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Rose Rosen and Lila Huse oral history interview by Christopher Patti, September 21, 2010

Rose Rosen (Interviewee)

Chris J. Patti (Interviewer)

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Christopher Patti: Okay, today's date is September 21, 2010. This is our interview with survivor Rose Rosen and her daughter Lila Huse. My name is Chris Patti. We are in Sarasota, Florida, in the United States. The language is English, and the videographers are Jane Duncan and Richard Schmidt.

Okay, Mrs. Rosen and Lila, thank you so much for doing the interview today. We'll start off with—could you just tell me your name and spell it, please?

Rose Rosen: My name is Rose Rosen. R-o-s-e R-o-s-e-n.

CP: Have you gone by any other names throughout your life or your—

RR: Yes. Before I was married, I was Šafa.

CP: Is that Ša—

RR: Rachel, actually Rachel Šafa.

CP: Is that Š-a-f-a-r?

RR: Rachel is a-c-h-e—Rachel, like in the Bible. (inaudible)

Lila Huse: It's R.

RR: Rachel, c-h-e-l, Rachel.

CP: Okay. And can you tell us your date of birth?

RR: October 24, 1921.

CP: And that makes you eighty-eight today, is that correct?

RR: Yeah, almost eighty-nine.

CP: Almost eighty-nine, yes. And where were you born?

RR: I was born—it used to be Czechoslovakia; it's the Ukraine now. It's deep in the Carpathian Mountains, beautiful mountains. And it's a poor country, but there was no industry, just like tailors and shoemakers and stuff. But especially in the city there is no—and there was kind of beautiful—the country was beautiful, and the weather was. There was in the ground all you could plant: potatoes, corn, beans, and what other stuff. You would plant tomatoes, but they'd never get red: you'd have to pick them up and put them on the windowsill for the sun to get ripe.

CP: Was that because it was in a valley?

RR: Yeah. If I looked on one side of the window from the house, I see the wooded area; if I looked at the other side, I see the wooded area. It was beautiful. And we also had a piece of property that—this part of the county was rich in mineral water, you know, like soda water would come out from the ground. And we had a piece of property that was like five kilometers from the house that has a little—the water came—

LH: A spring?

RR: Mineral water would come out. Was a hole, like.

LH: Like an underwater spring.

RR: Yeah. We would come out; we would come out and catch it, and was very good to drink.

CP: It sounds like a pretty magical place to grow up.

RR: Yeah, there was—tourists used to come backpacking from England and from all over. The reason we knew because most trees were the pine trees, and they used to write on the core of the trees their names and where they're from. And it was beautiful country.

CP: And was that—was the name of where you grew up, was it Volvé [sic]?

RR: Volové.

CP: Volové, V-o-l-v-e.

RR: V-o-l-o-v-e. I don't know what it's named now. Now it's the Ukraine, and they have a different name.

CP: So in the pre-interview, you told me that you can remember all the way back till you were about four years old, is that right?

RR: That's right. My mother was—my mother passed away when I was four, maybe four and a half, and she used to go—she had tuberculosis in the lungs. And she used to go—they used to—the farmers used to gather the sheep in the summer in the hills, and there they would pasture and they make cheese there, and we owned some of those pastures. And my mother, they said it would be good for her to go up there for the air, good air, and

the fresh milk from the sheep. So Daddy used to make a little shack from two by four and we would—they used to stay one place and then they traveled to other place. So every time we would—we were there with the people who owned the sheep and traveled. But, like, in the summer, we used to work there for a couple of months. That was beautiful, too.

LH: Because the air was cleaner and fresher for her lungs.

RR: Pardon me?

LH: Because the air was cleaner and fresher for her lungs, because of her tuberculosis.

RR: And the fresh milk there. We had fresh milk, we had cows at home.

CP: And you said that she was only twenty-seven years old when she passed away, is that right?

RR: Yes.

CP: Do you have any other memories of your mom that you would like to talk about?

RR: The memories, I remember that when she was at home, I used to say—they didn't let us go next to her bed and touch her, because it was very contagious. So I used to come home and cry, "How come my girlfriends can go and kiss their mother and go close and I cannot?" And also, I have a memory that we had robbers in the house: they came in for money.

CP: We'll talk about the robbery in just a minute. Can you tell me a little bit about your father? He was much older than your mother?

RR: Yeah, my father was about forty years older. He was married and he didn't have no children with his first wife. She passed away and he wanted children real badly, so he married a young girl, and it was World War I, after World War I. And my grandmother was left with small children; my grandfather passed away so she didn't—there, if somebody was poor, [they] stayed poor for all their life. The girls, usually they had—if

they didn't have a dowry, they just married anyone who doesn't have anything either. So that's how they—and who had money? You still—like, we had a lot of property, and we also had a tailor.

CP: So your father, he was pretty successful?

RR: Yes, he was very successful. My father used to say that he has enough for his children that we don't have to work all the rest of our lives, but Hitler seemed to it.

CP: And you mentioned that you felt very spoiled when you were young, is that right?

RR: Yes, I was very spoiled because I was a very mean child, very mean. I was spoiled, and I told my girlfriends that everything what I wanted, if they have something, like we played something, if I wanted to ask, I should have it. Everything what I wanted I thought I can have, because that's how my dad—after so many years not to have children, so he just kind of spoiled us. And I was the one more spoiled than my sister, because I was so anemic all the time, didn't want to eat. We had fresh milk every morning and fresh butter. I didn't want no butter; I wanted margarine.

CP: And you said that you were very small and very thin when you were young, because of the anemia?

RR: Pardon me?

CP: You were small?

RR: Yeah. I was in school almost the smallest. There was one girl that was maybe a half an inch smaller than me.

LH: But you told me one time that the teacher thought you needed glasses. But then when her parents took, or her father took her, they just said it was from the anemia, that her vision was foggy.

RR: Now all of a sudden in school, when I was in third grade, all of a sudden I couldn't see anything, just stars in front of my eyes. So I went home and told my daddy, and he took me to the doctor and it was because [of] anemia. Nothing wrong with my eyes.

CP: Well, it's pretty lucky, then, that you had a father who was well off enough to try his best to take care of you when you were young.

RR: Yes, I was. Was lucky, we had everything. We didn't (inaudible) like my girlfriends, like they didn't know—we used to go, like, out on Sundays. We used to go to different place, like five kilometers, and he used to take sardines along, or—what do you call it? Not bologna—you know, lunch stuff. And they didn't know what sardines was because they didn't have no money, so we used to give them to taste; and salami we used to take along. And we used to have all that.

CP: Were your friends jealous of you because you got these things?

RR: Their parents, you know, especially one; she was my cousin. We were very close, we were the same age and we used to sit in school together all the time, and she was always—the teacher always put down that she was copying from me. And her mother—and I used to take her away. I didn't have what to do. We had a sleep-in maid, because we had the cows, and she cleaned house; and we had a second cousin that she took care of the house and raised us. She raised us like a mother. And so I used to drag them away to go places, and their mother used to say, "You cannot run after her; you have to be at home or you have to wash dishes and do this and do that."

CP: Can you tell me about religion in your family?

RR: Yes, strictly Orthodox, ultra Orthodox. Very, very strict. As a matter of fact, like *Fiddler on the Roof*, whatever you call it. There was that—the guy wanted to sit next to the rabbi, if he would be a rich man. Well, my dad was sitting next to the rabbi.

CP: You said your father and the rabbi had a very close relationship, is that right?

RR: Yes. He had the seat next to the rabbi. You know, he's sitting—did you see the film?

CP: *Fiddler on the Roof*.

RR: Yeah, and he says then if he would be a rich man, he would. So, my father had a seat like this.

CP: So, before the Holocaust really began for you, did you notice a lot of anti-Semitism in your community?

RR: It was not noticeable because—see, the Czechs were very good, but the Czechs just occupied. They were just there from after World War I till 1938. They were very good, and they were just teachers and lawyers and all those kind of people, not settlers there. Those settlers were farmers; most of them lived in the hills. They were just—they lived around the Jewish people. They used to sell eggs; they used to, you know, go around and sell all kinds of stuff. But the kids used to come and sing and holler under the windows, “Jew go to Palestine. Jew go to Palestine.”

CP: Did you know that there was all this turmoil in the world going on, or the potential for something bad to happen?

RR: We know it's going on. We did not—we knew in Poland because it was next to the border. We knew that they're taking Jewish people away, but we did not know where they're taking them. Neither did we when they took us. We didn't know where they taking them, we didn't know what they do with them. We couldn't read no newspaper, we couldn't listen to a radio, we couldn't discuss. We had to wear the yellow star. And as a matter of fact, there is a—for the food they would give us half of food stamps. They would give us half of the food stamps than the other people. You would get half.

CP: And before all those restrictions started coming, your family actually suffered a robbery. Can you tell us about that story?

RR: Yes, they came in through a window. They were good guys; my daddy knew them. But they came through the window and they wanted money, and my daddy had—we had a tavern and we used to buy—he used to buy wine with the barrels. We had a cellar, also, for wine and for beer. And he was going to the next day to the big city. This was a small town, but it was a county seat, my hometown, but nothing was big there, small. And my mother didn't know that he had under the pillow put away the money, so in the morning he'd be ready to go.

So they came and they ask for money, and—well, I think my mother knew. She went and she was taking the money and he didn't let her, and they were beating her, beating her over the head, was a lot of blood. And my daddy went to the window to open the window to call on the neighbor. We had a neighbor, a non-Jewish neighbor, that we were very good, across street. And when he opened the window, the guys—three of them were in the house and the others were surrounding the house, so he cannot jump out from the window. So the way he wanted—so the guy with the—they had the—what do you call it? Rifles, and at the end of the rifles they had that—

CP: The bayonet?

RR: The bayonet. And Daddy wanted to, you know, (inaudible), so he caught with his hand the bayonet so they wouldn't stab him in the stomach.

CP: Your father stopped it?

RR: Yeah, so they wanted to stab him in the stomach. And then the neighbor said to her son—they got outside and they said, "The police is coming, the police." It wasn't, but he just scared him and they ran away.

CP: And when they had beaten your mother—they actually stabbed her, too, is that—?

RR: No, they didn't.

CP: They didn't stab her?

RR: Just hit her.

CP: Oh, they just hit her?

RR: Hit her real hard that she was bleeding from the head.

CP: And she was already quite sick at that time?

RR: Oh, yes, she passed away six months after that.

CP: How old were you at that time, do you remember?

RR: Four.

CP: Just four years old.

RR: And I don't remember when the robbers, because I was sleeping in the room where the window was, which way they came in. And when they were escaping one accidentally pulled my blanket, and I woke up and opened eyes and I said, "Oh, my uncle was here." He was tall like my uncle, my mother's brother, and I thought it was my uncle.

CP: Wow! It's amazing that you can still recall that to this day. So, then things started to change. You said the restrictions started to come—

RR: When Czechoslovakia fell in 1938.

CP: May 1938.

RR: The Ukrainians thought that they're going to have it, and they were very anti-Semitic and they had already a list. There were those who could—not the natives that lived there, but the ones who ran away after World War I when Russia came Communist, the lawyers and also teachers and doctors. They ran away and they came there. They were living there.

LH: They were living in your hometown?

RR: Yes, a lot of them.

LH: So they ran away from the Ukraine and came to your—

RR: From the Russian.

LH: From the Russian occupied Ukraine.

RR: So they had a list, how they going to kill the Jews in order. Three days we were afraid to look from the window; we had the shades down. Don't go outside from the house for three days, and one morning, on the third day, I opened a little bit the shade and I see one of the native. They used to say, "*Syl'na Ukraïna*, strong is the Ukraine." They would greet like this, like *Heil Hitler* but *Syl'na Ukraïna*. And then I see one guy go by and says, "*Slabka Ukraïna*, weak is the Ukraine." So I said to my brother, "Something must have happened." What happened? The Hungarians came. Hitler gave this part of the country to the Hungarians because they went along with Hitler.

CP: And at this point, was your father still alive?

RR: No, my father passed away, just a year and a half before the Czechoslovakia fell.

CP: What happened to your father? What did he pass away from?

RR: He was an old man: he was eighty-three years old. He was doing very well, but then when—my sister's wedding, he lived to see my—so then he was so excited that he lived to see a child getting married, and he wasn't the same man no more. I mean, his mind wasn't the same.

CP: You talked about—after being so well taken care of by him when you were young, after he passed away, you talked about feeling very alone.

RR: Yes, I was. Well, my brother-in-law moved in to us. We lived in the same house. I mean, I was—my brother-in-law was my—you know, you have to have somebody, because I was of age—not of age. So he was my—

LH: Like a guardian?

RR: Yeah, he was my guardian, appointed guardian because Grandma lived in another town. I still had my grandmother, my mother's mother, and she went to Auschwitz with us.

CP: Can you tell me about how did that come—you were taken to a ghetto before you went to Auschwitz, is that right?

RR: Yes, we were taken to—you know, they took all the Jewish people. First in 1941 they took all the Jewish people together, the Hungarians, and they were going to take away. Some of them they did; that time we got out for money.

LH: You could pay the Hungarians to let you be.

RR: Yes, there are quite a few people, quite a few Jewish people. But then in 1944—no, forty-three [1943]—they took us. That time money didn't help. They took us all. They took us all together and took us to another town. And there, what they've done the ghettos. They took out the Jewish people from a certain area near the ghettos. In a certain area the Jewish people—they took out from a certain area and put them in one area, in other houses, the Jewish houses and other houses. So one area was—we couldn't go to other—I mean, in the other town. And there we was in the ghetto. They were under the SS. The Hungarians were governed. The SS used to come and visit. They were very, very nice visitors.

CP: They were nice visitors?

RR: No. (laughs)

LH: She's being sarcastic. (CP laughs)

RR: And they would give us a little soup, a potato, and a little bit of bread. And we were there like seven weeks, I think, four weeks. I don't really remember how long we were there.

CP: Do you remember when you went to Auschwitz? How did that happen?

RR: Well, they emptied the ghetto. They took—everybody took together and they took us to the trains. They said, “Fix your stuff what you can—what you want to take with you.” And we didn’t know where we were going. I put on three or four dresses, one on top on the other, just in case I need—you know, we don’t know where we’re going. And they’re like—my sister had three small children. One little girl was six and one boy was five and a half and one was a year and a half. So they made the little backpacks and put the name on it and put a piece of bread in there and stuff in case they get separated, so they would know. So they put us—they took us together and they put us in those cattle—

CP: Cattle cars.

RR: Cattle compartments. And was like 100 people in one of those. The most of it was standing room only, the most.

CP: You told me about how when it rained on the train, you tried to collect the water.

RR: Yeah, we didn’t have no water or nothing. And when it was raining we were—through the window there was like a little opening. We would take a little cup and get a little water to drink.

CP: Do you remember at all what you must have been feeling in that situation? Were you terrified, or were you numb?

RR: You know, I think we were just numb. We didn’t know where we were going, we just didn’t—it just—

CP: Just confusion?

RR: Unreal, you know?

CP: Unreal, yeah.

RR: And then after three days we came, we stopped. God knows—we didn't know where this, but we seen some people with striped clothes, and we didn't know what they are. We didn't know.

CP: And where you stopped is now what we call Auschwitz II-Birkenau, is that right?

RR: Yeah, but we didn't know where we were. We just stopped; the train stopped. And then they came up and they said, "Men separate and the women separate." So my brother-in-law had to be separate, so my sister says to me, "We take like a living chain." We take one child by one hand, like she took by one hand the little girl and the little one, one and half, in the middle and then me on the other hand and other child. And we walked and it was like straight and then a T, like a T. It was maybe like from here to on the other side of the wall, and there was on the top of the T, Dr. Mengele. The famous Mengele was standing and he was seeing them line up. He was having this thumb and the wrist and the finger like this and with the other hand showed left, right, left, right. Who knows what's left and who knows what's right? We didn't.

So a young fellow came over—he was in the uniform already so he probably was from Poland—and come over [and says] in Jewish real quick, "All the young people don't want to go to work. They take the children. Children will find their own way." My sister wouldn't give the children, and so he seen what's going on and has to go quick because he could not stop. We kept walking. So he seen what going on, so he went to me and one child and the other child and took me by the shoulders and pushed me. I couldn't say no.

CP: So he pushed you into the other line?

RR: He saved my life.

CP: And he saved your life?

RR: Yeah.

CP: You told me that that was the last time that you saw your sister and her children?

RR: That's it. I didn't even say bye. I couldn't say bye. It was all—you know, they could cut you off and give you a push, just like—

CP: And they were most likely taken to the gas chambers pretty quickly after that, you said?

RR: Yes. Well, then they cut her hair. They put it—the SS were sitting when we were naked and were cutting the hair, and they were laughing.

LH: Did they cut your hair, too?

RR: Yeah, yeah.

LH: They cut everybody's hair whether or not you were going to go to the gas chambers or not, right?

RR: I don't know the others. I didn't see no more.

LH: That's true.

CP: And was it all women in the line that you got put into?

RR: Yes, no men. Men were separate.

CP: You had separated earlier?

LH: Were the SS people men or were they women SS?

RR: Pardon me?

LH: Were the SS people that were laughing at you, were they men?

RR: Yes, men.

LH: Men.

RR: They were laughing. We was naked. They were shaving all over.

CP: Were you still in a state of shock at that point, or was there a feeling of embarrassment?

RR: State of shock and numb.

CP: Numb.

RR: And then we went to the shower and they gave us—whatever we had, we had to leave because we couldn't—we were naked, we couldn't anyhow. Went to the shower, and they gave us the uniforms and they put us in a building. And in that building there were already women that were there longer and they say, "Oh, see the smoke, everything coming? They are burning your parents. You didn't care what they are doing to us. You didn't do anything." What could we have done? They just—they were already so, you know—

LH: Hardened? Full of pain?

RR: Full of—yeah. And so they gave us boards to sleep on. I don't know how we just—just compartments and boards. We were like fourteen people, seven on one side and seven on the other side, so we were sleeping head, feet, head, feet. If one turned the other one has to turn, couldn't just on one side. And I had there some cousins, and I was going to go with them. I was alone. So the others had sisters, they had cousins. They didn't have no room for me because they were full.

So there was a lady, a neighbor that knows me very well, with her three daughters, and she says, "You come and you stay with us." And she got me, so I stayed with them. And when they brought the first soup, they brought for the fourteen people like two bowls, two big bowls of soup. No spoon, no nothing; you just had to drink one after the other,

and I couldn't. So she said to her three daughters, "Give Rachel first. Maybe she doesn't want it because you are drinking first. You give her first and then she might drink the soup." In Cleveland, I introduced her to that lady.

CP: So you and this woman both survived, and then many years later you introduced your daughter to her in Cleveland.

RR: Well, we met. Then from Birkenau—after I was in seven weeks in Birkenau, they took us to Stutthof. That's by the Black Sea [*sic*], because the Russian has—it was Odessa; the city is named Odessa by the Russians.

CP: Was it called Danzig at the time?

RR: Yeah. It was a free city. Everyone had to—I don't know what it was. And Stutthof was not too far from there, and we were walking in the white sand, white like this, the sand was there. I was there like three weeks. They gave us in the morning one slice of bread, and it was with penicillin—

LH: It had mold.

RR: Mold. And they gave us some soup with just green stuff, nothing in it, but at least we had a bed for two people, two people in one single bed. But it was better than on the boards. So that was—and we didn't know that they have crematoriums there or not. As we were walking there, we came—they took us with a little plane, an open plane—a train, I mean, an open train. And as we were in the train, the sparks from the locomotive would fall—we didn't have no hair—and would fall on our heads. So we pick up the dress—we didn't have no underwear, just a dress—and we covered the heads. And (inaudible) came Hungarian soldiers; well, they were in the war. And they left from us and they said, "They have such beautiful life, Jews," the Hungarians to us. And, you know, they made a joke for us: the beautiful life is gone.

As we stopped with the train, it was—see, there were different SS. There were some SS that wore black uniforms: they were the worst. And we stopped and there was a little street going between the trees on both sides, and on there were the ones in the black uniforms with the—behind the ones like this. So we walked and we came there, and as we walked one guy was walking that he was there before, and he walked like beside us and was talking. "Do you understand Czech?" We said yes, whoever understood. So he says, "They have crematoriums here, but they're not in use. They don't use them no

more.” So they don’t use them, that’s good, and he also—that we know. But while we were there, they brought the Jewish people, the people from Holland—you know, the children—and that’s when they started again.

LH: They started the crematoriums up again then?

RR: Yeah.

LH: So the lady that had the three daughters—

RR: No, when we were there they and the woman and I were all standing, and they separated the stronger ones and the weaker ones. Of course I was one of the weaker ones, and the lady with the three daughters and some of my cousins were the stronger ones, and they took them to the other side with the stronger ones.

LH: But that was still in Stutthof?

RR: Yeah.

LH: Was that right?

RR: And I seen that and I started to run to the other side, and the SS woman caught me and pushed me back. I was going to run to the stronger ones. And so that’s when I was separated from that woman. But we met after the war. She had the three children, and I
—

CP: Getting back to that woman—

RR: And me they then put in another camp. I was working in Poland by Bromberg [Bydgoszcz]. The city was called Brahnau but it was with the large city Bromberg.

CP: Bromberg-Brahnau.

RR: There was a camp. There was a camp that they had an ammunition factory, all kinds of factories. They had—the top was planted tomatoes and grass and flowers, so when you see from the—on the roof, so they wouldn't see from the planes. They were halfway underground.

So first I worked just—I don't know what we did; some kind of work. Then I worked in a factory that they made fuses, like spaghetti kind of fuses. And that's what she was talking about. There was like downstairs and like two steps upstairs. They had a roll of some—I think like rubber or something. We called it a Torah; it looked like a Jewish Torah, you know, the Ten Commandments. And that was hot: they kept it in a microwave or something. We had to pick it up and carry it upstairs, so it was like two women and two Polish women who were in camp. The Polish was—not because they were Poles but because—I don't know, some political.

So I was with one of the cousins, and one time we carried that upstairs and the next time they carried it. And upstairs there was a stand like this around and that high, like, and we used—we had to—in the middle we had to put some nails around, and on top of the nails an ring, like a gold color ring, and then we would push up to start the switch and it would start. But the thing from the top, that would come down, and if we touched that ring that would go straight in the middle, then the factory would explode. So once, I said to my cousin, "Oh, it's going to explode, it's going to cook it. I'm going to stop it." So I went to stop. She took my arm, she says, "No, we're going to die anyhow; they're going to kill us anyhow. And they killed our parents and everything." But I pushed and I pulled the safety switch.

So then I was in Cleveland for a bar mitzvah, her brother's son. And she lived in Israel and she came for the bar mitzvah and I came to the son, to the brother, and I sat in the front, you know, and I said, "Where is Choshi?" Her name, they called her Choshi. He says, "Go in, she's there in the bedroom." And they was ready to go, so I went in and she was in front of the mirror and she seen me in the mirror come in. She jumped and started to kiss me and hug me and everything, I think even cry. And then the brother says, "How come you didn't do that to all my friends, to all my relatives—I mean, the brothers?" And she says, "She saved my life."

CP: So she was ready to give up at that moment, and you decided to pull the alarm, even though there seemed like there couldn't have been hope.

RR: So then, from there was like spaghetti; [it] would come downstairs and there was a table like this and measured; you cut the thing for the fuses. Who knows what it was? And then we were—cannons, you know, the big guns like this, big—

LH: Big cannonballs.

RR: It was not balls, hard stuff. They would bring it in the wintertime—cold, no gloves or nothing. We used to load it up in there with the bare hands. Like now I can carry a hot

(inaudible) even told me it was hot. I can carry hot stuff, because of the thing, the Torah. And then I worked in another factory. So, I don't remember what we did with so much. And there was a girl from my hometown. From my hometown was a girl that she was sick, and she worked in another company that was a little harder than mine. She had two sisters there, and cousins and an aunt. And they were deciding what should they do with her, to change with someone the companies. "Oh, Rose is going to change."

LH: You mean like—when you say companies, does that mean the job that you were supposed to do? They wanted to switch jobs?

RR: So they came over and they said they have a proposition for me. There was so many from my hometown, but they choose me to change, so I changed with her. And guess what? When we come back, they recognized her in the morning when she went to the job, and she said, "Well, she overslept, so somebody was missing from this job, so she went to that job." She didn't say she changed. So then when I came in, they took me out of the row and they said I have to stand after dinner. I have to stand in the line so they assign me to another job. So they assign me in the morning, like six o'clock in the morning, to go to a farm. The farmer would dig the potatoes and you would go like this: don't bend down, just go and get the potatoes in big barrel. And I started to cry, you know, after all.

So her cousin, that girl's cousin, was my next-door neighbor at home. She says, "Don't worry." She was a little, you know—well, she would do things without the SS knowing—without the SS knowing we're doing. She said, "Don't worry, you're going to do your job very well." She went in the morning, six o'clock, to one—which was not very nice, but to one lady that she was not too bright, because they took her children away. And she woke her up and she says, "You get up, you have to go to work." She [the woman] says, "I don't have to go to that work." [The girl said] "I'm saying you have to go to that work." She sent her to that work, so that's how I got out from that—those things.

Then I volunteered to work (inaudible), because they gave a glass of milk every day and they gave once a week a little bit sugar. So I was with another cousin there and we were together, so we got a glass of milk so we each one—so we split one glass between us, and one glass we took to the infirmary, to the was sick people. We had there somebody who was sick and we gave her the glass. That was every day; we just split the glass with the girl. So I worked in that, and I worked twelve hours, one week day and one week night.

And one morning—oh, you wanted to know—in Auschwitz also, I seen with my own eyes in Auschwitz. We could not go to the bathroom in Birkenau when we wanted. In the morning they would count us: they called it the *Zahlappell*. We had to stay in the line, hundred women, and they would count us. We had to stay straight. And one morning, I don't know; I did not faint, but I just went down. I didn't faint. And there was one girl, she was from Prague, from Czechoslovakia, and she was the one looking over. And she seen, and she came over and picked me up and started to beat me so blood would come, you know and picked me up. Because otherwise, if they would see me—

CP: Then you would have been taken away.

RR: Yeah. And I met her after the war in Brno, in Czechoslovakia.

LH: So she saved you that time.

RR: Yeah. And I seen—so, we could not go to the bathroom. (inaudible) after they counted us we could go to the bathroom. So it was outside. She's seen that; it's bad.

LH: I visited Auschwitz.

RR: It was a row of ten little holes, cubbies, and you would just sit down. There was a Ukrainian woman who was in charge with a big belt, "Get up, get up!" You cannot—sometimes you couldn't go right away. Doesn't matter. Get up. So I seen a little girl—there was a young, young girl, and during the day she had to go. She jumped through the window; they caught her and the SS woman was beating her to death, just beating her, with her legs. And we—at night they would put (inaudible) that you could go. But one night—across in another block there were women with children. And, you know, kind of life to see. One night we could not go. In the morning we could not—no women and no children.

LH: They wouldn't let you out of your barracks that one night, and the next day you found out there wasn't—

RR: They were already—they were in the crematorium.

LH: So Mom, when you said that when they changed your job, they were punishing you for switching places with this other young woman.

RR: Oh, they went like this.

LH: And then they sent you to this other job that was very difficult that you couldn't stand up, and you said you started to cry. Did you not cry almost every day?

RR: Yeah, I cried. We stopped crying after about—if we wanted to—the dress what we were wearing, so we washed it at night. You put it on the mattress on the bed—that was already not in Auschwitz; it was in Bromberg—and it would dry from our body.

LH: From your body heat.

RR: Yeah.

CP: Okay, I think this might be a good place to stop for tape one, and then we'll pick up and we'll talk about liberation. And I'd like to ask you a couple of questions about what's it like knowing that your mom has experienced this and growing up knowing that. So, we'll talk about that on the other side.

Part 1 ends, part 2 begins

CP: Okay, this is tape two of our interview with Rose Rosen. And over the break, we started to talk about some more stories that you had during your time in Auschwitz. And you mentioned what would happen on—in Auschwitz on Sundays. Could you tell us about that?

RR: On Sundays a lot of times they took us—quite a few people, they took us to work on certain things. One thing was that we used to clean the toilets for the SS youth. And they would stand like a little higher, and they would throw stones in the toilets so that—it would spread over us, the dirt.

LH: So the people guarding you would do that; they would stand up higher.

RR: They would—the youth.

LH: Oh, the Hitler Youth.

RR: Yes.

LH: They were the ones throwing the stones in the toilet.

RR: Yes. And then, did I say what the French—

CP: No, please tell us.

RR: The French. Sometimes on the Sundays we used to go to a place. I don't remember what we were doing there: sometimes we were planting trees, sometimes we—and we were on one side of a big, big field, and on the other side of the big field were French soldiers. And they had the outhouse—we used the same outhouse, but of course not the same time. And the French soldiers would take sometimes chocolate or other goods, a sandwich and stuff, and they would put it in the sand and put a little stick and then showed—I showed what we would do—when she goes to the toilet to pick it up, so we had a little treat.

CP: So they would leave that for you?

RR: Yes.

CP: And hide it for you.

RR: Yeah. And that's what we used to do on Sunday.

CP: You mentioned also the sweater story; could you tell us about that?

RR: Oh, yeah. They gave one of my girlfriends a sweater.

LH: The French soldiers did—the captured French soldiers?

RR: Yeah, the captured French soldiers. And somebody snitched on her to the SS that she has a sweater. So she knew that, so she—when I went to work she give it [to] me. I should take her sweater and go to work and she—because it didn't have the red, the red stripe.

LH: That all your clothes had?

RR: And so she took my sweater. And I didn't know what they were going—doing during the day; I was at work. I come from work, and by the gate they called me to the side and they took me to the office, and they said, "Where did you get this sweater?" I said, "From here." They said, "Well, it doesn't have the red line." I said, "It washed out." They know that was a lie. So they start to beat me. "Tell me where you get it." So, I had to tell them. But when I came in the camp, when they let me loose after the beating, they took the sweater. So I heard that they had her in a bunker, and they beat her all day and she confessed. She told them: that's why they knew to take me out from the line, and I didn't know nothing about it. So then after a few days they called me and they gave me this sweater. And I was so stupid that I gave her the sweater.

CP: You gave it back to her?

RR: Yeah. I should have kept it, but I gave her the sweater. I didn't—whatever I could do some good, I'm good.

CP: And Lila, if I could ask you a question, what has it been like knowing that your mother had been through this when she was younger? How have you dealt with that in your life? Is it hard to hear these stories?

LH: It's very hard; it still is hard for me to hear them. But growing up, my parents never spoke about those times, so that we would have as normal a childhood as we could. And only until we were being taught Holocaust history in schools did we even know the kinds of things that they endured, when they showed films at school. And they still weren't very forthcoming. I think as their generation aged and they were afraid that there would be no one left to tell these stories, they started opening up about them. But growing up, most of the stories I got was when we visited other relatives that had the same experiences and they would talk amongst themselves, and so you would glean a little bit of what it was like. But they really wanted us not to be burdened with the things that were so difficult for them.

RR: We shielded our children. We didn't want them to know; we didn't want to upset our children.

CP: Is it hard for you to talk about it today?

RR: Now it's not that hard. It used to be that I didn't want to talk, but—I mean, they wanted me to go to interview kids in schools—you know, to tell kids—and I couldn't because I would start to cry. I couldn't do it. But you get used to everything. You live, you get used to it. So what—where did we go again?

CP: Well, I think that it's interesting that your father sheltered you from quite a lot when you were young, and then you also sheltered your daughter from as much as you could. But I think the last main thing that we have to talk about is liberation. And were you liberated from Bromberg, is that correct?

RR: No, we came home in the morning—I came home in the morning. I worked twelve hours—

LH: At Bromberg, when you were at Bromberg?

RR: Yeah, in the—what do you call it? By the bombs, making bombs. And they said to pack the blankets; we had blankets, a blanket and the soup bowl. And we're going—the thing was like this, that they had ready gasoline around the camp. They had everything ready, just somebody to tell them what to do, to burn—to burn us or to evacuate. Well, the decision was to evacuate. So we walked I don't know how many miles in January, in Poland, in the snow—

CP: Did you say that it was January 26, 1945?

RR: I was liberated January 27. I was liberated.

CP: Okay. And that was by the Soviet forces?

RR: Wait a minute, that's not the end. So we walked a whole day, and then they locked us up in a barn. They didn't give us anything. They gave us a piece of bread for the—when we left: a piece of bread this big, this big. Not cut, just a chunk of bread. And then the next day they counted us—of course, we were all there—and we walked again.

And I heard one lady that I knew from my hometown: she says she is so hungry that she feels that she's going to collapse. I said, "Why, don't you have still bread, a piece of bread?" "No," she said, "I was very hungry and I couldn't resist, I ate it all yesterday." So I said to my neighbor, I said, "Do you have a knife?" She says, "What do you need a knife for?" I said, "Well, I want to cut her a piece of bread." She says, "Are you crazy?" I said, "No, I'm not crazy." "You're crazy," she says. "You're not going to get no more bread." I said, "No, I'm not crazy. I can let her borrow or I can lay here in the gutter dead, and the piece of bread next to me. And now I can give her a piece of bread, so I give her." And I met her in Israel. She remembered. I was in Israel visiting her; she went—I went.

And then we walked, and we see the SS woman started to dress in civilian clothes. And the civilian people were running (inaudible), you know, running away: the Russians are running close. And so we seen that something is happening. So the seven of us from the same hometown; they had been rich, the other girls. Well, we started to go slower and slower, since the SS women weren't, and they—they left us with the Wehrmacht, with the regular soldiers, not with the SS. We started, the seven of us, slower and slower, staying back and let the other transport go. And we were stayed back until it was clear.

There was a little house, and we went to the little house and [there] was a Polish guy, with the candle lit and praying, and he had heat in the house. He let us in and he gave us a potato. And it started to be a little late in the afternoon, and he said, "I would like to keep you here, but it's a main highway, and they are going through here. If they come in and they find you, they kill me, they kill you, and that's it. If you can make it to the nightfall, here is a small farm town on a side street, and you will be safe there."

Here I couldn't walk because there was that sick girl, and I took her blanket. Me, a big shot; I carry her blanket and my blanket, and I fell and I hurt my tailbone. And I barely walked, so I said, "I cannot make it, I cannot walk." So my brother-in-law, sister and my cousin, one took me by one arm and one by the other arm, and they tell me, "You walk and you come with us." I said, "No, you're going to save (inaudible) from my side, that I'll live to the last minute, but I couldn't make it." "No, you're going to make it."

So finally I made it to that small town. We come. There was an empty house that the Germans left, and there was some straw in there and there was—I don't remember, potatoes, so we had heat. So we settled down there in that house. We were there and it started to get dark, and one man, a German, a civilian, comes in and says, "You Jews, you are running away from the concentration camp." He took out a gun and he says, "If I come back here in an hour and I still find you, I'll kill you all." And he left for that. And

we started to cry. What are we going to do? It's night; where we going to go? He's going to come and he's going to kill us.

So there was a Polish woman, a neighbor there. She come in. We were howling and crying, and she says, "Quiet," [and asks] do we understand Polish? Sure we understand Polish, because we're from Czech. She said, "He is not going to come back, he just wanted to scare you. They're all running away, the Germans, and don't worry." So, okay, it was nice of her, and we were settled down. And then there was a—water that you took to—

LH: A well?

RR: Not a well. Well, there was a thing of water, and we had to—and we didn't have enough (inaudible). So that girl with the sweater and me, we went to the next-door neighbor to ask for something that we can take water. So she says, "Yes, but first you sit down." She sat us down by a table. She had fresh baked bread, just out from the oven, and put that on the table, a couple of pieces of bread and coffee and preserves. We ate that bread, and when we finished those pieces she says, "Would you like more?" and she give us more. That was the first piece of bread that I had.

LH: That didn't have any mold on it? It was the first piece of bread that you had—

RR: Fresh from the oven. And a cup of coffee. So we went to the others and we told them that we—how she treated us real nice. And then we were there a couple of days, and we didn't have—we couldn't lock the door; it was broke. We laid down, covered with the blankets, and three German soldiers come in. They have piano, they have wine, they have whiskey, but they need women. So they find us.

LH: Three Russian soldiers?

RR: No.

LH: Three Germans?

RR: Germans.

LH: Oh, dear.

RR: They settled across the street; there was a grocery store, and they took out from the store the Polish people; they settled there. So we covered ourselves and they said—they pulled out the guns and they said, “We’ll help you.” So we got scared. All of a sudden comes an officer, a German officer, and said, “Don’t you see these are tired people, worn out people? Get out of here, and don’t you dare come back.” And then he says to us, “They’re not going to come back, don’t worry. I’ll see to it.” He was an actual German soldier, a German. And then we walked on the street the following day. He seen us, an officer and he says, “Do we have any other clothes?” “No, we don’t have, and anyhow that clothes is our identification number.” So he took us to a basement, and there was potatoes, and they killed a hawk and he gave us some meat. And that was like on a Wednesday. And he says, “But don’t go on the street.” So, we didn’t. He said, “I’m letting you go, but others won’t.”

Sunday morning, we were going to the—again I was going, and that girl. We went out the side through the kitchen—we went for water—and we meet the German soldiers all dressed in white. Some of them were laying in the snow with the—in the snow with the machine guns, and some of them were going there on the attic. Bullets, hearing the machine guns. And they said, “Stay inside.” So we went and we stayed, and we said to the others, “Well, this is—we live or we die.” That’s all it is. And we were sitting there and listening to the bullets going back and forth, and all of a sudden, somehow the bullets stopped. And all of a sudden there’s like smoke in the house. So I thought the house on fire and so did—the house is on fire.

So we ran out, and we went to the neighbor; the neighbors were in a bunker. But an old lady was sitting with a candle in the kitchen, and she wouldn’t let us in. And we said, “You’re going to let us in, for no matter what.” So she let us and we stayed there. And the bullets stopped, and all of a sudden there was twice in front of the other house—shooting twice. And that girl what I’m talking, she was there with her mother and two sisters. She’s going to see who it is. They begged her, “Don’t go, don’t go.” No, she’s going to see. She goes to the window, and she comes in with two Russian soldiers.

LH: So that was the girl with the sweater, too?

RR: Yeah, she comes in with the two Russian soldiers, dirty. We said, “*Zdravstvuet, tovarishch*,” and we kissed them. We didn’t care that they’re dirty. And all the—we have a number on the dress; he asked could they cut off the number. They ask us were we in

this and this concentration camp, because they went through there and they were wondering where the people disappeared to in there. And so then when those two left, others came, and the others were not so kind. They wanted us to eat with them and drink vodka with them, and to eat with one bowl and with the hands, everybody eats with the hands, and then vodka. So I used to take the vodka and (inaudible). And then they wanted girls, so we started to go forward.

So we went to a big—we walked and came to a town outside of a big city in Poland, and there was some—already Polish, Polish guys, said they were taking care. And we said we need some place to stay overnight. So one says, “There is the concentration camp; it is empty.” I told him, “You know what, we were in there and now you can go there, just like this.” So the other one says, “Don’t make fun.” So they give us a place to stay overnight, and then the next morning we went to the city. There was a building, a big house, and there was a lot of other people from another camp, women from other camps that were liberated, and we stayed there.

And one day we were on the street, and one of the—a Polish, a Polish officer, says to us—it was me with another girl. He says to us, do we have other clothes? No, we don’t. So he says, “Is more of you here?” We said yes. “So, bring all of them and come to the jail.” So we came to the jail, and he counted twenty German women on one side and twenty of us. And we got into the jail, inside, and he sat like this. “Take which clothes you want and which shoes you want, but don’t leave them naked. You have to give them your clothes.” So, I didn’t take the dress: I took a coat, somebody’s coat, and then I went to one to take pair of shoes. Well, who’s got small shoes like me? But that doesn’t matter. I took a pair of big ones, and we had those wooden shoes; we walked in the snow. So I gave her those, and her foot wouldn’t go in. She says, “My foot doesn’t go in.” I say, “I don’t care.” So she called the officer and showed them, and he says, “Your toes are in, that’s enough.”

So we got some stuff from the German women. First we said—if he thinks that he’s going to kill them. He sit in the middle with the guns and he asked for the jewelry from them first. And we think that he’s going to kill them and we’re going to take—no way, we didn’t want to see them killed.

CP: You told me a story about the concentration camp dress; do you know what I’m talking about?

RR: Yeah.

CP: Is that connected to this or is that—

RR: Yeah, yeah, that's the dress. We wouldn't give up the dresses because that's our identification. And we traveled from there. Then all of a sudden the Russians—the Germans beat back the Russians. The Germans beat them back, so everybody started to panic. So we went to the station. They weren't here yet, but they were close by. So we went to the station to take a train. There was—it was—you never know when a train is going to be; you never knew nothing. So we come there to the station and a train just left. When is going to be another? Maybe a week, maybe in a few days, you don't know.

So there was a Red Cross train, so finally we got on the Red Cross train, and we were—we were flying; it was a plane, not a train—I guess a train. Well, we were going. We seen bullets going cross, you know, they were shooting around. And a good thing that we missed that train, the first train that we missed: they were shooting at that train, and one of the girls from our group was killed and one of them got her toes cut off. (inaudible) was on that train. So—and then we were—the Russians, they didn't take care of us like the Americans and the English. The Americans looked what they were eating and they gave them stuff and everything. They would just let us loose, nothing. They just let us loose.

LH: And you were probably malnourished?

RR: Well, sure we were.

LH: But did that train take you back to your home?

RR: No, that didn't take—we got off at another city.

LH: I think Chris wants to hear the story about how the dress—what happened to your dress.

RR: Oh. Well, I thought he wants to see how we got to home—

LH: So you were just on your way home.

RR: Yeah. So you just want to know what happened to the dress? You don't want to know the way home?

CP: It's up to you.

RR: Well, if you want to know.

CP: Sure, please.

RR: If you think it's interesting to you. So there was no—so we came to one city, where there was already a Jewish federation, and there we were. We got a piece of bread and some—there were waiting people for a train. Was waiting; we did not know when the train—a train is supposed to come, but there were Polish people sitting on the floors, and here we are, seven, just. And then an officer came by, a Russian, and he says, "Don't worry, you stay with me. You'll get on the train." The train comes on; he takes us through the other side. In Europe they have two doors, the compartments: the train compartments has two doors, you know, one on one side and one on other side. And he takes us to a compartment, and there were Russian soldiers standing, not letting on no one else, just for us. And there were three Jewish guys sitting there from Poland, and they got them with us, so we went a certain way until the train stopped.

Then we went to Warsaw. Warsaw was just brick on brick, no building, nothing, absolutely nothing. The ghetto, you heard about the Warsaw Ghetto? You could still—still the bricks with blood on them and stuff. And then there's a suburb of Warsaw—it's called Praga—and you have to through the water, the Vistula. There was no bridge; there was just boats for that. And we walked on that and it was shaking, and we'd see there in the ice, in the water, German soldiers, dead soldiers, laying there between the ice and the water. We came there—and there was a Jewish federation, too—and we got there so we'll go further. We come to one city that was a very, very Jewish city, because there were still signs from businesses, Jewish businesses. So we said we're not going to the Jewish federation, because all they give is soap and bread or salt on bread, and they didn't give us anything. So, we go to the Red Cross.

We come to the Red Cross, and we tell them we need some place to stay to rest up a little and go further. So they said, "You are Jewish, and the Jewish—the Red Cross is not for the Jewish people. There is a Jewish federation." We said, "We are not Jewish, we're Hungarian—no, we are Czechs, and we just have to rest." So they gave us a key to one room with mattresses, and they give us food. We stay there about six days and had food.

And that's when we were going home, we took—we returned the key, we said, "Now I'm going to tell you we are Jewish. And the Red Cross is international, and when we come home we'll put in the paper that the Polish people say that the Red Cross is not for Jews." We didn't, we just said that.

From there we went straight to the border, to my home, and by the border I found out that my—two of my uncles are living, my mother's brothers. One came from Russia fighting with the Jewish legion; there was a Jewish general who formed in Russia a Jewish army, and one of my uncles go fighting. And we were already (inaudible), and there was the Czech flag and the Russian flag hanging, and they said they're going to see what the people want, what the other people want. We knew they want Russia. So my uncle, the one who was in the Czech army, came and he says, "Come on, we are going to the Czech Republic." So we went there. And from there, when the Russians were coming, we went to Germany to a displaced persons camp.

LH: So when did the mother and the three daughters, when did they go to Romania?

RR: We went to—yeah, in Romania. That's before, when we came to—when we came to —

LH: To your hometown.

RR: Yeah. I didn't stay in my hometown; I stayed in another city. And they went to Romania because they gave them money for survivors.

LH: So they heard that—

RR: So the woman with the three daughters, the one who let me in Birkenau stay with them and sleep, they were going to go. But they were—her youngest daughter was sick before, when she was liberated, with typhus fever. They all had, because they were liberated by the Russians and they didn't care what they ate. But she felt better, and they went. But she didn't have her dress because she was sick and they—so, they borrowed my dress from the concentration camp. I was going to save it for a souvenir. She came to Romania, she got sick, and she passed away in my dress.

LH: So what did you tell me about that dress?

RR: What?

LH: What did you—how did you put it about your dress?

RR: That somebody had to die in the dress.

CP: You said that—isn't there a Yiddish word that you used?

RR: *Bashert*.

CP: *Bashert*, and that means that it's fated to happen or it's meant to be?

RR: Yeah, it's meant to be.

CP: You said someone was meant to die in that dress, and so it's lucky that you gave it away. One of the things that's so fascinating to me about your story is how things sort of come full circle, something happens early on and then later on in your life you meet this person again: you know, a person that saved your life you'll meet later, or someone whose life you saved you'll meet later.

RR: Yeah, like the girl in Birkenau who picking me up, she's originally from the Czech Republic. She was from Prague—or Brno. We were in Brno and I went to her. It was a holiday, a Jewish holiday. I went to a temple and I seen her. Where would I dream that I would meet her? She picked me up and—

LH: Helped you walk the last—she picked you up and helped you walk the last way.

RR: Had walked, but when they counted and I fell down.

LH: Oh, that's right, I'm sorry. When you were standing to be counted and you felt faint.

RR: Yeah, the woman who walked to that—those were nice people I knew. We went—were liberated together.

CP: Can I ask you one final question?

RR: Yes.

CP: As some who survived so much and been through so much in your life, and you've lead a long, beautiful life since then, what message would you have for future generations who are learning about the Holocaust and who are watching these testimonies?

RR: Just start to learn, and let's never forget it. Don't let us forget. Don't let it die, because, look, it's again very anti-Semitic stuff here.

CP: Well, thanks to people like you, you make it very hard to forget. So thank you very much for sharing your testimony.

RR: There's more. Don't you know, you just cannot say everything, it doesn't—

CP: Yeah. Well, thank you very much.

LH: Thank you.

Unidentified Woman: You should talk about your time in the DP camp and how you got over here.

RR: You're wonderful.

CP: Would you like to talk more about the displaced persons camp?

Unidentified Woman: When they met Uncle Al and you had Lila.

RR: Well, do you want to know about the displaced persons camp?

CP: Sure, yeah.

LH: Those were some good times.

RR: For good times.

LH: Better.

RR: I went there with one of my distant cousins, distant relatives. He was older, and he had two children, a boy and a girl. He kept me like with his children, together wherever they went—you know, they wouldn't let—because my uncles, they stayed in the Czech Republic.

LH: But you told me that when you were in the Czech Republic that you realized there wasn't anything there for you, isn't that right?

RR: That wasn't—there was going to be Russians there. The Russians occupied.

LH: Right, and you didn't want to be there.

RR: No, I don't want to be with the—if I was going to be the Ukrainians, the Russians, I could have stayed in my home.

LH: So that's why you sought out?

RR: I couldn't stay in my home. When I got home and I went to the officer and said, "I'm the only survivor, so this is my property," they said, "All you can have is what you can work yourself." I never worked the farm property. What can I work? Just picked myself up and left.

LH: That's why you went to the camps that were set up by the Americans in Germany? Isn't that right? Isn't that why you went to the displaced persons camp?

RR: No, from home I went to Czech Republic. From the Czech Republic I went, because the Russians were coming, to the displaced persons camp. We didn't have no homes, we didn't have any (inaudible). And there we—we had food, I mean, some of them. You could buy, some of them. There was a kitchen. But, like, there were a lot of young people, survivors.

CP: Did you feel a sense of relief being there, or was it still chaos?

RR: Yeah.

CP: But you felt relief?

RR: Yeah, free.

CP: Free.

RR: Free.

CP: So you weren't numb anymore at that point?

RR: No, it was free. And we dated, you know, we met people. And we had like a group of some people that they played the violin, music, and we used to go Saturday nights to dance. No matter what kind of music, we danced. And we had the kitchen; we used to take out the food because we were a family, you know, with my cousin. We didn't go and eat in the—we ate in our apartment. And one day I would stay with one guy that was with us that we know from home, and the next day his two kids would stay in line for the food. So one day, one Sunday, I was staying with that guy, and the line was a big line, with some pots and pans for the food. So here comes a little—a little—

LH: Policeman.

RR: Policeman, and he comes to me and he says, “If you give me the pots and pans, I’ll take you the food out of the line. You don’t have to stand in the line.” I said, “Why not?” So I give him the pans, and I said to the guy, I said, “Isn’t that nice? How come he takes me? I don’t even know him.” He says, “He danced with you last night.” I said, “If I would know everyone who danced with me last night.” Because they used to—you know, they would like some girl to dance with, they used to go in the middle and knock on the—take over the—

LH: That’s called cutting in.

RR: Cutting in.

CP: So you were just a young woman; you were probably around twenty-four, twenty-five years old, is that right?

RR: Yeah.

CP: So you sounded like you were very popular, then, dancing?

RR: As a matter of fact, then my cousin’s daughter, the one who was with me, she didn’t want to go because she used to say no one would take her dance. So I thought I couldn’t go either if she doesn’t go. So her father said, “You go ahead and let her stay at home if she wants to.”

LH: So go on about the policeman that gave you the food that danced with you.

RR: Yeah, the policeman gave me the food, came down, and asked me in which barrack I lived, you know, like—so I told him. That afternoon, all of sudden, he’s there. He is there, and he used to come every time and he—

LH: What did he bring you?

RR: One morning—we were sleeping a bunch of girls in one room on cots, you know, military cots. They were barracks, like I don't know what it was there, a camp or something. And one girl came out running; she was out and she says, "Get up, get up." I said, "What's the matter?" "Go and see what you have." What do I have? An iron bed with a mattress. And it was a single bed, but I had to let that girl sleep with me because she was his daughter.

And he would go and bring an egg for the cigarettes; he would go and bring for the farmers [and get] an egg or something. So their stepmother—the guy remarried. Stepmother went and would cook the egg for her daughter. So I told him that on the side, "Don't bring no eggs, because I don't eat them. She doesn't give them to me, she gives it to the other girl, so don't give away your cigarettes for the eggs." And then he said he's going to marry me, and he wants to marry me. And then he goes on, marry, marry, and I wasn't ready. There was another guy that wanted me and dated me, so I wasn't ready. So we had to take chest X-rays every year, chest X-rays there in the camp because of—

LH: Because of tuberculosis.

RR: So they took chest X-rays, and everybody got their result that it's negative. I didn't get nothing. And he bothers me to get married, so I told him, I said, "Listen, I'm going to tell you, I might be sick. I didn't get nothing. My mother passed away from tuberculosis in the lungs, and I didn't get the result." And he says, "I wouldn't leave you even if you would be sick." That made it.

CP: That did it. (laughs)

LH: And how soon after that did you get married?

RR: Huh?

LH: I said, how soon after that did you get married?

RR: A few months. Didn't have no big wedding. Didn't have to—everybody ask me, "Is this is your wedding ring?" I said, "Wedding ring? I waited twenty-five years for that."

CP: For the ring?

LH: Yes.

RR: For this. It was lucky that he could buy a wedding band.

CP: Were you married in the camp?

RR: Yeah, she [Lila] was born in the camp. She was a year and a half old when she came to the United States.

CP: Wow.

RR: You want to know how she learned English? We came to my husband's aunt; they send us papers. And there was her daughter-in-law, couldn't speak Jewish, Yiddish, just English. And I could speak just Jewish, I couldn't speak English. And she started like this, "For my mama, this is a *left*; for Aunt Florence, this is a spoon." They called her a talking machine, because she was a year and a half old and she talked just as plain as it could, and everything in two languages.

CP: So you just learned both at the same time. Do you still speak any of the other?

LH: No, I don't.

RR: A little bit.

LH: I can understand a little bit. But can you tell the story about how Uncle Aba found you in the displaced persons camp, and how it was that you and Daddy came to the United States before he did, even though he was the older brother.

RR: Yeah. So then my—Rosie's father, this Rosie's father, he went to Russia. Then the
—

LH: The Germans—

RR: When Hitler came, I think they beat him up; that's what Daddy said. And he picked himself up and went to Russia, was in Russia during—and he didn't know where he was. I mean, he knew in Russia but [not] where. Then one day I was—Lila was already born—with the baby, and my husband was on duty. The head of the police came from the camp, the displaced persons camp, and brings Rosie's father. He said, "This is your husband's brother." So he went and sent my husband home, and he brought me a sewing machine, an old Singer sewing machine. And then he found out—he had the address from the aunt, mother's three sisters in the United States, and he wrote them and he said, "They're going to send papers. I want you to go first, because I'm single and you have a family, you have a baby."

But see, what was with me before she was born, I used to say—people were going illegally to Palestine at that time—legally—and I said, "I don't want to go." He used to tell me that he's got aunts in the United States and we can go there. I said, "I don't want to go to no America. I want to go to Israel where I stand the ground, I stand up, I know belongs to me. And you're not going to tell me to go to Palestine." That's what was my saying. But then she was born, and Israel—he had a cousin and he asked him to come. He [the cousin] says, "I can give you where to stay, but I cannot give you no food." It was going on before—you know. So, I came to the United States. I'm not sorry. I still like Israel, too; I was three times there.

LH: But it was sort of meant to be as well, because didn't you say even when you—even when Daddy's aunt sent papers, you said, "Well, there are people in this camp that are waiting years to go to the United States, and I don't see them going on any boat." But—

RR: I said, "They were waiting." There was a lady from my hometown, and she said she had a brother in the United States and she had papers, and she's been waiting already two years. And here we just—we just got, and we were already going. How are we going? Because they knew [Charles] Melvin Price, a congressman from Illinois, and he put our papers on the top. He didn't take no money, but he just put the papers on the top, and within two or three months we were going. We were called to the consulate to another city, went to the consulate in another city, and it was to be on a Friday, late afternoon. And some woman—a Russian woman was in front of us, but she couldn't read, write, no

LH: She couldn't emigrate; they wouldn't let her emigrate.

RR: Well, I don't know if they let her, but they put her aside to go to us. And he didn't ask us to even read or write; he just had—"Pick up your"—he took you under the—the consulate took you on to his lap and says, "Raise your right hand and swear." We raised our right hands. "Now you go and pack, and you're going to leave Tuesday." That was Friday and we left Tuesday.

LH: So it was my father's American cousin, the son of his aunt, who went to high school with an Illinois congressman. And they had still kept in touch, and so he was able to pull the strings necessary for my parents—and myself—to emigrate.

RR: We went to see him. We went to see him; you don't know that. When a little baby he took you—he also took you on his lap, and he said, "I hope you're going to vote Democratic." (all laugh)

LH: There's always a little politics involved.

CP: Of course, of course.

RR: Had to wait five years before I could vote, but that time I lived already in Missouri.

LH: So you couldn't vote for him anyway. (all laugh)

RR: He was—he didn't have no problem to the end.

LH: That's true. They named a highway after him in the state of Illinois.

RR: Yeah, he was—

CP: That's quite amazing. Are there any other stories that we should talk about?

LH: Well, the fact that Daddy's brother Abe ended up in France, where he married and he had two children.

RR: He came with three to the United States.

LH: Three, excuse me, three children that were born in France. And when we became citizens we sponsored his citizenship, his emigration to the United States. So he and his wife and three sons came and—

RR: And she was born in the United States.

LH: Yeah, Mother's niece Rose was born here.

RR: She can be a president of the United States, she cannot. (all laugh)

LH: That's right, Rose for president. (all laugh)

CP: Well, I think we are about at the end of this tape, so I just want to thank you both again one more time for spending time with us.

RR: When is the tape going to be ready?

End of interview