while, but we ended up in Romania.

We did pass on the road a prisoner of war camp with German soldiers wanting—reaching out their hands for cigarettes. And as a child, what did I know of how to deal with them? I knew they were bad, and I didn't know any other way to say it, but I stuck out my tongue at them as we passed by, and that was my revenge. (laughs) Childish one, but—and when my father said that's who they were, I was so angry.

But we did get back to his place in Bucharest. And he was working during the week with other immigrants that were—they were planning to make trips. Their final destination was Palestine. At that time, it was called Palestine. And he was busy during the week, so he needed to find someplace for me to be during the week, taken care of. He knew of a children's home that was right in the suburbs of Bucharest, and he made arrangements with the people who were taking care of those young people. Most of them were teenagers. Many of them were—I was one of the youngest ones there.

During the week, I stayed there. Most of them came from Poland. They were orphans, and they were gone to be sent to Palestine to work on the kibbutzim. They were being taught agronomy, how to become farmers—at least the older ones were. And the younger ones were—they started Hebrew classes for the younger ones. And during the week, that's where I spent. My father would come on Friday evening. He'd be welcome and we could stay at the meal, and then he would take me over the weekend and I would have a

nice time away with him. But when I would come back, all those children were without parents, also.

There was a big problem as far as how they felt about me. I was really an interloper. First of all, I had not suffered the way they did during the war. I was in a safe place. They might have been in camps, they might have been other places, and their life story was very different. And so, they resented me. It took me a while to warm up to many of them. I found one little girl who had a father, who I became friends with, and she was my buddy. And I would share with her things; if my father gave me something, I would share with her, but I was afraid to share with everybody else. Things were taken away from me. If my father gave me colored pencils, the next day they belonged to the whole group; they weren't mine anymore and I had to share. Which was okay, I shared. But it was hard to do, because I didn't understand why. But they were already learning how to be part of a commune, where you share things. It was an interesting time, and I learned a lot. I did not go to school per se, but I did start learning Hebrew.

And one day, my father came on a Friday, and he had amazing news. One of the letters that he had been sending out arrived at my mother's destination. My mother had been sick during the war, when she was in Austria. She had typhus and she had been in the hospital, and she did not venture out of—her health was not that good that she would venture after the war, and she was liberated by the American army rather than the Russians. My father had been liberated by the Russians, and so was I. But she was liberated by the Americans.

So, she wanted my father to come to her. And so, he did. He left me in Romania. I don't know what the reason was at the time, why he did not take me with him. Maybe he did not know how my mother and he would—whether they would be able to be reunited as a family, or whatever. He left me in Romania, and he went to Austria and found her in a displaced persons camp. By that time, she had been in a displaced persons camp, and she told the story about how she had been ill.

She had been taken off the streets of Poland, from Lemberg, for slave labor in Austria, and she was working in a place called Linz. She worked in a castle where the Germans occupied. She was a cleaning woman, and eventually worked herself up to be the head of the cleaning department. She spoke German and she spoke French and she spoke Polish beautifully, so she was an asset to them, but she was a *putzfrau*. She cleaned. And when she was liberated by Americans, she worked locally with a family that had a restaurant, and she worked in the restaurant, cooking and serving. It was a small family. And then she eventually ended up in a displaced persons camp.

And when she found my—so my father, when he found her, he went to that displaced persons camp, and they made plans for the future. And my mother and he decided that they were going to come to United States instead of going—we were going to go to Palestine then, my father and I. We had already—we had a reservation, so to say, on a legal ship, because the trips to Palestine were either legal or illegal, and they were called *aliyah alef*. The *alef* were the legal ships, and if you went on the [*aliyah*] *bet* or the other kinds, they were illegal.<sup>1</sup> They were being smuggled and ended up in Cyprus and all that. But he decided that—and my mother—that we were going to go try to come to the States.

It turns out my mother had another brother. The second oldest brother had made it during the war. He had gone from Poland to France, from France to Haiti, and from Haiti, he ended up in the United States in the early forties [1940s]. Somehow or other, they found him—they found each other. The communication must have been during the forties [1940s]; they still maybe kept it, because they contacted each other, wrote letters. And she wanted to go to be with her brother.

And so they decided—my father went back to Romania and he got me, and we went on another long trek from Romania to Austria. And that was more adventurous, more borders to cross. But it was an amazing day. We came on a train that had—the old trains that had to have coal. And the dark coal—I'm putting my head out the window to see what is happening out there, because I wanted to find out how fast that train was going so I could get to my mother, and I turn up to be full of coal. (laughs) Little soot all over me.

But we got there, and she wasn't there for that because she didn't know exactly where we were coming. We were going all over the—this was like a hotel—and we are looking all over for her, and then she came in, and it was amazing. I mean, we were all crying, and we were all—and she had saved things for me. She had saved socks. She had little toys and she had a little doll for me, because she had imagined what age I might be and what I might want. During the whole time, every time she looked at a child, she would say, “Oh, my daughter might be about this size, this age.”

She was just amazing. That first night when I was with her, she insisted that she would give me a bath in the little sink in her little room. And I let her, because—I mean, I understood that she needed to do this. I was seven, or I was almost eight years old. I was over eight at that time, because when my father got me, I was seven. So, this was a year later. I was almost nine. And I let her give me a sponge bath. And the three of us shared a room.

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<sup>1</sup> Between 1934 and 1948, the British colonial government in Palestine severely restricted Jewish immigration. *Aliyah alef* (“Aliyah ‘A’”) refers to the sanctioned immigration, whereas *aliyah bet* (“Aliyah ‘B’”), or *Ha'apala*, was the term for illegal immigration during this period.

When we got to Austria, my aunt, the one—my Aunt Beba—came with us. No, she came to the same displaced persons camp. She traveled from Poland and came there. My other aunt ended up going—she found her husband and ended up in Paris. And eventually, when we came to the United States—my father and my mother and I came to the United States; my two aunts ended up going to Canada. They could not come to the United States, because the quota system was such that—we were able to come. My uncle was able to give us an affidavit, but he was not able to do it for his other two sisters.

So, one of the sisters, my Aunt Beba, went to Canada under—she was indentured for a year. She was indentured and she worked for a family as a housekeeper for a year and she saved up her money, and then with that money she sent for her other sister and her brother-in-law. And they came to Canada. So we all ended—the three of us—the family ended up being on the Canadian side and New York, and eventually we would visit each other a lot between the two countries.

But my uncle who gave us the papers to come to the United States, he was trying to set up a business, the same as my grandfather had. And he wanted my mother and my father to be part of it. But my parents were a little worried about how this was going to work, and they wanted more freedom. They did not want to be under somebody's orders. It wasn't a good family mix.

So, my father instead worked—at first, he worked in—there was a possibility to work in a diamond business, because the Belgian diamond cleavers left Europe during the war. They escaped. The business completely went to the States. So my father—when he was studying as a young man during the summer, he had a job when he was studying in Belgium. He learned how to be a diamond cleaver. So, he got a job at the diamond business. But he was there maybe a month, and they went back to Belgium. He was no longer able to do that, so he couldn't do it.

The only other things that he knew what to do was go and work in the garment business, because they needed people in the garment business. He was trying to learn how to sew on sewing machines, which he had never done before, and he tried. My mother worked in the garment business, too; she was a finisher. She had always sewn as a young woman and loved to sew for herself, because that's the way she got nice clothing. And rather than have go to—my grandmother used to take him to a seamstress. And my father—my mother would love to make her own stuff, so she would. She was very good at it.

So, she was able to work in the garment business. She was a pieceworker. She worked on coats, in the hot summer, un-air-conditioned factories in New York at the Lower East Side, and then in the Garment District. And piecework meant whatever coat you worked on, you tear off a little piece of—after you finish, the little ticket, and at the end of the

week, you handed in how many tickets you worked and that's how you got paid, for how many pieces. If you were faster, you had more money, if you were not so slow. And one time, she lost those little tickets, and she was in tears because she could not bring home the money.

It was very tough at first when we came. We were first in a hotel for immigrants, and from there, we went to try to find—we got a small apartment on the Lower East Side. When we were there, I was a latchkey kid. My father got sick immediately. He had been healthy and keeping himself together. When he came to this country, he all of a sudden started having ulcers, bleeding ulcers. He needed surgery a couple of times. He was not in the best of health. My mother and he were working very hard, and I used to always say to them, “How come I can't have a baby brother or baby sister?” And they said, “We're struggling. We're just doing the best we can.”

I was a latchkey kid. Every day, my responsibility was to go to school, and then I would have to help set up the start of dinner. But I came and I started. I was in fourth grade for a little bit, just for a very short time. And then, when we moved to the Lower East Side, I started fifth grade. I was sent to camp by the Service for New Americans, and I learned my English there. The Service for New Americans took me to a circus one time, and I had a great time at the circus. English came very easily, in a way, because I had gone to school in Austria. And I was in third grade in Austria, I finished.

We had also moved from one displaced persons camp to another. We were in more than one camp prior to coming into the States. It was a long road to get to the States. It took us months before we got permission, and we were—finally, we went on a ship. We went on—it was S.S. *Marine Tiger*. It was a Marine boat, and it was a transport ship in those days, for soldiers. And we were twelve days, crossing from Bremen [Germany] to New York. And in New York, we stayed at a hotel—it was called Hotel Marseilles—and there we were until we found an apartment in the Lower East Side. And at one of my—also, networking found some relatives, and this relative took me to school to introduce me to the education in this country.

They figured I better go into fourth grade. Even though I had finished third grade, I had not had school for over a year. So, I had to start a little—I was behind a little bit. But I had a teacher who spoke Yiddish and who understood—I did not speak Yiddish, but I knew German, so between the two of us, we got along. Eventually, once I came back from camp, I spoke it and I was fine.

I finished my elementary education, and eventually we moved to Brooklyn. We had an apartment in Brooklyn, and after the Lower East Side, we moved to Brooklyn, because the one on the Lower East Side was in dilapidated houses that were supposed to be torn

down, but after the war, they did not have much housing and the soldiers were coming back and they needed [housing]. So we lived in a squalor place in the Lower East Side, but my parents made a heaven out of it. And we have some good stories about that.

But we moved to Brooklyn, and then I finished elementary school and went on to high school, [High School of] Music & Art in Manhattan, and was very independent because my mother didn't want me to travel for an hour and a half to go to high school, but I did. And then I went to Brooklyn College and Columbia University. When I was twenty-three years old, I married a Harvard graduate. I had worked in summer camp, in a camp for handicapped kids, and we met there, and three years later, we were married. When he finished law school and I finished up Columbia, we were married, and we moved to Florida and lived in Tampa, Florida since then.

TL: Since then?

SR: Yeah, we lived just for a little bit—we lived for a short period of time in Jacksonville, and then for about a year in Washington, D.C. But then in 1964 or so, we came permanently. But I was married in Tampa, in 1961. I was married in Tampa, because his parents lived in St. Petersburg, Florida. So, Florida was the place to be. And I became, eventually, a teacher at Hillel School, teaching Hebrew and Judaic. Who would have thought that that's where I would end up, after being in a convent all the time?

I do speak to the children about my story, about what happened, and I have a happy ending. My mother and father and I, we did very well. We had a tough time starting, but my father died of a stroke at the age of seventy-nine. My mother lived till ninety-nine and a half, and I had the pleasure of taking care of her during her last years. She lived here in Tampa for about seven years. We survived, and we had a good story to tell.

TL: Okay. If it's okay with you—

SR: Sure.

TL: —I'll ask you maybe just to go back to one thing, and then ask you something a little more current. Is there anything else you remember about the displaced persons camps?

SR: Yes.



TL: Any specific experiences?

SR: Well, the first displaced persons camp was like a hotel. We were able to—we had a room of our own. There was a community kitchen, and everybody worked together. I remember getting care packages from the United States. My father worked in the UNRA, United Nation Rehabilitation Association. He worked for that, and he worked with an American soldier, Mr. D'Andrea, wonderful man. And I remember going every day or so, often, to visit the office.

It was a very nice life. Austria was beautiful. I learned how to—I had a sled. I had freedom to walk around. I was the only child in the school system that was not Jewish. I went to school. My mother helped me with my German. I survived beautifully. There was no problems. I had a wonderful teacher, and it was a very easy relationship. It was individuals. It was not a mass of—I was me. And I was able to go with the class on the sled in the park, and as part of the class, we would go to the mountains and ski—not ski, but sled down the hill.

It was a lovely, lovely experience. The whole year or so that I was there was wonderful. I had my appendix taken out that time, too. I had adopted play—would play with adopted dogs, because they were part of the community, and I adopted a little dachshund that was part of the—the kitchen staff had him, or somebody had him, and I played with him, put him in my doll carriage. I never played with dolls, but I played with that dog. And it was a great time.

But then, we were—the Americans who organized these displaced persons camps needed us to move, and we moved to another one. And that was in a different location. And there, it lost its personality. It became like a barrack place again. It was also—for some people, it was more like the camps that they were used to, but there was freedom there. We could go in and we could go out, but it was still a barrack-type living conditions. It wasn't there for very long. And then we were taken to Munich, to Germany, and from Munich, we were taken to Bremen and was all through displaced persons camps.

It was okay because I was with my family, but I did not go to school at that time. I did not have an education. I was just—luckily, I had educated parents, and so we would have stories. My father told me different things that he had read. And so, my education was just being at home with my parents, but I did not go to school.

TL: Okay. May I ask you about your religious life throughout your life? You've said that you were baptized in the convent.

SR: Mm-hm.

TL: And that you experienced the holidays that they did, and then you talked some about your mother telling you to genuflect when you went certain places.

SR: Yeah.

TL: Were your parents—before this started, were they very religious?

SR: They were not very religious. They were very modern in their upbringing. They were not from—it was big-city life. My grandparents kept a kosher home. They lived in a neighborhood where all their families were around. They had family gatherings. My grandmother would bake the challah for Friday nights. And I remember with her while she was—she would let me taste the yeast, the little cakes of yeast, and I guess I craved it because it tasted so good to me. Yeast just doesn't taste that good, but it did. And I remember waiting for the dough to rise, and she and I would dance in the kitchen. That's one memory, must have been for Shabbat.

Then, there was a memory of unpacking dishes for Passover. And I don't remember the Passover part, I don't remember, but I remember the unpacking and my mother showing me the cups for the wine that they used when they were little kids. That I remember, but that's all I remember from religion. I do not remember anything else.

I was put back into Judaism at that children's home, because I was so young that I was not involved, and then there was the terrors and there was no time for religion. There was no time at all for it. Whether my parents celebrated something, I don't remember it. I just remember the challah and the unpacking for Passover. I remember the unpacking. I was told later on by my mother that that was for Passover, but I don't remember the Passover part. So, my being back to Judaism was in that children's home in Romania. I went through a year, a cycle of the holidays there before I came.

And once I was with my parents, together, we became traditional Jews. My mother never kept kosher again, only maybe Passover time. She would buy kosher meat, but she didn't—she said it was fresher and it tasted better. But she didn't buy it for religious reasons. We had a very traditional—we went to services. We belonged to synagogue. My father spoke beautiful Hebrew. I went to Hebrew school. After regular school, I went to Hebrew school. I was pretty good at it, because learning languages came easily to me.

But I was not—we were not very religious in the sense of how some people are keeping kosher and going to services every week. I do that more now. I do go to services, I attend. I do not keep kosher. I'm more of a vegetarian than I am anything else; but my daughter is, though. My daughter keeps—

I have two children. I have a son and a daughter. My daughter is a very traditional Jew. She married another person who is also traditional, and the two of them have a kosher home. Their children go to Jewish day schools, and they practice very nicely. They are Conservative Jews, but they are observant. On Shabbat, no money is spent. They keep a kosher home. And when I'm there, I go with her and I do the same. I know exactly what to do. My aunt in Canada kept a kosher home, but my mother and father did not. I asked my mother why, and she said, "If I had my parents and I had family around me who wanted to do that, I would do it." But otherwise, they didn't.

TL: How interesting.

SR: Passover, they did. There was a disassociation, but yet, we were very traditional. All the holidays were kept, going to services for Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Passover every holiday. And I was sent to Hebrew [school]. I did not have a bat mitzvah until I was thirty-five.

TL: You had it at thirty-five?

SR: At the age of thirty five, during the time of—we had a gasoline—in 1973, there was a gasoline shortage stuff, and I could not travel back and forth when I was driving my kids to Hebrew. So, the cantor said to me, "Sylvia, time for you to learn." And so, I became a bat mitzvah at thirty five. And it was fun. My kids came to it and it was very—nowadays, a lot of women who did not have, because traditionally women did not have a bat mitzvah. Later on, girls had it at the age of twelve, but it was not the same as the boys. They could not read from the Torah. They just had a little party. They said a couple of prayers, and then they had a little party. But nowadays, the young women have a—they go through the same studies as the boys, and they have the same traditional—and my daughter is one of them, too, both my daughter—I have a grandson, my granddaughter, and we're going to have one more. My youngest one is going to have a bat mitzvah in 2010.

TL: Wow.

SR: So we—and my husband now, his children are also starting to have it. But we are very traditional Jews. Yeah.

TL: So, that's your daughter. What about your son?

SR: My son is a great human being who has chosen not to be part of any religion. He brings home the trappings of Hanukkah and Christmas at the same time; he is a universal man. And he is married—the first wife—they both are not affiliated with any religion, but they are very respectful, and their children get the best of both.

TL: And how many grandchildren do you have altogether?

SR: I have four. I have three from my daughter and one from my son, and then I have two more from my son; they are not my biological [grandchildren], but they are part of the blended family, 'cause my son got married again. So, I have two more. And then, my new husband has four. So, we are a large family. (laughs) We have quite a few. So it's four, four, eight, ten. (laughs)

TL: Wow. And you mentioned earlier that you share some of this—depending on the age—but you share some of this with your grandchildren.

SR: Oh, yes.

TL: Will you tell me a little about how you do that, how you approach that?

SR: Well, when my granddaughter Hilana was old enough to want to hear stories how it was when her mommy was a little girl, and what happened when I was a little girl. She would come to—when I would visit her, she would come to my bedroom and make an appointment with me. And at seven o'clock in the morning, she would be there first thing in the morning and crawl into to bed with me. She calls me *Savta*, which is Hebrew for grandmother, and she says, “Savta, tell me a story.” So I would tell her stories.

This would go on and on. And then, the other one, Micah, came along, my next grandson. He would join us, but he didn't come—it wasn't as much interest, but he would come and he would listen. But Hilana was always there to listen to all the stories, and then her younger sister. Five years later, she had a—her sister came along. And she's also into it, into listening and coming into bed and stories, but the best one is still the oldest one. She

loves stories. She loves to write, and she is going to be the keeper of the memories for me. My other one likes to listen to it, too. And when the book that the Holocaust Museum put together was published, they each received it. They enjoy listening to the stories, and they are very sensitive about it. And I'm proud of them.

TL: May I ask you—in your adult life, do you have specific memories of anti-Semitism in the United States, as an adult?

SR: In the United States, personally, I was lucky. I lived in New York. New York was very easy to be Jewish, because a lot of neighborhoods where I lived were Jewish. And even though when I lived on the Lower East Side, they were—I had a—they were mixture. It was starting to be—some Latinos were coming in, just a few; there were still some Irish people left over. It was a blend, and Jewish people were still there. I did not feel it. I felt more of a—not anti-Semitism, but I felt more of being a greenhorn, as they say, somebody who was new to the country. And I felt that more than being anti-Semitism.

But my husband in Florida was in St. Petersburg. He was invited one day to a beach club, and he was told that—a friend brought him, and when he had to sign in, he was told never to come back again because the club did not allow Jews to be there. So, that was always something that I had not been a part of. And this came much later. This came in the fifties [1950s]. So, I was very surprised. But that was also during the time when I came to this country. When we traveled from New York to Florida and I saw for the first time the water fountains for blacks and water fountains for whites, bathrooms for—and then to go to the back of the bus. I mean, those are the things that I was not part of, growing up in New York. I had heard about it, but until I traveled south, I did not know about it.

But eventually, the South was one of the better places, sometimes, to turn it around than even some of the northern places. I remember when in the sixties [1960s] that came in Florida, my husband was working with a judge who had to do with integration, and I saw how Florida was so much better than maybe Boston or some other places. But I did not feel it. I was very lucky, or maybe I just had a good attitude, but maybe it went over my head. I was aware that it was, but not with me.

TL: Okay. Thank you. And finally, is there any final experience that you would like to share, or any advice you would like to give to young people now?

SR: Well, I think the world needs to learn how to be kind and find that religion has a place in their lives, but not to make religion the overall; and that you do not have to be on the same path to God as somebody else; and that you should respect each individual for

what he is, not because he has a certain faith or because he lives in a different place. And the world has not learned how to do that yet. And we have too much problem because we think, “My religion is better than your religion,” and that is the biggest problem.

And economics—I think if we can keep everybody safe and fed and happy, problems do not arise. As soon as you have some kind of economic problem, that’s when hatred comes out and people start picking on [others] and scapegoating. I’m just hoping that I live to see that this gets better.

TL: Well, thank you very much—(clears throat) excuse me—for sharing your story with us and for giving us this experience.

SR: Well—

TL: I appreciate it.

SR: I hope that—my story is a gentle story. There was tough times. There was a lot of suffering, but I was fortunate that I had good people around me. And as I always say, I say thank you to that policeman who was able to that day make that decision to save my mother and myself, because had he not made that choice that day, I wouldn’t be here. So, that’s what I have to say.

TL: Well, thank you so very much.

SR: You’re welcome.

TL: I appreciate it.

SR: Yeah.

***Part 2 ends; part 3 begins***

TL: Okay, I am Tori Lockler, and this is tape three. I am here with Ms. Sylvia Richman and Mr. Marvin Halem. So, what I would like to do first is ask you how the two of you met.

**Marvin Halem:** We met, believe it or not, in a synagogue when I came into—I came down from New Jersey to Tampa. We went to a bar mitzvah at Rodeph Shalom, and my cousin who lives down here was gonna fix me up on a date.

SR: Susan Holman, from university.

MH: And she was—so, the woman that she was going to pick came in, and I didn't think she was my type. Now, I met Sylvia at the door when I was coming in, and I didn't know her at all. So I sat down and we're there, and so my cousin said, "Well, what type of woman—who would you like?" So I look over and Sylvia just happened to sit down at the end of the pew, and I looked over and I said, "That's my type of woman over there." And then my cousin's daughter, they asked her if she was married. She said, "No, her husband passed away, and she's a widow." And then my cousin called up and asked if she would go out with me. That's how it got started, and we've been together since then.

SR: I was the teacher for his cousin's children, for both her children, and we just happened to meet.

MH: Yeah.

SR: It was happenstance.

TL: Can you tell me a little about your perspective of living with a survivor and of her sharing her story with the St. Pete Holocaust Museum and with this project?

MH: I think it's wonderful. I think it's good for her to be able to talk it out and to get it out, and it's great to get it into young children to understand that this thing actually happened. When she tells these stories, it becomes a learning situation. So, I think it's good for her, because she's able to get it out and she's able to help children understand what's happening, and it's helpful for the children. And I hear—you know, it's amazing. Her stories are amazing.

TL: Would you like to tell us something about your children, your grandchildren?

MH: Okay, my son [Daniel R. Halem], as I said, he graduated from Cornell University and then he went to Harvard Law and he graduated with—Obama was in his class, by the way.

TL: Oh!

MH: So he graduated. Then he was working for a law firm in New York, doing a lot of arbitration work for baseball, and he was winning so many of his cases that the commissioner's people called him and they asked him to be vice president of Major League Baseball, which he presently is. He works for Major League Baseball.

My daughter became an accountant, and she worked for Time Warner in New York City, and she became a big shot there. And then they started having children, and my daughter believes, like I believe—she stayed home to raise the children. So, I have two gorgeous grandchildren by her, and I have two wonderful grandchildren by my son. And I wish they were closer, but I love Florida, (laughs) and they live up there in New York.

TL: And this is a blended family, right?

SR: Yes.

TL: So, altogether, you have four children.

SR: And they met at our wedding. That was—

MH: Yes.

SR: —one of the reasons we wanted to get married, because we wanted our children to know each other.

TL: Oh, wow!

MH: Right.



SR: Yeah. 'Cause I was a widow for a long time before I met Marvin—almost ten years—and we knew each other for a long time, too. But when we decided to get married I said, “We’re going to get all those kids together.”

MH: Yep.

TL: Wow!

MH: And it worked out. It worked out good, and the kids got along; when they’re together, they get along with each other.

SR: Yeah.

MH: So, it worked out.

TL: And do you have any final thoughts you would like to say? Any final messages based on what you’ve learned from being together?

MH: Well, one thing I have to say, I can’t recall in eighteen years—we never had a fight, never disagreements, if we discuss—if there has to be. So it’s been very relaxing. It’s been a wonderful—

SR: But is it tough to live with a Holocaust survivor? (laughs)

MH: Well, no, because we get along. You know, she has her [things] which she enjoys. Like, she’ll watch baseball (laughs) and I’ll watch other stuff besides baseball. No, we have—we give each other—you know, she does her thing. She plays mahjong, which is wonderful; I go play my golf. No, we get along good. She understands.

For instance, when I came to Tampa, I decided to become a real healthy person, 'cause I wasn't. As I was going, I would eat fast food, because I was working two jobs and had to just grab. Coming here, I decided to go to health food stores and I decided to eat healthy, and it creates—not a problem, but then Syl loves to cook. But she knows I don't eat (inaudible). (laughs) So we go out to eat a lot, but, you know, we get along great.

You have something?

SR: No, I'm just saying he had to learn, living when I was taking care of my mother.

MH: Yeah, that was hard.

SR: And having the mentality of a Holocaust survivor, and the feeling of needing to take care of the—we took care of each other. It was not the easiest time, even though he says everything is fine. That was a very tough time on him, because my mother lived with us for two years in this house, in this little small two bedroom apartment, because this is really only two bedrooms upstairs. Three of us were living here, and it was very tough. And also, how the interaction between a mother and daughter of a Holocaust—

MH: Yeah, it's very—

SR: Very different from most mothers and daughters, and it was hard on him. It was very hard on him, but he weathered through it. It took a while, but it was a tough time, and you sort of forget about it after it's been over.

MH: It's just talking about the last—

SR: Yeah.

MH: Yeah, that was hard.

SR: And it's something that I think in retrospect he realizes, the more we are into some of the stories and hearing from other people. He realizes that there is a certain mentality with it that comes with being—that most people don't understand it.

MH: She's very, very fortunate, when you look at all the—she was able to get her mother and her father and—

SR: Everybody together.

MH: —together.

SR: I mean this is—not many stories. My story's very tame, in comparison to others.

MH: Did she tell you that the monastery—or is it the convent?

SR: The convent?

MH: It's still in existence, and they contacted it.

SR: Yeah. Oh, we forgot that.

TL: Oh, would you share that?

SR: Yes. Through the Holocaust Museum, we were able to email the convent and Ulla, who is the Director of Education, was able to write a beautiful letter in Polish to the convent. And the convent was able to send a printout of when I was in the convent and then when I came out. So, it's still in existence. And it's something that I'm keeping in the back burner, but I'd like to be able to maybe someday do something about that, about either visiting or sharing something with the convent, because they were so amazing to me.

TL: Oh, that's nice.

MH: Let's hope we have a lot more years.

TL: Well, thank you very much.

SR: Well, thank you, too, and thank you for the project, for doing this. And I hope that people who listen to this have the idea. We were there. It happened. It's not a story. We lived it. And we just survived by inches.

TL: Thank you.

*End of interview*