

Kate Lebovitz Interview

February 23, 2000

Okay. Let's see if it's working. What is... okay. We've got the introduction. What was your name at birth?

My birth was in 1926. Stan Kuteling.

And what city were you born in?

I was born in Budapest.

Oh, okay. And what did you know about the circumstances of your birth? Were you born at home?

You know, I don't know much about it, but I know that my mother was 30 years old when I was born, and my father...it was a second marriage to him. So I had two half brothers. We were from the same father but from two mothers. After the war, none of them came back. My father was shot from the Germans in the Danube and my two brothers went to labor camp. One in Serbia and one in Russia, but I don't know where. Neither one came back.

Now what were your parents' names?

My mother's name was, um, Hannah Blanstein, her maiden name. My father's name was Joseph.

Okay.

And my grandfather was a *malamud*, which is a teacher. And then my mother had 12 brothers and sisters. I'm not sure exactly how many boys, how many girls anymore, but out of that was living after the war...I know we had...oh, one in Budapest with him. Well, not with him, with his wife. But there was my mother and her brother who remained in Budapest. But in America, I had...she had a sister, a rabbi brother in Danville, Illinois, and that was that. So when, after the war, I found...I was telling my husband, I remember my mother has a sister in America. Let's write or send some kind of a message that we are alive. So we were in Italy when my son, George, the first born, was...he was the first Jewish boy in Genoa and the *chayalim* made him a *bris*. And I said to my husband, "We have to send something to America to find out if..." I know the address of my aunt. And I remembered the address, but I didn't know the address was the business of my uncle who was a jeweler in the jeweler section. So my husband's name was Yanu. When we came to America, we made that to Eugene. When it belonged to Czechoslovakia where he was born, he was Evžen and in Italy he was Eugenio because we lived

in Italy for a year. So my husband signed the telegram. "We are alive in Italy, Love Katel." I was called Katel for short – like I today I use Kate. Katel – Yanu. Like three weeks later, because we were in a ...it wasn't a camp. It was a villa where my son was born in Genoa. And then everyday we went to see if who got mail or who got... who's looking for somebody. And I went downstairs and I see Herman Rothstein is the sender, which is my uncle, and he sent it in Katel Fenya. Fenya in Hungarian means the fir tree, or the Christmas tree, you know? But, I figured he got the telegram. He figured I got married and my married name is Katel Fenya. So I went to the office and I explained which took me a half an hour. "Can I see that letter? I'm sure it's my uncle." Sure enough, it was my uncle. The telegram said, "Don't move. Stay where you are. We'll do something." Sure enough...

They did.

...they did. They sent an affidavit. But the consulate in Italy, in Genoa, was not open until May 1st, 1946. So we got up, oh God, 3:00 in the morning and we stayed in line. We got the first three numbers on the Czechoslovakian quota, because Eugene was born in Czechoslovakia. Eugene is my husband.

Right.

So we got the first three numbers. This was May 1st. July 20th, 1946 we arrived in America.

Okay. What you've done is some of the things that I've got later. But I'm glad you did it because that helps us...

Well, it was kind of combined how we got here.

Right. That's fine. So tell me about...let's go back to your mother and father. What did your father do for his occupation?

My mother...my father...we had...we were a middle-class family. We had a business of taxi. My father had his own taxi and my two brothers were driving as the chauffeurs, you know. So we had a good business. We had a Benz Mercedes.

Uh-huh. And what did your mom do?

Mommy was a...

a housewife?

... housewife. She took care of us. And, you know, she'd...in Europe, women didn't go to work at that time. I mean, this...I'm talking back many years ago.

So you said you had...and the members of your family were two brothers and you. So you grew up together?

Right.

And, you know, how old were your brothers in relation to you?

My brothers were, oh, I would say, 15 years old than I am.

Uh-huh. So there's a big age span?

There was a big age difference.

Right.

And they absolute adored me. They'd really...because they were older they understood. You know, so...

They took care of you.

They took care of me. As a matter of fact, many times I'd remember mom used to yell, "Leave her alone!" [laughs] They used to take my side, and mom didn't agree with that. But, they were really...I miss them terrible.

What were their names?

One was...one was named George and one was named Martin. Martin.

So tell me a little bit about your neighborhood you lived in, what was your street like?

We lived...you know, I have to tell you. I lived in Budapest...Ordseeute it's called, and I went back. My mother...she survived. And when I went back, I just wanted to see the house, if I remembered it right. Because Budapest had...Europe has different rules than America. Like 10:00 they close the door. So if you want to come in, you have to ring the bell and the house superintendent would come open the door. First he looked out and if he doesn't know you, you can't get in. But if he knows you, you give him a tip, he lets you in. So I went and I looked up the house. And many...well, I wasn't home after liberation, 17 years, I have not seen my mother.

By the way, what year did you go back to Budapest?

So figure out. In '46 I came here and 17 years after.

Okay.

'46...'56.

That's alright. Don't figure it out.

'70...'63.

Right.

And I was shivering because it was behind Iron Curtain. And I...everybody said, "You're crazy. Don't go. You know you were born there." But I said, "I'm an American citizen. I'm not afraid. What can they do to me?" So I...I'm going from one thing to another.

No, you were talking about getting into the home, to see your home again.

Yeah. So I remembered. I remembered the little apartment. We had like a living room, a bedroom, a foyer.

So you had a nice, nice...

Yes.

... nice place.

A bathroom.

Did you get in? Did the guy let you in?

Yes.

He did?

Yes.

He did.

Yes. It was a lady, an old lady. And I told her "Can I come in? I was living in this apartment." And she said, "Sure." She...you know, when you go to Europe, the way you're dressed...and I'm conservative in comparison to other travelers. She knew right away I'm Fenya. You develop a little bit of an accent. Well, in English, I have a good accent.

Good for you.

But in Hungarian, you also develop one already because you're mixing the two languages and it doesn't come out the same way. But it was lovely. And then I went to look for my best girlfriend, unfortunately, and she died. And I couldn't find her.

So you were saying that you came from a middle-class family.

Yes.

Did you have servants?

No.

Did you own land?

No.

Did you take vacations?

Yes. We went to the Balaton for a week.

What does it look like there?

Balaton...

Or what did it look like?

I have a friend who calls that the muddy water. [Laughs] I swear. But you know, at that time, it was beautiful. To us Balaton was blue, nice, border and you relaxed and that's it. What do I know at that time? I was very young. So I don't know.

What kind of foods did you eat back then?

Almost the same as I remain to cook today. Very much.

Are you're still a Hungarian cook?

Yes.

Good.

I'm still a Hungarian cook.

That's good.

I don't use that much fat and I ... you know, modernized a lot of things. I don't use that much einbrand. What do you call einbrand...? Thickening of, of the...

The sauce?

The sauce, yeah.

Yeah. What...so what were some of the favorite foods Hungarians like to eat?

Well, you know, Hungarians eat different. They don't eat meat everyday like we do. They have days that they have a soup and pasta and they have some fruit and that's enough. And they

usually...their big meal is lunch time. And at night, they have a sandwich, tea with...my favorite was with the tea, with toast with garlic spread and goose fat on it.

What is that?

Goose fat?

Is it goose...? Oh, and that's what we don't use much of anymore, right?

First of all...

Goose fat.

In Hungary...

Instead of from the cow, it's from the goose.

...you force feed the goose. And you got chicken...goose liver, my God! You ever tasted goose liver? That is absolute to die for. Delicious! But my mother used to buy...I used to go with her to the market and, you know, they top ended the goose for the ladies. It was fat enough, in the *tookus* because if it was not fat enough, the goose didn't give a ... that fat had to last all winter long.

No kidding

You know it wasn't like that like here. You go to the store and you had 96 million oil to pick from, but you don't know which one to pick to begin with. So mother used to...we had two 20 liter...I don't know what they called it. But she put the fat in there and that stayed in the camera [sic].

Like a churn of some sort?

That's right. And that stayed in the camera [sic] which was cool, all winter long and when she needed it, she went there and she took out.

As much as she needed.

Right.

That's interesting. And did your family have any political affiliation in Hungary?

You know, that I don't remember.

Okay. Okay.

But I remember my father davened in the *Tefillin* every morning. That's because my mother came from a religious home. My father was not that religious. It was my mother.

She made him do it.

She made him do it. Right. She made him come in, and he promised her that he was going to do it. My mother believed in that, and he did it.

We're going to get back to that pretty soon. Describe the schools you attended. What were your teachers like?

You know, I went to elementary school and I...

Public? Private?

Public. Public. And I went to Hebrew school.

How many times a week did you have to go?

Twice. I went twice a week. And I went to...

Did you go to *shul* on Friday and Saturday?

Yes. I went to *shul*. As a matter of fact, when I went back to visit, I went to visit my Hebrew school teacher, the rabbi, who died since then, but Dr. Shongra Laslo was his name. And I went to him. That was the second time I went with my little baby Karen who was, at that time, two years old.

Oh. What year was that when you went back again?

Oh, I went about every four years or so.

After that first time?

Yeah.

That's because your mother was living?

Right. And I took Karen. Karen was three years old. And I went to the rabbi. And, of course, you know, he hasn't seen me in 20 years. And I'm walking, and I says, "Hi, rabbi! I'm Kathy Lebovitz. I used to be Kate Stern." And he says, "Oh, my God!" And Karen was gorgeous. I...Harzfeld used to be here and I used to dress her gorgeous. We walked down the street in Budapest and everybody turned. She had curly hairs, and blonde, and beautiful. And Dr. Shongra Laslo was absolute...couldn't get over it. I stayed at the hotel, Royale Hotel, and he says, "Can I come and visit you?" I said, "Sure." What did I...you know, I didn't think of nothing. Of course, he could come and visit - I am here with a child. Why not. Sure enough, one day I get a call. From downstairs they ring the bell in the hotel. And...and the guys said, "Mrs. Lebovitz, you have a visitor." I said, "I have a visitor? Who is the visitor?" He said, "Dr. Shongra Laslo." I almost dropped the phone down. I said, "Okay. Send him up." He came. He

brought a beautiful box of candy. He brought a toy for my child and we sat down and we talked from old times, and so forth and what he went through, what I went through. It was a very nice conversation. [Phone rings and tape cuts off.] Yes. And then he said, "I would like to take you out to dinner." And I said, "Look, I came here to...I usually don't spend my night out from the hotel. I have a child." I took a suite, because hotel was so cheap at that time. Behind Iron Curtain, you know, American dollar was ... you had to pay dollar, but I remember I paid like \$5 a night. Ridiculous! And I said, "Rabbi, I'm sorry. I'm not going out at night. You want to see me, you could call me. But that's about it." Sure enough, he called me a few times and couldn't get rid of the man! And finally, I told them downstairs, if he calls again, please tell him I'm out of...I left already to USA, please. I'm gone. Forget it. [Laughs]

That's so funny.

Yeah.

Well, the other thing is did you have any favorite subjects in school?

My favorite subject was math and thank God most of my children inherit that from me. They all do. They... George was a ...in math, math...started out as a math teacher. Then he had a doctorate in education. But all my kids, Shari, Karen, Allen, they all do the math and I had spelling. Those were my two favorite. In German, I was very good too.

Did you graduate from high school?

Yes. I graduated from high School. But when I graduated from high school, then started already the antisemitism. So I could not get into *gymnasium*, college. You call it here...

Coliseum and....

Yeah. Yeah. Well, at home, it's called *gymnasium*.

Yes, but it means the next level of education.

The next level of ... after high school.

Right.

So my mother said, "Kathy, you better learn a trade because the way it looks for Jews, you have to live. You have to do something." I said, "I want to learn how to sew." My mother says, "No way. You're not going to learn...I learned how to sew. If you're going to learn that, and you make a lady a dress, you're married to her. If she loses, she gains, she'll bring it back as long as you live. That it doesn't fit. Now it's too big. Now it's too...just...no. Learn something else. Pick something else." So I was thinking and I went to learn to be a hat maker.

A hat maker?

Yes.

Interesting.

I graduated from that too, and I was good to it too.

So it was like an associate degree? Like a two-year program?

Yes. Yes. It was a year and a half program. I had to go with a firm, go to a firm and go to school. By the firm, I learned the actual doing of the hat ... the pressing, the sewing, the decorating.

The apprenticeship.

That's it. I was thinking. I couldn't think of that word. And, I remember that too. I was very young. I was, I think, 16, 16 years old when I learned that.

Was it a big company that made hats?

No, but very exclusive. Inside, in the high society section. Even today, you go to Budapest... that's the heart of Budapest, where you go if you want fashion, you want elegance. And my mother said, "If you're going to learn already, learn from a good place," you know, that it's something. And I went and this place had the boss, and the lady who was teaching me who was...I think she was some kind of a partner in a way because the boss didn't work. She was always out somewhere. But I do have to deliver the hats and make the hats, and ... but it was a good experience.

Did they ... so they ... do they still wear hats in Budapest? Was that a big thing?

Some. It's like here. Some do. Some don't.

Yeah. It's slowed down.

It's not what it used to be. Not as much anymore.

So you were especially making them for people?

Right. It was all done. We had people who came in. We had styles. And they picked it, and it was beautiful ... and that was that. And ...

How long did you do that?

About a year and a half. And then came the ... I think ... yeah, about a year and half because by that time already, Gene was in Budapest too.

We'll get back how you guys got together in a few minutes. Did you do anything fun as a youngster with your friends?

Oh, yeah. We used to go on the ... climbing the mountains, picnics, just like here. Exactly. Even more because we didn't have television, but we had radio. The only thing we had ... I think the European children are more used to radio and this way introduced more to opera, to classic music, to things like that. That's why, even today, I hear an opera on the radio or on the TV, I could tell which one. My daughter ... my children don't like opera. They were not raised with it.

Right.

It's probably my fault.

Well, it's part of the society, like you said.

Yeah, and it's a different world today, you know.

Did you have any hobbies or belong to any organizations?

I belonged to Girl Scout, believe it or not.

Really? The real Girl Scouts?

As a matter of fact, we had a customer from the Boy Scouts, and Eugene find my Girl Scout pictures because I brought a lot of pictures back from my mother. And he said, "I have to show this to Abe, that you were a Girl Scout." You know, with the hat, with the uniform, with the pockets here and with the belt.

That's cute.

And it's cute.

Did you belong to any forms of Jewish organizations, though? That wasn't prevalent then?

No. No, not at that time because at that time already I was about 17, 17 1/2. 18, I got married.

Okay.

So there was not much. But I went to synagogue. I was raised with a lot of Jewish feelings.

Yeah, that's where the activities were.

We kept Yom Tov when, you know ... we kept *Shabbas*, and we ... holidays. Yom Kippur and I remember ... I remember I used to, as a child, I used to take, oh my goodness, what is that apple called? Oh, it's ... it doesn't have it here all the time, but not in Europe either, but we

used to put in the smelling thing and I used to take at Yom Kippur to my mother to the *shul*, that when you get hungry, you smell that.

Is it that mentholatum?

The smell that makes you take away the hunger.

Oh, oh, oh.

And this was the belief, you know. So I don't remember. Maybe it will come to me. I don't remember it.

Yeah. If you can remember it, just let us know.

Yeah.

So you had friends, you know, when you were growing up.

I had a lot of friends, yes.

Right. Did you ... any of them, are there any of them around?

No, unfortunately. I went back. Most of them ... I don't have one friend left. I had two really very close friends and they both died. One in concentration camp and one in, after the war, after liberation. So it was horrible.

What ... let's ... one more question about your parents. Were your parents strict or, you know, did you have an open communication with them?

Well, more strict than parents are here today. Yes, my mother taught me how ... you know, in Europe, you had a hole on to your socks. You didn't throw them away. We had the little ... you took a glass or something. You put it in the socks and you fixed them, you know. She taught me how to do that. And my brother smoked, so I used to fill cigarettes. We had a hand filter. And I got ... if I ... how was it? If I filled up hundred cigarettes for him ... you know, they bought the paper separate and the tobacco separate. And this was a little ...

Machine like an ...

Yeah.

... apparatus?

Apparatus. You put in the tobacco. And it was a wooden thing. You put the paper at the end and you pushed out the tobacco into the cigarette. And I used to put them into the box. I was about ...

Did you tell your kids about this? (Laughs)

14 years old. I made money. My brother paid me, I think, 20 fillér ... at that time it was fillér over there.

How old were you when you were doing this?

14 years old - 13 years old. And I used to do it every week because they smoked and he paid me. But when I did the stockings ... the socks, I didn't get paid. My mother said, "It's your stocking. You fix it. You know."

Let me ask you something. Did your parents know you were doing this for your brothers?

Yes.

Oh, okay.

As long as they paid for it, fine. That was okay. It was okay. And we loved it.

All right. So now we're going to talk about values and standards. Did your parents have certain, you know, requirements and standards from you as a child that were most important to them for raising you?

Oh, yes. They were ... my mother was more strict. My father was ... our house is the same way. My hubby is the sweetie, the easy going. I'm more of the strict one.

How did these values ... well, I think we're hearing it now ... values that you had before affect your daily life? You know, how you're running it today? From what the way they brought you up?

You know, you'd have to ask of my children. I don't know.

Okay.

I think I was ... you know, it's funny. When you raise children, they thought I'm sure at that time ... that how terrible. I was strict. That I didn't let a ... I remember many Friday nights they cried because we didn't let them go to the dance because Friday night was *Shabbas* night, and I made the dinner, and my husband insisted. Friday night we're eating together. There is no ... you were born to the wrong parents. You do not go on Friday night and that was that. Today, you know, when they're older, they said, "It wasn't that bad." They were so. And they look back, you know. There were so many places that was much worse than they had it.

That's right.

We were really lenient. But at that time, I'm sure they thought that, "God, my mother is terrible."

What was your religious life like in your general community? Did you live around a lot of Jewish people in the community?

I ... no. No. Just like here about.

Yeah?

I was not in the ... there was also in Budapest, religious which lived close to the Orthodox neighborhood, you know.

Section. They had a section.

But we did not. We were not orthodox, so we didn't live there.

Well, I know you talked about your family celebrating Shabbat, but what about the holidays?

We did that too. Yes.

And what was your favorite one?

(Laughs) My favorite one was always anyone except *Pesach* because it's too much work. Oh, God! But now I'm very lucky. My son-in-law and my son, they both of them come and they help. Taking down, bringing up and I'm changed the dishes. So Allen is a big help.

They made it easy. Yeah.

And so is David. Yeah.

So what was your favorite holiday? You liked all the holidays.

I loved any one except *Pesach* when you have to be restricted with dishes, with bread, with the matzoh, you know.

Did you celebrate any of the secular holidays, like the non-Jewish holidays?

In Europe?

Uh-huh. In Hungary?

No. Only when store was closed, so we couldn't go. But, or when school was not on. That was it.

Okay. Were your parents more concerned about maintaining Jewish identity or fitting in?

My mother was very much so, because she grew up ... my grandparents were orthodox, you know. My grandfather was a *malamud*, was a teacher. And my uncle here in America was a

rabbi. So she grew up in religion. But my father was not. And my mother introduced him to religion, more or less. He knew he was Jewish. And, you know, he could *daven* but he wasn't keeping it. But my mother made him.

Were you encouraged to develop friendships with all people or just Jewish people?

No. I was friends with ... we had non-Jewish friends too because we went to public school. You were together.

Were you or your family interested in secular culture? You've talked about opera. You know that's what we're saying.

Yes.

What about art, philosophy?

Yes. Yes. Yes. We absolutely ... we went to shows. And even when I went back to visit my mother, the first thing I went to the opera house because, if you ever go to Hungary, you have to see the opera house. It is absolute magnificent. Is gold. The whole thing is gold. And the paintings ... there is no painted wall. It's hand painted figurines and, oh ... it's ...

So that's the artwork of it, yeah.

It's absolute magnificent. So beautiful.

How well were the Jews accepted in your general community?

Was pretty good. I lived in a nice neighborhood. They were ... I don't know behind my back what they said, but ...

Well, I know you started to talk a little bit about antisemitism happening at the age that you were ...

I was 17 ½ already.

And why you couldn't go on in school.

Yeah. That's ...

Any other examples?

That's the time when already we couldn't get into *gymnasium*. Then they came in that we have to ... they had sections for Jews. We had to go to a ghetto, and I was about 17 ½, and they put two, three families together in an apartment and you had to wear a yellow star. And, at that time, Gene ran away from Czechoslovakia because they already took the Jews from there. When he came, nobody wanted to believe him that they were taking the Jews. They thought it was a making up story. In Hungary, we had a good life, you know? They don't take the Jews.

Who's going to take it away? Sure enough, the Germans came in. But, anyhow, before I ... I don't know when we moved into this ghetto. And at that time was the thing, if you get married, they don't take you to camp ... to labor camp.

This was in Hungary's ghettos?

So you could (inaudible). I heard right. It's rain. So Gene and I, we got married in the apartment under a *chuppah*. At that time, there was two brothers, the Fabian brothers. It was Dr. Fabian was the rabbi and Fabian Bellah was his brother. He was the cantor. And they came to the ghetto to marry us. And I was 18 and Gene was 19 ½. And my uncle, I had one uncle living in Budapest ... he came to the wedding and ... [phone rings and tape cuts off] My uncle came to the wedding, which was ... maybe there was six people. Whoever lived in the house and we knew came in. And I'll never forget it. My uncle said to my mother, "You crazy! Why are you letting these two kids get married? She's 18. He's 19 ½. They're not going to eat a pound of salt together." So my mother said, "But they love each other, and God knows what tomorrow brings, so let them get married." So we got married and thank God we had more than a pound of salt together. We married - this year we'll be 56 years. But I never forget as long as I live my uncle ... what my uncle said. Even Gene says that he always remembered what he said.

Is this the one that is ... is he still living, this one?

No.

No, that's not the one.

Uncle died.

Okay.

Both uncles died.

So ...

So ...

Basically, we were talking about what happened after the war. You talked about your occupation being hat making.

Yeah.

And that you did probably until you couldn't do it any longer?

Right.

Is that correct? And then ...

Then we moved into the ghetto. Then, in the ghetto ...

This is together, right?

This is together.

You two. This is where we're at.

Gene worked at the ... at the custom-made place where ... you know, his father was a very famous tailor from home. And he learned basically everything at home what he knew from his father. So he had a job in Hungary because you still could work. But the Jews have to be gathered in a neighborhood together.

Right.

So, and then, Gene was involved with the Zionism and we ... you know, when you're young, you do many things that today I would not do if they paid me. Through the Zionist organization, we became Red Cross ... believe it or not, how I did that I don't know ... volunteers, you know. So I had a Red Cross thing on my arm and we went with ambulance and we saved Jews from the ghetto. We drove the ambulance.

That's like what goes around comes around. You're back in that car again. The taxi.

Back in the ambulance and we went and we took out sick people that they were, you know ... they knew who they, you know there were informations given out. There was always. And we did this for, oh, until we were ... oh, I think was ...you know, it's hard to remember. It's ... it was ...

You mean, how many years maybe?

Yeah, this was 1944 I think we were in the ghetto. If I remember right. And we did this -it was very dangerous. Very dangerous because that time already Gene and I had Christian papers.

You were Jews and you were doing Christian stuff.

I was blondish, so I looked like a *shiksa*. Nobody knew I was Jewish. I did not have that real Jewish look. And I was born in Hungary. See, with boys it was harder, because what these son of a guns did, they took them under the ... inside the house. You know, every ... the apartment houses had doors that you opened up and you could go inside before you get to the steps. So they took the poor boys and told them to pull your zipper down. If you're ...

If you're circumcised.

If you were circumcised, they knew you were Jewish. So forget the papers! I didn't have that problem. I looked *shiksa* so I was more of a ... but still it was ...

What about Eugene?

Well, we went. We lived like this. We went to ... far from the ghetto. We rented an apartment as Christians. And, I'll never forget it. Then we went to save somebody and we got caught. We got caught bad, let me tell you. We were caught. At that time, you know, the SS was ... we used to say the Russians had red. They were miserable. The Germans had black angry. They were antisemites. The Hungarians were green. They were worse than the two of them together. So was the Polish. Once you got to their hand. So they took us to this Royale Hotel, which that was their main place. And I ... we walking in there, and there's screaming and yelling and crying and these idiots, they in private clothes, but they have this insignia of the Hungarian Nazi thing. And gun, and, what do you call this?

It's like a stick thing, isn't it?

Yeah. And I see in front of me ... they took me separate and Eugene separate. They took me in a room and there was this, oh ... this lady was about 54, 55 years old. She was not Jewish. What they got her in for I don't know. But they got her in ... most of them, many of us ... everybody was spying. Now why ... who could I spy to? What did I ... what do I know spying? And in front of me, they put this poor lady on a table. What is that called? It's not a ... it's a gun that you go hunting, you know, to shoot birds? The long one.

It's the archery, the ...

No, it's not archery. There's a gun that has like a ... it's like a ...

No. It shoots something off, but it's not a bullet.

No. No. It's a gun, but it has ... the gun is long.

Right.

And here it says for your eyes to look through.

Is it a rifle?

I think it's a rifle.

Okay.

Anyhow, they put this poor woman on this table in front of me and that's when I broke up and I started to cry. I was hysterical. And they put this thing in her you know what, in front of me. In the meantime, they made me drink salt water because they told me that I'm a spy. And I will not talk about it until I finish all that salt. Did you ever drink salt water? I started to throw up. I was horrified. But then there was a younger guy who was ... belonged to them. I don't know. He got a Jewish girl, a beautiful Jewish girl, and he said to me, "Where do you live?" And I told him. He says, "Okay. Get your things." I said, "Well, I want to get my

husband.” He says, “Okay.” So he took my husband and me and this girl. He wanted to rape her but we had no choice. We were under a gun. He wanted my apartment. So we went there. And ...

Did he know you were Jewish yet? Did they know you both were Jewish?

Yes.

Oh, they already knew it already.

They already knew it. And he went in the room, the bedroom. We stayed in the other room. We waited until he fell asleep with the girl and we sneaked away. And we went into the ...well, after that we went into this Swiss consulate. Actually, it was the ... you know, my memory is leaving me.

That’s all right.

Actually, it was Wallenberg ... the Swiss...

Consulate?

Under the Swiss ...

Something under the Swiss government?

It wasn’t the consulate. It was in the bottom of one of the synagogues where they put these Jews that they ... they got caught and they were under there, and where they were bombing, and we were there for a month. It was terrible. I was there. And that’s where I got some lice. You know you have so many people you don’t clean yourself. Oh, it was miserable! Miserable. Miserable. And then we got, finally, after, liberated. But I am one of the Wallenberg survivors from Hungary.

Okay. This is going to go off in a few minutes. Okay. Well, we talked about your wedding and where you lived when you were first married. And you talked about what you guys really did during the war. But were any of your children born during the war?

Yes. George - not during the war.

In the liberation.

After.

In the liberation.

In Italy. Yeah.

Okay. Right. Okay. So, what ... I'm going to ask you a couple of questions and then we're going to go to Italy in a second. Okay. When ... well, you talked ... I think you became aware of the Nazi presence more or less when you were 17 years old when you couldn't even get into school already.

Oh yes. Oh yes.

And you kind of remember the first day that you ... of occupation, of seeing the Nazis come in?

I remember.

It was a little different there ...

Because we were married and my husband and I and my parents, we went to a synagogue that was giving a place for Jewish people. He knew somebody there and we went there. And middle of the night, we hear this banging on the synagogue. And that was [inaudible] and everybody had to come to the synagogue. But before you get into the synagogue, on each side of the door, there was a German soldier. And each one had a ... a lamp in their hand. At that time, you always had darkness outside because they were bombing, so you could never have full lights in nowhere. As we were coming in, I never forget it. My mother went first. She went to the right. My father, took him to the left. I went to the right. Gene went to the right. That was the last time I saw my father. And this was ... they picked 28 people in that synagogue that they took them to the Danube that day, because one man survived. And this one man came back. He was a younger man. My father was about 58 ... wait a minute, maybe 60 already, and they all shot them in the head and all fell in the Danube. That's why every time I went to Budapest, I could never look at the Danube the same way as I used to look at it before.

Do you think it was his age that put him on the left side?

Well, I don't know what they were looking for. If they didn't like your face, that's it. And I think older persons they didn't want to be bothered.

They didn't think he could help with the labor camps?

It was horrible. As a matter of fact, we didn't even know for a long time whatever happened. He disappeared. But about a month later, found out when this man came back to the synagogue and said that he was one of them. We knew him. And he said, "Yes, your father was executed."

How did he survive?

He swam. With the shot, he didn't get killed all the way. The bullet somehow ... see, you have to have a certain way the bullet hits you. He was young. He was strong. He swam through, and he came back. It was a horrible thing.

So ...

I loved my father. My father was a very wonderful man.

So, I'm trying to get into this other part. You knew about the presence of it. Okay. We talked about ... watch if this goes off. But you weren't in Germany, so you didn't have the ...

No, I was ...

... anything with the *Kristallnacht*?

No.

And ... but you did say something about wearing the Jewish star?

When we were in the ghetto in Budapest.

Uh-huh. Did you wear almost ... oh, but then you took it off when you were doing the American [sic] Red Cross thing.

That was ...yes, of course.

Yeah, because you couldn't be a Jew for that either, right?

Oh, no. I went as a *shiksa*, you know. No way!

So did any non-Jewish people ever help you? Or were you ...

No.

Not in your position?

No. No.

Okay.

You were ... you were afraid to trust anybody, you know. They were ... they were themselves afraid of this Nazis. Who knew? You know, nobody knew what tomorrow brings. It was horrible. But then...ok.

Ok. Now we are going to talk about your liberation. Then we'll get to talk about your kids. Where were you when you got liberated?

I was in Budapest. In Hungary. And somebody came in the bunker - we were under the basement in the synagogue - which was under the...that's when we got all these...

I have to stop. [referencing needing to start recording on next side of tape.] How did you know you were free?

Well, at this time, a lot of people were under Wallenberg. You remember Wallenberg, the story that he was a young diplomat and he came in and he saved all the Hungarian ... a lot of Hungarian Jews because of ... under the ...gave out all these passports, Swedish passport, it's called and I still have it. I have to show it to you somewhere. I have it ... my picture on it and, anyhow ... so finally, somebody came and banged on the ... yelled down in the basement that we're free, come on out. But we were afraid. We didn't believe it because, you know, many times somebody came with a stupid joke that you're free and it wasn't true. But finally we heard screaming and yelling and we came out and then we were looking for family. I find my mother.

Where was she all that time?

She was in that little place where we were in the ghetto. And I find my husband. And my husband says, "You cannot stay here. We cannot stay here. This is not a haven. We gotta leave." But how are you going to leave? You have no papers. No, nothing. He says, "Well, through organizations ... Zionist organization." At night we packed up whatever we could put on our back, which was not much.

Your mother too?

No, my mother was too old. And she wouldn't. She found her bedroom. She would not leave her bedroom set. And she stayed home. And we went at night with the ... as a matter of fact, they were taking groups. And it was fascinating to me. Little children. It reminded me. Every time I go here in America to a *bris* and they put a little cup in the wine and put it in the baby's mouth before a ...

Bris?

Bris. That's what they did. That's the first time I saw it, doing that. When we crossed the Hungarian/Austrian border. The little kids were given this little wine in the mouth and they zonked out and we walked.

Was it sort of like a good luck thing, that ...?

No, no! Not to cry. Not to talk. Quiet.

Hmm. That's what it was for! Yeah.

See, the grown ups, you tell them, "Don't talk," they don't talk. But children, they gotta make ... they hungry, they pee-pee ... this and that. So, they were zonked out with wine. Only wine. It was not harmful. It was okay. And, finally we made it. But by the time we made it, we slowly threw half of them back, back out, because it was such a long ... I don't know how many kilometers at that time we walked. And we wore shoes which was ... your feet was all ...

Blistered.

...swelled up and, uck, miserable.

How long did you do that?

Well, we did it over a whole night. We walked.

And you went to?

And we went to a barn. But, see, these people ... the Zionist organization, they had their places. They knew who to deal with. They were paid off. They knew. And we were in this barn.

Like the underground.

We got to Austria and that was it. And from there, we went to Graz. And from Graz, we went to Udine. But by that time, I became pregnant. And we wanted to go to Israel. So we stayed in Udine, and from there, they took us ... I never forget it. We had, I think, maybe a dollar, and we saw the first orange after the war. And we ate it at night when nobody saw, just between the two of us. And saved half of it for the next day. From an orange!

No wonder you like oranges!

I love oranges! I never forget it. So, and then, from Udine, Italy, we went to ... (cell phone rings) ... shut it. We went to ... more south of Italy. We went to ... what was the name of the city? Genoa. And then we got, again, the Israeli soldiers were there. It was after liberation and we wanted to go to Israel. But, at that time was the ... (phone rings and tape is turned off).

You were in Genoa and you wanted to go to Israel.

We wanted to go to Israel. But, at that time, all the boats were caught by English ... by the English soldiers, and they were taken to Cypress. Being I was pregnant, they wouldn't risk me, because they never know what's going happen when they get a ship of Israel Jewish people. So, that was it. That was our end. And that's when I remembered in Genoa ... George was born in Genoa. I remembered I had an aunt and uncle in the Bronx, New York. And that's when we sent. So actually, George was born January 18th and I told you May 1st up in the consulate. July 20th we were in America. George was six, seven months old.

So you didn't really have a lot of ... what year was he born, '46?

'46. George is 54.

So you really didn't have to stay long there. You were one of the first one ...

No, we were there in Genoa a year.

Interviewer coughs.

Bless you.

Excuse me. So tell me what was life like there when you were living there?

Life was gorgeous. I mean, when you come after a war and you see this beautiful, artistic stones and oranges. You walk down from ... we lived in a villa, which was for the refugees. And this ...

Were there other Jewish people there too?

Yeah. All Jewish people - all refugees were waiting to go somewhere. All displaced persons, we were called.

So you were all waiting to get to the next place.

All waiting to get somewhere. And George was born there and the *chayalim* made him the first *bris*. So I used to, when George was born we didn't have a bed for George or you know. We had - the UNRAA sent Carnation - you remember Carnation milk in the boxes? So, I used to put in some little blankets there and he would be there and he would peak through and we put a box out on the sun. Dried up. I had two boxes, one up and one down. And, you know ...

And that's how he was fed. And that's how he was (inaudible - talking over each other).

(Inaudible - talking over each other) I breast-fed him. So it was okay. And I made very, very good friends there with a Polish couple whose husband died in the ... she was pregnant and the husband died in concentration camp. And she gave birth at the same time I did, a little girl named Naomi. And, Naomi was also breast-fed, but she was a little milk sister to my son because Anna was a school teacher and she had to go for some papers to Milan from Genoa, and she couldn't take the baby, and I had told her I feed her, don't worry. And I took care of her baby for three days, and I had enough milk, so I both breast-fed them. And when George went to Israel, he looked up Naomi.

And when was that?

Oh, that was when George ... George was what, 18 years old? But, you know, what I forgot that address and I don't remember her last name. I should have wrote it down, which I was a big mistake. Many, many mistakes I did with dates. But, you are young. You didn't think of these things. I would have loved to hear from them, but that's how life is. What can I do? Anyhow, George was six months old when we came to this country to my aunt and uncle.

And you came to ... what city did you go to?

New York, Bronx. And they lived on second floor. My uncle was a jeweler. My aunt - she was my mother's sister and it was very hard at that time. In 1946, you couldn't get an apartment.

In New York.

In New York for no money, only if you paid under the table. Now when I ... we came to America, we had a six month old baby and two dollars. That's it. That was everything we owned, plus a little junk here and there, up and down clothes, which wasn't much. And then

my aunt got a crib for my son and a high chair. And they had a neighbor, next house, and he said to my husband, "Gene, I loan you \$600." We almost fell over at that because to us \$600 was so much. It was a lot of money at that time. We didn't have a job. We didn't know the language. He says, "There is an apartment. If you want it, we loan you the money." So I ... my aunt never had a child. She didn't know what it was to be with a child. I wanted to have my own place, whatever it would take and, thank God, we took the \$600. We got the apartment. Some people gave us a kitchen table and two chairs. That was enough.

How many rooms did it have, this apartment?

It had a little living room and a bedroom, and a toilet and a kitchen. Yeah. So, that's it. My husband ... he's a wonderful worker, and the first week he got a job as a pattern maker on 7th.

A pattern maker.

7th Avenue.

7th Avenue company, or factory?

Right.

Or company, or whatever.

Right. And, oh God, I never forget it. We were in this apartment and the bedroom window was in a ... there was ... you couldn't see. There was another house.

It was another wall.

It was so dark. And when you came out, and it was walk up, fourth floor. And, you know, with George ... when George was born, he was a big boy. And to *schlepping* George with the packages ... so finally they told me there is a dumb waiter. You put your packages in there. You go upstairs and you pull up the package. That wasn't easy either, but finally I got used to it. It was tough at the beginning because I didn't know English. But in the one year in Italy, I learned a little bit Italian. I learned in camp Jewish. And between Italian and Hungarian ... so the butcher was a kosher butcher. I talked to him Yiddish. The produce man was Italian. I talked to him Italian. And that's how I managed to shop.

So when did you learn English?

I learned very simple. I had a radio in the kitchen. The radio was on from morning til night. My ear had to get used to the ... I had trouble with words that sound alike. Like hear ... to hear something and here, in this place. It's different spelling but sounded the same. Oh, you know, there is many words in English. But, slowly we picked it up. And then we got ... Eugene worked on 7th Avenue, then got ... he right away got a job. And then we moved to ... oh, after, I think, a year and a half I lived in the Bronx, we moved to the West Bronx. I got an apartment and I got pregnant and Allen was born. Allen was born in Grand Concourse Lebanon Hospital, which was such a wonderful experience after what I went through with George. George, I was in an Italian hospital. He was born in Genoa and I was so young. I didn't know where is this

child going to come out from. They talked to me Italian and I talked Hungarian and we didn't understand each other. And the pain was crucial. George was four and a half kilogram.

Which is?

And I was a little girl. Which is about nine pounds, nine and a half pounds. And, but he was gorgeous. He was born with big eye lashes and eye brows and he had ... the end was standing up. And they... that kid was strong from end to end. Everybody admired him. He was ... he looked like a boxer.

Oh, okay.

He looked like a month old baby when he was born. But with Allen, I had a 52-hour labor pain in Lebanon Hospital, but ... oh, with George, I was two weeks in bed, because it was 1946. Don't forget that time was different.

You didn't move.

Allen was born two years later. I gave birth today. The next morning I was off the bed.

Didn't go back when Allen was born.

After two weeks, when you're in bed, I couldn't walk.

Yeah.

My legs were swelling. You had no strength. You lose your strength. It was horrible. And with Allen was unbelievable. And right away they put you down and you ...

Did you have a *bris* for him?

Of course.

In the hospital?

Oh, yes. Yes, think I had a *bris* in the hospital for him. Yes, of course, we did. That already was in America. And then I had Shari three years later. She was also born in Lebanon Hospital. But with Shari was already Lebanon Hospital, Grand Concourse, had a new system. Rooming in, mother and baby. So the baby stayed with you during the day and they took her away at night.

That was ... that was innovative back then.

That was already ...we were growing up. You know you really got advanced with each child.

Was Karen born in Kansas City then?

No, Karen was born in Patchogue, Long Island.

Oh, then you moved there.

Karen was born December 31st, and my general physician was my obstetrician too because I lived in Lake Ronkonkoma at that time. We bought a house and we live in Lake Ronkonkoma. And he announced that “Kathy, I’m going for vacation.” I said, “Ted, you can’t do this to me. I’m due end of this month. You can’t go for a vacation. I can’t go now with a new doctor that doesn’t know me. I’m really scared.” So he said, “You want to induce labor?” I said, “Yes, I want to induce labor.” So we induced labor. That’s how Karen was born because I didn’t want to give birth with another doctor. That was Karen’s story.

So you’ve talked about, you know how you’ve ... you know, your husband’s still working, doing well with his ... was he still working for companies? Or did he own his own place?

My husband was a very talented guy. You see, he does all these thread sculpture. Besides, he fixes all my kids’ torn jeans and coats and pants, and you name it. And he does drapes for them and anything they need. He’s very talented. I’m not as talented. I’m only talented in the kitchen.

Well, that’s all right. That’s okay. So, he’s ...

He plays accordion.

What did he ... did he still keep up his tailoring situation when he lived in ...?

He does. He still does.

No, I mean in the ... you know, in New York, when you were living in New York.

Oh, yeah! That was our living.

He still was ... he was doing pattern making that whole time?

Oh, yes! Oh, yes!

Even after you moved into the ...

And the funniest part was that when Karen was born, after that, and Gene got a very good name on 7th Avenue. There was a man from Kansas City came to 7th Avenue who was looking for a designer. See they were making coats, but they were not as successful with their coats as they were with their suits. So they wanted a coat man who does successful business with coats and they interviewed my husband. At that time, the kids were growing up, and if you will remember, that time was the hippie time, which Eugene already established himself and it was three places we could go. We could go to Europe, we could go to San Francisco, or we could go to Kansas City. We lived already on Long Island. We had our own house. So Europe I didn’t want to go. I was born in Europe. I had enough Europe. Forget it. I loved America. We both loved America. Who wants to go to Europe? You’ve got to be nuts to go to Europe. San Francisco was too much hippie for me. I didn’t want it. It’s enough to raise four kids without hippie city. And I like the name Kansas City. I didn’t know anything about Kansas City.

Did you ... and you didn't know anyone here?

I didn't. No. Only the man who interviewed Eugene ...

Just this man?

Yeah. Uh-huh. It was Leon Karosen.

And he took him out from his job and paid our moving and paid him beautiful sum. It was very generous. And we moved to Kansas City and, as a matter of fact, I remember, I came visiting about ... Gene was here a month before I moved out because he had to see, and to work and so forth. And he hired him. And I came to pick a house. We picked this house. And Leon ... I remember, he wouldn't let him ... only buy in Kansas and he told him, "I want you to belong to my synagogue, Beth Shalom." That's how we got Beth Shalom synagogue because I wanted to join Ohev Shalom. It was right here.

You could walk.

Right. Walking distance. But he wanted Beth Shalom. So we went. I moved here with the four children in 1960.

How old was George?

George was 17.

Did he ever go to high school here, though? Or ...

Yeah!

Oh, he did. So...

Finished his senior year.

I can remember him being one of the first ones ... Jewish ones ... at Shawnee Mission East.

Yes. He was on the first pilgrimage from here. And then here, you know, he had ... George went to college. He decided he wants to take the combined program with Columbia University and the Jewish Theological Seminary. He wanted to be a rabbi. So, okay, Columbia University. You know at that time how much money that was? At that time was \$6,000, the combined program. That was a lot of money. But we said, "Okay. We could pull together." And you could always do something in order to ... I remember when we arrived and we didn't have money. I used to make pasta and potatoes. It was cheap. Today it is not cheap, even pasta and beans and potatoes. But at that time, it was pennies. So we send him. He came back from Israel. He decided there's enough rabbis over there. He didn't want to be a rabbi. But he met his future wife. So I asked him I said, "George ..." He came back to the University. And he says, "Mom, I have to go to Israel to study. I don't know enough Hebrew." I said, "George, did you study Hebrew or do you went to study the girls?" He says, "No, I went to study Hebrew too." So we found out that he met Aviva and so really, that was it. And he married and he

moved away. He was teaching here and then he moved to Cincinnati. So, thank God, I think we did good. George got his doctorate in education. He was a principal in a private school in Los Angeles. Allen has ... is a lawyer. Shari and Karen are teachers. Shari's still teaching in Missouri and Karen substitutes sometimes. That's about it.

Right. So the kids were fine.

The kids were fine.

You got over the language barrier.

And we're going to celebrate our 56th wedding anniversary this year, God helps.

God helps, right. So ...

And we have wonderful nine grandchildren and four great grandchildren. My oldest grandson, who is 30, 40 years old ... can you believe that? My grandson. He's already ... he's a radiologist in Mount Sinai, New York hospital.

So, he's in New York.

He's in ... he lives in New Jersey but he works in New York. Yes.

And what kind of a doctor did you say he is?

He is a radiologist. But he is a specialist in brain radiology.

Neurology, is that it?

Neurology. Brain neurology. Yeah.

Did you ever ... when you came, you know, being that you were in New York and being that you were in Kansas City, did you ever run into any discrimination?

No. No. Thank God. Not yet. Not ... yes! I'm sorry. I'm wrong. You know what? I didn't believe that. When I came here to look for houses, I went to Gregory...Gregory Barkley ...

In Missouri?

Missouri. And they were so nice towards this guy. Yeah. I didn't like the houses. It was so (unclear) ... steps ...

Diebold?

Diebold houses. And I said to my husband, "You know, I really ... I'm not for this too many steps. I had enough steps. I don't want this many steps, but maybe we'll think about it." So he says to me, "And what is your name?"

This is the ... a real estate agent?

This is the real estate agent and I said, "We are Mr. and Mrs. Lebovitz." And he said, "I'm sorry." I said, "What do you mean you're sorry? What are you sorry for?" I didn't get it! I didn't catch on! And my husband ...

He caught on.

...poked me. He says, "What do you mean you don't catch on?" He says, "We don't want the house anyhow." That was the end of it.

That's interesting.

That was and ever since I never had anything. And then I we went to ask his boss, "What's going on here?" So he asked, where were we looking for houses. And he said, "I don't want you to look in Missouri. Go to Kansas and buy a new house."

So that's where you went to this neighborhood?

That's when we went. Yeah, Diebold Homes and he explained that Diebold was an antisemite who did not ...

I didn't know that.

That he did not sell houses to Jews.

That is real interesting. Did you realize how many Jewish people bought these homes later on?

And I said to myself, at that time, "Oh, my God. I came out from one thing. I ran into another. What is this going to be?"

So here you are. You've got your family set up. You've met many friends.

We bought this house in 1960 and we still live in the same house.

That's great. I know it is.

And we paid \$36,000 for it.

Today, hmm.

\$120,000 ... \$125,000?

Yeah. Look at the houses behind there, what they're going for ...?

Oh, that's ...

Yeah. And that adds to you.

You know when I moved here in 1960, there was a Senator's cousin living in this corner house. Now a doctor lives there.

Was it Winn?

No. No. No. [unclear]

There was somebody.

Anyhow, in the back of the thing was for the maid, for the horses, for the help, living quarters, and they had a little pony, a little horse. And we use to go out every morning and give a little candy, sugar, to the little horse. The horse came to the gate and we greeted him every morning. When they moved away ... he died and she moved away.

And they sold the property.

They sold this corner.

Megabucks.

Megabucks. Over millions, and every house they build behind me is \$360, \$460, \$500, so forth. So even if ... the property alone is worth the money.

Oh, yeah. And the area is unbelievable.

Here, you don't have a house on this block more than a week. It's sold.

Uh-huh. Oh, yeah. It's very valuable. Well, now I know that you've been involved in other organizations, you know, since you've been here.

Oh, I was involved in Hadassah in New York, yeah. I started here too. Then I gave it up. I was too busy with my family, with the kids.

You can't do it all.

And I went to visit my mother, you know, who passed away about ... she was 96 when she died about 6 years ago. I visited her. She was 95. After I left, she died a few months after that, which ...

When ... one thing you were talking about, you know your husband worked for ... what was Harrison's company called?

Youth Craft.

Youth Craft.

How do you know it?

Oh, this is all ... this is ... this is history.

It is?

This is all history what you're talking about. I'm more familiar with it. Tell me about ...

Daddy went to work for ... he worked for Youth Craft, I think, 13 years, 14 year, something like that. No more, because I live here 40 years so. Well, half he worked Youth Craft and half he worked Fashion Built. Henry Present. Yeah.

So, how ... wait, I know he didn't ... then he opened up his own place.

No. No. He never opened ...

He never did? He had ... he always ...

What happened was when the kids grew up I was sick of already... I didn't want to see kids. You know, when you raise four kids and they had ... my children were active in the thespian and George liked plays. Allen like debates. So, 5:00 in the morning take them to the bus stop, go to Topeka and here and there. I was always ... I was the chauffeur and I had enough.

The taxi again!

Taxi. So I said to my husband, "You know what? The kids are getting married. They're growing up. I don't want to babysit every time. I babysit when I want to." And I got the store for myself!

Oh.

And I had the store ... I was in the store for 20 years.

And where was it located?

It's on Wornall - 83rd and Wornall. A tailoring shop.

Oh, by Linda Dubrowski's. That's right.

Yeah. Abe's Tailor Shop. So, and that was ...

So that was yours. That was 20 years.

Yeah. Because George got married and moved to Cincinnati. Then, well Al lived in town. Shari lived in town, but Karen got married and she moved to Los Angeles. But then Karen moved back. And now I'm happy again to babysit. First of all the kids aren't - only Karen has babies now and they happy to - the little one is always happy to sleep over here Friday night. Shabbas is Grandma...

So you don't have the business anymore?

We still have the business.

You still have it?

Yeah. Yeah.

So is your husband in it too?

Yeah, he is into it. Yeah.

Now he's ... it's sort of like a little retirement thing here?

Well, yeah. It's good to him.

So you're working also there?

Yeah.

Oh, okay. I didn't realize you were still doing that.

It's nice. I have a lovely clientele.

Sure.

You know, nice people. And, I met an awful lot of people through the business and I enjoyed it. I really enjoyed it.

When did you become an American citizen?

Five years after we came, '51.

But you picked up the language by yourself? You didn't have to go to classes?

Yes. We picked up some. Like George didn't speak ... he learned on the street. He played with the other kids. I mean, not on the street. He played ... when I lived in the Bronx. They played in front of the house. So the kids taught him English. At home, I talked to him Hungarian. George still can read and write Hungarian. It's amazing. Allen still understands when I talk to him Hungarian. As we go down the line, Shari understands a few words. Karen is blank.

She's all American.

She locked it out. She never learned.

Well, she was born here.

Now she's picking up here and there a few words.

So did ... when you were here, did you take vacations?

(Phone rings and tape is turned off)

First of all, I went ... with Eugene I went back to Hungary about six, eight times. Then actually it was ... my children never met their grandmother because my mother would not sit on a plane. She would not sit on a boat. She'd ... no way she would come to America. She'd find her sewing machine. She'd find her bedroom and that was it. And she don't know the language. She says, "I'm old. I can't adjust. Okay, so, I went back. Shari was 21 years old. She graduated. She became a teacher. I said, "You know what, Shari? You need a vacation. I'll take you with me to meet your grandmother." And we went to Hungary. It was behind Iron Curtain. You never saw how a 21 year girl so afraid. She became light. When those Russian soldiers came ... this was already my second trip behind Iron Curtain and she was petrified. But my mother wrote to me, I'm going to send you a gold bracelet, which I have. I mean, when you're going to be here, I'm going to give it to you. But when you arrive to Hungary under the Russians, you have to declare the jewelry that you bring in, that you take it out too. You couldn't sell it there. So I wrote in one bracelet because my mother wrote to me she is going to give it to me. So I put it in. So when we arrived, they're talking to my daughter who don't speak. First of all, I talk English to him. Then he takes my passport and he says, "Why are you talking English? You were born in Budapest?" I said ...

Then you change you.

I said, "You didn't ask me if I speak Hungarian. You just talked to me English so I talked to you English." So then she goes to Shari. Now she talks to Shari Hungarian. I said, "I'm sorry. She doesn't understand." She says, "You mean to tell me you didn't teach her Hungarian?" I said, "Why would I teach her Hungarian? She didn't need to learn Hungarian?" So she was pissed off at me. But it was okay. I didn't care. But Shari was so scared. Oh, my God, was she scared. Anyhow, going back ... this is a little episode. I went with Shari to the synagogue and the Hungarian synagogue, Dohaney Temple had a gorgeous museum. If you ever go to Budapest, you have to see it what a beautiful collection they have.

That's what I've heard.

They had two greeters. One was speaking Hungarian. One was talking English. So I told Shari, I says, "You go with the English lady. And I'll go with the Hungarian." There was a lot of out-of-towners, you know, visitors and they all went. The Hungarians were very few, because only if you lived in another country, and you came back, you went with them. So this man asked me where I'm from and I said, "I'm from America." He says "Where do you live?" I says, "Kansas City." "Oh," he says, "you used to live here?" I said, "Yes, I grew up here. And after the war and so forth, and I said, "You know, I'm want to ask you something. I would like ... my husband loves art. I would like to ... I really ... we really don't need anything what Hungary has, and I tell you this even to a Hungarian." And I said, "Don't think I'm a snob. I'm not a snob. But we really don't need anything but we love antique or Jewish artifacts. Things like that. I want to buy a present for my husband." He says, "I'll give you my address. Call me." He couldn't talk. He was in the museum. So I took a taxi and we went home. And I said to my daughter in the cab, "You know, I have this man's card and I told him I want to buy a present for Dad. But I don't know if he's married. I don't know where I'm going. What am I going to call him for?" "Oh, Mom. Don't be like that." You know, kids ... American kids are not afraid of nothing. I said, "Shari, I've been through too much. I'm afraid." So that was it. Sunday the telephone rings where my cousin, and my cousin says, "Somebody want to talk to

you.” Who wants to talk to me? Nobody knows me, I’m here. This man from the museum is calling me. I gave him where I am. He says, “You didn’t call me.” “Oh, I said, “I’m sorry. I was busy. I really didn’t have time. But I’m glad you called.” He says, “I would like you to come.” I said, “Well, I have my daughter with me. I’d like to go with my daughter.” He says, “Okay.” He says, “I’ll tell you what.” When I used to learn my trade, there was a beautiful pastry place, pastry shop, where you sit outside and you drink espresso and have a piece of cake.” I said, “I would like to meet you there and from there I’ll take a taxi and you take us where you live.” So, okay, it was fine. In the meantime, I met my girlfriend there too, and soon enough he comes. I introduce my daughter and my girlfriend. What happens? It starts to rain. And we’re sitting outside. So I said to him, “Now it’s raining already. The weather, it is bad. I don’t think we’re going today.” He says, “Oh, come on.” “What is a little rain?” he says to me. Meantime, my girlfriend says, “I have to go.” And my daughter says “Mom, lets go.” I wanted to kill her.

It was your turn now.

I said, “Okay, we’re going.” So we’re going. And I take a taxi and he lives far away. Taxis very cheap in Hungary. And we got out. We go upstairs in a lovely apartment and he brings out Judaica. I’m so sorry, today even. I didn’t have enough money with me. He had a little Torah that they found. I did not have enough money with me, but I bought this beautiful *yahrzeit* light, which I gave to my son in Los Angeles. He has it. It was in Beth Shalom for a year in the window. He bought us Elijah's cup. I said, “Well, I don’t want it.” And Israel things ... I says, “You know, we have more of this green stuff than I need.” Then he brought out this, from the 18th century, it’s gorgeous. Anyhow, I bought it. And then, finally, the doorbell rang and his wife came home. So I was relieved. You know, you never know who you bump into.

Especially in a foreign country, too!

So, okay. We bought this beautiful thing. I took it home and my mother says, “What is it?” I said, “Mom, this is for a *yahrzeit*. I bought it for Gene as a present.” “Oh,” she says, “that’s beautiful. You think he’s going to like it?” I said, “Like it?” He’s going to love it!” So how are we going bring this? The idea was ...

Yeah, because you didn’t ...

I didn’t write it in. The idea was ... see, I couldn’t put it in the suitcase. It was heavy. It had to be hand carried. So I said to Shari, “This is a *yerushe*. You know what a *yerushe* is? A *yerushe* is that what your grandparents left for you, your inheritance, and you’re taking it back with you in America. I don’t want to carry it because I was born here. They can do many tricks to me. You are an (unclear) American citizen.

Yeah, but she’s a real American born.

She’s a real American. Right. We go to the airport. Shari is well learned what to do. We’re going in.

Customs?

They go through my things. And they said, “Okay.’ And at that time, I was smoking yet.

Well, you learned from your brothers.

Wait. I’m smoking. No Shari and it the second cigarette and the third cigarette. And I’m walking up and down. Finally, I go to one of these guys and I said, “Have you seen a blonde girl?” No, they haven’t seen. I said, “Please, my daughter. She don’t speak English, she don’t speak Hungarian. I’m here a half an hour. I haven’t seen her. I’m worried.” They comes in, one of them, and says, “Oh yeah. We saw her. She is still there.” I couldn’t believe what in the world they doing to her. So finally, she comes out. Relieved her face. They thought it sterling silver. It was not sterling silver. And she kept on saying, “No, it is an inheritance my grandmother gave it to me. This belonged to our family. It’s a religious ...”

Artifact.

See, religious and antique, you could bring out. Silver, art, you cannot bring out. I wouldn’t risk her for no money. The bracelet was different. That was, my mother wanted me to have it. I put it ... I didn’t need a lock. You know, I took it out.

But you wrote it down anyway.

But I wrote it down just to be sure. But this was ... anyhow, we brought it home and we were so happy that she went through. But she was ... poor Shari was so scared. I never forget her luck. Oh, she was, very, we got through.

Well, we’re just going to kind of touch it toward the end, ‘cause you’ve talked about a lot of the things that are on here. But, how do the Holocaust memories penetrate your life today?

Oh, I still don’t go see murder films. I don’t even watch it on television. I only like love stories or meaningful stories or families that reunite, happy stories, happy things.

Are there sounds or smells that evoke past experiences?

Not really.

But you like oranges. That’s good.

Yeah. Yeah.

How did the war affect your attitude and practice of religion? Did you ever stop believing in God or do you believe more in it now?

I ... no, I think I’m about the same. We always have, Gene and I, we always kept religion in a moderate way. You know we keep all the holidays. We keep *Shabbas*. I have a kosher home. I light candles every *Shabbas*. My oldest son is ... he is *Shomer Shabbos* and so is my oldest grandson. Otherwise, the children ... as long as I’m alive, the three children who live in town, they’re always here on Jewish holidays for dinners and *Pesach* and *Seder* and everything. When I’m gone, I don’t know.

What does being an American mean to you? Do most Americans take their freedom for granted?

Yes! Yes! Especially at the beginning, when we came to America, and if you remember, was that ... they used to say, Reds, Communists, you know. Everyone who complained here, I would send them to Russia to find out what Communism is. To learn. From paper it sounds, maybe sounds good. It doesn't even sound good in paper. But I would want to give a one way ticket to Russia and stay there. Let's see how you would like it.

That's good.

Many times ... sometimes you're ... I'm in a deep sleep and I'm dreaming back, running and at night with the backpack and maybe it's not even true, maybe it's fading away. It takes me, you know, pinch myself that I really lived all this true. And I said, "Why, I don't know if I could do this again. Running, and surviving, and going with the Christian papers... You know, when I told you about the salt water I had to drink in the Royale Hotel, the first time I went back was Karen was three years old. And the only place I could get a room in that hotel. I really ... if I think back now, how I walked through that door and the memories that came back at that time. I nearly burst out in tears. They didn't know what happened to me. And, it was unbelievable that I have to be in the same ... stay with my child in the same hotel when those ...

You stayed in the same hotel?

Same hotel.

Oh, I didn't realize that.

That's the only hotel was made ready for the vacationers from out-of-town. This was behind Iron Curtain.

And you, you mean that's where you always stayed all these times ... every time you went there?

No. No. Not ...

Just that first time.

Just that first time.

This first time.

Because at that time, that was after 17 years I went back, and that just came back like a movie film, you know. Oh, my eyes, everything went back. The lady that with the gun and the ... you know ...

Happening in that same hotel.

The same hotel. Oh, it was horrible.

Well, I'll tell you. You were very descriptive. You could have written a movie right then and there.

I could have written. I could have. If I would have kept it memorized, I could have write a book.

You weren't ready to do it then.

No.

That's the difference between then and now.

It's the ... yeah. If you would know ... if I would know then what I know now, it would be a different world.

You never knew that that was going to happen. Okay.

(END OF RECORDING)