

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Esthy Adler
May 16, 1994
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Esthy Adler, conducted on May 16, 1994 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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ESTHY ADLER
May 16, 1994

Q: Can you tell us your name please?

A: My name is Esthy Adler.

Q: Where were you born?

A: I think I was born in _____, East Prussia, but I'm not sure. Any of the information that I'm likely to give you I think, but there was nobody close enough to me to corroborate any of the information, so I really am not entirely sure.

Q: Give us your earliest memories?

A: My earliest memories going to seaside place with my parents, which was not too far from where we lived. My guess is, and speaking to people, I was told that it was probably on the Baltic because _____ is not too far from the Baltic. That's really my earliest memory that I have of my parents and being there and not wanting to be left there because we had a caretaker with two children, and they were twins, and they were very mischievous and they always tried to play pranks on me, and I never wanted to be left alone there. So, one of the earliest memories I have is my parents bring me out there and wanting to leave me there and my absolutely refusing to stay without them. They didn't leave me, actually, they didn't. So, that's one of my earliest memories I have.

Q: Do you have any recollection of what they look like?

A: Very vague. I remember my mother. I seem to remember a dark haired woman rather pale. My father all I remember is that he wore glasses. Isn't that strange? I don't remember much more about him but that he wore glasses.

Q: Were you an only child as far as you remember?

A: Yes, yes, as far as I remember I was an only child.

Q: What do you remember after that? Did the war come?

A: Well, I do remember that on one of those trips to our summer place, the sea, I remember being very tense. I didn't understand clearly, but I understood that there was something going on and that my parents were very tense. They were trying to leave me there, and I didn't want to stay. Then I remember that we couldn't go back home. After that, we just couldn't go back home. Somehow, we had to go somewhere else, and we ended up going to a town where my mother's sister lived, and we moved into an apartment in the same building. I remember the language was different. I remember she had several children

including a pair of twins, twin girls, red headed twin girls. I remember. Isn't that funny some of the memories one has? And I remember they spoke a different language and they sort of made fun because I couldn't speak the same language, but it quickly sort of faded because I seemed to have learned enough words to get along. My guess is that was in Poland, and that's when I started learning Polish, really. So, that's some of the earliest memories I have. Then I have another memory of my mother dying. I remember she was ill, but very briefly. I have memories of my mother going out and bringing back donuts, jelly donuts, and I remember hugging her and she had snowflakes on her shoulder and her hair, and that's one of the early memories that I have. I assume it snowed quite a bit in Poland, so I probably had that experience more than once, but I do remember that. Then I remember my mother dying June the 9th and my father bringing me over to my aunt's place, which was in the same building only a different apartment, and I remember a great deal of upset in my life as a result of that.

Q: Were you aware that she had died?

A: Yes. My father told me. My father came to get me from my aunt's and told me that my mother had left. I think that's the way he put it. And that I wasn't going to see her anymore and that I had to be very brave. And then I remember a woman moving in with us, somebody who took care and cooked for us. Then still later, I remember my father remarrying, but that's only a vague memory, and I remember my aunt being very disapproving of the marriage. Apparently he made an unsuitable marriage, and I remember always a lot of talk about it behind closed doors, and as soon as I walked in there would be silence. I figured there was something wrong with the marriage. She was very young, the woman he married, and she was a very good looking woman and I suppose that didn't go down too well with my mother's sister and her family. So, that's some of the earliest -- and then suddenly a great deal of the war started intruding. I remember being on the street once with my father and Germans marching, and my father was holding on to me in such a tight way that I knew there was something wrong that he was tense. You know, how you communicate with children that there is something not quite right and he told me to be very quiet, which I was. I remember the Germans marching and a lot of the people on the street applauding as the Germans marched by. I remember going back home and there was a very somber atmosphere suddenly and neighbors kept on dropping in and there were meetings late at night. Sometimes I would hear through the slightly opened door that there were people meeting in the living room, you know, and talking and sort of making plans on what to do. I knew there was something very menacing going on, but I didn't know exactly what it was. Then the first inkling how menacing it could be. We were at dinner one day and I heard an enormous explosion. The noise, like my heart stopped for a minute. It was so close and so loud and I was told that that was a bomb that dropped very closely by. So, that's how it started. That's how I remember the war really. Then I remember people organizing themselves in a hiding place, a cellar was made ready for people to go down in case of bombings and in case of raids also by the Germans and the Poles together I assume. I remember very often being woken up and being asked to dress very quickly and very

quietly and everybody was trooping down into the cellar. After coming out on one of those raids, I wanted to go and see a friend who didn't live in the building but who lived just a couple of streets away, and my father said I couldn't go by myself anymore. I used to go by myself. It was just maybe around the corner, a couple streets away. So, he took me there and we walked over there and suddenly all I saw was a pile of rubble. Our building was gone, and my friend was gone and everybody in it was gone, and I remember coming back and for the first time feeling very threatened, really threatened, that maybe the same thing was going to happen to our building and to us in the building. That was a very threatening moment I remember very distinctly. From the on there was a whole series of raids and bombings which I --it got to a point where I was afraid to go to bed you know, because it was very frightening when it happened at night and I felt if I didn't go to sleep maybe it wouldn't happen, but it just kept on happening. On one of those raids we all trooped down to the cellar and I remember, there must have been bombs falling all over because the noise was just absolutely deafening. I remember very distinctly that stay in that cellar because we ran out of food and water. There were some children, and there was one child who kept on yelling for water. He sat next to me and that child, that little boy and I remember on one of those occasions when he started yelling his father put his hand on his mouth. I didn't see it because there was no light, but I could feel his arm and the little boy started struggling and kicking and then he just lay very still. My father said you have to be very quiet. You cannot do what he did. You cannot yell or cry or do anything. You do exactly as I tell you. He was telling me that in my ear. And I really did what my father told me. I really learned how to be very quiet, because even though I didn't fully understand what it meant I knew it was something final and terrible that had happened to that little boy. So, I knew that I had to do as my father said. We stayed in that cellar, and I don't know for how long because one day they just discovered us and they ripped open the doors and they got us all out in German _____, of course, and it was full of lice. It was at night and barking dogs and when I hit the air I fainted, so I don't remember what else happened there except when I woke up we were in the country, in barracks. I was with my step mother and aunt and the two girls, but all the men were gone. There were only one or two old men and all the other men were gone. They must have taken them away. That's the last time I saw my father. I don't remember ever seeing my father after that. So, that was the beginning really of most of my memories of war. That's the way it happened.

Q: Did you ask people what happened to my father?

A: You asked but you didn't get answers and I very quickly learned not to ask because it was annoying, and my step mother was very short tempered. And my aunt did a lot of crying and she had two little girls who were always sort of hanging on to her arms, so there was really nobody I could ask. There was some other people that I knew vaguely but I didn't know them well enough and I very quickly learned not to ask questions unless I would get an answer immediately I never asked a question again because I knew it was annoying. Very often they couldn't give me any answers and I was learning not to annoy people. It was too dangerous.

Q: How old do you think you were?

A: I don't know, maybe five, maybe six. I don't know. I don't know how old I was.

Q: Did you feel close to anybody after your father left at that moment?

A: I was clinging to my aunt, really, because my step mother I hardly knew, and she was not a patient or sort of nurturing kind of person. She was very distant, so I didn't feel comfortable with her, but I was trying to cling to my aunt, but she had two little girls. So, there was a limit of how much she could really do for me. So, I was learning very quickly to be alone, really.

Q: There were other children?

A: There were some other children of various ages, yes.

Q: Were you friends with them?

A: I didn't know them. I didn't know those children because I didn't know where they came. I'm not even sure that many of the people who were with in the cellar survived, because we were there for quite a while. My guess is a week, no food no water. That is a long time. I think probably a lot of the elderly died. The men were all taken away. They're weren't that many left, really. Some of them I knew by sight but I really didn't know them well enough and there weren't that many children in that cellar. There were my two cousins and that little boy who died and if there were any others I hardly remember them. I don't. So there weren't really. There were other children in that camp, but I didn't know them really.

Q: Tell us about the camp. What do you remember?

A: It was out in the country. It was surrounded by fields and trees and it was obviously wheat fields, is that what Poland must have had because that was in Poland. It must have been wheat fields. Also, you know, wood and such and there were mostly barns and people were housed very crowded in and every morning the younger women would be marched out at daybreak into the fields to work, and the others were left in the camp. At night they would come back and we would all congregate on that tree where they would bring out some food. Everybody went up. We all had a tin plate or something or wooden plate, even. I don't remember what it was really and we would get something to drink and some soup and a piece of bread. Then, one day they marched the women out as usual and then instead of leaving us in the barracks, the rest of us, the children and the somewhat elderly, people not well enough to march out, they rounded us and they started marching us to one particular wooded area and when we got there we noticed that there were a few men digging a sort of a deep hole and then they told us all to line up and I

noticed that they had machine guns lined up across from us and they opened fire on us. Then all we did was sort of topple into that hole into that grave. Those of us who weren't hit, fell anyhow because there were so many bodies milling about and I fell in there, and I must have lost consciousness for a while because when I woke up I started moving and I was sort of on top of bodies and there were other people on top of me and I felt some stickiness and I looked and it was blood. I wasn't sure if I was alive or dead, but I sort of sat up. By then there was nobody around, and I sort of climbed out. It was easy enough to climb out because it was on even ground. I climbed out and I sort of ran into the woods and I sat down in the bushes. There was very thick woods and bushes, a real undergrowth, and I sat down there because it was daylight and I figured I couldn't go out into the clearing. Then I heard a man with a dog coming, one of those big -- and suddenly I looked and there was the man and that huge German shepherd walking towards me and I thought, that's it. I thought that was the end. The German shepherd stuck his head in under the branches. Went like this and stuck his head out and continued with the man. To this day I don't understand what happened. I really don't understand because those dogs were really trained to hunt people, and I don't understand what happened, but they passed and I stayed there. I stayed there until it was dark and then I came back to the barracks to where I stayed with my stepmother and everybody wanted to know what happened because everyone realized what had happened, that something had happened, but they didn't know exactly what, and that particular barrack, you know, most of the people in it were missing and there were a few other barracks where probably some survivors had also gone back, but you didn't run back between barracks once you were into your barrack, so everybody asked me what happened. Then it was decided, there was one other little girl who had come back. I didn't even notice her, you know, I didn't even know where she was from, and it was decided that the two of us the next day when the women marched out to the fields that we would stay under the beds and we weren't going to move until they came back at night, and that's what we did. So, in the morning when everybody left the barracks, by then it was just the working women in the barracks, we too, stayed in the barrack and we stayed under the bed. I don't think we stayed there too long because shortly afterwards they rounded everybody up at sunset, you know, after they came back from the fields and they started marching the whole group. All the barracks were rounded up and there were a few children and the children were sort of hidden between women, large skirts covered the children, and I guess they didn't look too closely at the legs to notice that sometimes --.

Q: Were you under the skirts?

A: Well sort of. The skirts were sort of wrapped slightly around us, and they marched us to the railroad tracks and they shoved us onto trains and the trains left.

Q: Can we go back for a moment?

A: Sure.

Q: Were you wounded?

A: Yes. I had a wound -- at that particular time I had one wound in the back, one bullet wound in the back. Later on I got other wounds. I have about one, two -- I have seven wounds, seven bullet wounds. That was only one in the back that sort of grazed my back.

Q: Sideways?

A: Must have been sideways, I don't know.

Q: When you walked into the situation and you saw the guns, was there any time for something to go through your head or --?

A: There was no time. There was no time and there were people sort of falling all over you. People were yelling and trying to run and you know how it is when people try to run and they don't know in which direction because no matter where they looked they were either standing with rifles or there were machine guns set up, so there was no place to run really. No, I don't remember realizing what was happening. All I knew was that I was tumbling into the pit with everybody else. I didn't really realize what else I could do.

Q: When you touched this blood --?

A: I didn't know if it was mine or if it was somebody else's. When you are hit by a bullet it doesn't hurt right away, but when it gets cold it gets stiff and it hurts, so my back was bothering me and obviously when they were trying to take my shirt off when I got back to the barracks, it was sticking to my back. So, I must have had some kind of a bullet wound in the back because I remember it stinging by then I had learned not to yell or cry about anything. You learn very fast that there's no point in complaining, really. So, I think I had one of the wounds there, it happened to me in the back.

Q: Did you explain when the women asked you, did you explain what you saw?

A: Yes. I don't think anybody believed me about the dog. I don't think they believed me. They looked at me in such a peculiar way and one of the women said well I know they have a dog, and I know they walk around with that dog, so there was a dog and I could not have invented him because I don't think I was familiar with German shepherds and I described the dogs. Except I described him but he had green eyes. How can he have green eyes? I saw green eyes. I don't think a dog has green eyes, really, but I described you know adequately so they that they thought maybe I did see a dog but they couldn't believe that the dog walked right past me and didn't start barking or tearing me apart. That was the point, because I think that's what they were trained for. That was sort of a bizarre episode, that I just stopped talking about it. I decided I'm not going to -- but it stuck with me really, it really did stick with me that bizarre episode with the dog.

Q: Were you very hungry in this place?

A: I very often was very hungry, but what I remember most is thirst, always being thirsty and never having enough to drink. I think at one point I sort of lost my appetite for food except when you know you have a grumbling stomach, but I didn't know really. I was scared. I was always full of fear and hunger doesn't always assert itself when you're full of fear. Yes, I remember times that I was hungry, but not so much hungry as full of fear and very thirsty always. There was never enough to drink.

Q: Did the women -- I don't know if you remember, did they share their food with you?

A: You mean after this? Oh, yes. They did. They would always bring back a piece of bread or something. They couldn't bring back soup or something because they would have seen them, but they always managed to put a piece of bread in their pocket to bring back a piece of bread for us or something that could be carried unobtrusively. You know, they couldn't opening carry something because it would have given it away.

Q: When were you fed, at night?

A: Yes.

Q: Was there some soup?

A: There was some soup or potatoes or something like that or cabbage. There was very often cabbage and potatoes cooked together in sort of a soupy stuff which they handed out and a piece of bread.

Q: Did the women there also give you some of what they were given?

A: Oh, you mean when we were still in the open? When we were still in the open they gave us some too. After that supposedly there weren't supposed to be any children or any idle mouths to feed so from then on, no. But before that carnage, I don't know how else to call it, they did give us some food too, maybe not as much as the women, but we didn't need as much really. Mostly what I remember is cabbage and potatoes, you know, cooked with some water.

Q: But in spite of your fear, you were thinking very clearly where to go and what do to?

A: Oh, yes, definitely. I had to get out of that pit, that I knew. I had to wait until it was dark because I didn't feel too comfortable being out in the daylight uncovered. By then I had already learned that I couldn't be anywhere where I was seen. I did have the instinct to go back to the barrack where I had been with my stepmother. That I did. I always had sort of a very good sense of direction, even in the forest, how to navigate my way and I learned very quickly how to navigate my way through the forest.

Q: Was your stepmother there in the camp?

A: Yes.

Q: She had gone out and your aunt?

A: My aunt was killed with the two girls on that afternoon. She and my two cousins were killed on that afternoon, and I survived. Don't ask my why. It's a lottery definitely, yes, it really is.

Q: Okay, so now they take you out of the camp for transport.

A: We went sort of shoved into a railroad cars and what I remember -- that's a terrible thing. I really want to forget that because it was very crowded. I don't know how many cars they had and how many people. I don't even know where they got all those people. I didn't think there was that many people. It was very crowded and they really shoved us in. It was very hot and it stank and it was night, you know, and I was absolutely petrified. I was petrified then. When the car stopped and they let us out, there were like search lights and again I could hear the Germans. I could hear German spoken and dogs barking, lots of dogs barking, and they kept on pushing us, quick, quick _____, they kept on really pushing us to this side and to that side. I was so petrified that I don't remember the route that we took from the car. All I know is that we ended up in another barrack somewhere, but I do remember towers with guards just a little bit off the ground. The towers just high enough for them to be able to see what was going on and the entrance to the barracks and everywhere else. We ended up in that barrack. That other little girl was there too, and my stepmother and her mother. And then there was a third little girl in the barrack whom I didn't know and her mother and plus assorted other women. This was the women's camp, and again every morning they would open up the gates to get the women out into the fields, out in the working fields, and we three children were taken to a big shed which had a lot of carriages or not carriages but carts really, farming carts and such and we three girls were told to stay there and not to move from there the whole day until the women came back into the camp, and we did usually. I don't know for sure, but my guess is that all three of these women, my step mother and the two others were sort of the favorites of the guards very quickly became the favorite because they got privileges and I think the guard who usually patrolled that particular barrack knew that there were three children in there, but they didn't harm us. We just sort of got used to the routine. At night they would bring us into the barrack. The women usually brought some food back for us. They went somewhere else to eat. I don't know where. I never saw the place. And very early in the morning before they marched out the three of us would just sort of go in the shade, there was path along the barrack was here and there was a path here and we would go along the path to the shed, and we had to just run across another path and into the shed and we felt safe. One morning the guard

appeared at the door and told the women to walk out, and she took one of the little girls by the hand and said you come with me and he told the two of us, me and the other girl, you stay here, don't come with me. By then we didn't want to stay in the barrack, we thought maybe he was trying to save her and leave us there. So, we kept on following him and he kept on saying go back, go back. He was getting angry with us so we sort of crept after him along the barrack and he walked out with that little girl to that path that was between the barrack and the shed and there was a cot and a body was lying on that cot. It was the other little girl's mother and he took out a gun and he shot the mother and he shot the little girl. So, the two of us really very quickly ran back to the barrack. We realized -- we didn't know what had happened, but that night when the women came back, one of the women was the sister of the woman who had been killed with her little girl and she was crying. She had red eyes, and when she walked out the others were saying that her sister had small pox or something and they didn't want the whole camp or something contagious. I think it was small pox, because I remember noticing that the little girl had some pimples, so I figured it must be something like that, so they killed both of them to make sure that the rest of the camp didn't get infected. Why I don't know, you wonder why. But, from then on, it became even more threatening to be there, you know. We had sort of gotten used to a little bit to the routine but it became very threatening. And I was sort of turning more and more inward and to myself. I spoke very little. I never complained. From then on I was just sort of living full of fear. I remember waking up a couple of nights and seeing there was a candle and they had put a blanket over the door so that it wouldn't show through and they were digging the hole, the women under one of the walls. And my step mother walked over very angrily told me turn to the wall and don't look. You haven't seen anything. That's all she had to say to me, believe me, I didn't see a thing. What I realized later on was they were digging a hole to go out from under the barrack and since we were surrounded by fields there too, came a night when they woke us up, the two little girls, and the two mothers, my step mother and she and we all made our way under the holes and we were out in the fields and we started running and we walked all night long. So, from then on, the routine was, we walked at night and we slept during the day in the wooded area. Food was not often. Sometimes we would pick up apples so it must have been June, the late summer, it must have been the late summer because I remember also a lot of stubble on the ground where we walked which meant they must have cut the crops already. Sometimes we would steal something if something was to be stolen and once I remember a peasant, a woman caught us while we were sleeping and the two women started talking to her and asking her for food and they offered her a ring. One of the women had a ring and they offered her a ring and then she didn't come back and we were sure she was going to go and get the Germans or somebody and we were ready to leave and then she came back with some bread and cold boiled potatoes. They never tasted so good, so we did get some food. This whole trek was taking place because my step mother had a brother who was in the forest and she was obviously trying to join him so I don't remember chronologically how long that journey took, but eventually we did meet up with that group in the forest, which was a very motley group. What I remember best was that her brother was very angry that she had a child in tow and it didn't pay to have children around and he tried various

means to detach me of the group and dispose of me, but by then I had become very watchful and very clever about avoiding him.

Q: You mean literally trying to kill you?

A: Oh, yes, oh he would have definitely disposed of me. I knew it. I knew it, so I tried never to be left alone with him anywhere and with a group I knew I was a little safer because he couldn't very well start shooting into the group. That became my life for a while living in the forest it was full of escaped Jews from various camps. Incidentally later I thought that this camp was Treblinka before they installed the crematorium because the spot was right. Reading in books and I didn't know it until there was a gathering of Holocaust survivors here in Washington, quite a few years ago, ten years ago, longer than that and there was all kinds of books which Jim picked up, my husband, and reading up on it sure enough Treblinka was to begin with a women's work camp, and then they installed the crematorium, so we must have left the camp, escaped it just before it became really locked up and they started disposing of everybody. So, we must have just come out, because the area was right, and it was a fairly large women's camp. I remember that the gatherings of women there. It was a large camp, so it must have been Treblinka. It wasn't just another camp like the first one we were at. So, there we were in the forest and during the summer it was perfectly okay, and there was quite a motley crew in the forest. They were escaped people from the Russian Army deserters, there were Poles in it, women, children, lots of young women all of them carrying around guns, and armed, which was very strange. I don't know where they got their guns really and several children. We lived in the forest and at night they went to raid the farms and they brought food back, so we did have some food in those places really. Never enough, never enough food and water was always a problem because the Germans were very often hunting us and if they had any suspicion if there was a group in the area they would poison the waters. So, it was very-- we were told not to drink anyway. You had to be very cautious where you got your water. The winter was very rough and they just kept on hunting the groups. You know you never knew when you were going to be denounced by some people in the area who had been robbed of food or such, and then set upon by the Germans, or the Poles more like it. There were more Poles than Germans at this point who were doing the hunting. They were the Poles who were in uniforms, in those black uniforms. On one of those hunts they kept on driving us like you would hear shots. You would run in a certain area and they drove us out in a clearing and when we got out in a clearing we realized that they had machine guns set up on three sides of the clearing. Then they just opened fire and everybody was running back and forth and back and forth and on that particular hunt my step mother was hit and died. I saw her die. I literally saw her die. For some reason I escaped again. There weren't too many left of us. Again, we retreated towards the forest and we stayed put until it was dark, completely dark. Usually their favorite time of hunting was towards the end of the day. Then we sort of congregated together. We couldn't drink because they poisoned the water. That's when I was really wounded because I had several bullet wounds from that and so did the other little girl. The other little girl was with us still. I don't remember any other children left

except her and me. Then they decided, the people who were left, that they had to -- we couldn't stay in the forest the way we were. We were going to die, so they took both children to different villages and all I remember is that they brought out a peasant, mine was Polish speaking, I don't know what the other one was because I don't know where they took her because some of the villages were Ukrainian speaking villages and some of them were Polish speaking villages. They told him that he had to take me in and take care of me and if anything happened to me they would lock him and his family in house and burn the whole house down. And they did that. They used to do that, so he knew they weren't bluffing. So, he carried me home and they put me on top of the bread oven. They would have a bread oven and then around the corner on top there was a little knish like and you could climb into the knish and it was warm. And I must have been very sick because I remember very little. I remember waking up and them feeding me some water. I must have run a very high fever and then they told me at night they would put me there and then they said they couldn't keep me there during the day because they had two boys or three boys even and the neighbors would sometime come in, although not often. There was very little traffic between the houses and their house was sort of at the edge of the village. I guess that's one of the reasons they picked that house. So, they told me he was going to dig a hole in the storage room. He was going to lift a couple of planks and dig a hole and I would have to be there during the day and then at night they would come and get me and put me on top of that oven to warm me up again. That whole winter I remember that constant going back and forth between that little hole where I was just sort of reclining. It was just barely big enough to recline in and at night being taken out. I was completely stiff, and put on top of that oven to thaw out. It was pretty cold that place. I couldn't make any noise either. I wasn't supposed to make noise because if anybody came around the house they might hear if any noises were coming out of there, so I kept very quiet. I was sick a lot of the time. I probably was delirious. I don't know, but quiet, in a quiet way. Then, the spring came and the peasants said to me you know during the spring the neighbors come and go and everybody is out in the field and if they know you are here they could easily tell that to somebody. So, they talked it over it with me. They were good people, you know. They really were good people because they really sort of nursed me and they said what I should do is he was going to bring me part way to the next village and then I should walk to the next village. They were going to provide me with some shoes and clothes. I didn't have any shoes or clothes by then. I don't know what happened. I suppose they must have cut off my shoe because I had -- and I was going to have some shoes from the boys and they would give me some clothes. His wife was making me some clothes, and I was going to tell them that I came from that village, from the Polish village and I needed to hire myself out because my family was too poor and could they take me in as a cow hand. That's what happened. I walked to the next village, and they hired me as a cow hand. So, from then, what I remember is spending a lot of time in the fields with the herd, driving the herd in the morning and staying in the field and I was told very precisely which fields they were to graze when because they didn't want them to just ruin the field so you had to drive your cattle to one field, let it graze a certain amount of time and when the sun was at a certain point you drove your cattle to another field and come back at night and they attempted to teach me

how to milk the cows which I wasn't too successful at the beginning, but I learned eventually, and assorted chores around the farm, which I did and I stayed on that farm in that Ukrainian speaking village until the war was over. I remember the Russians coming and being in the village. Actually the villages were just as happy to get rid of them. By then the Germans never put food there because they were somewhere else already so you hardly ever saw any Germans. Nobody was doing any hunting there. They were such remote villages. There was no electricity, no sewers, no water, nothing like that there, so they didn't bother. The safety lay in that they were so remote, those villages. I remember the Russians coming through, the Russians soldiers being stationed right outside the village and some of the houses. I remember the guns going and I was told that that's when they had the siege of Warsaw. You could here the guns, all through the country almost. They were those big _____ that the Russians drove in. When they were all gone, that peasant came back and said now you can come back and live with us. So, I went back to the first village and they were pretty much decided that they were going to keep me. They had boys and she wanted a girl. She wanted to teach a girl how to sew. She needed somebody to help her how to make all the clothes and to spin, and actually I had learned how to spin in the other village during the winter. I remember one winter when I was taught how to spin and how to sew also and how to weave. They were completely self sufficient in those villages. They made all their clothes, all their food, everything. So, I was with this Polish family and for all I knew that's where I was going to stay for the rest of my life.

Q: I want to go back to the camp just before the escape. You had said that you were not so close with your step mother, but clearly she seemed to have wanted to take you with her.

A: I'm not sure really. She was very young. I think that one of the reasons she took me with her was because the women in that barrack chose the women with the children to escape. I think that was her ticket out, really. I'm not sure she would have been one of the ones who would have been chosen to escape if it hadn't been that she had a child with her. So, in a way, you know, we were mutually what's the word, necessary to each other. So, that's why probably she took me with her.

Q: But she also knew that her brother was in the forest?

A: Yes. I don't know how she knew it. I don't know how she knew it. I have no idea how the information came to her but she knew he was there and we definitely had a destination when we were going. We weren't just ambling around the countryside. They tried to walk in a certain direction. Of course they didn't have maps or anything like that, but my guess was they knew their general direction which they wanted to walk. And my guess is they might have missed the group a couple of times and then finally met up with the group.

Q: Now, you said her brother wanted to kill you?

A: Yes.

Q: But there were other children in the group also. Do you think he didn't want any children there at all or was there something about your presence with his sister?

A: I think it was my presence because I was a burden to him and his sister. You know, in a group like that you never knew how long you were going to stay with a group and those groups were forming and reforming all the time. You might leave one group. There were many of those groups roaming around the countryside and the forest and he didn't know how long he was going to stay with the group and he obviously was going to take his sister and why did he need a child at that point. I remember them as being very young, both of them. So, I don't bear grudges. I understand it. A child was a burden.

Q: Was this a resistance group as far as you could tell?

A: Yes, indeed, some of them were resistance because I remember they would go off on missions at night to mines somewhere and to blow up certain point so they were a resistance, definitely. They were part of the resistance group.

Q: Did you have any particular job in this group, any kind of responsibility as a child?

A: I don't think I had a responsibility, but I seemed to acquired a peculiar what do you call it, a peculiar calling. I seem to have an extra sense of when we were going to have the Germans descend on us in a hunt and I seemed to dream about my mother the night before. I have talked about it to some people. It's a ridiculous thing to say that I had a premonition or something but some people interpret it as I probably I had extra good hearing and I could hear maybe hooves of horses or vehicles rolling somewhere and I could feel it because we all slept on the ground obviously. That probably would trigger a dream where I was in danger and I would always wake up yelling and if I woke up yelling, everybody packed camp. So, I sort of became the mascot in a way. You know people who are in danger, whose lives are in danger are extremely superstitious and anything that helps them stay alive they will clutch at. That wasn't as far fetched as other things when you're trying to stay alive and you really don't know where your next salvation will come with.

Tape #2

Q: Esthy, you were explaining about this dream and your prophetic --?

A: Powers. I don't really remember it that accurately, but I think the first time when I woke up, the dream, when I woke up I was yelling because I was frightened and I think the dream was, my mother, whom I knew was dead was chasing me and I didn't want her to catch me, and I was running. You know how you run in your dream and you're sort of slowed down, and then I realized that I had a scarf, so I took the scarf and I let it float behind me like a sail and I was sort of jumping from stone to stone and floating away while my mother was trying to catch me. I was running faster and faster and I felt myself falling, and that's when I would wake up yelling. That happened to me the first time in the camp as far as I can recall. Of course someone was near me trying to put a hand on my mount to prevent me from yelling, and then everything around the camp was talked about and known.

Q: Wait one second.

A: So, they must have discussed it and they asked me what my dream was. Somebody came up to ask me. There was always a leader in a camp, you know, somebody was always a person whom they looked up to this was a man and he came to ask me what I had dreamt and I told him and he sort of listened and didn't say anything and then the next time it happened the woman woke me up, but this time she wasn't trying to stifle my yells. She just woke me up and I stopped screaming and she went and got the man and he came back and he asked me, and I told him it was the same dream. So, he left, and very shortly after the order was given to break camp. Usually an order would come and everyone would start packing up their immediate belongings and we started moving. And from then on, ovariotomy I had the dream, we packed camp and we moved, so I figured it must have something to do with my dream. Somebody once asked me whether I wasn't tempted to just sort of give false signals. And I said absolutely not, believe me. I wasn't about to test anybody to give false signals because it could have been disastrous and then where would I have been. I had to depend on the good will of others to survive and this was no way of doing it, so you didn't give false signals.

Q: Did this give you a different place in the group?

A: Yes. I felt safer. I felt much safer. I felt for instance very often at night we went on long marches when we were changing camps and from then on there was always somebody if I was lagging too far behind, somebody would pick me up for a while, sort of carry me around for awhile, carry me on, and then let me down. Very often before I was afraid I was going to be left behind and from then on I sort of sensed that I wasn't going to be left behind. I was going to be carried along if I faltered and if I stayed too far behind, which happened some times. It wasn't intentional, but I was sometimes so exhausted and my feet hurt that I just couldn't walk anymore and I would fall behind, so it was sort of a

helping hand that would come along and sometimes even two people would relay themselves and carry me for a little while. So, my status definitely did change from then on.

Q: What you didn't describe was how they connected your dream with a raid?

A: Well, the next day there was a raid. There was a raid after the first dream, and so the next time they obviously talked to each other and they decided to pack up camp and sure enough there had been a raid on that camp, because they sent back somebody and they found that the water had been poisoned. They got to test the water from time to time on a dog or an animal they would test it. There was no other way of testing the water. They decided there must have been a raid too because the water was poisoned. So, from then on I became the lightning rod. Is that the word for it? If I had the dream they would pack up camp and go. As I mentioned that before when I checked with somebody the explanation that makes the most sense to me is that I must have had very good hearing, which I did. I had excellent hearing and eyesight too, that I must have heard some vibrations on the ground. Horses hooves or carriages being rolled along and that might have set me off that there was danger coming. When you live with danger, even when you're very young, you often develop an extra sense about when danger is coming and where it's coming from. You really do, so that must have been my sense.

Q: What about clothes in this group. What were you wearing?

A: Rags, whatever you could to keep warm. Feet were usually -- shoes didn't last very long or if they got wet they got too hard and you couldn't wear them so whatever you had you would wrap around your feet particularly if you had to march around at night because you were going through all kinds of terrain, like fields that had been harvested and where the stalks are very hard to the soles of the feet. Or pebbles or things like that, so you did the best you could. You stole clothes. Very often they steal food, they stole clothes too. It was very hard to keep warm during the winter. During the summer you didn't care really what you wore, but during the winter it was very hard to keep warm. I don't remember ever washing now that I think of it. We must have washed sometimes, but I don't remember that. I guess it wasn't very important.

Q: Do you remember getting thinner and thinner?

A: I don't remember noticing. Probably I did. Probably I was never very fat, but I don't remember noticing that I got thinner. No, I never really looked at myself. You never looked at yourself naked, well maybe I really thought of it I would have looked at the arms, but you tried to keep warm, you know, you try to keep bundled up. You don't notice whether you're getting thinner or not.

Q: Was there lice because people weren't clean?

- A: Yes, oh yes, absolutely lice. I'm sure we were all covered with lice. I remember having lice when I came to France. They had to shave my head. They shaved my head completely because I had lice. I have a funny story to tell you about my shaved head but maybe I will do that later so that we do it chronologically. Any other questions about that, about the forest.
- Q: When you were caught and they were machine gunning you and you were shot, where were you shot?
- A: I have four wounds on my left leg, two bullets. One entered at a peculiar angle. One went through the leg and came out the back. One bullet went into my right breast and came out under my arm and that one must have touched a little bit long because I was spitting blood for a long time, so it must have touched the lung slightly.
- Q: But you were nonetheless able to run and escape this and they didn't chase you?
- A: No, because they were further away behind the machine guns. So they weren't chasing because they would have been caught in the machine guns. They weren't chasing. They were just sitting behind the machine guns really. They weren't chasing you.
- Q: Nobody had anything to help you with the wounds?
- A: No, no. As a matter of fact, I think they probably must have just put some rags on my legs and my other ones so there wouldn't be a trail of blood when they carried me to the edge of the forest and they had the farmer pick me up. They must have bandaged it up with rags because it would have been too dangerous to have a trail of blood I suppose. When you get hit with bullets, you don't feel, unless it hits a bone or something like that, it takes a while for the wound to stiffen up and hurt really. At the beginning it doesn't hurt.
- Q: Do you have any idea about how many people were in the group prior to this machine gunning episode and then how many after?
- A: It's difficult for me to tell because the group was -- there were people coming and going all the time, new arrivals, people who departed and went outside, and I really didn't have any sense of counting either. It was a large camp. There were lots of people, but how many I couldn't tell, no.
- Q: But obviously afterwards there were enough people that this farmer would take very seriously this threat?
- A: Yes. Well, they never knew because usually they would only send two or three people on any raid or on any mission. You know, they wouldn't send too many people ever so he had no idea how many survivors there were there.

Q: Were you frightened with this farmer at first?

A: I was too sick to be frightened. By then I was really sick. I must have gone into delirious state because I remember very little. I just remember them feeding me something to drink or a little bit of food, some soup, some potato soup or something. I couldn't even eat. I don't remember being frightened because I was beyond that. I thought I was truly dying. No. I wasn't frightened by the peasants.

Q: How long were you with this particular family before you went --?

A: Throughout the winter. I was there through the winter until that following spring when it became dangerous, when they were going to go out into the fields and when the neighbors were going to start dropping in and the boys were going to be in and out, it became too dangerous for me to stay there, so one evening, one night, he took me halfway and then he told me to stay in the fields until day and during the day to walk the rest of the way to the village and then --.

Q: But you felt kindness from these people?

A: Yes. I didn't feel that they meant me harm, and I had developed a sense already who meant me harm, but they didn't, so I felt comfortable with them.

Q: And the boys?

A: They were wild. They were wild, the boys, but when I left the boys had never seen me, remember. I was hidden during the day and I slept at night outside and before day break he would come and put me back in the hole so those boys never saw me until I actually came back from the other village after the war was over. They never saw me the boys, but I could hear them, you know, and they were wild boys.

Q: Now was it common for young children to go from village to village this way?

A: Yes. Sometimes you would have a farm which was particularly impoverished where they couldn't feed all the people that they had in their family and it was quite common for the youngsters to go and hire themselves out as cow herdsman, whatever you want to call it, and for the older ones to hire themselves out as laborers, so that was not at all uncommon, no. Nobody thought twice about it. They told me what name, by what name I was called, and they told me the end name, which I have forgotten since, that I was to tell the people who hired me that I came from that farm, which was their name so it would have been if they wanted to inquire it would have been -- but they never did anyhow because the two villages the Ukrainians never talked to the Polish and the Polish never talked to the Ukrainians, so we were pretty safe that nobody was going to go in to inquire.

Q: Did they give you a picture or anything to take with you?

A: No, no, they didn't give me a picture. I just went and but he used to drop in from time to time to come and see me so they knew that I had somebody to whom I was attached and it was obviously a peasant. You know, it was obviously a Polish peasant so they never thought twice about it. Then when the war was over, he came back for me and he said he wanted, would I like to come back and live with his family and I said, "oh" and he said well, mother and I -- I think that's how he called her -- mother and I talked about it and we have the sons but we need a girl. Would you like to be the girl and I said sure, so I went back with him. She taught me how to sew. She liked very much my sewing. I was a good seamstress, so they were quite pleased with that.

Q: Were you pleased to go there?

A: Oh, yes, I was very interested in what was going on in the farm. I was fascinated by the seasonal business of the sewing and then the crops were growing and the planting of potatoes and the vegetables and taking care of the livestock and things like that. I thought it was very fascinating. I was fascinated also by the fact that they did everything themselves. Like they made their clothes and they built everything and when it came to the fall they would all slaughter together. They came to help if they slaughtered a pig or a calf and then what they did with the meat and how they kept it for the winter. I thought it was very fascinating, so I stayed there and I thought that was going to be my life. I was still going to be -- obviously my job was going to do a lot of sewing and weaving because I seemed to have a knack for that. That was going to be my worth. It beat the camp, let me tell you, so I had no complaints about that, plus the outdoors. I always loved the outdoors, being out in the open, so that pleased me very much, too.

Q: In the Ukrainian village were you still worried because the war was going on but by then did you have a sense that you were pretty safe?

A: I was worried. I wasn't sure. I was worried, and life was hard in that Ukrainian village. They were violent people. I never had a chance to see what it was like in the Polish village before because I was always hidden but in the Ukrainian village they were very, very violent like for instance the farm I was on there was a mother and a son and the son when he got drunk he beat up his mother and he would beat up anybody and I learned how to run very fast because I made myself scarce. They beat up each other and they would get drunk periodically so it was violent.

Q: Were you ever beaten?

A: No. He never caught me. When he was sober he was okay, and I was out in the fields most of the time and I always did what I was told to do so there wasn't really any reason but when he was drunk he could have easily beaten me up, but I was always very scarce.

I could tell already when he was working himself up to a state of drunkenness where he was going to beat somebody.

Q: Did people talk about the war?

A: Hardly ever. Mostly they talked about the daily work and what they were doing, and then while I was there on that farm he got married and that was an enormous event because at Polish wedding, literally it is a Polish wedding. It takes place a whole week of festivities when there's a Polish wedding. That was a lot of fun because everybody gets into the act. So, I was -- but he beat his wife too. It didn't take too long before he beat his wife. So, that was sort of interesting and that was a big event and obviously a wedding takes place it's a big event in the village.

Q: How was your food intake at this point?

A: I ate like the peasants did. We all ate together. In the morning there would be mashed potatoes and if we were lucky there would be a little bit of bacon that would have been fried and mixed into the mashed potatoes. If there was a little bit of butter milk. The butter we never had because that was taken maybe once or twice a year and they took butter and eggs you know. They exchanged it, they bought it with other homes for necessities like plows and things like that, or seed. It was a very simple diet, but I don't remember being terrifically hungry. Bread was baked once a week and the bread was stored. There was always meat from the slaughter that took place in the fall, and it was hung in that storage room. Bacon and sausages, blood sausages. A lot of blood sausages, I liked it too, actually. During the summer there was a lot of vegetables. Cabbage, the potatoes were delicious. Let's see what else, there was a white cheese which they made in the cloth from the butter milk which was very good, which mixed with potatoes. Everything was mixed with potatoes. Every once in a while a chicken died. I killed one once unintentionally. You had the chicken for the eggs so you often didn't kill the chickens but when a chicken wanted to sit on the eggs, the farmer's lady would say to me just don't get in cold water for a little while, it will stop sitting on the eggs. Well I dunked it a little too much and the poor chicken just you know got too much of a dunking so we cooked the chicken of course. Somebody asked me once, didn't you kill another one. I don't think that would have went over too well if I had killed another chicken. So, every once in a while there was some fowl. A lot of meat from the pig. They mostly killed pigs. They didn't kill calves because they needed them for the dairy products. I don't remember any lambs at all on that farm. There must have been farms that had lambs, but not in that particular village. It was mostly cattle, cows and poultry. Hens, and geese and such. They would make a goose for Christmas. They would do that. The food was skimpy but enough to keep you healthy. I think people now a days would approve of a diet like that. They grew a lot of fruit in that part of Poland. There were apple trees and pear trees, small ones, the fruit was never large, but it was quite good, and cherries, yes, that's the main fruits that they had.

Q: You weren't thirsty anymore?

A: No, water, there was plenty of water there and everybody drank water. You drank something called _____, I believe, which was made from cabbage which had a slightly fermented tasted almost like apple cider only it was much sourer than apple cider. Lots of cabbage. We had lots of beats, lots of beats, lots of cabbage.

Q: Did you play at all?

A: No. How could you play? No, there was no time. Except I could sit. I could sit in the fields when I was watching the herds and the playing consisted of watching what was going on in a stream or birds, watching birds. I loved to watch the birds. Playing, there was nothing to play with really. What would one play with.

Q: Were there other children?

A: No. Because all the herds were kept separately and they would never graze together because each one of them had their plots and they would graze separately. They would not graze together. There were children in the village, but and sometimes they ran in a pack but I don't ever remember playing with them. I think part of the reason might have been that they thought I was Polish and they were Ukrainian, so that was already it created a distance. They did not like each other, so they pretty much let me alone.

Q: Did you think about particular thing when you were sitting there watching the herd, about what had happened to you?

A: I kept on wondering about some of the people where they were. That, I kept on wondering, where are these people now. That's mainly what I was thinking about. Very often I was also very tired. You know you get up very early. You get up before the sun's up to get the herd out and when you come back and you have to do other chores, by the time you are -- during the day I was always tired. It took me a while to wake up. I would be out there, and it was cold also, and the June there was a slight frost even in the summer, on the grass. I spent a great deal of energy and thought on how to keep warm because I always seemed to be freezing in the morning. I never had the right clothes for that, and I never had the right shoes. So, I would always try to figure out how to keep warm, really.

Q: Did you remain having dreams about your mother or did they stop after the woods?

A: They stopped after that. They did stop after that, yes. I don't remember after that. From time to time I had them later on. Usually when I was in danger. When I felt myself in danger, I would have that dream, it would come back but usually it was because I was in danger in one way or another. Strange.

Q: So, then he brings you back to the farm and you think this is going to be --?

A: That's right. Then I got to know the boys who were very rowdy and I was sort of very sedate. And the mother used to always protect me. If they chased me too much I would always go and hide behind her and she would make a game of that. She like that. She liked having a girl. And I thought that was going to be my life and it wasn't so bad, really. So, I was there, and one day I came in and there was a couple, a man and a woman and the peasant said to me that they were people who had come they wanted to take me away and I said why. So, they started explaining to me that they were Jewish people and they thought that they wanted to pick up all the Jewish children who were hidden in the countryside. They I remember they mentioned money that they would give some money and the peasant got angry and he said we don't want money. We want to keep her. By then I had been baptized and I had been given a little bit of catechism whatever you could get orally because I couldn't read or write, nor could they for that matter, probably. Everybody got it the same way. I was going to church with them on Sundays, and I did not want to go back to the Jews. I felt I really was catholic and for some reason I felt like the Jews were really the ones who killed Christ, so I wasn't going to get mixed up with the Jews.

Q: And you had no recollection of coming from Jews?

A: No. I probably came from a non practicing home and that is why I have no recollection of anything. So, I don't remember how it ended but they left those people and the next thing I know we were working in the fields. By then you know the spring was really advancing and we were working in the fields and I liked to feed the chickens so I was always sent back to the house and I would feed the chickens. I started feeding the chickens and I hear a car drove up and here that man and that woman and she jumps down and she grabs me and she pushes me into the cart and off they ride with me. I look back and the last picture I see is the peasants running after them shaking their fists and they drove off with me. So, I was pretty miserable. I really felt miserable and they drove me to a town somewhere. I don't remember much about the town except for some reason, I don't know why, but when I see in those westerns, those make shift towns, I'm always reminded of that town. But anyhow, they drove me to that town and that town was a collection center for children and I stayed with a family for a while in one of the houses consisting of a man who had lost his wife and married his wife's sister and his daughter and his wife absolutely doted on his daughter. Every day she had a tutor coming in to tutor them in English because they were going to go to the United States. They were waiting for papers to go to the United States. And she was taking such good care of that girl and I kept on thinking wistfully God I wish I had someone to take care of me like that. I felt really disoriented in that period. I felt very homesick for the farm, and I felt very uprooted and I felt sick. I just felt sick. So, I don't remember too well that whole period except the next thing I remember, the next memory I have is being Bratislava, but I don't remember how we got there, you see. I have no recollection of how we got from

that place to Bratislava. But in Bratislava was a stop off place and I got very sick there. I don't know what I had. I must have had the measles or something, but I was very ill and most of those children left except for one girl whom you saw I have a picture of. I don't know how long I was sick, but then other children started arriving and then we all were again a large enough group for us to continue and by small stages -- then I remember being on busses, and they got us out from Czechoslovakia. I think they probably must have gotten us through East Germany and the West Germany and then to France. In France we ended up in a home in Barbizon which is very close to Fountain Bleu. It was a beautiful spot. It was truly beautiful. That's where I got my first orange. That's where I got my first taste of chocolate, and that's where they taught me to eat with a knife and fork -- not a knife, a fork. We started with a fork. I don't think I ate with a knife for a while. That's where they started teaching us things. We were like savages really. That's when I had my head shaved because I was full of life. I was also ill, I was quite ill. I couldn't eat properly, you know. My stomach wouldn't digest regular food. I became very friendly -- it was so strange because the director of the camp was a man by the name of Eric Schott and he drove by and there was a group of us playing and he opened the door and he motioned for me to come into the car and he did. And he took me to the home where they lived which was on the grounds, but it was very extensive grounds there, so he drove me to their home and they gave me upstairs I met his wife and his son. He had a son, and they gave me what you call in French _____, which is in the middle of the afternoon and they gave me little sandwiches with cheese and a piece of chocolate and some milk. I thought that was absolutely delicious. So, that was a wonderful place. I have very good memories. Once he asked me if I wanted to go and see what the sea was like and I said sure. I hadn't seen the sea in a long time. I remembered it from the place we had, but he took his son and me to Brittany for vacation for a whole week's vacation and it was absolutely wonderful. It was for the first time I started eating certain fish which I had never had and shrimp and things like that. I had never tasted anything like it before. That's when I rejoined civilized life, really. The older children in that group then left for Israel except for two, that little girl who stayed with me in Bratislava. She found an aunt and uncle in Paris and she went to live with them, and I visited very often with them, and then when all the children had left, the director and his wife and their son moved to Paris and I moved with them. That's when I really started school in earnest. I had started school already in Barbizon, but it was a one room school with different grades. When we moved to Paris, I really started regular school and it was very hard at the beginning because I didn't speak the language yet and I had to learn to read and write at the age of 11 and the French are very strict where they place you. So, they immediately decided that I had to go into a class with younger kids which wasn't very good for my morale. The first day that we had you know the spelling test, the teacher put my spelling on the board as an example of what not to do. Twenty-three spelling mistakes, so I decided I had to learn fast, which I did, I did.

Q: Esthy, when they kidnapped you, were you screaming?

A: Yes.

Q: Did they talk to you?

A: They were just holding me. They said I had to come back. I had to come back. I belonged to the Jews and I had to come back amongst the Jews. Oh, yes, I was screaming indeed. I was fighting.

Q: Did you decide I have no power here, I will just take what coming as you did all the other things?

A: I had no choice. I really had no choice.

Q: Did you think about running away?

A: Where was I going to run? Where would you run, you know, at that point. If somebody fed you you stayed put because if you run who was going to feed you. So, I wasn't going to run because I didn't know exactly -- I could have never found my way back to the farm, never. I knew that. I was not going to be caught. I knew how violent the peasants can be, and I wasn't going to be caught somewhere like that. So, running away wasn't an option really.

Q: What point did you stop fighting or feel as if okay --?

A: Well, in Barbizon I sort of began to have a glimpse of another life. When we went away to Brittany which I found absolutely beautiful, I particularly liked _____, I remember. I have pictures with their son from _____ with Rene, who was the son of the Schotts. And, I began to have a glimpse of another life and then when I started school I very quickly learned how to read and write. When you're ready you learn it very quickly. You don't need several years like you have it here to learn how to read and write when you're really of a certain age and you're really motivated. So, I learned how to read and write very quickly and I learned French very quickly and I started reading a lot and that opened up to me a whole new world once I started reading. I knew now that maybe it wasn't so bad what happened to me, and I absolutely loved France. I found France beautiful. Everywhere I looked -- the city of Paris I just couldn't get enough. I used to just wander around by myself everywhere and it was safe at the time to wander around anywhere you wanted in Paris. I thought that that was the most glorious city that I had ever seen which it was. I was pretty happy by then and I was adjusting very well, and I was learning lots of things. I was going through school. I became very good at writing. I was writing poetry in French. I always found teachers who were always helpful and always pushing me along. I enjoyed that. It became very challenging to me and very stimulating not to disappoint them, you know, that the French are very big on competitions and regional tests and this and that, and I became a regular at the various competitions in writing and such because all of them wanted to send me because obviously I had a gift in that area. So, I began to really enjoy it. I had to work very hard,

because the French school system at the time was very difficult to get through. It was very challenging and I had a lot of work to do and a lot of catching up to do. It was ridiculous, I remember doing calculus and they discovered my multiplication table or my additions. And we didn't have little calculators at the time and you really had to be able to calculate and I couldn't. So, somebody would always step in to coach me so I would have several weeks of coaching in addition to the regular school. They were sending me for competition in essays and they discovered that I didn't know the rules of grammar in French. I had skipped the grade where there were rules of grammar so I had a tutor assigned to me from school for a couple of weekends to teach me what the rules of grammar were. You needed to know the rules of grammar when you off to a writing competition. So, I was very busy and I was very caught up in that life, and I really enjoyed it very much.

Q: You felt close to both Mr. and Mrs. Schotts?

A: I felt very close to Mr. Schott. Mrs. Schott, no. Mrs. Schott was a bit of a basket case and a difficult woman, although I couldn't blame her after she lost her son. Honey died when he was --I was -- how old was I when he died? 13 or 14, and he must have been 17 years old and he died of cancer, a young boy. So, that was a very terrible blow to them.

Q: Were you close to him?

A: I was very close to him, yes. He was very protective of me, and I was delighted to have a big brother who was protective of me, so I felt very close to him. I felt very close to Mr. Schott, in fact, I named my son after him. My son is named Eric after Eric Schott. And I got to know his family in England, and I became very close with his family. He had a brother and a sister-in-law and a nephew who lived in England and I became very close to them. In fact, I still see them. Unfortunately he died, and his nephew died a couple years ago, but we spent some time before he died together because they were very important people in my life. I made friends in Paris and I was doing lots of things.

Q: So you put your life together?

A: Yes, I did. I really did.

Q: Did you consider yourself a member of the Schott family?

A: Up to the time when he died. After that I didn't. After that I had a whole series of places I lived. She wanted to remarry and after all to have a young girl on her hands was not the best thing for her. So, I went to live with a friend of theirs who was my tutor. Eric Schott was my tutor first, and they appointed an assistant to him in case something happened to him, and when he died, I went to live with that other family by the name of Katts, and they were a terrible family to live with. They really were. Actually, I don't

think he particularly picked on me. They had two sons and he was equally cruel to his two sons, so it was not a good place to live. I stayed with them until I reached the age of 18 at which point in the French court, you can be declared mature of age if two witnesses will testify to your character and your maturity, which is exactly what happened. So, I became essentially 21 at the age of 18. From then on I could do as I pleased and I went to live with a family of two doctors who had been at that camp in Barbizon. They were taking care of the children. They weren't married, the two. They lived together. She had a little girl. Her husband had been deported during the war and killed and I lived with them until I married Jim. I met Jim in the summer of 1954 in Germany, as a matter of fact. He was stationed at Heidelberg, and I was visiting with this family because they had gone back to live in Germany because he was a doctor and he couldn't practice in France.

The French medical association is very reactionary and very tight and they wouldn't allow him to practice so, since he took his medical degree in Germany he went back to Mannheim where his family was a doctor and he opened up a very thriving practice, so she had to join him there and I lived with the daughter in Paris and during vacation time when we didn't have school we would go to Mannheim and stay with them and then come back to Paris when school resumed. One of the trips in '54 I met Jim, who was in the United States Army, and I went back to France and he went back to the United States but two years later, he came back and we got married. So, we were married in Paris.

Q: You corresponded during this period?

A: Not really. Jim is not really a letter writing. I know he can hear me. Telegrams mostly. He sent me telegrams, and also I must say my English wasn't very good, so it was hard to correspond when your English is not very good.

Q: So, did you take these people's name?

A: Lehman, yes, I took their name, that's right.

Q: So you were married --?

A: In Paris. We were married in Paris, but then when we came here, his parents wanted a wedding too, so we had a second wedding for his parents, too. And I didn't know anybody and it was very funny because whenever I was introduced to somebody and we would turn around to somebody else I would hear, is she Jewish? At one point I said to Jim why don't you make a sign and put it on my back, I'm Jewish.

Q: Were you taught anything about Judaism after the war in Barbizon?

A: Yes. Yes, as a matter of fact, I was in a very peculiar way. You see, in order for me to catch up with the French school system I had to go into a private school for a while to catch up. And it so happened that I was sent one year to a very special private school which was not Jewish and one year I was sent to a private school which was Jewish, and

the only way they would keep me there is if I would learn how to read and write Hebrew right away, which I did. We had religious instruction and we read the Bible every day in addition to the regular curriculum, so I learned about Judaism there, as much as you can learn in a couple of years, you know. I learned how to read and write. I learned even how to read _____, which I cannot do any more, but if I had to, I probably would again, I would learn it, if my future life depended on it, I would probably learn it again. So, I did learn a little bit about Judaism. It didn't take. It really didn't take. I think that the first time I really felt Jewish was after the Six Day War. That's when I really felt Jewish. I don't quite understand why except that maybe I saw the Jews stand up and fight and that did it for me. They were defending themselves and they were defending their land, and for the first time I felt Jewish. So, I feel perfectly Jewish now, but I didn't for a long time. I really didn't.

Q: What does that mean, do you think, feeling Jewish?

A: Feeling that I'm proud to be part of that breed. Feeling that in spite of all the trials that we have gone through we are a very strong and resilient people, not feeling that I'm ashamed of being a Jew. That's what it means essentially to me. I can't say that I'm really religious. It's just that I feel very Jewish. I really do at this point. I feel that I'm part of this minority, and I'm going to stay that way and I'm going to tell my children about it and I hope my children stay part of the minority.

Q: Is there a piece of the child in you feeling angry about what Jews did or didn't do during this period of time?

A: I think, yes, there was a certain amount of anger in me. There was the anger of our marching off like that. I was very angry about the, but I have come to understand that we really didn't have a choice. We were trapped and we really didn't have a choice. But I did feel angry for a long time, you're right. And I think that's probably why I didn't feel Jewish because I didn't want to be Jewish. I was angry about it. But the Sixth Day War showed me that if there was a way, the Jews can fight, you know, and they will fight. That made a big difference to me really.

Q: Your identity is something that you've created in a way that most people don't.

A: Don't most people create an identity for themselves?

Q: Yes, but you have a history that is lost to you.

A: That's true. Well, I had no choice really. I had to create an identity. You're right. I did create an identity for myself. I didn't realize it was that unusual though. I thought most people created their identities, no?

Q: But your history is one of so much oppression and so much terror as a child that you

couldn't be a child.

A: No, I guess I was always adult. I guess I was always adult.

Q: What was it like for you to raise children?

A: It wasn't easy. You know the best way of understanding another person is to put yourself in their shoes and I am very good at putting myself in the shoes of adults. I couldn't put myself in the shoes of children. As a consequence I was probably very over protective of my children. I was always trying to keep them safe, which doesn't work. I have come to certainly realize that. You can't keep anybody safe, but part of the reason was that I didn't remember what it was as a child. I couldn't venture out as a child because it was too dangerous, so consequently I probably tried to keep my children from straying somewhere where there might be danger. And I know that I had peculiar fears like if they had a rash it used to drive me crazy until I realized that it had to do with that little girl that that was shot because she had pimples. I associated pimples always with being sick and if you're sick you're going to get shot. So, my kids never had a rash I can tell you that. I drove them crazy but they didn't have a rash. You know, it's things like that that I probably overdid as a mother. But for a long time my children didn't know my past, which is again, I'm told, I didn't realize but I'm told that this is not usual with survivors of the Holocaust. I remember the first time my daughter came back from religious school and they were talking about the Holocaust and she asked me point blank are you a Holocaust survivor, and I said yes, and she got very upset. By then I think she must have been 10 or 11 years old which is an advanced age and she never had a glimmer that I might be a Holocaust survivor. So, you know, it's --.

Q: Did you then tell her?

A: Some, but then I wasn't able to talk about it all so I was very reticent and that probably created more anxiety than if I had told her. Our son never questioned me about it. He's the kind of a child probably that I was. He absorbed things by observing. He doesn't ask that many questions so he just absorbed and watched and didn't ask too many questions. My daughter is a real questioner. She likes to ask questions. Some of the answers I gave weren't entirely satisfactory. Part of the reason was I wasn't able to talk about it then, yet. It didn't come until much later when I was able to talk about it. I just sort of decided this was my past life, another life. I was living in a different life and I was going to pretend I'm just as normal as everybody else. So, that's really the mission I took on. I was going to lead a normal life.

Q: Did you imitate other mothers that you saw?

A: Oh, yes. And also, I had an instinct. I have a protective instinct to begin with so I would never do any harm to a child, so I'm very protective of children. So, that's -- and I read so

I understood some of the things that were going on, and I did let go of the children, I must say. Maybe not as fast or as soon as they wanted it to happen, but it happened. No, I understood suffering so I was always trying to nurture and avoid suffering, but I suppose that I must have brought certain hang ups with me that other mother's didn't have, I suppose.

Q: Maybe we should bring the pictures over here. Why don't you explain.

A: This picture was taken, it doesn't show my finger, is that okay? This picture was taken in Bratislava in 1946, and I am the girl in the middle next to the white bunny and the little boy who leans on my right arm we call him the Englishman because nobody could understand what language he was talking, which he spoke in. We all had a smattering of different languages, but nobody understood his. So, that was the Englishman leaning on me.

Q: So you're second to the left there in the first row?

A: I'm second to the left.

Q: Do you remember the other people?

A: No, I just don't remember them, except for that little boy. He was always next to me. He was always leaning against me, but he didn't speak. He never spoke. I never heard him speak. This picture also was taken in Bratislava and that's the whole group. You can see it's a pretty large group.

Q: Where are you?

A: There I go. That's the one, that's me. Around time, that was taken around the same time I would say. Same hat, same coat, I didn't have any more than that. Maybe somebody who knows Czechoslovakia will recognize the monuments, but I don't remember it. I know it was Czechoslovakia, and I think it was Bratislava, although we were also in Prague, but I think it was Bratislava. This picture I'm the one holding on to two hands.

Q: So you're this person?

A: That's me, that was taken later. That was taken in France. By then you can tell my hair had grown back a little bit. I had my head shaved when I came to France and by then it was growing back a little bit. I forgot to tell you a story. Mrs. Roosevelt came to visit the home and I was designated to learn by heart The Raven and to recite The Raven to her, which I did. When I was finished she patted me on the head and said, "What a cute little boy." So that was my first meeting with Mrs. Roosevelt. I met Mrs. Roosevelt later on because my husband and I started a Reformed Democratic Club when we lived in New York and she came to be our speaker and Jim and I went to pick her up. I told her the

story when I first met her and she looked at me and said, "My you have changed." So, those were my encounters with Mrs. Roosevelt.

Q: Thank you so much Esthy.

A: Thank you.