

Chana Comins: Oral History Transcript

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Name: Chana Bebczuk Comins (1918 – 2003)

Birth Place: Stepan, Poland

Arrived in Wisconsin: 1949, Madison

Project Name: Oral Histories: Wisconsin Survivors of the Holocaust



Chana Comins

Biography: Chana Bebczuk Comins was born in Stepan, Poland, on June 5, 1918. Although she attended Polish schools, Chana also received a Jewish education, learning Hebrew in the afternoons. In 1940, she married Melvin Cominetsky (name changed to "Comins" upon their arrival in Madison). Their first daughter was born on the same day the Nazis entered their town in 1941.

The 22-year-old new mother and her baby, only a few hours old, were immediately separated from Melvin and taken to a forced labor camp. There she witnessed the execution of her family and friends. In 1943, Chana made a daring escape from a transport of inmates on their way to a mass execution. She hid in the forest with her baby until the end of the war.



After liberation, Chana worked in Munich until she was miraculously reunited with her husband. They lived at a displaced persons camp in Ulm, Germany, where two more daughters were born. In December 1949, resettlement officials sent them to Madison, Wisconsin, where they were given housing, food, and employment. They also had a son.

Chana worked for more than 25 years as a cook in several Madison restaurants. Melvin was employed at Oscar Mayer and Co. for 23 years until his death in 1971. Chana died in December 2003.

Audio Summary: Below are the highlights of each tape. It is not a complete list of all topics discussed.

Tape 1, Side 1

- Chana's childhood
- Nazis invade Stepan, Poland, 1941
- Deportation to a forced labor camp with newborn daughter
- Life in the camp, executions and atrocities
- Escape and refuge in the forest among *Partisans*

Tape 1, Side 2

- Hiding in the forest with her baby, 1943–1945
- Generosity of Polish *Partisans* and Gentiles
- Life in Poland and Germany after the war
- Miraculous reunion with her husband

Tape 2, Side 1

- Immigrating to the U.S.
- Unfriendly treatment by the Madison Jewish community
- Finding work
- Support of neighbors

Tape 2, Side 2

- Children
- Family life in Wisconsin
- Husband's death, 1971
- Attitudes of American-born Jews toward the Holocaust

Tape 3, Side 1

- Reflections on Americans' ignorance about the Holocaust
- Travels and social life in Wisconsin
- Opinions on American politics and society
- More thoughts on maltreatment by Madison Jews when she first arrived

Tape 3, Side 2

- Friends in Madison and other survivors she knows
- Reflections on her childhood and her own children's lives

About the Interview Process:

The interview was conducted by archivist Sara Leuchter at the Comins' home on January 28, 1980. It was completed in a single session lasting two hours and 45 minutes.

This was the first interview conducted for the project. It is somewhat lacking in content compared to later interviews, for which more questions were devised. It is mostly in chronological order and traces the events in Chana's life from her childhood through her Holocaust experiences. It includes relatively little about her life in Madison.

Chana, who sat in a rocking chair, rocked nervously whenever the discussion became distressing. At first she was ill at ease, especially when she was unable to recall names and dates and became flustered. These details were supplied later, when specific incidents became clearer in her memory.

Teachers should note that this interview contains descriptions of horrific cruelty in Nazi camps, which may not be suitable for younger students.

Audio and Transcript Details:

Interview Date

- Jan 28, 1980

Interview Location

- Comins home, Madison, Wisconsin

Interviewer

- Archivist Sara Leuchter

Original Sound Recording Format

- 3 qty. 60-minute audio cassette tapes

Length of Interview

- 1 interview, approximately 2.75 hours

Transcript Length

- 60 pages

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Pictures:



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Transcript

The following transcript is from the collections of the Wisconsin Historical Society Archives. It is an unedited, firsthand account of the Nazi persecution of the Jews before and during World War II. Portions of this interview may not be suitable for younger or more sensitive audiences. It is unlawful to republish this text without written permission from the Wisconsin Historical Society, except for nonprofit educational use.

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Key

SL Sara Leuchter, Wisconsin Historical Society archivist
CC Chana Comins, Holocaust survivor

TAPE 1, SIDE 1

SL: Mrs. Comins, I'd like you to tell me just a little bit about your own background, where and when you were born and a little bit about the place where you were born.

CC: I was born in Stepan in 1918.

SL: And what country was that?

CC: That was Poland. Before it was Russia [inaudible], no, it was Poland. And then I went to Polish school.

SL: Can you tell me something about your father, his name and perhaps his date of birth, place of birth.

CC: I don't remember his birth, but my father was a cattle buyer. He used to ship cattles from one country to the other. My mother was a housekeeper but we always, you know, we were four kids who always got along good.

SL: What was your father's name?

CC: Pasa Babshuck.

SL: And your mother's name?

CC: Mila Voch.

SL: Can you tell me the names of your sisters and brothers?

CC: One was... the older brother was Aaron, the younger was David and my sister was Churna.

SL: Do you remember anything about your grandparents?

CC: No, because my grandparents was in this country. They left to the old country when I was just a little baby and I never met them.

SL: Do you remember anything about Stepan, about the city itself or the countryside that you can tell?

CC: Oh, it was a nice city and a lot of Jewish people were over there. And I went to school there, and then I met my husband.

SL: Maybe you could tell me a little bit still about your childhood. What kind of house did you grow up in? What did it look like?

CC: It was a house; it wasn't too many rooms. It was like five rooms for a big family like this, wasn't very much. But we always, my mother was very religious and she used to always go to... she used to say to us kids, where I work in five days for you and one day's mine. And Friday she used to take off her apron and get her candles light and leave for the temple and she never cooked or nothing till Sunday morning.

SL: Was your father as religious as she was?

CC: Yeah, but he wasn't that much religious than my mother.

SL: Did you go to Hebrew school at all?

CC: Yeah, I went to Hebrew school.

SL: And what about your Polish education? How long were you in Polish schools?

CC: Well I finished high school and then I met this guy and I didn't go very far. I got married, that was 33 years. No, more than 33 years. I was married in 1940. Sally was born 1941.

SL: What was your husband's name?

CC: My husband's name, Melvin.

SL: Where did you meet him?

CC: Oh, in a movie.

SL: In Stepan?

CC: Yeah.

SL: Was he living in Stepan?

CC: No, he was living in Rowne, but we went to a movie and he was following me home and that's where I met him.

SL: Do you remember what it was like before the Nazis came into Stepan? Did you have any indication that there was trouble in Germany?

CC: No, we were going on with our own business and we never imagined because in 1939 was that war wasn't too bad and we never imagined this will happen.

SL: Now you told me before that the Nazis when they moved into Poland that was over very quickly and you went around your life as usual.

CC: Yeah.

SL: Did you ever have any incidents where Germans came into your town at all?

CC: No, till 1941 we didn't hear about any Germans.

SL: Okay, could you tell me a little bit about what you were doing after you got married, where you were living?

CC: I was living in Rowne and my husband used to have a store, a grocery store. Then he decided, because his parents were, used to like farming and he bought a few acres and he was for awhile. But the most of the time he was in the grocery store.

SL: What was the date that you got married?

CC: I don't remember that.

SL: Do you remember anything about the first day that the Nazis came into Rowne?

CC: They came in one, that's the day when Sally was born and they told us we have to leave and they told us you can take one pillow and one blanket. I wrapped up Sally and I couldn't get a doctor and she was born right there and they told us that we have to go separate. They took my husband away, a separate camp, and I didn't see my husband till the war was over.

SL: You mentioned before to me that you had an incident with a German soldier who talked to you. Could you tell me about that?

CC: Yeah. When he came into our house, and he was the first one to come in, he was a young kid... and. I don't know, 20 or 22. He told me they went till they hit that city. They went to other cities, and every place they went, he said to me, said, "I shouldn't talk to you like this." But in every place they went, they went through, they burned the cities. And they... and I asked him, "What can I do? And go?" And he said, "The Germans will find you wherever you go."

SL: Were you surprised that he cared that much about you?

CC: No, he was kind... I don't think so. If he could take...he was kind of felt sorry for people. But I suppose he couldn't help it or something.

SL: What was your feeling when the Nazis told you that they were going to take you to camps? Did you think that they would threaten your life in any way?

CC: Yeah, I knew that because they allowed our neighbors of us got, they didn't wanted to argue, with them, they didn't wanted to get out of the house and they killed them right there on the spot.

SL: Did you see this happen in Rowne?

CC: Yeah, yeah. We had a lady, she was in the 70's and she was a doctor and she said, you know, her life is over, she doesn't want to go no place else and she laid on her bed and she didn't want to get out. They burned the house together with her. And I knew that's, that's trouble.

SL: Did they take all the Jews in Rowne at the same time? The same time they came to take you did you go with the rest of the Jews?

CC: Yeah, yeah. We have to because they told us to, you know, they told us they have to leave. They take us to a camp.

SL: Do you remember how many Jews were living in Rowne?

CC: I can't exactly remember because they didn't... I don't think so, they took for the, the first time they didn't take all of them but they took like a half a city, maybe 5,000 people, and they took us out.

SL: Now you say that they separated your husband.

CC: Yeah, yeah.

SL: They took the men to one camp?

CC: They took the men another camp because any boys or men or husbands they couldn't be together with the wives.

SL: Did they tell you what they wanted you to do at the camp? Did you have any indication?

CC: No, they said they would take us to the camp and you're going to work and live there, but we didn't know what happens.

SL: How did they take you there?

CC: Well, some of them by car, but the most of them by horses and wagons.

SL: And how far away was it?

CC: Oh, that was the day when they took us to camp, it was, I don't know, like from here to Chicago, they was like that.

SL: Did you eat anything on the way?

CC: No, you couldn't ask nobody for anything.

SL: What possessions did you take with you?

CC: Just what they told me to do, just one pillow and a blanket, that's all that you can take.

SL: And at this time you had an infant daughter.

CC: Yes, when they took us, she was just, I don't know, a few hours old, just a baby.

SL: Do you remember the name of the camp? Was there a name to it?

CC: I don't remember exactly what was the name.

SL: Do you think you could tell me your first impressions of the day that you got to the camp, what you saw, what it was like, what you thought about it?

CC: Well, when we got to the camp I knew it was trouble because the wires were high, you could never escape from it. And German Gestapo was all over the places and hunting, German Shepherd dogs all over there and I knew that with dogs you can't get out. And when they brought us to camp they told us, whoever

- gets out gets punished or killed. They can't get out without a pass unless, you know. It was just like school, you couldn't get a pass and you couldn't get out.
- SL: Were you afraid that they would harm Sally?
- CC: Yeah, I was even thinking about, it was a lady, she was Swedish, no Czechoslovakian and she never had any kids. I knew her before and she said if anything happened to Jewish she would like to adopt her, and I was almost ready to give her up. But my father, before they took him away to a different camp, he said never to do that, whatever will happen to you would happen to her but never give her away.
- SL: Now I would like to back up a little bit, now you had moved to Rowne when you got married. Did your parents come to live with you?
- CC: No, no.
- SL: How did you keep track of what happened to your parent?
- CC: I went back to, like to Stepan, before the war was started and whatever happened we knew what they went through over there, that's it.
- SL: Did you ever see your brothers and sisters again after you were taken to the camp?
- CC: I see one brother, one brother, David, because he was always feeling sorry for me, not for me but for the baby 'cause Sally was very weak, she couldn't, she didn't have anything to eat or nothing like this. But we couldn't do anything about it, we had to whatever they gave us to eat we had to feed her.
- SL: So you were in the camp with just your mother and your baby daughter.
- CC: Yeah.
- SL: Did you know anybody else in the camps?
- CC: Yeah, my aunt, and mine cousins, there was a lot, a lot of relatives.
- SL: Could you tell me something about the barracks or what the camp looked like physically, how much room you had?
- CC: Not much. We had a cot in one barracks, it was a room like this, it was like packed like 30-40 people in it, and all around the walls there barracks. A lot of them couldn't get out at the end because they were

- sick. They wouldn't take you to a doctor. If you are sick they take you out and you never see them again. They dispose of you.
- SL: Did you have any sanitary facilities, bathrooms, or did you just have to go out in the woods?
- CC: No, in the woods, they had woods all around but you couldn't get out because of the wire. They had some bathrooms.
- SL: Enough?
- CC: No, it wasn't enough, you had to stay in line, lined up to go in.
- SL: Did you have to wear a special uniform?
- CC: Yeah, they put patches on us, yellow patches.
- SL: Did you have roll call several times a day? How did they keep track of you?
- CC: I don't know, they use to, they had, they had so many people in there and they knew if something, they call off the names and if somebody is missing they knew something happened.
- SL: Now you didn't have a number tattooed on you did you?
- CC: You mean like, no, they just got patches for us. In Dachau and Auschwitz they a lot of people had the tattoos.
- SL: Maybe you could tell me just about a typical day in the camp. When you got up, what you had to eat and what they expected of you to be doing?
- CC: They use to wake us up, like a, like an army like 7 o'clock in the morning. They take us out, they make some, you know, they take us out because a lot of the places were destroyed, take us out like in the field to dig ditches or do some stuff like this. And one day they took us out near the woods, it was I don't know how many acres of ground there, and they told us just to dig, to dig and that's what we did. Afterwards, somebody I don't know how, but somebody told us the ditches we were digging we were digging for ourselves because somebody saw machine guns delivered over there to the same place. And we like this until 1 o'clock and then 1 o'clock you come back to the barrack and they give you one slice of bread and a cup of water. This was twice a day, at night and in the daytime.

SL: Did you work in the afternoon also?

CC: Well, they called you and you have to go work, sure, you have to.

SL: Now I am interested in what happened to Sally while you were working?

CC: My mother, my mother took care of her.

SL: Your mother did not have to work?

CC: She had to work but she was so, you know, she was sick and she was just laying on the cot doing nothing.

SL: At any time did they threaten Sally? Were you afraid that she might be killed?

CC: I was afraid because they used to dispose of a lot of kids and one day there was a lady over there and she was pregnant. They took her away into the infirmary, or what you call it. And they brought her back and I think they dispose of the baby and they sterilized her so she would never get pregnant again.

SL: Did you have to hide Sally or did they know she was there?

CC: No, they knew because the day they took us out of camp I was carrying her with me.

SL: How did you feed her? What food did you give her?

CC: Anything I could get a hold of it.

SL: She didn't get her own rations, did she?

CC: No, no.

SL: So in other words, you were giving her what you were supposed to be eating?

CC: Yeah, I am giving to her.

SL: What happened to your mother?

CC: My mother died, they took us out, one day there was, we were two years in the camp, two or more, I can't remember, and they came to the camp, the Gestapo, there was the 5,000 people and they told us they have to transfer us to a different camp. And me and my mother and my sister was in the same wagon and they told us we going to a different camp. But a lot of people used to come in to the wires and the Polish people and tell us, you know, they heard from my husband or from somebody because at that time they didn't [sounds like; talk/take] the Polish yet, the Polish people. My father use to have the neighbors

they were pretty good friends of his. They told us they taking us to Florida, and we couldn't believe it, a lot of people couldn't believe it. And then we were going on the wagon and I wanted to leave, to escape and leave Sally and my mother. And my mother knew what I am up to and she said, "No honey, she said, wherever you go, you take her, maybe someday you be alive." And I was in that wagon with a lot of people and I, you couldn't even ask, but I asked one Gestapo I said before I know where I am going, you can't fool me, but can I at least have a cup of water. It was a little farmhouse. And I asked him if I can go in, even you have a heart, you can go can I go in and have drink of water. He said, no, but then another Gestapo said what can you lose, let her go and have a drink of water. And he let me. I went into the little farmhouse and nobody was there. And it was a window, just enough to crawl out of that window and I got some water, and that was kinda high that window, and I broke the window with my elbow and I cut myself pretty bad and I was bleeding, and I tossed Sally out and I jumped out of the window and I escaped to the woods. When I escaped they start shooting but they never hit me. A lot of people escaped that day through the woods and I went to a woods I never been before I didn't know where I am and Sally, lucky Sally was a very good baby, she never cried. And then I escaped and it was morning and I didn't know where I am, but I could see, it was around 4 o'clock it was still light, and I could hear the machine guns and I could see some of it from the woods. How they, the people they took all their clothes off and they shot them and they just fell in the ditches, the graves, the ditches we used to work on it.

SL: And that was the last time you saw your mother?

CC: That's the last time I saw my mother, my sister and all my relatives.

SL: I wonder if we can go back a little bit to the camp. You had told me before that you did escape one day.

CC: Yeah, my mother was weak and I did whatever will happen, will happen. For some reason I knew a Polish family not far from there, I took her out and I got some milk for the baby and I got something else and I came back and I crawled into the same hole I went out. But for some reason they spotted me and they took away the stuff from me and they put me in a hole for 24 hours. You couldn't sit, you couldn't move, you just stand in it and rats were in there and they were just crawling all over me. When they took

- me out I was just like a piece of meat, I couldn't work, I was laying on the cot almost for almost two or three days from all the bits where the rats got me.
- SL: What did you think about when you were in the box in the hole?
- CC: Not much, I thought to myself, if I have to do all over again, I'll do it. If I can help my mother because I felt sorry for her, I love her so much and I just couldn't see her laying there and dying. I weighed 90 pounds when I came to this country too.
- SL: Did you ever feel that you really wanted to survive?
- CC: Yeah, for some reason or another I would like to, I wondered if I can survive and see the end what will happen to the people who did this to us.
- SL: Did you ever get beaten by the Germans?
- CC: Yeah, all the time.
- SL: With their hands or something else?
- CC: No, they had some clubs, black ones with the leather things. You get, you know, you don't do something right you get hit over the head or you get hit over your back, you know, how many times that you don't listen to them, if you start talking to somebody like when you work you get beatings, all the time beatings.
- SL: Did they only speak German?
- CC: Yeah.
- SL: Did you know any German before?
- CC: Yeah, I knew what they were talking about.
- SL: Did you have any trouble understanding if they gave you orders?
- CC: No, they gave an order you have to obey otherwise you'll be dead.
- SL: So there were no men in this camp at all?
- CC: No, there wasn't allowed.
- SL: Did you ever get messages from the outside?

CC: No, some of them young, uh, one fellow he had his wife and his mother in there and for some reason he escaped from the camp and he came and he told us not to get any hope because the camp not far from the men's camp they took them out and they told them they're taking them to a different camp but they never make the camp. They killed them right on the spot, all of them. And he says it's no hope. If somebody tells you they take you to work, don't believe 'em. If you can escape, anybody can escape, they should do it because anything they said that's a lie and wherever they go in from the camps nobody goes out alive unless they escape.

SL: So then you felt that your husband had been killed?

CC: Yeah, I didn't know if my husband's alive or my brothers. I didn't know till the end.

SL: Okay, once you had escaped....

CC: Yeah.

SL: You ended up in the woods?

CC: I ended up in the woods.

SL: That's a story in itself. Could you tell me just about those first days in the woods, what did you do?

CC: Those first days, I used to wrap up Sally in a blanket and take a, put her under a tree and make a sign there, I knew where to find her. And use to, Polish kids or the other kind of kids they use to come in and bring cattle or sheep over there to feed and they used to watch them. And I use to always watch the kids where they hang up their food, they use to hang up in a little tree pouch or something, and as soon as they went someplace, I always use to go and steal it. [laughing]. I had enough food for her for days.

SL: So how close were you really to some villages?

CC: There was a lot of villages there around, not [far] from the woods, but I didn't know the people. Because a lot of people if they spotted a Jewish family they reported to the Germans.

SL: Did you have any idea of where you were?

CC: No.

SL: How big were the woods?

CC: It was pretty big, and it was swamp and water and trees, it's kinda hard to find you if you know how to hide. And one day I just couldn't take it anymore and I thought I would go out because I didn't have more than one dress and one pair of shoes and you had to sleep in it. We had all kinds, and I don't want to say it, but we had lice in our hair and every place. But one day I was walking in the woods and here are two guys with machine guns, you know, they almost killed me and then one stopped and he said to me, and I knew right away it's not German, because they didn't have Germans clothes on it, and they had like Russian. But they were Jewish guys but this army.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1

TAPE 1, SIDE 2

SL: Do you think you can continue telling me about meeting the *Partisans* in the woods?

CC: Yeah, and them two guys, they asked me who I am and I told them, I am Jewish and I have a little girl laying there and I escaped from the camps, from where they took out from the camps to kills us. And he asked me if I know where I am and I said no. And they said they had 40 or 30 people, *Partisans*, they have Jewish people and other kind but they said they are afraid to take me with them because I have a baby and if the baby cries it's no good. And I told them I said why don't you try and take me someplace and if the baby cries then I'll leave. And one of the *Partisans*, it was a very nice man, and he said why don't we do that. And then I went with them, and I had a little cave. That was from the *Partisans*, a girl, she was from some different city. And there were two ladies and they said they'll take me in. They had a little cave, you can do anything at night but in the daytime you couldn't cook, you couldn't walk because of the [sounds like; *Paseo*]. But on top of trees you would never find that place in the daytime. But at night we used to cook and where we had a stray farm you go to the farmhouse at night if the dogs weren't after you. Once I went to a farmhouse and I left the baby with the people and I took three or four sheets out of line, stole them from the farm and made some diapers for her because she was so tiny. And that was okay, you can see the police cruising around over there looking for people but they never find them. Then some more *Partisans's* came in and they said they had just blown up a train, the Germans. And one day was pretty bad, we didn't know what happened because it was snow and some people from over there didn't ask because you have to be very strict, they were very strict, if you didn't listen to them, they even kill you if you don't listen to them. You have to protect them. And some didn't listen to them and went out when it was snowing and she made footprints all over and the German came in they spotted us. They came in, and it was so bad, I was outside they didn't see me but they were ready to go into the cave. And one man was holding me and I said no my Sally's in there, he said you can't help her, help yourself. I said, nothing doing and I got away from him and I jumped on the inside and I grabbed Sally and I started running, they were shooting after me but they didn't got me and I went into a swamp, it was like

mud all the way I was keeping my breath and all the way until under a tree and I was sitting there for fifty minutes with Sally. Then after it got completely dark then I went back to cave but we couldn't go to the same cave because already they spotted us. And we had to go to a different place move from one place to another.

CC: But Sally was a good baby. She used to see a plane flying or something, she'll lay down [inaudible] and not cry, just lay there.

SL: Did you manage to steal enough food to...?

CC: Yeah. And I used to go in like, we had two families Polish, my dad used to always get him horses on credit and then pay them and they were very good friends of us and I knew they'd never tell the Germans. You couldn't trust nobody that time but I took a chance. I used to go in at night and she used to always have a package for me, bread and milk and cheese. And then it would take her quite a while for Sally to eat all of that stuff. But till the end they killed them too, they find out she was hiding Jews and they killed them. Burned the farm and killed the people.

SL: How did you find these friends? You didn't know where you were, how did you?

CC: When the *Partisans* took me and they had, they were in that spot and I knew it, you know, I knew it because even a minister from Rowne, not far from there, he used to know my father and he used to hide Jews. He had, in the church, he had a spot where that thing was standing like a statue and in the basement he had a hole over there and he used to hide people there. Till they find out. Of course the Polish people were the same thing, you know. One used to tell on the other. If somebody's spotted and they wanted to have rewards from the Germans they'd just go and report that they're hiding people or something like that.

SL: Were you able to keep track of the dates at all?

CC: No. We didn't hear and we didn't have... we used to have a radio but that's all. But we didn't have anything, newspaper or... like animals.

SL: Where did you get the radio?

CC: The *Partisans*. I don't know where they got it but they used to have a little pocket radio.

SL: How many people do you think were there in the woods with you?

CC: I think it was about 60 of them, but they weren't all together. They were, you know, they used to stay at night and watch if somebody goes by or somebody that. And if it's snowing and you couldn't go out because Sally froze in her toes because it was so cold and I wrapped it up with rags and everything. I can never forget, one day she was so frozen I thought she dead and I took her to that Polish family and she promised me she'll take care of her. And one day two Germans came in and Sally you can't tell if she's Jewish or not she was crawling around with the rest of the kids and for me it was already late to get out because I was already inside and they were opening the door and I couldn't run otherwise they would kill me and they'll kill the whole family. And I was, I put on a... she gave me, the lady gave me the Polish people used to wear. I have the scarf she gave me. I kept it. I brought it with me to this country. It's a black scarf, a wool one, with flowers on it. And she gave me a blouse like the Polish, the Russian people wearing with the great big sleeves. And the Germans came in and they asked if she had seen any Jews around. And I couldn't understand what they saying and they start talking to me and the lady said, she's a [sounds like; deaf] that's my cousin and she can't speak German. The lady, a little bit she understood German, but she said, she's dumb, she can't speak anything. And I can hear what they asking her but I was just standing over there and playing with the kids like nobody's business. Then after they left I took Sally with me back to the. The lady made her a little sweater and she got her some shoes and I took her back with me and I put her back in the cave and I never took her back to her house. And at night when, in the day time or at night if it's snowing and you have to get out we made sticks like, you know. Its great big sticks and you put your foot and walking on them. It wouldn't be any footprints.

SL: Oh, like skis?

CC: Yeah, yeah. And you have to walk over to the road and the sooner you get to the road the sooner you can walk normally.

SL: Well you didn't have any coat or hat or gloves or anything?

CC: No, no, nothing. Blanket.

SL: Did you ever feel that you would freeze to death yourself?

CC: No. I was thinking about it but we used to, you know, do it like this and at night a great big fire, warm up myself. In the daytime you cover up with a blanket, you just lay there and wait till the night comes.

SL: What would you think about?

CC: I was thinking about my parents and about my sister and about my brothers and if I ever see them again. Because I knew my mother died in that place. Then my sister died but I thought maybe my brothers will live, but afterwards I knew it, you know, the camp they were. Of course the brother... the brothers was in the same camp in a bed one day, they killed them right away on that spot. They wanted to escape and they killed them.

SL: Did you ever find out from the other people in the woods what had happened to them?

CC: One family is in New York. She has a little boy. And a girl friend of mine I think she's in Detroit, not in Detroit, in Boston. She was the best girl friend of mine and she... they took her out from the camp to kill her and after they put them all, you know, they killed that day, I don't know if she was in a different camp, they killed, I don't know, 6,000 or 7,000 people and they shot her but they shot her through the arm and she was still moving. And a farmer was taking care of hay or something and he seen somebody's moving there and he took her in and he saw, with a saw he took her arm off and he kept her on top on the hay for a month or so. And he fed her and everything and then afterward, after the war she came to this country and she knew I'm here. I had a picture of her and she married her a doctor and she got a false arm. It was the left one. And she's pretty happy. She has three kids.

SL: The people that were in the woods with you, did they tell you about what had happened to them before they got to the woods?

CC: Yeah, some of them. They said they escaped from... no, a lot of them escaped from the camps and most of them just left the house and they signed up with the *Partisans*. But some of them were pretty bad even

the between Jewish people, you know. If they see a piece of bread or something, they'll take it, they fight for it. Like animals.

SL: Did you know anything about the death camps? Did you know what was happening?

CC: Yeah, I knew it. I knew it because I knew my mother was in the camp and they took them out and they took their clothes off and everything and they like, they shot 'em and that's it and I knew all the camps are the same. Even after the war... the war was over two weeks already and we were afraid, we were like animals, we were afraid to get out because we didn't believe nobody. We didn't believe the war is over.

SL: How did you find out that the war was ended?

CC: Oh for some, some from the *Partisans*, some kid, he was 19 or something and he changed clothes and he took a chance, we said if he dies, he dies. And he was with a sister there and the girls used to fight more than the men over there. Everybody had a machine gun. And he went into the city and he saw the papers and somebody... he went into a bar or something and he heard what they told him, you know, it wasn't a very big city because everything was destroyed but he heard people talking the war is over two week and the German lost and the Germans sneaking around in the woods, the rest of them, wherever they find because they start, they start shooting like gypsies, Polish people, ministers. And he said, they got burned pretty bad and they mad and they shoot, they don't care who they shoot. And we knew that the war was over. We came back and we still were for ten days in the woods. We still didn't believe it. Then we came out from the woods, some people died, some people had to be... some people lost a leg or something, frozen up and you have to take it off. But a half of them were alive. But the rest of the half was just bodies, that's all. And when I went out I didn't have any money, I didn't have any clothes, got the same dress and the same pair of shoes I wear that for months. And we used to at night cook 'em, you know, because people had, you know, lice. And we used to have a great big kettle and cook 'em, cook the clothes like, twice three times a day the same one. You couldn't wear it otherwise you just, you know, got them in your hair, you get 'em every place. And then when I came out I didn't have anything. I came in, it was a city, the name was Malinsk, I don't know how to spell it, and we went over there and I seen

people and people don't do anything. They don't kill you, they don't say anything and the army was there, the Russia army. And I went in a place and signed up for, you know, any kind of work I can find. And it was a Lieutenant, he was Japanese and what he spoke, you know, a little bit language and I told him, I said, can I do something to earn some money. And he said he needs a maid. And I said, boy, that would be good. And I washed his clothes and did his ironing and cleaned his uniforms and polished his boots and he gave me a few bucks for it. As long as I had enough, I never cared about myself, as long as I have enough for my daughter that was okay. And a place to sleep. I didn't care about anything else.

SL: Did you live in the house with him?

CC: No.

SL: Did you have an apartment?

CC: No, I lived in a... I was outside for awhile but then afterwards I moved in a rooming house. It was worse than living in the woods. But as long as I got a bed for her I didn't care, I can sleep on the floor.

SL: I wanted to ask you, after the war was over and you left the woods, did you try to locate your family, see if there was anybody left?

CC: No. I tried but one family, one, well, it wasn't a relative but they were neighbors, and they buried some stuff in the old house and they knew the spot where they buried before the Germans came in and they went over there. But the neighbors, they used to be good neighbors, they took away the gold from them and they shot them. That's why I was afraid even to go to the same place where I was.

SL: So you never went back at all?

CC: No, I've never gone back over there. And then afterward they start registered. Who wants to go to Israel, who wants to go to Canada, who wants to go to this country. It was kind of hard to do that too because they wouldn't let, the Americans they have to... if you lie you can't go through. They wouldn't give you the passport and they wouldn't let you go because they always were afraid the Communists or something. But my husband told them the truth, you know, he said if they let me through they let me through. Then,

- oh, after that they put us in a, after that place when I was working with that guy, the Jewish, a lot of, they made camps for Jewish people. It was Ulm, it was in Germany. And we were over there for awhile.
- SL: You and Sally?
- CC: Me and Sally.
- SL: You told me before that you went to Munich to work.
- CC: Yeah.
- SL: How did that happen?
- CC: I met a girl and she wants me to come stay with her but she was German, but she was a very nice girl. One day I was looking for work and she said to me, she said, she has a big house and her family died and she said if I can help her with the rent and with the heat, she said we can arrange something. One will work at night the other will work in the daytime we will pay together. And I moved in with her. I went to her and I moved in with her and then one day... they had a place, they used to put on all the names who's missing. I don't know how you call that place. And I put down my name and my husband's name in case somebody shows up. And one day my husband showed up.
- SL: Just, with no warning?
- CC: No warning.
- SL: He came to Munich?
- CC: No, he came to Ulm and then because my daughter's were, one was born, Mindla was born [inaudible] and Molly was born in Munich. But he was so skinny I couldn't recognize him.
- SL: What had happened to him? Did he tell you?
- CC: Yeah, he said, you know, he escaped for some reason. Yeah, he escaped because the Russia people came in, the army, in one place, it was a camp, and a lot of people got killed but a lot of people joined the Russia army. And when he when he signed papers he told them what happened and he said whatever happened I have to tell them the truth.
- SL: He fought with the Russians?

CC: Yeah, he was in the Russian army for, I don't know, a few months before... they would do anything to get out of the camp. And then they did it at camp the Russian people. And then he showed up and he was... I didn't recognize him, was just skinny, black little boy. We didn't even know if we, you know, after, he didn't even know if Sally's alive or dead.

SL: Did he tell you what he would think about when he was in the camps?

CC: It was bad, he said, he knew that, you know, in his camp was worse. I don't know the name of the camp where he was. It was a camp near Warsaw. I forgot the name of it, he told me. Sarno, I think that's what it was. And he said it was worse camp than I was because over there you couldn't get out even if you wanted. They used to take them out in the morning too because a lot of *Partisans* used to dispose of things and Germans and he was, you know, before he escaped he said they used to take him out in the morning and a lot of people got killed. They take you to work, they put chains on you. And if you can, if you can walk, keep up with the rest that's okay. If you can't walk they just dispose of you. They take you out right away and you'll never see them again. It's like you see in the Holocaust.

SL: Now you discovered that your father was alive.

CC: Yeah, I one day I ran into a Polish family, Switsky was the name, Bjinski, and they said to me, said, you know, he said, your dad is alive. And I said, my dad? And he said, yeah. And I said, where is he? And he said to me, he said, he heard about it, you escaped, and he's going to look for you. And I said, how can he look for me? He said, never mind, your father can do anything. And he said, he told me in case I show up I should keep you here till he comes back in a few days. And I stayed. He had a corner and you could never find it. Like a wall. But to the end, I don't know, for some reason, to the end they find out. They killed the whole family.

SL: You mean they killed this family after the war?

CC: There was, after the war, yeah. They knew it. They knew it they were hiding Jews. They didn't kill them. They burned the farm. They locked the doors and burned the farm and burned the people in that. These were SS... some Germans, you know, maybe a few of them, weren't too bad but the Gestapo, the

Nazis, they were horrible. They didn't care about anything. A girl friend of mine, she was a neighbor, and she had two little kids. They made her to watch when they killed the kids.

SL: This was in Rowne?

CC: Yeah.

SL: When did you finally meet your father? How long after the war?

CC: Oh, I think it was, I don't know, about a year before the war was over. About a year.

SL: You found him before the war was over?

CC: Yeah. He was already separated because, you know, and then afterwards... maybe it was a few months before the war was over. And then he decided to get married and he was separated and I was separated, you know, I heard from him and that's all.

SL: What had happened to him?

CC: To my dad? He died here in June.

SL: What had happened to him after the family was taken away by the Nazis? What did he go through?

CC: He went to a camp too. He went to the same camp my husband went. And he used to work and my father was a very strong man. He wasn't, he was a skinny one but he was strong and he knew what to do. And he hired with my husband and he was in the camp, they used to do the same thing, you know, he used to work and he did. But he never, my father was, he never believed they'll do to people what they doing it. When after he find out they doing it he knew it but it was too late. I don't know, the people believed it, if the people wouldn't believe it then maybe a half of them would be alive today if they fight back. They were they were like animals. Even the Jewish people. They were just going through the grave like nothing happens. Nobody tried to fight back or escape or nothing. They told 'em to take him to a different camp. They went to a different camp. But they didn't take 'em to a camp they took 'em to slaughter. But the main thing I can't figure out one thing, if they didn't like the Jews why they always took away the stuff from them. Watches, gold teeth, anything. They'll take 'em out from your mouth if they can have it.

SL: You said that if they knew, if the Jews would have known what had happened to them, you wondered why they didn't fight back.

CC: Yeah.

SL: Did you at all offer any resistance when you were taken away? Did you know what was going to happen to you?

CC: I had in my mind whatever it happen they'll have to shoot me in the back or some place, but they'll never get me alive in there. When I went out the camp, my mother couldn't do that because she was weak, she couldn't even walk. And my sister was the same way, she said, they take us a different camp, we can't do anything about, we'll work and that's all. As long as they take us to a different camp. But I, for some reason I didn't believe 'em. And I said no matter what happen I'll try to escape and if they'll shoot me they'll shoot me. Heck, what can I lose? But I always hope the war would be over and I can still see what will happen to the Germans. I hated them. I just...

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

TAPE 2, SIDE 1

SL: I'd like to ask you about the time you were working in Munich. This was before your husband came.

CC: Yes.

SL: What type of work were you doing?

CC: I was selling tickets in a theater at night.

SL: How did you feel about being in Germany?

CC: I didn't know what to feel but as long as, you know, as long as I could make a living for me and for my kid, that only thing I was thinking about. And that girl I met, she was a, she was a very nice person and I didn't know what to do, anything else.

SL: Were you scared still that something could happen to you?

CC: No, I wasn't.

SL: What happened after your husband showed up, did you continue to live in Munich?

CC: No, we moved back to that, we went back to... no, we stayed in Munich, yeah, we stayed in Munich.

And then we went and signed up because they asked us where we wanted to go. And a cousin of mine and some friends of mine they signed up to Israel and the reason we came to this country because I have three aunts here in Boston, Massachusetts, and my father never seen them since they were little. But, he said he wants to go to this country, he wants to see because his father, my grandfather, he died a month before we came to this country. That's why we decided to come to this country.

SL: Could you tell me a little bit about what the Displaced Persons Camp was like?

CC: Where?

SL: At Ulm.

CC: In Ulm. Ulm was a camp, was a camp in every, it was barracks. Wasn't any heat in it. Was a little stove there but not much heat and people who couldn't work they were laying in the barracks and dying. Everyday they take out two or three people from a barrack. I don't know what they did. They didn't even bury them. They just throw 'em out and that's it. Of course there was back here when Eisenhower came

- in and it was, forgot the name of that, and it was millions and millions of people near Munich and I forget where it was the name.
- SL: The camp?
- CC: The camp. Yeah. And then he gave an order, you know, to bury all the bodies there because a lot of people were just laying there dead.
- SL: Did you have enough food to eat in that camp?
- CC: No. No. In the camps, no. But after the war in that Ulm camp, no. They were two, you're just in one room with a lot of people. It was a camp too but you had a little bit of food to eat.
- SL: How did the people feel about remaining in what essentially was still a concentration camp?
- CC: Oh, some people started going out and, you know, on the black market and do things and figure out something to make a buck. But other people just didn't feel anything, they just like they were numb. They didn't know what to feel. I certainly didn't know what's going on or what's going to happen. I just didn't know what to do.
- SL: Talking about the black market, what items were the most popular that people wanted to get a hold of?
- CC: Everything. Sheets, blankets, nylons. Anything you can, you know, if you can buy for a, like for a dollar, and you can sell it for five. If you can do it.
- SL: Where were people getting the money?
- CC: Oh, I don't know. They got some, some people I suppose, some Jewish people hid some and then go and get it. Or some people with the black market, you know, like I remember before my husband came, used to be one day I went in a black, I didn't have any choice, I went to the black market. I look around what's going on. And people, you know, it's like a bazaar, talking Russia, talking German, talking Polish. Speaking all kind of languages. And here, he was a general, he was working in a hospital. He used to make, after the war, he used to make this lace for people I would call it. Cloth or something. And he was an old man and somebody from behind me, I had my purse and somebody swiped my purse and I can never forget because I got some pictures of my parents. And I didn't, I even said to myself, I don't care if I

had a few dollars to take it, but the pictures I would get back. They took everything. Because I didn't have any passport there or nothing. But they took it. And this man saw it, well he was a Russian general. He came in and he start talking to me. He knew English a little bit, he was talking all kind of languages, and he said in Russia to me, he said, he feel sorry for me, he saw what happened. I said, happen, what can I do. And he said, do you want to make a few dollars? And I told him, I said, sure. I said, what do I have to do for the few dollars? And he said, not what you think. And I said, I'm not thinking anything. He said, I want you in my house and he was in Russia [inaudible] from a hospital. And he used to, you know, take things, take it out the hospital and nobody stopped him. And one day I said, what can I lose and I went to his house. He had a daughter and his wife was. He was from Kiev, Russia. And I came in, I said, what do you want me to do? And I thought he wants me to clean the house or something. And he said, no, not that. And I said, what do you want me to do and he said, I'll give you stuff to sell. But if you get caught don't involve me, don't tell 'em where you got it. And I said, how can I get stuff to sell, I don't have the money to pay you? And he said, you have an honest face. For some reason, he said, I trust you. And I said, I didn't even know you. And he said, I don't know what. And he said, you come in tomorrow morning and I'll give you some stuff. And I came in the morning at six o'clock and he had sheets for me and blankets and nylons and quite a little bit. And I said, how do you want me to sell this? And he said, I don't care, as long as you get a dollar for everything. A dollar a piece and I don't care for how much you sell. You can sell for ten dollars, that's yours. As long as I have a dollar for every sheet or for every, of course nylons like a \$1.15 and I wrote everything down and I didn't take too long I went in the market and it didn't take me an hour and everything was gone. Because it's brand new. And I made \$20 that day. Boy was I happy. I didn't know, I thought I'm in heaven. I came back and I gave him the money, what, you know, and I told him how much I sold it. He said, I'm not asking you how much. I told you how much I wanted and how much you can keep it. And I worked for him for quite a few months and but I promised myself if somebody catches me, because he did a favor for me, if somebody catches me, no matter what they do to me I would never tell 'em where I got it.

SL: So you used that money that you made then to...

CC: I bought a, I went and bought, the first thing I went and bought a dress for Sally, a little one, and I bought her a pair of shoes and a sweater and it wasn't, didn't much left, and I went and bought a pair of shoes for myself because I had a pair of shoes it wasn't even feet to, you know, nobody can wear 'em. There was holes and everything. But I always was thinking about my daughter. If she has enough then if I got leftover I'll do it. Otherwise I can go by without it. But I promised myself, and I think that's a sickness, I promised myself if I ever got out no matter what if I'll have the money and if I can afford it, even if I can't afford it, I'll buy clothes and I'll buy shoes. And I think I have a sickness till now. I have so many shoes you wouldn't believe it. Half of them I don't even wear. The kids sometimes ask me, mom, what are you doing that for. And I tell them. But they can't figure it out. And I say, you can but I, it's a habit. When I see something I want it, I go and get it. And people are pretty, they're pretty nice here in Madison. I like it. I can go in now, my husband had a very good reputation. When we bought this house we paid \$500, and we didn't even know the people. But like I said, the people took... we told 'em he was an attorney and he was in business with Pash, [inaudible] Pash. And he said, for some reason, he said, you have an honest face. I said, what's the matter with my face. And we took this house to pay 15 years and we paid off it all. But we were, I was very close to my husband. Whatever we made we went together. It wasn't like these days, this is yours and this is mine. It's never been like that.

SL: Going back to what you said about the shoes, do you feel the same way about making sure that you have enough food to eat?

CC: Yeah. That's what the, sometimes when I go to the grocery store, just me and my son, and I spend like \$140 and I came home and my refrigerator's busting and the kids ask me, mom, you're just two of you, what are you buying so much. And I said, don't ask me for some reason I want to have food in the refrigerator.

SL: Okay, now we got you in this DP camp with your husband. What did you have to go through in order to come to this...

CC: This country.

SL: This country?

CC: You didn't have any passports, you didn't have anything. You just have to go in and there was Americans. You have to go in and you have to talk to them and if you told them, they can tell if you're telling the truth or you're lyin'. Cause a friend of mine lied and they didn't give him a passport to this country.

SL: What would they lie about?

CC: The guy with his wife, he was in the *Partisans*, and he covered it up. He said he never been there, and they have a way to find out. And my husband told them. Joseph was his name. He said, Joseph, don't lie, tell them the truth. He said, with lies, he said, you can never go by with it. And we been in quite, it took us almost two months till they allow us to leave the camp. And we told them why we want to go because the grandparents are here and, you know. And they looked at us and they said, okay. And we went to, when we were at the camp we went to Italy. They made us stop over there and we were in Italy for six weeks.

SL: Where were you?

CC: In, forgot the name of it, the part of Italy. But my Minnie she got sick. She got sick in the camp. She was running a fever, I don't know, very high fever, and my husband said, if this ship leaves and we not on it, we have to wait another half a year till we can get out, what can we do. Then we get, the doctor gave us some pills, it takes away the temperature for 24 hours. We gave it to her and we went, we went through the line and they checked the eyes and everything and she's okay. And I was shaking inside, they take, because a lot of people they took them outside from the line because the kid had a cough or a kid had measles. They wouldn't, they were very careful. And we were on the ship almost a day and then she start, she had a fever 104. This wasn't good and I told my husband, no matter what happen, you have to go to the captain and tell him what happened. She's sick. My husband said, I'm staying out of it, he said, you handle it. And I went to the captain, I told him, I said, captain, my daughter is very sick, running a fever 104 and I didn't know why. And he said, I'll send a doctor to check her over. And she got the

measles. And after they checked her, the guy came in and start yelling at me. He said, are you sure she wasn't sick before you left Italy? And I said, no. He said, you're a liar. And I said, no, she was, she didn't feel good but she didn't have any temperature when we went out. He said if we wouldn't be wasting a day or two, he said, I would turn around and drop you off back. And I said, captain, whatever you do to me, you do it. I said, I'm not afraid of anything. I said, I went through worser things than that. Then they took her away from me and they put her in a, in the basement was a room. I can see her through the glass but they wouldn't let me inside. She got the measles. And then before they, when we came to New York, a doctor came and checked her over if otherwise they had a place before New York, he came exactly on Christmas Day. And they told us they have to check her over in case she still had the measles they can't take it off, they have to send her on a little island over there. And Melvin said I have to go through that, then I don't know what to do anymore. And the doctor came in and looked her over and she was okay not contagious and they let us out. We stayed in New York. In New York, the Jewish people, the committee or something, I don't know what it is, they took us in a apartment house, where I was I think on the 16th floor or the 20th floor, I don't even remember. And we used to go three times a day down below and have meals. We were over there for two months or three months, I don't remember exactly, and my husband said to me, he said, honey, he said, I can't stand it anymore. It reminds me of the camp, it reminds me of everything, he said, I don't want this. He said, no matter where they send us, if I can work and make a dollar for myself, he said, I'm helpless here. And one day they came in and they told us it's a Jewish committee, the name is Madison, Wisconsin, and if we want to go there. And my husband said, I'll go any place, as long as I got out of this hole. It was good, you have three meals and everything but it reminded you a lot like, you know, like not your own personal. They send us over here and Rabbi Swarsensky was waiting for us, he picked us up.

SL: What date was this?

CC: I don't remember.

SL: The year do you remember?

CC: It was in, we came to New York 1949, I think it was in 1949, I'm sure of it. I don't know what month or what day but it was. And he took us, he had a house, an old house, he lived with his mother on West Avenue or some place, I don't remember that place. We stayed over there for a while with him. Then we moved, they took us from over there and we couldn't speak any English. You know, if you can't speak the language you're a dead person. And the first thing they put us on Mound Street, Synagogue, it was an old man next to a grocery store, and it was one room, two rooms. And we lived there and then all three kids of mine got the whooping cough. And I used to stay up night after night and it was an old doctor, he used to take care of them and we didn't have to pay, this wasn't the committee. And then he didn't do much for the kids and then I said to my husband, I said, Melvin, the doctor I don't think he knows what he's doing. You know, for free, who wants to bother with anything better. Then one day they recommend a Doctor Parks. I still go to him. He was our family doctor. He was a good man. He is. And he took care of us. And then one day after the kids got better, I said, we have to, the doctor told us, you know, they changed their climate and they went through so much and I think that's why they have the whooping cough. And then after this we moved in, what did we move in? We moved, Mrs. Rothchild, she used to have Barron's Store, years and years ago. She bought a house on Broom Street. It was heaven. That's when we have our Thanksgiving thing. She put us there and she said, she bought a house for refugees and she said we can stay there till we be able to pay. We stayed there a year and we start paying her like \$50 a month. My husband went to work for A. A. Sweet, I don't know if you know them, and he was working for 75 cents an hour and he came home one day, he broke his back. He was carrying potatoes on his back and he wasn't, you know, all worn out. And I told him, I said, honey, you'll just kill yourself. He said, what can I do. I can't speak English, I'm not a citizen. And one day we went some place on West Avenue and we seen a restaurant and we went in, it was [inaudible]. She was a German lady. And she was running that restaurant for 49 years, it was a big place. We went in over there on Sunday for a cup of coffee. And I told her, I heard her, she said, are you from Germany. Rabbi Swarsensky told them a family will come in and if you need, if you can give them any help for work I will appreciate it. And we

went in and we had coffee, she start talking German, and she asked me what I can do. And I told her, I said, I can do anything but I can't speak English. She said, I'll put you on a job, you don't have to speak. I said, all right. And she hired me. She paid me, I think, two dollars an hour. I was washing dishes. I was washing dishes for almost a year over there. Then one day the cook, an elderly lady, she took off a few weeks because she worked so long over there, and one day she came over and she told me, she said Chana, and I said, I have to do something about this language, about talking. And I went to night school, vocational school, and I signed up for night lessons. Of course I have to learn all the stuff about getting a citizen and I went over there for two semesters and I start speaking English. And it was broken English, it's a little bit better now, but she told me, came to me and she said, Chana, you have to help me out. And I said, what do I have to do now Daisy? And she said to me, and she said, you're going to cook. And I said cook, I don't know, I know what it is but I can't write yet? And she said, you'll manage if I know you. And I was working over there for 16 years in that place. And she closed up that place.

SL: What was your husband doing?

CC: My husband was still working over there and he ruined his back and I was talking to Daisy and she was, she was German, her parents were German, but she was so good to us. She used to send us boxes of food every day to the house. And I used to feel bad. I said, Daisy, I can't pay you. She said, who's asking you? And one day I told her what happened to Melvin and she said she needed a dish washer for pots and pans. And I said, he can't even do that, he ruined his back. And we just used to live on that stuff what I used to make. But one day she hired him. He used to sit the rest of the day. And he said, if it doesn't bother me why's it bother you? And she used to pay him. She paid me about \$2.95 an hour and she paid Melvin, I don't know how much. But one thing I didn't like, one day from the committee, Mrs. Silverburgh? was her name, she came in, they thought, you know, people that came here from the old country, you know, they don't know anything, they don't have anything, they never had anything, and they brought up a pajama for my husband and they told my husband how to put it on. And he really, he was crying, he really got worried, he said, my God what do they think we are. They brought a little plate, a

electric one, a little one to warm something up. They told me said do you know what you have to do with it, and I just played dumb and I said, what do I have to do with it? They said, you have to plug it in. And my husband got mad and he opened up. And she told me another thing, I can't eat more than a have one egg a day because they can't afford it with all the Jews they came in they can't afford too much money for this. My husband opened up the door and he threwed her out. And he told her he doesn't want any help. And he doesn't want her anymore in the house. Because he said, so help me God next time if you come in and start telling me what to do, he said, it will be something bad. And I never seen her again. Her husband used to build all the houses, Silverburgh was the name.

SL: Now the Madison community helped you when you first came, when you first settled.

CC: Yeah, it was a help, it wasn't a big help, but it was a little bit of help.

SL: Did they do anything for you besides finding you a place to live.

CC: No, they use to bring a few clothes and a few things, but that's all. But then one day my husband went, after we got our citizen papers, I don' remember what year we got, we came to Wisconsin in '49 '50, I think we got ours citizen papers in '52 or '53, I don't remember. As soon as we got out citizenship papers he went and applied for a job. He could, you know, he started speaking English and could write English. And he went and applied for a job at Oscar Mayer's. And he worked over there for 23 years. And I'm cooking since then. I cooked 16 years there and then I cooked on Regent Street for four years.

SL: At what place?

CC: At Larry's Cafe. All the students used to come in eat over there. And then I cook for Dolly, D & D, that's on Park Street, across from the Bancroft for a year. And then this lady I work for, for seven years now, Bev. She got a hold of me. I didn't even stay at home for a week. When she found out I quit over there. I didn't quit but they sell the place and I still work for her. I don't know how long but I'm still working.

SL: And what type of work are you cooking?

CC: Where, now? Everything. She's everything homemade, soups, beefs, frying stuff. We don't bake much because we're too busy over there, but otherwise I cook everything and I like it.

SL: And where is it located?

CC: It's 2422 Winnebago Street. But I don't work very much now. I used to work and I started on Saturdays, Sundays helping out. Sunday's it's closed, on Saturdays. And I used to work more hours but now I work five hours a day, whatever. Less hours is better for me. And I took off this year. I didn't make much because I took off quite a few months. I was sick and I didn't feel good. But still I hate to sit around at home because too many memories.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1

TAPE 2, SIDE 2

SL: Mrs. Comins, when you first came to Madison did you experience any anti-Semitism at all?

CC: No.

SL: Did people react to you in a certain way because you had come from Europe?

CC: Some of them but not very much, no. Because you go in a store and you want to get something and you can't speak English and they don't understand what you're talking about and they really, no, don't pay too much attention to you. I speak Polish and I speak Russian all that and even Hebrew, but I couldn't speak English and that was kind of strange to them.

SL: Now I was wondering if you could tell me about your children, their names and when they were born.

CC: Sally was born in August 6, 1941; Minnie was born in June 18; Molly was born January 31 and Mike was born in March, he will be 21 in March in about a month.

SL: So Minnie and Molly were born in Europe?

CC: Yeah, in Germany. Sally was born in Poland.

SL: And so Mike is the...?

CC: Mike is the last one. He came pretty late and he was born here.

SL: Did you speak English in the house all the time with your children?

CC: No, sometimes I tried to speak Yiddish but a half of them they don't know what I'm talking about. But some of them, Mike went to Hebrew, to school, and he was *Bar Mitzvah* and he can, you know, I speak Yiddish to him.

SL: Now Sally, did you, you spoke Polish with her or Yiddish with her?

CC: She can speak Yiddish, she can speak English, but she can speak Yiddish and she spoke a little bit of Polish because when she was little I always taught her. But she forgot. She still knows what I'm talking about but she can't, you know.

SL: Was it hard for her to learn English when she came over?

CC: No, Sally was a excellent student. I can't forget when, she went to Washington School and she brought her report card and for citizenship she had an A and the teacher wrote it down, she's the best student in the class and she didn't know it, she was so little, she said, you know mom, she said, I have a good report card, she said, but we have a lot of kids and some of them said, we are pilgrims, we are refugees. And I explained to her what it is and she said, oh. And then one day, I don't know how old she was, and she wasn't very nice dressed, I couldn't afford it, she had, she was worn there but like people wearing nice coats, I couldn't, I did the best I could, the food on the table, me and my husband and some other stuff, but we couldn't afford a coat for her. And she met a girl friend and she said, Julie was her name or something, and she said, mom, I would like to have a new coat. And I told her, she has to, I can't afford it, you have to wait. But you know how kids are, they don't... if she wants a new coat, she wants a new coat. And I called the committee and I told them if they ever run, you know, any kind of coat for Sally, I will appreciate it. And they told me then she is spoiled and she doesn't know what she's talking about. And they took her to a doctor, his name was Bernard, he was psychiatrist, and I went with her and this lady went with her. It was Mrs. Silverburgh too, I'll never forget her. And when I went, and I went in the doctor asked me questions and I told him what happen. I said, she wants a new coat, what's wrong with that. And he said, that's all? And I said, that's all, I said, you can talk to her. And he talked to Sally, Sally answered the questions, then he called her in. And he told her, he said, I don't think so, if something is wrong is Sally. I think it's wrong with you. He said, a kid wants a new coat and you bring them in for psychiatry? He said, you're the crazy one and she's the normal one. Then she called and she said she got her a new coat, but I got paid from Mrs. [inaudible] and I told her I want some money ahead and I'll work it off extra hours. I used to work on Sundays, clean up for her and everything. And she gave me extra money and I went and I bought her a storm coat. I remember like today, was a brown with a collar and boy did I make her happy. I paid, I don't know how much. I bought it at Penney's in the basement, it wasn't too much money, but I got her a coat and she was wearing it for quite a while. I still have that coat in the attic. I keep it for a souvenir.

SL: Did your children ever have any problems in school with other children making fun of them?

CC: No, no, no, they never. They had a lot of friends, good friends, and Sally... Sally, when she decide to go to, when she finished high school, she was in everything in high school. She was on the committee and she was in all kinds of stuff. She was the president of the class and she always had straight A's. And Sally was a person, she doesn't have to study and when she, she always said she's going to the university and she went for five years. And she used to work on three jobs because we couldn't afford much for her. But we helped as much as we could. But she had three scholarships. She has a scholarship from Oscar Mayer's, she has a scholarship from Rennebohms, and she has a scholarship with university. And she used to work for a professor typing at night, she worked on Sunday and Saturday at the [sounds like; Kroitz's] as a waitress and she worked at Rentschler's Flower Shop selling flowers.

SL: While she was in school?

CC: When she was in school. And she got her Master's Degree in Michigan.

SL: In what subject?

CC: She's a professor now in physical therapy in the University of, in Chicago, I forgot the name.

SL: Northwestern?

CC: No. Northwestern, yeah, that's what it is, yeah.

SL: And is she married?

CC: Yeah, she's married, she has a little girl, husband.

SL: You told me before that she married a survivor.

CC: Yeah, Adelbert. He was married before but his wife died from cancer.

SL: And what about your other daughters, what are they doing?

CC: The other daughter, her name is Mindla and she's a court reporter here in Madison. She has two little boys, one will be three years old and the other one's four months.

SL: What's her married name?

CC: Rothman.

SL: And your third daughter, Molly?

CC: My third daughter is Stone. She has a little girl seven and the girl's eight and the boy is seven.

SL: Are they here in Madison also?

CC: Yeah.

SL: Does she work at all?

CC: No, she's not working. She said, she would, you know, she helps out my other daughter with the kids.

The kids are too little, she said to, you know, she worked before she got married. She worked in a telephone company for a long time. But now, she said, the kids need her and she wants to be till the kids a little bit older. She doesn't believe in hiring teenagers baby-sitters to baby-sit for them. She doesn't trust them.

SL: And what is your son doing?

CC: My son goes to university. He'll be at the end of the semester be three years. And he's taking medical, uh, metal, metal engineering or something like that. And he's pretty good.

SL: How much do your children know about your experiences?

CC: They know a lot. They know a lot. And I think I'm lucky because they are good kids. They never got in trouble. Oh they used to get in trouble once in awhile, little things. But in school they never get in a fight or, you know, argue with people. And the respect, maybe they say something to me, I don't like it, but they would never say to strangers. They respect people.

SL: In comparisons to other families, do you see that your children maybe have over achieved because they wanted to make up for things that you couldn't do yourself?

CC: I don't know, maybe that's why it is. But I did, like my husband used to say, we always do what the, you know, the best for the kids. He was a man he loved the kids, he loved me, and we were married almost for, I don't know, 43, 42 years, and the kids always came first. For me and for my husband. What's leftover was for us, but they always came first. And he was [sounds like; independable], he didn't like charity. If he could make a dollar on his own, he wouldn't take from nobody.

SL: And when did he die?

CC: He died, it will be [inaudible] it was, last week. It was nine years last Saturday.

SL: And did you receive benefits from Oscar Mayer? Have they, uh...

CC: Yeah, some of it, but not too much because my husband he was, I don't know. I always used to tell him to take off insurance or something but he never believed in it. He was old fashioned. But he took some out. It helped out a little bit.

SL: Could you tell me a little bit about what happened to your father after the war? He came to this country?

CC: He came to this country but the committee send him to Florida.

SL: Why didn't they send him here to Madison?

CC: I don't know. They send different people to different places, like Chicago, Milwaukee, Madison and they send him to Florida. He lived there, he came in later than we did. We came in 1949, he came in 1951 and he had a son, this was a step-brother of mine, and he remarried but I don't know. The marriage wasn't... of course, I don't know, I liked her as a person but it wasn't like my mother. Maybe that's why, but a lot of marriages work now but he married and I couldn't say anything to him.

SL: Did he ever come to visit you?

CC: He used to come in every summer for two or three months, stay with me. I went to visit him because my husband went one year over there and they were looking, they have a house there, and they even have a cottage. They have people living there and they get the rent. And my husband went to Florida, we went on vacation, my husband had four weeks vacation from Oscar's and we drove over there with the kids and my dad wanted to buy the house and my husband gave him \$2000 cash to, that's what they were short on the house, and we bought a house for dad. We bought him an air condition over there and we stayed there for a while and my dad used to always come and stay here but every time he came over here in this weather it did not agree with him. Cause he liked it there. He has a beautiful home and flowers around the backyard and everything. He always liked to do his own way, to the end. His own way. He was clean and he was 94, 95 years old and when he came this last time here he didn't feel good. He fell in Florida

and he had trouble with his back and I went over there and stayed with him for three weeks. Then one day he called me and he said he's coming and we picked him up and he stayed here for six weeks, and then he did not feel good. And we took him to doctors and one day we took him to the hospital, he was running a fever very bad, and he died June 15, right here in my house. But he always, I don't know, maybe God want that way because he always used to talk, and he told his wife, my step-mother, if something happens to him he wants to be buried here next to Melvin. 'Cause his son is the young generation, you know, he doesn't care if dad did that. When I was in Florida, dad asked him something and he just turn around and he doesn't pay attention to him. And I, I'm glad he's buried here because he used to talk to Mike and play cards with Mike cause always and Mike used to say, mom, you know, grandpa's cheating and I said, oh forget about it, he's an old man and you can't do anything. He said, but he's cheating. And I said, let him cheat, if he enjoys it, I said, let him. And he told Mike, one day I walked in from work walk and he was talking to Mike, he said, Mike, if something happened to me I want you to say [inaudible]. And Mike promised him he'll do it because Mike always goes, says [inaudible] to my husband. And I wanted to put a headstone but I can't put it because my father was religious and I can't put it before the year. In Jewish religion you have to wait a year till you put a monument. He died here and, well, my father is gone.

SL: Could you tell me a little bit about buying this house that you live in?

CC: We were looking for... we lived... after we moved out of Rothchild's house we moved in a house on Milton Street. It was Sam, Sam Sweet, and we lived there for, I don't know, three or two years. It had five rooms. Was heaven. People were nice. They don't want us to move out of there because we used to take care of the house, the backyard. And then my husband said, why should I pay rent when we can buy a house. And we start looking at houses and you wouldn't believe it, that year we looked in houses that reminded me of camps. It was old and dirty and we couldn't afford. We couldn't even live in that houses. Then we see a house on Hancock Street and the house was like this. I don't know how old she was. And I told... my husband said, if I have to buy a house like this we better wait till we can afford it. Then we saved up a

thousand dollars and I said to my husband, I said, you can't buy a house for a thousand dollars. He says, who knows, maybe we'll run into something better. In one day we, me and the kids were taking a ride, it was on Sunday, we went to the street and I looked at houses, it was over here, the neighbors are just wonderful. They know I'm Jewish. But they checked on me twice a day. They call me. If they don't see me outside, then they call me. "Are you okay Chana?" I say, I'm fine. And we went by here and there was a sign outside. They selling the house. The lady she lived here with her husband. She was in the real estate and he was an attorney. He was an attorney with Pesh, Morey Pesh, together. And I looked at her house and I almost popped my eyes out. And I said, Melvin, shouldn't we go in and ask? And he says, with what? And I said, you can't tell what will happen. We walked in and they was, and the house was just sparkling, everything in there, Peterson, Arnold Peterson was the name. And we walked in and looked and I said I see a sign on and they said to us, are you interest to buy it. And I said, can we look around first? He said, sure. We went in the kitchen and upstairs and I said, Melvin, I just love this house. He said, love, no love, he said, we can't afford it. And I told him right away, I said, Mr. Peterson, introduced himself, and I said our name is Comins and we told her we are newcomers and we don't have much money. I said my husband just started Oscar Mayers and we saved a thousand dollars and I says I'll tell you the truth and I don't think so if we can even look for the house because we're not that stupid, we have to pay at least a half in to buy it. And we didn't have a recommendation from nobody. And he said to me, when did you come to this country? I told him. And we knew Morey Pesh pretty well and he said, do you have any relatives here? And I said, no, I have good friends. He said, who are they? And I said, Morey Pesh is our attorney and Dr. Park and that and Rabbi Swarsensky and he said to me, he said, why didn't you want to talk about? And I said, because we can't afford it. I didn't want to waste your time. And he said, don't worry I have plenty of time. We start talking and he said he would like to see us again. And I went out and I said, Melvin, did he meant what he said or he's just making fun of us. And he said, no, he seems like a nice man. And I made an appointment with him. And we came into see him again. And we bought the house, closed the deal. And the lady said, you know, we bought the house cheaper

than we buy to a real estate because she's the one, she's selling herself. I don't remember for \$27,000, 26 we bought it. We paid him the \$1000, we bought and he sold the house like we sold, he didn't sell to a, you know, himself to us because he build one on the lake and all the rich people from Sherman Avenue live, I forgot the name of it.

SL: Maple Bluff?

CC: Maple Bluff, he builded a house there. And he left the table here, he left the buffet here, this went with the house, and the stove and all the curtains and everything. And I said, I don't know, I said, if he's crazy or we are crazy. How can he do that. And he told us, he said, you know what, he said, I'll take a risk. If you don't pay we can always let you, you know, throw you out. And we took the house to pay for 15 years. Never in 15 years, in 12 years we paid off. Never, we missed a payment. We paid \$200 or \$250 a month. And if we had more, we paid more. We used to, I used to bring mine check and my husband used to bring his check and you to sit in the kitchen would figure out, this goes for the rent and whatever left for food. If he can't buy anything, you forgot about it. As long as we had them two things, food and pay for the house, the mortgage. We paid off in 12 years. And the funniest thing, we went to the, last payment we made, the girl from the bank got a mistake and we still have to make three payments and she give us all the papers. But if she signed it out, it's all paid, it's paid. Came home and my husband looked in the papers, he said, honey, they had a mistake. And I said, what do you mean? He said, they gave us the papers before the time is over, we still have three payments to make. And he took the papers and he went back to the bank. Here the telephone was ringing, and he said, do you know, he said, it's our mistake, if you don't want to pay that's okay, we already signed out and everything. And all of a sudden he said, forget about it, he said, your husband's already here with the papers back. And we had to pay three more months, we pay him off. We paid off of the house.

SL: What year was it that you first moved in?

CC: I don't remember. We in this house almost, I don't know. In this house I think we are about 25 or 26 years, I can't tell you exactly. But the people they sold us the house, they were very good people. He

used to come almost for a year and show us how to... she used to come and show me what kind of wax they use on the floor because she told me not to use any water. I never used any water on the floors upstairs. And he told me how to operate and my husband the furnace and how to do the roses and how to do... he always used to help us. But he forgot a saw, an electric saw, it was very expensive because he used to always make stuff, and one day we came in the basement and it was about two months, we didn't even know it was on the workshop table, a great big one in the basement. And my husband said, this must be the people they lived here. And I said, what are you going to do with it? And they never called. And we called them up. We told them, I said, Mr. Peterson, you forgot your electric saw and it's a very expensive one I can tell. And he said, if we forgot it, bad luck he said because you moved in and you're over there, it's yours. I said, no, it's not mine, it's yours. And he picked it up and went in the car and we went in the house and gave him the saw. And then my husband went for driving lessons because he didn't drive a car in Germany. And, you know, they see a newcomer they take advantage. After he got his license we went and bought a car from a guy. Was a black car. And he paid \$500 and that car wasn't even worth \$100. But he didn't know. And it was in the Police Department, Mr. Keltenburg was his name, I remember him today, and he was a good friend of us, and one day we called him up and we told him what happened and he said, leave it to me Mr. Comins, I'll take care of it. I know where you bought it and I know he's taking advantage of people like you. And he went over there and he told him, he said, did you sell a car for Mr. Comins? And he said, yeah. He said, how much did you get it? And he said, he got it from the junk yard. He said he doesn't remember, \$100, \$200. And he said Mr. Comins has a receipt for \$500. And he said he almost got killed, he said. I said if you want to go to court you get sue for it. And he said, no, I don't want to go to court. And he said, what can you find for Mr. Comins for \$500. And he gave him an old Chevy. It was a pretty good car. And he told, Mr. Keltenburg, told my husband, he said, Melvin, if you ever want to buy a new car or something, ask me or ask people they know about. Don't go buy a piece of junk. And he never did any more. If he had, you know, to do something, he always asks people who know about it. He trusted people for some reason.

SL: You said that some of your good friends, you mentioned who they were, and most of them are Jewish, the ones that you mentioned.

CC: Yeah.

SL: Parks, Rabbi Swarsensky. Do you have any non-Jewish friends whom you're close to?

CC: Oh yeah, I have a lot of them. I have so many of, you know, they'll do anything for me.

SL: What about your neighbors, are they mostly non-Jewish?

CC: No, they're not Jewish. I'm in a neighborhood with all un-Jewish. But they always there when I need them. When my husband died, they were just, you know, heart broken. They were over here helping me with this and helping me with that. And my neighbor, across the street, the neighbor, if I leave, if I go on vacation she always takes care of the house. And if she leaves, she left Christmas for two weeks, I took care of her house. Nobody knew even she was gone. And when I was pregnant with Mike and I didn't have a washing machine then and I used to hang my clothes outside, when I got home from work, my clothes were in the basement. They used to take it off from the line and bring it in. And they are pretty good. And now with the lady I work for, her children, do anything for me.

SL: Do you have a lot of contact with Madison Jews now other than the ones that you've met when you first came?

CC: Yeah, yeah, a few of them.

SL: Do you belong to any synagogues?

CC: Yeah, I belong to one on Mound Street.

SL: Do you go there often?

CC: Yeah, yeah because my husband went over there, I go there, and I ordered, when my husband died, I ordered a plaque for him. It's right near the beam and I ordered, when my dad died, I ordered one too with his name, you know, when it comes to High Holidays then they always light a candle after them.

SL: What do you think American Jews that you met think about the Holocaust? Have you talked with them about it?

CC: Some of them, you know, they still don't know, they can't believe it had happened.

SL: Even the American?

CC: Even the American. But the most of them know it, you know. They know it's happened and nobody can believe. I'll tell you the truth, if I was there place I wouldn't believe it either.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 2

TAPE 3, SIDE 1

SL: Have you told any of your non-Jewish friends about your Holocaust experiences?

CC: Yeah, I did.

SL: What was their reaction?

CC: Oh they feel bad, they can't believe it is happening, but they said, you know, after they, a lot of people, even my neighbors, they seen the Holocaust on television. They can't believe it, people can be that rude to do to other people.

SL: Have you had any experiences with non-Jews on say not believing that it happened to you?

CC: No, I didn't run into any of them.

SL: Do you feel that they think the same way that American Jews think of the Holocaust, do you see a difference here?

CC: Oh you can find a few of them, you know. But I run into one guy at work and he didn't know I'm Jewish, because everybody knows I'm Jewish over there, cause I take off for the holidays and I... then he asked me something we were talking about and about Israel and about that and he said, he said, he said something about money. He said, all the Jewish people have money. That's the only guy I run into and he said, do you know why, he said, we don't have any money, he told me, he said, me and him. And I say, why. He said, because, he said, Jewish people always have money. And I said, you're mistaken. And he said, what do you mean. I told him. And I said, because I'm Jewish. And his face turned all kind of color. He said, I didn't know you were Jewish. And I said, you never asked me.

SL: What do you think you'd feel like if your children married non-Jews?

CC: Oh, what can I feel. That's their choice. My children, whatever... my husband used to say, he doesn't like it but if they want to do it we can't do anything to them unless we lose the children.

SL: Going back to just your life in general in Madison, did you or your husband belong to any political clubs or any social clubs?

CC: No, no. We didn't have time to do anything except work.

SL: Do you think that your feelings about...

CC: Sally belonged to BBG. She was there.

SL: Now in a religious sense, have your feelings about your religious beliefs, has it changed at all since you went through your Holocaust experiences?

CC: No.

SL: Do you feel any more that, I guess what I'm saying is, um, if you believed that God existed before the Holocaust, do you feel that he couldn't have existed because of all these terrible things that happened?

CC: I used to think about it when I was in the camp. I used to think if God can, you know, I used to think to myself maybe there's no God because if he can see what they do to people and he doesn't do anything. But I don't think so if I feel any more like this.

SL: Do you read books and magazines?

CC: Yeah.

SL: In English?

CC: Yeah. I was reading yesterday *The Parade* part about how kids treat parents, abusing parents. That's unbelievable. It takes me back to that war, tied up a father and hit him with a hammer over the head. I was reading yesterday, I just can't believe it, people can do, kids can do, to parents that.

SL: What magazines do you get here in the house?

CC: I get *Wisconsin Journal* and my son gets some magazines, some other stuff. I used to, in Florida, my dad used to get the Jewish paper. Used to bring it over here and read a lot. I don't do it.

SL: Have you read any books on the Holocaust at all?

CC: *The Hiding Place*, I read that book.

SL: What was your reaction to it?

CC: I don't know, I just... it bothered me a little bit.

SL: How so?

CC: You know, what they did, what the book says and everything. But sometimes, in the book even is not the same story like it was in real life. They skip a lot of things. Even in Holocaust, it's not the same like it was in real life what they did to people.

SL: Did you watch the entire television series?

CC: I watch some of them because I... when I watch the Holocaust I start crying and my daughter didn't want me to watch it. It reminded me a lot of things.

SL: Did any of your friends become more interested in what had happened to you after the program was on?

CC: Yeah.

SL: Made them more aware?

CC: Made them more aware and more realized.

SL: How satisfied are you with the cultural climate here in Madison? Offers you enough movies and museums, that type of thing?

CC: Oh, it's not enough like in the big cities, but I like it here and I like the people. I would never go back to the old country. I like it here.

SL: Have you traveled in the states?

CC: Yeah, I went a lot of places with my husband but not as much as I wanted to see.

SL: What parts did you like the most?

CC: Oh, I went to Washington, DC, I was in New York, I was in Texas, I was in Mexico, I was in Florida and some other stuff. But I didn't see a lot of things my husband want to see. He said he gets retired we'll see more but he never got around to do it and I don't do it any more myself.

SL: The traveling in Wisconsin that you did, is there any place particularly here that you liked in Wisconsin?

CC: A lot of places I liked I can't you mention it which one.

SL: How much does this area remind you of your native home?

CC: A lot.

SL: In what ways?

CC: The neighbors, even if they not Jewish the neighbors are pretty nice and we used to have always even in the old, you know, we used to have Polish people neighbors, we used to have Jewish people and they didn't make any difference to me. Of course I grow up with Polish kids. I used to go to Polish schools.

SL: What about physically, physical resemblance, do you see any?

CC: No.

SL: Would you consider yourself to be a Midwesterner?

CC: I don't know, maybe, I can't answer that. I don't know.

SL: How much happier do you think you would have been living in a city that had a large Jewish population?

CC: Oh, I don't think so if I'd be happier. I like it right here and I would even like to be on a farm because I like, you know, I like the work. And like I said, when we were in New York, it's too close. Everything is closed in on you. I just didn't like it there.

SL: But the fact that there aren't very many Jews in Madison, does that [inaudible]?

CC: Bother me? No, no.

SL: How do you feel about living in a state where there's a large percentage of ethnic German background?

CC: That I wouldn't, I would feel bad, tell you the truth. Of course not all the Germans were bad. I can't say all the Germans were bad, but some of them weren't. But still, I wouldn't like to live with them.

SL: But here in Wisconsin there are a large number of people with German backgrounds.

CC: Yeah, I got a few Germans over here. I know them and they friends of mine.

SL: Does it make a difference?

CC: Oh, no, I don't think so.

SL: Have you made any effort to become acquainted with Wisconsin history at all? History of the state?

CC: No. Like I said, I've never had the time to do anything. If I don't work I've been in the house most of the time because I'm always, when the kids were smaller, I'm always were here for them where they needed me and, you know, I don't go in bars, I don't do anything like that. The kids needed me, I was right there.

- And my husband needed me, I was right there and I was, I never took time for myself and I'm still this way. Sometimes the kids tell me I shouldn't, but I do anyway.
- SL: Do you think that you felt an obligation to this community because it gave you a start?
- CC: No, no. If would my husband wouldn't like it and we decide to go some place else, I would go any place he goes.
- SL: What was your reaction when the American Nazi Party was planning to march in both Milwaukee and Madison?
- CC: Oh I hated that. I couldn't figure that out. I told my daughters a good thing I don't see them otherwise I would go with them together.
- SL: Were you scared at all?
- CC: No, I wasn't scared. But, I don't know how the country can allow them to do that.
- SL: How satisfactory do you find the American government to be, the system of government, elections and...?
- CC: Don't know. One thing I don't like it, they said last week Carter just said register young kids. And the Women's rights now, they want it, they ask for it. They wanted to be independent and I'm thinking about my son because he'll be 21 in March. In Europe, when a family like me and my son is just the only son, they wouldn't take him. I don't know how here is. But over there they wouldn't take him because he's the only one who supports it and stays home or something like that, I don't know. I don't know, but I'm still worrying, if they take him, I don't know.
- SL: Do you remember what year it was that you got your naturalization papers?
- CC: Citizen papers? I have to look at the papers I keep them in the safe deposit box. I think in '53 we had the papers. I'm not sure. I can't tell you exactly.
- SL: Have you always voted in elections?
- CC: Not before, but after I got my...
- SL: Afterwards?
- CC: Sure.

- SL: You felt that because you'd become a citizen you wanted to take advantage of it?
- CC: No, no, I just, you know, if I'm a citizen, if I can do it, why shouldn't I. I don't know if I do that, I pick the right one but I'm doing it.
- SL: How do you feel about the prominence of Jews in American society, in politics? For example, how did you feel say when Kissinger became Secretary of State?
- CC: If he can do it.
- SL: Were you, are you afraid at all that... do you feel that Jews maybe should not be as visible in business?
- CC: No, no I don't think so, they should. If they can do it, and they do a good job they should do it. Maybe I'm wrong but that's the way I feel and I can't help it.
- SL: What do you see as the most important issues that are facing Americans today?
- CC: I can't answer that. I don't know what they... I feel sorry for the hostages now in the... I don't know what's going to happen to them. They not Jews but I feel sorry for them and it reminds me a lot, you know, and like I said the Russian, I wouldn't trust them from here to there. They can say one thing and they mean another one. And but Carter I was watching, I don't know, he doesn't have any choice neither. He has to get... I don't know what he's going to do but a lot of things maybe I didn't like before about him but he should stand up to them. If he gives in to them that's the end of it.
- SL: What do you feel about the women's rights issues?
- CC: I don't know [laugh]. That's kind of answer, I don't know. They wanted their rights. Now a lot of them complaining because they going to; now they have to register. They wanted, they asked for it. Like my daughter said yesterday, she said, mom, she said, I have my rights, you know, as much as I want to. But a lot of them start complaining because Carter said they're going to register, you know, girls too. But I think, I don't know, not everybody, but some of them should be... that's what they want to, that's why so many divorces, you know. A women goes out to work and then she goes out someplace out, she leaves the kids with a baby-sitter and the kids, a half of them don't even know when the mother comes and

- when the mother goes and it's not good for the family. That's why there's so many divorces. A husband do the wife's work. I'm from the old country, maybe I'm wrong, but that's the way I feel.
- SL: To what extent do you believe there's anti-Semitism in Madison?
- CC: Quite a lot, yeah.
- SL: How secure do you feel, though, here? Do you see a situation maybe arising in which Jews face the same types of problems that you faced?
- CC: Yeah, I was thinking about it. Maybe it will come sometime, but I don't think so it will be as bad as was Germany and Russia. It could arrive.
- SL: Have you received any restitution from Germany?
- CC: No. The people in New York, the people in Washington, DC, the people in a lot of places they had quite a little bit of help from, you know, it came in. But here in Madison they didn't do much about it. It's the committee's fault. They weren't interested to do it.
- SL: What are your feelings about Germany and present day Germans?
- CC: My daughter went to Germany, she was in Munich, after the war because they send them different places to hospitals and she said the people are different and its rebuilded and everything. But she doesn't know, she said, if another war breaks out, she doesn't think they'll do the same thing they did it, but who knows.
- SL: Do you have any feelings of hate towards the Germans today?
- CC: I do in a way but you can't hate forever. What they did to my parents and everything is just unbelievable. I don't like it and I start forgetting it but when they start marching around over here again, the Nazis, it brings everything back and it hurts.
- SL: Have you ever been to Israel?
- CC: No. I'm planning. My daughter was last year.
- SL: So you would like though to...?
- CC: I would like to because I have a lot of friends there and a lot from school a lot of kids who we went, my daughter went to visit some of them. My daughter even went to Poland.

SL: Did she go back to Stepan or Rowne?

CC: No, she was in Warsaw and she was in the other, in Rowne, she was in other places. But she was a little bit shook up because she was born there. If she wouldn't be a citizen maybe, you know, she would have trouble because they took her passport away. Before she left maybe, ten minutes, they brought it back and gave it to her. But they can't do anything because she's American citizen. If she wouldn't be and she's born there, they can keep her there.

SL: Did she try to find your old house?

CC: No, no, she would never find it.

SL: You yourself would never want to go back there?

CC: No, I don't think so because, its just memories and why should I go there and look at that sand or the houses or something. That's why I want to get out of there, I didn't want to look at anything.

SL: Do you think it's easier for you to talk about your experiences today than it might have been maybe five years ago or so?

CC: In a way it is now but I never stop thinking it about it. I lay in bed and think about. Sometimes, you know how sisters are. You know, they never, they pretty close but sometimes they don't agree on everything, it's natural. And I tell them, I said, boy I wish I would have my sister or my brother and I can argue with them. But it comes to the point I don't have them. I said, you should get along.

SL: How do you feel about an increasing awareness here in this country about the Holocaust?

CC: I think people should know. I think they should, everybody should know what happened. It wouldn't happen again maybe.

SL: Why do you feel that it's important to get your thoughts and your memories down on a tape?

CC: Oh, I don't know, if I were, you know, I'll be dead or something, if my grandchildren should see that, people should know what happened years ago. It wouldn't happen again. I hope not.

SL: I've kind of run out of questions that I had prepared, but I would like to know if you had anything that you wanted, anything else that you wanted to say or anything else that things that maybe about your life here in Wisconsin or in Madison that you could talk about that I...

CC: Oh, when we came over here it was kind of hard, you know, if you can't... you don't know the language, you don't know the people, people don't trust you. But I'm here in Madison almost, I don't know, 25 or more years and the people are pretty nice. They know I'm Jewish but it doesn't make any difference to them and I can go in today in any store and if my husband was alive he always, he was good with credit and everything. I can go in any store and charge or borrow money and they don't ask any questions, they trust me. I have a lot of friends and I like it here and I think this country is a good country. If people would, you know, realize that. If you want to work, even if it's, you know, if it is, it's kind of hard for me to keep up this house now, of course with all the taxes they put on it I have to pay thousand dollar taxes a year and with all the heat and everything. But is still I can do it. If I try hard I can do it. And I like it and I would never go back to any country. I like it here.

SL: This is your country now.

CC: This is my country and I think it's my country here and the kids have their education and they like it here and my daughter Sally, when she goes, she goes just for where she has to go. But she would never give up this country, she loves it. And I do too.

SL: Do you have any bad feelings about the way that you were treated when you first came here?

CC: Yeah, yeah. Even other Jewish people I met. Her husband died and we went to the house because when my father died she came over here to the house and I told her and she couldn't believe it. She said, how people can, Jewish people treat people like that. She said, we didn't know, nobody told us. And I said, we didn't know, we thought everybody's like that because no human being tells you like I didn't have any shoes when I came to this country. I got, like I said, I have 50 pairs now. I didn't have a pair of shoes to wear and they were full of holes and if you work and we didn't have the house yet and nothing, we just lived in that apartment on Broom Street and one day I told, because Rabbi told us if you need something

we should call Mrs. Silverburgh. That was the lady, I called her and I told her I said if I ever can repay you, I need a pair of shoes, I'm just completely out of it. And she said, okay, and she came in and she took me in the basement at Penney's and she didn't take me there. She was ashamed with me to go downstairs or something. She was a rich lady and I was a poor little thing who came here doesn't know anything. She left me, she took my shoe and she went in the basement of Penney's to get me a pair of shoes and she left me with one shoe sitting around the capitol to wait for her. Can you believe that? And I was waiting and then when she came out with a pair of shoes it couldn't even... my feet, after the war they were, you know, they were worn out, I couldn't even get them in and I got mad and I just took off and my husband picked me up and I said, that's the end of it, I said, I'm going to look for a job if I speak English and how bad I do I have to do something, I said, I can't take it anymore. And I never seen her again. My husband threw her out the house. He said, I don't care about her.

SL: Were there any other Jews from the committee that you dealt with?

CC: Yeah, Mrs. Sweet... no, it was... yeah, it was Sweets, they used to live on I think on Vilas Avenue and they were pretty good, they always used to come in. It was Marvin Sweet, Harry Sweet and another one and they were pretty nice to us. They didn't give us anything but they were nice people and they understood us because his parents came from the old country years ago. We got along with them. But Jewish people, I don't know. They find me now, they are, you know, for donations. They know where I live and they know everything. They come in... so one day they called me, so they always, you know, I never let it out to tell them anything but I always like I said... my husband had a cousin in Israel and I always used to, we always used to send them money, we always do. But now I'm by myself, if I can I do, otherwise I don't. I always send donations over here, if they send me a letter or something. If I can, twenty-five, as much as I can. One day from the committee somebody came in here and looked around and he asked me, he said, how can, how did you do all this. And it's all paid. And I said, don't ask we worked hard for everything. For every penny, everything is paid. The house is paid, the things we have inside its maybe not good looking but it's paid.

SL: What kind of contact do you have with other survivors who live in Madison?

CC: Was a family, Cooperman's they were, I think they live now in New York or Buffalo or some place, and they always... and then I have friends in Flint, Michigan, they have two families. They always, you know, they call me once in a while and I talk to them. Then I have some other relatives. My husband used to have an uncle in Detroit. He died, we never seen him again. Because they used to send us old clothes. They didn't even, you know, if I would be in the concentration camp they would be nice, but like black coats and black shoes and things, I would never wear it here. I gave it away to the Goodwill or I brought to the [inaudible] a whole box of it. Nobody wears it these days.

SL: I noticed before when we were talking that you were angry because you said that people expected that you didn't know how to do things.

CC: That's right and we did. We did like in this country. When you were in the old country maybe you weren't, you know, as rich, as rich people, but my father used to... we have a house, five rooms, and we had a farmhouse and my father used to raise horses. We had dogs around the house, we had a grocery store.

SL: Did you have a car?

CC: No, we had a buggy and horses. I used to ride horse. I even brought my boots over here. I still have 'em but I can't wear them, they're too tight. I used to have this pair of pants and boots to here and it's all leather. I used to ride, horse riding with a saddle and I liked it. We never know like to go in a store and buy a loaf of bread or something like this. My mother used to always bake herself and like buying vegetables, we never bought in a store. Even if we had a store. We always had in the backyard. We had a garden and everything. And we made a living and it was good till Hitler came along. We liked it.

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 1

TAPE 3, SIDE 2

SL: Mrs. Comins, I wanted to ask you again about friends of yours in Madison who are survivors of the Holocaust. Are you friendly with any of them who still live in Madison?

CC: Yeah, Sam Gordon, he's like a father to me. When he was sick and I took him to the hospital it was like my own family is in there. 'Cause you see he was very sick and they don't have any kids. Because he's, I think he's remarried again, this his second wife or something and he had a wife before with kids, they died in camp. He's a good friend and a good man and he would help every time I need him. He's the only one that's close to me, and I am close to him

SL: Have you been close ever since you first came to Madison?

CC: Yeah, ever since I met him they are, you know, the best family I... I am right there when they need me and they are right there when they...

SL: In those early years here in Madison, did the community try to put you together with other DPs?

CC: Yeah, yeah, quite a few. Harry Gordon was pretty close with my husband too because he worked with him. And Cooperman, that's the one they moved away. And then we have Crona's or some other families. But the closest one is Mr. and Mrs. Gordon.

SL: You told me before that you thought it was such a shame about the fact that your husband hadn't lived to see his grandchildren. How do you think he would have felt about them being Americans?

CC: Oh he would like, he would loved it, because even when my younger daughter was pregnant, Molly, with the little girl and he used to say, I would still have liked to see a grandchild. But it never happened. What can you do?

SL: Also you told me about how you felt all your life about working and keeping busy. Do you think you could just tell me just a little bit about how you worked, you know, how much from being a child...

CC: At home and I was, you know, I used to get up early in the morning. My mother used to be up at six o'clock, that's why I get up here at six o'clock one reason and we had cows. We didn't have to... here you use a machine, over there you have to do by hand. And milk the cows and help my mother to clean the

house and the backyard, to take care of the backyard and take care of the vegetables and sometimes we had two dogs running around, you have to give 'em a bath and do things like this and help out in the store. I got up in the morning until night I... and I enjoyed it. I knew I do something for the parent. I have to help them because without help because one brother my Aaron, he was a spoiled one. He was the, they used to say, I don't know, for some reason my father used to, he loved him, if he doesn't do anything all day it's okay. But my younger brother, if he doesn't do anything they yell at him. They never yelled at me because I always, and my sister was the same thing. She can do anything and get by with it. And I think in our family is the same thing. My daughter Minnie, Mindla, she can do anything and she never does it wrong. My husband used to always [inaudible Jewish words], in Jewish he used to say, what's gone is gone. She can do anything, but she'll never come to me and tell me she did wrong. Hit a car or somebody hit her she'll come home, no matter what time, two o'clock at night, she'll never tell me. But she'll tell dad because he'll never say you did it wrong. She always... when she went to school, she went to school for a year, university, then she came home and she told she said, dad, I decided not to go to school anymore, I want a job. And he said, that's your decision. You don't want to go to school I can't force you. And she went to American Family Insurance and worked as a secretary there for a year and then one day she wrote a check, call me, she said, it's nothing, the work I put in and my husband use to say. They way you made your bed, the way you sleep. You didn't want to go to school, do what you want. And one day she came in, she said, she wants to buy a new Camaro. That's when she was working. Then Melvin, my husband, he went to the Chevy company and he bought her a new car. We didn't have a new car, we had an old junky but he bought her a car and we signed the papers for her and she has to make the payments. And after she paid of the car, she came home one day and she said I registered. I said, where. She said in school back. She said, I'm going back to school and then when she graduated and got a court reporting thing. And I think she's thankful to dad and me because she has a job now and she makes more than her husband does and she likes her work. But my husband didn't have a habit to push the kids, they have to do that. Whatever, for some reason, he said don't push 'em.

They'll find out themselves, and they did. And they loved him for that. He said, they own their own mind and whatever they want to do it let them do it. And they never got in trouble. Oh, little things like that but they never... they were good kids.

SL: Well...

CC: That's all.

SL: Yeah, thank you very much.

CC: You're welcome.

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 2

END OF TRANSCRIPT