

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

LILLIAN TAUS

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Patricia Rich
Date: January 14, 2009

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Gratz College
Melrose Park, PA 19027

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LT - Lillian Taus¹ [interviewee]

PR - Patricia Rich [interviewer]

Date: January 14, 2009²

Tape one, side one:

PR: This is an interview on January 14, 2009 with Lillian Taus. This is Patricia Rich interviewing her and we are at her home. Lily, can you tell me where you were born and when?

LT: I was born on October 3, 1922.³

PR: Okay.

LT: In Klascanovo⁴ that was the city that I was born and it was a little city near Munkács.

PR: And what country was that a part of?

LT: It was Carpatha-Russia.

PR: Okay. And can you tell me about your--a little bit about your family?

LT: Yes we were a big family of children. I was the oldest and at one time it broke out--it was very bad--it broke out--typhoid fever and a lot of the children died and then the Hungarians came in--took over...

PR: Can I slow you down for a minute? You said you were a large family?

LT: Yes.

PR: How many children were in your family?

LT: Well, there were, we were about 13 children but six died when we had the outbreak from typhoid...

PR: Oh my goodness.

LT: ...typhoid fever--yeah.

PR: So that was before the war?

LT: Yes.

PR: Wow.

LT: No, that was when the war was on.

PR: That was during the war?

LT: Right.

PR: So there were 13 children...

LT: I was a single girl.

¹nee Mermelstein. See also interviews with her sister Shirley Don, two interviews with her brother-in-law Sam Don and an interview with her brother Louie Mermelstein all by the Gratz College Oral History Archive.

²Previous interview done with Mrs. Taus on November 23, 1981, interviewer Hanna Silver.

³In a previous interview, Mrs. Taus gave her birthday as Oct. 10 1923.

⁴Klascanovo - possibly Kliachanovo, a town near Munkács, also called Chervenovo, part of Subcarpathian region. Alternate spellings Klyachanovo [Ukr], Kličanovo [Slov], Klacsanó [Hun].

PR: You were a single girl?

LT: Yeah, 22 and that was in '43 so I was 19...

PR: The typhoid was in '43?

LT: Yeah I think so...

PR: Around then. Tell me about your mother and father.

LT: Yeah. My mother was a 19 year old girl when she married my father and then when the Russians came in they took her away like--you know--a young girl and the Cossacks came in and they took her away. All of the sudden she disappeared and finally she--they brought her back--and after that a year later she married my father and then it changed around--another country. The Germans came in and they occupied the territory...

PR: Okay.

LT: ...where I lived and...

PR: So when...

LT: And every year I had to learn another language which I did and...

PR: So your mother was 19 when she got married?

LT: Yeah.

PR: And was she from the village that you grew up in?

LT: No, no.

PR: Where was she from?

LT: It was called also--in the same. It was about 30 miles away from where I--we lived. It was called Bolova, Bolova [phonetic].

PR: And was she...

LT: Also in Carpatha?

PR: Was she from a religious family or an agricultural family or what?

LT: Religious, you know.

PR: And did she ever talk about when she was taken by the Cossacks? Was that something she ever discussed?

LT: I was too young to know. I don't remember. I don't think I was even born.

PR: Right.

LT: Because I was born in 1922.

PR: Okay.

LT: Yeah, October 3.

PR: And your father?

LT: My father was in the First World War.

PR: Oh, for the Russians?

LT: Yeah

PR: For the Russian army?

LT: Yeah

PR: Okay. And do you know anything about his family background?

LT: Yeah. Yeah, I remember my *Zadie*, my *Bubbie* and I remember his brothers.

PR: Were they a religious family?

LT: Yeah, yeah.

PR: What did that mean then to be religious? Did they dress differently? Were they kosher? Were they...

LT: No, kosher...

PR: Kosher?

LT: They always had a kosher home.

PR: Was there a synagogue in your community?

LT: Yes, yes it was. In fact, when the day came that they got us--they came in that we were sitting at the *seder* and somebody knocks on our door and the Hungarians, "Get the Germans together. You have to be packed tomorrow eight o'clock and gather all the Jewish people in the synagogue." "What did we do? We're celebrating our *seder* now. Can you..?"

PR: How old were you then?

LT: 1943...

PR: It was '43 so you were 21.

LT: Some...

PR: Somewhere around there. So before that I want to ask a little more about what Jewish life...

LT: Yes.

PR: ...was like in your community before the war. Can--do you remember were there a lot of Jewish people where you lived or were you a minority?

LT: It was not too many. I would say about 70-80 families.

PR: Okay.

LT: We had a synagogue and naturally we were observing everything that is Jewish. And then they brought us to the place. It was a factory where they make bricks and that's where they left us. All the Jewish...

PR: That was when the war started.

LT: When the war started.

PR: Did your family ever experience antisemitism prior to the war from your neighbors or people in your community?

LT: Yeah, well nobody liked the Jewish people except I left everything that I--we possessed--I left it for my neighbor and she said, "I will take it, I will put it away and when you come back here, you'll get it back" and never came back.

PR: You never--okay.

LT: No.

PR: Yeah.

LT: No, we never went back.

PR: What kind of work did your father do?

LT: He was a butcher...

PR: Oh he was a butcher.

LT: Yeah, and he was in partnership with his father.

PR: The kosher...

LT: Kosher butcher yeah--but when the war started they weren't allowed to have kosher meat that to have it made kosher. So they--what they did--we did it like quiet. Like in the outside there was like a shed. I was standing there with a candle and holding the candle till everything was done. There was--you know--a calf or a sheep because you didn't do any big animals because you couldn't do it.

PR: Couldn't hide it.

LT: You couldn't hide it--right. So it was cold. In the winter; it was good and thank God that they didn't catch us. If they would catch us they would kill us.

PR: That was very, very brave--you were very...

LT: Yeah.

PR: ...secretly *shechting* [kosher slaughtering] the meat.

LT: And I had to help my father. We were 11 children, and I was the oldest. So I--but I had to take in the kosher meat to the big city on a bicycle. I had to get up at three o'clock in the morning and go with the bike. It was about four miles. And one time I wound up in jail because they caught me with the meat and I had to tell them where the people live and who they are. "I don't know" I said, "I stopped at my aunt's and that's where they come and pick it up and pay me for it and that's all I know." But then they put me for a week in jail and...

PR: Wow, was that the...

LT: The Germans.

PR: That was Germans at that point?

LT: Yeah, yeah.

PR: Okay. So was there anything else you can tell me before we get into what happened during the war--any other memories about your community or your family prior to the war starting?

LT: Like what?

PR: Like--was life hard? Were you poor like a poorer family or did you have--you know--were you able to have some nice things?

LT: No.

PR: No?

LT: No we had a lot of children and you know--in fact the kids were when they grow up another one--the little one, he wore the...

PR: Clothing, hand-me-downs...

LT: Hand-me-downs, exactly, yeah.

PR: Did you go to school?

LT: I went to Russian school and then I went to Hungarian school and then I went to German school.

PR: So you were saying that you had to learn a different language...

LT: Every year, right.

PR: Wow.

LT: Whenever somebody took over the country, I would then...

PR: Learn their language...

LT: Yeah.

PR: Okay. Did you ever have to--well you said you helped your father with his business...

LT: Like with the business we should what enough to eat--we should go on. We had a horse--they killed the horse. We had a dog--they killed the dog.

PR: The Germans?

LT: Yeah.

PR: Okay.

LT: My brothers and my two uncles were hiding in the woods. Because they knew what they were older--and they knew what's going on. So when the dogs start barking and the Germans came to look for them--so my brother says, "I have to kill the dog, because they will bark. They will get us." So he had to kill the dog.

PR: Okay. So let's now start with the war. You said--when did you first become aware that the war had started?

LT: We was--I was so naïve. I didn't know that it was a war. I didn't, like, yes--when we were already taken away from my home we had nothing. So we realized--they told us after a while there were thousands and thousands of people--Jewish. All the Jews were put in that--that they made the bricks in the brick factory and they made a kitchen there. I worked in the kitchen.

PR: So the first you knew--I just want to be clear--was when the knock came on the door. So you had no idea...

LT: No.

PR: ...that there was a war...

LT: Nothing.

PR: Well had the Germans already occupied your city?

LT: They probably did. Otherwise they wouldn't be there.

PR: So you didn't know about the Germans and you didn't know about the Jews being rounded up?

LT: No, I just know--on *Pesach*.

PR: You were at *seder*. You were actually at the *seder* at that time?

LT: Right, that's when they said, "Tomorrow morning you have to be out of your home."

PR: So you must have been totally shocked?

LT: What else? Everybody, not just me, the whole family and the whole...

PR: What year was that?

LT: I think it was in 1943.

PR: 1943, okay. And then that's when they took you--you said first to the synagogue?

LT: Yeah and then in the morning we had to walk to the city where the...

PR: The brick factory.

LT: ...the brick factory was. It was about four miles.⁵ So we walked with all the bundles--whatever they let us take and that's it. They--we slept on the floor for about four weeks--the whole family together. But being that I worked in the kitchen a little I was able to get a little more food--so which was--you know I was always aggressive, I didn't sit much.

PR: How did you get to work in the kitchen?

LT: I asked. I went in and I said I could do--I could peel potatoes, I could help in the kitchen, I could do anything. But I wanted, you know, to keep my family alive. So it happened that way. And after that they...

PR: Was that Germans that were keeping you there? Were there soldiers?

LT: They watched us--sure. And then when they came with wagons, you know, like, like the--what is it--trains--not trains but open trains...

PR: Like car--cattle cars?

LT: Right.

PR: Okay.

LT: Yeah, and they took everybody in and took us to Auschwitz.

PR: So you went straight to Auschwitz from there?

LT: Yeah, yeah. And my mother, may she rest in peace, she, "Oh my God," she says, "I know where we're going. We're going to be gassed," she said.

PR: So she knew, she had heard what was happening...

LT: Yeah, she was a very bright person but I didn't know what this meant.

PR: You had no idea?

LT: No.

PR: So you were on the train--was it a long train trip?

LT: Yeah, it was about three days. No food, no toilet, no nothing. In fact, I had a box of cigarettes because my father smoked and that was the only life that he had. So every time one of the [unclear] came over to me and I was afraid to give it to him because in case I run out of it. He is going to be--so I just gave it to him whenever I really thought I must do it.

PR: So you went straight to Auschwitz?

⁵In her 1981 interview she identifies the city as Munkács.

LT: We went straight to Auschwitz. And when we came to Auschwitz they made the selection. Like the kids they put on one side, the people that was able to work they put them on the other. And the men they did the same thing and they took away all of our clothes--just put on those white and gray stripe dresses, no underwear, no nothing. Wooden shoes you know like--you know what those wooden shoes are. That's all we wore all the time that we were there.

PR: And when you got there you were in the line with, with who, which line did they put you in?

LT: Well they put me into work and my sister was a lot younger. She was about 12 and she was the only one saved. The rest went straight to the gas chambers. So I was holding hands with my sister...

PR: So your mother and father, where did your father go?

LT: My father worked in Dachau. He wound up in another camp. And he worked in the kitchen because he was a butcher so...

PR: Oh right.

LT: ...they put him in there. But the Day of Liberation he died in the camp.

PR: Oh my gosh.

LT: Yeah.

PR: So he wasn't with you at Auschwitz?

LT: No, never saw him...

PR: So your mother went and you said there were...

LT: My mother had a baby, two year old baby in her hands and the Jewish boy said, "*Verreckte kind*, throw away the child. You're going to be alive--you're 39, 38 years old." And she said, "He's crazy. He's telling me to--it's my flesh and blood--they're telling me to throw it away." And they came and she went straight into the gas chamber with the baby in her hands. I never saw her again.

PR: Oh my gosh.

LT: That's it.

PR: Did you know where she was going at that point? Did you know what was going on?

LT: Yeah, because you saw the smoke when they took them in. Sure...

PR: And you said there were 13 children...

LT: Yeah.

PR: So that accounts for three of the children: you and your sister and your baby brother. Where were the other children?

LT: They took them to the gas chambers too.

PR: Now you said six of them died of typhus?

LT: Yes, and then I had the [unclear].

PR: Was that before this or after this?

LT: Before.

PR: Before getting to Auschwitz?

LT: Year or two before, yeah. But...

PR: So that was while the Germans--before your family was deported. When you were still home was when the other--they died?

LT: Yes, that's when the outbreak of typhus fever, yeah.

PR: Okay, okay. So your family was half the size at that point?

LT: Exactly.

PR: And then--so there were three others who also went to the gas chamber? Is that right?

LT: Was more. I had a little brother that his *Bar Mitzvah* was the day that they put us on the train to Auschwitz. He took his *tefillin* and he put one on his one arm and one on the other and he buttoned his jacket and said, "They will not take that away from me. Today is my *Bar Mitzvah*." And this is how he went into the gas chamber.

PR: Oh my gosh. Wow.

LT: I was in Auschwitz...

PR: How did your sister--how did you manage to keep your sister with you?

LT: Whenever they made an *Appell* [roll call], you know, they made a line and we were holding hands and I saw what was going on. So I hid her in the washroom. And I stayed in the line and when the Germans left I took her out from there. See what I did, the *Stubenältester* [person in charge of the barracks] do you know what that means? No? It's the one that took care of the barrack. I washed her clothes. I...

PR: Was she a German or a Jew?

LT: She was like a German-Jew. I washed her clothes. Anything she needed to do, I did for her. So she was very good to me. So whenever there was an *Appell*, you know, to count who is going to be alive and who is going to be sent to crematorium. Like we would stand like six in a row and they saw like somebody like a little 12, 13 year old. They took them out to the left side and those that would go to work they put them on the right side. Because they are going to go to work in factory and they took us to another place. They took us to Stutthof and I was there for the while and then I got a job there in the -- to pull out the dead bodies and to put a number on them, how many I have today. And the Germans they gave me--you know I spoke German and I could do all these things.

PR: To pull them out from where?

LT: To pull them out from the room where they died, because...

PR: Like in the barracks?

LT: Huh?

PR: In the barracks you mean?

LT: Yeah, in the barracks...

PR: ...sleeping?

LT: Yeah, people who died.

PR: So people who died...

LT: I had to pull them out and put them in the snow and put the number...

PR: Oh my gosh.

LT: ...and then the Germans came with a big truck and picked them up but I had to make sure that the number is on and their name, everything. Yeah that was my job.

PR: Do you remember how you coped with having that job?

LT: I coped with it. You know why? Because I decided being that the food, that they don't eat anymore--they're dead. So I was in 30, 29 block and other next door to us was another barrack and I had a friend there. So I told her, "Ida, how about if I open this window and I give you all the soup that they gave to these people that are dead--save lives in others, you know, in your barrack." And she did that. So she didn't know how to to pay me back or do something for me. She took a blanket and cut out for the neck and cut out a piece of her from the blanket for a tie and made me like a poncho, that I shouldn't-- because I was shivering. It was cold. And then when the *Oberscharführer* came to count, you know, "Where did you get this? What kind of right did you have to take a German property and cut it up and make yourself comfortable and warm?" to me. I said, "I didn't do it." "Where--who did it?" That's all I needed to tell that she did it and he would do with me. "No," I said, "I took it off from a dead body and I put it on my body. It was full of lice and I put it on me. Is there, is that something wrong that I did?" He said, "I want to see you tomorrow nine o'clock in my office." Well, I figure this is it, I'm finished. And I came nine o'clock there and I told him, I said, "I didn't do that. My girlfriend did that. Because she saw that I'm cold." He opens the door and he says, "Get out," like this. So this is how I saved my life.

PR: So you told them and they didn't go after your girlfriend?

LT: No, because I didn't tell them who did it. I said that I took it off from a dead body...

PR: Right.

LT: So I saved her.

PR: Right. So the food--so though you had this grizzly job of pulling out the dead bodies it also helped you survive because there was more food. You could eat more.

LR: I had enough food and I gave some that I saw that are still going to survive. I gave them the food that dead bodies didn't need it any more...

PR: Right.

LT: ...I did that.

PR: Right. And how did you keep your will going? You know, what kept you strong?

LT: I don't know.

PR: ...to be so resourceful?

LT: I wanted to save my sister so badly. I met a--from Litvac, a Lithuanian--a woman. She was a nurse and my sister got typhoid fever in the camp. So she gave me every day an aspirin. She says, "Give it to the 12 year old girl and she gave it to me and she says, "No I'm not giving it to your sister. I'm giving it to you because I want you to survive." So I said, "Okay." So I gave it to her and I didn't take the pill. I got well without it.

PR: So you had typhoid also?

LT: Afterwards, yeah.

PR: Afterwards.

LT: I got better.

PR: How long were you in Auschwitz?

LT: In Auschwitz? I must have been about six, seven months and then they took us to Stutthof and from Stutthof they took us to a place it was called Praust to build an airport station.

PR: Praust?

LT: Praust it was called.

PR: Is that in Germany?

LT: Yeah. And my sister couldn't. A 12 year old kid--how could she do that? Dig the ground and plaster it to make an airport space. So I had to do her job too. Sometimes I hid her behind the little things that they had to fill up with the dirt and sometimes she just sit there. She got hit plenty of times.

PR: She got hit plenty of times?

LT: Sure because she didn't work. You know she couldn't--she was sick and that's how it was.

PR: Wow.

LT: So we were there and we were building the airport stations and all of the sudden I take a look: they pick up my sister and take her back to Stutthof. And they want me to stay there. "You are healthy. You could stay and work. The war is going to be over some day." When I saw her on the truck, half dead, I jumped up and I said, "I'm going with her." That's all I possess is my little sister--and the nurse they started hitting me. I got 25 over my back, all over myself. And she said, "Now you could go. See how you look?" After 25 on the head I didn't know even what was going on. My aunt was there and she said when the war was over--she told them that she saw when I died.

PR: So she didn't know that you survived that?

LT: No...

PR: She thought they had killed you?

LT: No, no, because they thought that, you know, that they took my sister to the crematory so I go right with her. And we came there--we came...

PR: So they took you back to Auschwitz?

LT: They took us to Stutthof.

PR: Stutthof again?

LT: And in Stutthof, they--it was Sunday they brought us there--and they said--I don't know if you'll understand this--they say, "Why did you bring this *shit* here today? Don't you know today is a German holiday?" And the next day I thought to myself, "God I'm nervous, I want to live." We went through--we got one slice of bread a day that I fed my sister with--and when they had the lines that go to count and who is going to stay alive and who is not because--so I took her with me.

PR: On the line?

LT: Out from the line.

PR: Out from the line.

LT: Yeah, and into the bathroom where she hid it. And...

PR: Did you go in the bathroom too? Did you hide too?

LT: No, I didn't hide. I had to stay in line, yeah.

PR: And what happened next?

LT: What happened next?

PR: They didn't. Because they had shipped you to go to the crematorium but then they didn't...

LT: No, because it was a holiday.

PR: Right.

LT: So and then I told the *Kapo*, "I didn't go with the transport because I was standing in line for bread and they didn't take me and my sister."

PR: So you were able to not get in the transport? Did you hide from the transport?

LT: The ones that went to the crematorium? I didn't. The *Kapo* he said, "You are a good girl. You look like my daughter." His nose was like this. [chuckle] I'll never forget him.

PR: Was this a man?

LT: A man, and he took me into a room and all of a sudden he wanted to rape me and I knocked out the wall--the window--and I jumped out of the window and then I told this to the *Kapo* what happened?

PR: Was he the *Kapo* who tried to rape you?

LT: No, he was a *Kapo* but I told the *Stubenältester*, the woman that was in charge. That's what he did, "So that's what it is."

PR: Was there a lot of rape that happened in the camps?

LT: Plenty--plenty.

PR: That's something you don't hear about as much it seems like but it must have been rampant.

LT: Oh yeah and then finally they heard--all of the sudden they heard shooting--and planes going back and forth and they start to evacuate us--to take us from

Praust where we made the airport station--they took us on a boat for 12 days--no food, no water, nothing, and they took us--I think it was about 10 or 11 days on the boat...

PR: Was this after Stutthof?

LT: That was after Stutthof and then when we were in Praust when we were building the airport. They took us to evacuate, you know, to run away where the Russians were bombing and we came with the boat...

[Tape one, side one ended.]

Tape one, side two:

PR: This is tape one, side two. Lily Taus being interviewed on January 14, 2009 by Patty Rich continuing her story.

LT: Okay--so we went on the boat and we came to where the water was a little shallow. So we had to get out of the boat. We walked in the water. And my little sister she got a full mouth of sand and she said, "Lily, is that the way you feel when you're dead?" I said, "[unclear] I'm not dead. I'm holding your hand," and we went--wound up in the woods to the place where...

PR: Can I slow you down? You told me something the other day...

LT: Yes.

PR: About when you were on the boat...

LT: Yes.

PR: And some things that happened to you on the boat. Do you remember?

LT: Oh yeah, because there was a girlfriend of my mine and the Germans threw away the cans that they ate the meat and everything. So she took her belt and tied it to the can and wanted to take a little water. And he said, "Do you want to drink water?" and he kicked her into the water, and I never saw her again.

PR: She drowned?

LT: She drowned, yeah.

PR: And that was someone you had helped to keep alive?

LT: Sure, yeah.

PR: And something about the boat and some explosives you told me?

LT: Yeah, there was...

PR: That the boat was...

LT: That the "Capricorn" [phonetic]. I don't know if you ever heard about it--the name of the boat?

PR: What was it?

LT: It's "Capricorn" [phonetic].

PR: "Capricorn" [phonetic].

LT: Yes--that was a boat. That was the name. My husband was on that boat. He was a, you know, also a, in a camp.

PR: But your boat--you said that there was the boat or the thing with a blanket.

LT: Our boat. There was a Norwegian captain--he says, "This boat is gonna--they're going to clean out the people, you know, they'll kill them or whatever and the boat is going to be sank you know..." [unclear].

PR: The Germans were going to...

LT: The Germans...

PR: ...were they going to blow up the boat?

LT: So the Germans picked themselves up and they run away and they left us there in the middle of the water. And this Norwegian captain said, "Listen honey, everybody who has a blanket hold it towards the wind. If God wants us to survive the wind is going to take this"--because there was ammunition under the boat...

PR: Was it in the boat, like in the...

LT: Under the boat.

PR: Under the boat.

LT: Because it was staying in the water "and if God wants us to live maybe we will survive." So when we came to the back all of a sudden we see the fire--the flames of the boat and we are in the water [unclear] and we went into the woods.

PR: Now wait a minute. So it worked? So you held up the blankets that caught the wind...

LT: Yes, caught the wind.

PR: And you got off where the explosives were? Wow.

LT: Yes. And we wound up in the woods and we were so glad no bombs, no no shootings, no nothing, but we had one blanket--five girls. And we laid down there. Thank God, we don't hear no shootings, no planes. And we laid down there and all of a sudden we see a guy running. We thought he is a German and he starts running and we start running, you know, away from him. And he spoke Yiddish and he says, "Girls where are you running? The war is over. We're free. You don't have to sleep here with the bugs and on the floor. I'll take you into a house that the Germans left and you could sleep in a bed and you could--and the next day you could take a shower and I..." and he...

PR: Was he German?

LT: No, it was my husband.

PR: He was speaking Yiddish to you?

LT: Sure.

PR: Okay.

LT: So that's how we stopped because we thought he is a German and we run. And the next day he took us into a house. We slept in a bed. He brought us food. He brought us clothes.

PR: What country were you in? Was that still Germany?

LT: Germany. Germany, sure, in Lübeck. The city was Lübeck.

PR: Could you believe that the war was over?

LT: I just believed him...

PR: Yeah.

LT: ...because he was so good and--you know he put us in a home--we slept in a bed for the first time.

PR: I can't imagine what that must have been like.

LT: Oh my God!

PR: And you were still with your sister?

LT: Oh yeah. With the girls. We were left together. And then my husband-- he just took care of us and he moved into the city and I organized a lot of things. He even brought me a watch. He went into a German house and nobody was there and he brought me a watch. And I didn't want to take it. I figured that if I take the watch he's going to think that--you know--I'm different. I'm going to--you know. No, the men went in another room and there were five men.

PR: He didn't take advantage of the situation?

LT: No, no, no, not, the opposite, and he said, "You know what? I'm going to raise your sister. I'm a barber and I can make a living" and what do you got that you're going to do there? I said, "This is for my sister's sake I'll do anything he says." He brought food, raw food, I cooked in the German house for the boys and for them for everybody. And we survived. Well and the boys [unclear].

PR: Quite a story.

LT: Yeah.

PR: And did you ever go back to your town?

LT: No, I never went back.

PR: And nobody survived other than--you and your sister were the only survivors from that family⁶?

LT: And the other five girls were there, they were alive.

PR: They were with friends?

LT: Yeah, and my husband was on the Capricornia. On another ship. That's how he came to the woods to look if somebody is there and he found us there.

PR: Do you remember the name of the ship that you were on?

LT: I think it was the Capricornia.

PR: Was that your husband's ship?

LT: Yes, yes.

PR: What about your ship?

LT: Ours was an army boat.

PR: An arm--German...

LT: Yes.

PR: ...army boat? But a Norwegian captain huh?

LT: Yes, he told us to keep the blankets...

PR: He didn't leave the ship when the Germans did?

LT: No.

PR: Did he have the choice of leaving?

⁶Mrs. Taus had an earlier interview with the Gratz College Holocaust Oral History Archive on November 23, 1981 during which she indicated that she and her sister, Shirley Don, were re-united with their one surviving brother, Louie Mermelstein, who went to the U.S. with their cousin, an American soldier.

LT: I'm sure he did but he said if we hold the blankets like this, the wind is going to go away from where the ammunition is and we're going to be alive and that's what happened. And that was the day when we were liberated and that's it.

PR: Did you ever have contact with any partisans or resistance?

LT: No.

PR: So you're...

LT: I was so naïve that they didn't know what's going on. All of a sudden they come out, we were at the *seder* and all of the sudden they take us out. For what? Why? What did we do wrong?

PR: Right okay. And were you aware of any of religious services or were people--when you were in a camp were people observed--trying to observe in any way?

LT: And let me see, May the--May the 4th or the 5th we were liberated and July the 4th we got married. Sixty-three years that we were now...

PR: And I know because I know you--that you recently lost your husband one year ago...

LT: One year ago, right.

PR: ...but you had 63 years together...

LT: Right.

PR: ...and your sister...

LT: Yeah, he raised her.

PR: He raised her and she is still very close with you?

LT: Oh my God. It's my life.

PR: And she just had her birthday right?

LT: Can I have? Here, I want to show you something nice.

PR: Okay.

LT: I didn't show you this?

PR: I think you did. Is it the birthday party--Lily is showing me a birthday party invitation for her sister's brunch on Sunday, January--it is Sunday, the 18th at 11:30 at the synagogue.

LT: Yeah, Adath Jeshurun.

PR: So when the war ended did you go to a DP camp?

LT: Yeah, sure.

PR: Were you ill? Did you have to recover physically?

LT: Yes, from hell.

PR: Did you get medical treatment or did you just need to eat and sleep?

LT: I really didn't know what I did. I was like an animal. And just to shake my [unclear] I should have my sister with me because I didn't believe in marriage or anything.

PR: You didn't believe in marriage?

LT: In nothing. But somehow--you know--in fact after they took me to a German doctor and he...

PR: What kind of doctor?

LT: He was a psychiatrist and asked me all kinds of questions and this and that. What kind of people were your parents and I told him everything and he says, "Now listen honey, whatever your parents didn't finish you have to finish. You have to pick up all the pieces. You have a little sister here and you have to go on with life." And that's made me so strong that the Germans could say something like that to me and this is how I go on with life. I always remember this...

PR: You're trying to complete your parents' life and their wishes.

LT: Yeah, wishes. Look we don't even have a stone. We don't have nothing, there where anybody is--nothing. Everybody went straight to the gas chambers and that was it.

PR: And you know--and you said your father lived through the war and died...

LT: I know that they told me that he died the day of liberation.

PR: Wow.

LT: He was happy that he was liberated and he ate something and he died by eating the food. And he didn't...

PR: He wasn't accustomed to eating?

LT: Yeah, that's right.

PR: How tragic. Well is there anything else that you want to tell me before we turn off the tape?

LT: Yeah, well, I could tell you that we got married and we have a daughter. Now she is 60 years old and she has two grandchildren and that mine are great grandchildren and we are alive and we survived and we are... [speaking to the person at the door] Yes, yes. [short pause, tape clicked off and on]

PR: Go ahead.

LT: Before we went on the boat they brought in dogs and, because we were hiding we didn't know where they're going to take us. So the dogs were biting us and chasing after us till finally when that boat that they took us and we wound up in the woods there.

PR: Okay.

LT: And then we came to Neustadt-Holstein. That was an army camp and they put us up there.

PR: When was this now?

LT: That was after liberation.

PR: After liberation?

LT: And that's where we stayed for about six months and there was a...

PR: Did you know what your--I'm sorry.

LT: They had a--it's called the UNRRA. I don't know if you know what it means now? They had an American--like if they would come--if needed help or needed something. It's called the UNRRA, U-N-R-A.

PR: Okay. Oh the UN Refugees, United Nations Refugee...

LT: That's right--that's right. Yes, yes, yes, that's where we stayed.

PR: And did you know what you were going to do next?

LT: No, because they had a kitchen there. They gave us food, and little by little we became normal again. And that was it. [phone rings.]

PR: And did you and Moish decide together to come to the States or did you...?

LT: Oh--we were married already.

PR: Right.

LT: We married in 1945, July 4. [phone rang, short pause]

PR: Let me just repeat the question. I just asked Lily because she gave an interview for the Spielberg project: why you wanted to do this again and maybe you can answer me now?

LT: Yeah, because I'm now 86, 90--wait a minute. I'm 86 years old now and I don't know how long I'll stay here and do my job so I figured I have to leave some legacy that people should know what I went through and what my family went through and we're only left two children, me and my sister that's all. Right? Okay.

PR: Thank you.

LT: Thank you.

[Tape one, side two ended.]