

Regina Goldberg Interview

September 30, 1999

What was your name at birth?

Regina Ohinger, O-H-I-N-G-E-R.

And where were you born?

Cottbus, Germany

And that was, how do you spell that?

C-O-T-T-B-U-S.

Do you have any idea what approximately was the population was of the city?

I understand it was about 60,000. A small community.

And what percentage would you say was Jewish?

A small percentage.

A small percentage.

We were pretty involved in the synagogue and I believe there was only one.

Okay. And, when were you born?

February 18, 1926.

And your parents' names?

My mother's name was Mariem, M-A-R-I-E-M. And my father's was Jacob, J-A-C-O-B.

Were they both born in Germany?

No, my father was born in Poland.

How did they meet?

Apparently they were just introduced to by somebody else.

Did you have any siblings?

Oh yes. I am the youngest , was the youngest of six. Four older brothers and one older sister, and then I was born.

And what did your father do?

He had a number of jobs and businesses, but while I was alive, that I remember, he was selling wine - represented a wine company.

So were you like middle class?

Well, I don't know. I never considered myself middle class, because by the time I came along, I think we were pretty poor. I think there had been the inflation and my father had lost a lot of money. And he was glad to get this job representing the wine company.

But before he was with the wine company?

He had different businesses, but I'm not too familiar with.

So was the family at one point middle class, or...?

I think so because my brothers and sister all went to private schools. By the time I came along I went to public school.

And so you were the youngest of six. And what are the names of your siblings?

Well, none of them are alive, but my oldest was Leonard. There was a seventeen year difference in ages. My second brother was Joseph. Then came Sigmund. Then Joachim, we called him John. And then my sister Lottie. And then I.

Okay. Do you remember what the neighborhood was like that you lived in?

Yeah, it was small town-ish and we were able to walk wherever we went and... I really didn't know that persecution were going on. Most of my friends were actually non-Jewish kids, you know. And the only time one of my neighbor's parents asked if my parents had gone to vote and I had been told by my parents that they didn't go to vote because they were Jewish.

So Jews were not allowed to vote?

Apparently not. And I was little so I don't remember very much. The only thing that I knew was that my brothers left the country because they were not able to practice their professions. But aside from that I really didn't have any understanding, you know, that there was Jewish persecution.

So you didn't... From your memories you didn't... You personally didn't experience any antisemitism?

No.

And most of your friends were Jewish. Do you remember...

Non-Jewish.

Excuse me, non-Jewish. What kind of your surroundings, as far as your home. Did you live in an apartment?

Lived in an apartment.

And was it, did it have several bedrooms?

Yes, mm-hmm. Now my oldest brothers were already out of the home. They had gone to school away. My oldest brother was a physician, and then next to him was a dentist, and then seeking work with my dad in the wine industry. I think he had his own place. And then my brother John, there was a school where you learned how to weave cloth and he became a textile designer, what they call it. But my oldest brothers would come home during, you know, school break. As I say, they were already in...

Were they in the university?

Well, they had gone originally to the University of Berlin, but they felt it was just getting too antisemitic. So, I mean, I found that out later on. At the time nobody talked about it. So they transferred to the University of Würzburg, which is southern part of Germany, where they were felt there was less antisemitic, and finished their schooling there. Interesting enough, one of their friends was in the SS and he used to come to the house with his uniform. So my brothers were not able to find housing at University of Würzburg. So, he went up to the landlady in his uniform and said, "You rent these guys a place for them to live to finish their studies." So, he was a dear friend, all right. I guess he felt that we were not like all the other Jews. I don't know.

Unbelievable. Just out of curiosity, what happened after the war? Did this person in the SS survive? We don't know?

I don't know.

You don't know. I was just curious.

I often wondered. Matter of fact, one of the organization I belong, this woman had a last name the same. I've never, I don't remember his first name. I've not forgotten his last name. And I said, "Do you have any relations in Germany?" And she said well, her husband came from Germany but they didn't have any more.

Amazing. Were your parents religious Jews?

My father was extremely religious.

Was he considered a Hasidic Jew?

Oh no, not Hasidic, but Orthodox. We kept kosher at home. We celebrated all the holidays and *Shabbat*. And he was very devoted to his Judaism. And as a matter of fact, when we were kicked out of Germany, he took one briefcase and that briefcase was his *tallit* and his *tefillin*.

Oh my goodness. Did you know your grandparents?

I remember meeting my mother's father one time. And I guess he lived to be a ripe old age. I don't remember too much about him.

Okay. Well, somehow... How old were you when you left Germany?

I was, in '38, I was 12.

You were 12. So you still can remember quite a bit probably.

Well, I remember, for instance, my sister was kicked out of the *Lyceum*, which is a private girl's school. And I remember her going and watching her former classmates through the gates. And I remember her being so upset about it and I tried to pull her away, not to, you know. So, that's just one scenario I recollect. And then my brothers leaving, you know, leaving home for the States. My father thought he would just, that it would blow over, and he was, I think, in his late 50s and he said he just didn't want to start life over again. He had fought in the First World War and he just didn't think Hitler would do what he ended up doing. In his wildest dream did he think anybody would turn against him in Germany. It was home.

Now, did your family... Growing up, what were some of your fondest memories?

His memories?

Fondest memories.

His? My father's?

No, yours.

Oh. Well, actually, my mother used to travel a lot. She kept friends in Berlin and she would go off on weekends and things. And, my father used to just sit and tell me stories and... you know.

Did you take family vacations together?

No, because there was such an age difference. I remember my sister and my parents and I would go nearby. But the whole family, no.

There was never a whole family group.

No, because, you know, by the time I came along they were pretty grown.

So, when you took a vacation, where did you go?

Just nearby in the country somewhere, you know, in Germany.

Did you have fond memories of the vacations or were they just kind of vague in your mind?

Vague, vague. I remember being away at camp and being very homesick. [laughing]

Oh really. Where did you go to camp? How far away were you?

I don't know, somewhere at one of the seas.

You took a train to get there or...

I must have. I don't remember.

And you spoke German. Did you also speak Yiddish in the home?

No, just German.

Just German.

Just German. But, I mean now I can fake Yiddish, but then you didn't.

Yeah. And you went to a public school?

Yes.

And were you like... Were there any other, hardly any other Jewish kids in public school with you?

If there were I don't think I knew them.

Really! That is really interesting. Did you feel, you didn't feel different from the other kids? Because...

No. Not at all. Not at all. Part of the gang.

Did you, now, did you, how far in school did you go? When you were in Germany?

Well, let's see, I was 12, it was just a local school so, what would it be? Fourth grade?

If you were 12 here, probably, it would be more like 6th or 7th grade. Were you active? Did they have organizations the kids were active in? Outside...

Not that I remember. Now that we are talking I remember now one of my teachers that I loved dearly - still remember her name - once hit me in the face. I don't know what I, what provoked her.

And did you play an instrument or take dance classes or...

No.

So it was just school and fun?

Yeah, playing with the kids in the neighborhood.

Did you have a bicycle?

Yes, a bicycle. [laughing]

Well, you needed transportation.

Yeah, there is a lot of bicycle riding. I played a little tennis.

Now you were too young to, to date obviously.

Oh yes.

But your siblings, did they have boyfriends, girlfriends?

Well actually, one of my brothers, Joseph, the second one, was tutoring someone. I don't know what he was tutoring her in - math or Latin, and they ended up getting married in this country and she is about eight years older than I am. So, she became kind of a surrogate sister. I spent a lot of time together with her and our home was kind of her second home.

Was your mother a good cook? I'm just kind of curious.

I always thought so.

Did she cook Jewish traditional dishes...

I think so.

...or mostly German or a combination?

Both. Mixture, kind of a mixture.

A combination.

Yeah. For the holidays, before my brothers would come, she would bake a lot like December and she'd bake a dish that they called *christbrot*, which is like a *stollen*. You know, it's a German dish. And so I think her cooking sort of was combination of Jewish and German. You kind of adapt to the society you live in.

Now did your hometown have the bakery where they made the *cholent*?

The *cholent*? No we didn't. And in those days I didn't even know what it was.

Really?

No, we didn't keep the Sabbath that way.

You didn't?

No.

But did you, was it a traditional *Shabbat*?

Oh, like Friday night, you know, prayers and things and I think probably going to services. And having family, you know.

Now did your town have a synagogue?

Yes. We had a synagogue.

Some of the people I've interviewed, their, they didn't have a synagogue, they would just meet.

No, there was definitely a synagogue. I remember my dad going to High Holidays wearing a top hat to synagogue. I don't know whether that was Jewish or German, or whatever.

Now, were you taught Judaism?

Well, I had some Hebrew classes.

You went to Hebrew classes or did someone come to your house?

I went, I remember. Somebody near, in the Temple I guess. Well, maybe it was in one of the rabbi's home or something where I had some Hebrew and some exposure to Judaism, but that was the extent of it, except for what I got at home.

Did they try to teach you the prayers and how to participate in the service? That wasn't part of the...

No. No. In those days women weren't...

Yeah women. Yeah. So there was no preparation for the *bat-mitzvah*?

Oh no.

They didn't have *bat-mitzvahs*, really, did they?

There had *bar-mitzvahs*, my brothers were *bar-mitzvah*, but not *bat-mitzvahs*, no.

We've kind of gone over Judaism in your home. I'm assuming your parents kept kosher?

Pardon?

Did your parents keep kosher?

Did they what?

Keep kosher?

Oh yes.

It was a kosher home. Did you celebrate any of the secular holidays?

No. I celebrated Christmas with my Christian neighbors. They'd invite me over to decorate the trees and occasionally I went to midnight mass with them on Christmas Eve.

Did you ever feel like you were missing out because you...

No. And Hanukkah was not such a big deal, I mean we lit the candles and things but...

No, no, no. Not at all.

But my father, as I say, was very religious and I remember us going around the rooms to sweep up the *chometz*. He also would take me to the river or lake, I don't know where it was, during Rosh Hashanah to throw all the sins away.

Yes.

We used to have *Havdalah*.

Was your family Zionistic? Did they talk about Israel?

They talked about it and now I remember my brother had a good friend, who was a family friend, and they were Zionistic. I think there were ambivalent, there was an ambivalent feeling in my family in terms of Palestine and Zionism.

It wasn't like a goal or a yearning?

No. Not at all.

And so your family was very comfortable living where they were living and up until a point they felt very safe?

Yes.

And comfortable as Jews?

Yes.

Were there, in your community, did they have Zionistic organizations? Was there an active...?

If they did, I just as I say, I was too little. But this woman who then, she and her family made *Aliyah*, and they had one son who was, must have been younger than I. Yeah, he was younger, because I remember him as a baby. They made *Aliyah* and this son served in the Israeli army and we heard later on was killed, so... But I think my mother kept track of her. But that's the only exposure I had to Zionism, is someone who was interested.

Now, when you were growing up in the home, now how many girls were there?

My older sister and myself.

Just you and then the rest were boys. Were you required to help your mother in the kitchen or around the household? Was that something...?

Well, we did. We did. It was no big deal.

Yeah.

My mother always felt, maybe it was later in years that she felt, that women should have professions and careers and not just focus on kitchen.

So she was very modern in thinking?

Very modern.

Very modern. So do you remember her instilling that in you as a young woman?

I think later in life I remember, yes. There are certain things that a lady shouldn't be doing. [laughing] I used to wash walls in my home and she kinda was...

Okay, well I think as far as growing up in your small town, is there anything else that you can think of, any memories that you would like to talk about? Because you were 12 years old when you left... so...

We didn't leave voluntarily. Maybe that comes a little later and you want to interview me on it, how we happened to leave Germany.

Well, let's talk about that.

Okay.

Okay, so you were 12 years old when you left.

Well, it was a day like any other day. I went to school.

Now prior to this did you have a feeling that something was going to happen? Had your parents mentioned anything about it not being safe there? Were you sort of mentally prepared?

Not at all. You know one of the things, at least it was in my family, I was the baby, and they were protective and they didn't talk in front of me. I had no idea that anything was going on. Maybe they didn't either, I don't know. All I know is my father did send his sons out because he felt it wasn't safe.

And where did they go?

Okay, my oldest brother Leonard, who finished medical school in the University of Würzburg, I told you, and he was not able to get a residency and he wasn't able to practice medicine.

Because he was Jewish?

Right. So, he had a professor, a non-Jewish professor, who said, "Let me see what we can get you out of this country and you get a residency in Chicago where I have a friend at St. Luke's Hospital." This friend was not Jewish, either, and the professor at Würzburg was not Jewish. So he wrote to his friend in Chicago, Dr. Edwin Hirsch, at St. Luke's Hospital, and told him about my brother Leonard. And Dr. Hirsch replied, "I cannot have this young man be at St. Luke's Hospital, at this moment we don't take any Jewish residents." He said, "But I have a good friend Dr. Otto Sophia at the Michael Reese in Chicago, which is a Jewish hospital. Let me see if we can't get Leonard a residency there." And sure

enough he did. So that's my brother Leonard got a visa to come to the United States to Chicago. And then my brother Joseph, who was a dentist, could not practice dentistry in Germany, either. So then my brother helped him to get to Chicago. And at that time, as I was told, the dentistry was more advanced in this country than in Germany, so my brother had to go back to University of Illinois and finish his training.

He knew English?

I'm sorry?

He could speak English?

Well they were in private schools. They learned English.

Wonderful.

Sure. So, and then they brought my other brothers over because then I remember hearing that it was dangerous for Jewish boy in the event a non-Jewish woman said they were accosted by him. That without questions asked they would put him in jail. I remember something like this being told.

So about what year was this? Wasn't it difficult to get them out of Germany?

Well it must have been '36 or '37. Because the day that I was at school and the police came to pick me up was in '38. It was in October of '38. And I was at recess when this teacher said somebody wants to see you in the office. I went to the office, there was a policeman who said, "I'll take you to your family." I didn't know what was going on and I didn't understand. So we walked to the local jail and there was my mother and my sister and I think other women from the community. I don't know. And they put us in the cell and apparently my father was in a cell with other men. And all I remember is my mother crying hysterically for my father and my not really understanding what was happening - just feeling embarrassed that she was carrying on so. So...

At this point were you asking "What are we doing in jail?"

Not, you were just in such a state of shock and just, I don't know what I did. I just don't ever remember if I did anything. But then a few hours later they said, come on out, and they took us to the local train station. And they put us on a train to Poland. And then on the border for hours or days we were standing there while negotiations were taking place. And, again, you know, we hadn't had sleep and I was just... you were just kind of total, not knowing what in the world is happening. So then from Poland we went to Warsaw where some of the local Jews took us in.

Now were they already in a ghetto?

No, no, that was before Hitler had invaded Poland. They felt very secure and very safe even though there was antisemitism in Poland. They didn't think that, you know, Hitler would come to Poland.

So they transferred you to Poland?

Yeah, because my father's birthplace was Poland and they made him a man without a country. They took away his German citizenship. So it was a lucky thing because that was October 28 and *Kristallnacht* was November 14th [sic - November 9-10]. So, when all hell really broke loose.

So a Jewish family took you, and your mother and father and sister.

Correct. And we stayed a few weeks or something, but then my brothers who were here secured passage for us to go to Cuba. So they paid a lot of money for us to get a permit to go to Havana, Cuba. So from Poland we went to France where we boarded a French ship in the harbor. And we took the ship to Cuba and my oldest brother from Chicago came to pick us up. Only to find that the other big ship, the *St. Louis*, was in the harbor there. Have you interviewed people who were on that ship?

No. No I haven't at all.

That was a ship with a thousand Jews that had originated from Hamburg, Germany. And our boat had about a hundred Jews from France. And, they didn't allow these people on the *St. Louis*, which was the name of the German boat, to disembark in Havana and they didn't allow us to disembark. So my brother, because he was a physician, was able to come aboard and at least give us a hug. But then poor guy had to go back alone to Chicago. And we were at the outskirts of this country, I understand, and the American waters, and I think went to Mexico. And finally the captain of the boat said to his government these are refugees from Germany and you need to give them sanction. Unless you do, we'll just travel on the seas. So, finally, the French government said, okay, well, come here. They knew that we would eventually want to join my brothers in the United States. Just takes a long time to get a visa, you know. The Polish quota or anyone refugee in those days, they just didn't take them in with open arms. So, we went back to France and we stayed in a community called *Saint-Lazare*, which is in the Brittany part of France. And I enrolled in school there and went to school and became quite fluent in French and then the Germans occupied France.

So, how long were you in France before the Germans came?

Must have been maybe a year or something. Then they occupied France and then we were stuck again, you know. We said they were pursuing us from Poland to France. And then the war broke out and there was a lot of bombing. We spent a lot of nights in the shelters, you know. And then one day just before the High Holidays there was a notice on the local, you know the newspaper or something, stating that would the Jewish people register. So my father went to the French police and said you know we here from Germany and we saw

this notice about registering. What do you think we should do? He said, “Don’t register.” I might tell you then, by then, France had fallen. And France was divided up into Free France and Occupied France. Now we were in Occupied France. Free France was Marseilles, where the American Consul was, so that we needed to get to Free France to get our visas to come to the United States. Now, to travel was kind of dangerous, you know, since we are German Jews. So this policeman gave us a fictitious paper stating that we were French citizens who were returning home to Marseilles, France, and gave us a fictitious address in Marseilles. That’s how we were able to cross the border.

Now was he a friend or he was just a...?

He was a police, you know, *Prefecture*, was the head of police department.

He really didn’t know your family?

He didn’t know my family, so, I guess he did it out of the kindness of his heart.

Yes, yes.

Unless my father gave him some money. I don’t know.

Okay, uh-huh.

And, so on the border of France, of Free France, and Occupied France they took a, before then, my father had given me a hundred dollar bill to sew in my coat which I sewed. And I don’t think my father thought he’d be able to make it. He thought sure that they would catch us. My sister was fluent in French so she did the interpreting while my parents slept so that the Germans wouldn’t bother them. So they had took us out on the border and I was sure they were going to shoot us, but a few minutes later they had us back on the train and we went on to Free France.

So they believed the story?

I guess so.

So you made it to Free France and then what happened?

Then we stayed in Marseilles for a few weeks or something, you know, the bureaucratic. And finally got our visa to go to the United States. And then from Marseilles we took the train to Lisbon, Portugal. And we expected to be in Lisbon for two days and then get on the *Yankee Clipper*. We had passage on the plane. Except when we got there they said, no, we don’t have any seats for you. That was in ‘41 and they were calling back a lot of the diplomats from Europe to this country because they felt United States probably would be entering the war. So we were in Lisbon about three months. So one day my father said to me let me have that hundred-dollar bill that I gave you. So we were on our way to Pan Am

line, and I gave him the hundred dollar bill and he shook hands with the clerk at Pan Am. And the next thing, the next day, we got on the *Yankee Clipper* to the States.

Oh my goodness. So then your immediate family survived?

Yes.

What about your grandparents, aunts and uncles?

My dad had a brother in Berlin and he apparently escaped to Shanghai.

Oh, Shanghai.

Yes they were taking some of the Jews. My mother's, my mother had a brother with, he had a family and a sister. She never heard from them again. And my father had another sister, never heard from them. When we were in Israel, Yad Vashem, we tried to find any names, anything, but we didn't, so...

Have you been back to Germany?

I have never had the desire to be back, interesting enough. My older siblings have been back. And they've even, as a matter of fact, my son even went back to my hometown.

Yes.

And my husband was born in Nebraska City, Nebraska, and he said, "Mom, it's not Nebraska City, Nebraska." Apparently, this small community had been bombed a lot, too, before, you know the Russians occupied. It was kind of occupied by Russia, you know the part where we lived, so... It just was destroyed from the bombing and then rebuilt, apparently was quite a sight. But three of my siblings have been back. I just never had the desire to. As a matter of fact, the first time I was out of this country was we went to visit some friends in Mexico, I could not wait to get back on American soil.

Really!

I was such a wreck. [laughing]

And how long ago was that?

Oh that was maybe thirty years ago. I have traveled to Israel a few times.

What about Europe?

Europe? Well, we didn't go to Europe, we you know, passed.

So you haven't traveled Europe since you've been here?

No. No. Not really.

Is it mainly because of the memories or the feelings towards...?

No. No. There is so much to see in this country.

Oh, so true. Oh yes.

People get such a high going back to Europe. No, I think I wouldn't mind going back to France one bit, maybe to see if it's the way I remember things.

Are you still fluent in French?

Not really. I was just in Florida where my son Eddie has a congregation. And one of the women there had survived the French occupation too. And she'd been born in Paris, and we kind of started talking and I tried to have a conversation in French with her, but I got a little too slow. [laughing]

So how old were you when you came to the States?

So I was 15.

Oh, okay. Now did you at that point, were you more aware, obviously you had to have been more aware of what was happening to the Jews.

Yes, but we didn't have awareness of the concentration camps or atrocities.

Really?

No, no. I mean you didn't have the media like you do now. You know, television and things. And not till we came to this country, no. When after the war, when, you know, the camps were liberated, I don't think anyone ever realized. As a matter of fact I used to ask my husband, "Didn't you read about the boats in Cuba and how they, people were trying to get in, you know, to the United States?" And he said, "I didn't pay much attention to it."

Yeah, that's right.

You know like, unless things happen to you or your family, it doesn't register.

Well, we all do that. Even today.

Yes.

So now you came, you took the boat.

We didn't take the boat. You mean the first time?

The first time.

But then the second time we flew to the States.

And you flew to, straight to Chicago?

No, no, no. We flew the *Yankee Clipper* lands in Flushing, New York. So we went to New York. Then my brother, the dentist, had already opened an office in a little town in Massachusetts. So he rented an apartment for us in Brockton, Massachusetts. And we stayed there a while, and I went to high school there for a little while. And then when we decided to join my brothers in Chicago, 'cause they were all still single.

So you came to the States, you didn't know English, right?

No.

Was that difficult for you to...?

Well, at that age it really isn't difficult. As I say I just was exposed to English speaking and I remember going to the bakery with a dictionary. You know, an English/German dictionary. And people were very gracious and tried to be helpful.

And what were your impressions, coming to this country? Did it seem extremely different than what you had been used to?

Oh, not really. I don't think so.

Oh, okay. So, so there wasn't a huge adjustment for you?

Well if there was I wasn't aware of it. We had rented a house in a suburb of Chicago of a professor who was on sabbatical. And I went to a high school there for the summer, New Trier. And some of the people there were very eager to be of help and would invite me to their homes to play tennis and things. I felt comfortable.

What about your parents?

My mother had been to this country as a young woman, just visiting.

Really!

She was uh...

She really was well traveled at that you know, at that time, my goodness.

Yes. She knew a little English and she went to school, to learn English, to read and write. But it was very difficult for my father.

Did you sense, did they like being in the United States?

Oh, they were so happy to be here, what in the world.

There wasn't this longing you know, to get back?

Oh, not at all. My dad was very frustrated because he didn't work.

Yes.

And just before he died he went and applied for a job in the neighborhood where we lived, and that job entailed working some kind of glass store or glass factory, I'm not sure, and apparently was heavy lifting. Anyway, I think he lasted a few days or a few weeks, I'm not sure. And then he had a heart attack. And that was the end, I mean, he couldn't work then.

So how, so how long was he in this country?

Let's see. He died when I was eighteen.

So he was only here like three years. Is that right?

Yeah. Right.

Oh my goodness! It must have been really horrible, especially for your mother.

Oh, terrible because he just went to sleep one night and didn't wake up.

My goodness. So you stayed in Massachusetts for how long?

I think maybe, let's see, we arrived in April, and then we were, I was in summer school that summer. So we could have just stayed there maybe a couple months.

Oh, that's all? And then you moved on to...

Chicago. We first lived in the suburb and then we lived on a, in an apartment on the border of Evanston and Chicago.

And how long did you live there?

Till I was married.

Okay, so you... How old were you when you met your husband?

I was 26.

Oh! And you dated for...?

I dated in Chicago and then I came to Kansas City where my sister had been living with her family.

You were married when you came here?

No.

No.

No. I met my husband here. He was a blind date.

Oh my. So you were schooled in Chicago? Did you go to college there also?

Northwestern. Um, hmm. And then...

And you got your degree in...psychology?

No, I had an undergraduate degree, Bachelors in Sociology. And then I trained at the Michael Reese as a medical technologist. And worked in the field for a little while. And then went to visit a friend in Palo Alto in California and on the way I stopped off here to see my sister and I met my husband.

Oh my God, your husband was a blind date. You had a date with him and then you went back to Chicago?

No. The next day I left for California.

Oh, you went to California, then you went back to Chicago.

Yes.

And you were somehow communicating with your husband.

Right. Right.

Were you calling each other or writing?

No, I took a position here at a health center.

Soon thereafter?

As a micro-technologist.

What was, was he the main reason you came or was it just that...?

No, no. I had very impulsively left my position with the Michael Reese in Chicago and my friend in Palo Alto, her professor, her husband was an Associate Professor at Stanford. She had been wanting me to come out and in those days it was pretty costly, you know, to go, on the train. I don't think they had planes. So, when you take the train you can stop off in Kansas City. So I stopped off to see my sister on my way to visit my friend in Palo Alto. And, I had a blind date with Wesley on Saturday night and Sunday morning I left for Palo Alto. So while we were there we kind of, I told her a little bit about this date I had and she said, well why don't you write him a note. So I wrote him a note and on the way back he called again and then I took a job. He had been involved with some women so there was no romance there right away but then...

What was your husband's profession?

He was in sales. Sold men's socks.

And is he still alive? Is your husband still alive?

No.

No. Now, now your mother, when did she pass away?

She died...

[Tape ends then interview resumes.]

Okay, I'll ask again. Now your mother passed away...

About twenty-five years ago.

And she stayed in Chicago?

Yes.

So you came to Kansas City, you got married, you settled, and how many children?

We had one child and he died at the age of seven of a Wilms' tumor. And at the time we had two other children and then the twins were born afterwards.

Okay. And what are their names? Go ahead. We want to know everybody's name and their ages.

Our daughter's name is Linda. Our son is Stephen. And then the twins are Roy and Eddie.

Now I'm curious, going back to your mom when they came to this country, did they remain pretty religious? Did they...

Oh yes, yes. They continued to keep kosher. Keep all the holidays, *Shabbat*, everything.

And what about you and your siblings? Did you pretty much maintain the degree of Judaism that you were brought up with?

Yes, definitely. Now I didn't keep kosher because my husband did not keep kosher. He didn't especially believe in it. So, um, and since he traveled he ate out a lot. I didn't want to be a hypocrite so I did not keep kosher. But now my children, my son who is the rabbi, and his wife keep kosher.

What synagogue did you belong to?

We belong to B'nai Jehudah. But he has a congregation in Coral Gables, Florida.

Is it reform?

Reform.

Oh my. And your other children, what are their occupations?

His twin is an attorney in Washington, DC. And then Linda is a social worker like her mom. Then Steve is a cardiologist.

So when you got married, did you continue working, or did you...?

No. I didn't work at first. No. I went back to school when the twins were six years old and I did some vacation relief for my pediatrician. He said, well Reggie, you've loafed long enough. So, when his medical technologists were on vacation or not available I'd go in and help out. And then I would have had to retrain in my field because technology had been so advanced. And I found out about a graduate program at KU Med in social work, so I took that and became a social worker.

Okay, so now how long have you been a social worker?

30 years.

30 years. And were you, when you became a social worker, was it full time or part time?

I started part time.

And eventually worked into full time?

Yes.

I would just kind of like to know, after, about what point... Did your family talk about the Holocaust?

All the time.

All the time, after...?

After we found out all the horrible things.

What had actually happened in Europe.

Apparently my husband's brother, who is deceased, too, liberated one of the camps. And for years he wouldn't even want to talk about it. It was such a painful experience to him. He was 21 years old or something. He was in the service. My brother John, the youngest of the boys, was in the United States Army, and he, I don't think he liberated camps, but he used to do a lot of intelligence because of his knowledge of German. But, you know, then we would talk about it. We definitely felt all of us were being traumatized by it all.

And I'm sure your parents, leaving family behind...

Oh yes. Yes, my mother used to cry a lot for her family. And she'd cry for her things she left, you know, and I used to say, "But we're together!" You know, now that I have had my own, you know, things I can understand, but at the time you don't understand what your parents go through.

No, of course not. No, I can't imagine. Now what about your children, did they have a strong curiosity?

Actually I had a lot of difficulty talking about it. I wanted to shelter them for it, from it. But I think as I got more mature and more comfortable with some of these things that have happened, I was a little more able to talk about it. And I think when the twins were at an age where they could understand, I think I shared a little bit more. But interestingly enough, Eddie, who is the rabbi, last week, when I was at his home, had some friends over and they asked me some questions and Eddie just walked out of the room. Poor baby.

Really... I was just curious, what kind of questions were they asking you?

I think they asked something when I was hidden and was in France or something. I think it still upsets him.

That to me is absolutely fascinating because you weren't talking about being in a camp, you know. You were basically talking how you dodged or were able to survive by not going into camps. But that was really...

Well he's still, he's a very sensitive human being, so I didn't realize. And we were one year in Jerusalem together at Yad Vashem, and he showed me, he always does, you know here were the trains. That's an interesting experience to have your child show you, you know. Anyway, but my children, at this moment are, Linda married a Jewish man and they keep a very Jewish home. They don't keep kosher, they're vegetarians so it doesn't make much difference. [laughing]

They're kosher. [laughing]

They just took their family and went on a two-week trip to Israel and just came back. And they live in the San Francisco area where, you know, young Jewish families are not really practicing Jews, Judaism. That kind of bothers them. Anyway, then Eddie and Melanie and Steve, now Steve is not married yet. We'll see what happens. And then Roy and Laura are in Washington and they don't practice too much but there are feelings that I think as the children get older they will, they will get more involved.

Yes. Have they showed any desire to go back to your hometown? Your children?

As I say, Steve went. His office travels to Europe. The rest of them, I don't know, they probably wouldn't mind, you know, travel to Europe.

Well, I think we've just about... is there anything else you'd like to say?

No. I think I've really kept from giving my story, but I think now that my generation is getting older and, you know, we're going to be dying out. I think it's important that some of these stories are documented. And when I was in Washington they had a big article in the *Washington Post* on the exhibit on the *St. Louis*, which was that German boat that I told you about.

Yes, you mean in, where was the exhibit? Where in Washington? At the Holocaust Museum?

At the Holocaust Museum. They had a special exhibit and then in New York they had a special exhibit too. So I called and I left a message, I said, "You know, I don't see that it's been documented in history but there was another boat at the same time, a smaller boat." Be interesting to see what happened to some of those Jews there.

Yes.

You see that the non-Jews were able to embark.

It was no problem for the non-Jews. Oh I didn't realize that.

And the money that the Jews had paid should be able to land in Cuba. It was just gone. It was a lot of money in those days.

Oh, yeah I'm sure. Well, here's a question that they'd like to have. What does being an American mean to you?

Freedom.

Do you think most Americans take their freedom for granted?

Yes, yes, yes. For years I only would buy only American made cars until I found out a lot of the cars... [laughing] Definitely, I have deep feeling for all this. It's an adopted country and with all its problems it's still the best place to live. Definitely. And I still remember when I became a citizen.

Did you do it after being here five years?

Yes.

So you did it in five years. And you had to go to citizenship school?

No, I didn't. My mother went to citizenship. I guess I didn't because I took civics and things in high school. Just, I guess you're asked some questions. I remember taking a couple of girlfriends along. You have to have some witnesses.

And what are some of the most important lessons we should learn from the Holocaust?

Just to say it can't happen here. God forbid.