

Ann Jacobson Interview

January 28, 2000

Today is Friday, January 28, the year 2000, and I am getting ready to interview Ann Jacobson, and the time is approximately 9:30 in the morning.

[Tape Pauses]

...interviewing Ann Jacobson. Ann, would you like to tell us your name at birth?

My real name was Anni Ernestine Reisner.

Oh, my gosh! You will have to spell that.

A-N-N-I. My maiden name ... I had two first names. Anni Ernestine and Reisner. R-E-I-S-N-E-R.

And where were you born?

I was born in Berlin, Germany.

And when?

April 25th, 1926.

I've had some people who wouldn't give me a... [laughing]

Who wouldn't tell you, huh? I'm very proud of it. [laughing]

And were you born in a hospital or at home?

I think I was born in the hospital and I was the second child to be born. My father had been married and his first wife died in 1918 in that big flu epidemic. And he was a widower for about five years, then he met my mother. And they got married and my mother had a baby that was a blue baby. In those days they couldn't do much with that. She died. And then a year later, almost, I was born. And then three years later my brother, younger brother, was born. So there were two sets of children in the family. My older sister, older brother, myself, and my younger brother. There were four of us.

Four children. What were their names?

My older sister was Liesl, L-I-E-S-L. And my older brother's name was Franz, now anglicized to Frank. My younger brother's name is Peter.

And your parents' names?

My father's name was Fritz Reisner. And my mother's was Eugenia Goldman Reisner.

And what did your dad do for a living?

My father was a graduate civil engineer who in fact, during World War, and this is kind of pertinent to the rest of the story, during World War I, he was hired by the German government to build, you know, oil installations in Bulgaria, Romania, and I forgot where else, and ... so he was in the essential wartime, you know, essential wartime occupation. Whatever you want to call that. And his father had been a physician in Graz, Austria. And my father wanted to become a physician and his father wouldn't let him because those were the times they didn't have anesthesia, they didn't have penicillin. And he thought it was too rough to be a doctor and forbade him to become a physician. And, instead, he became an engineer and then moved away to Germany, because he could find a job there, and married there, and had his first set of children and then married my mother.

So your father was born in Austria?

My father was an Austrian. Yes.

Now did you know your grandparents?

No. They were both gone before I was born.

And your mother was a homemaker?

My... No way. [laughing] My mother was born in Plotzk [Plock], Poland, and my grandfather, on that side, was one of the first Jews of Poland to be made a citizen. So he did not have to live in the ghetto. And he was a man of considerable means, owned property, became the member of the Federal Reserve of Poland, and died when my mother was five years old. He had been married twice before and then married my grandmother. And my mother and two brothers were born of that marriage. And my mother, being, being the youngest, he died when she was like five years old. So my grandmother kept everything going, you know, property, grants, the whole thing. But things were getting very bad in the early 1900s. And in 1909, my mother and grandmother moved to Berlin. My mother spoke six languages. She studied to become a concert pianist. She was in Berlin, a graduate from the Berlin Conservatory of Music, and had also gone to business school, you know, to become a secretary. 'Cause, you've got to make a living. I've got a picture over there. She eventually became Pola Negri, the movie star, way back - silent movies and other - her personal secretary. And I think that was what she was doing when

my dad met her. And, so she was about that time must have been 36 and my dad was about 40 when they got married. I mean, she really had us late in life, both of them.

So then she performed?

Pardon? My mother played the piano beautifully but she never made a career of it, you know. When I was a little girl and I the piano was when we played quartets, I mean, duets and stuff. But, no. Music was a very important part of our lives. And those are my, my parents.

Okay. So now, were your brothers and sisters, were they musical, as well?

No. In fact, I'm probably musical but I hate it, taking piano lessons. [laughing]

It was forced on you?

It was forced on me. And I quit at the age of 15 and, of course, today I am terribly sorry. [Laughing] There's a wonderful story, though, connected with all that. When my mother was 8 years old, which was 1895, my grandmother sent to America for a Chickering piano, which then arrived. And that Chickering piano, God, I wish I was a good writer, that piano went to Plotzk; from Plotzk it went to Berlin; from Berlin it went to Vienna –you know, I will talk about that later - and from Vienna it came to America and was in Kansas City for many, many years in my house. But, when I moved from my house, I gave the piano to my oldest son who's really the only musical person in the family at this point.

It's still in the family?

It's still in the family. It's over a hundred years old.

Oh, what a treasure.

It's gorgeous. It's a Baby Grand. It's still beautiful. It's still lovely.

Well, it sounds like you were ... were you like middle-upper income?

Yes. I would say that. I, I had a nanny and, you know, we had household help always.

So you grew up in Berlin?

No. I lived in Berlin until I was, I went to kindergarten and started ... I went to kindergarten. Then my father, who was in the ... first my dad was also in the automotive parts business for awhile. And then he was employed on a management level with Olex. Olex is like Shell Oil Company only it was the German Orient Oil Company. And he was made the District Manager of Gutenberg, which is a province of Germany. And we move to Stuttgart in 1931, probably.

So how old were you then?

I was five.

Did you remember very much about Berlin?

Oh, yeah.

Really?

Oh, I remember, you know, going to *Tiergarten*, which is the great big park in Berlin to, you know, walking. And, yes, I remember, you know, what our apartment looked liked.

Well, describe it.

Well, [laughing] in Berlin?

Yes.

It ... I remember my room was, as you walked in there was an entry hall. My room was on the left. And I shared that with my little brother after he was born. Our apartments were always very similar; whether it was Berlin or Vienna, there was always a salon. A music room where the piano was with comfortable chairs and so forth, which I would say is like today's living room. And then there was the library. That was my dad's. You know, all black furniture, bookcases and so forth. And dining room and at least two or three bedrooms. You know, one that I always shared with my brother or big sister, and bedroom which parents had. And we always had a maid living with us. So it's, you know, all that, and, of course, bathrooms and whatever, kitchen, etc.

And were your parents religious?

No. That's very interesting. My, when my father's ... first of all, I think the Reisner side came from Hungary originally. They were very assimilated. I mean they were not, they didn't convert, but they were typical of the, you know, more assimilated Jews of those times. My mother comes from a long line of rabbis. We can trace part of her mother's family back to the 17th, 18th century, you know, and they were rabbis. My mother... My father, when his wife died, was very angry at God. And in those days, you could step out of your religion and became, become like agnostic or whatever.

An atheist?

No. It was *konfessionslos* in German. *Konfessionslos* was meant without faith, without belief or faith, and that's what he did. And he did that to also with his two children.

He didn't consider himself Jewish anymore?

Oh, definitely Jewish. He just didn't believe in organized religion anymore. You know, in going to temple and practicing ritual.

Did he believe in God?

Well, in a way I think he always did.

But he wasn't practicing Jew in any way?

No.

Okay.

In fact, my household had a Christmas tree until I was seven years old.

How interesting.

And my mother still practiced religion.

She still practiced Judaism?

She went to Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah. You know that kind of thing. Taught us about the holidays. Hanukkah, I know it was always lovely. She would sit by candlelight and read the Hanukkah story to us.

And your father didn't care?

And he didn't care.

But she didn't keep kosher?

Huh?

Did she keep kosher?

Oh heaven! Nobody kept kosher. No.

Nobody kept kosher in your community?

Huh-uh. Yes.

In Berlin?

No.

Really?

No.

So there were very few religious Jews?

Well, I certainly do not remember any. Not in my circle, you know, of ...

So all of your, your parents' friends who were Jewish, they were all assimilated ...

Similar.

... and just ...

It was similar. That was typical, though, of Germany of the intellect, intelligentsia, and that group of people. So when I was, when we moved to Stuttgart, I was then seven. My mother said to my dad, "Ann is going to start religious school and then she can decide, when she's grown-up, what she wants to do." And out went the Christmas tree, and I went to religious school. I began to learn Hebrew.

Well, just, I'm just curious, you know. Was it confusing to you to have the Christmas tree and...?

No, that... [laughing]

That didn't mean anything?

Didn't mean anything. [laughing]

Didn't mean anything. Okay. It was just fun. Looked good in the house.

I went to a religious school and I think at seven I must have started seventh grade, I mean, first grade because I learned how to write, and I learned German script, you know, which is very different from the script that you write English in. So, because when I came ...

But you went to a regular public school.

I went to a regular public school but I also, you know, once or twice a week, went to a some kind of religious ...

Was it in a synagogue?

That I really don't remember. The synagogue didn't really enter into my life until I got to Vienna. I do not remember any synagogue until we came to Vienna. So whatever my mother did, she did on her own. You know, didn't take the kids with her. So in 1932, we were well ensconced. I think that's probably when our lifestyle was at its height. We lived in a house in Stuttgart up on a beautiful hill. And my brothers have been back to that house.

The house is still there?

Oh, yeah. And the ... and we had a Mercedes touring car. I've got pictures. You know, it was lovely ...

It sounds like a charmed life.

It was a lovely life. When one day, my father got a letter from his company asking him to resign because the, they were during a lot of business with the German government. And the German government said, "You must be *Judenrein*. *Judenrein* means "clean of Jews." "Free of Jews."

About what year would you say that was?

1933. So in 1933, my parents discussed what to do. And my father, being an Austrian, had a job waiting for him, without change of lifestyle, in Vienna. No change in language, family there, and my mother said, "No. No. No. It's not a good idea. It'll happen there too." And my father said, "No." She wanted to go far away. I mean after all, my mother had escaped pogroms of Poland, once. Now Berlin, twice. You know you hate to do this over and over [laughing].

Yeah. She got the message. Now, did your father think that you wouldn't experience antisemitism in Austria?

Oh, listen. Antisemitism was so much a part of life you got used to it. I mean you don't get used to it but you live with it.

I see.

So he went... so we packed up and went to Vienna. And in Vienna he started working for a company that was partially owned by his brother-in-law, which was a Belgian glass company. You know, made Belgian glass, beautiful tiles for bathrooms and floors and all those things, and he became the controller of the company. So our lifestyle didn't change. Same, same apartment [laughing].

Okay. You went back into an apartment, but it was still wonderful.

And I started going to public school. Well, the first thing that happened is I had to learn another script because I had been taught the German script, which I still can write to this day. So I had to learn the other. And, and I started there and my little brother ... how old was Pete? I was seven and Pete was four. So he didn't start kindergarten until the year after we got to Vienna. But then we walked to school together. And I also went to ... I was enrolled in religious school and we went to a synagogue 'cause I went to synagogue with my mother on High Holy Day. And when I got older with my girl friends, I would go to Sabbath services. You know we'd walk to the synagogue. And I went to public school for four years and then the parents wanted me to go to a very nice private school, but they

wouldn't accept me 'cause I was Jewish. So, instead, I went to a predominantly Jewish private school, a *gymnasium*. And I got an extremely fine education there. French, and, you know, everything. It was very progressive. And in the afternoons, after school, the Catholic girls went to a class with a priest, the Protestant girls went to a class with a minister, and we had a rabbi. And I learned to write Hebrew and read Hebrew, etc. So, everything was going along just fine until March of 1938 when Hitler took over Austria.

And how old were you then?

'38 I was 12. So my... there are two things. One was that starting that summer, my parents were called to the Gestapo every three months.

How were they handling this? Weren't they getting a little bit nervous?

Oh, very, very, very and were thinking about "where do we go?" I mean, you know, my parents' home was always a big central place for lots of people. My parents were very social. They had many, many friends.

Were most of their friends Jewish?

Not ... sort of, yes. The majority, I would say.

And they were all intelligentsia. They were all well educated?

Yes. Yes. And... and I can't remember when the first time was that they had to go.

When the Gestapo called them, what happened?

Wrote them a letter and said, "We expect you to be down at the headquarters at such and such a date.

What would happen at headquarters? Did they just question them?

No. They made an ultimatum. They said that we want, you know in the beginning, the plan was not elimination of the Jews. "Get them out of there. Get them away." And that's the early part. And they wanted, if Jews had a way of getting out of country, go.

They were letting Jews go freely?

Oh, yes.

I didn't realize that.

Well, I mean, you couldn't take everything with you. But, oh, my uncle. Yeah, in the beginning you certainly could because my uncle took lock, stock, barrel, money, everything.

This was about 1938?

In March, April and came to the United States. He had relatives here. He then spoke to a friend of his who happened to be the head of Martinson Coffee Company, which is still in existence today. One day, I saw ... I don't know whether ...

You're kidding. I never ...

I saw a Martinson coffee can on their shelf.

Oh, my gosh! [laughing]

And Mr. Martinson gave out 200 affidavits, you know. Pretty much like what we had gone through with the Russians, you know. Somebody has to vouch for you.

Yes.

Yeah. The drawback in our situation was that one of the things required was not just an affidavit, but you needed a letter of credit because in our family there were two underage children.

What was considered underage?

Under 16, because you can get social security number when you're whatever. Actually, you can get when you're 14, but 16, you know was kind ... And my uncle did not wish to get that letter because he did not ... you had to say how much money you had, where it was. He refused to do that. So that made life very complicated, to say the least. So every three months the parents... I, I don't know why they handled him with such kid gloves. It must have been June and September, twice that they went. And they always gave him three months extension. The only reason, the only reason we think that occurred was because of his service to the Fatherland. You know, in Germany. Anyway, comes *Kristallnacht*. Oh, in September of '38, no Jew, no Jewish kids were allowed to go to any schools.

Whether it was Jewish or ...

Private or public or... Forget it. And they started ... [whispering] what do they call those? Whatever they were, schools for those kinds of Jews. For Jews. We went to that school starting in September. My parents became very worried, you know, about getting out and enrolled my brother and myself in the *Kindertransport*. I'm sure you've heard. You know that's the one where they ... England took in children, France took in children, etc. And we were to go to England on March 1, of '39. On November 10th, which was the day after *Kristallnacht*, after they burned the whatever... We were in school and it was a very strange day because, slowly but surely, all day long, kids were sent ... you know, would be pulled out of class and sent home. We couldn't understand it. You know it was very odd. And when school was over we walked home and there was my mother, hysterical. My, my dad was in the hospital, thank God. He had a gallbladder attack and there was a hospital

in Graz run by the Catholic, by a Catholic order of nuns that used a very different approach. I think it was like, you drank oil, thinking that oil would flush out the gallstones. Well, evidentially, it worked. But anyway, he was in the hospital away from Vienna. So, you know, he wasn't available. So my mother was hysterical. My brother, my older brother, was living with was then and he had gone out at 10 o'clock in the morning to mail a letter and never came back. They were picking people up on the streets. Jews.

They knew who the Jews were?

I can't remember exactly how it happened that they picked him up, but they picked him up, whatever. And later in the afternoon, I would judge it was like 5 o'clock, there was a knock at the door. My mother opened the door and there stood three burly guys. Two, one was dressed in the SS uniform, which is the black uniform. The other two were dressed in the SSA [sic: SA], which was the Nazi uniform. The, you know, brown shirt. And they said, "Where's Mr. Reisner?" And my mother said, "He's in the hospital." They said, "Okay." They walked in and said, "Where's your money and your jewelry?" And my ... "we have to confiscate it." They took everything. And even the short - my father was a short radio enthusiast and they took that. And my mother in her innocence says to them, "Well, will you give me a receipt and when will I get this back?" And they said, "Lady, you should be glad we didn't throw your children out the window." And walked out. My mother ... no money, you know, because dad had made arrangements for money to be in the house because he was gone. So my mother called the bookkeeper of the company, who was not Jewish. He came right over, which was, you know, kind of courageous of the man. He came over. He gave my mother some money and that's it. So, by that time, things were getting pretty bad. My parents were terribly concerned. Actually, that's when they decided to send us on the children's transport. You know, it was a terrible time. I mean, our own extended family... People were making plans, those who could, to leave and left. My uncle, my, my father's sister, her husband and son went to Israel in what was then called the capitalist visa. If you had 10,000 *shillings*, were willing to take that to Israel, you know, so that you wouldn't become a burden at the Palestine, that you could go. And they went on that capitalist visa thing. Before they went, they would stay with us some of the time because my aunt, my mother were taking cooking classes. [Laughing] My mother never cooked in her life and now she had to learn to cook and she learned how to bake Viennese specialties because that would be a job when she would get here, you know. So they had ORT, like what is ORT, the Jewish organization, that teaches technical and vocational things. Well, they had that. And my cousin, who's about three years older than I am. Now understand, I was light-eyed, green-eyed, blue-eyed, blonde hair, which I wore in braids and I was the one who was always sent out to do things because I didn't look Jewish. So, I always took him to his place where he did his training. He became a mechanic. He worked in shipyards in Israel, in Palestine. And they left, to go. I don't think any of our friends, one friend from ... some people from Germany, you know, left earlier. One went to Australia. Some parts of the family went to South America. We waited and we waited and everything was packed. We each had our own trunk, my brother and I, with everything labeled already, the clothing, you know, to go on the *Kindertransport*. In the meantime, my brother had been picked up. He was picked up and put what they called holding places, which were like public schools, gymnasiums, and, you

know, public places where they stuffed people in there. But anybody who had any documentation to show that they were leaving was let go. Well, he was in there for two weeks and it was not very good.

And your mother ...

We didn't know.

... didn't know where he was?

No. We didn't know.

Oh, my gosh!

But we heard that people had been picked up, and, you know, so we assumed. After two weeks he came home and he was a totally beaten person. I think he still has scars on his back.

And how old was he at the time?

He was born in 1916, so he was ... was that 22? Ah, what am I saying ... 16? Yeah, he was 22. He was 22. He had, he had, he ... that's a real interesting story. He and my older sister, when we moved to Vienna, both of them went to work for Shell Oil Company And my sister was a very beautiful woman. She was in the 1939 Miss Austria and she was the runner-up.

Oh my gosh!

Anyway...

Did they know she was Jewish? [laughing]

I guess. I don't know. But, anyway ...

Was she blonde like you?

No.

Did she look Jewish?

No. She had an absolutely classic face. I mean she was very beautiful, very tall. Taller than I am. Neisel was working and so was Frank. And Shell Oil, when all this started, made arrangements for all of their Jewish employees to give them visas to either go to England, to France, or to Trinidad. Wherever they had, you know, company holdings. And my brother had planned to go to England because my mother had stepfamily there.

So, he showed them his papers and they let him go. On top of that, Franz had been in the Austrian army. So he had that to his credit. So he came home and went on to England. My sister, in 1934, was told, but the company, Shell Oil said, "We cannot have nepotism. No two members of the same family can work in the company." And my sister, who is very *chutpadik*, always said, "I am ... it's going to be a lot easier for me to find another job than my brother, Frank." She had studied photography and went to Czechoslovakia, to Prague, and got a job doing commercial photography. And she met my... she met her to-be husband there. And so in 1934, same year, '34, '35 whatever, somebody called my dad ... She would come -she would fly and visit us, you know, regularly. When someone called my dad and said, "You know, don't have Liesl come anymore because the next time she comes, they're going to pick her up for smuggling." So he wrote her not to come to see us anymore. I did not see my sister for at least nine years. And they, of course, lived in Prague, not married yet, when Hitler invaded ... after we left. When Hitler invaded the Sudeten, Germany, they escaped to Finland and lived in Finland for a year. And when the Russians invaded Finland [laughing], they escaped to Sweden. From there they went to South America and she lived in Sao Paulo for many, many years with her husband. There is a big Czech colony there. And that's the two of them. Coming back to us, lo and behold, by a miracle, in January we got a notice that we were to appear before the American Consulate for our physical examination. Well, once that happened, it pretty well was assured that we'd be going. So the parents took a chance and dis-enrolled us from the *Kindertransport*. And we, February 24th, went to the Consulate for exams and I heard my mother screaming. Well, it turns out because she was born in Poland, they were going to put her on the Polish quota, which was zilch for America. So my father did a lot of fast-talking [laughing] and they let her go. And that was sort of the beginning of everything. We booked passage on an American ship because my dad knew if, if you are on an American ship, you are in America. You are on American soil. You cannot be put off, you know, because if it were a French ship or another ship, they would be turned back to Germany. So we made preparations for leaving. All that time, pretty intensively, both my brother and I had an English tutor and the parents had an American lady who came and spoke English with them. And, so we all learned English, you know, intensively. I'm like my mother. I have a tremendous capacity for languages, and I already spoke French, obviously German, French. I knew some Hebrew, and I learned English. I was the only one in the family who really could speak English. I mean, the rest could understand but speaking was not so much. And then we were leaving on the 13th of April and my father's deadline was the 15th from the German government. Before we got on the ship in Hamburg, we went to visit friends in Berlin. That was bad, bad because, you know, all the closest friends had no opportunity and members of the family, some members of the family. Years later when we came ... when in 19- ... when my ... well, when my husband died and I gave up the house, my children came and we spent a whole weekend in the attic going through papers. And I had a lot of papers from my parents, letters from my mother, going way back. And of all ... amongst all things, I found a post ... I felt so bad for her. I found a postcard marked 1941 from Warsaw. Her brother, her brothers were in Poland and she tried to move heaven and earth to get 'em out of there. But he wrote a postcard and said, "Please! Please, do something!" And that poor woman had to live with that. And he was shot on the street on the square in Warsaw. We found out later. He was a Professor of

Mathematics. She had to live with that all the rest of her life - that she couldn't do anything to get him out.

You didn't realize that until you saw the postcard years later?

I just hadn't seen it. I hadn't seen it, and she may have talked about it, you know, in those years but ... you know. Anyway, so, while everybody was so desperate about getting to the United States, my mother ... I mean, there was a thing going on where people wrote to their namesakes in England and the United States hoping at somebody along the way, in the family, had emigrated. Well, there was an old patriarch still living in Poland who had kept track of everybody in the family. There was a young cousin, who at the age of [speaks aside and is unclear]... A young cousin, who was 18 years old who had run away to America. And, he still had an old address. So my mother wrote a letter. These people ... he had ... remember when they decided in New York to ship a lot of these immigrants out to the West, get rid of them?

Sure.

Well, this guy ended up here in Kansas City [laughing].

[laughing] Oh my, the wild west.

So, his children wrote us a tear-stained letter. They had no idea they had any family in the whole wide world. And what can they do? What can they do to bring us here? Well, by that time ... by the time this all happened, we were on our way to coming over and they insisted we should come to Kansas City because the opportunities would be better, etc, etc.

Now were your parents Zionists at all?

No, I was.

You were?

I went around, in those days, like in 1938-39 from house to Jewish house and collected *shekels* for Palestine. I belonged to a Zionist Youth Club. I was being trained to be an Olympic swimmer. We had a, it was called *Hakoah*, and it was swim and, you know, athletic club idea for young people. And I was such a good swimmer that the coach was training me for Olympics because my speed was so good, breast stroke. So, I did that. Yeah, I was a Zionist.

So you were a Zionist. Were you the only Zionist in the family?

Oh, yeah! For sure [laughing].

[End of side one.]

We were talking about you being a Zionist but then ...

No before that.

Before that you were, you found a distant relative who had settled in Kansas City.

Yes. So we arrived in, in New York. We went ... we came over on the *SS President Roosevelt*. A very nice ship. You know first-class, everything. It was lovely. My dad, you know, could prepay everything, but when we arrived, family of four, \$80.00 in his pocket. All we were allowed to take with us was ... there was a formula. You could take a lift, L-I-F-T, which was about the size of a room, a wooden structure, you know, that they would then put on a ship. And anything and everything that could go in there, like furniture and so forth, you could take. So the piano. The parents took enough, like, four, they had them built, in fact, four things that were like daybeds but they could be sofas during the day. And some tables and a ...

Was it a difficult decision for your mom to make?

It must have been, you know. That candelabra came. All these beautiful things.

I was noticing that.

Yeah. This is all ...

China.

... China.

Oh, I love that.

My grandmother, on my father's side ... see that green stuff?

Yeah. I love that.

That's Herend, that was her engagement present of my grandmother.

I love that. It's beautiful.

And there's some very lovely antique things that are family things, not collectors. But they're collector's items, obviously.

Right ,sure. You're so fortunate.

And, and china. You couldn't take silver. And the only ... see, this ... I don't know. How did they manage to get that out?

I don't know, to tell you the truth because that is silver and a couple... I think you could take silver but you couldn't take gold and, you know, valuable stuff. What did they know from valuable? I mean the Nazis. [laughing] Anyway...

So your dad only had \$80.00 on him?

Right, and we had, you know, all these nice things, and clothing and, you know, so... I know we had a lady from Bohemia who would come and spend a week at the house and make clothing. I had enough clothes to last. Of course, they weren't American looking when we got it [laughing].

[laughing] You still looked like immigrants, huh?

I was a teenager and that didn't work to well. And so, you know, we did everything we could. Good linens, good china, that all came.

So you landed in ...

Books.

... did you ... when you came over were you in ... did they take you to Ellis Island?

No. It didn't exist in [unclear]. It didn't exist.

Oh, okay.

We went right straight the wharf.

So, what was your impression? Do you remember coming in?

Well, I remember ... you know it was very funny when we were approaching the Statue of Liberty, everybody went to that side of the ship and it just kind of went like this. [laughing] Uh, you know. It was, it was like a dream. Those first few weeks - I think we were in New York for about three weeks. I arrived two days before my 13th birthday and I think the only thing I got for my birthday was my aunt gave me a dollar. And with that dollar I went to the dime store and bought a present for my mother because she had a birthday three days later. Life was difficult. I mean it was exciting.

I guess, it must have been.

The family from here, three people came and picked us up.

When you came to Kansas City? So you were only in New York about three weeks and then you came directly to Kansas City.

Yeah, because they talked my dad into the fact that he would be more likely to find a job here. Well, we came here and, you know, the Federation put us ... first we lived with the family and, you may know the family. The Jewels and Marcia Goldman. Or...

I should know them. I probably do when I see them but the name isn't ... were they survivors or...

No.

Oh, no, of course not. This was before that.

The Goldman family, Mike Goldman. There were three sisters and a brother of that man who came originally. My mother's maiden name was Goldman. And Mike had ... I think they had a plumbing supply business for years and years and years. Anyway, they lived at 48th and Woodland and we lived with them in a big house. We lived there until August or so. I went to Francis Willard School for about a month before school ended, and that was quite an experience.

Now, how was your English?

It was pretty good.

It was pretty good?

Yes.

You felt comfortable ...

Well, no, I didn't feel comfortable. It was a struggle. I mean it was one thing I learned English, English. People kid me, to this day, when I came I spoke Oxford English because that's what I learned. But out in the schoolyard, when the kids, you know, I was an oddity. So the kids would all come and start jabbering at me. And it was like hearing the ocean waves. I couldn't understand them. I mean, this was, *this* was English? [Laughing] So, oh, I was so frustrated. I forgot who told me this, that when I would start dreaming in English, that then I would really know English.

How interesting. I never thought about that.

And I finally, in September, I started dreaming in English and it was fun. Anyway, we moved to 28th and Woodland and, you know, got some ... I mean we had some furniture and had some more donated to us and clothing and we got free medical care through Alfred Benjamin Dispensary, which was part of Jewish Family Services. So, you know, resettlement of refugees idea. My mother started baking like crazy and became very popular. Confirmation sent parties and you name it in that little teeny, tiny kitchen. She baked thousands of...

So she was...

...her specialties.

So she was kind of catering in ...

Well, yeah.

...baked goods?

Baked goods. My dad was 54 years old. Could not speak English very well, and certainly it was sort of the end of the, you know, not Depression, but things had just started up again. And it was very difficult for him to find a job. He was a very proud man.

Yes.

He didn't want to reject anything. So, I think, his first was a maintenance man in a factory some place. He lifted big barrels, you know, threw out the garbage and stuff like that. He was such an elegant man. You have no idea. And, he lost that job. Then he started selling house-to-house for Kansas City Power and Light Company. Light fix-, light that, you know, it's before your time. That's how they sold those three-way light fix-, light...

Light fixtures.

...and all kinds of things. Lugged this up steps and down steps. Well, he had a massive, massive heart attack.

How long had you been in this country?

Dad was ... let's see. Not very long. He was ... let's see because he lived about at 60 and yeah, it was not terribly long after -, like a year. He went and Doctor Kahn, who was the heart specialist at that time at Menorah, said to my mother, "He's going to be an invalid the rest of his life." Well, it turned out my dad fooled everybody and he got a job as bookkeeper for Jewish Family Services. Then he became bookkeeper for Sun Wholesale, which was liquor company. And when I married, when I met my husband, their company was looking for somebody. So they hired my father and he worked there.

What company was that?

A.D. Jacobson. A plumbing and heating company.

This was your ...

Mechanical contractors. You know, the big hospitals and sewage plants and stuff like that.

This was a family business? Your husband's?

Yeah. Anyway, in the meantime...

Yes.

... I, I worked. I...

At 13 you started working? You had a job?

I did babysitting and I did housework. And when I was 15, I went to work for, I worked at the Chicago Bakery on weekends...

Oh my!

...and I did very well in high school. I did, you know I had such a fabulous education that I already knew everything except for American history, which I wasn't too familiar with. [laughing]

So, otherwise, you were like miles ahead of the other students ...

I was.

... all through high school?

All through high school.

And you went to ... what was the high school [unclear]?

Central.

Oh, you went to Central.

I went to Central Junior first.

Okay.

Oh, the teachers were wonderful. I dreamed of becoming an actress.

Really?

Yes. And I took expression and the expression teacher would take her lunch hour to work with me on my th's and s's because that was the most ... and the v's and the w's, to this day, I have to stop and think if I have to say "winged victory." You know, of course, those are ... in German ... that's the most difficult for Germans to learn are the th's.

Yes.

You know. This is this, is what it is.

Yes. Well, my mother is Polish and she still doesn't have that down.

Yeah. Okay. Well, I got that down. Anyway, but I'm very proud in that I played one of the leads in *Little Women*.

In high school?

In junior high school. And I knew I was going to go. Well, my parents put the *kibosh* on that because being an actress in Europe is next to being a prostitute. So that was completely out.

So you were heartbroken?

No. I kept taking drama courses, you know, whatever. [laughing] But, anyway, you know it was hard. I mean if you were speaking just to me it was a hard time for a teenager. I worked very hard. I was always hustling to get a job and make money. I had to wear other people's clothes.

Yes. Now, I am curious because you came from such a privileged background, was ...

It was very tough, very tough.

And for your mother, too.

And for my mother, my God, that poor woman. I mean here is a woman who speaks six languages and plays the piano and is ... Well, my mother finally ... this is what's interesting. During the day we slaved away. Okay? At night my parents were ... they immediately were picked up by, like, the Ullman family, became very close to them. Mother and dad were ... go to, went to concerts, were friendly with the conductors, were, you know, the university people. They became very involved on that same level and accepted. So at night, in their lovely clothing, they were like everybody else. [laughing] And my mother entertained a lot. Later, she became a law librarian at the University.

At UMKC?

KCU, then. And that happened while I was in high school. I went to Central High School and I won a scholarship to Washington University in Saint Louis. But I couldn't take it because we couldn't afford board and room, you know. So I went to UMKC because it was cheap. My mother was there. I could go at fifty bucks a semester. I did very well in high school. I won an essay contest. I was... Well, everybody remembers me when I went to the 50th reunion.

Wow!

But, anyway.

Now what did you major in in college?

And then I went to UMKC and I want you to know that I became the President of the Student Body in my junior year as an independent.

Wow, independent.

And, and, you know, made honor society or whatever. I finished college in three years because I met my husband and my parents were insistent that I had to get my degree before I get my MRS [laughing] and so ...

So, now, did you meet your husband in school?

No. One of the people I became friendly with in freshman year at KCU, introduced me to her cousin, which was my husband later. I met him on a blind date. He was in the army. He was home on leave for a short while with a broken leg, no-less, kneecap. And he knew the moment he saw me that he wanted to marry me.

Even before he talked to you?

The moment I opened that door.

Saw you across the room?

No.

One of those? No. And how did you feel about him?

Well, I wasn't ready to get married. In fact, I put him off. I told him, since my parents were European he had to do it the right way. He had to go ask them and I knew for sure they weren't going to let me get married.

How old were you at that time?

I was 19.

And he was ...

And... 21.

Okay.

So, believe it or not, they said yes.

Because they liked him so much?

My father said, "That's the first man that ever came to the door." I mean I dated a lot. I had a wonderful social life.

But the boyfriends never came in the house?

Oh, yes. I mean they all knew my parents.

Yes.

But what my father was saying was he was a real man and he impressed them. He made all kinds of promises, which he did keep. My mother said, [laughing] ... my mother and father said to him, "He knows Ann. We did not raise her to become a house-, a *Hausfrau*, and a cook." They said, "She has a mind. You have to let her use her mind." And he said, "I promise. I promise. We'll have help. We'll do this. We'll do that." He kept his word. He kept his word.

My gosh! That's beautiful.

So, they were very modern people, my parents.

Yes, that's obvious.

They felt that I should have a career in a diplomatic corp. You know I could speak four languages. I... French.

That is just something. My, gosh! My mother is so old country to this day. And I guess it's all of the, you know, the way she was brought up.

Right.

But that's fabulous.

So, I, you know, I spoke four languages and I planned to go into the Foreign Service or something.

You planned to do Foreign Service?

Um-hmm.

So you graduated from college, three years, and then you got married?

And then I got married and we went up to KU because he ... my husband still had a year of engineering school left and I encouraged him to get his degree. And I went up there thinking I could do a Masters in Romance languages. When I went to the Romance

language department, they said, “We can’t do that. We can’t, in our right mind, accept you,” they said, “because they are desperate for native-speaking language teachers. You go over to the German department. They need you.” So I went over to the German department and I ended up teaching German that year at KU.

On a college level?

Hmm?

At KU.

And took medieval German and a whole lot of other things. And then when I came here, my French professor said, “We need a German instructor.” Even for one summer I was the whole German department and I taught until I was five months pregnant with my first child. And then I stopped teaching and became very involved in the community - many, many things.

Now you were married in what year?

1946.

Okay.

I was 20 years old.

Did you have a large wedding?

Yes, very large.

Because it’s, of the husband’s family.

Yes, at the Ambassador Hotel.

Oh, sure.

Roof Garden.

Yeah, the Roof Garden. Oh, boy! My father had a tailoring shop right next to the Ambassador for many, many years.

Oh, he did?

Yeah.

Well, that was ...

That was after the war, though.

But, anyway, that's where it was. And I ... you know we kept house at the Sunflower Village over, you know, the old ordinance plant across the street because there were know housing for married couples at the University, or there's very little. And then we moved into an apartment here on Roanoke Parkway where I had my first child. Then when he was five-months-old or so, we decided to buy a house and then we had another son and a daughter.

And so you have three children?

I have three children.

And their names and how old are they?

There's Mark who is the ... he's now 51, going to be.

Was he born in '49?

He was born in '49. And Steven was born in 1952. So he will be 48 next month. And Susan was born in '56. She just was 44 a few days ... two days ago.

Did she go to Southwest, too?

She went to Bingham and then she went to Southwest only in her freshman year.

And then ...

To Sunset.

She's exactly my sister's age. They were both born in '56.

In what?

In 1956, my sister was born. My maiden name is Warshawski.

And what was her name?

Debbie.

Debbie Warshawski. I'll ask Susan.

Yeah.

Anyway, they ... yes. The boy, I mean Mark, who's the ... he became a, a physician and he's a professor at the University of California at San Francisco Medical School. He's a big man in research in AIDS.

Really?

He's world renowned, if I may say so.

Oh, my gosh!

Steven is the head of the Public Defender Office in Boulder, Colorado, and has three boys. And Susan got married four years ago and she is ... she moved to Fort Worth, Texas a couple of years ago because her husband ... his position, he had a new position which took him. So that's the kids. And Susan has a lot of children but they're her husband's children, including a Baptist minister. I have a Baptist minister grandson. Her husband, her husband is not Jewish.

I see. Okay.

Well, I mean my ... I was ... You know I look back, yes, 1939 coming here was difficult, but I worked hard both in education and otherwise. And interesting thing happened. I was picked up by the YWCA here to speak to high schools and church groups about freedom, because of Hitler, in coming here.

This was when you were a teenager?

I was 14 years old. Because my parents would ... We were considered aliens, okay? Meaning you were a non-citizen. Remember, it's still wartime.

That's right. That's right.

So my ... why I always had to get permission from the, whoever it was, District Attorney or whoever, to allow me to go ten miles out of town. [laughing] I mean like going to Raytown or whatever. I could not get my citizenship when my parents did. In '43, '44 my parents became citizens. I was 18 years old at the time and, therefore, was not a minor anymore. So I did not get my citizenship with them. I had to wait until I was 21. When I married my husband it took a year off because as a wife of an American citizen, I could apply for it earlier. So I did that. I was teaching at KCU, at the time, and the grilling they gave me was believable.

For instance?

Well, relationship to government, you know, to make sure I was not [unclear] communist. It was tough. I remember [unclear] I just kept saying, "No, this can't be because this is a government of the people, by the people, for the people!" [laughing] That was my new mantra.

So when you became a citizen ...

I became a citizen on my own.

On your own?

Uh-huh.

So how did that ... did you feel relieved or wonderful?

Oh, I was relieved. I was so ... I had a party. Let's see, I became a citizen in 194-, '48. No. What am I saying? Yes, in ... couldn't be '46? It had to be 47 the year after ... shortly after I was married. In that March after that September is when I became a citizen. And... in 1998, I had a party to celebrate 50 years of citizenship.

How lovely!

Of my American citizenship.

Yeah. Yeah.

And, so this last year, in March - in May, it was 60 years that I had come to Kansas City.

Now have you been back to your ...

Oh, yeah. I've been back.

You've been back to Berlin?

I've been back to Berlin. Where I lived there was completely demolished and it's like a whole new neighborhood, you know. In Vienna, it's still there, the apartment, everything.

Is the synagogue still there?

Yeah, all of it.

Now is ... is the synagogue like, because I was there a few years ago, do you remember where it was located?

It's ... I can't think of it. *Sophiengasse*. No. *Sophiengasse*, which is in the first district.

It seemed to me, when I was in Vienna, they had only one synagogue left.

Heston Stars. [*Stadttempel* is the synagogue in Vienna that survived *Kristallnacht*.]

Yes. That your synagogue?

Um-hmm.

Oh, my God! I was absolutely overwhelmed with that sanctuary. It was like really and truly, to this day, the most beautiful synagogue I have ever been in. That's where you went to synagogue. My goodness! And I remember when we went they had guards there.

I'm sure they do everywhere, except in this country.

Yes. That was my first experience. It was just a ...

Unfortunately, now we even have it here.

Yeah. It's very unsettling.

For safety. Yeah.

Was your brother *bar mitzvahd*? No, he was already ...

Reader of the Torah.

Reader of the Torah.

At B'nai Jehudah.

Oh, okay. Now when you were finally settled in Kansas City and the war is going on ... now before you left Europe, had ... Do you know if your parents were aware of the camps? If they knew what was happening to the Jews? Or if they just ...

Because my uncle was in Dachau. The one who went to Israel, in the beginning, as I told you, when people had documentation that they had a way to leave the country, they could leave. He was in Dachau maybe a couple of weeks.

Now was it a death camp at that point? Or was it ...

No. It was ... death camp didn't come until 1941 when the, when the Final Solution was decided on. So up until '41, there were no ...

It was work camps, basically?

They were work camps or concentration camps. Slave labor another one. After '41 is when death camps came into being. I know that, I remember seeing a picture in the liberation. Remember when they were liberating the camps?

Yes.

And the *Kansas City Star* had a picture. We were totally shocked. We knew, I mean, we knew, you know, that things weren't good, but it was just too hard to believe.

Uh-huh. Were you given information prior to that during the war that Jews, you know, were being murdered and gassed and...?

No. No.

So you knew nothing of that?

We just knew people were in concentration camps.

But you had no idea what was really going on there? So the war is over and the information is coming out. What actually ...

We were shocked as everybody else was. Yeah. Listen, I was in Israel. I've been to Israel 25 times. One year we visited the *kibbutz* that was established by the people who were in the Warsaw Ghetto, were in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. And, you know, we came and they told stories. One of the stories they told was that people would come back and say, "This is what's going on." You know, they will have run away and found and heard these things from people who had escaped concentration camps. Brought the information back and the people didn't believe it. They didn't believe it because they didn't want to believe it. So those people were sitting right here and the death camp was right here. That I found interesting. It's so inhuman ungodly. I can't think of too many "un" words to speak about it. How man's inhumanity to man can happen like this, you know. And the importance of making it live, somehow or other for people so we don't make that mistake again. The potential is in everybody. And if the circumstances force you to choose, what would you do?

I've thought about it but I honestly, you know, unless you're in that position, you honestly can't answer that.

And I marvel at the people, you know, who were in concentration camps and saw such horrors and experienced such terrible things, that they live constructive lives today. You know, you have to give them a lot of credit. And, you know, my whole life has been driven by one thing from that moment on when we came, when we found out how many people perished and all that kind of stuff, is "Why, oh, God, was I chosen to live? Why am I here?" And, therefore, I must make my life count for something. And so I have worked in human rights and volunteerism and making the place a better world, a lot. You can't help yourself. I mean, I won't say you can't help yourself because not everybody is doing it.

That's right.

All right. So my life ... I'm very lucky. My parents gave me a good mind, good genes [laughing].

Well, that's obvious.

And I'm a very creative person. I've done a lot of things. I've established lots of things, and I feel very privileged to, you know, to have lived in this country to do these things.

I'm curious now have you personally experienced ...

Antisemitism?

... antisemitism living in this country?

Yes. It's very funny. I came [laughing], you know, of course, I had to leave because of my parents. Not I personally. I did not experience antisemitism anywhere. Me, Ann, that somebody said to me "you dirty Jew" or, you know, "you're a Jew."

Never?

Never. My parents told me I couldn't get into that school because I was Jewish. But that wasn't, you know... I taught at KU, German. And the guy who was one of the professors tried to undermine me at every avenue. Now there were two professors, one was the head of department and the other one was like the assistant. And the assistant is the one who did all kinds of things. You know, said that I gave people grades that didn't deserve them. You know, whatever it was. And I finally went to the department head and told him what was going on. And he said, "Oh, it's all because you're Jewish that he's doing this. He's a tremendous antisemite." And I said, "I didn't come to this country to experience antisemitism." [laughing] You know there's been ... I mean I was aware that I couldn't join a sorority or that in high school I couldn't get into some of those literary societies because we didn't have sororities at Central. I was aware that certain things might not be open to me. It's a fact of life. And I certainly fought that all the way with constructive things. Developed the Panel of Americans, worked on the Human Rights Commission, you know, worked on black/white relations. You name it. I've done it.

You were also a President of Federation.

I was President of Federation. And later on I ... when my kids were all in school, I went back and got my degree in social work and I worked in the black community. Right ... During the riots, I was the Project Director for George Washington Carver Neighborhood Center. And they ousted the white director and I became the interim director and I was the only white person on the staff. [laughing] Then the riots came and one of the black board members said to me, "Ann, maybe you better go." And I said, "I'll tell you what. I'll go when those people come to my door and say, 'We don't want you anymore.'" And nobody did. And I had a hard time weaning myself away from them because they didn't want me to leave. And I kept saying, "You gotta have a black director." And they said, "No. If you leave, we lose our best friend. We don't want you to go." I started ... I want you to know that I started, what is today, Black History Week in Kansas City at George Washington... there was an article in the paper a year or two ago on this.

How long ago was this?

19- ... well, I graduated from KU in '67. I started over there in '67 – '68. So it was between '68 – '69, and then I left. I started ... I organized the Volunteer Center here in Kansas City and for one year I worked for nothing so that the grant money we got ... I wrote a proposal - the grant money I got, under the wing of the United Way, would pay for staff. And after a year, the board decided that was enough, that they wanted a paid director. And they asked me to be the paid director. So I became the paid director - founder and paid director and, eventually, I became a vice president, staff vice president in the United Way, which was ... I was one of half a dozen people in the United States, women, in that kind of position. And I've written books, I mean, publications and I've done things for the Administration on Aging. I became very interested in information and referral and, especially for the older person. And President Nixon appointed me to ... I don't brag about that because [laughing] it's Nixon.

We want to hear all.

President Nixon appointed me. He started the volunteer, voluntary action ... National Center for Voluntary Action and appointed me to the board. And I went to the White House for dinner, twice. And I became an expert in the field of volunteerism. I've published about four publications.

About volunteerism?

How to manage volunteers. How to do evaluation on programs, etc. And, what else have I done? They started a lot of programs in Kansas City that are still going today. Then I retired in '89 and that's when I wrote the publications. And then I got a contract through the Administration on Aging to write training manual for state agencies on aging, to train people in delivering information of referral services in their states. That's still selling today. And I wrote a manual for Information Referral Services generally speaking at 12, you know, 12 books. What else have I done? I started ... oh, that was cute. It was recognized recently. I, 25 years ago I started the first chapter of the Missouri Chapter, I mean, the first, I started the Missouri Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, here in Missouri.

Well, you have been non-stop.

Just about. And then I was Federation President for three years. And I've been a delegate to the Jewish agency in Israel for many years. And then I go to Naples and they say, "You've got to come on our board. We want to start a Federation." [laughing] And I've been President of the Federation for three years.

In Naples.

In Naples.

Oh, my gosh!

And I finally got it to where it should be. And we fired an executive director and they can't find anybody to be president. So it looks like I have to keep going. So that I'm on my ... and now I really start my third career. [laughing] I want to go back to something ... I don't know what I want. I haven't decided. I mean, maybe go back into social work to some extent, like life coaching or something like that. But I've gotten lots of honors –the, the national and, and NCCJ, National Conference on Christians and Jews. The [unclear] Jacobson award, outstanding student social work. I've got lots of lovely honors.

I didn't realized I was interviewing a celebrity.

The recognition is very nice.

Thank you very much, this has been a very enlightening interview.

Oh, and one of the things that I really am proud of. I became the first woman to be elected to the board of our development in Naples where I live. Wyndemere Country Club.

Really?

Yeah. It was a struggle. I had to run for this three times.

You had to run for this? Oh, my gosh!

I wanted to break the old boy's network.

Yeah. Is there a lot of Jews in Naples?

Um-hmm. There are 1,600 units, you know, meaning households.

At Naples?

Um-hmm. And we have about 600 people on our roster campaign, something like that. I think some of them are really duplicates because they're husbands and wives.

Oh, sure. Sure

So, yeah, it's pretty good. We've raised about \$400,000. We have...

That's excellent.

We have an employee, part-time employee of Jewish Family Services. We now are going to have an executive director. The potential is tremendous because ... you know the interesting thing about Naples, it's not so much a basically a retirement community. There are a lot of young people. We have 200 children...

[End of recording]