

Ann Federman Interview

August 4, 1999

Ann, what was your name at birth?

Anna Warszawski. W-A-R-S-Z-A-W-S-K-I.

Okay, and when were you born?

I was born August 16, 1925 in Bedzin.

In Bedzin, Poland. Okay. And, were you born at home or...?

Yes, all of my brothers and sisters were born at home, we had a midwife and my mother gave birth to all the babies at home.

What were your parents' names?

My mother's name was Miriam Frankel and my father's name was Abraham Warszawski.

What did your dad do for a living?

My dad was a, supposedly a real estate, he referred people to rentals, like rental apartments, and things like that.

Your mom didn't have a job?

My mom was a housewife.

Describe the members of your family - how many children were in the family, their names and their ages. That's kind of a toughy.

It's kind of tough. What I remember my mother telling us children that there were thirteen kids in my family. Three or four died in the First World War of yellow fever, whatever... And the rest of us were, there were nine living children. And I'll start with the oldest one, My oldest one was Izak. Then there was a Benjamin, and there was a Rivka, those living. I didn't know anything about the other kids. There

was a Rivka. There was a Gutcha. There was a Chaim. There was an Aron and a Laika, Lola. And myself, Chana. Lola was the youngest one.

And where were you in the family?

I was one before the youngest one...

You were the youngest one?

One before the youngest.

Oh my goodness...What kind of neighborhood did you live in? What was it like? Were you living in a *shtetl* or was it... ?

No, it was actually a very nice street. It was Kollataja 17. There were shops. You know the old country, people didn't have, I don't remember, really suburban areas. There were just streets where people lived and then there were courts. The streets were where the shops were, we had beautiful, like, sweet, we had a beautiful sweet shop across the street from where we lived. Next door we had a ladies ready-to-wear. Up the street was a men's shop, a beautiful men's store. And it was really a lively, a lively street. There was a lot going on and the people just lived within their shopping areas.

So, what was your home like? Was it like an apartment? Was it a separate house?

We lived in an apartment type of a thing, with a great big porch, you know, all around the building and we had one big great room, which was, in my days it was a living room and a dining room and a bedroom. But it was a huge, huge room. In the back of the room were all the bedrooms and the middle was the dining room and then we had a very nice kitchen.

So how many bedrooms?

There weren't any bedrooms, there was one great big great room... One great room.

So the kids slept in the great room?

We all slept in the same room in different beds, it was like...

Oh my gosh! So when you walked into your house...?

There was a kitchen first.

There was a kitchen, then you go into the great room?

We had a small front room where we had a leather, black leather sofa and then you go into the great room.

Which was filled with beds?

There was a big beautiful dining room and a lot of beds. And, of course, kids doubled up. I mean, you slept with another sister. The brother slept with another brother and my parents had a big, great big room... I mean a great big bed for themselves.

Did your family ever take vacations? Did you ever do anything like that...

Not that I ever remember. I know that the cousins and the uncles and the aunts lived all nearby, you know, little *shtetls*.

So sometimes you would go visit?

And on *Shabbat*, mostly on *Shabbat* and on holidays, almost every holiday, every *Shabbat*, we would walk ...

How long?

Oh, it would take an hour or two, and sometimes in the wintertime my mother would put on a very heavy shawl. And we would hug under the shawl, and walk with our hands, you know, warming our hands under her shawl. And we would walk to see the uncles and aunts in the snow. And it was fun.

It was fun.

It was fun. The uncles would always have apples. Frozen apples were fun, just to put 'em in the oven. The apples froze up then you put 'em in the oven and they were delicious. A lot of times the uncles came to visit us on *Shabbat* afternoon, which was naptime usually. The Jewish people were supposed to lay down and rest and have a nap after *shul*, after the heavy meal. So we would just go to visit our uncles and aunts and they would load us up with fruit. Fruit was a big thing in Poland. It was a luxury. And I remember, in particular, one of my uncles would always have tangerines. And he would have pockets full of them. It was a big treat.

Now, why did he have tangerines all the time? Somebody had a source?

I guess, I guess maybe he had, what do you call it, one of those, you know, fruit groves.

So you would just go for the day and then you would come back?

Oh yeah, I never remember spending the night away from home. We just went for the day and enjoyed just visiting and chatting. This was the highlights of our, really weekend. It was wonderful.

How old were you when you started school in Poland?

I was seven. We started at the age of five at home.

And you went to a public school?

First grade, yeah. Public school.

Public school. So how old were you when the war broke out?

I was actually fourteen years old and I had finished up at school...

You'd totally finished it?

I finished probably seven grades and then the war broke out. Well I was actually, when I was 17 is when I went away. I was 14 year old when the war broke out.

When you were in school, were the Jews the minority in your community?

Yes, yes, we had Jewish people and non-Jewish people in our school. In fact I remember it so well, when we did religion, when they talked, when the subject came up on religion, they asked the Jewish kids to leave the room. Like, you know, when they did the prayer in the morning. It was not meant to be for the Jewish kids. We did the prayer for the other kids and so they asked the Jewish kids if they would leave the room. I still remember that.

Was it a bad feeling? Did it bother you?

Very. Very bad, very bad feeling.

Was there just a small percentage of the Jewish kids in the class or was there quite a few?

Yeah, there were quite a few Jewish kids in my class.

Did they have crosses hanging in the schools?

No, I don't remember, but it was mostly Catholic, a lot of Catholic kids.

How big was the city of Bedzin?

I would say between 20-, a little over 20,000. And there were about four to five thousand Jewish population there.

So it was like twenty-five percent?

That's right.

Did you experience a lot of antisemitism?

Not until actually, in 1935. When I lived, where we lived, where I always remember. It was the only place we've ever lived, on Kollataja 17. There was a woman, who was janitor, who cleaned, you know, swept and everything and she had a daughter who was my age. And one day, we played, we were good friends, we played all the time with this kid. And one day she said Hitler is going to come and he's going, and she said go to Palestine in Polish. She said you should go to Palestine. I could not understand what she was talking about, this kid. So then we figured out that the parents must have been talking about that at home. And the kids got it from their parents. And she was stomping her feet and she says wait till Hitler comes. This kid. Wait till Hitler comes and he's going to send all the Jews to Palestine. That's when I witnessed, that's when I became aware of what was going on.

And how old were you then?

I just, I just got out of school. I must have been 13 maybe.

That was really the...

It was scary to me. I didn't know what she was talking about. I came home crying to my parents and...

So then, overall, in school, with the exception of them asking Jewish kids to leave for prayers, you didn't experience...

I never had, no...

...people calling you names, or... ?

No, I never had any fear of that. There were quite a few Jewish girls at my school.

So, overall, at least on the surface, the Jews and the Gentiles in your community, pretty much worked together, got along okay?

Well, they tried. There was a lot of resentments because, you know, the town that I lived in, there were quite a few affluent people that I remember...

Jewish people?

My neighbors, Jewish people. They had, one person had a dry goods store. The other person had a piece goods store. One had a leather shop and they were quite

affluent. And I think that there was a lot of jealousy among the Polish people. And I don't remember, really, because I was too young to know. But when I came back to Poland after the liberation, I ran into a woman whose daughter was threatening me with Hitler was coming. And she stood in line, we both stood in line, with Gutti, my sister. We both stood in line to get a loaf of bread. And the woman said to me, in Polish, she says, "I didn't know you still alive. I didn't think you still alive." In other words, you know, Hitler took you away. And there we are, we came right back where we were. That's when it was very scary for us.

Yeah. Yeah, I bet.

But I mean we lived together with these people, some of whom we trust, and I guess the resentment set in, and jealousy.

Now, when you were in school - do you remember your school years fondly? Were they happy times? Did you guys have parties?

No, no parties.

No parties.

No, we had friends. We had organizations - some people had organizations, but I was too young to join them. There were quite a few Jewish organizations, there.

So what did you, like as a young, as a preteen, what did you and your friends do for fun? What was your recreation? Did you just walk around?

[inaudible – both are talking]

We went out, everybody walked, you know, everybody walked, because people didn't have cars, so you run into a lot of your friends. And we played hopscotch, and we did pebbles and, I mean, we had a lot of fun. We didn't know that there was anything else out there, you know. Every once in a while somebody would go "My mother wasn't feeling well," so they went to the nearby city, little town, where she stayed because there was a forest. My mother went there for a rest and my father got her a little apartment. So we would go, a neighbor of ours had a wagon, a horse and buggy, so he took us there. It was a big treat for us to get on the horse and buggy. And he took us to that town, to Czeladź, and we saw my mother, and it was fun. But I don't, I don't remember personally. When I got a little bit older, then I went on the streetcar with some people. But I don't remember ever going out of town anywhere.

Now, did you have bicycles or was that an expensive item?

Yeah, people did have bicycles, I didn't have one, but my brothers did.

Your brothers had one.

Yeah, my brothers had bicycles.

Now, was there a reason why the boys did but the girls didn't?

Well, the boys played a big role in the old country. This was, you know... They either did it for business reasons or working reasons. My brothers worked and I didn't, see. I mean, those people who worked had to have transportation. Most of us walked. But the bicycles were very popular. Most people who could afford to have a bicycle had one.

Now, would you consider your family kind of middle income?

In the middle, yeah.

You were in the middle. Yeah. Okay.

We weren't rich, but we were happy.

Did you personally have any hobbies or anything?

Myself?

Yeah.

No, I was too young really.

So overall, you have fond memories of your childhood?

Yes, yes. More or less. We did have good times.

So, you were fourteen when the war broke out and, okay, we've talked about your spare time. So, you were too young to be dating. I mean, did you have a boyfriend?

I didn't have a boyfriend, but I was eyeing a little guy across the street [laughing] who had, a who had a knit factory. You play games when you're that age.

Right. Right.

There was a little knit factory and there was a little guy. I still tell my kids about him. He wore a brown suit. I don't understand how he could work in a suit. Perhaps that's all he had to wear, you know, that's all he had. So we were sort of playing games. He was like peek-a-boo. We were playing back and forth. He was looking and I was looking at him. You began to see a guy, you know, you began to get at that age.

Were you too young to date at that point in time?

Yeah, because at the age of seventeen I went away. I really was too young to date. My sisters and brothers dated. Everybody else did. It was only my sister and my youngest little sister. Myself and my youngest little sister who stayed home most of the time. Because everybody left for the evening and there were organizations that you had to be a certain age to join and I wasn't eligible yet. But we did have good times, on the court where we lived, you know. There was a great big court with concrete. We played hopscotch and ball and all kinds of things.

What was your relationship like with your parents? Were you...?

Relationship with parents was wonderful. I don't remember my mother that well. Because, you see, my mother died in 1934, and I was a little kid.

And when did Dad die?

And my dad died in '67 in the war. We had a very good relationship with our dad.

Now, when did he die?

In 1967.

Not '67.

He was 67, in 1942. I'm sorry.

In 1942, so...

The war had just broken out when my father died.

I see. So, you had a great relationship with your dad. Was he a warm person?

He was a wonderful man, he was a lot of fun, with a lot of energy.

Had a good sense of humor?

And he was very much loved by the community. He was just, everybody knew [unclear] Warszawski. They used to call him the *Wieśniak*, which means from a small town person. He was born in a small town, a village, in a little village. And everybody had nicknames in the old country, you know. And so his nickname, somebody says the blonde, the yellow, the redhead, you know everybody had a nickname. His name was the *Wieśniak*, [unclear] *Wieśniak*. If you said that, everybody knew him. He associated with very prominent people. My dad was very popular in the old country. Everybody just loved him. He had a lot of energy, and he did a lot of things.

Yeah.

He was referring people to the banks, and he was referring people to everything, and he was a *chevre kedishe* man.

Really? Oh my!

My dad was big in that. He took the boys all the time, you know, with him. When someone knocked on the door at night and someone died...

He would take one of the boys?

So, he would always take the brothers.

Now, where was my dad, age wise, in relationship to everybody?

Your dad was, let me see, which he was... one, two, three, he was about the fourth one in line. But when they knocked on our door, there were no phones at that time, somebody would come and say... because in the old country you're not supposed to keep the dead body in the house for too long. To give them their rites, the body. I don't remember where they took them. There is a process that you have to go through. And my father was one of those who taught the boys how to go with. Aron will tell you, I don't know. Your dad used to go all the time.

My God, he never told us that!

Oh yeah, *chevre kedishe*. *Chevre kedishe*, that's very, it's a very big honor.

Yes it is, it's a real big *mitzvah*. So they would go and prepare the body?

Uh huh. My dad was there all the time. He was, he was pretty popular man. My dad was... he knew the city and knew all the big people and small people and he would always speak for somebody who he felt, couldn't afford it. He would go to a banker and say I can vouch for this guy, he's okay. You know? And all those things.

Would you consider your family very religious at that time? Were you guys like modern Jews?

We were very Jewish. We, in those days, they weren't, they weren't really crazy *Hasidic*, but they were very, very Jewish, my dad was. I mean, we kept a strictly, we didn't know anything else. There was no two ways. That was the way we were raised.

And what about the majority of Jews in the community?

Yes, they kept *kosher*.

Everybody kept *kosher*.

Most of them. If there were a few, they were just sticking out.

Really!

Among the crowds.

Were they ostracized? Did the other Jews not like to mess with them?

Well, people looked down on them a little bit, if they didn't wear a hat, or didn't go to *shul*, or they rode on *Shabbat*. They were different from other people. They were just different. There were a few people we knew. But my dad was very observant. He *davened* before the congregation. He did that. I'm sure your dad told you that. He used to love doing the service. And he was musical.

He was musical? I didn't know.

He used to, he used to do his own music for like the, like for the *Mussaf* services.

You mean he would create his own...?

He would create, yeah, he would compose his own music.

Did he actually write music?

He, yeah. He didn't write the music, but he had it all in his memory.

Did he play an instrument?

My dad didn't, but all of my brothers played instruments.

Oh, all of them did!

You know your father played a trumpet.

Yeah, that I know. What did Aron play?

Aron played a trumpet.

Oh! I can see the two of them [laughing]

You didn't know that. And, of course, Itcha, the oldest one, I don't remember, but I think he played a trumpet. But my middle brother, my brother Moishe, was a

violinist -accomplished violinist. My father spent a lot of money, which we couldn't almost afford to on music.

For his lessons?

On music books and for him going out of town to Katowice for music lessons.

Oh my!

And he graduated with honors in a big city, in Katowice. My parents went up there, I still remember. We couldn't go when he graduated from that school and gave a concert.

Really.

He graduated from a very famous music school.

So did he plan to become a professional violinist?

Yeah. And then he had for him, his own little band. He had 3 or 4 people playing with him and he was in charge. My brother formed all that.

Was he the oldest?

No, he was the second to the oldest. He was next to Itcha. Itcha was the oldest.

So, okay, you were very religious. Now, did you have a Jewish education, a separate Jewish education, or...?

No, I was too young. There was a *Beit Yaakov*, they called it. That was a school for girls, and some of my friends went to that school - after school. I mean, we didn't have like we have the Hebrew Academy here. We had a school if you wanted to learn strictly Hebrew after school.

After school? So was it like every day after school?

Well, I think it was two - three days a week. It was for girls only. I didn't apply because, again, I was too young. But some of my friends who were a couple three years older...

So you had to be a teenager .

...went to that school, yeah, and they had a good education. But the reason what I know about writing and reading and Yiddish is because a very close friend of mine who I went to school with, her mother was a *rebbetzin*. She taught kids how to read and write. And so, after school, I would go there and she would teach me.

Oh, that's interesting.

So that's how I learned how to read and write, I didn't know how to do that before.

And your brothers? They automatically went to *cheder*?

They all went to *cheder*. I mean, that was the only way it went.

There was no question, every, other boys went...

There was no other question, they had to go to *cheder* after school.

Okay, all right. Let's see here. We know you didn't work before the war, right? You didn't have a job before the war, did you?

I did a little work, I babysat. In fact, I still have a picture with the little boy I babysat for in the war. And the mother had a ready-to-wear like lingerie shop, where we lived on our court. And she asked if I could come in and help. That was during the war and I, I loved it because there were beautiful, you know, nylon and silk gowns and undies and all that very fancy stuff. And I worked there, I helped, you know, work, and I was under 17 years old. And then helped take care of her little boy.

If the war hadn't broken out, what do you think you might have done? I mean, do you think you would have eventually just gotten married or were you interested in having some kind of occupation?

Well, I'll tell you, the women in my days, the women in my company, didn't exactly look for careers, you know?

Right.

We were basically housewives, except some people went to *gymnasium*, whose parents could afford to send them.

And what was that?

***Gymnasium* is like a college, already. And I knew some people who did that. And we just, you know, this is the way the girls were. The parents would always make sure that the boy was the breadgiver, you know, and they're the people who have to see to it that they have a profession. So that they always pushed for the boys to have a profession.**

Right.

And we were housewives.

Yeah. Did they use matchmakers very often?

Yes, my broth – my sister was matched up. My sister got married in the war, just before, right before my mother died and she was matched up.

Now, did she, did it bother, I mean, did she want to be matched up?

No, no it wasn't really a match. I remember someone said we'll meet you at such and so. And the boy and the girl met. And I remember him bringing a present to my sister. But most of my, of course I know my brother was married. My oldest brother was married. This was not a match.

Before the war?

Before the war. They've known each other since they were kids. So this was not a match. And my sister more or less, she went to Hebrew - she took Hebrew classes. My sister was very much into education, Regina. And she met this young man who was a Russian Jew, and they got married.

Just getting back, real quickly, I was thinking, family life in your home. There were so many of you. What was like dinner, what was dinnertime like? Was it crazy [laughing]?

It was, if one child didn't show up for dinner, mother forgot and that was it. We didn't have buffet, we served everyone a plate. And it isn't funny, but it happened many times, when one person didn't show up for dinner, and they forgot. When you have nine people around the table, they forgot. It's a joke really, but you were out of dinner that night.

So there'd be no leftovers [laughing]?

Yeah, there would be, but, I mean, it wasn't much of a dinner.

Nothing satisfying.

Everybody showed up at the table, and dinner was afternoon. It was not in the evening. We had the big meal, which we have here in this country, we have the big meal at nighttime. At home the people would come home from work.

Yeah, about what time? One, two o'clock?

Oh, one o'clock, from one to three.

So you'd eat from one to three and rest?

The big meal. Then at nighttime you have a sandwich or, you know, buttermilk or cottage cheese, stuff like that. A light meal at nighttime.

So then the woman of the house was spending...

Cooking all the time. We didn't have dishwashers. We didn't have Mixmasters. My mother made the most beautiful sponge cakes by hand. She used to make them with a fork. She used to fluff up the eggs. She made sponge cakes for some of the neighbors - the gentile neighbors, for like, you know, Christmases and places, because we made beautiful cakes. And the oven was a coal oven. We had to bring the coal, go out and buy coal, and bring it in a little wagon. It was hard, but you know, somehow, this, this was the way of life. And we thought this was the way it is.

Now, I'm just curious, with the oven -- you know here we have to bake at 350 degrees, at 325...

No way.

There was no, you just...

No, if it was high, if it came out, you needed a stepladder to go out, to get your cake out of the oven. You'd peek in, you know, here we don't peek in, we look through the window.

Oh gosh [laughter]!

Yeah, my mother was a good baker and a good cook. And on, like on Fridays, for *Shabbat*, when there were short days, when *Shabbat* started, let's say 4:00 in the afternoon, my dad would come in in the morning. He was an early riser. He would go out with his friends and already been out and we were still in bed. He used to say, "Oh everyone is wide-awake, *Shabbat* is early, you know, this time. Gotta get up and get ready for *Shabbat*!" So, you know, we cleaned windows and we cleaned candlesticks and everybody was busy doing something. It was fun. And we started cooking because we only had one burner, so and on the coal stove. We used to start cooking because there was no time to stretch. So by 3:00 your floor has to be washed, your house had to look good. And my father would always bring home out of town people for the Friday night.

Really!

Yeah, he loved...

Out of town people?

Well, some people got stuck for business reasons, or came to the community for *Shabbat* to another synagogue. And we had a synagogue where we lived in our court. Right where we lived. And my father would always see somebody who's a stranger - a stranger in town. It was a good deed, it was a *mitzvah*, to invite a stranger to come to your table. So he would bring home one person or two people

and most of the time they would spend the night because they couldn't travel on *Shabbat*.

Where would they sleep? In your house?

Well, we had that black leather couch, I still remember that.

No kidding!

And they put the guy on that couch and he slept there.

The room where the leather couch was in, was it totally furnished?

It was a little this, with a little bit of a... no it wasn't furnished, it was just a couch. But the guy was happy, very appreciative. He didn't have a place, people didn't go to hotels. They didn't go out to eat, you know, so...

Was there a little hotel in your community?

Not that I remember. There must have been because my brother played in one area called [unclear], which was a hotel and he entertained there. We used to go there and peek in through the window - we kids. But my father used to bring home people on *Shabbat* all the time and house them and they would leave on Sunday mornings. Some people got stuck for business reasons, and some people just were poor and they wanted to go to another community hoping that someone would ask them to come, you know, home for dinner. And we would always have these people for dinner.

So, was *Shabbat*, I mean, did everybody really look forward to the Sabbath?

Yes, yes. It was one, one time when everybody, especially my parents did. It was a day of rest, you know. Friday night my father emptied his pockets and got dressed in the finest, whatever we had.

Everybody got dressed up? For dinner?

Everybody got dressed up, what we had, yes. And the candles were on the table, the house was cleaned up and --

What would be a typical Sabbath meal?

A Sabbath meal? We would always have, like, soup, chicken soup.

Yeah.

You know? And then mother would make carrots. And there was a turnip type of a vegetable that she used to make and that used to take a long time to cook. That's the reason my father woke us up in the morning, was turnips to cut up and let them cook first. There was *tsimmes*, you know regular *tsimmes*. And then a meat dish of either beef or chicken and some compote for dessert. And, of course, Mother would always bake a big *challah*, you know. And she would cook enough for *Shabbat* day, because you couldn't cook.

Yes.

So if they could afford a goose or a chicken, we would serve it cold on *Shabbat* morning. And *Shabbat*, we would have a *cholent*. You don't know what that is...

I know what it is. I've never had it. I don't think I've ever had it myself.

You need to try that, a *cholent* or a [unclear]. We used to grind, grate potatoes and my mother would put in meat in it and we'd take it to the baker. We paid the baker on Friday. It so happened this was my father's cousin or aunt or somebody, who owned the bakery. Challah Rivka was her name, I still remember, short for [unclear]. She took in all those *cholents* and shoved them in the oven, you know, it was a hot plate. And on Saturday, after *shul*, my father would go to *shul* and all the Jewish people would walk home from *shul*, and they looked forward to the meal. So it was always the youngest or before the youngest. I'd have to go get that *cholent* from the bakery. And the woman used to bring them out with a great big long thing. And we signed our name on it, because a lot of the pots looked the same. It was a black pot, you know, heavy pot.

Oh boy! Cast iron?

Cast iron pot. And I'll tell you, this was the most delicious meal. [unclear].

It was piping hot when it came out?

Piping hot.

How did you carry it home?

Well, it wasn't easy.

I can't imagine...

I used to cry myself every *Shabbat*.

Really?

Because my little sister was too little to do it and I was big enough. The older sister would have been embarrassed to walk with that big pot, because their friends were out there promenading. So I would always be the one and there was never a time when I didn't come home crying with this thing, because my friends were there and they were teasing me and all that stuff. But, the *cholent* was delicious and it was a must on *Shabbat*, because you couldn't cook. And we didn't have an oven big enough to put that stuff in.

Even in the summertime... how hot did it get there?

Year round... oh, boiling.

But even in the summertime you'd eat that?

Always, that was, that was a traditional meal. That was something that no *Shabbat* went without. And we did that in our town.

Yeah.

It was somehow, somehow it was good memories to me.

Yeah, it sounds wonderful.

In fact I used to have a girlfriend whose parents were so affluent and she couldn't wait for that *Shabbat* because, we used to soak that pot, you know, after we ate? We soaked the pot and then she would eat all the stuff that came off from the rim of the pot. She couldn't wait to get there. Apparently her parents didn't make a *cholent* for *Shabbas* so she was very excited about that.

Oh how cute! Gosh!

Yeah. We had good memories.

It sounds like, over all...

Yeah, we didn't know anything else.

And your brothers and sisters, did everybody else, did you get along pretty good? Or the typical siblings, fighting...

Yeah, the brothers were always, you know, kind of wrestling back and forth. And I have to tell you that on *Shabbat* my father disciplined the boys. And at 3:00 every

one of the boys had to be at home. They would go out to play ball and everything, secretly because they weren't supposed to. My brothers loved to play football.

Yeah.

And, but at 3:00 he expected to be at home and they were studying the portion of the week.

My gosh!

That was part of it. If there wasn't a father, there was an uncle, there was somebody who said this is it. Because Isak's uncle, you know, Isak lost his father at an early age and his uncle was the one who taught him what he knows and he practiced with him. It was very important to do the *Perek* and to do the portion of the week. And the fathers, and they studied and they debated.

Really!

Oh, it was wonderful. They better be home. Those boys had to be home *Shabbat* at 3:00.

So there was never any concern about losing your Jewish identity?

Oh never, never, no, not where we were raised. My father never walked out without a hat. My mother wore a wig. But it was our way of life, and I don't think we were the most *Hasidic* people in town. There were *Hasidim* too.

Right, sure.

But the observant, we couldn't use, we had to have a *shabbos goy* which turned off and on the lights and give him a piece of *challah*. And a non-Jewish person came in, those of us who had lights, had to be turned off and on. And that's how it was. My mother was observant, we were *kosher*. There was no two ways about it. Our house was *kosher*, we didn't ride on *Shabbas*. We didn't handle money. There was no way how you would go out and shop or buy anything on a *Shabbat*. It was a no-no.

Now, was there any other form of transportation for your dad, if he didn't walk? He would get on a bus?

Yes, there was tramway, there was a streetcar. There was a streetcar, but it cost money. And the streetcar took you like to Katowice, to Dabrowa. At home, in those days, it was like out of town. Here, it's like, like Kansas City, from Johnson County to the downtown. Which he couldn't walk. But a lot of our people that we know walked. My uncles used to travel on that, on that streetcar on business. There were trains. There was transportation. People did businesses out of town.

Was your dad a Zionist?

Yeah, yeah.

Would you say almost all the Jews in the community were Zionist?

Mostly. There were a few Communists. There were a few Communists. One of my brothers were. My brother was not a believer. One of my brothers were.

Really, he was a Communist?

Uh huh.

I'm just curious, but if your family had the opportunity to go to Israel and leave Poland do you think they would have done it?

No, no. My father said nothing is going to happen. We've discussed it. My father had a sister and a brother who left. And one who left for Brazil, a sister...

Yeah.

And my father's brother whom I met many, many years ago, he's deceased since, lived in Isra – in New York, and I don't remember the story, how he went and when he went...

This was your father's brother.

Brother, and my father had a sister whom we visited in Montreal in 1948 and they immigrated with their children. But my father said nothing was going to happen. I'm not leaving this, where I live, and nothing is gonna be.

If, let's say there was no threat whatsoever and everything was peaceful and there wasn't antisemitism, etc. - do you think, if he had the opportunity, he would have taken the family to Israel to live?

No.

No? Even though he was a Zionist?

No, he would not.

Why is that?

Because in our days, Israel, you should excuse me, was not very religious. There were *kibbutzim* there that the people worked on *Shabbat*. And they did many things

that religious people didn't approve. And so I know Isak, for one thing, my husband Isak, wanted to go to Palestine, and his father told him...

No way. Really?

It's not a Jewish, it's Jewish state, I mean Israel now is Jewish. They didn't want their kids exposed to that. They just didn't want their kids exposed to this kind of a life. See, this way they were able to hold a [unclear] and keep our religion very close. So my father, I remember it like today, my father said, "I am not leaving Poland. I am not leaving." And some people did, who had foresight, and they saved their families.

And of course he died before it got bad enough where he might have said, you know, maybe we'd better leave. Is that right?

No. No, no.

Or was he still living?

He was still living.

He was still living and he didn't, he still didn't...?

No, and then when we could have left, it was too late. It was too late already. When we saw the writing on the wall, it was too late for us to leave already.

Amazing.

But see, my father died when the boys were being sent out to the work camps. That was like 1936, '37 [sic – was not before the German invasion in 1939]. They gradually came for the boys in our family.

So that was the first presence of the Nazis?

That's right.

When they came to the community, what did you think? Did you realize that...?

We were scared.

You were scared. I mean you knew that they, that there was...

Yeah, we knew at that time that the writing was on the wall. Once they took the boys away we knew that it's problems already.

So the first thing they did was they came into your community and they took the young men to go to labor camps?

To labor camps.

And were they actually taking them to labor camps?

Oh yeah.

So they were going to real labor camps?

Yeah, the young people were sent to labor camps.

When, you know when you say labor camp, describe exactly what kind of work would they be doing?

There was all kinds of work. They worked in ammunition factories. They worked in ditches. They did a lot of labor, mostly factories.

Hard labor.

Hard labor. And then later it became a concentration camp. But at the beginning, they, working camp. Your father was sent to a working camp.

Yeah. And they didn't come home for the weekends or anything like that?

No, that was it.

That was it.

They came, my brother was taken, the violinist was taken away like the other boys were. And then one evening, a German in a uniform came and he knocked on the door and asked for the violin - my brother's violin. And so we gave it to them. And my brother was entertaining the Germans. For a long time he had a good life.

He was in labor camp, and so he wasn't doing hard labor, he was just entertaining?

No, he was a musician and he was entertaining them and we had to give them the violin and that was, that was that. So he wasn't actually working labor - heavy labor. He was entertaining the Nazis, or whatever.

So that was the procedure? They would come and they knock on your door? Or would they...

They knocked on the door.

Did they know whose homes to go to?

Apparently so.

Yeah.

Oh, they knew.

And so they came for the men first. And then, tell me about your story. You know, when, how long after that...?

See, then, in 1942, and they had already taken all the young men.

So that had already been how many years already now?

It's already between 1939 and '42.

So it was about three years?

Some people went a little bit later.

Yeah.

So then they called it *Judenrein*. They were going to clean out the rest of the Jews in that community. You know when the Germans came closer, they were cleaning out and then they wanted us to...

Now had you heard about the camps yet, by then, about the concentration camps?

No, not too much, yet. I - we hadn't.

You hadn't yet. You just knew about the labor camps.

The labor camps. And then, one morning in September, if I remember correctly, there was an announcement made that everyone has to report in a football field.

You mean soccer field?

All the Jews, in a football-soccer field or something. All the Jews had to report and those who are not reporting, will get killed. There was no way anyone could hide.

Gosh, it's unbelievable. So they didn't make a ghetto out of your community? They didn't create a ghetto?

Well, there was a small ghetto that we saw when we were in Poland. A small little area that was a ghetto.

But your family wasn't forced to go into a ghetto?

Well, in the war, you know, it was like a ghetto, because we couldn't, after seven o'clock, we could not leave our houses.

But you could, at least, live in your homes?

We could live in our homes. We had to wear the armbands, when we got out. And there was a curfew that we had to be home by 7, 8 o'clock in the evening.

So before the Nazis came, not too much antisemitism that you experienced?

Well, it started - it started now with the Polish people. It started kind of brewing already. Because they tried to save themselves, you know. There was a lot of Polish people who suffered, too. They tried to buy themselves out, they tried to save their lives. And so that's when it started setting in.

Yeah.

But then, we got into that field and they said everybody has to report.

Okay.

So we went. All of our family went.

With your belongings? Or just, did they say bring a suitcase or...?

No, just what you...

Just show up.

Show up, and take what you can take. Just a small little, you were allowed so much... I don't even remember how much. My sister-in-law was already having two children at that time. She was married before the war and my brother had already gone to the labor camps. So we went and walked with her to the, well I call it ghetto, but it was to the gathering. And she at that time lived with a Polish family, because a lot of people came in from other areas and we had to give up some of our quarters. We gave up our kitchen. So other people from the German areas came in and lived with us.

Oh my!

So, anyway, she lived with a Polish family and the woman was very nice and had watched the kids grow up. And she begged my sister-in-law to leave the children with her. She didn't really know what was going on. She thought maybe this was going to be a temporary thing. And she said why don't you leave the kids?

You think the Polish woman knew?

I think she knew a little bit. And my sister-in-law said no. I don't want to leave the kids, I want to take my kids with. So anyway, we stopped and got the family, and we all got together and they started sorting out people. See, my father, in the meantime, had died already, before we went, which was a big deal to us, because the Germans didn't get their hands on him. We buried my dad and we went to the gathering.

And you were about 17 at that time?

I was 17.

And how old was younger your sister?

And she was 14.

Uh huh. Yeah.

So we gathered and they started sorting people out. They took the old people in one group. They took the kids in another group. They took the young ones in one group. And they, you know, and of course you know, the kids were crying. They were really hungry. There was no food, there was nothing there. And they put us immediately on, on wagons. They put us on trains, different transportation. So the old people, they didn't even bother with, because the old people immediately went probably to the ovens, what I can imagine. The kids, they don't have any use for the kids, but they figure the young people can be working. So those of us, like myself, survived only because we went to the camps and we worked.

Now, you were sent directly to a concentration camp or to a labor camp?

It so happened that we were not in a concentration camp. We worked for a company in Czechoslovakia.

Oh my!

It was a company my sister and I worked for that was owned by the Germans, and it was in Czechoslovakia in the mountains where we went. And they just put us to work.

And so you were there throughout the war?

So we were there all the time, see. We never got into concentration camps.

Even at the, okay, so how many years were you there?

Three and a half years.

Three and a half years. And how were you treated there?

Well, we had to stay in line. I mean, we weren't treated like the people in the concentration camps, but we, as the war went on and on, things got worse.

Yeah, I'm sure they were...

They were - we had to go out in the morning to get counted, cold. They gave us very small portions of food, very few things to eat. And we worked twelve hours a day.

Now, was Gustie with you?

Yeah, she was with me all the time. From the first day on we were together.

Now, when the Germans came in and their presence was very strong, etc., how, I mean, were you scared to death constantly?

We were scared to death. We were scared to death. We used to gather, I remember, our parents were gathered in that little court where we lived. The first thing they did is bombed our synagogue. We could see from our yard where we lived, we could see the flames of the synagogue. In fact when we took the kids, six years ago, no, it was already eight years –

Has it been eight years now?

Maya was an infant. Maya was six months old when we went and she's going to be eight.

I can't believe it.

We saw the flames, they put some gas, some gasoline on them. And they burned Friday night the synagogue and most of the people got out of there alive. And there was a church next door that housed, that took some of the people in. So, but in the evening, we would gather because we couldn't get out, so because there was a curfew at 7 o'clock. So we would gather and talk politics and talk about the war and everything. Seven o'clock you had to be in your house. You could not go out.

Were there any Polish people who showed sympathy towards Jews?

There were a few Polish people who tried to hide people. And some did it for money and some did it because for the good of their hearts. But I know a lot of people had paid them off and they had, some of the Polish people had farms, and they had quite a few people on their farms. And we know some people who were hidden through the forest. They paid them off, and either that or, every once in a while, you would find a family that had been close to a family in town, you know. Either for business or other reasons and they would hide them. But it was very risky to be hidden. Because you never know. They come in and you don't have a chance. If they find

you or someone would give you out. You don't know who's gonna, word's gonna leak out. Who's gonna say I found some people over there that are hidden. So the Polish people who hid some people were really pretty risky. I mean, they risked their lives. But I know families, like Maria [reference to Maria Devinki] was hidden by a family.

Oh really!

They were hidden. They never were in the war. They were hidden on a farm.

Amazing. I know my aunt in Israel...

Yeah, from Israel, she was hidden.

And, I think, her husband, too.

Yes, he was. I believe that's how they met.

They met after the war.

Maybe so.

Okay, let's go on to liberation. So how old were you when you were liberated? You were about twenty-ish?

I was twenty and a half.

Do you remember the date?

That's where I met Isak.

On liberation day?

Yeah. Not on liberation day. I was, we were liberated May 24th, if I'm not mistaken.

Yeah, of 19- what?

'46. [sic – means 1945]

May 24, 1946.

No. No, no, no.

My mother was April. She was April 15.

We were liberated by the Russians. And we were liberated in May. We spent – no, we were liberated in '45. I'll take it back, because I knew we spent a year roaming, not knowing where we going. We were liberated in '45 by the Russians.

Were you still in Czechoslovakia?

No, well, we were in Czechoslovakia when the, the Americans came in with the tank... you know, we could see from the windows how the German army is throwing their guns away. We lived - where our camp was, there was a stream, a great big creek, and that creek was just plugged up with ammunition. They were just throwing away the ammunition, they were on their way.

Surrendering or whatever?

Yeah. And we heard, we heard the news like a month before, because we worked with a lot of Czechoslovakian people. See, where we worked, people came in to work from the outside. A lot of Czechoslovakian people worked in that factory.

What kind of factory was it?

It was a factory that was making from scratch, a fabric. From cotton we started fabrics. First, we made spools of fabrics, threads. And from the threads they made fabrics. That was in another division. We were basically, my sister and I, she started with the balls of cotton, and then it went into another machine. And I was the next in line, who was making a thread from those spools, spools of thread. And my younger sister came to us and she was also working in the factory. You want me to tell you...

And she died in that factory?

You want me to tell you the story about my sister?

Yeah, I would love to hear that.

Yeah, my little sister was still in Bedzin, because when they said *Judenrein*, when they were gonna clean out, there were still a few Jews who worked for the Jewish community. Like my sister Rivka was involved. And there were a handful of people were still left in the community. And they got *protekzia* from the high office, that the little sister should stay with them as long as they are there, my younger sister. Then when the time comes that they had to leave, they wrote to us - to our factory - to the boss, to say they would rather see my little sister work in a factory where they know she might be safe for a while, than having her sent out. And we were fortunate enough to get her into Czechoslovakia, where we worked, to come. So, she picked up what she could and she came and worked with us. She was working with us a few months and she was the baby of the family, about thirteen years old. And one day she got a high fever and she was sick. And our camp was not that bad yet. You

didn't have to worry so much about being sent out yet. So we were thrilled, of course, that she could come to us and there is three sisters - and she's the youngest and we could take care of her, which was a very unusual situation. And one day she got sick and she a high fever and she was a little bit spoiled yet. And so she said, we had a little sanitarium within the camp, where people were sick, they put them in there. And never had an incident.

It was safe to go there?

It was safe at that time. And it would be our luck that one day, as the war progressed, we lived in one warehouse. We had one room, one long warehouse where we slept and lived there. It was a concrete floor and they had bunkbeds. And my little sister what we thought was safe in that room, that they are taking care of her, we thought that they would give her some medicine and she would get rid of the fever. 'Cause she worked in a, in a room where there was a lot of steam. See, the thread that she spinned went through a steamer, it was a process of that kind. And I guess the steam got to her. And we were afraid she was getting pneumonia.

Sure.

So we put her there and, it was one evening the SS women - they were prisoners, and with the shaven heads and the striped coats, and they were sent to clean out that sanitarium. [sic - the SS women were not the prisoners.]

Oh my gosh. And that was like the first time that it happened?

That was the first time that it happened, that I know of. Everybody who was in there was taken out and sent away. And she came to us that night. You know, we heard wooden steps, you know everybody wore those wooden shoes. And we heard those steps going, and we both had, both of us, Gutchie and I, and there is my little sister. And she says, "I gotta go."

Amazing. My gosh. And you couldn't do anything. Gosh.

No.

So this was - were we already getting close to the end of the war, now? No, no, that was when they took your sister?

My little sister, I don't know where they took her, but probably... the writing was on the wall. When you're sick, you're just not much help to anyone. They're not gonna cure you. They're gonna send you away. So, that was that. And so I was checking back, because I was talking to you about the liberation.

Right.

So, I know it was in May of 1945.

You had a pretty good feeling that you were going to be liberated soon?

Yeah, because we had these Russian, these wonderful Czechoslovakian people who sometimes came in and brought us the news and many times they brought us a snack. It had to be pretty secret, because they would get fired from their work or maybe even shot. So, there was one in particular guy that was just wonderful to us. And he would always say, "Number three barrel." See, we had cotton going into the barrels. And he would say, "Number three barrel," you find something there. So we would always have some kind of a snack and, and they would tell us the news, that soon it should be over, you know, and all that stuff on the radio, because we didn't have any news. So finally, just a few months before that, they took us out to work in the ditches. [unclear] We were digging ditches. They put heavy rubber boots on us, and we were digging ditches.

So everybody had a shovel and...

I still haven't been able to figure out what we were doing there, but we were outside digging ditches. And where we worked, where we worked was a cafeteria - and was a German cafeteria, a German cafeteria for the people who worked there, for their people to eat. And so those of us who were on night shift, sometimes, we worked all day and slept sometimes for an hour or two in the afternoon. They would call, if we were lucky they would call us to help peel potatoes at the kitchen. That was the biggest treat, because if you peel potatoes you get some food and then you could smuggle out a few. So we would, my sister and I - Gutchie, would always fight for this job. We would always go and bring home stuff for other people who were so helpless and didn't have anything. So that was good. But then, later on, the war progressed and it came almost close to an end. We were standing at the windows looking out and we saw the army moving away. And a few days later, and we were liberated, but we didn't know where we were going to go. You know, there was a bunch of women in a camp. The Russians liberated us. Some of the Russian soldiers came into the camp and they wanted to try to help us, but they weren't much help. They took some girls out. That was not fun. And so, the doors were open for us to go and do what we wanted to do, the army came in, they liberated us.

When they actually came in, the day that they liberated... Were you just so elated, you just couldn't believe that you were finally going to be...?

Yeah, we were and we weren't. Because already the fear set in about what are we doing next, you know, where are we going? They were wonderful to us. They ran into the kitchen, the Americans mostly, to see what kind of nourishment we get. And they brought us in breads and plenty to eat. And, of course, a lot of people got sick, and some died from overeating. You know, they were eating too much.

Yeah.

But the, the big problem was that you didn't have anybody and you didn't know where in the heck you gonna go from there. So, you know, do you want to stay in Germany? Nobody wanted to do that. Some people did. Want to go to America - but that's gonna take, you know, time. So we waited a few days and Gutchie and I picked ourselves up and went to Poland. Because there were all kinds of rumors that people were so confused, that when we saw people, they said they saw the brother, they saw a sister. And it turned out to be that they really didn't. They just thought...

Now how did you get from Czechoslovakia?

By train, by bus, by [unclear].

You had no money or...?

Well, we did get a pass. We had a displaced persons' pass, that we could get on any train we wanted to get on.

So you didn't go to a displaced camp right away?

Well no, we from there we went to Bergen-Belsen, of course. But they gave us a pass immediately, to say if you have any travel to do, you can do that.

So they did, when they liberated you, they put you in a displaced persons camp first, and...

Right, but we could go anyplace we wanted to.

Yes, but you chose to go there.

Yeah. We went to Poland, my sister and I, first.

You went there first, and then?

Yeah, first we went to Poland and only found a cousin there.

Just one cousin?

One cousin, that he happened to be a policeman in the street. He took over a house of some German in a small town in Germany and he lived there, and so, he took us in. He lived there with somebody else and he took us in, and we had at least a shelter for a short while. And then my brother Aron was already in Bergen-Belsen, by the way, with your father. And they, they heard that we were in Poland. Someone told them they saw us in Poland. So Aron picked up and came to Poland.

He came to the, to your...

To us.

To your hometown.

Cousin's house, where we stayed with the cousin.

Now, wait a minute, I'm, was your cousin in your home town?

No, that wasn't...

Okay.

That was a town in Poland we went to first.

Okay, so you hadn't been home yet? Back to your hometown?

Oh, first we went home, and then we went down there. First we went to Bedzin and didn't find anybody.

Was it an awful feeling?

It was a terrible feeling. First of all everything was bombed it seems like.

Oh my God. So you hardly recognized it.

Where we lived was all hanging. We needed to spend a couple of nights and there wasn't a place where to go. We found a place that was in the middle, like nowhere you know. This was a town. It was just hanging, the apartment. We found a guy who was a neighbor of ours, a young man who had just gotten married in fact, and he was kind of looking after us. He brought some water to us. We bought a loaf of bread, and we didn't stay there very long.

Did anybody in the community recognize you?

That's when the woman said I didn't know that you were still, that you were still alive. There was no one else left.

So, the Gentile Polish people could have cared less?

Oh, they resented our coming back. They just resented our coming back. They didn't realize that it was still, they thought that they got rid of all the Jews, that there was no one living.

Amazing!

Yeah, but then we went to [unclear] which is another town in Poland. And that's when we saw the cousin and he housed us and we spend there a few days. And Aron got wind of this, of our being there, and he came and got us. He came and brought us Bergen-Belsen. Bergen-Belsen was the displaced persons camp where they housed all of us, those of us who needed a place. And that's where my sister-in-law, Chava, who was married to my oldest brother, Izak, was living there.

Yes, so she survived.

She lost her kids. She survived. Had been remarried, and she saw to us, that we had some shelter, and she helped us a lot.

So she re-married right after the war?

She remarried, yeah.

And where did she end up moving to?

What?

Where did she move to?

She was in the camp also.

She was in the camp?

Not where we were, no, but she survived the camp. She was lucky.

So where did she go after the war? Did they move to the, where'd she move to? The States or...?

She... No, she went to, she lived in Germany for a while.

She lived in Germany.

And then when we went, not too long. But then we went, when we were going to Bergen-Belsen that's where she settled in Bergen-Belsen, in the displaced persons camp. And she was in charge of a block. A block was a few apartments. And she was in charge of... because they brought everyday the food to us; and she was in charge of distributing for the block, so much per person. There was plenty to eat, but she was the one who got the bulk of it and then we came to her apartment.

So at this point you knew that you had, that your two brothers survived?

I already knew I have 2 brothers and my sister.

And that was it?

And that was it.

And were you certain that everybody else was murdered?

No, no, we were searching and talking and we were giving names. We were registering. Bergen-Belsen had a registry. It wasn't computerized, like it is today, but they had a registry of most people who were living, to the best of their ability. And then you could go in there and check the books and you could find, you'd be surprised. Isak found some woman from his hometown in that office. And your mother's friend, who lives in Israel, she went to see her, in fact.

Oh yes! Yes, yes.

Rusza. That's her.

Yeah, she told me about that, yeah.

And so, if there were people living, and they went in and registered, their name was on and so you knew that they were alive. But if you didn't hear, you still don't lose hope. I mean, you think something will turn out.

Well, what were your spirits like, how did you feel emotionally?

It was very, very depressing, because you see, in Bergen-Belsen, [telephone rings]

[TAPE CUT OFF]...emotionally, of course, naturally, you were very depressed.

I was depressed, and you don't really... you don't know where you're going. What you're gonna do. But, by that time, I already met Isak.

In the camps?

I met him in Bergen-Belsen. In that displaced persons camp.

Yeah. Okay.

We came back from Poland and I met my brother.

How did you meet him? Just introduced or...?

Well, he was a very close friend, in fact your father Chaim was a very close friend of Isak's. And this is how we met.

My dad and Isak, they met...?

Were very close friends, they met in Bergen-Belsen.

...in the camps? They met after the war?

Yeah, in Bergen-Belsen.

Amazing.

They might have been in some camps. Because I know Aron was in some camps where your father was, and they didn't even know until later they talked. And it turned out that they were in the same camps.

Yeah.

Some of them.

Yeah.

So, anyway, it was depressing. But I met Isak then, and then, and of course, I had my brother and sister. So, life was pretty much confined to the house, because there wasn't a heck of a lot we could do in Bergen-Belsen.

What, as far as... now, were you in pretty good physical condition?

I was okay. My sister Gutcha got very sick. She was sent, immediately when we came to this country, she had to be sent out.

So, in Europe, as far as you, after the war, you were...?

I was in good shape.

You were in pretty good shape.

Physically I was just..., and I think that's helps a lot when you are in good condition physically, and young and you have the blessings of being healthy, then you could survive it. Otherwise you have a problem.

So, you and Isak met, and were you attracted to him immediately?

Yes! Immediately! It was love on both sides. Not on one side, on both sides. Well, it so happened that my sister-in-law, the one in charge of that block, and she was just wonderful to us. You haven't met her. You were just a little girl when she was in town, when she came here.

Is she still alive?

No, she died of cancer. She was here... God, you must have been a little girl. My kids remember, Art remembers her.

She passed away a long time ago?

Yeah, she died of... She came here, she was determined to see us and died. She lived actually with Aron and part time with us. And she spent, I think, about a couple of weeks with us and went home. We knew that she wasn't well, and about a few months later she died.

Where did she live?

Israel.

Oh my gosh. Well, okay, so you fell in love, now how long did you know each other before you decided to get married?

We were in Bergen-Belsen quite a few months and for some reason, and I don't remember how this went, we went to a city called Bad Nauheim. And there the boys were trying to start a *shul*. You know, they were trying to be busy and clean up a *shul* which had been bombed during the war. And it was like a Jewish community. Everyone got together in front of that *shul*. The young boys and girls got together and that was in 1941, it had to be, or '42. No...

No, it has to be...

No, sorry, it had to be the beginning of '46. Like January. President Truman announced... there was a radio there, you know, where the boys used to meet. And they had an announcement from President Truman on the radio, that he is going to open up the doors for 100,000 newcomers. Not necessarily Jews, but newcomers to this country. And it'll be on first comes, first served basis, whoever comes first will get immigrated. So, at that point, Isak said, came home, and said, "We're going to register to go to America." Well, we could hardly believe that we can have a chance to even register to go to America. You know, America was such a big thing in our minds.

Yeah.

So Isak says, look, we're gonna register. So the family all got together, reluctantly, we decided to register. And it took us- we lived in that town of Bad Nauheim about nine months. It was near Frankfurt, it was a beautiful... bath houses it had.

That's what they're known for.

Oh, it was gorgeous.

So, I mean, you had no desire to stay in Europe anymore –

Oh no.

You wanted out of Europe? No matter –

We wanted out of Europe. We wanted to either go to Palestine or where ever we can get out first. So some people stayed in Germany. Some, very few people, stayed in Poland. But we wanted to make a home for ourselves. So finally we did register and about nine months later came an announcement, a telegram, to report in Frankfurt to the Consul and whatever, to the big office. And at that point, we got there, a few of us, well all of us got the announcement, except Isak never got his. He is the one who is instrumental in doing the whole mess. And he never got called. So he made up his way over there [laughing]. He made up his way over there, the office was wide open, he found his papers, it wasn't like today [unclear]. He found his papers, and he put them on top. And so we were accepted, we went through check-ups. And...

Were you the only two in the family who got accepted at that point?

Well, Aron...

Aron did?

Your mother and dad were still in Germany because, in Bad Nauheim, because mother was expecting Murray at that time, and they didn't want her on the ship pregnant. Today, I guess anybody can travel.

Well, sure.

So they came almost like a year later, here. Murray was like nine, ten months old when they came to Kansas City. So anyway, they accepted us, and we went to all the check-ups and got through the papers and they told us they would, you know, let us know when we can immigrate. Telegram came and they said where would you like to go? And we said we don't care. We don't have any... see, if you had relatives they would sponsor you.

So, you didn't even have an idea like...

No.

You didn't know that California would be a great place or...

No. We didn't know the difference between California, Kansas City. We never heard of Kansas City.

Of course not, it's so...

We heard of New York, of California. Kansas City, we couldn't even pronounce it. So we, they brought us into New York.

They put you on a boat. Did you have to go through Ellis Island? Was that still, that wasn't...

No, it was already closed at that time. We came in by, on a ship, we got off, and it was the most fascinating thing, probably, in our lives. Coming from a small community and coming from nothing - from camps and everything. We couldn't speak a word of English.

Right.

We traveled on a train for two and a half days. Those weren't days, people didn't fly so much. They put us on a train. The Joint Distribution Committee and the UJA, they paid for our trip. They put us on a train. Of course they paid for our trip to get on the ship to begin with, out of Bremen. We came out of Bremerhaven. And we got into New York and it was late afternoon. And it had to be the hottest, if you think Kansas City here in '99 was the hottest, it had to be the hottest, the most humid summer in their history, they said.

And you had never experienced that kind of weather in Poland.

And we never experienced, because we don't have humidity in Poland. And, you know, at nighttime it got cool there, and in the morning it got cool. We're dressed to kill, whatever we had, we were trying to impress everyone. They're waiting us, the AJDC and UJA, they're waiting us. They're gonna place us in New York and have briefings with us. So they're putting us in a hotel, which today is already not a good neighborhood. It was a pretty nice hotel, and they're giving us money for meals. And they are briefing us everyday. In the meantime, somebody in Bad Nauheim, who was a chaplain, lived in Kansas City.

No kidding!

Firestone. You remember Sal Firestone, who owned the *Chronicle* many years ago?

Yes! It was him?

It was he who was a chaplain in the army and he met the boys in Bad Nauheim. And he says, Isak, should you ever come to America, call me. He never realized that we would ever be coming to Kansas City! And he had some kind of a uncle. They gave us enough money to take a taxi to see his uncle in New York. Anyway, we came back to our hotels, we were briefed everyday. They gave us meal tickets, and told us that this was a free country. You can go to any city you wish to go, unless you have relatives, unless you have someone who would sponsor you.

They would let you go anywhere?

Oh, we could go anywhere in the country we wanted to go, because wherever there's a Jewish community, they'll take care of you. So but this fellow said, New York is not for you. You'll never Americanize. You're welcome to stay here, but you'll never speak the language, you'll be speaking Yiddish. You know, all kinds of Jewish people live there, all kinds of languages. And it's a big city and the people just don't have time to be bothered. That we have a community that's called Kansas City and they haven't yet witnessed any newcomers. See there were a few dribbling in, there was a ship before our ship that a few people came. In fact, they came to Kansas City, too. So that they felt that Kansas City would be a very good community for us. And we said what do we care, we don't know Kansas City from Chicago. They talked about Chicago, they talked about all kinds of places. Some people say there's a lot of Polish people in Chicago and other places. We weren't interested. So anyway, they placed us in to Kansas City. They said we think that the Jewish Community will welcome you. They have the time. It's not that big a community and the people are very kind and I think that they would like to see some newcomers here. So we said fine. So, of course they took, three days I think later, they put us on a train, and we came here from New York City, to the train station. In fact, they're gonna write up about the train station and our coming. Don't say anything. Anyway, it was the most exciting thing. This Union Station with this big plaque, you know, and so many people there ...

You'd never seen anything like it.

And they want to feed us and nobody can translate the menu to us, you know, they want to take us into a restaurant and give us some food and we don't...

So they have nobody speaking Polish, to translate.

In Chicago they made an announcement and asked people if somebody would be able to translate.

I'm surprised nobody spoke Yiddish, that they didn't bring somebody...

Well, it was one of those things. But anyway, we came to the Union Station and we had a, we had a volunteer. Her name is Esther Cohen and her name is now, was Esther Cohen was her maiden name... Levens. She was married to [unclear] Levens.

Yeah, I know who Esther Levens is, yeah.

Well, she was a volunteer, a young woman, could not speak a word of English or Jewish. We couldn't speak English, you know, and she couldn't speak Yiddish to us. But she drove a car and she was supposed to place us where we gonna live. So, it was hot, no air conditioning in cars, and we all broke out in a sweat. We didn't know where we were going. And she placed my sister and I and the boys in another place. Isak and I weren't married yet.

Oh, you weren't married yet. Okay, all right. So, were you engaged?

No, no. We didn't engage, we didn't have anything to be engaged with! A good word is...

[laughing] But you knew you were going to get married.

Yes, Isak said he did not want to get married in Germany, doesn't want to have memories like this. So, if we gonna come here, he said, we might as well just wait and get married over here, which we did. So Esther picked us up and she put us each in our respective apartments. So we were rooming, room and board. Because in '46, we came June of '46. All the boys were coming home from the army, you know, from the war, and there were not apartments available. You could not get a place to live on your own. And of course, you know, we didn't have money, so they put us up in room and board. So we were being put up on Montgall, on 44th and Montgall. No, on Tracy, the boys were on 44th and Montgall. We were at 34th and Tracy. We lived with a woman, a widow, with a blind daughter and they let us use - they paid them, the Jewish agency paid them for the room and board. We had an upstairs bedroom, not air conditioned. So my sister and I lived in that apartment until we got married. But then Gutchie went away to the hospital in Denver. She was sick, so she was treated for two years in Denver.

For two years?

She was gone two years. So I was married in the meantime.

So how long were you in Kansas City before you got married?

We were here no more than three, four months.

Where'd you get married?

And Isak befriended Rabbi Stern who is still living now in Florida. But he had a, he had a pulpit in 44th and Montgall in that little *shul* there, which became, I think, a merger of KI since then. And he was writing a book in those days and he befriended Rabbi Stern. And the rabbi said, you know, why don't you come over, you could help me with some pages and stuff. And he also had a study group in the evening. He taught Hebraic or Jewish Dialogue, whatever. And so Isak used to go there. And he finally said to Isak, you know it's time that you get married already. How long you gonna *shlep*? Isak said look, we don't have a decent place to stay. We don't have a place where to live. He says we don't even have an apartment, how can we get married? He says, you know what, you can come and live with us. That's how people used to be those days. He says we have an upstairs, we have a bedroom and when you get back - we went on the honeymoon to see Gutchie, to Denver, with Aron.

Oh my gosh.

When you get back you come to us, and you stay with us till you find an apartment. So there is this big spread in the *Jewish Chronicle*, that the concentration camp is going to the altar, and that the public - the Jewish community - the community's invited!

So you were the first couple...

We were the first from the newcomers couples, survivors...

To be married in Kansas City.

So Mr. Bettinger, who was well-known person in Kansas City, very charitable, who had a hobby of starting synagogues, in Houston. And he started a little *shul* on 63rd and Brookside. And that was, our wedding was the first steps that people made into that synagogue. We were married in his *shul*. I mean, he considered, he's died since then, but he considered himself that we were his kids and that he married us. Five hundred people came September 22nd. It was a pouring Sunday, pouring rain...

Five hundred!

In our *shul* - to see the wedding,

Were you overwhelmed? Did you expect five hundred people to show up?

We didn't expect anybody. We thought, you know, the rabbi was gonna give us the blessings. Aron stood up for us and Jack [Mandelbaum] was there. And anyway, they had a money collection for us. They had a big cake and punch, and the rabbi gave us the blessings, and people gave us money gifts. So for the money gifts we bought a bedroom set, 'cause we then moved already from the apartment where we were to the first apartment on 29th and Olive. We had a beautiful bedroom set for that money. And the community showed up. I had a shower before that. The ladies gave me a beautiful shower, a miscellaneous shower, everything I needed to have.

Were you overwhelmed with the generosity? Did you expect that kind of...

I was so overwhelmed that when they gave the shower to us, I couldn't speak English, so I gave a speech in Yiddish. My thank you was in Yiddish. And, of course, a lot of those old timers knew Yiddish and some didn't.

Of course.

It was a surprise shower. In fact, they put a corsage on me, and the woman where I lived called Mr. Bettinger, who I worked for, and asked if I could take the day off. She was supposedly taking me to lunch that day. But it turned out they had a tea in the synagogue, and I came in there and there were those long banquet tables loaded

with stuff. Blankets and towels and dishes and all that stuff and I didn't know really what was going on. They put this corsage, I still remember the dress I wore. They put the corsage on me and they had a tea. The women in those days baked and brought stuff. And I was - I didn't know what to do with all that stuff. We didn't have a car, none of these people had cars. They had to rent taxis to house my stuff with the woman where we lived and where Aron and Isak lived. You know, in their attics. So, I mean, the people were so generous and they were so wonderful. So, I mean, our memories about Kansas City were just great. Then of course, you know the agency that was on Admiral Boulevard. They had the Alfred Benjamin Dispensary, which is where we had all the check-ups. You know all the health clinics.

I remember that clinic. I remember going there. 'Cause we grew up on, you know, 12th and Admiral. I remember. It was like a little hospital or something.

Up the street from you. It was a small little dingy place. And we went there for checkups and then we went there to see our people who were in charge, like what do you call them? The people who were in charge of us. You know, everybody had a department...

Sponsors or...

Sponsors, no not sponsors. They were actually paid people that were checking out our situation.

Social workers.

Social workers. Job situations, they tried to get us jobs, they tried to get us clothing and a little bit of spending money, while we were, you know...

So, they got you your first job?

So, yes, they were responsible to get us jobs. They talked to people the community and people offered some jobs. That's how Isak got the job.

What was your first job?

I was lining trunks.

Lining trunks? You mean luggage?

You know those trunks you send kids to camps in?

Yeah, yeah, I know exactly what you mean.

And they had lining inside? I was doing that, and then I went to work for Brendan Puritz, I was sewing. I didn't know how to sew, but they were just wonderful to me. They worked with me and they tried to train me for whatever, because I, we had no profession, neither one of us. Isak didn't – Isak went to *cheder*, he didn't know anything. So they taught him how to do this upholstery business and that's how he went in the business.

Oh, I didn't know that.

He quit the job, he didn't like... and he went in the business. So, that's how it started. And, of course, you know, Isak, Aron was in the business with Isak for a while.

Right. Now when... How old were you when you came to this country?

I was twenty-one.

Twenty-one.

Isak was twenty-four.

So, you were about that age when you got married?

I was married at twenty-one.

And then you had a job, now, once you got pregnant, did you continue to work?

No. Isak says I've never worked another day in my life! [laughing] This, you don't call work. I never worked since I had my baby. My baby was born in '48.

Was it difficult for you emotionally? I mean, were you always kind of, had to feel like you were pulling yourself up? Did you find yourself falling into depression? Or thinking about your family?

A lot. A lot. A lot. A lot. Here we came. When we came to, I'll check back, when we came to... we got off the ship - you know how people await other people to come in and the noise and there were thousands of people waiting for other people to come in and we didn't have one person greeting us at that point. And that's when you begin to think, now you don't have anybody. It's so sad. The people were wonderful to us. I mean, they made us feel at home. And when we came, especially when we came to Kansas City, the first years we were invited to peoples' homes. People who didn't even know us, you know, for Friday night dinners.

Were people curious about what had happened to you during the war? Did they ask questions?

Some people asked questions that were, you know.

Absurd?

One person asked if we saw Hitler. And of course, you know, it wasn't televised like it is today. We didn't have CNN and most people, really, can't blame them, they didn't know what took place in Europe. Most people didn't know what was going on. So, of course, you know, the people would invite us to come and they loved that we talked Yiddish. Some of the old timers especially.

Really!

The woman where we lived, you know, had grown daughters. And they came for Friday *Shabbat* dinner and they said you can speak English, you know, it's good for you to speak English, because it's good for you to practice. And we understand, and they really didn't, but they made us feel so good. The people were just wonderful. We used to go to people's houses for dinner and I was not envious of the homes, but I was thinking to myself, if I could just have, you know, one room like they have maybe five, six rooms in the house, I would be perfectly happy. And Isak still laughs about it, because from there we went to the Plaza, you know.

Yes, I remember.

From all these, we lived in three different places where we had room and board with different people. And finally we got up in the world when Shelly was born. We got up to the Plaza thanks to Mr. Bettinger, that he had those apartments on 45th and Wornall. Just up the street where Wolferman's used to be. And he let us have, because we paid, he let us have one of those apartments. You had to have a pull with that. You couldn't just, apartments still were still not available. And that's when we finally begin to breathe a little bit easy because we had a bedroom. And Aron lived with us in the kitchen, 'cause he was still single at that time, and we had an [unclear] bed, a pullout bed. And we were really as happy as we could be. We had a nice little porch and we had a nice little apartment. We thought, we considered ourselves very lucky to have that because so many people didn't have a place to live. So things were beginning to look up a little bit already, when we got to the Plaza.

Was it hard for you to talk about what had happened?

At the beginning, we didn't talk about it at all.

You didn't want to talk about it.

We didn't want to talk about it. Isak and I between us did, but not to the kids. We never talked to the kids about our past.

Even if they asked you questions?

No, in those days, they didn't know what to ask questions about. But when Art was a B'nai B'rith boy...

He was already a teenager?

When he was a young teenager, he went, he won a scholarship, the Molly Gilgus, you read about it, the Molly Gilgus scholarship which entitled him to go to a camp - a B'nai B'rith camp. And who do you think was a speaker at that time? It's Elie Wiesel. You know, this goes way back, Elie Wiesel wasn't what he is today, but I mean, he was always so dedicated.

Isn't that something!

Elie Wiesel spoke, and he talked to them about, you know, the past of the Jews, what we went through, the Nazis days. And Art knew a little bit, you know, he's so sharp, and he kind of picked it up quick. And he called home. I guess one evening he called. He said, "I didn't know anything about it." So...

Do you want me to stop the tape a minute?

[TAPE PAUSES]

Uh oh, we gotta start talking.

It's very interesting, so then Shelly, she was already, how much older is Shelly than...?

See, Art, she is two years older.

And so Shelly never asked questions?

No, because we didn't talk about it. Then we started to talk about it. And you know because it started to be to be where more and more people talked about the Holocaust. Today, we do. In those days, no one talked about it.

So up until that point, for the most part, while you were making your new lives in Kansas City, you never...

Yeah, because I'll tell you, we didn't, we didn't want to make the kids sad. We didn't want the kids to be upset. So we really never talked about the Holocaust. We would get together with some people, you know, like us, in summertime, up at the Swope Park. We would talk and reminisce. The kids didn't know, really, that much. But then when they started to ask questions, that's when we started to talk to them about it. And they said, we didn't know. He wrote a letter, he says, I didn't know anything about it until Elie Wiesel spoke about the Holocaust in that camp. So this

is how it started. But we started to make a better life ourselves already on the Plaza. We lived there quite a few years and then Art was born.

First Shelly was born in '48.

Shelly was born in '48.

And Art was born in '50.

Art was born in '50.

And then Lori?

No, Art was born in '50. Lori was born in '53, '52.

Okay.

'53. Art was born in '51. Shelly was born in '48. '48, '51... '53, and '51. Yeah.

Now, to learn English...

Oh was that a pain. That was tough. That was, that was the hardest part of our lives.

I just can't imagine.

Because we would sit on a streetcar, going to work in the morning, sitting next door to some gentleman who was reading a paper maybe. And he would turn to me and say, "Wasn't that awful? You know, this person got shot waiting for a bus?" We lived in that neighborhood, in those days with the Italian people. You could get shot, but they were so good to us. "Wasn't that awful this person got killed by waiting for a bus-stop?"

Was it like Mafia, Mafia related, that kind of thing?

Yeah, exactly. And we would - and I would sit there and smile, because you know I didn't know what the heck the guy was talking about and I didn't know what to answer him.

Yeah, sure [laughing].

So I would just sit and read the signs. I learned to read, tried to read the signs so I could learn how to speak. We went - we had three times a week at the Jewish Community Center. We had classes and we learned English. And none of the teachers needed, one of the two teachers, spoke Yiddish. And if they did, they would not speak Yiddish to us. So it was done by English only. And if they couldn't make

us understand, I still remember she went down and got a wastebasket from the Center. In those days the old Center didn't have elevators, there was stairways upstairs. She would go all the way down to bring a wastebasket to show us what a rubbish was! This teacher, Mrs. Rakchis, passed away not too many years ago, maybe five years ago. She was our teacher, and Mrs. Burns was her associate teacher and they volunteered their time. We had a lovely class. And we had a lot of fun. But you know, you had to learn to speak and that you have to do. And sometimes we said things that probably didn't make sense, but we tried.

Well, of course.

Yeah, reading and writing and speaking. It took us at least two, three years before we could communicate with people. That had to be one of the most frustrating things in our lives because the English language is so different, I mean, it doubles up so many...

Double meanings?

Right.

The grammar is different.

The grammar. But this was hard and of course to work on a job. It so happened that Isak worked with a guy that spoke Yiddish. And I used to work in this trunk company, which, when the girls had a break, to go out, you know, for the break, they would, you know how you stand around and you talk to your friends and you have a Coke. And I was standing in a corner by myself because I couldn't speak. And they were trying to make me feel good, so they were just smiling. You know, I can't participate in the conversation. And I used to hear them say "she" and "he" and "she" and "he," and I still remember I thought they were talking about me, you know? I always had that feeling that they are talking about me, which they probably didn't.

Yeah, oh yeah. That would be obvious.

And my boss, the young man, Mr. Bettinger's son, who is dead since then, too, used to say "*Schnell, mach schnell, mach schnell!*" He used to talk to me in Yiddish, that's the only thing he knew how. Because I apparently was too slow in work and didn't produce enough! But the people were basically just very nice. And, of course you know, I once was supposed to meet Isak downtown on a *Shabbas, Shabbat*. He was gonna buy me a pair of platform rockers, shoes, at Klein's, it used to be Klein's Department Store. And we were going to go to the Tower, it wasn't your days. The Tower Theater had a double, two shows, what do you call them?

A double feature.

Double feature. And then they had a stage show. And it was, it was a lot of fun, it was the minimum of something. So this is our entertainment. We didn't have kids yet. So Isak was supposed to meet me downtown and I was supposed to walk from where I was working, 3rd and Delaware or 6th and Delaware or wherever. And I walked in the wrong direction and didn't know how to ask somebody. And he came home and he was besides himself.

I'll bet he was.

Couldn't find me. Finally we found each other. I can't even remember how it went. But it's a horrible feeling when you can't ask. When you can't speak. And you see all kinds of people and you don't know where you are.

How horrible.

If you could just ask which direction to go, you would be okay. But we studied English, and we learned. We were eager. It was just like it was an emergency. We had to learn.

Now, how long were you here before you got citizenship?

The first papers we get... the first papers, five years.

Yeah, five years. So you did it in five years. You'd been here five years and then you got your citizenship?

Yes.

Was that an exciting...?

Wait a minute, I was pregnant with Art, so let's figure out. I was expecting Art and he was born in '51, and that's when I got my citizenship.

I remember going to class with my dad.

You did? At the Center?

Taking classes.

To the JCC?

Yeah. I remember him taking me in this, had a blue Chevy.

Yes, I remember that car.

But, so when you got your citizenship...

I got my citizenship... it's very, very interesting. I was expecting Art and I got my papers in the court where Art...

No!

...got sworn in.

Oh my gosh, that is unbelievable! My gosh!

In fact, he looked over the records, Judge Stevens. And I don't remember who the judge was that gave us the papers, and the, and the flag. I was a wreck. I was a wreck. I thought I'm not gonna pass. You know, you're supposed to know a few questions. Well, it turns out that they took the whole group. They took the whole group and we were all doing the Pledge of Allegiance...

Together.

Together. And they gave us the little flag and we got sworn in. And I still have a picture of being pregnant with Art.

Oh my gosh.

And I told Art, I says, "I don't remember so much about this particular courtroom." But I says, "Would you look it up?" And he says "It's Judge Stevens." It's in the record that he gave us the citizenship papers. And it was held in the same, remember being there when he got sworn in?

Yes, yes, I distinctly remember it.

It was done not... just by sheer coincidence.

I can't believe that was coincidence.

It was a coincidence. Art didn't know where he was gonna be sworn in. I was pregnant with him when I got my papers. It was a very, very exciting day for us, because, you know, we tired to get dressed up and we went to the courthouse. And I thought, "Oy! If they ask me too many questions, I may not pass." I don't think they do that. Everybody did that and...

So you didn't have to do a written test? You didn't have to...

Well, for the first papers, we did.

Okay.

Yeah, for the first papers, we did.

So when you got, when you can actually say you're an American citizen...

Oh sure.

So...

That was five years. You know that already, you know, we were a little bit more at leisure.

And you never looked back and thought, "Oh, I've..." you know?

No, I'll tell you, you can't. You can't look back.

No.

You just have to be grateful. I mean, you know, might not be here all together.

Well no.

It was a good thing that we came here. We were lucky to come here to this country. They didn't want us [UNCLEAR] Palestine. We would have gone to Palestine just as easy. We would have been happy to go.

Yeah, Palestine was open at that time.

We would have been happy to go.

Yeah, that might have been your first choice...

But they, you know, they opened up the doors to here, to this country, to the America and we said this is fine. So we were really very lucky. And Kansas City has been just really wonderful to us. We've made a lot of friends here. And we love the community. It's not too big - the Jewish community, and we became active in it right away. Isak got on the board immediately, became president of KI. And he was very active in different divisions in Federation and now my kids are trying to be. So, that's good. So really we have a lot of blessings. I can't complain.

Oh, yeah, completely. Do you feel like the Holocaust and what you went through, is it like, daily in your mind? Do you think it...?

No, not every day. No, I mean I think about it, maybe at nighttime a lot, but I think about mainly my little sister.

That's, that's...

I just feel like she shouldn't have gone the way she did.

Right, right. So that, in particular...

I feel, I feel very responsible with her.

Now why do you feel responsible for that?

For some reason, I think if we... 'cause nobody knows, you know, it's always hindsight...

Yes, I see...

I feel responsible, because if we had known what this is consequence, we wouldn't have let her go in there.

But you didn't know.

But we didn't know.

But it still bothers you.

But it bothers me.

For some reason, you think you should have known. Right, so it just...

Because, you see, it never happened in our camp before.

Yeah, of course.

They were pretty lenient about a lot of things. We had to be pretty much in line to survive. But, and there were a couple of girls who were sent out, it was one reason and another, for bad behavior and things like that. But basically we were lucky as compared to other camps. We were lucky to be where we were. And so I'm thinking she should have been able to survive.

Yeah.

It was just... meant to be. Just...

How, how do you think your experience affects your belief in God and being Jewish?

I, I have the faith. But Isak - Isak does not. Isak does not.

That's very interesting. Would you say, like, immediately after the war he lost his faith or is it something that happened...?

I think so.

Even though he, gosh it seems like, I mean he's not, he's very...

He's very Jewish.

But he's so Jewish.

He is.

And, of course, he's extremely knowledgeable. My God, he knows everything.

But he, for some reason...

Yeah, well, it affects everybody differently.

...lost a little bit of faith.

So but for you, you still feel just as strongly in God as you did before the war and...?

Well look, before the war I was a kid. And I was doing all the things that I was supposed to do because that's what my parents told me to do.

Of course, of course.

You know, we didn't have our mind of our own at that point. You know, you did everything was in the book. You did this, that, and the other thing and you didn't know anything else.

No, of course.

But I - I'm different from some people. I, I just have the faith.

Yeah, no matter what. Yeah There's a question here that says, "To what would you attribute your ability to adjust to a normal life after the war?" Do you feel that it's more of a personality, genetic thing? That you're, you seem to be a very strong person.

Yeah, physically, maybe. Mentally, too.

Mentally, you seem to be... [telephone rings]

[TAPE PAUSES]

And because I kept telling Isak, you know, we have a lot of blessings.

Yeah.

Even with that.

Yeah, exactly.

So – I'm here. I got a good family.

Yeah, very definitely.

So, you gotta be strong.

Yeah. What do you feel, as far as being an American? What does it mean to you?
And do you think that Americans take freedom for granted?

Yes they do. And I love being an American. I really do. I just love it here. I think it's a good country. We have a good life. We need to have freedom, that's all. We have a lot more freedom than many countries have. I love this country. I love everything about it. I just wish that we didn't have some problems that we have. But as for myself, you know, you hate to see other countries having problems. But I just think it's a wonderful place to live.

Do you feel that your childhood, in some ways, was culturally maybe more satisfying?

Yeah. I don't, I mean, if I didn't, if we had to live in peace, you know, in Europe and Poland the way we did, we probably would have been just as happy to spend the rest of our lives there.

Yeah.

But now that we're here, I'm grateful that my kids didn't have to be raised in Poland.

Of course.

I'm grateful we live in this country - that we live in a free country. The first thing really when we came here, the first thing that was in our, on our minds was the freedom.

Yeah.

And that we could do anything we want to do. You know, you could wake up during the night in Poland and not, or in Germany, and not know who's gonna to knock on your door. Anything that could happen. But for some reason, I feel like the freedom that we have in this country is something that you can't buy. So that's why, I mean, we feel good about being here. Times have changed, of course, since we came, but it's still the best place to be, I think.

Yeah, yeah.

I'm very grateful.