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# **Felicia Brill Interview**

## **February 3, 2000**

We're recording now.

OK, first of all, tell me, what was your name at birth?

**My birth name was Felice Sussmann. S-u-s-s-m like in mother a-n-n**

Where were you born?

**I was born in Vienna, Austria.**

And when was that ?

**On the 28th of April, 1922.**

Do you know anything about the circumstances of your birth? Where you born in the hospital?

**I was born at home. I had three doctors, and three midwives, my whole family, uncles and aunts, everybody was present. My father, he fainted, he fainted.**

Why were there so many people there? Was it a complicated birth or...?

**No! It was the family, you know, we lived very close to our family. My grandmother wouldn't have had me in a sanitarium, or any of that, God forbid the child would be exchanged, so she didn't trust this. So, we all congregated. My uncle used to tell me that he could remember everything from my birth.**

How many brothers and sisters do you have?

**I have one brother. I don't even know if he is alive. He was born during the, during the war, he's seventeen years younger than I.**

He was born during the war?

**Yeah, my mother got pregnant in [unclear] pregnant during the war. After, after when we were in Prague, after our exit from Vienna.**

So, how about at your birth, what number child were you?

**I was the only one.**

You were, oh, OK, so your mother only...

**My mother had a unfortunately, she had, she lost twins during the earlier pregnancy, because my grandma was a twin, it runs in the family.**

So you were the?

**I was actually...yeah, but she never saw the kids. The kids were never born. She was maybe two, three months when she had to, she lost them.**

So you were her first survivor?

**Her first birth child, yeah. And she was very young, she was twenty-two when I was born, she was very delighted.**

But your mother came from a large family?

**My mother came from.. yeah, she was one of seven and the eighth child died of crib death or something. It was eight days old. It was a boy. She had four brothers and two sisters.**

And how about your father?

**My father had only one sister. They both, a brother died at birth.**

I see. So where did your parents come from?

**My parents came from, well, my father was born in Vienna and his background is Austrian, and way back Czech, Slovak and Hungarian. But my mother's background, both parents came from eastern Galicia which is now Ukrainia. They were born there but came to Vienna when they were around twenty years old, when they got married they moved to Vienna.**

Your grandparents moved?

**Yeah, my mother's parents.**

OK, so then both your parents were, did they grow up in Vienna?

**Oh yeah, my mother especially. My mother was...my grandmother, my mother unfortunately was born in Poland, because my grandmother wanted to be at her mother's house in Poland. So she went back when she was in Vienna, to have the baby in Poland, which my mother resented terribly, and then, right away back, so my mother was Polish-born. Had no idea about Poland, so they came back right away to Vienna, to their home and...**

Why did she resent being born in Poland?

**It was like, it had like a stigma, you know? Oh, I am Viennese, I'm not concerned. The Viennese Jews were very chauvinistic. They were Viennese and that was it.**

How... how were...

**They looked down on the, on the eastern Jews.**

So the fact that she was born in Poland was...

**That was terrible for her. Also our quota for America wasn't the best. We could've gone to America, but since my mother was of Polish quota, she couldn't come. You need an Austrian quota. I mean I, my father was Austrian quota so that hindered us actually, to come to the United States in 1938.**

So you came to the United States in...?

**In 1951.**

So what happened that...?

**Many detours.**

OK, let me, I will come back to that...we have some years to cover.

**I hope, right.**

So how long did you stay in Vienna then...?

**Sixteen ye... well, I was when we left... But the reason why we left is my father, Can I tell this story?**

Sure.

**Was warned...he had many Christian friends, he was warned that the next day he would be put in a concentration camp.**

In '38?

**In 1938 when Hitler came, it was, he came on March 11 and in July my father was warned, I have it right here, he was warned to be put in a concentration camp if he doesn't disappear. So he went overnight with a guide over the Czech border and made his way through to Prague and then uh, a few months later our landlord said, "You've got to leave the apartment." And we were without home, everything there, we had to go also, over the**

**border, jumping off a train and with nothing... We left everything to go to Prague.**  
And that was in 1938?

**That was the exit from Vienna. A very tragic exit.**

Now what was your family life like in Vienna?

**It was a very nice family - a real family with a big Seder, oh, just wonderful. My grandfather wanted to get me drunk all the time he had a little wine. It was a wonderful life.**

So you had...

**I had a fantastic education. I went to middle school and then I went to, wound up in prep school to be a teacher and my night school and learned languages, I learned ballet, I played the piano and singing in the choir- a very nice life.**

What was your home like? Was it a...

**It was an apartment. In Vienna, everybody lives in apartments.**

Did you live in the same apartment all the time you were in Vienna?

**Yes. My mother got married there. My Mother lived there 18 years and I was born there.**

And what was it like? Was it a big apartment?

**Well, it was like...in Vienna they don't have big apartments. Like, like let's see, three bedrooms, a bathroom, a kitchen and a dining room, something like that. This was already fancy in Vienna.**

So was it a nice neighborhood?

**Yeah, it was very nice. It was actually bordering on the suburbs. It was like here on the weekend. It was the end of the...We had the inner city. It was called *Innerstadt*. There was [unclear]. More business area, because my grandpa had three stores on the main street there, very close to where I lived. As so he wanted to live in the business district, in the same house where he worked. And so he had three stores, and we lived only two streets away from my grandparents. So we lived, like, two minutes from, two minutes from him...**

And what kind of stores did your grandfather have?

**My grandfather had a shoe store, a furnishings store--ladies and men's furnishings--and a clothing store. They were all in one house, just like the whole block was my grandfather's place.**

Was this, this was your mother's father?

**This was my mother's father, yeah.**

So were they...?

**My uncles were employed there. They worked there.**

So were they pretty, did they seem to you to be affluent people?

**They are not rich. In Vienna, nobody was rich. It was after the inflation, there was a depression. They were just nice living, a nice life, go to the opera, go to the theatre, go to the movies, go dancing, you know, a nice life, a real nice life.**

It was comfortable?

**Sundays we got together, sometimes forty people, see my grandmother and grandpa had the whole family in Vienna, so we were an enormous family. They lived away from us, but we had a real big family.**

All within?

**Lots of kids and grandchildren. My cousin was my piano teacher, so it was a real nice Jewish family.**

I see.

**We had lots of fun, we used to play records of Caruso and all kinds of stuff and dancing. My uncles taught me how to dance when I was four years old, modern dancing.**

What did your father do?

**My father was general representative of a Norwegian firm and he was traveling a lot.**

What kind of a firm was it?

**Rep... it was for feed and for the country, you know, to feed the cows and all that.**

Yeah.

**And he had, he traveled like in a car. He had a chauffeur and like ten salesmen with him. He had a big car, you know.**

So where did they go?

**They use to go out through Austria and Yugoslavia and usually weekends he came home. And before that he was his own, he had a department store. We had so many stores, but in Vienna, it was a big crisis all the time and this didn't work out.**

Your father had a department store?

**Oh yeah. My father had a depart..., we had a department store on the Hungarian border.**

Excuse me one second, let just make sure this is... [tape stops briefly]

**I don't know if you know Mr....you probably know him, Mr. Bruller, was a very similar name to my husband. Victor Bruller. He was from the same little town that my great... that my grandfather came from.**

Is that right?

**In Austria, yeah. He knows the town that my father had the department store.**

I see.

**And the lady, the mother from that garret was my nanny. She taught me Jew, Hebrew, I told you she taught me the *Shema*.**

Was your family religious?

**My family? Yeah, we went to conservative temple, my mom and I and the grandparents have to be in their own *shul* with a big thing... See my grandmother dedicated with a big plaque her life story there. That was in the neighborhood.**

Why did he, uh...?

**It was not kosher enough...the Temple. We had all the conservative temples nearby and the orthodox temple he didn't like either.**

It wasn't orthodox enough for him?

**No, it was just a bunch of *ganovim* [Yiddish: thieves], he used to say (laughter). You know what I mean? Yes, *Got's ganifs* [Yiddish: God's thieves], he used to call it, my grandfather.**

He was probably an interesting man.

**Fantastic! He, the interesting, see my grandfather, he was an absolutely gorgeous man, he came, he was a Sephardic Jew probably. His name was Turkish and he came from Turkey, so he was a Sephardic Jew that may... was probably persecuted in Turkey and came to, um, to Poland. So he was not an Ashkenazim, his forefathers.**

Is that right?

**So we were Sephardic Jews from way back, from my grandfather. But he had the bushy eyebrows and beautiful black hair--gorgeous man, simply gorgeous. I wish I had that part of him. But they killed him in Auschwitz too, a wonderful man. He was such a great guy. He was the only, I thank him for all the *Yiddishkayt* that I am, because he was really the**

**one who instilled a love for Judaism in me.**

In what way...?

**...I was his first grandchild...**

how did he do that?

**Well, he was my baby sitter.**

Yeah.

**And he used to tell me stories, you know. And taught me the Jewish song *Oyfn pripetshik brent a fayerl* and you know these...**

Yeah.

**... and all that stuff. So I learned all that when I was a kid. And the Seder and all the holy days you know.**

Did you always have the Seder at his house?

**At my grandma Emma's. Yes.**

It was that same grandfather?

**When somebody came, he used to wear, what do you call it? A *pince nez*, what you put on the nose.**

Yah, a *pince nez*, those glasses?

**And when one of the kids came, [unclear], he was so mean. He looked real mean, but that wasn't allowed. And I say, the *Mah Nishtanah*.**

You said the Four Questions? Yeah?

**The Four Questions. Because he had a daughter, the granddaughter was born four years later, though I was his favorite grandchild.**

Were you the first? Was your mother his oldest child?

**She was the oldest child.**

You were... And you were the first grandchild?

**I was the first grandchild. And he bought me when I started school, a fabulous leather satchel. He said I could be a doctor with that. In a fantastic leather, wonderful leather, very expensive.**

How old were you then when you started school?  
**Six years.**

And you remember that?

**Oh I remember everything. I remember every, everything, I have a fantastic memory, I don't remember what I did yesterday, but...**

But you remember your childhood?

**I remember, yeah.**

That's good.

**I remember everything.**

Did you go to religious schools or did you?

**Only in the end, in the end. The last two years, I went to a regular grade school and then gymnasium, they call it, which is a higher education for students, and then I was supposed to go to teachers college after I finished this year. I had straight A's afterward my, I had straight A's, everything A, that's how my grand...my son is.**

Good student?

**Straight A's, A pluses, mostly, he was more, my son, fantastic grades.**

But you were...but were these public schools you went to?

**Yeah, I was, yeah sure. Right in the neighborhood. First the public school, then the public gymnasium, this is the higher learning thing. And then I went in the Jewish area to parochial school, the last two years to prepare to be a teacher in the same school. They used to call me, said "This is our future teacher," you know, when I was a little girl.**

**I had a fantastic teacher which I write here too. I would have been a fantastic teacher for me [*sic*], too, because I was recognized as a very good student [unclear]. They destroyed it, naturally.**

Right.

**Because the Nazis, like I write here, they occupied the first day of my Jewish school as the SS headquarters. That broke my heart because I loved my school.**

Well, I want to ask you about that some more. But first I want to know a little bit more about your family. What were your parent's names?

**Giselle was my mother's name and Julius my, my father's name.**

Your mother didn't work, did she?

**My mother was a legal secretary, sometimes. Oh she was, because she wanted to be home with me, you know. She worked as a legal secretary. She was extremely intelligent. Highly intelligent. Sophisticated really...What?**

Was she an educated woman?

**Oh, fantastic. Really, both of my parents were...highly educated.**

Was it self-educated?

**No. They had the school, academy, you know?**

Did they go to religious schools or did they all start....?

**This was obligatory in Austria. I went to, we had to go to Hebrew school. In my parochial school, from, what was it, chief Rabbi of Frankfurter's niece was my teacher. That's what I remember. She was a beautiful young lady who came to America when we got here. Of Dr. Frankfurter.**

So your parents were well-educated?

**They came...oh yeah, very, very. And she taught me about opera. My grand.., my uncle said my mother was actually his mother. She taught him about opera, the love for, for the finer things in life, you know, art and all that.**

Did you have art in your home?

**Oh yeah. I have pictures of my mother, did you see? I'll show you. My mother is, I have also a picture... [tape stops briefly]**

Alright, so did you have any servants in your home?

**In Vienna?**

Yeah.

**Yeah, we had . We even had to have a Christmas tree once in a while for the two *shiksas*. My grandma had a maid and we had a maid, well, later on, no, because later on times were very bad in Vienna. There was the inflation like here, the depression.**

But you had a nanny when you were little?

**I had a nanny when we had the department store in Hungary on the border of Hungary. A Hungarian.**

I see.

**And we had most of the time, my mother had like a woman coming in doing the wash, doing things, heavy stuff, but she loved, she was a fantastic cook and baker and everything.**

That was my next question. Your mother liked to cook?

**Oh, my mother was fantastic! Oh, cook and bake especially. Croissants and everything and apple strudel, oh, all kinds of apple strudel. She was fabulous, the best thing she did. She was my ideal, all the time.**

Do you like to cook or bake?

**Cook, no. Bake, no. I'm not a baker. Because I could never compare with her. My father used to tell her, "Teach the kid something". She says, "You know what I am going to do? When she gets a man, I'm going to come there on the sly and cook and then she's gonna tell her husband she did it!" That's how she was.**

She had plans.

**She had plans. Never had a man though, no.**

Did your family keep kosher at home?

**No, we did not because of my father. My grandparents did. My grandmother never ate at my home.**

Because...

**My mother – what's the use - and men were not brought up that way. She gave it up. She started orthodox and he wanted to eat what he wanted, like he was used to. So instead of making trouble, she just adjusted herself to the life of her husband.**

That's what a lot of people do.

**They did, to have peace.**

So what were your favorite...you mentioned you were a good student...?

**I was an excellent student, yeah, especially languages, especially, I wonderful in German and history, what else? Singing, naturally, singing. I was pretty good, drawing, really good start. I was straight A's, I mean.**

You were good in everything?

**Yeah, everything**

What about your friends when you were little?

**Friends? A little girl? Mostly, ah, the kids that I met in Hebrew school, we had to go, obligatory, to Hebrew school once a week.**

So this was...

**That, that is the case, the land, the church and state are not separated in Austria. So the Jewish kids had to go in the afternoon to a different school and learn Hebrew and Jewish history.**

That's interesting. So it was mandatory?

**Yes, mandatory, and the Christian kids had the Catholic, the Catholic state, had the Catholic and we had a little recess during that time, they had religious, and in the morning you came to the school and they said their prayers, the Our Father and every...we had to stand there, we didn't have to say anything, but we had to stand up, for instance, Protestant children had also in the afternoon religious school because there was a minority, Jews and Protestants...**

And so you also had religious school?

**We had religious school and that was the first time I really met Jewish kids and so my mother started sending me to Jewish camps during the summer and it was wonderful to have Jewish kids, to finally meet Jewish kids and not be the outsider.**

Your neighborhood where you grew up, there weren't very many Jewish families?

**Totally, no, we were the only Jewish people there and my mother got along with them fantastic, naturally, and I had only Christian friends. I had one little girl that was half, the father was the son of a Jew, but...she had no religion whatsoever. [unclear]**

When you were growing up, do you remember experiencing antisemitism?

**Extremely, extremely. They used to, when I used to go, they used to say, like mean songs. "Sarah, let the geese run so they don't run into the river," or something, and they used to sing, "Jew, Jew, spit in your hand, tell your mama that is good." That was continuously, the antisemitism was born in the Austrians, much worse than in the Germans. Hitler was Austrian too. But this was it, they drink it with mother milk, the antisemitism.**

Did...how about your parents friends? Or did they mainly....

**My mother had lots of *goyische* friends, lots of, my father did too. We had a few Jewish friends but we did not live in a Jewish neighborhood. So when we wanted Jewish people we went to our cousins and neighbors, you know, from them and they lived in a Jewish district, we did not live in a Jewish district.**

So there was a Jewish district?

**There was definitely, oh yeah. It was called Leopoldstadt and Brigittenau and our family lived all over there, the expensive area, you know, my yeah, but yah...**

I see, but you didn't live in a Jewish area?

**No, definitely, strictly *goy*. They accepted Jews, let's say they tolerated you as a Jew. "Excuse me, are you Jewish?" That's what they would say. That's how they would, like it was an insult, if you're Jewish. That's how it is.**

And you had, you felt a lot, you experienced a lot of harassment?

**Oh sure. I used to sit in the bus like this so they don't see I'm a Jewish girl.**

I was going to ask how they knew you were Jewish, with the...

**Well, I had...no, I wore...but I used to do that. I mean we spoke the same dialect, and my teacher one time she heard me speak dialect, there is a Viennese dialect, she said, "I don't want you to speak that dialect." But I said I speak dialect too. As soon as you spoke high German, which I always did, you were a Jew.**

If you spoke high German, you were a Jew?

**A Jew. When you spoke the Viennese dialect, you were not considered a Jew.**

Did you feel antisemitism from your teachers at school?

**Yeah, oh, did I ever feel! When I was in that special high school, the special prep school, one teacher wore the, the swastika under his lapel and he hated me one time, he gave a French exam, and I took my vocabulary book and wanted to put it in my desk. And he saw me holding it and he said, "You are cheating." He took this enormous book and hit me on the head.**

Is that right?

**I was twelve years old, I will never forget. I know his name too, Karas. He must have been a Greek guy because he had black, curly hair, always like a black curls, Professor Karas. I did not cheat. I just took it, it was still on my desk, and put it inside. But can you imagine? To hit a little girl with a big book like that? And so many mean things. That's why the German people could take things to wherever they moved. See, in Austria they treated the Jews so badly, if somebody had a beard and *payes*, they had to scrub all the stuff from the street away, you know, because the former party had all kinds of red signs, crosses and stuff, so they mistreated, they killed them like terrible, just awful when the Nazis came.**

Was it so bad before they came?

**No, it was hidden, the antisemitism was hidden. It was there but it was not as, it was there but it was hidden, it was not in the open as much, oh, sometimes they used to talk bad**

**about Jews and I used to say, "I'm Jewish." "Oh, excuse me!" "The lousy Jews" and stuff like that, you know?**

They tried to cover it up a little bit...?

**They tried to cover it up and say, "I'm sorry, I didn't know you were Jewish." And that happened to me in the United States too at one time. This is not only in Europe. I had a friend, very good friend and she found out one time, she said, "What is your religion, Felicia?" And I said, "I'm Jewish." From that moment, she was not my friend anymore. So you could see there is antisemitism here too.**

Sure.

**That didn't happen to me anymore.**

At least it's not state antisemitism.

**It is not that you say Oh, you are Jew, OK, go, you know? My mother wore native costumes, she didn't look Jewish, and gym shoes. Because a Jew dressed up a little better, nice dresses, and they had nice shoes on, so as soon as you had a good pair of shoes, you were a Jew because they were in a better situation - financially.**

Were the Jewish families that you knew mainly....?

**Yeah, they lived a better life, let's face it.**

They were better...? They lived a better life?

**They tried to have a better life, they worked hard, you know, so they had a better life.**

And probably?

**Like here, you know. They work hard at the same job. Try to live like a *mensch*. They used to, the Viennese used to take their salary over the weekend, they drank like crazy and then they had no money anymore so there was nothing left. They were drinking beer and wine.**

It's an old story.

**My father used to make a joke when his customers, he said, "So how many bottles of wine did you drink?" They said, "Thirteen bottles of wine." Oh, can you imagine!**

His customers in the feed business?

**Yah, no in the store.**

Oh, when he had the department store?

No, this was the regular men's furnishing store, he had all kinds of stores, lots of store, antique store, coffee house, sometimes he had seven stores at the same time. He wanted to be rich quick and it didn't work out.

Hard to do.

Not in Vienna.

So, how did you spend your free time?

There wasn't much free time. In the end I came home at 5:00. I had a long trip from my Jewish school in the Jewish neighborhood, then I did homework. And then I, I did homework usually with my *goyishe* friend, girl friend. We went to the same school, and then I'd come home again. My father picked me up at 9:00, very strict, 9:00 from her house. I was never alone. I had no dates, no boyfriends, nothing.

They didn't let you date or anything at that age?

No, no, not at that age, fifteen or sixteen years of age.

My mother didn't let me date at that age either.

No, I mean in Prague I used to be, I waited and with a nanny too, my father picked me up and every time brought me home. They were very strict. I had no interest. We were adoring our teachers. We stood around in front of the teacher's house and wait until she gets out, we can say hello, we can carry her bag and stuff. We were decent little girls, you know, kids, all of us.

Nice kids.

Yeah, nice kids.

You have good memories of the holidays?

Oh, fantastic, wonderful, especially Seder, was just a treat. My grandma had put it all in the attic, you know, dishes, everything. She had a special thing in the attic and she was so kosher, there was kosher and then special for *trayf* not for *trayf* but for *milchig* and *flayshig*. I know that when the woman came with the fish to the house and my grandmother selected the fish, she'd just hit the fish on the head and kill the fish or the chickens, the same thing.

So it was fresh!

And then she would *koshermachen*, the blood was running off from the meat. That's kosher, particularly in the [unclear]. She was a holy woman, extremely, extremely orthodox.

So, what was it like when the Nazis came to power in... When was it, '36?

No, '38, 1938. On the 11th of March, 1938. Would you like me to translate it for you?

Sure.

**OK. At this time I was in a school for Jewish children. My school was immediately an SS headquarter. After many weeks we were allowed the school year to end. I was a fantastic student. I have the copy of my last report card and I wanted to be a teacher in our school. And I had to work five more years to be... [unclear]. Then the story with my father.**

So what happened? Did things...?

**We met my father in Prague.**

Well, but did things, when the Nazis came to power, did things change? I mean did the laws change all of a sudden?

**Immediately. There were changes, that the Nazis came to power. The next day they came to my grandfather, they had big trucks. They told, loaded all the merchandise from three stores in trucks and emptied it all out, and said to my grandfather, "Out! You cannot be in the store anymore!" That was it.**

They took all his stuff.

**Every merchandise. My grandfather had remodeled end of 1937, fantastic, you know, front all brand new, like one big enormous store, it was so beautiful, and they put, it was a green, kind of a green store, "Jude" you know what "Jude" is? In red letters about this big (gesture showing size), "Jude" on every store *Jude, Jude, Jude*, so a goy was not supposed to go there.**

And they took everything away anyway?

**Everything vanished, that's right, they *schlepped* it away. And that was it. And then we had a, the cat, wouldn't even, he had a cat, he grabbed the cat and went to their house.**

Then what did they do?

**Nothing, they had no income. Nothing, my grandparents, that was it, what they had to live was there. There was a kitchen for Jews that they gave you mostly rice and prunes or something. They fed the people. My father went into the country and made like he's a *goy*. Otherwise we had nothing to eat. But he was only that, three months with the Nazis only so we had nothing. We sold things, that was all. We tried to sell things.**

You sold the things that you had?

**Yeah, to live, jewelry and stuff, yeah, that's how we lived. Horrible. It was horrible. And there was an incident, a horrible incident, when they let us go from, do I say too much?**

No, no, please go ahead.

**When my grandfather, when our landlord said, he always wanted our apartment, it was beautiful, he said, "You have to leave by the first of August." So we schlepped a few things to my grandma's house and as soon as we came to my grandma's house, one of the neighbors said, "Oh, we get addition here, we get an addition." My mother said, "Nazi." And the next day we were commanded to go to the Gestapo and they said, "You called the lady an "Arisch, swine." My mother said "I never took that word *Arisch* into my mouth." *Arisch* was an Aryan.**

Aryan, yeah.

**He said to us, we were at the Gestapo headquarters which was across from where we used to live, he said, "If you don't leave in eight days you are going to a concentration camp." That's why we left at night to follow my father.**

But you father left a few months...

**In July. We left on September 8th, September the 8th.**

So he left almost immediately...

**He was in Prague. He was in Prague.**

After...

**Well, he had to because they wanted to put him in a concentration camp where he ended unfortunately in a concentration camp, in Treblinka.**

So he was told that...

**He was told that he would be put. He had lots of *goyishe* friends who loved him, because he looked to them like one of us, you know. He was one of them, blonde, blue-eyed Jew, you only rarely see that, so they told him that. "You better disappear because you are going to be picked up tomorrow."**

So how come you didn't all go with him? Or was that just...

**We could not - we wanted to, I mean I was still in school, we didn't know it was gonna be that bad that they gonna go attack women and children. I mean we wanted to, we waited to go to America, then my mother had that problem with the quota.**

Because she was Polish...

**We waited a little, so we waited a little until September to go and then my mother did not want to go and I, I was sixteen at the time, forced her to go to...**

To...

**to Prague, over the border. She said, "I don't want to do anything, I don't want to do anything", she said. I said, "You're gonna go." So I became the mother and she was the daughter. She was not strong enough. So we walked over the border, jumped off the train...**

You crossed the ...

**Jumped off the train before it hit ...**

The station?

**The end of Austria, of the station and then we walked. A horrible accident happened, we were in the train and a Nazi approached us, checking us out and said, "Maybe the ladies are Jewish?" And I said, I said, "How can you offend us that much?" And I want to tell you my mother had her book, the only thing she saved, a Jewish prayer book. And she said, "If the guy opens up my purse, we are finished." My mother looked at me like "That kid is really something, you know." I'd saved our lives.**

That took a lot of...

**There was a Jewish man on the same train and he said, "What are you, Jewish?" He said, "No, I'm a Zionist. Oh God, they grabbed him. So, it was horrible. Then there was a Jewish collection, Smaya, which is on the border. And then they gave us the money to go to Prague and join my father, totally unexpected.**

So...

**He did not expect us.**

He didn't expect it but you had been thrown out of your apartment.

**And the Gestapo, so there was nothing, left everything. The Gestapo said "Out," you know?**

Get out, yeah.

**So we were in the train with nothing and there was a, they asked us, "How come you don't speak Czech?" And I said, my mother said, named some German town there where they spoke only German on the border of Germany and Czechoslovakia. And we talked to a soldier. We made ourselves really like we belonged. Then with a lady with a doggie like we were relatives of hers. It was...and you know we went between guns, not, what do you call those big, big...cannons, it was just close to the war, it was so close to the war. They had that war with the Sudetenland which was the German area of Czechoslovakia, so we had to go between all the cannons.**

That was when Hitler later took over Czechoslovakia...  
**They did Sudetenland, you know?**

That's right.

**They had many Jews from Sudetenland killed in the war.**

So you...?

**And so then in Prague they finally, the Quakers and the Salvation Army, they gave us food, one meal a day and they treated us wonderfully, that's why I've always contributed to the Salvation Army, they treated us like human beings. They had flowers on the tables for us and we had lots of nice people. And we were just rehearsing to make an operetta, the Gypsy Baron, that was one of the singers, and we had a, in a very lovely place and all of a sudden the door opens and the Nazis come in. That's when Czechoslovakia was invaded by the Nazis. Guess what they did to us? They loaded us all on a truck and put us all on the border and said, "This is the end." And they didn't shoot us, but they said you have to go immediately and my father had no passport, nothing, because he went illegally over the border. We, we had gotten our passports from my uncle who worked at the passport office as a Jew, they take care of Jews, and he had sent us a passport, so we went to Milano, that's how I got to Italy.**

How about your father, did he...?

**My father went to Poland, he went East. He was a couple weeks in Kielce, and ended up in Lwów [Lviv, Ukraine] which is east of [unclear] which was eventually partitioned by the Russians, became a Russian zone, so he was employed by the Russians, then came World War II, 1939, and that was the end. The Germans invaded Eastern Poland and put my, my father was hiding in the woods for over two years. It was only in the '40s and they finally, they got him in Treblinka, there was a big killing and he smuggled out from the concentration camp a card that the Nazis got him, in our own language. He called Hitler "Victor" and I was married to a Victor, which is a strange coincidence. So he wrote "Victor finally got me" and I knew what that meant.**

So that's how you knew what happened?

**There was a big killing in Treblinka, where they murdered all the Jews, and in Brody, which was near Treblinka. That's how I found out what happened to him.**

When did you find out about that?

**1942 and on September 22, 1942, I dreamt that my father was screaming in my dream "I want to see my kid again." I can't talk about it. That was the dream, my father's killing, so... But, in the meantime, this was '40, my mother, it was my, can I tell you the story?**

Please.

**That happened to my mother and I?**

What happened?

**I was in Milano with my mother. Okay. We had very little to eat and looked [unclear] flesh and then my aunt came later on too. My mother was pregnant when we left Prague, four months pregnant, and she started showing, so the Jewish, Jewish community got her a job in England as a domestic. And I was... and I got a scholarship to go to England, so my mother left as a pregnant woman, heartbroken to leave me alone there, with my aunt from Vienna, she came and I was alone with my aunt and then came, the war broke out. She went in July and then in September the war broke out in Italy and England - no communication anymore. So I lost the scholarship in England and my mother and I were separated. OK?**

Yeah.

**Then I was there, oh gosh, over hundred... 1939, we wrote to my uncle who lived in Switzerland and my mother got the baby on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December, 1920...1939.... He was just sixty years old, my father... they put her in a beautiful place, the English, and they treated her very well. Then when the war broke out, they put her in a kind of concentration camp because she was an Austrian citizen. Can you imagine that?**

In England?

**In England. She was in a kind of a concentration camp because she was Austrian. The stupid English did not recognize that the woman was a Jew.**

She was an Austrian Jew.

**And unfortunately, I have to tell you the truth, I don't tell it to most of the people, on October the 15th, my mother committed suicide. Left a nine month old baby, she couldn't take it anymore.**

In the concentration camp?

**And she left a nine month old child. [Unclear] And some Czech refugees that were there. They were considered just problems, you know. Anyway...**

How did you know? How did you find out?

**They sent me a card. I have still copies of that, there and in the meantime, it was possible for me to get to Portugal with a fake visa from a very lovely consular who took, took pity and gave me a visa, transit visa, to go to Portugal and to go to Panama, all fake. And so I could leave. I left alone on a train to Lisbon.**

How old were you then?

**I was seventeen. So Lisbon there was a war in Spain. Finally, I arrived in Portugal. There**

**was a committee for Jews and they were very nice. We had, at last we got something to eat and they gave us a place to work. My aunt was there, came a little later, she came to Portugal.**

What did you do in Portugal?

**Nothing. Then they confined us in a place, you know, when the war came we were confined in a small town and then it was nice, we were young people, we had, there was a casino, you could go dancing, it wasn't bad in Portugal. They treated us fantastic. So that was it.**

So how long did you stay in Portugal?

**I stayed in Portugal from 1940 to 194... to the end of 1942. Then a distant relative sent me a visa for Ecuador. So I got Portuguese, Italian and then came the Spanish. I stayed in Ecuador eight years.**

You stayed in Ecuador eight years because you had a distant relative there?

**Yeah.**

How did the relative even find out, even find out that you were...

**Well, we were in contact.**

You wrote to everybody...

**Yeah, I wrote to everybody. I wrote to my relatives in Australia, all over, so... he took me there but they had me, I came on a Saturday and by Monday they had me already working as a cutter in some job or something. Since I was, I was a dressmaker, I graduated, I was working to be a teacher so I could do something to support myself. I worked the whole time, by the way. I was nurse, and I was a nanny and all kinds of things.**

You mean in Portugal?

**Yeah, all the time, in Milano, even in Prague, I was, during the day I used to go to the people sewing, I was a young kid.**

Because you had to do something to make some money?

**[Unclear] Yeah, I survived. And then, in Ecuador, I lived in Ecuador and married my husband.**

Where did you meet your husband?

**At a German masquerade party.**

In?

**A Jewish, German Jewish masquerade party in Quito.**

In Ecuador, really? How did he end up in Ecuador?

**He ended up directly from Germany. They treated the German Jews better. The German Jews were treated still human. They were not treated like we were, and he could take trunks along with things. And my husband had his own, he was there fourteen years and he had his own art studio...**

In Ecuador?

**Oh yeah, all the big signs he made, neon signs and everything. In the meantime, when I met him he was already an established man, you know? And I had, and I was working as a bookkeeper. I did not live with my relatives. Just very shortly, once I was twenty-one, goodbye!**

So you went, did you live with friends or around you?

**No, I went, very lovely friends, they had a house and I had an apartment there, a little apartment and they kept me like... (end of this side of tape)**

Your friends in Ecuador?

**I lived alone, well, in like a pension, they rented me like a little apartment.**

Like a little apartment?

**An apartment, yeah.**

And then you...?

**I lived, yeah, they had a house across the street and rented the apartment. And the husband used to go there only for drinking and smoking, her husband, he liked me. But when we met, can you imagine, I was [unclear], I just wanted to see it and we met over there and it was so wonderful to see each other, both grandmas and we were all young, you know, eighteen. I was one of the family, they treated... Catholics**

They were Catholics?

**They are Catholics, they are wonderful. She said always to me, "Felicia, you are a wonderful girl, you have one mistake you make, you are not a Catholic." I said, I will be, be what I am now, I will die like that!**

That's not something you're gonna change.

**Yeah, they could, they couldn't, yeah a change to be a Catholic.**

After all this.

**The only big mistake I made, yeah.**

What happened to, how did, what happened to your grandparents? And the rest of the family?

**My grandparents, it was very unfortunate, my grandmother, they walked over the border to Belgium and were caught. And they were all put in a concentration camp. My sixty-three year old mother [sic – means grandmother], who was a sickly woman, my aunt, my uncles, everybody.**

Now, I'm getting confused, didn't you go with your mother to Prague?

**Yeah.**

OK.

**But this happened in the meantime, this had nothing to do with it. My grandma stayed in Austria...**

Because I thought you said your mother.

**Grandma, my grandma, my grandmother, stayed in Vienna and had an operation and died in 1939 of that.**

So she stayed in Vienna?

**When I was in Italy, they told me, "You've got to go back to your grandmother and help her." I said, I'm not gonna go back, you know? They would kill me. I wasn't stupid. I worked for Ger, German goys who were very nice to me, by the way, much nicer than some of the Jews. I was a nanny for them and they were Germans so we could speak German. You know, they loved me, but, I said "No, I'm not gonna go back. They'll kill me right away." So my grandmother died and my grandfather shortly after her death was sent to Auschwitz. The Jews, the Jewish community just gave the Nazis a list, and the list, they sent them all to concentration camps.**

The Jewish...?

**That's how they treated the Jews who were left in Vienna!**

The Jewish community gave them a list?

**Yeah, the Jewish community.**

How? Why?

What they called *Kulturgemeinde*. It's like a JCC would give a list of all the Jews that they know, and my grandfather was one of them. And they killed him in Auschwitz...

So they...

...he was only sixty-four, he wasn't that old, so that's what they did. Now, the, the main guy came to Portugal, the man from that community, from that Jewish community. You should see what the people told him in Portugal. All these people who were, saved themselves, you know? They told him, "What did you do to us?" [unclear]

So what did he say? He probably said...

Nothing, he disappeared. Mr. Lowenstein, I remember his name - Lowenstein. The tragedy is that my uncle was the chief of immigration in Vienna, and he did not get us out. We asked him, "Please, can we go to Shanghai?"

He said, "There is no future in Shanghai."

We had a wonderful future, my mother killed herself, my father died. That was, this is our future. That's not a future. In Shanghai, my girlfriend Eva was in Shanghai, they were in Shanghai, they saved themselves,

And they did alright? They saved themselves?

They saved themselves, sure, they saved themselves, even their mother, everybody. Couldn't he have done something for us? This was a Jewish, an orthodox Jew, he was so *frum*. [Yiddish: ultra-observant].

Maybe he didn't know, he probably didn't know.

Oh, he knew exactly, because my mother had concentration book, books - may I give you some drink or something?

No, I'm fine for now. Whenever you want to stop, just let me know.

No, I have time. That's it, that, that, the Jewish orthodox man, the *macher* [Yiddish: big shot] from, from the *Kulturgemeinde*, from the Jewish community who was handling the German immigration with all the German Jewish actors, could not get for his own sister-in-law this... He went to, he went to Australia naturally, so he survived and opened up a jewelry store. His daughter married a doctor. Oh sure, he survived, naturally he survived. In fact, his piano teacher sent him there - he paid her the fare and she sent him a visa for Australia. There are many irregularities happened, believe me, unforeseen, terrible things, and just so mean, the whole thing.

Yeah.

And frankly, I have a good nature. I mean I, I'm a survivor, really, as you can see, so I

**survived all this time...**

You're a ... you were a tough kid back then.

**I had to be, because my mother said, "You wanted to move, you wanted to get out, you decide." We come to Milano, she gives me all the money, she had, a little money and "You take care of us." So I said, I'm only sixteen years old! But my mother was not able to handle that kind, the whole thing.**

So what happened to your little brother?

**My little brother was not adopted. I did not give my consent. He was staying with very nice Sudetenland *goyim*, and my mother had naturally a *bris milah* [Hebrew: ritual circumscion], for him but he was, and that was it.**

You don't know what happened to him?

**The *goyim* even sent him for a *bar mitzvah*, and he didn't want to go *bar mitzvah*. Oh yeah, I know he became an actor. He played in *The Longest Day*, he played in *Guns of Navarone* and ..**

In the movies?

**In the movies, a movie actor, I have a whole, well, would you like to see my stuff?**

Okay, let's take a look. (tape stops briefly)

**(Tape restarts) You know, he even walked like my Daddy. He was such a nice guy, and he lived in a fabulous neighborhood in London, fabulous, Millionaires Alley, they call it. But somehow, in '87 or something, there was some crisis and he lost the money. He used to convert cheap buildings into nice places for people to live, as an architect, an architect, you know? And then that, something happened, that he lost all the money and he called me in '91 and said, and I had just broken my leg, was in the hospital, and he called and he said, "Can you give me your Visa?" And I had very little money at the time. I said, "No, I cannot do that." Because he would just take everything away...**

Yeah.

**...you know? I didn't know him that well. I saw him once in my life, you know? How can you do that? And from that moment, I don't know, he says, "I'm in trouble...." I'm so sorry, I just broke my leg. I'm in the hospital. That was the last time.**

And so you haven't heard from him?

**Well, my son tried a little bit to hear something, but we have not heard anything and I was even in Majorca one time where he used to live sometimes, and in London and I couldn't find him...that was...**

Well, let's go back to...  
**The end of that sad story, yeah?**

Yes, I was going to go back to Quito and how you met your husband.

**Oh, Quito, yeah, OK. We were at a masquerade party, I was like a Spanish, with a big thing there, you know like, a Spanish girl, and he was like, a bum and he didn't impress me too much.**

He was dressed as a bum?

**He was dressed as a bum with a terrible overall. My husband was a very good-looking guy, that's why I looked at him like, a little bit [unclear] very handsome man and he did not impress me too much, but he seemed so harmless. I said, You can.. He said, "May I get you to your house?" And we, we lived almost within walking distance and so he took me to where I lived, I had my house downstairs. And we talked until three o'clock in the morning.**

Is that right?

**Turned out to be he was born in Vienna, not far from where I was born. It was just like was made in heaven and we liked all the same things and we started talking and talking and then we had dates, this was the 27th of February, 1949. We got engaged on the 28th of April, on my birthday and got married the 22nd of May. And they said it couldn't last! But it lasted! But we were very much alike, we like this, traveling and every single thing.**

So he was...

**He was an established artist.**

He was someone older than you?

**Six years older.**

Six years?

**Yeah, yeah.**

Okay. What happened to his family?

**His father, he went to Amsterdam, to Holland. And he must have been sent to Theresienstadt, which was another concentration camp. That, the mother died of a natural death like in 1946 or something, we kept in touch. He was from Hungary but his brothers through all this, they all lived in Hungary too, they are, they were also sent to a concentration camp. The Nazis killed everybody, pregnant women they killed, they were killed. So his sister-in-law was pregnant seven months and they murdered her and her husband I think in Auschwitz, death march, a death march. It was his only brother, then**

**he had sisters, he kept in touch with his sisters until they died. They were much older than he was because his father married a woman with four grown-up children and my husband was the only child from that marriage...**

I see. So he was much younger than they were?

**Much.**

They were his half-sisters.

**They were his half-sisters and half-brother. They were like his parents. They were born in the same year, like my mother.**

They were much older?

**Yeah, right. And his mother and father were born like in the same year, like my grandparents. So it was like an entirely different generation.**

Right, right.

**So he belonged to most of my mother's generation because of the relatives, you know.**

So what was your wedding like?

**My wedding was the most ridiculous thing! We went on an outing with a group of young people and between the mountains and the llama, we got married, because we had no parents anymore. We got married in Ecuador by a judge of the peace.**

You didn't have a rabbi?

**Oh, no, I never got married Jewish. But I always wanted to do it! But we had a *bris* for my son. So my son was born eleven months after I got married. And I was happy.**

You were still living in Ecuador then?

**I lived in Ecuador, yeah. My son was one year, my oldest son, Danny, was one year when we came here. Finally, could get from my, affidavit, uncle an affidavit and we came in 1951.**

Your uncle was in Kansas City?

**My uncle lived in Chicago, we lived in Chicago. Thirty-eight years in the area, Chicago vicinity.**

Thirty-eight years? Oh, is that right?

**Only ten years here, oh yes. I'm only here ten years, will be eleven years soon.**

Yeah, we lived in Chicago too.  
**You did? Edison, Illinois.**

Where in Illinois?

**Edison, Illinois.**

Well, we lived in the city.

**I lived in the city too, Southport, German neighborhood, Lincoln, Belmont. Sure, that's where my son was born, Southport. My son, my uncle had a store in Southport.**

We lived in, on around Belmont and Lake Shore Drive, that area.

**You know, I lived near Diversey.**

In fact, I lived on Diversey and Lake Shore Drive too.

**You know what we did? I used to go the Diversey, to the beach.**

Yeah, sure to Lake Shore Drive... Lincoln Park, right.

**Lincoln Park with the baby in the buggy. It wasn't that bad, you know, from Southport you could go there. It was Diversey down, just all the way. So you'd go to the beach? So you were in Chicago too?**

Sure.

**My son went to, was born in Michael Reese Hospital.**

Is that right? My husband was born in Northwestern Memorial Hospital.

**Any my son had a scholarship from Northwestern and he could had taken that but then he became, you know, he wanted to be a doctor. But he went to DeKalb University.**

I went to Northwestern.

**You did!**

Yeah, I was at Northwestern.

**My son went to DeKalb because he was so attached to us that he said he has to get away from home, you know? He was not such a baby anymore, but he was [unclear]. He was in DeKalb. Then we had another house, a country house we had in Sandwich, Illinois, where we used to go Friday, on the lake. Beautiful home - it was supposed to be our retirement home. Then my son goes into the army, they paid, the medical corps, the medical corps paid for his education, ends up in Fort Riley, meets his wife in Kansas, B'nai Jehudah, and**

**we had to move to Kansas.**

So you moved to Kansas because of your son?

**Because of my son. We would've never moved, why would you, we had a fantastic retirement home already prepared, four bedrooms, a beautiful home, and we had to move.**

Because you wanted to be close by?

**Yes, I wanted to be seeing my grandchild born, which we did. So we came July 1989. He was born September. My first grandson and he's a gorgeous guy, they're both gorgeous!**

My daughter was born in December '89. She was born December 29, 1989. So she's gotta be, your grandson is ten?

**My grandson is ten, yeah.**

Yeah, the same age, pretty much.

**And the other one is eight.**

Mine are ten and five, my children...anyway, but I don't need to record that, about my children.

**But you have like two boys, yeah?**

No, girls, two girls.

**Oh, how lovely!**

That's funny.

**Do they go to the Jewish Community Center?**

The Hebrew Academy. The older one went to the Hebrew Academy and the little one goes to K1 preschool.

**But they live too far. My son lives in Shawnee in a beautiful home there, so that was too far. But they changed for the Beth Torah because more younger people you know, at B'nai Jehudah, the people are very old, and he has never met anybody so he wants to, the kids should be exposed to some children of their own age.**

Kids, sure. So what was Chicago like when you came?

**Chicago - a new life- uh, I made my first salary, \$0.65 an hour. I was a real rich woman. I had, I sold dollies at Diebold's. Remember Diebold's?**

I remember Diebold's.

**My husband worked at Diebold's for seven years as an artist, commercial artist, and I did all kinds, I was a manager for fashion store in, what was that? Gosh, I forget that...how can I forget that? In a, not in Woodfield... but, one of those... Can you imagine, how can I forget that stupid little, and I remember all kinds of stupid things, and I can't remember that.**

Woodfield, Old Orchard.

**Old Orchard, the other one on, off uh, anyway. I worked in a very beautiful store, I was manager there. And I was the highest paid employee, \$2.90 per hour, can you imagine? When I wanted a raise he said, "You're the highest paid employee!" Not Northland, what was it called? Alright, anyway. Then, then I, then I became an insurance agent, and adjuster, and after the adjuster I worked for the government, as an employee relations. I went to McDonalds and different places to the meetings, were taped on the recorders and the televisions, tell the people that the people should hire people over fifty.**

Yes.

**Because they need the jobs very badly. Now you don't have to do that, they hire any kind of people.**

That's right. Did you, was it difficult for you in Chicago did...?

**It was very difficult. To find a job, you know, we were not so perfect in the language yet. We knew English, mostly from movies and learned it too a little bit in school. But it was very hard, especially for my husband and then he finally got this job at Diebolds, they paid him like \$75.00 a week, so he worked until like four or five o'clock and he had another job at E J Korvette, remember E J Korvette?**

Sure, yeah, sure.

**In the evening and Saturday he used to go for Watkins or sell other stuff, so three jobs. And I had always only one job. I worked like three days when he was home. Mondays and Thursdays and Saturday and Sundays. So, but he was home with the kids on the weekends. I didn't leave my kids alone. But, it was tough. We had an apartment for five years. Then we got our first house.**

Where was your first house?

**In Edison, Illinois.**

OK.

**Very happy. Lived there for seven years. It was a nice house.**

That's nice.

**It was a nice home. We paid only like \$1,800 down payment. The whole house was \$19,000.00 like twenty five...**

I remember our first house was...

**It was a nice house, it was a split level, [unclear] house, beautiful house.**

Yeah, our first house was in West Rogers Park.

**Oh yeah? Typical.**

Yeah, Yeah It was like \$22,000.00.

**It was *goyishe* too, I always lived in a *goyishe* neighborhood.**

Yeah, it seems that way, you always lived...

**I always since, I don't know what, but it was off the Eisenhower Expressway and my husband worked for General Auto Advertising Company which was on the way, on the Eisenhower Expressway, so we had to move. We had first he put a down payment on Park Ridge, but this was too far removed, so we lost ten dollars, I think he gave him. At that time, everything was so cheap.**

No, well then was a lot of money.

**Yeah. He worked for Sprint, [unclear], for GTE Automatic Electric.**

So, in Chicago? So since you came here, you've been retired?

**Yeah, my husband retired from Sprint in 1988. Then he worked as a salesman. He couldn't give up me working and I worked until 1989 [unclear]. Then we sold our nice house and came here. [Unclear]**

Let me just make sure.

**Have you asked me everything? My houses I just sold. [tape hold]**

Your own life, because you meant that.

**Because I thought I could do better, but I couldn't do it.**

Most of this I think I've covered...um, so what were the biggest challenges coming to America?

**The biggest challenge - finding a job, it was bad. 1951 was not easy, we lived in an apartment with no heat. We had to buy an oil stove. Across from my uncle, right near the store, on Southport Avenue, a cleaning store. And it was very hard to adjust and it was the war, the Korean War at the time. I had my things packed for a whole year, my suitcases. I**

said I go back to Ecuador, we live like human beings in Ecuador. We had a beautiful town and maids, all the time, maids, you know?

But why did you decide to leave Ecuador?

Ecuador has no future. It was the last year, a polluted lousy city, the dollar is like 100,000.00 *sucre*, horrible, absolutely horrible. It used to be a very lovely, then it was 2,800 kilometers up in the air, so you could not breathe. The air is so thin there, like living in Aspen or in Colorado. It was impossible. That's, I think, why my husband got that heart condition too. We lived there fourteen years, we had to go. The whole time we want to go to America. We lived in a third world country, they were good to us, I mean, they saved our lives. My uncle died also of... emphysema. He always smoked and he had his voice box removed. It's terrible.

This was your uncle that sent...?

My uncle that sent me there, to Ecuador. But the thing is that my relatives over there. I have some distant relatives, they have to, they have a big wall, they have three locks, otherwise, they rob them overnight. It is a terrible life. It is a real, bad life in Ecuador, especially now.

Did you experience some discrimination when you came to Ecuador?

No, no, no, there is a Jewish Beneficenza, they call it - *Beneficenza*, and it was a group of maybe 1,000 Jews and we belonged to that, and it was wonderful.

How about when you came to America?

In America? You mean antisemitism?

Any Jewish antisemitism?

No, no. I cannot remember any. Oh, incidental, like a girlfriend who didn't want to talk to me anymore, things like that. No, we had no...

But in terms of getting work or anything like that?

No, in fact, I was always, you know, "Wow, she speaks six languages," you know? Everybody was so nice, so friendly. They worked, everybody. I was a manager of a fantastic store. At that time, the [unclear] alone was \$27,000.00 where I worked. First I worked at, maybe you know him, [unclear]. I had my first job in Hillside, in Hillside.

Yeah, I know that name but I am not sure from where.

Yeah, all over, they had in every department.

Yeah.

**And then I worked for Emerson. They had a beautiful store next to [unclear] shopping mall that I cannot remember. So it was nice, no discrimination whatsoever.**

That's good.

**Since I don't have a Jewish accent, you know? I assimilated well.**

So you liked living in America?

**Yeah, we belonged to a congregation out in Edison. I know, maybe you know Temple Hal Zion? We used to belong. My son was *bar mitzvah*-ed there.**

I knew of it.

**Conservative congregation.**

I knew the mall in West Rogers Park and in Skokie where we lived later.

**My, our accountant lived in Skokie. What was his name? I forgot, I forget these things.**

There's probably a lot of Jewish accountants living in Skokie.

**Oh, God.**

What happened, I mean you mentioned your mother was one of seven children, what happened to the other aunts and uncles?

**Well, they were very lucky. See my, most of them, except my mother and my poor aunt died of cancer in '51 in Canada. My aunt went to, eventually to Australia to my uncle and got married in Portugal. My youngest aunt who was like my second mother who was with me in Milano and then my uncles, were they sent them to England - They were in a concentration camp in Dachau and in Buchenwald, both concentration camps, three uncles of mine. The fourth one went to Switzerland and lived a very nice life in Switzerland with his wife. But the three uncles who were in Dachau and in Buchenwald got some fake affidavits, everybody got at the time and they came to England and put them also in a camp, Kitchener camp, where they survived and they were naturalized Canadians. That's why most of my *mishpoche* [Yiddish: family] was from, lived in Canada. That's why my oldest son lives in Canada.**

Your older son lives in Canada too?

**Yeah, he lives in Toronto. He has a job for twenty-five years. We sent him over there because we lived in an Italian town in Edison, Illinois and there was Mafia and one of his friends went to prison and I said I don't want my kids exposed. He was such a fine boy. So we sent him to my Uncle George. I just got a letter from him. He is now ninety years old. I hope he gets to be a hundred and twenty at least. [unclear]**

Is this from your mother's...?

**This is from my aunt, from my youngest aunt who was with me in Milano. The husband who got married again and married a lovely lady. We were in Europe together and his wife is also 90 and suffers a lot had a stroke, and he writes me such, he's so wonderful still, you should see the letter, how he writes! Absolutely incredible, a ninety year old guy, he has, it's just fantastic. He's like my own flesh and blood. He's a wonderful person, a real nice guy.**

It's nice that he's still around.

**So my uncle saves himself and went to Canada and the one uncle went to the United States and got me over here.**

When did you become an American citizen?

**Five years after I came. 1956.**

OK, alright.

Question here: "What, if any, postwar events have been of great significance to you? Any events happening after the war, like the Cold War, the civil rights movement, feminism, the State of Israel?" How about any of those?

**Well, I belonged to all the time I was brought up as a Zionist. I belonged to all the Jewish things in Vienna, you know? Learned the Hebrew songs. I was in the Youth Aliyah.**

So you were always a Zionist?

**I was always an active Zionist, yeah.**

Did you have an opportunity to go to Israel? No, I don't mean to travel...

**Yes! Yes, when I was sixteen years old, they took the children to Israel and my mother said we will never be so separated. A year later we were separated.**

You were separated anyway.

**She... Even in Prague, I was still a youngster. They did not take me as a domestic to England as a domestic because I was too young, but my girlfriend, my best girlfriend, Friedl was sent to Israel. They gave her (tape stops) The Youth Aliyah from Hadassah. Do you belong to Hadassah?**

Yes.

**OK. Youth Aliyah as I told the ladies once, what group are you in? It used to be Hertzl and now it's Chaim, Chaim is now. Hertzl disbanded because the ladies are so old.**

I don't know..all I know is that I am a lifetime member.

**Oh, you're a lifetime member? I'm not a lifetime member but I belonged to what is dead, we were, I was such a big *macher* and you know what, I was president, I was everything. Here it wants only money. I belonged like thirty years to, we had a wonderful group in a neighboring suburb in Edison. In Elk Grove Village, you're probably familiar, where most of the Jews came then from the Jewish part. We almost lived in Elk Grove Village and in Hoffman Estates, you're familiar with Hoffman Estates?**

Yeah, my father was a carpenter. Sure, sure. He built a lot of houses there.

**I worked in Mount Prospect.**

Well, we were in West Rogers Park and In Skokie, that's where we were.

**Yeah, I know, our accountant was from Skokie. But I worked in, I worked in Rolling Meadows, not Mount Prospect. In Rolling Meadows, when they built that enormous, big beautiful building, I worked as an adjuster for Fireman's Fund.**

Sure, right, yeah I know the area.

**How long were you there, how many years?**

We moved here in '85 so I grew up in Chicago.

**So just, you're almost...Is your husband from there too?**

Yes.

**Oh, fantastic!**

Highland Park.

**Highland Park, yeah. The only Jews live there. But since my uncle lived in Southport, "You come only where I live," you know. We had to live with the *goyim* there for so many years, in Chicago.**

Well, OK, let's see, you told me, so your first, your oldest son was born in Ecuador?

**Our son in Ecuador. He was one year here and he was not even diaper, we had to give some diapers to him, when we came, didn't walk yet. He learned to walk on the beach in Chicago. He was making one, two, [unclear] forty steps -Yes! He was so cute, he's still a cute guy. Did you see the family pictures from my sons?**

Yeah, I will, I have to take a look at that. I mean I saw some... (tape stops) That's OK, I'm fine. The, let's see, asked you about your children... So in light of your past experiences, how did

having children affect you? Do you think your experiences during the war...?

**Horrible. How it affected me? I had very bad labors, really. I was very small and I had, the the, especially the last one, God. It was horrible. The first one was OK. I was in a Catholic hospital six hours only.**

Now, but in terms of your experiences during the war, for example, how was it having your children? I mean, you didn't have your mother around anymore, your grandparents.

**Oh, that was tough. That was horrible, absolutely horrible, because now I know I must have had postpartum... [inaudible - noises on tape]**

The first one?

**Yeah, I couldn't hear the screaming and the noise. It was hard for me, it was really hard.**

Especially since you grew up...

**Because I had no mother. And my husband used to help me with preparing formula. Then I had inverted nipples so I could not give him mother milk. I was torn from here to here (gesture of width) we had, and the kid was a small child, like 7lb 6oz something and the doctor said, "This kid is losing weight." And I didn't know, what do I know, you know? That I had inverted nipples, so I didn't feel too good, sick and depressed. I was really down, believe me. So it was bad for me.**

Well, especially since you had such a wonderful...

**But the next, this one was 9 lb and 21 inches, this was murder and I did not see the child until the next day. He was born in the afternoon and at night, like 4:30, and I didn't see him until 10:00 next day. And I thought there is something wrong, but it was wrong with me because I was all blue from everybody examining me. And I was in a bad situation with the second child. He was such a big kid and I was only 120 lbs.**

You're a little tiny thing.

**Yeah.**

Do you, did you, talk to your children about the war and your experiences?

**They're not too interested. Danny, maybe, the older one, but its old hat to them you know? They're really not too interested. We were, when we, when we used to speak Spanish together. "Oh, don't speak hiding language, speak German," they said.**

Do they speak German?

**They understand, yeah. But when we came here my son did not speak until he was three years old. And the doctor said, "You have to speak..." the kid doesn't speak! We have to teach English to him. So we sent him to an English teacher, an American kindergarten and**

**we spoke only English, very seldom we spoke in German. Then the, but the kids said, "Don't speak hiding language." But then my son took Spanish in school because as a doctor you have to know one foreign language.**

Yeah, So he got over..

**But they, we mix it. Never knew was it Viennese, was it German, was it Yiddish, my kids, "Mommy, what is it, Yiddish?" Then we had certain things that we said Mu-ni-ci-pal. "Mu-ni-ci-pal building, municipal" That was right, right? He would say to say "mu-ni-ci-pal," things like that. And my youngest son used to say "Ya-dy" and I'd say "Lady." It was like "Yady" So he had in school a little problem in the beginning, but not much. Then they were fantastic students.**

That's good. Your memories of the Holocaust, do they, I can see that they affect your life even today.

**They affected my life terribly, but I don't let that get me. I mean I try to enjoy life, what's left, so, yes, yes, it definitely affected me. Not having a mother when we were so close. My mother, we were like two sisters, she was only twenty-two years older than me. They used to speak to her on the beach - I said, "Go away, that's my mother." They used to say, "You're a beautiful lady." They used to tell her, you know. They didn't recognize, this is my mother. She was so cute. I said, "Don't talk to her, that's my mother!" I'm jealous.**

How, how did, did the war have any affect on your practice of religion? We talked a little about that.

**Not in the least. I was more religious than ever. We belonged to the Jewish community there in Ecuador and in fact, when we were in Prague, my mother and I, we used to go to the temple and with Carlos, I was in a Jewish neighborhood, every week we used to go to the temple and then when I was a little kid, my mother said, "You pray, God will hear you, because you're a child." So nobody ever...My father used to make some remarks that I did not like about God because he did not believe. He used to say, "God is all over with." I said, "God is here...and he's there, God is all over the place" So I did not like, this was like blasphemy, you know?**

Disrespectful, yeah.

**I don't like that. I did not like that. I wanted to convert him always to be like my daughter-in-law's father. They don't believe in anything, God or anything because his parents got killed during the war. He was a Russian soldier and when he came home, they was not, they were not there. And you know how they got to tell me that? How we got this house? I was supposed to advise my in-law if he should buy the house here, in this area. I had no idea how to buy a house. My son said, "Go with him, give him, give him advice, he listens to you." I came here and saw the model home and I said, "I want the house." I signed up before him, he bought and now he has a smaller house.**

Is that right?

**He says, "I should have gotten your house" he says, because he has only two bedrooms. He does not have all that (gesture), you know? The houses are different. Cost more money. He, he doesn't like it. He used to live, you know where Verona is? He used to have a fantastic home there. Now it's just a little thing.**

It's hard to adjust. I know you told me you belong to a synagogue, do you have a favorite Jewish holiday?

**I like...actually, I like *Pesach* the best. *Purim*, we talked about *Purim*.**

Do your kids come for *Pesach*?

**No, not anymore. Since I'm alone, I don't do it.**

You don't do it anymore?

**No.**

Did you used to when your husband was around?

**All the time, we had big *Seders* and then the *Hagadah*, we did everything.**

Did your son come in from Canada?

**No, my son from Canada comes, doesn't come here now, for *Pesach*, once in a while, he will.**

Do you go there to see him?

**Oh yes, he came, he was here a few months ago, and bring me back boxes. He still has a box outside. A Danny box. (laughter) I don't know what he puts in there. They help me in any way they can. My daughter-in-law helps me a lot with folding sheets and putting them into the things, and packing and all that and my neighbor. So they were all very helpful.**

How do you feel about being an American?

**As proud as an American. I can appreciate, you know, America the beautiful, when they sing the songs, I get tears, believe me.**

I believe it. I do too sometimes.

**When they sing "American the Beautiful" and "God Bless America" and "This is My Land." Oh, sure, I'm the best American that you can have...really, because I know to appreciate! Look, when I go on cruises and stuff, when I come back, I said, "You should kiss the ground that you walk on here." The people should travel to other countries, how miserable it is. Have you traveled a lot? Especially Caribbean or Quito, Ecuador. I ...**

**(tape stops)**