

Clara Grossman Interview

August 26, 1999

Note: Regular type face is interviewer. **BOLD type face** is Clara Grossman.

Tape One – Side One

Interviewing Clara Grossman at her home on August 26, 1999.

OK, what was your name at birth and how did you - do you - spell it?

My name at birth was Klari, K-L-A-R-I, Hercz, H-E-R-C-Z.

OK, and when where you born?

I was born on September 6, 1930 in a small town called Nyírbátor in Hungary.

And what was the total population of your city?

The total population probably... 20,000 possibly.

And what was the Jewish population?

3,000.

What do you know about the circumstances of your birth?

I, I know I was born at home by a midwife and I was a second child to my, uh, parents. And, I remember back, you know when I was like four or five years old. But my brother who lives now in Philadelphia he was a year older than I. And then I was born. And in a year later another girl, my sister, and what five, six years after a little brother.

So there were four?

So we were four children, two boys and two girls.

OK, what were you parents' name and would you spell them, too?

My father's name was Armin, A-R-M-I-N, Hercz, H-E-R-C-Z.

And my mom, mother's name Ann Leichtman, A-N-N L-E-I-C-H-T-M-A-N Hercz H-E-R-C-Z.

OK, can you tell me how your parents met?

It was an arranged meeting. My mother lived in a very small village, I think maybe about 100 kilometers from our home town. And, uh, it was arranged. I don't know by whom, but they met and my father was very religious, came from a Hasidic family. And I don't think they saw each other too many times (really) and they got married and that's when my mother lived in, you know, in Nyírbátor. And then, I think, after they were married, then a year after, my brother was born, a year after I was born, a year after my sister was born and then my little brother.

OK, and now what was your mother's role in the household?

My mother's role was mainly caretaker, taking care of us, taking care of her husband, first. And taking care of the children. And we always had a relative living with us, part time or full-time, a sick aunt, or a sick uncle, or whomever needed some taking care of. And I remember, you know, we were very involved as children helping and taking care of some of these family members. Especially I remember an aunt that I was very young, I was only like 4/5 years old and she had, she must have had Parkinson's, but they didn't know the diagnosis at that time, because she – her hand was shaking terribly and she couldn't feed herself. And my job was to make sure that she ate properly, and I fed her. And I think it's just a wonderful lesson for children.

Absolutely. Teaching someone at a very early age to give.

Yes, it teaches you very early age – and it stays with you. (affirmative hum) No one can take it away.

Did your mother have a profession before she married or not?

No, I don't think she had a profession. She was, you know she was like I said, she grew up in a very small village and her parents died in a very, in an accident, they owned land, and they had a vineyard and both went down to a wine cellar and it just exploded. So she never even knew, she was raised by an aunt and uncle and she really didn't know that 'til she got engaged that they were not her real parents. So that was a terrible shock and I, you know, in those days was no, that much schooling, maybe just, you know, a few years and whatever you had you were fortunate enough to learn at home. And she, she was a wonderful, wonderful mom and just a wonderful person. Everybody in town just, you know, loved her. And she was kind and took care of the world. She really had worked all over helping the less fortunate. And you know, I remember that.

A good role model.

Uh hum.

What was your father's occupation?

My father's occupation, uh, was, uh, raw chemical business which meant that he bought up raw chemicals like menthol and different herbs that, he went to the farmers and asked them to grow that in their land, and in large quantities. And he bought it up from them and then it was dried and pressed into bark. He had a huge big warehouse where it was done and then was shipped all over the world, you know, to pharmaceutical companies. So that was the business. And for a while he was doing very, very well because we lived very well with servants and maids and in a large house. And then later on his business was taken away from him as antisemitism got going more so. And he brought in a non-Jewish partner and then later on that was not even allowed and it was taken away completely.

OK, did you have grandparents?

I had a grandmother. One, from my father, my father's mom lived close by and we saw her almost every day. And it was just wonderful. We loved her and she was, everyday we came when we came home from school she was walking. Always, we had a little park in front of our house and I could just see her walking to our home to see all the children, her grandchildren. And she was really a great lady. I remember when she passed away, I was about seven years old.

Can you tell us what your fondest memories might be other than the fact that you saw her?

Well, she was always coming to our house and taking time to sit with all the grandchildren and ask each of us what was our day in school and how we did. And, and she sat and played with us. And there were, you know, a few grandchildren, but somehow you felt that you were the one, the special one. She, she made you feel that way. And you know, I have very fond memories of her.

Do you know what kind of work your grandfather did?

No.

Ok. So you said...could you describe your neighborhood a little bit?

Um, it was um, very, very lovely homes and um, not, not too many cars, mainly, you know, few cars, but carriage and horses and so forth and bicycles. And small town. Big town square that every, you know, Thursday, the farmers came in and it was their farmer's market. And that's where we purchased all our, um, goods, you know, chickens and, and eggs and all that fresh was brought in every Thursday, you know, we went, my mother and I went to the market. And we had three synagogues – Reform, and Conservative and ultra-Orthodox. And then we had um, the Jewish school and regular public school. And, uh, it

was very nice town and I had many cousins and uncles and you just, your whole time you were with, you know growing up, with them and it was just a wonderful, supportive system growing up because you were never really alone, you always had family or friends, or you know, they were cousins but they were friends also.

What was the inside of your home like?

Um, I remember the house that I was born. It was a smaller home, and nicely furnished with, with you know, comfortable – not elaborate, you know, but just nice and very beautiful rugs and tablecloths and so forth. And beautiful gardens, always, and I think that's why I love my garden. And uh, another, then we were, like I was 5 or 6 when my father was doing well then he bought this big house. And that was really beautifully, uh, furnished and, uh, very, very large and elaborate. In my mind anyway at that time.

How long did you live in your second house?

Uh, we lived there about 9 years and then my father got sick and the bank would not, um, give, extend his mortgage or something you know with that because of antisemitism was really rapidly rising. And then, uh, he sold it. And then we rented another house, we didn't buy a house after that. And that was, you know, really very lovely. Very comfortable, big garden, vegetable garden also.

Did you have indoor plumbing and running water?

Oh, yes, yes, yes.

And did – how many rooms would you say was in your house?

Uh, that first house, it was just small, I think it was just uh, like a kitchen, bedroom, uh, kitchen area which was the living room and sitting room and then two bedrooms – one for, that it was only the two of us, three of us you know, small children – and then my parents.

Did you have to share a room with anyone?

Yes, yes. And then even in the larger house we had enough bedrooms but I shared a room with my sister. And then when we rented the house we had two bedrooms and like a little, a dining room and kitchen/pantry and the garden.

You shared a room there too?

Yes, yes.

How did the laundry get done?

Uh, the laundry – was no washing machines. (Right) Everything was done by hand. And scrubbed, and they used to boil the laundry and bleaching it out, hanging it out on the line.

And it smelled beautifully. And then, the ironing, everything was done by hand. It was a difficult life (interviewer chuckles) Very difficult. My mother worked very, very hard.

So, your mother did the laundry?

Well at first, when we...when we could afford it she did later on, you know, she didn't because she had help.

Now your family, you said, was well off at one point?

Yes, yes.

And you had servants – could you tell me what kind?

Well, we had two – a cook, who came into...well sort of. And cleaning and did the laundry and all that. Yes.

Did your parents own any land outside of their house?

No, no. Jews were really not allowed that much to own land.

Did your family take vacations?

Uh, yes, yes.

Ok, where did you go?

In the summer time actually my father only came up for a short time. But my mother and my brother and sister went up to the mountains to, I don't know what, 250 kilometers way up into the mountains. And you know, to a resort area and we rented a place and we spent summer there. And just, you know, just running around and playing and my mother relaxed and read a lot – and you know, just enjoyed it. And my father used to come up.

What kind of foods did you eat?

Foods were wonderful, all freshly prepared. Baked our own bread, grew our own vegetables nothing but fresh. There was no supermarkets, just little tiny stores. And even that we hardly ever used because everything was made at home, and fresh. Churned our own butter and we had, you know, chickens and ducks and geese and, then, you know, Friday at evening went to the *shokhet* [ritual slaughterer] and they had, you know, fresh poultry for the Sabbath and very delicious food. My mom was a wonderful cook.

What were some of your favorite things?

Oh, my favorite things, uh, actually my favorite was on Friday evenings when the delicious *gefилte* fish was prepared. The fresh carp gelled and the *challah* that she baked. And we sat

around the table and the chicken soup, and homemade noodles, and the roast chicken or roast duck, or roast geese was prepared deliciously and with all the trimmings. And then I loved, you know, the goose liver – the paté. And then I loved the daily dishes also that, you know, fresh – it was a Hungarian string beans, soup, or fruit soups and strudel they make – delicious. Really good.

I can almost smell it and taste it.

Yes.

What language was spoken at home?

It is interesting, even though my father was extremely religious, uh, spoke Hungarian and we never, hardly ever, my parents spoke Yiddish once in a while, but not really too many times. So we never, you know, learned Yiddish. Which was very interesting. And, uh, that was the only language that, you know, I learned because even in school we only learned, you know, the Hungarian, uh, no other languages were available.

Did your parents speak any others besides Yiddish and Hungarian?

No.

No. They didn't either.

No.

Were your parents involved in anything political?

No.

Can you describe the schools you attended?

Uh, yes. We walked to school. It took, I don't know, about 20 minutes to get there. And there was no transportation, no cars or anything else. But it was fun. You know, I always enjoyed it. And either met friends or my brother and so forth. My brother always went much earlier because he had to get up like 5 o'clock and go to *kheyder* [Jewish religious school] first. And then study that until 8 o'clock and then 8 o'clock came into the regular school. Uh, we had from kindergarten to eighth grade there. It was a Jewish school.

Private school.

Private school – Jewish private school. And Hebrew was not really taught but the teachers and the principals were, you know, Jewish. Actually, uh I should say that, that was, we started in regular public school. Um, in kindergarten and then first grade and went up to, I think, fifth grade and then they announced that we cannot go any more to the public school. And then we went into the Jewish private school.

Your brother also?

My brother also, and my sister also. (interviewer interrupts, apologizes). **And then, we were there 'til, you know, about the eighth grade.**

What were the teachers like in public school? How did they treat you?

I never felt any antisemitism at school. They were, they were, always nice. Uh, as I remember, you know, back. They were never any problem, you know in school.

Were they pretty strict?

Yes. They were very strict. Much more so in their religious, you know, in their Yiddish school, in the parochial school. Much more so.

What were your favorite subjects?

My favorite subjects were geography and languages, even though we didn't have languages, like, you know, like Hungarian, and writing and reading.

And how far did you go in school?

I went to 8th grade in, in, in Hungary and then we were taken away.

What did you do for fun when you were young?

What did we do for fun? Uh, we played so much, I had so many friends and we used to do jump rope, uh, go hide and go seek, and uh, there were no telephones so we always had to meet, you know, and get together that way, and talk. And movies we were not allowed to go to, because we were too religious. And swimming, any of the sports we were not allowed to, never learned how to swim, how to ride a bicycle. Isn't that interesting?

Do you know why?

I don't know why. I don't know why. It was very, you know, very grey and I don't understand, was it because we were, I know we were not allowed, you know, once I went to the movies but my parents really didn't know about it. And then later on, we were not allowed, because of the antisemitism. And, then, sports, I don't understand why.

Did you want to do those things?

Yes, I did, I did. Yes. And, you know, we never, you know, really discussed that. I asked my, you know, my mother and she said no we can't, you know, we can't do that.

Can you describe your friends, and your hobbies and the organizations you belonged to, if any?

Uh, it was not really, no group organizations, you know, but we were, you know, it wasn't like, you know, BBG girls, or any of those, we didn't, you know, have that. And, it was my friends, you know, like any young people we were busy, uh, getting, you know, beautiful clothes, everything was made to order. You just didn't go to a store and bought your dresses, only thing, you know, you bought is shoes. And even then you went to the shoemaker and he, you know, made it. And, uh, I don't know, I remember back on Saturday afternoons after, you know, Shabbat dinner, all my friends and cousins we all got together and, three cousins lived in this big home, and they had big huge garden we used to play all kinds of games and from afternoon 'til like sunset that, you know, that time went by so quickly. And you know, my friends were very close.

Did you have any hobbies in particular?

No.

It sounds like you were very busy.

Yes, exact busy.

Too busy for hobbies, huh. How did you get along with your parents?

Very well, you know. I think I was closer to my mom because she was, you know, always there and my father was either away on business and, or at the synagogue. And, uh, I resented a lot, I think now when I think about it, deep down the restrictive way of life. And, I used to, you know, rebel at times about it, you know, that I didn't want to go along with it. But, you know, my father, uh, you know, you never communicated as much, I think that was the old way. And uh, but, my mother was always there for us.

So you feel your parents were more strict than permissive?

Yeah, I would say so. Yes, yes definitely.

And now the next question – were you ever rebellious, you said you were.

Yes I was, very much so. I used to, I remember, uh, one Friday night, I was playing with non-Jewish children and I didn't realize it was so late already, and the Sabbath was coming and they were looking for me, calling me, looking. And far away I heard them, but I didn't want to hear that voice calling me and, and sitting down to, you know, to the routine. And I didn't get back 'til later. I was punished. I never did that again, (laugh) never.

Were you grounded?

Yes, severely, severely. So um...

Were there certain issues that created more tension.

Uh, hum. I think more so, so we had to wear, uh, long hose in the summer time and long sleeve dresses and uh, I wanted to wear my hair, you know, in a different way. And you know you couldn't do that and I was really angry about that. Why? I said we were just children and I couldn't understand what would be the big difference if we wear short sleeve and all that. And I as a young child, I always said to my mom, "I will never marry anyone that, you know, someone picks out for me. That's not - that won't be." Well it didn't happen but you know. I don't know what would have been if I would have, you know, the war would not have come. But, um...

So you wanted to express yourself.

Yes. I wanted to [interrupted by interviewer] Definitely express myself more. And do my own thing. And be much more independent person.

OK, now what values or standards were most important to your parents?

Well, I think the standards, you know, that to be good people, helping other ones, that was very, very important, very much instilled in, in all of us. And, and, uh, do well, study and to make something of ourselves. And, uh to be polite and, and good children to grow up to be good adults. And, and uh, helping, helping other people.

Were these values, um, did you get them from example or did you talk about them, or did you just observe and...

Both. My mom was, as I said, she was always there (Right. Um hum.) doing something.

So you had a good example.

So it was a good example. And we always, you know, my mother and father, you know, they gave a lot in charity and, and it was both ways. And talked about it also.

How did these values affect your daily life?

At that time? It didn't. It was an accepted thing. You never even, you know, thought about it, it was, you know, growing up. And this was, you know, the life, you know. And we, we just, you know, went along with, with whatever your parents, it was no big discussions, I mean, whatever your parents said, or installed on you, you know that's how it went. And it was fine.

Now your family was very religious. What was the general religious feeling of the community at large? Were most of them...

Oh, it was a mixture. It was a mixture. A large percentage was Hasidic. I had, let's see, one, two, three, four uncles and one aunt – so from the four uncles I had three quite religious like my father. One was extremely, like my father, and my father the same. And one was almost like that. And one came, emigrated to America, very young so I never, I

didn't remember him. And one uncle was not that religious. He was like more Conservative if that's you know.

How well were Jews accepted by the general community in your town?

In the beginning I think we were, you know, accepted quite well. In, in um, the 30's, you know, into the late 30's, beginning of, you know, of 40 – by late 30's and then, then it has all changed. Uh, you always felt though, uh, there was antisemitism.

You did?

Yes. There was always a sense of knowing that you are just not one of their group. You were always different. And that was, you know, started in a very early age.

Did you experience any antisemitism?

Yes, yes.

Could you give me some examples?

Uh, going to school, we were constantly harassed and beaten up because we were Jewish. And I remember once sitting at the Sukkot table, we had a beautiful *sukkah* and a big rock was thrown through the *sukkah*, fortunately it missed my father by just this little. And uh, many, many instances. So it was – life was good because our families were so close and we made our own lives but there were always an underlying uneasiness. As a child, I even felt it.

Really?

And I'm sure my parents, much more so. Because children don't focus upon it.

Right.

But as a parent, I'm sure they were so worried what will be the future for us.

So were your parents able to have any kind of life in the general community, or was it mainly just the Jews?

Only in the Jewish community.

Only Jews.

Only the Jewish community.

Can you describe your religious education?

It is interesting being so religious, my father never focused on the girls. I mean, what the girls were. What did we count?

Typical.

Typical, right? So we had tutors coming to the house, for my sister and I, to tutor us in Hebrew. I mean, I still read Hebrew. I mean, I was never Bat Mitzvahed. It was not the thing to do. And, uh, we were taken away around that time anyway so it was not focused on it. Girls were not Bat Mitzvahed. It's not a religious thing. Only boys, and even my brother, was not, because he, you know, we were taken away. But he had a lot more education than I did, and my sister.

So

Jewish education.

So the boys had more?

Boys, right, right.

And, well we, I think we've kind of touched on this, but how was Judaism practiced in your home?

Well, it was very observant. I mean we were, we were very, very, very religious.

Your father did daily prayers?

Oh, yes. My father went to *shul* [synagogue] every morning, early in the morning. And the high holidays, I mean he wore a *shtreimel* [fur-trimmed hat worn by Hasidic Jewish men on the Sabbath and holidays]. And *Pesach* [Passover] he wore the white *kittel* [long white belted robe]. And high holidays the black coat, and my brother had long *payes* [side locks]. I'll show you a picture later on.

I'd love to see it.

It was sent to my uncle I have, you know, a copy of it. So very, very religious. I mean, as I said before, I was not overjoyed but this was my life. I couldn't do anything about it.

Well obviously, your family kept kosher.

Oh yes, (laugh). Very much so.

How did you celebrate *Shabbat*, and the holidays?

Oh, it was.

Start with Shabbat.

Shabbat was a big, big, big focus on that. We, no one worked naturally. And then Friday night my father was always home early. And Shabbat table was set beautifully with white damask tablecloth and fine china. And everything looked cleaned up and beautiful and we were all supposed to be all ready and helping. My job was always to get the wine, uh, from the, I don't even remember, I had to walk into town and have that, the decanter filled with kosher wine. And then my mother baked the *challahs* and, the chicken soup, and the fish, and you know, everything was made. And, uh, whoever, sometimes we have people who have no place to go, my mother always asked them to come, and share the Shabbat meal. And then Friday night, Friday afternoon, uh, I always had my job, they made this *cholent* [a stew of beans and grain and meat, similar to cassoulet, usually slow-cooked in an oven]. And my mother prepared it and that was my other job that I had to take to the community oven and they put it in before sunset and we picked it up Saturday after coming home, out from *shul*. It was done. It was delicious. Oh, the best, the best thing. And that, you know, it was very traditional. And I remember that very, very fondly. It was, you know, something that you know, you know, you have to go and do it. A lot of times I said, "Why do I always have to go?" And, then Saturdays, my father, you know, always went to *shul*. My mother didn't go, the women were not, not all the time, you know, high holidays, yes. And then they, you know, and they, my brother and my father came home and then we had our big meal, again. And then they always, you know, rested. My parents and, uh, or my mom would, you know, go out into the garden, whatever. And then we children, we all went to play, 'til, you know, it got later and then, you know, we all gathered back home again, and had a light meal.

And the other holidays, how were they?

They were very, very much, you know. Rosh Hashanah was, you know, very big, high holiday. Very. My father was, he went to *shul*, you know, at sunset. And then, uh, all day the next day, Rosh Hashanah, it was two days, not one day. And, and 'til like 3, 4 o'clock in the afternoon, it was the services went on and on and on. And I remember my mother used to pack up lunch for us when we were young and, you know, we used, you know, to go out and give us fruit and whatever, because it was such a, you know, long day. And we children we were in and out, running around, and being a pest (laugh).

Like children?

Like children, right.

What was your favorite holiday?

Uh, Shavuot, I like the spring, and the beautiful flowers and, uh.

How did you celebrate Shavuot?

We had, uh, obviously, you know, a beautiful dinner, and went to temple, and it was, uh, lot of dairy dishes made and they were, you know, delicious. And lots of flowers, all over. And, uh, peonies, and everything was just in bloom. And they were always, you know, brought into the house. And, uh, I remember, I something about just spring, it was so beautiful to me, everything was re-birth again. That's why I think it meant a lot to me. And it was not as strict as Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur at that, you know, you couldn't breathe.

Right.

That was a happier -- Yom Kippur, naturally, you know, everybody fasted.

Yeah.

And it was, you know, a difficult, long...

Very solemn.

Yes, very solemn day.

Did you celebrate any secular holidays at all?

I don't remember any. I didn't.

What kind of Jewish cultural activities took place in your town? Was there any Yiddish theatre, or...

None.

Music, literature, art?

Nothing. Nothing.

Really.

Nothing. I think about it now, really.

No local residents got together or did anything?

No. No.

OK, what impact did the secular culture have on your life?

What impact?

Or did it have an impact. I guess it...

It didn't, really.

And your parents were more concerned about maintaining your Jewish identity than to fitting in to the ...?

Oh, well that was the life. We couldn't, we couldn't fit in. They wouldn't allow us to fit in. The neighbors, we had gentile neighbors, on our third house, and, uh, they were very nice, and were, you know, but everybody – you know, they kept to themselves. And the Jewish people were kept to themselves. You know they were not allowed to, to break through or mingle at all.

So you weren't encouraged to make other relationships?

No, no.

Other than Jewish relationships.

Right. And you know the local dentist and his wife possibly, you know, they were, you know, involved with other people but I don't even remember, you know, that, that much. It was, you know, Jews.

And you didn't have any non-Jewish friends in school or?

I had non-Jewish friends but not really, you know, very close friendship. Uh, I didn't, you know, the only time I went into non-Jewish people homes – that there was a store down the street, and I used to go in to purchase, you know, something my mom ran out, or talked to them once in a while. And, then uh, every morning we went down, or every evening, either evening or morning to have fresh milk. They milked the cows and then I was to go down, and I got to know them, and I like them very much, and they liked me. And they were very nice people. And that, you know, and we became sort of friends, even though we never visited in their home, but there was a closeness. Which later on when we were taken away she came to that ghetto and brought us food.

Oh.

Which you know meant a lot, a lot, to us. And she, before we were taken away, she was, wanted to hide us, my sisters and brothers. And, uh, but my parents made a decision not to do it.

Was your family interested in any of the secular culture, like the music or the art of the country, or the philosophy?

No.

Ok. How did Zionism affect you and the Jewish community?

Not really, not much actually. Later on, later on it became, you know, after the war.

After the war.

Before that no. Because we were so religious and in Hasidic Zionism was not playing a role, because Israel will never come through Zionism, come Messiah will bring it. So.

Yeah, I understand. OK. So you were very young, so you didn't have an occupation, and you weren't married before the war.

No.

OK. When and how did you first become aware of the Nazi presence?

Oh, well we had news, you know, radio, short wave radio in our home. And, uh, we had relatives in this country and we got, um – you knew it was coming, year after year. It was more and more...

Starting when would you say?

Well, in, like I said, in the late '30's, when Poland, went into Poland first, you know, the ghetto. When the Polish ghetto started in '37? '38? Something like that. Then you know we started with that and then you have there were later on in the 40's a yellow ribbon and a yellow star and we were just not allowed. My father's business was taken away. And we were not allowed to do many things.

So you were pretty aware at a very early...?

Yeah, we were aware of it. And, you know, and I to this day I could not understand why my parents did not come out. We still had plenty opportunities to emigrate to this country and my mom really wanted to leave. My father was very reluctant because of his religion. He always felt he could never practice his religion, I mean there was no God here, only God in Hungary.

Really?

It's very sad.

Yes it is.

Because we probably could have been all saved because my uncle, sent ticket after ticket. He was so kind and wanted us so badly. It was my mother, my mom's uncle, great uncle to me, but he was just a wonderful man. And, uh, you know, we could have been all here. And he, my father had a brother living here also. So, but that's how life is.

Choices we make.

Yes, yes.

Do you remember the first day of occupation?

Yes, very vividly. Something like that, you know, even though, you know, I don't dwell upon it, thank God, but I remember it clearly. It was, uh, April, in March 1944, uh, one day I was like on the main street in Nyírbátor and then German tanks....

Tape One – Side Two

So that was the occupation, when troops came in...

Yes, troops came in and life was never the same after that. I mean, everything, just everything changed. Even though we were persecuted before, and that, you know the height of antisemitism, it was at its height, but we still were free to, you know. Well, it was a curfew later on. But we still were in our home and we still had all of us, you know, together. And after that, the rumors were that we would be taken into a ghetto and we would be taken away and interestingly enough, you know with all that terrible things going on, the Jews just sat there and waited for the Germans to take them away. It was really, I could not, later on when you think about it as a child you know, you really go along what your parents are doing. But now when, you know, when I think about it, I thought about it I said, "Why? Why they did that?" So, uh, because almost everyone could have, you know, at least half of them could have been saved. And it was later on, and they knew about Poland, and they knew what was going on because this was really coming down to the end, end of you know '44. You know, you know, it was late. We were taken away in '44 in April. And then, you know, I thought everybody thought that they would just leave us stay in the ghetto. And see even if we could have got up to Budapest, you know, to the capital, then we could have possibly stayed in the ghetto there and be saved, because they didn't take all the Jews from Budapest. They took it from all the smaller towns. And my, you know, my father tried to get us out to Switzerland, and with false papers. It was too late. They wouldn't allow us to get on the trains any more, or use any transportation. And I had a cousin who lived in Budapest and she was spending time with us. She came down for a month and she couldn't go back to her parents. So she went away, she was taken away with us.

Do you remember what feelings you had at that time?

Frightening, very frightening. You know, I could see my parents were like beside themselves, very, very sickening you know. I mean, they just didn't - they knew that it's going to be very bad and then they had all of us there, you know, and they didn't know what to do. Like I said, some of the Gentile neighbors tried, that one couple wanted to hide us. Then another farmer who was growing some of the chemicals for my father, he got to know them, and they said, "Please bring the children here," and it was a little, like a farm, and just a farmhouse and lots of land. And they said, "We'll take care of the children." But my parents were afraid.

I can understand that.

Yes. You know.

Did you have any kind of, before you were deported, did you have any personal experiences with - during the occupation that you recall?

No. Really the Germans, they didn't bother us. They just, you know, gathered everybody up and then herded us into a school, and then from the school, we had to only, we could only take as much as we could carry, and leave everything behind. But before we went my parents hid lots of the jewelry and money and belongings in the basement. And they showed each of the children where it was and some up in the attic, and uh, who came home to be able to find it.

Do you remember any discussions with your parents at home about the Nazis, talking to you about them, or...

The only thing, you know, I remember that, you know, they saying the war is going on, and you know, hoping that we won't be taken away. That they will just leave us in the ghetto, and how, you know, we get there, they don't even mention it because they knew, I'm sure they knew. But I don't think anyone knew how bad it was. Because no one really came back to tell you. So there was, you know, only, only little news coming out. And well everybody was waiting for Roosevelt, my father especially. Oh, I mean all, they were listening to the short-wave radio that Roosevelt is coming to save all the Jews. Sure - as a child I was laughing at that. I said, that's all he had to do, to come and save the Hungarian Jews? I mean, the war is going on in Japan and in Europe, and he's thinking about - he didn't lift a finger. He knew way ahead of time.

Now we know.

We know that.

What was it like to wear the Star of David and to be prohibited from going to public places and have your property confiscated or destroyed?

It was very difficult. You were different. Soon as you put the Star on you were not you, you know, you were someone else. You were - how should I say - we were put out to be displayed, because the Jews, you know. Why? Because we were Jews, that's it. Because we had different religion and, and to be ridiculed. And to be, you know, to have your lovely home and then someone come in and take everything away - it's, it's horrendous. It's something that, you know, uh, no one should ever experience. It's a terrible, terrible feeling. It's - it's just... To, to, to get rid of - you know, you wanted to just scream, you know, because you were so angry and you were so helpless, and you couldn't do anything - just had to go along with it. And you were stripped of any dignity, anything. It's, I think it was very difficult most of the whole time. And I'm sure my parents even more so.

You said some non-Jews wanted to help you, hide the children.

Yes.

Do you remember their names and what they did?

I don't remember their names.

You told me...

One, both farmers. One I never met, 'cause he was a friend of my father. And the one, you know, we went there to get our milk.

Why do you think they were willing to risk their lives to do this for you?

Because they were good, kind people. They never thought because of religion. They were Roman Catholics and, see it was, you know, the Church, they taught that the Jews were, you know, evil, evil people. But they were much more, I think, much more intelligent and they knew that it's just a religion and we are good people like they are. And they just didn't want to go along with the herd. They wanted to be kind and nice. And that's, you know, the one lady came down and brought us all kinds of prepared foods to the ghetto.

Were you ever deported to a concentration camp?

Yes - to Auschwitz.

And what events led up to this?

Well, we were in the ghetto for like 3 – 4 weeks. And we were hoping they would let us stay there. And then one day, they said gather, you know, one suitcase and leave everything behind, whatever, we had not much left. And then they took us to the train station and we boarded, what you call those cars, the trains – big uh

Boxcars?

Boxcars. And just, put, you know, like 80 people into each boxcar. And we were taken to Auschwitz.

Is that where you were until the end of the war?

No, fortunately I was selected as 1,000 young women to go and work in a, you know, like *Schindler's List*, almost. And I was in three different camps. I was in Auschwitz and Stutthof, which was some work. But from Stutthof into another place, Braunau where it was all work. And it was doing very heavy work. And fortunately that's how I survived, otherwise in Auschwitz I wouldn't have never been here.

It's very hard to leave it here – this is the pre-war. I'd like to go on.

I understand because I gave you know, the other testimony on that so.

Is there anything else that you think is important that we haven't covered?

Anything else? I could only say that my life, you know, in the first, you know, up to ten years was, you know, really happy. And my parents and my brothers and sisters was a wonderful life. And then it all changed and I think it helped me to cope with a lot of horrible tragedies that came along in my life and made me stronger and I'm always, you know...[long pause] very grateful to my parents for all the love they gave me.

(Stop tape – restart tape)

This is the post-war interview with Clara Grossman. Can you describe the circumstances leading up to your liberation?

We were gathered in Braunau in the work camp, we were 1,000 women, and they wanted us to uh, to take us back to Auschwitz, and to exterminate all of us. We were in a camp, that it was Wehrmacht, fortunately not SS guarded. And they were, some of the guards were somehow a little kinder, not kinder but, but sort of looked upon us as human beings. And when we started gathering one early morning in March, towards the end of March of 1945 - I had my cousin who could not go back to her family, to Budapest, her name was Shari – her name is Shari - and three other cousins from my home town – and

Were with you?

Were with you?

Yes. Which was a wonderful support system, we all stuck together and helped each other. And we started walking and we were, it was very, very cold – snow just very high, snow. And no clothing, only just like uniform and hardly no shoes, if fact just cardboard wrapped around us. And we walked the whole day and in the evening the guards herded us into an empty farm silo and we stayed there over night. And then in the evening - during the night, my cousins we discussed to try to escape. We said we're not going back to Auschwitz. And we decided to stay at the end of the line and see what happens. And if they not really watching us then we'll just walk up the next road. And that's what we did. The guards were – the war was 2 fronts, the Russian front and the American front – and we were in the Russian front and you could hear the bombing all over. And they really were getting very close. And they were trying to hide – I mean, to get, to hide themselves and save their lives. And so, we were shocked – we couldn't believe that no one was guarding us and we just walked off on a road. And it was an empty German farm – that they escaped, they ran away. And it must have been just maybe hours before because the stove was warm. I mean, the things were hot on the stove. And we looked all around – the dogs were barking. And an old very prosperous, beautiful farmhouse. And we just like –

uh, I couldn't believe it. And we hid out there for about 7, 6 days before the Russian troops came in and they liberated us.

Did you know that liberation was coming at that point?

Yes, we felt that it was coming, because you know, some of the guards were, you know, saying that this is the end. The bombings were coming, the troops were coming – the front, the Russian front was coming close.

So when you were liberated you were in a German farmhouse, right? With your cousins.

Yes.

What do you recall about the moment when you realized you were really free?

Well, we were just – could not believe, I mean we – we all, all of us started crying, sobbing and hugging each other and kissing. And we were so starved – I mean for a year we didn't have hardly any food. And we were basically really frozen toes and, and pretty bad physical condition. But we were free and we kept running to the door every, each time someone was standing guard because we couldn't believe that someone was coming to get us, you know the Germans, still were, you know, somewhere hiding and they going to come in. And, uh, as the first day went by in the evening and we got some food together, and we ate. It was warm. The first thing we went was take baths, I mean we were never had a bath, or be able to wash ourselves for a year. I mean, we had no hair. Everything was, you know, gone but, you know, it was quite a, quite a moment.

Now, what date was this?

It was, um, March ...

I mean, 194-?

1945. I don't know the exact day, it was toward the end. I would say like the 25th, something like that.

And the Russians liberated you – how did they treat you?

Not that great.

The Russians. Not that great.

Matter of fact, two troops came through. And the place was really lovely farm house – and as soon as they came through they just took over the whole house. They threw straw all over – into the rooms. And let the soldiers come in, and then they left and they took a lot of the food with them. They were not concerned that we needed anything. And then the second troop came by and one night, they were there for about I think 2 days, and then one

of the officer came over to my cousin, the older cousin, and said to her, "I would advise you to leave from here. This is not a safe place for all of you. He said I will protect you. I will put someone in front of your doors tonight. But after I leave, I won't be able to. So please go." I think he, I'm sure he was Jewish. Yes. And he was very high-ranking Russian, you know, officer. And then after they left the next day, we made enough food up, roasted things, packed up and the next day we left. And we walked.

So where did you go?

We walked to Warsaw. We were in Poland. And uh, the war is still going on. I mean it was middle of winter. We were the first camp to really be liberated – actually liberated. And, uh, people kept looking at us – where we came from? – everybody stopped us. "Where did you coming from?" You know and we start to tell the story. And not too many Jewish people were left in Warsaw. They were all taken away. And then I remember it was, um, what holiday was it – it must have been, what was – not, Purim.

Purim?

And some young woman walked over to us and said, put a little piece of paper in my hand, it said "Please come, we want you to have a Purim meal." And it was, you know, Jewish people. And we just, you know, walked up there and they didn't know what to do with us and they wanted to know, you know, what went on and so forth and so on. And then we had no food left, and then we were wherever we could see we were stealing food from, from carts, you know in the farm – we had no money, nothing. So, and then we worked our way through to Lublin and walked to the close to the Hungarian border. And took the train, the first train that we could get, that civilians were allowed to get on, and went to Budapest. And we were the first concen -, Holocaust victims to come home. And they just didn't know what to do with us. They were like so overjoyed. And right away we were taken care of and given all the food and made sure that we get back to our hometown, and rested up. And everybody was in pretty bad shape.

Did you get medical help?

Yes, anyone who needed medical help.

That was after you got back to Budapest?

Yes, yes. And even in Poland, I think, uh, you know, a doctor came by, you know, through this Jewish couple to see if anyone needed help we got it.

Were you in the hospital?

No.

What did they do for you?

No. I was not in the hospital. Just, uh, we were very thin, very malnutrition. We had dehydration. Um, we had, um, lice. We were just sick and mentally even sicker.

Well, this was my next question – what was your mental state?

Very, very poor. Very poor. We, you know, we didn't realize at that point actually that when we went from Budapest, we took the train back to my home town, and then suddenly we realized we are the only ones. That I was the only one from my family, and my two cousins, two girls, sisters, they were the only ones from their family. My other cousin, she was the only one from her family – and my cousin Shari, who you know, visited me, she had trouble with her leg and she could not walk because in the snow, and we were before we went off to the farm and one of the German officers, a woman, screamed, "I'll take her! I will put her on a sled." And I didn't want to leave her, and she took her on a sled and saved her life. I didn't know that at that time. I was, you know, I was anguishing over her and that why did I leave her and I should have gone with her. And then suddenly you realize you are all alone – and suddenly you have this thing, why was I, why did I come back? Why was I chosen to be from all our loved ones to be the one? So you have these mixed feelings and, and, and, you were just heartbroken. And, you know, here I was, like 15 years old, all by myself – an orphan. That's it. So then, you know, I went and I found all my stuff that was buried. And I pulled everything out from the house. We didn't own the house, I couldn't really go in there but, all the furniture, everything was gone, everything was gone. At that point you really didn't care. Material things didn't mean anything to me. I was just, we all wanted to get back to fairly physical, good physical condition and mostly good mental condition. And we did a lot of friends kept coming from Budapest. They were hiding and they were – they came down, and we talked a lot. And had parties, and started to, you know, live, and said the hell with everything. That's it. We are just going to do this.

So is that how you kind of started putting your life back together?

Yes, yes, yes. Friends and celebrating and feeling that this is it we don't care. And you know, we doing whatever we want to do at this point. We went through such hell in our life, you know, we are entitled to whatever we want to do. And, uh, this was in March, April, May, June.

In your hometown?

In my hometown. We had one, I told you three cousins, they had this big huge home, they each. They were two brothers and a sister – and they lived like in a compound. And we took one of the houses and we all moved in there. And that's where one cousin cooked and we all just lived together.

How long did you live there together?

We stayed there 'til uh that following, uh from March to like September/October and uh actually that summer, you know, when we came back – in July, someone is calling me and

they said oh someone is here to see you, and my brother walked in. And he was liberated, the American troops, and he felt the same thing, he just wanted to come back. He felt that someone must be alive.

And no one from your family besides your brother?

No. No one else. My mother and brother and sisters were killed right away in Auschwitz.

Both, your sister, too?

Yes, they were. You know I was separated from them when we arrived and my father was with my brother until like 2 days, 3 days before the liberation.

Where did you want to go at that point? Did you have in your mind where you might want to go?

Yes. We knew we didn't want to stay there. We knew right away. It was just temporary. To get ourselves back to some kind of physical condition, and mentally. We had to just see what was going on there and who was alive and so forth. And this was home base, you know, we knew that was not really the place we wanted to be any more. And uh, we decided, my cousins – my first cousins – see, I had my uncle, my mother's uncle in here and my father's uncle. And uh, my mother's uncle through the Red Cross kept sending all kinds of telegrams trying to find us. And I contacted the Red Cross in Budapest and right away they contacted him that we are the two of us alive. And right away he sent us money, packages and said, "Please write to me anything you need I'm sending you affidavits right away. Why don't you come out."

Where did he live?

He lived in Hazleton, Pennsylvania. And uh, he was 16 years old when he left Hungary all by himself and emigrated to United States penniless and he became a very wealthy man. But anyway, he thought, you know, my parents were still alive. And then, you know, I wrote to him, said, no, he was an older man. And uh, we were making plans to emigrate. In the meanwhile, the Zionist organizations were coming in very strongly and they wanted us to *aliyah* to Israel. I didn't want to because I had, you know, my uncle and I just – I said my life was very difficult already - I worked very, very hard. I know that I wanted a much easier life at that time. I was smart enough to realize that this was the way for us to come. And my cousins, my other cousins, was from my father's side, uh, my other uncle sent them affidavit. And then my uncle from Hazleton would have sent it to them anyway. He always said to me write to me who else needs papers. But then we made, you see we didn't – we needed papers to come out, because the Russians were coming, starting to come in and be an occupying Hungary, and we wanted to get out before it was too late. So we really went from to, from Nyírbátor to Budapest and spent a few days at my other two cousins, the two sisters, begged them to come with us. And they said no, they didn't have any real family here and they thought they would go to Israel. And uh, so it was my cousin Shari and my brother and I and uh, Shari married while, you know, while we were in Hungary and her

brother, Louis, who was in the ghetto in Budapest, he married. And it was 2, 4, 6 of us that went to Germany and to Austria first. From Austria to Germany to um, Displaced Person Camp, DP Camp in Ulm. And we stayed there from '46 to '48. Actually they, you know, they had a big camp there. Which was you know, not... For us it was good because we were, my cousins we all worked and I went to school and my brother, you know, worked and they were all connected. It was all the organizations, HIAS [Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society] and ORT [Organization for Rehabilitation through Training] set up the schools. And uh, UNRRA [United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration] took care of all the food. But we were in a camp again. Even though it was free, open and you could come and go. But you still, you know, because they didn't make it easy. It was not easy to get a quota number to come out. You had to wait, you Hungarian quota, is very small. And my uncle kept working and working on it. And finally he was advised to send us to an orphanage and let us come out as orphans, which we did. And that's how, you know, my brother and I emigrated. We came out in April 1948. My other cousins came out a year later.

In the camp, you went to school in the camp? Is that basically how you spent your time or what else...?

Yes. Basically went to school and then just socialized with all the young people. And that time I was like 15 1/2, 14 1/2, 15, you know, a young girl and met different people from all over.

Did you meet any one you knew there from your town? Or that you had known?

Well more cousins, that came, which you know, was very, very nice. And uh, actually, we met them in Budapest and they came out with us to Germany. We all, uh, you know, made this big decision to all come out. And uh, all the other, well I met my girlfriends - some friends that I had not seen, and I didn't know they were alive. And I met... and then in April '48 we emigrated to this country.

And you left the Displaced Persons camp – you went to the orphanage first?

Orphanage – we left from the orphanage. It was Ablästerhausen in near, I don't even know where it was near – I think not far from Frankfurt.

So how long were you in the orphanage before you came?

About seven months.

When you were in the camp did you talk about your experiences with the others you met?

Not really. Not as much. No. It was – I think - too soon. And I don't know, we were just too involved of living.

Did you get married here?

Yes.

We'll leave that until the proper time. So you wanted to live in America?

Yes, I wanted to – yes definitely. I mean, I had, you know, my uncles. I just felt that this is, my mother always wanted to come here. And I – this was the choice, that my brother and I made together instead of emigrating to Israel.

And how did you get here?

On a ship.

On a ship.

Yes. Came on a ship.

What were your very first impressions when you came to America?

Oh, arriving to New York and seeing the Statue of Liberty we were like, oh. It was a dream, that you, you never ever forget that. I still in my, my head, I see my brother and I, two little young people standing there and I remember I put on my best clothes that I had. And, and I had you know longish hair and my brother was standing by the rail and seeing the Statue of Liberty and we kept saying that no one will ever hurt us any more.

So you went to Pennsylvania?

Yes. Actually 2 weeks we stayed in New York. I had some cousins in the Bronx. And we were, since we became orphans we had to stay in an orphanage because they had to process, the process you know go through medical examination and uh, physicals and all kinds and then... But, we were, my cousins right away, I contacted them, they were from my mother's side also. And the orphanage was not far from them and they came right in and took us out. And it was around *Pesach*, Passover. And we were, you know, with them every night for dinner. And they took us here and there, you know showed us what is New York all about. And then my uncle came in from Hazleton with his wife to, to, to meet us. And he was just a wonderful, wonderful man. He was just so, so happy to have the 2 of us and he said not to ever worry about anything. He will always take care of us. His wife was not as kind and nice, she was like, "who are these two people?" And uh, but you know, at that point I never even paid that much attention. I, he, I always felt he was always there. He will always be there for us. And he gave me that confidence and the reassurance that I just didn't even bother. And his children also. But my other cousins in the Bronx they were just wonderful to us – whatever we wanted, you know they took us out and bought us clothing and whatever.

Did you know English at that time?

No – not a word.

And how did you learn?

I learned when I came – after two weeks, you know, my uncle came and my brother and I came to live in Hazleton. And my uncle lived in a hotel apartment, and they were close to 80 years old so, it was no sense of living there. And he made arrangement, there was like a third cousin of ours who had two children the same age – a girl my age and a boy my brother’s age. And he made arrangement that we will live there. And we moved in there. She was Regina and Martin Lau. And I will never forget that they were very kind to us and wonderful. And Lucille their daughter was my age – was great. And I started high school. And uh, my brother went to school also. He was always thinking of going to Philadelphia to see, you know, my other uncle. Naturally, you know, we got in contact. He came in also to New York to see us. You know, my father’s brother. And uh, uh, let me go back a little bit. Learned English. We arrived April, May. In June my uncle from Philadelphia and his wife had two small children and they summered in Atlantic City. They lived in Philly and that was, they went, they had a summer place there. And they invited me to come and spend two months there. So I was there July and August. And that two months I learned enough English, just by conversation. I could not speak Hungarian, because no one understood me Hungarian. And my aunt’s brother was a young medical student and he used to take me out every night and he taught me a lot of English and that’s how I learned. And when I went back at end of August, beginning of September I started high school.

So you learned just by immersing yourself in the culture?

Yes. Right.

How did you adjust to your new country? Was it hard?

It was – the transition wasn’t as difficult because I lived in a small city, which was very, very, very helpful. It was a very close Jewish community there and we were like big celebrities, we were Holocaust survivors. And everyone just wanted to do for you, and be with you. And in school, all the – not even Jewish girls or students – everyone, was most helpful. Any time I had trouble, you know, with English, or with any work, they always stayed with me later and helped me – all the teachers. I must say the support system was unbelievable. They all, you know, belonged to BBG, girls, girls in different organizations. And they all asked me to join and be part of it. So it was a wonderful, wonderful – I was very, very, very fortunate because it was not like that for everyone. Believe me. And my brother didn’t have it as good because he, he decided not to go to school and go into Philadelphia and stay with my uncle. My uncle had a specialty shop, ladies specialty shop, and he was working there. And uh, you know, he missed his education. And it hurt him later on in life. So uh, my transition was really very easy.

Where there any challenges you can think of – your biggest challenge?

Well, just, you know, learning language and graduating from high school. It was a big challenge because I made it, you know, I went into senior year. And I made two years, junior and senior year.

So, did you graduate on time like you would have normally?

Yes, yes I did.

That's remarkable.

I did. Which was really lots good. But like I said, everybody really helped me. And you know, I was busy. I had a big social life, I was dating, I was happy. I was, you know, adjusted quite easily to the life.

Did you face any kind of discrimination at all?

No, none.

It sounds like the language barrier really was very negligible.

No, it was easy. I mean, it wasn't easy but I picked it up. I don't know how – you learn.

What gave you the strength to go on?

What gave me the strength to go on? Ah, I felt that there was something else that I had to come back for something. I was selected to come back to, to uh do something special or be a mother and have children and grandchildren and continue the family. And that gave me a lot of strength and uh, I was fortunate enough that I was very strong, both physically and mentally when I came already to this country, and I would persevere and go and do things that you know, that would, you know, help my life and just making the decision to come to this country was quite a thing.

Did you talk about your experiences?

Yes, to my family. You know, my cousins in New York, and my uncle, my uncle was absolutely wonderful. Every day in Hazleton after I came home from school 3 or 4 o'clock, always came over to my cousin's house, and always sat with me for an hour. He was in his 80's and he just loved me so. Always gave me big amount of money. I was such a young girl, you know, it really didn't mean - if I would have saved that money – now I would have had lots of money, huge amount, to just do with whatever I wanted with it. And, you know, like I said, material things, money didn't mean anything. We had everything and the next day it was taken away.

But you told him about your experiences?

Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. I told him. I told my cousins who I lived with, you know, with Regina, she was so kind – and she always, she wouldn't let me do anything. Did my laundry, and wash, and my ironing and took care of everything. Life was good in Hazleton. And then after...

Tape Two – Side One

Continuing the interview with Clara Grossman. You were talking about Hazleton.

Life was very good in Hazleton and I was able to put my life together, you know, quite a bit. And getting an education and having loving family close by, and my brother. So it made my transition, you know, really, really quite good in this country. And just were overjoyed to be here. And then I made the decision to, uh, my brother was already in Philadelphia, and my cousins that we all came out with uh, were in Philadelphia – my cousin Shari, 'cause they came a year later and they went to my other uncle, who was their uncle, you know. And they all started making their lives. And my cousins in Philadelphia, I had many cousins from my father's side, they all got a house for us. Because one was in the banking business, and this house was came back, and you know, and he said, "I want you to have this lovely house." And we, all the cousins, went and furnished it for us and made it very nice. They lived in it before I did, my other cousins. And my cousin Shari did the cooking, and we were let's see – Shari and Tivy, 2, Louis and Heddy 4, my brother and I 6, my uncle Mano and Joe 8, and Rinna. There were always 10 people together. And everybody was either going to school, or working. My cousins, both during the day, working and at night going for a degree.

And what did you do?

I already came and started working in my cousin's bank, because I felt I could not take any, you know, more money. I felt it was time for me to, you know, hold a job. And I worked at the bank and at night I went, you know, to University taking courses.

So you went to work in your cousin's bank? You're saying that's how you got your first job?

Yes. Right. And then, you know, I worked there for a while and then I went on to a larger bank. And you know, I worked there, and this was let's see, we were in uh, '49, '50. And I was, met lots of American friends, girls my age.

Who did become your closest friend, or friends. Were they Americans or were they fellow survivors?

Uh, actually there were no fellow survivors where we lived. We just had our family group. But mostly the American girls became very good friends to me. And I met girls from my work, from the bank. And uh, which was Jewish girls. And there was some girl down the street, Joanie, she was another Jewish girl. And uh, then some other girls. And I was, you know, busy dating and very busy going out with all different young men. And, uh...

Have you ever felt that being friends with another survivor, you have a certain unspoken understanding between each other rather than something more than you would have with an American friend?

No.

Ok. Now that we are talking about dating and everything, you're getting close to marriage I have this feeling.

Right, right.

OK, so I want to know how and when you met your husband.

I met my husband, um in '51 in March in New York at a Hasidic wedding. When you meet my husband, he's certainly not – even close to that. As a matter of fact he went the other way. Uh, actually, my husband's – my father-in-law I should say – grew up in Hazleton. And, uh, his sisters lived in Hazleton. So while I lived in Hazleton, I met my husband's aunts. And they always kept saying, "We have a young man for you." And I kept saying, "I'm busy enough young men. I really don't want to meet – I don't want to be fixed up with anyone." And then it just happened. One of my cousins from New York, from the Bronx, you remember, married one of my husband's aunts. But he is like a 3rd cousin to me. And their daughter was getting married. And was marrying a boy from Toronto. And they decided to get married in Williamsburg [Brooklyn], very logical. And, I was invited from the bride's side. And, my husband also because of the aunt, you know, his aunt. And, uh, my brother and I debated because it was on a Thursday evening wedding. Which we'd have to come in Wednesday, and we'd have to take time off work. Should we come, shouldn't we come? So I said, "You know, why not. Let's go." And we went in and stayed with my cousins, you know, in the Bronx and went to the wedding. And he was actually sitting out with his grandfather. I never saw him because, you know, it was all separated, the women. And I went over to say hello to his aunts and his aunts said, "we want you to - would like you to meet our nephew – that we've talked about." And I said, "Ah come on." And they said, "Oh yes please." And one of them got up and took me out and introduced me. And we talked for a while. We talked and then we came in. And his parents were sitting at the same table as other aunts and he introduced me to his parents. His father was a rabbi, a Conservative rabbi. They lived actually in Philadelphia. And then they just moved to New York, when uh, like 6 months before. And my husband went to Penn and, you know, lived there for a little while.

Your husband went to where?

To Penn – University of Pennsylvania. Then we met. And he wanted - he asked me right away for a date – to come the following Saturday to drive to Philly from New York. There had no turnpikes and that time – it was quite a trip. I said I was busy so I couldn't see him. So he called again and he came out the following week and we started seeing each other – and seeing each other. And, uh, before we knew – this was it.

So what attracted you to one another?

Well, uh, you just know. You just know.

Hard to put into words.

You know that we basically, fell in love. We didn't really – we were married, we met in March and we were married in July. I came in to see his parents before he actually really asked me. They lived in Forest Hills, and uh, they were very, very nice. I met all his friends. They all lived in Philadelphia. And uh...

Sounds like a whirl wind courtship?

Yes. Very, very quick – very fast. We had a beautiful wedding.

Would you describe the wedding?

Yes. My uncle from Hazleton, my uncle Cal, saved his money, because the family were not very overjoyed, I'm sure to know, that he is giving me away and making the wedding. And he said, "I am taking care of it." And he sent the money to my cousin's bank into Philly and he made a beautiful wedding. It was like 150 people and beautiful hotel in Philadelphia and all the cousins from my husband's side – and you know, not many family from our side. But, you know, my uncle gave me away.

You mostly had family and friends.

Friends. Lots of friends. And then my cousins who lived in Philly, you know, on my father's side naturally. Lots of friends, so it was a beautiful wedding.

Who officiated?

My father-in-law. It was very, very nice.

Was there food and music?

Yes, it was plenty food and music and dancing. And it was on a Sunday evening. Sunday night we stayed in Philadelphia after the wedding. Then one day we went to New York and flew to Bermuda for our honeymoon for a week. My husband, you know, naturally lived in New York already and he was working at a pharmaceutical company.

What was his position there?

He was a what do you call them – a detail man. They sold the medicine to the doctors. They detail the doctor. They gave them all the informations on the drugs – what it is and how they should prescribe it, for different ailment. He started with a small company and he went to different smaller/larger companies. And, that's you know... Actually, he almost

went into TV but this job came through first. Then he got the other job in TV when TV got started.

Oh, he went from pharmaceuticals to...

Actually he applied to work at a TV station and then work to be in the pharmaceutical industry. And the pharmaceutical industry job came through first and he chose that. No regrets.

Tell me about your family – your children?

Yes, we have 3 married daughters – we have three girls.

Tell me what their names are.

Their names are Ann Marjorie Grossman Plessner now. And Edith Linda Grossman Gothels. And Nancy Joy Grossman Hess.

They were born in what year?

They were born Ann was born in '52, and Eddie was born in '55, and Nancy was born in '61.

Do they live here?

No. It is very difficult. Miss them terribly.

I'm sure. You have to travel. You have to make lots of trips.

Lots of trips. Actually, Ann lives in San Francisco. And two, Eddie and Nancy live in Boston area. One in Needham and one in Newton. So they are close to, you know, to each other.

Now you said... did you continue going to school after you started working?

Yes, I went to school for a while and then I got married. I never got my real degree, just the courses. Then I never went back to, you know, to get my degree. But after we got married I was working in an office in New York, on Madison Avenue. And saved enough money to get a new car, our first car. I was pregnant actually. And I worked all the way, she was born in October and I worked all the way to end of September and then I quit. After that I stayed home – raised our children. We moved from, we lived in Forest Hills for 2 years, and we lived in Queens. Then from Queens to Long Island. From Long Island when our youngest child was born we moved to New Jersey, and my husband went with Hoffman LaRoche, the big pharmaceutical company. He was with them for well, what, 25, almost close to 28 years, 29 years.

How did you get to Kansas City?

How we got to Kansas City. He came here on business to Marion a few times. And he got to know a few people at Marion and they, he became Licensing Director for Hoffman LaRoche and was starting to go to Japan and to acquire drugs for the company. And Marion found out about it and one of their vice presidents contacted him and asked him if he would be interested possibly and come and work here. Work for them and help them to get a new drug from Japan. And, you know when he came home and he said to me, "Would you be interested?" I said, "Interested to move to Kansas City?" The only thing that helped me before that, I was doing corporate meetings – that was my company. I worked with, first I worked for a friend and then we had this big company, and then I had my own company putting meetings, corporate meetings and events together. And I came out, I don't know, about 12 years ago, my partner and we had an appointment at Marion – we were selling one of our ideas. We stayed at the Alameda Hotel. And I walked around at the Plaza and I said, "What a lovely place." And we took the cab the next day to Marion and to go down Ward Parkway – I saw the best. When my husband came home, I said, "It all depends. If it's really a good deal – if it's worthwhile then maybe." And they really wanted to make sure that I wanted to come, because it's a very expensive move to have us - they pay for everything to move us. And then they flew me out a few times to see their place and talk to people and meet people and then go out with the realtor. And when it came closer and closer to make the decision I just, I said to my husband, "I would really love to do it, but I don't know if I can." There our children were driving distance, they could come in for the weekend, we could go there for a weekend. Here, everything, you know, is flying. And I, you know, 30 some years, even more – 40 years of life there. And, all your connections – your friends, and good friends and your life was just put together and it was very good.

Big decision.

Big decision, big decision. But I know my husband really wanted it. He was not happy in the New York area. He wanted to get away from that. He, you know, I mean, if I would have said no it would have been fine. But I'm so happy I said yes.

How long have you been here?

Uh, 10 years. It will be 10 years in October. It has been really wonderful years. The community really just, really welcomed us and made lots of new friends. Became very active different organizations. We just love it. The only thing we miss is our children. And we have 8 grandchildren.

So there's a trade-off?

Yes, yes.

When did you become an American citizen?

I became American citizen 6 months later – after I got married. You have to wait 6 months. I remember going to Brooklyn to the courthouse – so proud, so proud to be sworn in American citizen.

So it was a very significant event for you?

Special day, very.

Aside from owning your own company, doing corporate...

I started out, that was my later – started out, had a ladies boutique for 10 years in New Jersey – did very, very nicely. And after my partner and I we sold it, I did um, um, what do I say? Wedding –not um - clothing. You know, they came to me and I took them into the market to buy all their wedding clothes and so forth. And then after that I went into the corporate business. And I just loved it. And I probably would have been still in it – I did some work when we moved here for a while. But, my husband left Marion after they merged with Merrill Dow, because it just was not working out – he didn't want to stay with them – this was not the company it used to be. Fortunately, he opened his own consulting company which is has done very well, thank God. And he' very, very happy what he's doing. And he can do it wherever we are. So it's just wonderful.

So your career – you kind of –

I sort of slowed it down and did a little bit here and there. Because I go travel with him and I go to see the children. And I said, “You know what, I'd rather do more community work and volunteer work than just do that.” Because it's a big commitment - you have to be away a lot. So I decided, you know, that that was enough.

What kind of hobbies and recreational pleasures do you enjoy?

Oh, well I enjoy music. We have, you know, symphony tickets. I enjoy it very much. I started to play golf- I'm a terrible golfer but I keep hanging in there. It makes it very nice that my husband and I can do it, you know, together.

Is that how you got interested, through him?

Well, we joined a club and then through friends. He started playing more and you know, that's how it escalated. He plays a lot more now than I do. But I play also.

What if any did post-war events – yeah, what post-war events have had a great significance to you, such as the Cold War, the Civil Rights movement, Vietnam, the '60's, feminism, assassination, the birth of Israel?

Well, each one in its own right was significant. But you know... I mean the wars naturally always left that very, very sad taste because what I went through. So that was never –

always not overjoyed. Fortunately we had girls, so they were not involved in any of that. The assassination, also, Kennedy's assassination because Nancy my youngest child was just one when he was inaugurated, Jan. 20, I always felt very close to Kennedy, to the president. It was a terrible shock, you know, you always felt nothing like that will happen in this country. Only happens in Germany. But lot of things happen here too. So, you know things like that – naturally the wars, and now the ethnic cleansing in Kosovo is very difficult to see that and experience that it is still going on. That the world has not learned yet.

In light of your past experience, how did having children affect you? What were your emotions upon having children?

It was the best thing in life – you know, having our children, and grandchildren. I just, you know, I couldn't imagine life without children. And I never, when they were younger, I never really got them too involved. They knew that I was in concentration camp and I lost my whole family and so forth. But I never said that and dwelt upon it. I was fortunate enough that I came out quite a whole person, that I could function, you know, quite well and I was very, very, very fortunate, very lucky. I didn't want the children to grow up with always hearing me to, you know, what it was. But yet I wanted them to know. And no matter what, they are children of the Holocaust. And as they got older, naturally, you know.

How old were they were you started discussing?

They were in their teens. And, you know my grandchildren also.

How did they react?

Well, you know, they were very saddened and they looked at me and they said, "Mom, we don't believe, we can't believe you went through all that." And a lot of times they cry and when I told them first. My daughter, my oldest daughter and I went back to my home town two years ago, to Nyírbátor. I wanted her to see, you know, her roots. And went to the houses that we lived. And walked the streets and then to the school. And took pictures, videos. It was quite, quite experience. I wanted actually my three daughters to go back and the two – one just had a baby and one couldn't make it. So for me it was like it was like a closure. I really don't want to go back there anymore. Nothing to go back to. Went to the cemetery and saw my grandfathers, found my grandparents stone graves and so forth. There is nothing there. There is not one Jew from 3,000 Jewish families.

Not one?

Not one.

Do you still talk a lot about it to your children?

No, not as much. Not really. I don't live in the past, I live in the future.

Were your children named after any of your family members who perished?

Yes, yes. My oldest daughter, Ann, is named after my mom. And Marjorie (Note: this is the middle name of her oldest daughter Ann) is my sister, Magda. And Eddie is named after my mother-in-law's mother and Nancy is named after my father, translated.

Now you have three daughters?

Yes.

I thought I heard another one in there. Do you feel you raised your children any differently because of your experience?

I don't think so. I don't know, I'd have to ask them that, you know. I really, I don't think so. Maybe a lot of times I feel when I was younger you wanted to do so much more. And we were not the generation that took our children all the time all over, like they doing it now. So possibly I would do differently in those - with that instinct. But otherwise, I always look back and then when sometimes we discuss some things and I tell them, "I did the best I could." I grew up without any nurturing and you know, and taken care of. And I certainly did as much as I was able to do. And they all grew up to be very lovely young women, married very nice young men, and had wonderful children.

What more can you ask?

What more can I ask?

Have you experienced any antisemitism here in America?

No, not since I've been here. I hear about it but fortunately I'm not.

How do your memories of what you went through during the Holocaust penetrate your life today – do they?

Well, you know, you never forget. Never. I'm very involved as much as I can, because we travel so much, in the Holocaust Education Center. And, I lecture, I speak at schools as much as I can. It takes a lot out of you, lot, each time you get up there. But I feel it's very, very important. Certain schools I've been there 3 – 4 times each year, the teachers just request me to go back. I told them until I can't I will do it – as many times as I am able to do it. And then I spoke, first time, at my granddaughter's Hebrew school, Sunday school, I should say, in Boston – which was very, very difficult – very difficult. And then my grandson goes to Milton Academy and I went in and I spoke there and it was much more difficult. And that's – with the family. And – I don't know -- my daughter in San Francisco said Mom, maybe you would speak and I said, you know, just let me know when. My daughter in San Francisco gets involved with a group, Children of the Holocaust.

Are there any smells or sounds that kind of evoke past experiences – that bring it all into focus, again? Or anything that haunts you?

No.

How did the war affect your attitude and practice of religion?

Well, I – in the beginning when we came back we just really didn't want to know about religion.

(Clara's husband Rip walks in, chats)

But as the years went on, we always had a Jewish home. We always you know had – all the holidays was observed. My father-in-law, you know was a Conservative rabbi. It's not even, my husband is not fell far from the tree cause he was, you know. So it was you know, me because you just cannot take it away – it's in you.

So you raised your children Jewish?

Definitely. From the 3 girls, 2 married Jewish men, young men and one didn't. But their daughter was Bat Mitzvahed. And, you know, our son-in-law, you know, is just really very much for whatever his wife wants. We have a Jewish home. We belong to the Temple. We go on the holidays. We do as much as we can in the community.

Which synagogue do you belong to?

B'nai Jehudah.

Did you ever stop believing in God?

I have doubts many times. It was difficult at times to feel there was someone up there who could do all these – allow these horrible things to happen to good people, because of religion. Everything was because of religion. So there is – even though I do not believe in this – I cannot do this, I cannot practice any more. At one time right after, we were, you know, I wanted to just assimilate into another religion – I couldn't do it. It always came back – yes, I am Jewish. I went through all this hell because I was Jewish. I'm not about to give it up after I made survived. At times, yes, I was angry, very angry and sometimes you still think I get angry – how did this happen. Why was this allowed to happen. And you keep asking you know these questions. And then you just don't get the answer.

And now do you believe in God?

Oh, yes.

Are you active at your synagogue?

Not really that active. We support it. I'm not involved in the sisterhood and all that.

Did any faith that you had help you survive do you think, or...?

I don't know, that was – either faith or sheer luck and I was just chosen to, to, to, make it – to survive.

What traditions before the war have you shared with our family here? Did you have any family traditions that you kind of continued?

Oh, family traditions. Well, you know, Friday nights, even though we haven't done it – earlier when the children were young – we were not that religious, we were, you know, Conservative. Now we are Reform. But that's one of the things. Some of the Hungarian cooking and talking to Hungarian – actually my children don't speak Hungarian because of my husband, not being Hungarian. At times I feel maybe I should have spent some more time and taught them. But, it's not a language that's going to take you anywhere. It's just, you know...

Do you look at life any differently – do you think than if you hadn't had the experiences?

Well, I look at life – I think I appreciate it a lot more. I try to live the fullest I can. I don't know what I would have done if I would have stayed in Hungary, would have been an entirely different life. But, I am very happy person. I try to be anyway. I enjoy most of the things. I do lot of things – come and go and enjoy. We travel a lot. We have a home in Scottsdale and we go there quite a bit. Go on trips with our children and grandchildren. We really a very close-knit family. And each day I get up, it's a bonus. I am alive. I am here. And it's a gift. And I try to really enjoy each day to the fullest – some days you get up, and then it clicks in – make the most of it.

What does being an American mean to you?

It means freedom. I can be here, no one ever asked me who I am, what I am doing. I can come and go without any papers or anything – and be, and choose what we want to be. And raise our family whatever we want to be. And that just complete freedom – it is the best thing that anyone can have. You don't realize until it is taken away from you.

Do you think most Americans take their freedom for granted?

Absolutely. Absolutely.

Do you feel American?

Yes, very much so.

How so?

It is very interesting – I've been here many more years than I lived in Hungary. So, uh, I am American. I spent many years here. I gave birth to my children here – I raised them here. I, we contribute to the society. I am Hungarian by birth, Jewish by religion, but American because this is where my home, and they opened their doors to me and gave me a home.

What are the most important lessons we should learn from the Holocaust?

What's the most important lesson? That – you think that you are safe and you secure and one day it all fell apart. And we should never take things, you know, for granted and just feel that people you know, are fortunate that they were here in this country, and they never went through anything like that. I feel that, you know, that I am very fortunate. I came out of it in such fairly good shape. The Holocaust I mean, it happening all over again in another way. Like, you know, ethnic cleansing all over. I wish that the world would look upon it and see that's enough already. We all one people, one human being and we should all take care of each other. It's easier said than it's done, unfortunately. But we hope always for the best. That, you know, things will be good – that people won't start killing each other off in the name of religion, or name of race, and bigotry – it's, it's just sad. Human beings still didn't learn.

That is the end of our interview. Thank you very much.

You are very welcome.