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Toni Rinde oral history interview by Carolyn Ellis, October 7, 2010

Toni Rinde (Interviewee)

Carolyn Ellis (Interviewer)

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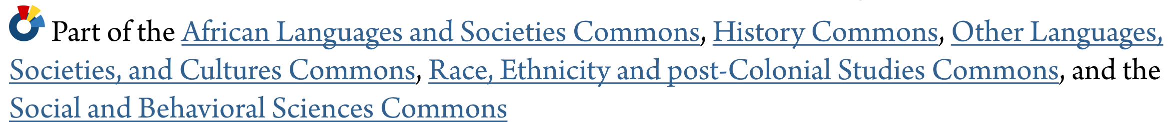
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Carolyn Ellis: Today is October 7, 2010. I am interviewing survivor Toni Rinde. My name is Carolyn Ellis. We are in Largo, Florida, in the United States, using English, and our videographers are Nafa Fa'alogo and Richard Schmidt. I'm here with Toni Rinde. And Toni, could you tell us your complete name and then spell it for us?

Toni Rinde: It's Toni Rinde, T-o-n-i R-i-n-d-e.

CE: And your complete name at birth, and spell it for us.

TR: Tonia, T-o-n-i-a. Last name is Igel, I-g-e-l.

CE: I-g-e-l, okay. And any other names you've gone by?

TR: Yes, my name was changed during the war to Marissa, M-a-r-i-s-s-a, and I don't know my last name.

CE: You don't know your last—okay.

TR: No.

CE: And the date of your birth?

TR: November 9, 1940. I'm not seventy yet.

CE: And I'm not sixty yet.

TR: Well, good!

CE: Not till next week.

TR: Okay, and I'm next month.

CE: Next month, okay.

TR: Right.

CE: And then the city and country you were born in, if you would pronounce it for me.

TR: I was born in Przemysl, in Poland.

CE: And the spelling of that is P-r-z-e-m-y-s-l. Okay, let's just start with what you know about your early history.

TR: Okay. I was born, as I said, on November 9, which is about fourteen months after the war broke out in Poland. The war broke out in Poland in 1939. My dad was an officer in the Polish Army, so he went into service the night of his wedding.

CE: Wow.

TR: And he was in service for a little time. Poland was run over by Germans within no time. And right after that first deluge my father went home and was with my mother for a little while. And I was conceived, I'm assuming, at that time.

CE: They had no children?

TR: No, no, no. They had no children; they were just recently married, as I said. I'm assuming I lived a relatively normal life, or as normal as one could have, with the situation going on in the world at that point.

CE: Before you go on, just tell me a little bit about—more about your parents. What had your father done before he went into the war?

TR: My father was an agricultural engineer; his parents owned a lot of property in Poland. They had dairy farms and grain farms, and they really weren't farms, they were like huge—I guess almost estate type of places. And my mother, before the war, was a bookkeeper in her parents' store. My grandparents, my mother's parents, had a dry goods store in Przemysl. Now, my dad lived outside of Przemysl because, as I said, he—they lived on a farm, so they were in the rural part. And my mom lived in the city and she worked with her parents in the store.

CE: Okay, and then tell me about what you know about your parents' siblings.

TR: My parents' siblings: my mother was a—one of seven. She and a brother are the only two that survived; of course, my uncle passed away, as my mother. And the others were killed during the war. They had husbands and there were children, and everyone was killed.

My father's family was a little bit luckier. My father's father survived part of the war living with us in the basements and the woods: wherever we were, that's where he was. And a sister of his survived and an older brother survived—very interesting story. His older brother was a physician and went to the United States, to New York, for a medical conference and got caught in New York by the war and telegraphed my grandparents. "What am I supposed to do?" And they, of course, said to him, "Stay where you are. Do not come back." And my father also has, and still has, a younger brother, who also lived with us. My uncle is in his early nineties and very, very ill. But my father's family was a little luckier, because my father's mother died of natural causes. She had severe diabetes;

in those days, that was a major problem. So my dad's family was just a little bit luckier than my mother's family.

CE: Do you know the birthdays of your parents?

TR: Of my parents? My father was born October 18, 1915—sorry, 1912—and my mother was born January 6, 1916.

CE: Okay, and your mother's name?

TR: My mother's name was Lusia, L-u-s-i-a. Her maiden name was Mamber, M-a-m-b-e-r.

CE: Okay. And her last name was I-g-e-l?

TR: Her last name was I-g-e-l, which they pronounced as Igel.

CE: Okay. And you had told me that the Polish spelling may have been—or the Polish—

TR: The same.

CE: The same? Okay.

TR: The same, the same spelling.

CE: Okay, and your father's name?

TR: My father's name was Stanley—they called him Sam—and Igel, last name.

CE: And where was he born?

TR: He was born also in—well, I want to say Przemysl, but I think it was Stubienko, which is where his parents lived. And in those days you had midwives who came to the house, and that's where he was born, on his parents' property.

CE: Okay, and do you know how to spell that?

TR: No.

CE: All right, I forgot to look that one up.

TR: Let's try it. S-t-u-b-e-n-k-o? We're missing something, but—

CE: Well, that's enough, so we can—

TR: That's close to it.

CE: We can look it up.

TR: Right.

CE: Okay, all right. So now, back to what you know about your early—

TR: Okay. War breaks out. The Jews of Przemysl were herded into a ghetto. I'm cutting everything short—

CE: What's the name of that ghetto?

TR: It was the ghetto of Przemysl; that was the name of it. The name of the city was the name of the ghetto. And in the beginning, when they were first put into the ghetto, they were still given the opportunity to go out during the day and go to work and come back at night for—you know, to sleep. And then, after a while, that changed. But while they were able to go out, my parents were walking in the street one day pushing a carriage,

and a lady comes up to my father and says, "What are you going to do with this beautiful child, taking—bringing her to the ghetto?" And my father looked at her and—it's tough.

CE: I know. This is hard stuff.

TR: And said, "Well, I have nothing to do with her. Will you help me?" And she said, "Yes, I'll take her." Arrangements were made to meet the next day on a street corner, certain time. They were going to bring the carriage, put the carriage down on the street corner, turn around and walk away, and she was going to take it. That's exactly what happened, because my parents watched while this was going on, to make sure that she indeed took me. And that was the beginning of my life. Sorry.

CE: No, that's okay. How many months old were you?

TR: I was sixteen months old. I lived with her for three and a half years. Again, my younger uncle, the one that I mentioned that's still alive was—thank you—being a young kid in those days, was able to sneak out of the ghetto much more often than my parents were. 'Cause, you know, kids just managed to get out and do whatever. And he would go occasionally and check on me, just by standing near the house where I was living in, and saw that everything was okay.

CE: So he didn't go in, he just looked in the window.

TR: No, no, no. He was afraid to go in. And of course, I'm sure that the lady that was hiding me, taking care of me, didn't want him in there either, because being caught with something like that is instant death—not only for her: her family, my family. So, there was no need taking that kind of a chance.

CE: What kind of understanding did your parents have with her?

TR: The understanding was that if I survived, that they would come and pick me up after the war. If not, of course, then I will be living with her and that will be the end. My parents were fairly comfortable financially and my mother's entire dowry was kept in her home—

CE: Kept in this woman's home?

TR: In this woman's home, yes, as well as money. And my parents gave her the entire dowry, and jewelry and money. And a very interesting little sidebar with that: I had wanted to list her as one of the Righteous Gentiles at Yad Yashem, and I found out that if you saved a life for money, you could not be listed as a Righteous Gentile.

CE: Interesting.

TR: Which was kind of amazing to me, because I thought to myself the sacrifice that this woman made was no way to repay her, but that's the ruling. I guess they had to set guidelines of the way they—

CE: And I wonder—I mean, lots of people got some money. You know, at what point—

TR: Right. Well, she got a lot of money. As I said, my parents were quite comfortable, and in those days you had huge dowries, especially if you could afford to have huge dowries; and jewelry, my mother's engagement ring. I mean, everything, everything. And also, a Torah was kept that came out my grandfather's synagogue, and she kept that as well. That she returned; that she didn't need. But the rest, what can I say?

CE: Have you ever wondered if she—well, I guess the question doesn't really matter. I was going to say did she do it for money or did she do it out of wanting to save you? But —

TR: I think she did it wanting to save me, because when she met my parents she had no idea what they had. I mean, how would she know? They were two Jewish people living in a ghetto pushing a baby carriage. So I'm going to believe that she did because she wanted to save a life. Money becomes secondary at that point.

CE: And the risk she was taking—

TR: Oh, of course.

CE: There is no money.

TR: There is no money. You can't repay that; there's just no way. So, you know, money was given to her very, very willingly, certainly not begrudgingly at all. And as a matter of fact, when we came to this country we were sending her money and sending packages; but Poland was under the communist rule in those days. So we found out from somebody else who had contacts, better contacts than we did, that no packages were getting through and no money was getting through: they were all being confiscated. So we just stopped sending, of course.

CE: Do you know her name?

TR: Her name was Konoysna. I think that that is her last name. I called her my aunt, which is Polish is *ciotka*, and I called her *ciotka* Konoysna. That's all I can tell you about her name.

CE: Okay. Now, I have a spelling that you gave me for her. That's K-o-n-o-y-s-n-a.

TR: That's close enough. Can you sound that out?

CE: Konoysna.

TR: Konoysna. Yeah, you know, Polish has J's and Y's and Z's and X's all together, and they make up a sound that dosen't even match it. So, that's the closest I can do.

CE: Okay., So you—were you ever back in touch with—we'll go back to the time you were with her. But before that, were you ever in touch with her afterwards—were you ever able to be in touch with her?

TR: When we were living in Poland, yes, because we stayed in Poland for a little while until my parents managed to get themselves together, get their lives together. We moved to Katowice, which is another large city—I want to say northwest of Przemysl—and my father became the head of the Jewish community there. He became very, very involved in helping other people recreate or put their lives back together. He was writing false birth certificates for children that were left as orphans to Israel, to Palestine. And there's another story about that; if you remind me later on, I'll try to fill you in with that.

CE: All right, the birth certificate story.

TR: Right. And we were living quite nicely in Katowice behind an armed guard at our door and a double door: one of metal on the inside—wood on the outside, metal on the inside, and an armed guard at the door. And whenever my father would go to the office the armed guard would follow him, because he was a Jew. That's the only reason, because even after the war, Pollacks were still gunning Jews. And one day he took me to the office with him and we were walking down the street, and all of a sudden there were these horrible screams. A woman was running after a man, who was holding a child and took this baby and threw the baby into a truck, and the baby died. And the mother was screaming, screaming. And my father saw that, so he told his security guy to take me home, and that was the end of it.

CE: Do you remember that event?

TR: That event I remember very well, very well. That was like in your face—I mean, I was like four and a half years old at that point, maybe even closer to five. The following night, there was a note on our door that if you don't leave in twenty-four hours you will be killed. So we packed and left.

CE: Okay. Let's stop that story and go back now, if you don't mind—

TR: No, of course.

CE: —to the time you spent with your "aunt."

TR: Okay. I went to church every Sunday and possibly more often than that. My name was changed, as I said, to Marissa. I had a birth certificate issued with that name.

CE: So she managed to get that for you.

TR: Well, no; it was my father.

CE: Your father?

TR: My father and grandfather were amazing people. My father just made things happen. My dad would speak to a wall and that wall would answer him back. He had tremendous connections. My grandparents had a wonderful reputation in the city, so people were willing to help. Przemysl was the Catholic Archdiocese for that part of Poland. So I guess the bishop or whoever, the priest—whoever is in charge of that section of Poland—wrote me a false birth certificate with my name as Marissa. I would learn catechism. I became a little Catholic girl with everything that goes with it. And I had to say a prayer every night, kneel down at the bed.

CE: So you can remember that?

TR: Yes.

CE: Wow.

TR: That I can. And my aunt would say to me, "Don't forget at the very end to pray for your parents." And I did, at the very end, every—every time I said my night prayers, my parents were mentioned. And the story was, to anyone that would come and talk to her or ask about me, was that I was her niece. I called her *ciotka*, I was her niece. And my parents were working for the war effort in another city, and that I was living with her until Germany was victorious and my parents would come back and take me.

Another little tidbit: she made arrangements with my parents one day to bring me in front of the ghetto, and this was a time when the Jews were not allowed out of the ghetto anymore. That she would bring me in front of the gates of the ghetto, and my mother and dad would look out the window.

CE: Wow.

TR: And that happened, and the horrible part was that I recognized my mother. I saw her and started screaming.

CE: That's amazing that you recognized her.

TR: Yeah. And, of course, she just took the carriage around and ran, because she was so concerned about being caught.

CE: Do you remember that, or is that a story you were told?

TR: No, no, that's a story that I was told. That's a story that I was told. And I started yelling, "Mommy, Mommy, Mommy."

CE: Oh, wow. And do you have any idea when that would have been, like how long ago?

TR: Shortly after they gave me away, probably within weeks, because time lapsed very quickly. The Jews were allowed out of the ghetto, and then all of a sudden they were not allowed of the ghetto. So this was at a time when they were not allowed out the ghetto anymore, and yet before any major action took place on the German part.

CE: So, she was probably afraid to try to let them see you after that.

TR: Oh, of course. That was the end; that was the last time they saw me.

CE: So what else do you remember from that time of being with your aunt?

TR: I remember one thing in particular. I was always told that when someone comes to the door and comes into the house, I was supposed to go and play in another room, not to stay where the kitchen and large table was, where people would come in, because that's how it was. In those days, you didn't ask why; you just did what you were told, especially in those days. And as I said, I was always told, "If someone knocks on the door, you go straight to your room," and the room was to the right down the hall. And I was always there whenever anybody was in the house, and that I remember very distinctly, because that never changed. Kids talk. People ask questions; for a piece of candy, anything will be told. So, that I remember very distinctly.

I remember the room very distinctly. I remember—I remember the house. Interestingly enough, we went to Poland many years ago with several people out of the museum, and we went to the house where I lived, and I didn't recognize it from the outside. It's not what I had pictured. It was a small house. And when we came back it was a house—I mean, it was a whole house, which I had never realized. And we went inside—and knocked on the door, of course, went inside. A lady came in, went inside. I told her who I was.

And we were standing in the little vestibule in the front, and I said to her, "What an amazing imagination that children have." I said, "I had this totally different picture of where I was living. You walk through the door, there was a big room, a big table, a fireplace/stove type of thing at the back of the wall, and there was a hall to the right and there were two bedrooms there. And she looked at me and she says, "You know what? I remodeled this house four years ago. What you are telling me is exactly what it was."

CE: Wow.

TR: So kids remember, and you know, even as a young child when things happen that are traumatic, you remember. It may not be at the tip of your tongue, but as soon as your memory starts being refreshed, it comes out.

I remember an incident, which must have been—and I don't know when it was. It was the time that the Russians occupied Przemysl for a short period of time, because they occupied Przemysl for a while and then the Germans came back in. My father was carrying me down the steps in an apartment—we lived in an apartment, like three floors up. There was some sort of a siren that was sounded and my father was carrying me down the steps. And I asked him about this so many times, 'cause we just talked about it and I said, "Was it really true that I hit my head and I went, 'Oh, my gosh!'" And he said, "Yes, that's exactly what you did." Which is so silly, but I hurt my head. I remembered that. And you know, you just remember things, you do.

CE: Can you remember any feelings toward this woman?

TR: No.

CE: No?

TR: No. But as I said to you many times before, there have to be some deep feelings someplace, because I have such a hard time discussing anything that happened at that time. So, I'm assuming that—I'm assuming she treated me well, because I came out okay. My parents always used to tell me that she always used to take me for a walk up in the park, which was very close to where she lived, and we would always pick flowers—always flowers and to this day I adore flowers. And interesting from that: I would take my granddaughters in the backyard when they were little and walk around the flowers.

CE: Flowers, oh.

TR: Yeah.

CE: Wow. Anything else from that time that you recall?

TR: No, not really.

CE: So do you remember—so now, let's go back to what was happening to your parents during that time. And this would be from stories that they've told you.

TR: Exactly. My parents were in the ghetto. My father was a *macher*. For lack of different terminology, he was able to just do things and people responded to him. He was a delightful man in people-to-people contact.

My father was teaching the commander of the camp, whose name was [Josef] Schwammberger, who not too long ago was sentenced to death in Germany[1], horseback riding. My dad was a wonderful horseman because they owned property and he would go ride around the property on horseback. So he taught him and his wife horseback riding. And he, the commander, was a very, very cruel man. My father would tell stories of him riding with my dad next to him, and children were playing in the street and he'd take his pistol out and shoot them and kill them just like that, you know. Now, the wife, apparently, was a much nicer lady, a much softer lady, would bring my father food every once in a while. But he, he was a horror, a terror.

CE: Sounds horrible.

TR: Horrible. So that was part of my father's life, and that's how he was able to do the things that he was able to do. He became in charge of food distribution in the ghetto. So he, of course, made sure that people that needed it had food, and we had food, or my parents had food, as much as they could get. That was when things were fairly loose,

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1Josef Schwammberger was captured in Argentina in 1987; he was then extradited to Germany, where he was tried and sentenced to life in prison. Schwammberger died in prison in December 2004.

when food was still being delivered, when food was still being distributed, when they were still walking in the streets without being basically housebound.

Things changed very drastically. They started having *aktions*, where they would gather up people and ship them off—they later found on out to Auschwitz—and of course never seen or heard from again. My dad found out that there was going to be an *aktion* within the next few days, managed to get word to one of the people that used to work for my grandfather, and made arrangements to get my mother out of the ghetto at night in a horse and buggy covered with hay. They took my mother out of the ghetto one night. The next night, my younger uncle was taken out the same way with his father, with my dad's father, also in the same way with hay. They just got out of the ghetto.

The next morning after my uncle and grandfather were taken out of the ghetto, they had a roll call and my mother was missing and my uncle and my grandfather was missing. And they said to my father, "Where's your wife?" So my father said, "She's sick, she's in the hospital"—the *Krankenhaus*, as they called it—"and my father is with her, taking care of her, because she's very sick."

CE: Did they have roll calls a lot?

TR: They had roll calls every day. Every day, every morning was a roll call. And the uncle—and my father became kind of standoffish about it. You know, a young kid, where do you expect him to be; who knows where he is? And they let it go, they let it go, I mean, that's called the luck of the draw. He could have been killed at that point, because the guy could have said, "Well, you're being very arrogant. Wham, you're gone." That night, my father got out of the ghetto. They found out there was going to be an *aktion*, there was going to be a roundup, and my father got out of the ghetto.

CE: The same way?

TR: Same way, same way. But there's a story before all this happened that just came to my mind. There was a commander of the army in Przemysl—his name was Dr. Battel, Max Battel[2]—who my father befriended. And when my father was in charge of the food distributions, he befriended this commander of the military that was in Przemysl at that time, became very friendly with him. There was a big to-do one day, and it is historically recorded that the Gestapo was going to come into the ghetto and, of course, just take

2TR is confusing the two men involved. Max Liedtke was the commander of Przemysl; his adjutant was Dr. Albert Battel. Both men resisted the SS evacuation of the ghetto, blocking the sole access point and sheltering up to 100 people. They were recognized as Righteous Among the Nations for their efforts.

everybody out and send them off to Auschwitz. And my father got word to Dr. Battel that this was happening. And Dr. Battel sent his forces and surrounded the ghetto to keep the Gestapo out. Dr. Battel didn't last in that position for many days after that.

But to interject here, the relationship between my father and Dr. Battel—when my father was taken out of the ghetto at night in this horse and buggy with the hay, he was taken to where my mother and my uncle and my grandfather were, and they were then taken by Dr. Battel to the basement of his office, which was the basement of the Gestapo.

CE: Wow.

TR: Okay? So my parents—my parents, my uncle, my grandfather, [and] several other people were all hiding in the basement of the Gestapo office.

CE: Wow!

TR: Okay? Talk about nerve? It's called *chutzpah*, let me tell you, and you either have it or you don't. And if you have it sometimes it works, like it did in this case, and at times it doesn't. Dr. Battel sent one orange down to me every single day, because he said that children need fruit. One orange came to me every single day. We were there for like over a week, under the Gestapo's nose.

CE: So you were there then?

TR: I was there then, yes. I was there then.

CE: Wow.

TR: So, there's so many things that happened. The time frame I really can't tell you, because there was always bits and pieces of conversation that I overheard that was going on, and a lot of conversation—when they would get together with their friends, they would talk about those days. And that's how it was mainly—that's how I knew so much, was just by eavesdropping.

CE: So do you remember the day that they came to get you? So they got out of the ghetto —

TR: They got out of the ghetto. They were held in this basement of the Gestapo, and then they had to leave because Dr. Battel got into trouble for preventing the Gestapo from getting into the ghetto. So, of course, the higher ups—the Himmler and the Heinrich, the whatever—found this out, and Dr. Battel was sent to Siberia[3].

CE: Okay.

TR: Okay.

CE: And now when do you come into the picture?

TR: I come into the picture a little later, because my parents, after the basement situation is—I'm assuming at that point is when they gave me away after that. Because they left the ghetto, came back into the ghetto, things quieted down in the ghetto.

CE: Okay—

TR: Okay, so they came back into the ghetto—

CE: Okay, okay, got it. Okay.

TR: All right? And then I left. Okay. After my parents left the ghetto for good, they went into the woods. They basically became partisans within a group and survived in people's basements and people's attics. My grandfather, since he had a lot of Polish people that worked for him—and he obviously was a good boss, because a lot of those same Polish people helped us an awful lot.

One couple—this is an amazing story. I was already living with my *ciotka* Konoysna, okay. My parents were hiding with several other people in a barn. Somehow or other,

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3Both Liedtke and Battel wound up in Soviet captivity. Liedtke died in a Soviet prison in 1955, sentenced for alleged war crimes, while Battel was eventually released and returned to West Germany.

word got out into the Gestapo that this particular man—his name was Garula—was hiding Jews in his attic. Okay? They came to his farm with his wife, and he had a son. They came to the farm and started questioning this Garula, and my parents were up in the attic watching this whole thing take place. And Garula said, "Out of the question. I'm not hiding Jews." To make a long story short, the couple was taken to town and hung in the town square. And he would not admit that he was hiding Jews. Now, his son, we were taking care financially of him for many, many years. What happened to him now, down the road, I don't know. But my parents made sure for the longest time that he was okay, that he was taken care of, as much as they could, as much as anybody could in those days. So, that was one little story.

One time, my parents—apparently, it was a very, very cold winter. Poland has terrible winters. This was in the winter. My parents needed to get someplace—shelter—and they didn't know where to go, so they went into the coal shed of my *ciotka* Konoysna.

CE: Oh, my.

TR: Okay. In the morning *ciotka* Konoysna went into the coal shed to get coal for the stove and sees my parents there, and says to them, "My God, what are you doing here? You've got to leave, you cannot stay here." So they said, "Okay." She gave them some food, bread, and they—at night they left. And basically for two years I didn't see them; they didn't see me.

Ah, the war ended. I'm sure lots of excitement went on for them with their lives in between all that. Everything was okay with me; I was taken care of. The war ended, my parents came to pick me up. But I had no idea who they were. I didn't want to go to strange people, why would I bother with them. My parents moved to Aunt Konoysna's house. I started, you know, acknowledging them. They're my parents, I called them Mom and Dad, but that meant nothing. I could have called them Tom and Dick, it didn't matter. And after a while my mother started getting a little closer with me. And my parents hired a young girl, a Polish girl who apparently I had been friendly with, that Aunt Konoysna had me involved with. Hired her to come live in this house with them, in Aunt Konoysna's house, to try to be the go-between them and me.

CE: So, they really took their time.

TR: Oh, three months.

CE: Three months.

TR: Three months.

CE: Wow.

TR: And they needed time to come to themselves, also. I mean, you know, I would come and spend some time with them in their room. Eventually my parents moved out, and I would go to their home with this girl, during the day; at night I had to go back to Aunt Konoysna. Apparently I loved this one particular soup that my Aunt Konoysna made, so my mother started making soup. But of course, it wasn't as good as Aunt Konoysna's. And that was that. That's when—after that is when we moved to Katowice, when my father got his wonderful note to vacate in twenty-four hours otherwise you are dead.

CE: Now, had you already moved in with them at that point?

TR: Yes, I moved in with them at that point.

CE: So eventually you moved in.

TR: Yes, of course, I moved in with them eventually. Was I comfortable? No. Did I like them? No.

CE: So you remember all that?

TR: Oh, yeah. Oh, I had a hard time, very hard time. My mother I related to much better than my dad.

CE: Do you remember more of how you felt? Did you feel—

TR: I didn't belong.

CE: You didn't belong there.

TR: I didn't belong. And yet, I had to be there. I mean, there was no discussion; that's how it was. My parents spent three months, this entire process trying to get me to go live with them, to be with them. So I went, and what can I tell you? You do what you're told to do, right?

CE: Yeah, yeah.

TR: You know, how many kids rebelled in those days? I don't even know whether we knew what that word meant. At least, not the way I was brought up. This is what you did because this is what your mom and dad said that's what you need to do, so that's what you did.

We moved from Katowice. We went to Czechoslovakia, and the reason we went to Czechoslovakia was because we were hoping that there was a quota opened for immigrating into the United States. By the time we got to Czechoslovakia, the quota was closed. So we stayed there for a while, because my mother got sick with typhus and she was hospitalized. A Dr. Skamena—another little sidebar conversation story, and this I remember very well—a Jewish lady who was taking care of my mother, after my mother got well my parents moved with me into her home; she had a beautiful home in Prague. And we stayed there for several months, found out that a quota was opening in France, so we picked up and went—

CE: To come to the United States?

TR: To come to the United States.

CE: So your parents still had some resources, apparently?

TR: My parents had some resources and, more than that, my uncle had resources, who was in this country.

CE: Oh, okay.

TR: And my uncle was the one that was really taking care of all of that.

CE: Okay, okay.

TR: So, we moved to France. We lived in Paris for several months. From Paris we moved to Amsterdam and—

CE: For the quota reason again?

TR: For the quota reason.

CE: So you're trying to follow the quota around?

TR: Well, you're trying to follow the quota wherever they have an opening for, again, immigration to the States. Finally, with my uncle's—I don't know what; probably at that point because of his wife, Peggy; was an American, had a lot of money. She was one of the "Four Hundred" families of New York, which was a very, very posh, posh, posh upper echelon thing in those days. We came to the United States. From Amsterdam we went to Rotterdam; from Rotterdam we took a Holland America Line first class to the United States.

CE: And you came into New York?

TR: Came into New York, to Hoboken, New Jersey. I remember being so amazed at white bread. I had never seen white bread in my life. Bread was dark. I just couldn't get over white bread. It was just an astonishing thing to me. And it had crust; it was a square; that was amazing. And I couldn't get enough of this white bread, which was very lucky because we had a very rough voyage for a couple of days and everyone was seasick, but in order to keep from being seasick you have to eat. Well, I ate white bread, so I was okay.

CE: That's the best thing, yeah.

TR: And we came to this country, disembarked in Hoboken. My uncle was there to meet us. He had an apartment waiting for us in Manhattan, fully furnished, fully stocked with food.

CE: Wow.

TR: And there we were, beginning a new life. My mother became pregnant shortly after we came here and miscarried very shortly after that, and then became pregnant again, and I have a brother—had a brother. In those days, I wanted to kill him. (CE laughs) I couldn't understand why I had to have a boy, of all things, around.

But we lived in New York for a while. And because my parents came here on a—my father on an agricultural visa: that's what had opened—we had to go on to an agricultural business. So we moved to New Jersey, to South Jersey, which had an awful lot of immigrants, into Vineland near Atlantic City. And my father bought a farm which, down the road, became one of the largest farms in the country, in those days. We had like 75,000 chickens, which in those days was an astronomical number.

CE: So you lived on a farm?

TR: I lived on a farm. But it wasn't a "farm" farm, because we lived in a house and the farm was like—

CE: Out there.

TR: Out there. You know, it was not a "farm." I would love to go and look at the little baby chicks when they first came, the tiny little yellow things. They were put under big heaters and that was my—but then I got afraid of chickens, so I stopped doing that. But —

CE: Now, all this time, do you remember, like, warming up to your parents? And what was your relationship with them like?

TR: Yes, of course, of course. My relationship changed tremendously. They were my parents, what can I say? They also had big adjustments to make; their lives were in turmoil, needless to say. I remember times in Czechoslovakia when there was so many issues and so many problems and so much discussion all the time, just a lot of—a lot of conservation. What do we do, where do we go—you know, trying to establish a life. What do you do, you know?

And I keep thinking back, and I was talking to a friend of mine the other day. You know, we talk about parents, and in one's head, your parents are fifty, forty, sixty. My parents, when this was going on, were in their early twenties. You know, you don't think of parents as twenty! You think of parents as parents, adult mature parents. These were kids! These were kids that were hit with a catastrophe. How do you deal, how do you make decisions? How do you manage in life? You have a wife, a father, brothers. They're trying to kill you wherever you go. How do you manage? These were people in their early twenties. When you look at a child, a person of early twenty today—

CE: We think of them as kids.

TR: As kids! Can you imagine having something like that thrown at you at that age? It's just unbelievable. But you know what? You rise to the occasion no matter what, no matter what.

When we moved to Vineland, my father wanted me to go to a Hebrew/English school, a *yeshiva* type of thing.

CE: Had you been to school prior to that?

TR: I was in school in New York, yes, the same type of school again: a Hebrew/English school. Then we moved to New Jersey, so I, of course, again went to a Hebrew/English school. And my father insisted that that's where I have to go because I needed to have that Hebraic, Judaic education. This is what this whole thing was all about, and he was not about to have me not have the ability to do what they had such horrible issues with because they were Jews being persecuted. So my father said, "You're going to get that Hebrew education."

Now, I lived probably forty-five minutes to an hour from Atlantic City, where that Hebrew education was to be gotten, okay. So let me tell you what my mornings consisted of and my evenings consisted of: I would get up early in the morning and my father would drive me to a town called Mays Landing, which was about ten miles, twelve miles from where we lived. I would take a public bus, go from Mays Landing to Atlantic City —which they stopped along the road, so that was a good forty, forty-five minute drive. I would take the bus to the bus station in Atlantic City. I would then take a jitney, which was a little tiny, little—like a little van—from the bus station to the school.

CE: Wow.

TR: Okay. Talk about, you know, walking in snow that's miles high. It took me an hour and a half to two hours to go to school, and the same time to come home at night. Okay? In the summertime it was light outside, so it wasn't too bad; but in the wintertime, when it got dark early, especially up north, I was scared to stand out there and wait. There I was at a bus station—which even today, you know, you go to a Greyhound station, you don't have the finest caliber of people. Well, it was no different in those days. I sat there very quietly, I remember, on a bench in one spot and I was afraid to move. And I had to wait until this little jitney came, and they ran every fifteen minutes. So if you missed the jitney, I sat there glued for fifteen minutes afraid to move and waiting for the next jitney to come.

CE: And your parents weren't worried about you doing this? I guess they thought the reward was worth the—

TR: You know what? I don't know that parents were worried in those days to the extent that we worry today. I think times were different. And you know what? I don't think you could shell anything out to my parents, what they had been through. Whatever I'm going through in those days, or was going through, was nothing. Think about it: when you parallel sitting on a little bench, it's like nothing.

CE: It's tough love.

TR: You know, this is how it is.

CE: Two hours there, two hours back, big deal.

TR: It's no big deal; it's no big deal. But that's how it was every day, and if for some reason my father couldn't pick me up in Mays Landing, I would spend the night at my principal's house. Now, can you imagine anything more exciting than that, sleeping at your principal's house? His name was Dr. Cobstein. I will never forget his name as long as I live.

CE: Were you upset that you had to do all this?

TR: Mm-hm.

CE: You were? So you were not happy?

TR: Yes. No, absolutely not. I had a very rough childhood. But you know what? My happiness wasn't really a focal point.

CE: Survival was.

TR: That's right, that's right. My happiness became a very unimportant issue—

CE: For you? For them? For all of you?

TR: For me, it was an issue.

CE: For you, it was an issue?

TR: For them, it was not an issue. What is happy? What does that mean? What is happy? I'm alive, what is happy? You know, so if you—

CE: You're alive, you have these opportunities—

TR: I have food, I'm warm when it's cold outside, I'm not hungry. So what's safe, what's happy? You just move on till tomorrow, and then you start the process all over again.

CE: So did you rebel?

TR: Probably, because I was a rebellious kid. I was—I mean, I felt very strongly about what was right, what was wrong. I don't know, I guess that was inbred, because I'm the same way today, I haven't changed. I'm still a rebellious kid. (CE laughs)

Yeah, I did not have a great childhood. I had a very hard childhood, because not only did I do all this traveling back and forth to school, but my friends lived in Atlantic City, which was an hour away. Well, my parents had no time to drive me to play with my friends for two hours and drive me back. That was a non-issue.

CE: So you didn't have a lot of time with friends?

TR: I had no time with friends. I had no friends. I had—whatever friends I had was the day at school, and that was it. Otherwise, there was no—

CE: On weekends you didn't have?

TR: Not at that stage in life, no, no. There was no relationship established like kids have today, or kids have fun or they do this or do that. There was nothing, nothing.

CE: Were your parents real serious? I assume they were.

TR: My father was. Both my parents were, but my father was very serious, very strong. My mother was the soft one. My father was law. If my father looked out the window and said it was nighttime—it could be bright and sunny outside—it was night. So I was brought up very, very strict, very strict. This is how it had to be; there was no discussion and there was no, "But, Ma, wait a minute, wait a minute." There's no such thing; it just didn't happen.

CE: Let's stop now, but when we come back I would like to ask more about your brother and what's happening with him.

TR: Sure.

CE: Okay, thanks.

Part 1 ends; part 2 begins

CE: This is tape two with Toni Rinde. So, Toni, let's go back. I wanted to ask you if your parents spoke Yiddish?

TR: My parents did speak Yiddish. But Yiddish was usually spoken in the little tiny *shtetls*, small little villages, small little towns. The bigger cities had an educated population that went to schools, and everything was done in Polish. So they did speak some Yiddish at home, probably like we spoke Polish at home 'cause we didn't want the kids to understand, and I have a feeling that that's what it was. My mother may have spoken Yiddish a little bit more in her family than my father did in his family, but it was not the major language spoken at home. Again, in the *shtetls*, they did speak Yiddish; that was their major—in the cities, they didn't. In the cities they spoke Polish because they were part of the Polish society.

CE: Yes, and that helped—I assume that helped people—you and every other people pass as being non-Jewish.

TR: Well, yeah. I passed as being non-Jewish only because I was a little kid. So I don't know that—but you're right, you're right; if I had been raised in Yiddish, then I probably—

CE: And if you had an accent.

TR: Exactly, exactly.

CE: But you were so young.

TR: That's right. But that's probably very true. And the fact that my parents were so involved with in the Przemysl society, that's what helped them and helped my father, especially, find different places that they could go to and hide, and different people that they had connections with, that they could survive.

CE: And you mentioned a birth certificate story that you were going to—

TR: Yes, yes. I mentioned before that when my father moved to Katowice he became head of the Polish community there and was writing birth certificates for orphaned children to Palestine. Tells you what a small world it is. Years and years and years down the road they went to Israel, my parents, and were shopping in Tel Aviv or Haifa, I don't even remember what town. But they were in a department store, and my dad walked to a

saleslady asking her for a piece of merchandise that he was looking for. And she took him to where ever it was, so on and so forth. And he said to her, "You don't have a typical Israeli accent." He says, "Where are you from?" So she said, "Oh, I'm from Poland." So he says, "Oh, from Poland? Where?" She says, "Oh, a city you probably don't even know about it." She says, "I lived in Katowice." So he says, "Oh, you lived in Katowice? How did you come to Israel?" She says, "It's a very long story. I was an orphan child, and this man—"

CE: Oh, my!

TR: "This man made a birth certificate for me and gave me the ability to come to Palestine." So my father started crying. And he said, "You know, I'm the man." I mean, just think about that, something like that happening in life, one chance in a gazillion. But that's where two people meet, and nothing more had to be said. Everything was said with that one sentence.

CE: Um, I also want to you to talk a little bit more about the contact that you had with the woman who kept you—later.

TR: Again, once we came to this country, we tried to connect with her again. We were sending packages to Poland, we were sending money—and not directly, of course, to her, because we had no idea where she was in those days. So we made connections through another person, a third person, a fourth person, somehow or other to try to reach her, and we thought we did. So we were sending money—cash, because you can't send a check to Poland in those days—and found out that this was never getting to her. The communist were in the ruling class in Poland in those days, the government was communist, and that was that. And at this point of course—even when we were in Poland with the museum, which goes back probably fifteen, eighteen years ago, she was no longer alive. So we just lost contact with her.

CE: So let's go back, then, to your childhood once you were in the States and you are going to Hebrew school and spending all day getting there—

TR: Traveling back and forth.

CE: Yes. And so, you have a brother at that point?

TR: I have a brother and I—every big sister's wish, you don't want to have a little bratty brother around, but there it was. He was sweet and adorable and I took care of him a lot. By the same token, my father needed him to go to a Hebrew school. So he went to school on the other side of town, also a good hour away. And there was transportation though, they went—some sort of a carpool was arranged. My brother is eight years younger than I am, so he's still a kid.

I can't tell you much. There was my brother and me. Again, there were no kids around where we lived; the same thing with him. Socialization with kids was just nonexistent. We were at home. We had a dog; that was basically our play toy. You know what? Life was, and you made whatever you had—you entertained yourself. There was a TV, we watched television, we probably fought a lot. Can't tell you much more.

CE: Okay, so now you get to be a teenager—

TR: Now I get to be a teenager. I go to high school—again—

CE: Is that close, or still—?

TR: No, no. High school was in Vineland, which was forty, forty-five minutes away. My father would drive me to meet the bus— (phone rings) Excuse me.

Pause in recording

TR: Which was about five miles away, and the high school bus would then pick me up and take me to Vineland. So, it was a process. Nothing was very easy. We lived in a small little town in New Jersey and nothing was easy, you know, it was just a little—a village, basically.

CE: And how did you do in school?

TR: I did very well in school. I did very well in school. I graduated high school. I went to Drexel in Philadelphia.

CE: Any romances in that class?

TR: Yeah, there were always romances, you know that.

CE: (laughs) Of course. I want to hear about that.

TR: Romances are part of life.

CE: Anything serious?

TR: Yes, there was a serious romance, actually. I had met a young man, or a guy, through a friend of mine who lived near Philadelphia, Wilkes-Barre. And we started dating as one would date as a junior and senior—as a junior in high school. And one day he came over and had dinner at our house and went home; we went to the movies and he went home. And my father says, "You know, I really don't like him." So I said, "Okay." I said, "But—" (phone makes noise)

CE: You want to hit that button?

TR: "But we have plans for New Year's Eve." And my dad says, "I don't think so." He said, "We're going to New York for New Year's Eve." Okay, we went to New York—but let me backtrack a little bit. My parents and John's[4] parents were friends before the war. And apparently both of them had a mutual friend that lived in New York and bumped into John's parents in the street one day and says, "Oh, you have a son? The Igels are here and they have a daughter." All right?

So New Year's Eve, since I wasn't going out with Jerry Choter because my father didn't like him, I ended up going out with John. That was our second meeting. Our first meeting was pre-arranged by this mutual friend of our parents. He came to visit me in my aunt's apartment. Now my aunt [and] my uncle were extremely wealthy and my aunt is still alive. The (inaudible) family, as I had mentioned to you before, were one of the "Four Hundred" in New York (phone rings) and—I'm sorry.

CE: It's okay.

4John Rinde was also interviewed for the Holocaust Survivors Oral History Project. The DOI for his interview is F60-00020.

Pause in recording

TR: And they lived on Central Park West, overlooking Central Park, these huge apartments; the elevator came into their foyer. And the doorbell rang and there comes poor John, didn't know what to do with himself. He thought, "Where am I going? This is a Taj Mahal. This woman is definitely not for me," you know. And we sat in the living room and the maid came in and, "May I bring you something to drink, and may I bring you something to eat?" It was very uncomfortable for him, and I didn't know he was uncomfortable with that. That was my aunt and I was used to that. I had no problem with it. And I kind of looked at him and—it's okay, you know.

I came home that night. My mother says to me, "Well what do you think?" I said, "Don't like his socks." "Don't like his socks?" And there was something else about him that I didn't like—there were two things, but the socks were totally unacceptable. That was the day before New Year's Eve. We went out New Year's Eve and he changed socks, so things were a little better. (phone rings) I'm sorry.

CE: That's okay.

TR: Things were a little bit better. We went out New Year's Eve, had a nice time, had a nice evening, went to a party, and he went to MIT the next day and I went home to Drexel. He was in Boston and I was in Philadelphia. But somehow or other we connected, and the rest is history. (CE laughs) So that was John's meeting.

CE: Okay, so you were at Drexel?

TR: Right.

CE: And what were you majoring in?

TR: I was pre-med and then changed to medical technology; but at Drexel that was all under pre-med in your freshman year and then you would continue in that area. We got married at the end of my freshman year.

CE: Okay.

TR: Okay. Moved to New York, and I was still continuing school.

CE: In Drexel?

TR: In New York.

CE: In New York, okay.

TR: Right, continued school up there and then I became pregnant.

CE: And where were you going to school in New York?

TR: C.W. Post [Campus of Long Island University].

CE: Okay. Oh, yeah.

TR: And I became pregnant, so I dropped out of school for a little while. Then Debbie was born, my older daughter who lives in Tampa.

CE: And she's a doctor?

TR: She's a transplant cardiologist at Tampa General [Hospital]. She's head of the transplant department at Tampa General. She's a pretty—pretty big shot.

CE: What's her last name?

TR: Hoffman. She's hyphenated Rinde-Hoffman. And, as I said, Debbie was born, I stayed home for a while, continued my education. Then I started working part-time at a hospital, and then I just stopped working. I became a mommy. John was working at Sperry; he was an engineer. And we had an okay life. Nothing exciting, you know, two young people starting out in life.

And I'm going to fast forward quite a bit for another traumatic experience in my life. John comes home one day and says, "You know, I'm thinking about going to medical school." Now, that was about eight years after we were married. I had two children, and I said to him, "Lay down; it'll pass." (CE laughs) So what can I tell you? It didn't pass, and here I am knowing that we are going to be moving, because there's no way we could afford to be in New York and go to medical school. Somebody had to work, and the cost of living in Manhattan was out of the question for us to even be able to manage that.

So he started applying to medical schools. Now he was thirty-one, thirty-one years old, and that was the pre-*Bakke* Decision[5]. Do you remember that decision, where a gentleman sued because he was not accepted to medical school—

CE: Yes, I do.

TR: —because of his age. This was right before *Bakke*. So John could not even say, "This is what happened and a precedent was set and here I am." He applied to, I believe, like twenty-eight schools, was accepted to two, and Hopkins accepted him for the following year. Now, just to give you a little background, he has three degrees at MIT, a Ph.D. away from a thesis in mechanical engineering, degrees in electrical engineering and mechanical engineering both. Graduated MIT with 4.0 and couldn't get into medical school.

CE: Wow.

TR: Okay.

CE: Because of his age?

TR: Because of his age, exactly. Well, but somebody felt sorry for us and accepted him. So he was accepted, as I said, by University of Arkansas in Little Rock and Creighton [University] in Omaha, Nebraska, and John Hopkins the following year. And a lot of the schools were writing him back, like, "Keep trying; we can't take you, but we know somebody will. So, just keep trying." All right, so we decided that Little Rock was going to be it—

5*Regents of California v. Bakke*, 438 US 265 (1978).

CE: That's before you knew about Hopkins?

TR: No, no, no; we already knew, but we couldn't afford to wait another year because he was getting a year older. You know, my kids were getting older; it just wasn't in the cards; we had to go and do this.

Anyway, we moved to Little Rock. Well, culture shock personified, from Baldwin Harbor, Long Island, to Little Rock, Arkansas. We got an apartment there and decided to go to a football game. Neither one of us were football fans, but you are part of the establishment now: the Razorbacks are playing, and we went. And we sat within the student section, and all of a sudden you hear this yelling, "Sooie Pig! Sooie Pig!" And John says to me, "What are they saying?" I said, "I don't know, but keep still. I'm going to listen again." Well, his anatomy professor was sitting behind us, hysterical at this point, because that is what they do to call the hogs. Their football team are known as the Hogs, and you call the pigs and you call, "Sooie Pig." Well, we never heard of that, so I didn't know what they were saying. John's anatomy professor taught us what Sooie Pig meant. (laughs) So, that was an experience.

But, somehow or other, we managed. I started working in the clinical lab, in the chemistry department, and it was okay. We decided the following—the summer, the following summer, to go back to New York. I would take on my job where I left off and he would take on his job where he left off. Because let me interject for a moment: when John finally got accepted to medical school, I said to myself, "Self, I've got to do something to help support this man. He's going to be a student, what are we going to live on?" I mean, really, there's nothing there. So I went back to work at Glen Clove Community Hospital in their outpatient department and I thought to myself, "Okay, I'll work here for a few months, get a little bit of experience, remind myself of what I haven't been doing for a number of years."

Well, it worked out great, and within about a month the head of pathology came to me and made me an offer to take over the outpatient department on a full-time basis. And I said to him, "Oh, my God, I am going to medical school with my husband in two months, and what am I going to say to him now? If I tell him the truth, he'll fire me right away. If I don't tell him the truth"—I have a hard time doing that. So, I 'fessed up. I said, "Dr. Gross, I have to tell you the whole story." And I told him the whole story. I said, "I cannot take your position, your kind offer, because my husband and I are going to Little Rock, Arkansas." And he was delightful. He let me finish out the entire time, to work as often as I wanted to come, and observe if I didn't have the opportunity to work full-time there again. So, that was great.

And with that, I came into Little Rock in a comfortable situation familiar again with my past lab experience. So, as I said, I started working in chemistry in the pathology lab, and for the summer I was going to take a leave of absence, if they were willing to do that, and go back to working for Long Island Jewish, which was Cornell University. And John was going to be an engineer back at Sperry, okay. And that's what we did. The University of Arkansas was kind enough to hold my job for me for three months. We left the end of May, came back September, and I had my job in clinical lab again and John started his second year.

But I had my eye on the Hematology Research Department, because that is really what—my love and my specialty was hematology. So I said, "I can't stay in chemistry. I'm going to have to somehow or other get into this hematology research." Hematology research was run by Arthur Haut, who co-edited the *Wintrobe*, which is the bible for hematology/oncology students. That book is used till—today it is the textbook that they use. Now, to make an appointment with Dr. Haut was not an easy thing, because he never had a moment to see you: he was always busy, he ran a department, plus saw patients, all the hematological patients were under him—plus, of course, an associate that he had. And it took me from the middle of September until the beginning of November to get an appointment with him. It was Veterans' Day—that's the beginning of November, right?

CE: Mm-hm.

TR: The weekend before Veterans' Day, that Friday, I got an appointment to see Dr. Haut, okay. And I walked into his office and he, you know, talked to me, interviewed me—my experience, so on and so forth—and took me to the lab to show me—for me to show him whether I know what I'm doing there. Quick, quick, test one, two, three. And everything was fine and we went back down to his office, and he said to me, "You know, Toni, you're wonderful. I wish I could find a place for you, but I have no grant money and there's no way I can hire you now." He said, "Grants come back out again next September. Come back and see me next September." So I thanked him for his time, started walking out the door, turned around before I walked out and I said, "Dr. Haut, if you don't hire me, you're going to be making a big mistake."

CE: *Chutzpah.* (laughs)

TR: And he turned around, looked up at me, big grin on his face and I said, "Thank you," and I left. Well Tuesday morning—Monday was Veterans' Day. Tuesday morning I get a phone call to the clinical lab that Dr. Haut wants to see me. P.S. Dr. Haut hired me.

CE: Wow, wow. Wonderful.

TR: So it was an amazing experience. I loved what I was doing. Within about six weeks I became second in charge of the lab and literally more or less kind of ran the place because that's just my personality. If something needed to be done, he came down and said, "Toni, could you take care of it?" "Of course I can, what do you mean?" And since I had a relationship with the clinical lab, because that's where I worked before, if there was any scuffle between the two labs—as there always is in academia, you know how that goes.

CE: I do, yes.

TR: So I was the go-between. And he gave me—he hired me at a very low salary, which is what everybody was making in those days, but within two years raised my salary so that I became un-hirable by anyone of the other hospitals around. So, there I was. I worked like a horse because we saw patients all the time. I would do bone marrows. I would do the blood transfusions, the—typical hematology research material. And I loved it. I loved every minute of it.

CE: I can tell you do.

TR: I loved it. And everything was doing great. John was doing well in medical school. He actually rotated through the hematology research department. We had a three-headed scope in the back, and John was at one scope and Dr. Haut was at another scope and I was at the third scope and I was teaching John, which was terrific! I loved every moment of that!

CE: All right, all right. (laughs)

TR: So those were good times. But we had a wonderful experience in Little Rock because—needless to say, we were friendly with the professors, because of our age, rather than with the students, who were much younger. So it was great, it was just wonderful in every sense of the word.

But when we moved to Little Rock, we knew it was on a temporary basis. So what happens? When you have that in the back of your mind you can't really—at least, I couldn't get beyond that. I knew that this was here on a temporary basis: that's not where I was going to settle, that's not where I was going to stay. The year that John finished his residency, Dr. Haut's lab closed because of research money. Okay? I said, "You know what? It was meant to be." That's when we left Little Rock. Dr. Haut's lab closed, John finished his residency, we left.

CE: And where did you go?

TR: We went to Clearwater, Florida.

CE: Oh, my! Into this house?

TR: Into this house. Well, there's a little more behind that. We came to do interviews for John's residency at University of South Florida. Are you familiar with that place?

CE: I am definitely familiar.

TR: University of South Florida had a medical school that was open for two years, okay. And it was okay. John wasn't terribly impressed, but what really pushed us to say no was that we couldn't afford to live in Tampa, because any place that we really liked we couldn't afford, and places that we could afford we didn't like. So John said, "You know what, this is ridiculous. Let's go back to Little Rock, do my three-year residency and then come back here on a different footing." So that's what happened.

Now, how did we choose Clearwater, Florida? My parents had been going to the Safety Harbor Spa for a number of years and they kept saying, "Lovely place, lovely place, lovely place." And we said, "Oh, all right, we'll take a look at it." We came—we drove down, went down to Clearwater Beach. It was pouring rain, pouring. Parked the car, and within about two minutes the sun came out, huge rainbow in the sky, and John said to me, "We're moving here." That was it. No conversation, no discussion.

We decided that—my older daughter Debbie, was applying to college at that point, so she already applied to UF, got accepted there on a full tuition scholarship, academics—bright kid; takes after her mother. And we decided to take the plunge. We built this house long distance over about a four to five month period. I was flying down here once a month to

make sure that things were getting along, besides all my side little jobs, like running the lab in Little Rock. And that was it.

CE: Now, your second daughter—

TR: Yes.

CE: What is her name?

TR: Her name is Barbara Feller. She lives in Coral Springs. She's a CPA, has two kids, and actually we are getting ready to plan a bat mitzvah in February.

CE: Oh, wonderful, wonderful.

TR: So that's great.

CE: And Debbie has children?

TR: Debbie has two wonderful children: a boy who is twenty, my grandson Eric, and my granddaughter Marisa.

CE: Okay. And Barbara's children are named?

TR: Barbara's children are Sammy—Samantha, who's named after my father—and Alec. And you didn't pick up—I told you Debbie's daughter's name is Marisa.

CE: Oh! No, I didn't.

TR: Know what?

CE: That's interesting.

TR: Talk about life. Debbie's younger daughter, Marisa, is named after John's dad, whose name was Maurice. There are many, many names that start with M. She had no idea that my name in Poland was Marissa. It just happened.

CE: Wow. Wow. That's interesting.

TR: Is it in the stars? Who knows?

CE: Now, I want to know some about your parents after the war, and then I want to move to asking you some questions about being a survivor.

TR: Okay.

CE: So your parents—so I know they're living near Atlantic City, and they are on a farm.

TR: Right.

CE: Okay. And then just give me a sketch of what happens to them after that.

TR: We lived on the farm for a number of years. The poultry industry went down the tubes. My parents moved to New York, where my two uncles were established in the Mobile gas business. My father bought a gas station, bought a second one, bought a third one, and did very well. Retired to Clearwater, Florida—or Largo, actually, four houses down the street from me.

CE: So, after you were already here?

TR: Yes.

CE: Okay.

TR: So we had, like, a compound. I lived on one side four or five houses away, and my brother lives a block south of the area, within the same area, The Bluffs. They lived a nice full life here. My dad became ill at age eighty-one or two and died of pancreatic cancer. My mother lived for another ten years and died of ovarian cancer four years ago.

CE: Oh, I'm sorry.

TR: She was a magnificent woman, absolutely magnificent.

CE: So the two of you were close, you and your mom?

TR: Yeah. She was my mom. We did a lot together after my dad passed away, you know: whenever she needed clothing we would go shopping, and she would always say, "What am I wearing today? What are we doing? What am I wearing? We have to go here and there; what should I put on?" It was a nice mother-daughter relationship, and she was so close. You know, and we started traveling. We have a condo in Steamboat Springs [Colorado], so we started traveling there. And my mother became ill and I would fly out there and supposed to stay there for two weeks, and three days later turn around and fly home.

It was hard. It was hard, because my husband wanted to continue with his life and I had my mother who was not well. Thank goodness my brother was here, so he was able to kind of pitch in when necessary, but I'm going to call it Jewish guilt. I think it's just international guilt, but Jewish guilt really took over. And I had a very, very hard time for the couple of years that my mother was sick, because I couldn't pull myself apart. You know, do I go with my husband—who understood up to a point, but he was working and needed a break also. Being a physician, his hours were horrendous.

CE: Was your mom in a nursing home?

TR: No. My mother never, never left her house.

CE: She didn't, how wonderful.

TR: No. Towards the end we had care for her twenty-four/seven, and she never left her house. She died very peacefully in her home. My brother was on one side of her and I was on the other.

CE: Did you and your mom talk about their experiences in the Holocaust a lot?

TR: No, no.

CE: Or your dad? It wasn't—

TR: No. It was very hard for me to listen to their stories.

CE: Emotionally?

TR: Emotionally, yeah. It just had a lot of raw edges to it. I could never really deal with it. And it's interesting, because they never really considered me as a survivor. They were the survivors, not me. What do I know? I was just a child. Because you know, today everything is geared psychologically. You look into the way a child thinks and looks and talks and walks and what have you. The days when my parents were raising me, that never even came into question: you just raised your child—especially with the type of experience my parents had. So, to them, everything was great for me. I was living with another woman and everything was perfect.

So, we had very few discussions, very few discussions. I just found it very, very difficult to talk about that time. I don't know why, but I couldn't ever discuss it. Bits and pieces—again I would hear a lot of discussion that they had with their friends; my kids with them sometimes would have conversations. But I had a very hard time talking about it.

CE: So your kids did have conversations with your—

TR: They did. Not a lot, not a lot. I don't know that my parents were so comfortable talking about it for a long period of time. And then, when they became a little more comfortable, my father would go to schools locally and talk.

CE: He did?

TR: Yes.

CE: Oh, wow. Now, he wasn't interviewed, was he, by Shoah?

TR: My dad, no. No, it was before the whole big (phone rings) swing of—excuse me, I'm so sorry. (answers phone) Hello? Bob, I'm being interviewed right now. I have to call you back. Bye.

Sorry. My father spoke in the schools. No, he was not interviewed. The museum has a little bit of a tape of his that he speaks on. Actually, it was a very horrifying experience to me. They have a little area where they show films; I don't know whether you've been in that little alcove there. I had a very heavy morning one day there. I guess I was talking to somebody and just became very emotional. I said, "You know what, I just need a moment by myself." So I walked into that little alcove, and I walk in and sit down. My head was down, and all of a sudden my father's voice comes on. And I said, "Oh, my God." I had not realized that my dad was interviewed and that he was on tape there. And the last thing in the world at that point I needed to hear was my father, who had just passed away, talk about remembering things in life. That, I will never forget, as long as I live. That was a traumatic experience—

CE: That's amazing.

TR: It was unbelievable, unbelievable.

CE: That is amazing.

TR: Yeah.

CE: Have you listened to his tape?

TR: I have, I have. I have.

CE: Is it long or is it just a short?

TR: There's several different blurbs, several different pieces.

CE: I wonder if maybe we can get those at some point?

TR: Oh, sure. We can, because my daughter Debbie has the complete tape, so it's there.

CE: So we'll listen to that, too—

TR: Sure, of course.

CE: And watch that and talk about it—

TR: Of course, of course, of course.

CE: Yeah, that would be good, I think. So you—talk about identifying yourself as a survivor and not identifying yourself as a survivor.

TR: Okay, all right. Let's talk about identifying as a survivor. Jim Dawkins, who is the editor of the local Jewish press [Jewish Press Group of Tampa Bay], interviewed my parents during Yom HaShoah one year. And my father mentioned in the interview about a child that they had, a daughter who was a hidden child who lives in Largo, Florida, and her name is Toni Rinde. Okay. Well, I am extremely and was extremely active in the community at large, and a lot of people knew of me or knew me, not realizing that I was a survivor.

CE: Did they know John was a survivor?

TR: Yes, because he has an accent, so you pick up. Now, whether he was a survivor or whether just born in another country, they weren't quite sure. With me there's no accent, so you can't pick up that I'm not born here. That was the first time that there was a public announcement of the fact that I was a survivor.

CE: Because you were called a hidden child.

TR: Yes, and I called Jim and I blasted him from here to kingdom come. How dare you do that without asking me, how dare you publish that. It's a public newspaper. And he was terribly apologetic, of course. When I calmed myself, I called him back and apologized profusely, which was—you know, I reacted very poorly. I just related very poorly. All my friends knew I was a survivor, but nobody ever really paid any attention to it. It was kind of like, "Yeah, she's a survivor," but it was not in your face like John's accent is, so nobody even thought about it.

And all of a sudden, it came to pass. All right, it happened; people will forget, right? Well, people didn't forget, and I guess it became more of a public issue when I started speaking to kids, younger kids, little kids at the schools, some of the schools—very few, because I found it difficult and I didn't enjoy it and I didn't like it and I didn't like the fact that I started crying so many times. It bothered me. I didn't want to do that, and yet I could never speak to somebody at any length without breaking down, and I just didn't like that whole picture.

Okay, the Holocaust Museum was sort of a dream of Walie Loebenberg's, Walter Loebenberg's, and I guess he was the mover and shaker of South County, and I sort of had that semi-role in this part of the county. And our temple was going to be building a Holocaust memorial. They were going to do something, we weren't sure whether inside the building, outside the building. And we had a study session one Yom Kippur afternoon, and there were three young people in the audience and spoke very, very strongly about the fact that that memorial should be outside. I said, "Okay, the memorial will be outside." So I started looking around for artists and doing whatever groundwork need to be done, zoning and just an awful lot of red tape that's involved, and became involved with our Holocaust memorial.

Walter Loebenberg became involved with putting a museum together in South County. The phone rings one day. He says, "Toni, I need to speak to you." "Okay." I was invited to a board meeting of this fledgling little organization that was in Madeira Beach at the Kapok Tree. They had a board meeting and Walter wanted me to come, and he introduced me to people, introduces me as the mover and shaker of North County. Okay, and I'm looking around me. Sat down and I chatted for a while, and Walie says to me, "Okay, Toni, we have to work together on this. It's going to have to happen." I said, "Walter, I have a memorial that I'm working on. It's in my temple, on my temple grounds. There's no way I'm going to let it go. It's going to happen. That doesn't preclude doing the museum."

And things started rolling along. I became involved with the museum, of course, and more and more and more: on the board, then on the executive committee, then chaired the committee that wrote the mission statement on the museum, brought several exhibits on the museum, one that still is shown today. Jason Schwartz was the photographer, with the photographers of survival.

A cute little story: I'm in Toronto paying a *shiva* call to family and sitting around a table talking, and one of the young men at the table says that he just had a show at Yad Vashem. And my ear perked up. I said, "You had a show at Yad Vashem? What do you do?" And he tells me he's an artist, a photographer, and that he has done pictures, portraits of Holocaust survivors and had a showing at Yad Vashem. I said, "Oh, my God, we need to have you down in Clearwater—St. Pete."

CE: Wonderful, wonderful.

TR: Okay. And within a month or so the museum contacted him, and there he was. We had a donor that paid for all of this, but the contact was my cousin's friend from Toronto.

CE: I love that exhibit.

TR: Yeah, it's incredible, and again, what a small world. Being at the right place at the right time, that's what can make a big difference.

CE: So this—you were kind of outed at one point in the newspaper, but then when did you take on the identity of a survivor? Was there a moment?

TR: Yeah. I chaired the To Life dinner about four or five years ago at the museum and spoke at the end, the closing remarks, which were pretty strong, pretty strong. And at one point, I—we were talking about Holocaust deniers and I'm up on this stage with a thousand people—Judy Genshaft is sitting in front of my face—and I said, "And if you doubt that for one moment that the Holocaust existed, I am a survivor of the Holocaust."

CE: Wow, just like that!

TR: Well, just like that. Let me tell you, there was not a pin drop that you could not hear in that audience. That was the first time publically—publically, a thousand people—that I made that statement.

CE: And how did that feel?

TR: Okay. It was okay. It was time to take on that role. I had been hiding long enough. It was time to make that statement, it was time in that area to make a difference, because I have done so much work in every other Jewish organization that you can name in Pinellas County. It was okay. It was time.

CE: And why do you think you wanted to hide that?

TR: Why did I want to hide that? I think embarrassment, to a large point. You know, I let this happen. How did I fit into this?

CE: You let this happen? What does that mean?

TR: I'm sort of—I don't know. I feel that I'm a controlling individual to a large extent and I kind of can make things happen, and I let this happen and—

CE: You were a baby.

TR: A baby, I know. But I don't think of myself, or did not think of myself that way, as you don't think of your parents being twenty years old. I was not a baby. This happened around me, and it was going on. So there was a lot of embarrassment involved, and I'm not even sure why. But there was definitely embarrassment and then, even maybe more than that, guilt.

CE: That you did survive.

TR: Children didn't survive. Children my age are not here; it's a lost generation of people. And I did. So was there a reason? Yeah, I feel that there was. I just had to—I had to bear witness at that point. I had to admit to it. But I walked down the stage, off

the stage, and Judy ran over to me, gave me a hug and a kiss and she said, "Toni, I had no idea. I had no idea." So, nobody really knew. They knew, but they didn't really know.

CE: So now the identity feels?

TR: It's okay. I'm fine, I'm fine. I'm okay with it. I can handle it now. It took a long time before I could handle it. I don't know. Was there embarrassment? I can't even tell you why, but that is one of the feelings that I had.

CE: How do you think being a Holocaust survivor has impacted your life? I know that's a broad question.

TR: I think first of all, and most important, it's made me fight for the cause of the Jews above anything else in my life—except for my children, of course, and my husband; that's my first priority, but outside of my home, the rights of the Jews, the rights of people, but to me primarily of the Jewish people, because of what they have been put through. And that doesn't mean that others have not suffered in their ways also. But I find that the world helps others; the world keeps knocking the Jews.

When there's a catastrophe of any sort, Israel is there to help; and yet when Israel looks to the world for help in turn, they don't get it. They're always the ones that are being knocked down. And even the ridiculous flotilla[6] that was in the paper the other day: what a terrible thing Israel did, killed nine people. Of course the fact that this flotilla was not supposed to be there and that these poor soldiers were brutalized when they got on that ship—that, nobody wants to know about; that's not even a point of discussion. So is that a fair thing? It's not. You know, and Jewish people fight for the world, and yet the world doesn't fight for them.

CE: So you feel there's still discrimination?

TR: Oh, my God, unbelievable. Even in our own backyard, anti-Semitism is alive and well, absolutely.

CE: Do you ever experience it personally?

6On May 31, 2010 the Israeli Army boarded an aid flotilla on way to the blockaded Palestine city of Gaza; nine people were killed in the incident.

TR: You know, I'll tell you I experienced it very directly once as a child from a good friend of mine, and it hurt me terribly because I didn't understand it. I didn't know why Jews, "Pew, they stink." I didn't know why, why. And now, whenever I get into a mixed group and discussions come up, I am front and center and I will say, "Be careful what you say, I'm Jewish." And it's there; it's there. So I mean I'm up front and everybody knows what I stand for. There's no question about what I stand for and I'm okay with it and that's the way it's supposed to be. Because, as I said, you know, there were horrors in this world: floods and earthquakes. And the Israelis are right there, Johnny on the spot, first people to respond. And yet, the world would stand by and watch Israel fall and not do a thing about it. The United States would help, I have no doubt about that; but the rest of the world, no.

You know, on our Holocaust memorial at the temple, I have the camps listed and a quote: "While the world watched, while the world listened and remained silent." I don't ever want to hear that happen again. And whatever little tiny part I can assure that that will not happen.

CE: So that's really your mission?

TR: That is, absolutely, absolutely. And I will turn over to help the next guy, don't misunderstand. But nobody's there to help the Jewish people, nobody.

CE: Now, when you went back to Poland, what was that experience like?

TR: Very difficult. I didn't want to spend any money there. I didn't want to buy anything there. I just wanted to get out of there. I went there because I knew I wanted to go back and see what things were like, what I had remembered, what I thought I remembered. It was very uncomfortable.

We went into a synagogue in Krakow, an old, old, old decrepit building that had two caretakers—(clears throat) excuse me—that were non-Jews, elderly couple, and a—someone that ran the actual synagogue. The congregation probably had no more than twenty members there, and they were poor. It was pathetic, it was a tragic congregation. And I had money in my wallet. I opened up my wallet and I took money out and gave it to the gentleman that was—you know, the Jewish guy, the rabbi or whatever, *gabbai* or whatever he was. And I said, "Please make sure that this is used to buy books or whatever else you might need." And then the two caretakers came over to me and said

they need money, too. And I said, "I don't have any more. Look in my wallet, I don't have any more." And in Polish, one turned around to the other and said, "Look at the stinking Jew," not knowing that I spoke Polish. And I said to myself—

CE: "Get me out of here," is what I would have said.

TR: "Okay, out of here quick. Out of here, quick."

CE: Yeah. I have a couple—we have about five minutes—

TR: Okay.

CE: And I actually have three more—at least three more topics. Let's see if we can do them fairly quickly. How do you think it's changed—it changed you or impacted you as a mother, as a wife, as a person?

TR: As a mother, I needed to have total control of my children, and I think being children of a survivor, they are treated differently than others. There's something about being a child of a survivor. There's some control that I have to have.

You know, my younger daughter had an accident when she was in Largo High School. And she called me and she said, "I had an accident." Well, I have to tell you, as stupid as this was, I made her get out and stand in the street so that when I came by I could see that she's standing on her own two feet. Not wait till I turn into the parking lot to see her. I said, "Just get out there and let me see you standing in the street." So I think the control panic—yeah, the control of making sure that your child is okay, for every expense. And I'm sure every mother has that. But I find it overwhelming at times—and my husband also. I find that I have to have that over him, too. What are you doing, where are you going, where are you? Call me." That's how I am: overpowering at times. I like it.

CE: And do you dream about your youth, or do you have Holocaust dreams?

TR: I dreamt about my youth shortly after my dad passed away. They were pretty significant dreams. But not as a rule, no. No.

CE: And the last topic: what is the experience of telling your story? I mean, how do you feel afterwards? How do you feel during? How do you feel afterwards?

TR: Emotionally drained. Wiped out.

CE: Wiped out.

TR: It brings back a lot of memories that I don't enjoy going through. And if you look at it logically, it's something that has to be done, because the [Mahmoud] Ahmadinejads of the world will keep insisting that the Holocaust never existed.

Quick story, quite a propos: When I used to work in my husband's office occasionally, I would be at the front desk many times. A man came to the office and I opened up the window. "May I help you?" "Yes, I'm Mr. Schmidt. I'd like to see Dr. Rinde." Can he see you? So I said, "Yes," you know, "have a seat," what have you. Maybe he called to make an appointment earlier, I don't know. But to make a long story short, elderly man, thick Germanic accent, and I gave him his little form to fill out. And he fills out his form and he comes to the window: he's having some difficulty reading the English, could somebody help him? So I went out and offered my help to fill out his form. And as I'm talking to him his accent is there, in your face. And I said to him, "Oh, you were born in Germany? And what year were you born in?" He tells me what year. I said, "Oh, so you survived in Germany during the war?" "Oh, yes, yes, yes." I said, "Oh, my God, what a horrible thing. You know, can you tell me about it?" He said, "Well, there's nothing much to say. You know, the Jews make so much of the Holocaust; it really never happened like they say."

CE: Woo!

TR: Okay, so there I am, and I can feel the back hairs on my neck stand up at that point. I realized he was German, I realized what I'm talking about, what level I'm dealing with here. And I said, "Oh, you know, but you talk to so many Jewish people and they say they did this." He says, "Don't listen to them; they lie." So he filled out his form and I stood, he stood up and I said to him, "Let me tell you," I said. "Number one, I'm a Jew. Number two, I survived the Holocaust. Number three, you are not welcome in my husband's office." "You're a Jew? The man's name is Rinde. Rinde is a German name." I said, "He's a Jew, and he survived the Holocaust, too." And I took the papers, ripped them up in front of him and threw them on the floor. I said, "Out of here."

So the response, how do I feel? There's such emotion involved with it that you can't even begin to understand unless you've walked in those shoes. That's me.

CE: So you tell your story why?

TR: I tell my story because I want the young kids to understand. This is such a difficult world to live in. There's so much going on in our society, in the community that we live in, in the St. Pete area. There's so much bigotry, there is so much intolerance and so much hate and so much disruption and family life, that if I can prevent that happening to one child, that they don't have to go through what I went through, than it will make a big difference. I spoke to one little black boy at the museum who was there with his class, and he stands up there with his hands like this and says to me, "Well, you just don't understand. I live in a hood." I said, "Let me tell you, I lived in a hood. Let me tell you about my hood."

CE: Do you want to say one final thought? The camera is about to go off.

TR: Well, the camera's about to go off. I appreciate the time, the effort, the energy on Carolyn's part, on the photographer's part; needless to say, they were terrific. I hope this makes a difference in one life, and then, if that happens, I'm okay.

CE: Thank you very much, Toni.

TR: You're welcome.

End of interview