



SIB

Interviewed by Barry Chad

Interviewed at Jewish Community Center, Squirrel Hill

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Interviewer's Note

This is a very together lady whose strength and character are marked. Her experiences as a small child in the Holocaust, her earnest professionalism as a Social Worker, her commitment to fighting prejudice and intolerance through "education, education, education," make this brief glimpse into her life nothing, if not inspiring.

Interview

bc: The presence of the voice recorder won't make you self-conscious?

SIB: I've gone through this thing so it's nothing new to me. I've done about seventy or so interviews. I'm used to talking because I go out to schools and speak to children about my story.

bc: What is your educational background?

SIB: When I came to this country--to be exact, November 4, 1963--I remember the day of the week it was, I didn't know any English at the time: all I knew was "yes," "no," "okay." So I immediately, a few weeks after my arrival, I began first of all to learn English. Then I had to complete the rest of my high school because I came--originally I was born in Poland, lived in Israel. I understood how important education is so I was accepted here to University of Pittsburgh for my undergraduate degree. It was in Social Science and Psychology as a minor. I felt that this is not enough so I was accepted to University of Pittsburgh's Graduate School of Social Work and it's from that School that I received Master's Degree in Social Work with a specialization in geriatrics, gerontology. I worked basically in a nursing home with elderly folks.

bc: You were born in Poland.

SIB: Yes...the place I was born...at one time...before 1939 was part of Poland. It's that area of Eastern Europe between Poland and Lithuania that, in its history, was changing the "landlords." At one time it was part of Lithuania and then, after the end of the First World War, when Poland became an independent country after 150 years of partition between what was then Russia, Prussia and Austria-Hungary became independent country. So they lost some territories in the west but gained some territories in the east. There was this part of Eastern

Europe that was slightly divided--like Lithuania, Ukraine and Belarus. Part of it was under Polish control until '39 when the Russians--the Soviet Union--took it over and then that's when I was born...in 1941...in summer of '41, the summer after the Nazi invasion of that part of Europe. They invaded that area, to be exact, June 22, 1941. And I was born just about two months later in the city which today it's called Vilnius. Today it's the capital of Lithuania. And in that area there were quite a few ethnic groups at the time: the majority were Lithuanian, Poles...both were mostly Roman Catholics. There were some ethnic German folks living there. And, in the city where I come from, where I was born, there was a sizable Jewish population. That's where I was born.

bc: And you escaped....

SIB: My story I'll tell you in very few...my story is a very short story because I am not a camp survivor. I am alive today because someone saved my life. I was hidden for years of my life...somewhere in somebody's basement cellar, deprived of my immediate family, of all the very basic needs that any toddler, any little child who comes to this world needs. I was just a few months old when I was taken, hidden in this place and there was this Catholic nun who actually saved my life. I spent the very first few years of my life (not to be sarcastic) not in the best of conditions. It was just simply a deprivation of everything--the deprivation of food, of nurturing, or nourishment. When you are born to this life, not having any of your family with you.... So that's how I...I'm lucky that I made it because of that.

I became a social worker, you see--when I came to this country. As I said before, I didn't know a word of English--but living after the war under what was then Communism and experiencing some form of prejudice because I'm Jewish and experiencing some of those things very early in my life and some of it later as a teenager going through the first parts of high school in Poland, it kind of impacted what, later on, when I came to this country, [made me ask] what direction do I want to go? And it is for that reason I chose social worker because of the history of what happened to us--because the very first victims of that Nazi persecution, the very first to be killed and humiliated and degraded were [killed and humiliated and degraded] because they were Jewish...the very first victims of it. Later on[as well], experiencing a little bit of some parts of intolerance on part of some of my classmates in Poland...so that kind of prompted me to go to the direction of social work because we social workers are supposed to improve a little bit, in some way, the lives of our clients or patients, depending on where we are working, be it a nursing home or any other capacity, or field of social work that, in this country, is very diverse. So that's what kind of prompted me into this direction.

bc: I'm guessing you were allowed to leave Poland and go to Israel?

SBI: Yes, in those days yes, because this was under Communism and under Communism it all depends, as we would call it in those days, on the wind blowing from what was then Soviet Union. They allowed at certain time...because the government was controlled...the Polish government...it was a Communist

government at the time so the policies, many aspects of foreign affairs were influenced by the wind blowing from Moscow, as I am saying it. So at certain times they were nice to the Jewish folks, at certain times they weren't. It was very much fluctuating. And, altogether, the feeling towards the Jews (I'm making a general statement now, I'm not making an individual statement) was not very, shall we say, very warm or very friendly. So, they felt that, maybe, it's okay to let her go and so that's why the decision was made at that time.

It was 1958 when I was a teenager when I left Poland to Israel and I lived there for about five years. You know you go as a citizen because it's called in Israel the Law of Return: as a Jewish person you become almost automatically a citizen: if you immigrate to Israel, not as a visitor or a tourist. So that's where I went and spent about five years and obviously I had to serve in the army for about two years. (There's not much of a choice unless you get married or if you are very, what we call, very religious--very orthodox. Those are the exemptions.) Men served for three years; women for less. But if a young woman gets married before she has to go to service then, of course, she's exempted from the service.

bc: When you arrived in Israel, did you just speak Polish or what languages did you have?

SBI: I spoke only Polish. I always remember the day I left for Israel. We were in transit between Poland, between Warsaw and Tel Aviv and it was a stopover in Vienna, Austria, and the only language at the time I spoke was only Polish and I had some understanding of Russian because we had to learn Russian in Poland at that time. So, with that you cannot actually really conquer the world, can you? If you speak English, then the whole world is open in front of you, but with Polish and some understanding of Russian, you couldn't communicate very much; but, in Israel, it's another story because so many of the survivors were from Poland and it's a generation of survivors, a good many of them...after Israel became an independent country in 1948.

So you had to learn Hebrew. You had to learn...First of all you had to learn how to feel as a free person because I was not completely really free living in the Communist system--you didn't have much of any freedoms there at all. And then as a person who was born Jewish but was not free as a Jewish person as you are free in this country. So it's almost like, but not exactly like, getting out of prison because I was not really in prison, but it's kind of not exactly feeling *comfortable* there. So you had to feel almost like you were reborn again, as a brand new person of sorts.

bc: You came alone?

SBI: I came alone at that time, yes. You have to do two years of service in the army; then I work afterwards. And my late father had some relatives in this country, here in Pittsburgh: he had two uncles and some cousins and they issued affidavits. Of course I knew about United States, I knew a great deal about American history because I read quite a bit about what was then called the Indians (now Native Americans). I learned quite a bit; we knew about

entertainment from Hollywood in Polish publications. So I knew quite a bit of that life.

It took a while for me to get here. When I came here, as I said before, all I knew was just three words, "yes," "no," "okay." I remember getting lost almost a week or so [after arriving and walking around where I was living]. If you get lost: you ask somebody a question and I wasn't sure if I was going right direction and I can't ask anybody because here you get lost if you don't speak English—you have a problem. In Israel you won't have that problem because a lot of people speak Polish, Jews who came from Poland, most of them survivors. So you won't get lost in Israel speaking all kinds of languages. Here, in my neighborhood, where I live in Squirrel Hill there are not too many people who would speak other than English. I also remember, when I went to Kaufmann's and I wasn't sure if I was getting on the right bus. (And, if you're not sure, you ask a question, but you can't ask the question because you don't know how because you don't speak English at the time.) And I always remember that there was this lady, African-American, who looked at me, asked me some kind of a question and I remember vividly: I just looked at her but I couldn't answer her in English. And I said to myself, my goodness, I hope she doesn't think I'm some kind of a racist because, at the time, I didn't know what she was asking me. And, instinctively somehow, I did get on the right bus but I didn't know until it got back to Squirrel Hill that I had gotten on the right bus.

It was kind of like different stages: I entered, about two weeks or so after I arrived, special classes for new Americans, for new immigrants. At that time they were conducted in the very old high school, Schenley High School in Oakland, a wonderful, very old old building. And I had there a wonderful wonderful teacher. Her name—she passed away a long time ago (she happened to be Jewish)—her name was Ida Rosenbloom. May she rest in peace. Wonderful teacher. She had this wonderful method of teaching. She did not want any one of us to bring Polish or Hebrew-English dictionary, or Spanish or Chinese or Japanese dictionaries. She taught us visually through showing us objects. One of the very first words I learned was "pin" and "pen." [She laughs.] For some reason those words stuck in my memory. So I learned how to speak English grammatically correct—though not that I remember all the grammatical rules now, but it was important to learn to speak it correctly. And I also understood that it's important to have education so I had to finish the rest of my high school. They also had classes for adults in the evening school at Schenley. It took a couple of years because you have to have four years of English in order to graduate from high school. I got credits for other subjects, which was good. And actually there were hundred of us who graduated and I was the valedictorian of the class, the one who was not even born in this country: only a few years ago I arrived in America, "discovered America," you know?

I was working for a while, part-time in my father's office. My father was here. That's why I came here. He was sponsored by his relatives here. Then I came a little bit later than he did. He had other cousins. You have to have affidavit in

order to come here as an immigrant: someone has to sponsor you. So, we all came kind of piece-by-piece, I guess.

bc: So some of your family did escape?

SIB: Yes, my parents. Yes, yes, my family some. But I lost quite a bit of other...cousins I will never know...some cousins yes...very young ones. They were all about four years old when they were killed. Because the majority of people who were murdered in Vilna, the city where I came from, the majority of them were killed by execution by special killing police squads from Germany. They forced them to dig their own gravesites on the outskirts of the city and that's how a majority of Vilna Jews unfortunately were—I cannot say were “killed” because “killed” is too general: they were simply outright slaughtered because they were Jews.

bc: What did your father do?

SIB: My father was an electrical engineer and that's what I think, in some ways, probably saved him because they needed some kind of technical skills during that time because if you had some skills it may have perhaps saved your life—maybe yes, maybe no, you know. It's like anyone [who] survived--because when I was interviewing survivors for Steven Spielberg's project some ten years ago or so...(It was called “Survivors of the Shoah.” “Shoah” means “Holocaust” in Hebrew...Visual History Foundation)...and, frequently, one of the questions that I asked that we were guided to ask is, Why do you think you survived, how do you think you survived? Almost everybody said “Luck.” Every single person, almost, of the more than 70 people that I interviewed. [Some believed in God;] some of them didn't believe in God. But that's what everybody says: I'm saying it too because there is no...I don't think there is any explanation why some survived, why some didn't.

My father came here because of his technical skills. He was able to open a small business where he was manufacturing batteries for cars and some industrial equipment. So that's how he made his living. I worked in the office: not very exciting work, not very stimulating. I knew that I would want something more exciting than working in an office. I had this orientation towards social issues— injustice, prejudice, hate.... I had some experience of it (or “in” it, I should say, or victim of it.) So I felt that I can make a difference. When I graduated, it took me a while to get a job, but I wanted to work with elderly because, as I said before, they were the very first victims—they and the children, but I felt that if I would work with children I would perhaps be too soft.

bc: Did your academic classes satisfy you in terms of what you wanted from them?

SBI: In order to be accepted for a Graduate degree, you have to have Bachelor's degree. I would say that my Graduate degree definitely did. I had great professors. I had wonderful rapport with the faculty that taught me, wonderful rapport with the staff, and the Dean of the School of Social Work—he's now retired—David Epperson was absolutely great, very understanding. And I will

always remember, on the day of admission, they always have a get-together for the in-coming Graduate students and then we met again in the evening [with the faculty] and he remembered everything I'd said to him in the morning after meeting, you know, 200 or so new Graduate students. He was always very good obviously towards the faculty but very interested in the students and their academic progress. When my father passed away, [Dr. Epperson] learned about that and sent a fruit basket because it's traditional—a Jewish custom not to send flowers so much but to send when someone passes away fruit or a fruit basket to the grieving family. The Dean of Admissions was absolutely wonderful. They couldn't be any better. Actually I received a scholarship from the School. So I have no complaints. I'm very proud to be a graduate of the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Social Work. My kudos to them and their work.

bc: You say you chose geriatrics rather than working with children. What was behind that?

SBI: I felt that, in the field of social work, you have to be caring and responsive, but a little bit too soft—being too soft—is not a very good idea. I felt that I would be more effective working with the elderly for some reason—that it would be right for me. Because, with children sometimes you have to be a little more firm at times—not tough (obviously not). But I felt that I would be more effective working with the elderly—that this was the right population for me.

bc: So your career, your life's work, from that point on was as a social worker working in nursing homes?

SBI: I worked in a nursing home and I loved my patients. I cared very much about them, about their families. When admissions occur—the very first day and then a few days afterwards—how tough it was at times. More for the members of the family than actually for the residents themselves, depending on their situation. Those who were very confused; they didn't know what was going on. But those who needed more just simply physical care—the family could not provide it any more. How taxing and emotionally-draining it was on them. Just to say, "I promised my father or my mother or my husband, I will never admit them to a nursing home." But no one can ever make that promise because there's no guarantees what will happen to anybody in life.

[In getting admitted to a nursing home] there are certain regulations: you have to qualify: you need to have some kind of a specific care, that you cannot take care of yourself any more. So that's where the evaluation is made by--if it's a hospital, doctors. Social workers are involved. And then, of course, [on the day of admissions]: this is always the most emotional, the most taxing day, the most emotional, draining day for any member of the family. Visiting, working with the patients and family--watching how in some cases their condition actually deteriorated either physically or some form of dementia--and to go with them through that process, watching their parents not being able to recognize their own loved ones and the loved ones seeing that mom or dad or a husband doesn't know my name any more.

I had one resident actually a concentration camp survivor. This gentleman was getting dressed. And I said, "Where are you going?" And he looked at a TV set. (He was a camp survivor.) He saw an oven on the TV set and said, "I have to go to that oven." Yes, I will always remember that. He was very confused. And somehow that's what he saw on the TV screen.

And then, of course, you have to deal with when the loved one dies—with their wishes, what they want to do and provide comfort to the family. Some were more dramatic than others. You had to deal with being professional when some families, most of them, wanted burial, but some of them decided to burn the body and putting them in a little container. You had to overcome your personal opinion versus the wishes of the family, even religious reasons because Jews don't like to do that. But we are not there for our personal reasons but for the wishes of the family. So you have to bite your tongue in a way and not to say anything because it's what they wanted to do not what you wanted.

I remember the very first time we had our very first African-American admitted to our facility. There was a big excitement. This was excitement among the nurses' aides—many of them who were actually African-American: "Come on—like just another patient." Another experience I had was with a patient who died who was African-American. This is where my being Holocaust survivor played a big role because this person died as poor as poor can be. She came in poor and she left life being very poor. And, in Jewish custom, everyone has to be equally buried according to the Jewish religious laws—whether you are poor or you are rich. You might not have a fancy stone, but burial has to be, if it's simple, but you have to be buried according to all the Jewish law whether you are well-to-do or you are poor. We have this special Society that takes care of that. And this person [the African-American patient] had no one to take her body.

Usually, when the person dies, social work is finished. But I received a call—that they are not going to take the body. What do I do? I spent a good couple of hours that day finding one funeral home that will take the body because some other places were willing to take her [but] they would cut her up, do some experiments. I said to myself, You are talking to a Holocaust survivor: not as long as I can possibly help it! And it took me almost three to four hours to finally find a funeral home that would take this person's body and that's exactly what happened. I feel good inside of myself that I did it because if it would be another social worker: "Well there's not much I can do; somebody has to take it; that's the end of it. I'm sorry that your mother passed away." But it's the Social Worker in me and also the Holocaust survivor in me. [I was one person] that kind of decided, let's see what happens; let's be patient here; and they were very appreciative, obviously. Her body was taken and buried according to whatever their Christian rites they wanted to do. And I've been gone for quite some time from that place, but this is one of those cases where I will always remember.

bc: How long have you been retired?

SIB: What is it now: twelve years or so. I've lost track of time.

bc: How do you keep busy?

SIB: Oh I keep very busy. As I said, I'm a Holocaust survivor; so I go out to schools and speak about the Holocaust and tell my story in much more detail than I did here. Because there are so many kids either don't know much about the Holocaust; and particularly, in the last years, there is so much hate going on in this world and this unfortunate President of Iran, Ahmadinejad, comes up with this crazy idea of denial [of the Holocaust] and saying all these other horrible things.

We have here in Pittsburgh a fine institution called The Holocaust Center of the United Jewish Federation and a number of survivors who are able to (because it's never easy) go out to schools and tell their stories, but because my story is a kind of "smaller" story, I always inject a bit of information—a sort of introduction to the topic of the Holocaust: Why is it important to me? But I put it on a kid's level. I usually speak to younger group of kids. I even spoke to fourth and fifth graders, sixth graders, then sometimes in high school because they usually hear from camp survivor, but it's important to know that there were various type of groups of survivors—the biggest number obviously are those who were concentration camp survivors and there were "hidden children," like myself; and there are very few hidden children of my particular age because, next to the elderly, children were the first ones to be murdered and exterminated: because the Nazis didn't want to raise...to see future generations bringing on to next generations. It was risky for anybody to risk saving even little children. It was more complicated. The younger child required more care. So I give an introduction: the Holocaust, why it happened; what preceded the events of the Holocaust; then speak in more detail to my story; and give examples of intolerance later on. It's important for them to hear these things because I speak to what happened to me exactly at their particular age—fourteen or fifteen—so they can relate to that somehow. Then I give them examples of intolerance and prejudice versus tolerance. I give them examples of various friends that I have made—people with so many diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. And I always end up with an up-beat note that hate it's a negative energy: if you have all this energy to hate, you can always use this energy to do something good and you will actually feel better for it. And I give them example, you know, of my friends: one is Japanese, one is Chinese, one is Muslim from Egypt, one is from Korea, from many different places.

For example, I met this wonderful family also kind of accidentally. They heard of The Holocaust Center and they heard that I was in Amsterdam at one time and met Miep Gies who was in The Diary of Anne Frank who was secretary to Mr. Frank; and they wanted to meet me so they came to Pittsburgh to some Holocaust program. And, as a result of coming here from Wheeling, West Virginia, the mother, Donna, and [her two daughters] Gina and Nicola—Gina, the older daughter, at the time was in eighth grade and she was the one who was very much interested in the Holocaust. This is an example of how important it is to nurture this interest in a young child, in a young girl, who is only about 8 or 9 years old when she started to be interested in it. Because it's the educational

prospect of it. That's my revenge for the Holocaust: education, education, education!

bc: How attentive were the groups of children that you spoke to?

SBI: What was fascinating to me: the younger the students, the more questions they ask. The older they get...it's not so...as they say in kids' language, it's not so "cool" to show that I might know a little bit more than some other of my classmates, but they ask good questions. Very attentive. It's like, in some cases, you could hear a pin drop. The younger the students can you imagine to have attention for like almost an hour-and-a-half? In one class I was speaking they were so good. These were kids many of them who came from lower socio-economic classes. They were so good and asked very perceptive questions because the teacher prepared them. And they have written very nice letters. I remember in one school where I was speaking last year and most of the students there are African-American, I had to laugh almost because this boy (I always ask them to write to me in some form—to say not just polite "thank you for coming," but what have you learned.) So some of them expressed themselves in art form. And this boy (I think it was fifth grade)—I had to laugh—because he drew me in pencil a picture of myself, looking even slimmer than I am on a boxing ring with Hitler and me with big gloves and I knocked Hitler's face out and his teeth fell out. This was this little boy's response to my educational little program with the kids.

Like in the case of this young girl Gina: today she is now a graduate student in Columbia University studying Journalism and Foreign Affairs. And, again, it all started at a very young age of her own interest in the topic of the Holocaust. So I encouraged her. Of course with her mother's help. But this is again an example of where parents make a difference too because it all starts at home, but the rest is obviously up to the student. She had her own interest in it so you nurture this. When she was [pursuing] her undergraduate degree also Holocaust and History was part of it [and led to] developing an interest in contemporary issues of genocide in Rwanda and she has a tremendous interest in that in writing and she's a very gifted writer. So I can [claim] a little bit of credit.

I tell the kids, in terms of tolerance, [of my] friendship with a young German fellow who was working as a volunteer from a German organization called Action Reconciliation Service for Peace. His name is Florian. His father is German; his mother is Korean. One of the frequent questions the kids will always ask me is "How do you feel about the Germans? How do you feel about the Germans?" That always never fails; and I expect that question. So I always say (to anybody), You cannot forgive or forget ever 6 million Jews who perished because that would be just unacceptable. You cannot forget or forgive murder of 6 million Jews and millions of other people. But, if there are people today who reach out to you because they want to reach to you, then you extend your arm and your hand because, otherwise, if you don't, you give victory to Hitler and Company and some of those neo-Nazis today and like that President of Iran. The revenge is education. The example of that young man from Germany—19 or 20—and

because of his experience as a volunteer, he was interested in social work and I encouraged him. This turned into a very close friendship. I encouraged him in the field of social work: I was a kind of mentor to him. So it's not just enough to say it's wonderful, it's important to be tolerant; it's important to give personal examples of this.

How else do you change the world [except through education]? We call it in Hebrew—a very beautiful expression from the mystical time from previous centuries—Tikkun olam. It comes from the Kabbalah, from Jewish mysticism. “Tikkun olam” means the repairing of the world. We—none of us—can change the world, the whole world, but we do it kind of one on one. It's good for the person: the recipient and the giver of it. It makes the world a better place. I tell the students that I feel a better and richer person for meeting people from various backgrounds. I give them the example that I went to a movie with a group of friends: one was Italian, one was Japanese. The Japanese was sitting next to me with her husband and we were watching this very important movie, “The Pianist,” which was dealing with the Holocaust and the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in Poland in the 1940s. It was a very difficult movie and she reached for my hand and wouldn't let go of my hand until the end of the movie because it was difficult to watch. And I would tell the students I was not thinking of some Japanese person reaching for my hand. I was just simply thinking of one human hand reaching for another human hand for comfort. I tried to give them examples from my own small experiences—different human beings from various parts of the world that, more than anything else, were human first and then we come from various backgrounds and how wonderful it is to have all this friendship and how a richer and better person we would be if we all would do these kinds of things.

bc: You've described a very active and very involved emotional and intellectual life. Given that, what's it been like living in Pittsburgh?

SBI: Well, Pittsburgh is a wonderful wonderful community. If I go on any trip out of Pittsburgh, I can't wait to come back to Squirrel Hill. This is where I've actually been living longest in terms of living in a place. I am so used to living here. I know a good many people in the community. I can go to any synagogue in this area and there's always somebody that I'm familiar with or somebody that I met long time ago--they might recognize me faster than I recognize them. It's always wonderful to have these connections here. It's a great community; people are very friendly everywhere I go. Even if I met somebody a long time ago, they greet me warmly. There's always somebody very helpful, very friendly, very attentive. I'm very happy to be living in this town. I don't think, in terms of living in the United States, I would want to live anywhere else but Pittsburgh—Squirrel Hill specifically—because it's a great place. You walk on the street you see people from various backgrounds. It's not very homogeneous—a majority of the community is Jewish. You see here people of every background, every color and it's like a rainbow here, you know. And I love it; I love this place, this Jewish Community Center where we are doing this interview. I said to somebody, this is a Jewish Community Center, but you hear so many different languages besides English: I heard Russian, I heard Polish, I heard Chinese, I heard Japanese, I heard

Spanish. I met somebody from Ethiopia. I met somebody from South America. So it's a wonderful place, this institution: a wonderful example of cross-section of this society here in Pittsburgh. It's a wonderful place.

We live only one life and we all have various obstacles or difficulties in life—because that's life. But it's just, I guess, how you take it—are you gonna collapse and give up on things or live life and enjoy as much as it is possible to enjoy it. For me it's because there have been such wonderful people, in various ways, that came in my pathway. I think that's what makes a lot of difference for me personally. It's my great treasure because they can take your computers, they can take your car, they can take your stocks if you don't pay the taxes or bills...but no one can take your education from you, your heritage from you, or your close friendship—once that bond is made, that's it!

One can come out of this experience [such as was mine] hating everybody and anybody or you go the other way. So, I guess I chose the other way and I feel a better and a richer person for it.

bc: One of the reasons I did not want to interview you specifically on the Holocaust: frankly, I don't feel competent to ask questions about it. I'd probably be asking questions not that much different from what the kids you speak to ask. SIB: It's important to ask questions because it educates people, because so many people say, I didn't know anything about the Holocaust or they had never met a Jewish person, because some of them have stereotypes. They had never met a Jewish person—so what is a Jewish person supposed to look like? Like you, like anybody else. We have eyes; we have ears; we have personalities; some people are nice; some are not so nice; some are educated; some are not educated. We are human beings with all that is involved in being human. We are just like everybody else, but some people think otherwise. So that is why it is so important for me to do that.

I remember the very first time I looked at TV—that was 43 years ago and I couldn't understand because of not speaking English. I saw a rabbi, a Catholic priest, and a minister sitting next to each other and I wasn't sure if I was seeing it right at first. I've attended with my friends Gina and Donna an interfaith ecumenical service for the Holocaust in Wheeling, West Virginia, in a Catholic church. And I made a reference very politely to an anti-Semitic teacher I had in Poland: if she would have seen me here standing at the pulpit of a Catholic Church speaking in front of some four-hundred, mostly Catholic, some Protestants and Jewish folks, addressing the audience, she probably would not be very happy. But this is United States of America. You have this freedom of religion. When people ask me my background, I don't hide it, I give a very straightforward answer. And how wonderful it is that for Jewish holidays, we come to this building, but people are not scared to go to Services as they would be in other parts of the world or during the Communist time, because you are free to worship whatever you want to worship or if you don't want to worship at all. And this is one of those great, I think, privileges, that some Americans don't realize or

don't appreciate. Let's say, in the current situation, you disagree with the policies of the government, you are free to express your opinion and no one is going to arrest you unless you do something stupid like some physical action—that's a different story. But you are free to express your opinion if you object to policies of the U.S. government. And, if you support, you are free to do that too.