

Ida Loeffler Interview

December 2, 1999

What was your name at birth and how do you spell it?

My name was Ida. The same ... spelled like I-d-a, Wolf. W-o-l-f.

And where were you born?

I was born in Krakow, Poland in 1923.

Okay. And what was the total population of the city?

There was the biggest population of whole Poland, it was 100,000. That was at the time a lot.

Okay. And do you know what the Jewish population might have been at that time?

That's what I mean. Jewish population in Krakow. Just Jewish.

Oh, the Jewish population.

Just Jewish population and they ...

Okay. How ... what was the total population?

Maybe 300,000. So every third person was Jewish.

Was Jewish. Okay.

In Krakow.

What do you know about the circumstances of your birth?

Um... Of how I was ...

Well, were you born at home or were you born in a hospital?

I was born ... probably, I don't know, back then people were born at home. And then ... and my father was a tailor. He had his own business.

Do you think... you think that you had like a mid-wife?

Probably. Probably.

Okay.

Yeah. That was then, you see.

That's the way it was done?

Yes.

What were your parents' names and how do you spell ... how would you spell them?

My father was, of course, Wolf. Adolph Wolf, which after the war I just didn't want it to say anymore Adolph. Abraham I called him because it remind of somebody's else name. And my mother was Rosella Blonska.

Could you spell that?

B-l-o-n-s-k-a.

And how would you spell her first name?

Rosella.

Is that the first name?

Yeah. Rosella, like Rose. You know?

R-o-s-e-l-l-a?

Yeah. It's just like ... you know.

Okay. Do you know how your parents met?

My mother came from little town and she was working in Krakow for some family, and my father came out of very rich house and he went ... he was ... he met my mother and they got married. He fell in love with her and she was beautiful woman and nice woman and had good Jewish background. So my father did too and they got married and we live in a beautiful, big apartment then.

What did your mother do when she was in Poland when she came to Krakow? What kind of work did she do?

She was working for the family as a nanny.

As a nanny. Taking care of children?

Children. Yes.

Okay. Describe your mother's role in your house. What were ... what did she do?

My mother like ... you know, whole Jewish house... was a queen of the house. My mother was a queen of the house. She was a wonderful housekeeper and took care of the children. Of course, I wasn't then there alive and war... Second World War broke out and in 1919 and ...

The First... the First World War.

There was the First ... First World ... wait a minute. Yeah. There was the First World War and he went to military. Krakow was kind of not Poland anymore. It was Austria. And he was draft to the Austrian Army and fought for the Austrian government and all over in Europe.

But your mother was mainly a housekeeper?

She was...

I mean she was a housewife.

She was a housewife. She had, at the time, two children.

Did she ever have an occupation other than ...

No, no, no. She was just a housewife and she was taking care of the children. And my father he was officer in the Army. So he had privileges to come and ... once in awhile back home. And he was providing my mother with food so it would last for three months. Then he went again back to war and after three months again he came and provide my mother ... that's what my mother was telling us.

Okay. What was your father's occupation when he wasn't in the Army?

He was a tailor. He was a tailor, which he was having tailor designer ... designer school ... he went to designer school in Vienna. So, he was a tailor. But then... then after the war, of course, he came back and my parents, they lived, at the time, in little ... in Krakow in little apartment. One room, I guess.

Okay. We'll talk about that a little later.

Okay.

I want to find out about the other members of your family. Can you tell me who... if you had siblings, their names ...

Yes.

... their ages and relationship to you?

Yeah. My youngest sister was two years younger than I was, so when I was ... you know, two years younger let's say. Next one ... I was the second, I mean the youngest ... second from the youngest.

You know, I don't think I asked you when you were born. Can you tell me the date of your birth?

Yeah. 192- ... 28th of April, 1923.

Okay. So your sister was two years younger?

Two years younger. Then my older sister ... mine ... after me. No, I'm going the other way.

Okay.

You see, my oldest was brother. First was my brother. I don't know what time he was born. And then my sister, Felicia. My brother was Paul, name. And my sister, older sister, Felicia.

How much older was she than you?

Oh, 12, 15 years.

Oh, a lot longer.

Yes.

Okay.

And then there was Monia, we called her. But Hebrew name was Miriam. And then ...

And how much older was she?

She was about four years.

Older than you?

Yeah. And then was Ruth, the smartest and was a brilliant girl and high educated kid. There was I and then my youngest sister, Sabina.

So there were six children in your family?

Yes. All together, we were six.

Six. Two boys --

No. One boy.

One boy? Four girls? And five girls?

And with me was five girls.

Five girls?

Yeah.

Okay. Did you have grandparents?

My grandparents I remember ... you see, in Poland there wasn't communication like is now. It was very hard to visit.

So they didn't live near you?

No, they didn't. My father's mother live in Limanowa , which they had a... big farm and oil and everything. But when she was getting old, they didn't have too good doctors over there so they brought her into our house in Krakow. And so my mother took care of her for a little while, but she couldn't ... and she had help of course. But she couldn't do it much more because I remember my grandmother was in big room and big bed and she had to be changed every day and washed. And just like a newborn baby, and my mother had so many other children she couldn't do it. Even with help, she couldn't do it. So, we ... they put her to old age home, but it was something like a ... like a hotel. It wasn't just like, here, they are pushing away people. They took care of her wonderful. And I remember we did visit her almost very often because she was in the same city. I remember my oldest sisters, they visit her on their own. But mine youngest sister and I, we went with mother to visit. And father was busy. He came over there to see her whenever he could.

Now was that the only grandparent that you had?

Her... her fath- ... her husband, my grandmother husband, my grandfather, died long time ago, so I never knew him. And mine mother's parents, they died also very young. So you see people they didn't live that long. Fifty, fifty-seven, sixty very seldom. So I didn't know them.

What was some of the fondest memories that you have of your grandmother?

I really didn't know her very well because I really did start to know her and when she was in this home ...

Oh.

... and in our house. And she was always trying to get my hand and hold my hand. She couldn't kiss me anymore. And ... but hold my hand and try to get close to me and my sister and... but she wasn't very able to do it.

What kind of neighborhood did you live in?

You see, first they move ... they live in Krakow one-room. And then my father, after the war (World War I), rented a big, big apartment that was... three people. You see, we live in a half of the house, our half of the building. And two other people live on the ... across. So it was very big place. And... and then... we had nice furniture. My father provide this with everything. And he brought some beautiful crystals wherever he was, I remember, so heavy that I had to hold with both hands and I tried to drop, it would break on the floor and then break. Didn't even chip.

Really?

There was something whenever ... whoever came to my house, the... the girlfriends, I had to show them this. And I don't know what happened, those German took this away.

Now the street you lived on, was it more of a residential street or were there stores and shops?

It was a residential street. And there were grocery stores. Not as big as they are now here. We had two different grocery store in neighborhood, which was ... my mother was sending me. She run out of something. Across the street was smaller and then a little bit ... half a... half a block farther was bigger grocery store. So we had a little grocery store, and...

Did you have electricity?

We did because there was Krakow.

Oh, okay.

And we had water and electricity in the house and there was something unusual.

What about indoor plumbing?

No way.

No?

No. There was outdoor plumbing.

But you had in ... but you had running water in the house?

We did have running water. Not ... you know, little sink and... electricity which was unusual for, I mean, for the Polish country. But that was, you see, occupied by Austria and they were advanced much more than Poland.

And how many rooms were in your house, would you say?

You see, the rooms were big. They weren't like today's room. I don't know how ... how many feet was, but probably the smallest was 24 by 24.

Really? So, by ...

There was about four rooms and the one little room we call it ... it was maybe 12 by 16. That was the little room.

Now, did... did you share bedrooms with your siblings?

Yes, I share. Of course, we had to ... we slept ... the beds were much bigger than... than here. They were double beds like here now. So I slept with my sister and that's what we ... everyone had to share a bed with somebody else.

But did you... just you and your sister in one room? Or did the other sisters ...

Oh, no. In one room we slept about four people or... or ... yeah, probably four.

Okay. How did the laundry get done?

We had the once a week woman coming in and we had a washboard and then the other things ... and we were boiling ... at the time they were boiling the clothes, white clothes. And ... but my mother couldn't do it so we had somebody. And this woman, she washed the floors after she did the laundry. Three days later she came in and she was ironing because it was a lot of work.

Really. Six children, yes.

Yeah. My mother was cooking most of the day ... busy with cooking and shopping for grocery.

So would you say your family was pretty well off?

For Poland, I would say yes because we had nice clothes and enough food to eat.

Okay.

And we were very highly educated.

Did you ... were there any other people that worked for you besides this woman that came in?

Oh, yes. Well, my father.

Well, I mean at home.

At home?

Any other servants?

No. No. There was this woman come in... First when my grandmother was home, there was a woman which came every day to help out. But after she passed away we had a woman... once a week ... twice a week, twice a week to do laundry and ironing and cleaning. No, there was nobody else. No.

Okay. Did your family own land?

My grandmother from my father's side, they had a lot of lands. Like they had a big farm, horses and cows, and employed a lot of people. That's what my father was talking about. And it was oil like they called us *nafta, nafta*. Which people who they didn't have electricity, they were lighting this with *nafta*. This is kind of oil probably and they keep the light in the house, you see, instead of electricity.

And that came off of your land?

Of my grandmother's, yes.

Of your grandmothers?

Yes.

Did you take vacations as a family?

My mother used to take us to the farm out of Krakow and we rented big room.

Was this your grandmother's farm?

No. No.

Or just a farm?

Just...

A farm.

Where we could go out on the streetcar because there was plenty of transportation. And so we lived over there and there was [unclear], of course, and it was very nice and fresh air. Good fresh food, fresh milk. And ...

What kind of foods did you eat?

Fresh. Everything was fresh. Fresh vegetables and fresh bread three times a day. We went to... to bakery to buy fresh bread. We wouldn't eat old bread.

At home?

At home. We wouldn't eat for next day.

Really?

No. Nobody would. And then cheese and, of course, for dinner vegetables, meat, potatoes and soup; every day, soup. And ...

What were some of your favorite things to eat?

At first, when I was younger, I didn't want to eat anything. I was very spoiled and my mother had to go and buy from bakery for breakfast little cakes and cookies. That's what I did like...

That was [unclear].

You know, *noshe*, *Krakowa noshes* they called us. And then later on ... you see, when you have everything, you're particular what you are eating.

So you didn't have any favorite thing your mother made that stands out?

Oh, later on when the food were a little bit scarce. Of course, I did like the fish when she made it and the goose. This really goose I did like it. And what else? And soups when she made it I ate. Yeah, she made a very ... she cooks wonderful.

Okay. What language did you speak at home?

At home we were speaking Polish. My parents had to learn Polish because when I was born, there was Poland. But when they lived and grew up, there was Austria. So everything was in German.

So, they spoke... they spoke ...

They spoke two languages and Yiddish.

And Yiddish?

[Unclear]. Three languages already.

Okay. Were your parents involved in anything political?

My father was in working movements.

The working movement?

Yeah. I... I just can't ...

Do you ...

... don't know much. I was very young and, you see, they didn't talk about it because it was kind of secret. But I remember that he did buy a big dog... for protection of us and I really don't know what was ...

You think it was because of what he was doing? Or ...

It was what he was doing. Yes.

But you don't ... you don't know what it involved?

No, no... I was ... there was some kind of political movement, but what I really don't know.

Okay. Describe the schools you attended.

First place I was going to public school, which... I was very good student. But in Polish ... in Poland, they were then so antisemitic. I was... I mean in Polish language I was perfect. And I spell ... it was very easy for me to do that. I spelled wonderful and I did write wonderful and different articles. But the teacher told me, "You are Jewish. You can't get A from... from Polish."

So the teachers did treat you differently because ...

They did.

... you were Jewish?

Yes. So later on, after I finished public school, my sister was involved ... she was also a dressmaker designer, and she was making dress for a professor of... of *Gymnasium* and he was professor of *Gymnasium* and his wife, I don't know what she was. Anyway, that's the only way, through him, I could go to higher education. To Polish school, to *Gymnasium*, with this...

Was this like a high school?

Yes, but was much higher. That's what we learned in public school, they learn here in high school.

I see.

And our high school was... junior college level. We learned Latin. We learned German and English. Already three languages. And you had to know what you are ... you had to do it right, otherwise they would flunk you. And especially when you was Jewish, they would kick you out completely.

Were there other ... very many other Jewish students there?

Only... 3 percent and 103 people in my class, I was the only one. In the other class was another girl and they flunk her out for no reason, she was even smarter than I was. She was so perfect. I was going with her in public school too. And she was so smart and so intelligent but she didn't have no protection. Nobody was behind her to help her out so they kick her out of school and that was a lot of Jewish people. They set 3 percent and after few months they try to eliminate few people. So I was only 2 years because that war broke out and ...

So... So how far would you say you went? Like, what grade do you think you went through?

I had all education in this high school, *Gymnasium* two years only.

Two years? And so how old were you by then?

I was about 14. Well, maybe more than 2 years.

So would you say you were ...

Two and a half years.

...you were a freshman or a sophomore in high school?

I don't know. We were very advanced in education in this *Gymnasium*.

Now what would have ... how many years would you have had to go to complete the *Gymnasium*?

Four years. Four years.

Okay.

Before I would go to college, but ...

Okay.

... they wouldn't let me. I mean Jewish people weren't allowed to go to college in Poland.

What did you do for fun as a youngster?

I was belonging to Jewish organization Akiba. And then ...

Aki- Akiba?

Akiba.

Okay.

Like Rabbi Akiba. And we had all the Jewish people, boys and girls, and... we learned Hebrew. There was everything educational and whenever you could get some education, you got it. There was some older boys or older girls or they already graduate from it, they were teaching us. And that's where I learned how to read and write Hebrew. And ...

Was it social as well as ...

There was very social. We were singing Hebrew songs. We had a farm a little bit farther... at Krakow. We ... the whole group went to farm and we ... over there we played games and it was very much social and educational also. We learned about *Kabbalah Shabbat*, about everything. Jewish writers and everything what came in about *Jewishkeit*, we did it. Then we were helping out for Israel. We had ... everybody had to ... we paid so much and so much per month. First place to pay for the place where we had the organization; and the second, we sent money to Israel for *Keren Kayemeth*, you see, to buy the land from Arabs. And that was my... the nicest years of my life in this ...

And most of your social life took place there?

Yes.

Can you kind of describe your friends? What they ...

Yeah. They were all very highly educated because Jewish people ... if they have anything, any money, parents, and if they didn't, there was somebody in the family to help out. So I had... very intelligent friends and we had ... I mean we visit each other and I mean everything was in organization. When are you going to be there? Can you be there five o'clock? Four o'clock? But, you see I had to watch out when I went in because Jewish people weren't allowed to go to organization because if somebody from Christian would see me from the school, they would reported me and I would be expelled from school. So I had to go in whenever ... different ways from my home I tried so nobody would know me.

So did ... so you congregated with your friends at these ... at this place?

Yes.

Was this... this was during your teenage years?

That was the teenage years. Yes.

Okay. All right. Did you have friends of the opposite sex?

Oh, in this organization ... I'm in just the all together groups and singing and I dancing Horah, Hebrew dances. But there was nobody like dating now today dating. No. There was nobody dating. No way.

Did you have a job at that time?

I was working and ... in somebody ... there were making hats and I was trying to make some money and so I was delivering the hats and... buying things. They were sending me for shopping for the shop and... delivered the hats and I got a nice tips always because I needed money for the organization and sometimes we went to restaurant to have just cookies and ... or some kind of cakes for fun and that's everybody needs few dollars. Parents, they didn't give money to the children.

And how old were you about that time?

Between ... after ... when I was going to school there was [unclear]. Yeah. I mean between 12... 12 and 16.

Okay. How did you get along with your parents?

Oh, that was just normal life. There was nothing like they do argue and talk back. You don't talk back to parents. Whatever they decided to do, you just did it.

Do you think they were strict or would say they were permissive?

They were ... I mean we were raised like that, that the parents mean the best for you and whatever they want you to do, you should do it.

Were you ever rebellious?

I don't remember anything like that. Oh, sometimes I just didn't want to go to school and I play hooky that I am sick. So my mother told me if you are sick, you stay in bed. And that's cured.

That got you up real fast? Were there any issues that you remember that created tension between you and your parents?

No. No. No. No. Not ... there was nothing like that.

What values or standards were most important to your parents?

Standards were to educate the children, to feed them, to have nice warm clothes and educate them.

Education.

That's why we didn't have money. My father said, "All I will give you education which nobody can take away from you." But it happened the other way. They took that with the education. Took all my family. But that's ... I know when it came tuition, my older sister, she was going to trade school, also Hebrew. She learned Hebrew over there and that was very, very expensive school. But when she was going to public school, she took private lesson from English and French. So first year my father pay for the tuition. And a year later, she didn't need it. She makes so much money to giving French lesson in English lessons and she made it big money. She was then dressing up. I remember my sister made dresses for her, from pure silk. Then it was something unusual. But she was dressed up like ... because she was going to very exclusive houses, rich houses. And she made the money, good money.

Do you remember any other values that they instilled in you in particular, other than education? Or ... and any values that particularly affected your daily ... affect your daily life today?

Yes. My mother was teaching us the problem with the boys, what may happen. So, therefore, you see, she was telling us to not even dream of sex like they do now. That was ... my parents were telling us this and then there was ... I think the most important in having the right friends, you see. But we did have because all my sisters belong to this Akiba organization. And ... because of different stages for different ages there were.

What was the religious life like in your general community? Would you say it's more orthodox or more reformed?

There was orthodox. Jewish people were ... when there came Sabbath ... when the ... in the middle of Krakow, you saw Jewish people with the long coats, black coats, and on the head the kind of fur hats and they were going to sit and go and praying and there... and there was the Sabbath and, of course, my mother prepared everyone Jew, *cholent*... so because it was hot meal, but how they did it. They put ... prepare everything in the big container and give to day care. And after because, you see, Sabbath you're suppose not to have lights or nothing. So when that came I guess at noontime or after synagogue, we went to the day care to get the ... to bake the ... our *cholent* and that was a big dinner. But there was very religious city.

Would you say ... how well were Jews accepted in the general community?

In Krakow, in middle of the Krakow, they were just almost Jewish people in the... They settle in the middle of the town.

Jewish? All Jewish?

All Jewish. And who lived there only janitors or maids, but most Jewish people. And one was supporting Jew the other. We had a nice Jewish community when somebody didn't have enough food to eat or they were poor, the Jewish come to help them out.

So the Jewish community was pretty isolated, would you say and not accepted by the general community, or...?

Jewish people they kept to themselves because we couldn't get help from government. Any other help. Jewish people had to help themselves.

Did you experience antisemitism?

Very much so.

Can you give some examples?

Yes. In school, we could ... wintertime we were ice skating and I had the ice skates and we had the school playground ice. So we were ice skating, not everybody had this, but whoever had we were ice skating there. And what they were doing, they took a stick of wood and put under the girl's skates and she fell down and broke her nose. So from then on, my mother wouldn't ... my parents wouldn't allow to skate anymore with them because it could happen easily to me. And after school, we were thrown with the stones, with the rocks, and when ... I remember when we had ... you see there was no gas or electrical heating. It was ... the heating ... we heat up with coal. So when we needed to buy coal for winter, I remember that we hire ... we ordered the whole bunch of coal and then we had to get ... I remember this boy was going to school with me before. He was tall, big guy. And the only way we could get the coal home in one piece to have somebody Christian on top of the ... with the horses so they didn't know that it was delivered for Jewish people. Otherwise, we wouldn't get half of it back. And that's why the Jewish people keep to themselves. And, of course, if you wanted to have a good doctor, only Jewish doctor. But they had to educate themselves out of the country. They couldn't educate.

Your religious education ... can you describe your religious ...

Yes. My mother always teach me the prayer for bread and different prayers.

So was most of your religious education done at home? You said you studied Hebrew. Was that mostly in that organization?

Yes. My mother taught us the prayers and how to *Shabbos*... Sabbath holiday. How to do it. And then the rest I learned. I wanted to learn Hebrew so badly because my sisters,

whenever they want to say something to themselves, secrets, they were talking Hebrew. And I was very upset because I couldn't understand. So I learn intensive Hebrew which later on I said, "I know what you are talking here." I can't speak that yet but I knew what they were talking. So, but the most education ... first your religious background I had gotten from home about the kosher and the prayers, but the rest Hebrew education and the more advanced that was in this organization. Of course, I was going to Hebrew school. It was forcibly. Government asked us to go to Hebrew school but over there you didn't learn anything that was Jewish history which was almost ... I wouldn't know very on a high level. I didn't understand why I was going to that school and ...

And was that when you were in public school? When you were young?

In public school, I couldn't understand what ... I was saying what the books say but I really didn't understand. But later on in this Hebrew organization I learned and start to understand because they did explain everything. One... one little article in one whole hour.

Oh.

So, I start ... there was a lot of philosophy in Jewish religious and then there were famous writers and then that's what we learn about it.

And were your siblings' education similar to yours?

Exactly the same way. Everyone belonged to Hebrew organization.

And did your family kept kosher?

Oh, yes.

Okay. I thought so. And how did you celebrate Sabbath? You told me a little bit ...

Sabbath?

... and the other holidays?

Yeah, Sabbath was holiday and we then cook. Everything was quiet.

Did you go to the synagogue?

No. We young children didn't. My father did go. My mother didn't go. Most men, they did go to synagogue but woman didn't go very much. All on high holidays they went. And I remember, of course, they were fasting. It was very hard to, you know ... by the time they came home, some of my sister always ... older sister came with some food in front, you know, to meet parents and give them... most, I think the orange... orange, they gave them orange...

After Yom Kippur?

After Yom Kippur. They care so they let them have it on the way because it was quite a long... long stretch to walk home. So.

And the other... Did you celebrate the other holidays like ...

We did. Every holiday was observed the right way. The way, of course ... in Europe we weren't Orthodox but Orthodox were much stricter than we were. But in United States, we would be the Orthodox.

And ... so what qualities would you say were most important to your family?

Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah and Passover. It was a big holiday and hard holiday. My mother was slaving in the kitchen all day long.

What was your favorite holiday?

Passover.

What were your favorite ... some of your favorite foods? Jewish foods?

Passover, I liked the fried *matzah*, the way my mother made it and fish, gefilte fish, goose and the barley soup when she made it. And, of course, the cake, that was cheesecake. She made it by herself and poppy cake she made. They were most ... and apple cakes, she made it. Apple cakes...

She's a good baker? Huh?

Oh, yeah. Apple cake, poppy seed cake. They were the most, for the ... and cheesecakes and, of course, the plain for after the Yom Kippur, she baked just plain cake because first we had to eat something very simple. And we were fasting.

Okay. Did you celebrate any secular holidays? Like community holidays, national holidays?

Not Jewish people.

Okay. What kind of Jewish cultural activities took place in your town? Did they have Yiddish theater, music, literature?

Oh, yes. In Krakow, we had Jewish music, Jewish theater, which were speaking in Jewish. And that's all that there was. Jewish theater but it was very famous. People came in from all over because that was the only one theater in maybe half of the Poland.

What about Jewish writers and literature? Did they ...

We had ...

Music?

Yes. We had Gebirtig music. Gebirtig music. (referring to Mordechai Gebirtig)

What is that?

He was writing and, of course, during the war they killed him and his daughters. For a little while they were with me... with me in concentration camp when we were washing clothes by the big ... something, big washboards and I was with those Gebirtig ... two blonde, beautiful girls.

[End of Tape 1 Side 1 – no recording on side 2] [Begin Tape 2 Side 1]

Continuing the interview on the post-war experiences of Ida Loeffler. When and how did you meet your spouse?

I met him after concentration camp. He was looking for somebody from Krakow and he found me and we started to talk about our life in Krakow.

Where did you ... where did he find you in the [inaudible].

Yeah. After this war in Bergen Belsen and we started talking and we fell in love. So he proposed to me to get married. I said I wouldn't get married in Germany. I don't want to have on my certificate anything from Germany. So he said, "You know what? I found my brother in Sweden. I go to Sweden and then I send for you." But one thing was only I needed a letter from him but I did have letters from him. He was writing all the time to me. But I never had with me. I went over on the ship and I supposed to be going to Sweden. And I don't have no evidence to show me that somebody wants me from Sweden.

Oh.

So they send me back. But since I was working in this drug store, I was acquainted with all the officers from the ... our little government and I told them the problem. I need to go to Sweden. I don't have no passport and what happened. So they told me, "Don't worry. I know one girl what she has two affidavits. One to United States and one to Sweden. She chose to go to United States, so you go on and leave now."

So that's how you got to Sweden.

That's right. And on the ... you know, on the ... they look on this thing, you know, different name and they never questioned about it.

What attracted you and your husband to each other?

The stories were here to say where he grew up and about his family and, you see, Krakow ... you see, I seen him before but he was one year older and he was working and when I went to park, sometimes with group of people, I saw him sitting and reading book. But never pay any attention, I was with my group. But then when we started to talk stories and remind ourselves about the city, what we were doing because there was special people in Krakow. They weren't just ... everybody had ... was brought up high up in ...

Culture?

... in culture.

So you have a lot in common then, it sounds like?

Yes. And he was in music business.

Okay. We'll talk about that. Can you describe your wedding? Where was it? Was it in Sweden?

It was in Sweden.

Where?

It was in Sweden in Eskilstuna, Torshälla first. So how I came, you see, I wouldn't stay with my husband because I wasn't married. There was different life. So my ... his brother was married already and they had two rooms. So they had three beds. So I was sleeping in the kitchen and my future husband was in the bedroom and they were in the bedroom. And what I did ... we wanted place of ourselves but we have to get married and we don't have no money for nothing. So what we did we went to City Hall right away from work, with working clothes, and got married.

So your wedding was in City Hall?

In the City Hall and then we live together for...

Well, wait. Did you have any guests with you or take anybody with you?

No. We didn't have any ... we didn't even know how that goes but we knew that if I wanted to live with a man I should be married. So.

Who officiated at your wedding?

The officers from City Hall.

Okay. Okay.

We even didn't know we were going to get married. He said meet me here and there we go to City Hall and get the certificate. We didn't talk that was really marriage, you know. So

then we live together and Jewish Federation provide us with the housing. And was very poor place and cold, terribly cold. So we lived for a year... in this. We save up enough money. I didn't know anything about bank, but over there you didn't have to worry about nothing. We paid lot money, I put in [unclear] closet, on top, one on top of the other. The house was never locked. We went to work, came back. Everything was there and we save up some money then we made it religious ...

Religious oath.

Yes. After a year in Eskilstuna in Sweden. Yes.

What is that? Is that a city?

That was a different city. Yeah. And we had a rabbi and, you know, different ...

And did you have guests at this wedding?

Yes. I had guests. Well, they were just people where they came.

How many would you say?

Oh, I don't know. Maybe 30, 40.

Okay.

Those people where they live in neighborhood, Jewish people, you know.

And was it at a synagogue? Or at a ...

No. The rabbi ... there was no synagogue in the city. So the rabbi came to us and they made a *chuppah*. But it was all in the place where we made the reception and he asked me, "Did you invite your parents? Because you supposed to do it." So we didn't know anything about it. So he said a prayer.

I see. Did you have food and music there?

Yeah. We had food. I don't think so. There was no music. We had a so nice, sweet reception and fruit and that was it.

Where was your ... what was your husband's occupation?

Before the war he was working in the music store that was ... and he loved music.

And after the war?

And after the war, he was working as a printer. He learn ...

In Sweden?

No. No. In Sweden he was working in a factory, metal factory. And ...

In what kind of factory?

Metal.

Metal? Where did you want to live after the war?

After the war we live over there in Sweden in Eskilstuna.

Okay. But did you ... how did you end up in America?

My husband had some kind of relatives ... aunts and they send tickets for us.

And you wanted to come to America?

Yes, because I was thinking maybe I find somebody. Anyway, he had family here. So I said I was happy that he had somebody.

Okay. How ... what kind of family. Cousins, did you say?

They were two old aunts, three old aunts. One passed away just shortly and then cousins. He had ... there were real first cousins and, you know, they didn't want to know us.

They did or did not?

Did not.

Oh, really?

They told us that we are ... we were wanted something from them too much.

Oh.

And I was very disappointed, you see, because we weren't raised like that.
How did you travel here from Europe?

We came partially with airplane and my husband was so sick on the airplane. He said, "I won't go." We could have come to Kansas City on airplane, but he says no more from New York. So we went ... came with the train.

So you came to America coming to Kansas City?

Yeah.

That was where you were coming?

First I stayed in New York.

And this is where his relatives were? In Kansas City?

Yes, in Kansas City. And first we came to New York.

What were your first impressions of arriving in America?

Oh, I was dead tired. Just seen people and people. And, you know, I was very exhaustful.

How old were you at that time?

From Sweden? Um, 21 ... 30, 31 exactly.

1931?

I was 31-years-old.

Oh, you were 31?

Yes.

How long did you live in Sweden?

About nine years.

Oh, nineteen?

Nine years.

Oh, nine years.

Yeah.

After... so you came ...

Nine, almost ten.

So you came in what '55? '50s? In the '50s?

Even longer.

Really?

'57.

You came in '57?

Yeah. You see we got there to come to United States and my husband didn't want it because we had wonderful life in Sweden.

Oh, I see. Why did you ... why did you decide to come? Because of ...

Because of the family first place. And second, I was very sick over there. I couldn't take the climate. I was ... you see, first he caught cold then I caught cold and was going all around like that.

Oh.

And I started to have, you know ... in Sweden I developed my problem after the concentration camp and the climate was killing me. We didn't know. You see, we weren't allowed from Sweden ... when you settle down in one city, if you wanted to go visit, even somebody else in another city, you had to have permission to go. They were keeping tab on us.

Oh, I see.

And then ... we didn't have brains to move out to different city like Malmö was close to the ocean. It was warm. But we didn't ... we didn't talk that way, you see. We thought whole Sweden was cold. You see, we weren't thinking the way you think now. So we came here to United States and we weren't very welcome. Only this one aunt. She felt bad about her sister [unclear] because she send out here for brother and another sister to United States, but my husband's mother had too many children and she couldn't send them. And she felt bad about it. So she was very nice to us. She came from Colorado. She used to live in Colorado. And they rent apartment. The others, her sister, had a building and she made a place for us over there and she lived with us for six months. And, you know, we wanted place of our own but it was very hard to get apartment.

Oh, yeah. I'm sure.

I knew few words of English from school.

Just a few?

I could ... I understood what people were talking but I couldn't speak out.

Did your husband speak English?

No.

So how did you learn to speak?

I went to school. I went to ... but what I did, I went to a building and talked to landlord right away. I didn't want to talk to nobody else. Just the landlord directly. No managers. And I said, "I would like to rent this apartment," and this and this ... I don't know. He looked at me and he says, "Okay." Just like that. There wasn't too many ... there was no apartment. But, you see, this place he painted. It was clean. But ...

Is that ... now was that after you were here? Where did you live ... you lived in the place that she got for you when you first came?

Yeah.

So this is your ...

And then five blocks farther I found another apartment. But it was infested with cockroaches. And my aunt's place was also infested with cockroaches. I never saw cockroach in Sweden as long as I lived there. I didn't see no bugs even. We didn't have those screens on the windows because there was no flies or nothing. It was too cold. And I couldn't take it. So what I did I told the landlord. I don't know, somehow he listened to me. And I told him, "Look. It's awful hard to live here and very expensive because I buy a gallon every week of poison. I spray all around the house. For a whole week, it's nice and clean. Then they come back, then my neighbor sprays again and they come back to me." And I said, "It's too expensive for me to live here. I'm going to have to find another place," I told him. But what he did find ... he did hire company to spray every month. But, you know, the place wasn't really nice. So what I did ... yeah, we gathered some money compensation, \$2,000.00 for... It took us you know how many years to get those \$2,000.00? I got \$1,000.00 and my husband \$1,000.00. Maybe 15 years, 13 years. So what we did first? Bought a house here.

This house?

Yes. And he needed car. And ... because it was kind of dangerous to ... he was going down the streetcar before everybody started to get really bad over there. So he would drive a car and all the money gone.

How did you adjust to your new country? Do you feel you adjusted quickly?

Yes, I did. Because, you see, my language ... you see, I did more with my language than those other people when they came in because I had a background. And I went to school in Sweden. I already speak German, Swedish, Hebrew and Polish. And English just came.

What were your biggest challenges here?

How to ... I mean how to make a living because it was very difficult for us, and my husband didn't want to allow me to go to work. He thought, you know, of old days. But the bills

were coming in and it was hard to ... of course, it was rent not very much then, but it was hard to pay for everything. So I went, applied for a job as a cashier in Katz's Drug Store and I started to work. Right away they took me. And right away, of course, the wages were ...

This was when you first came here?

A few years after. And then I started a dollar per hour and because I had a child so I couldn't afford to have a babysitter. So I work from 6:00 o'clock to 11:00 o'clock at night. My husband came from work and I prepare everything and I went to work. So I made enough money for grocery, which that was a tremendous help. But then came Blue Law and I was part-timer and they lay off all the part-timer. I was the last one of laying ... being laid off.

Now the Blue Law, did that say they could not open on Sunday?

They couldn't sell tobacco.

Oh, okay.

And I was working in the tobacco department then.

Oh, okay.

Or toys or nothing in this thing.

Oh, I see.

So I was the last one to lay ... be laid off. Then I started to work for Avon and made it better.

Selling on your own?

On my own and I was working there for 15 years. First, I was walking. I was walking as far as Ward Parkway.

To houses, different houses?

To houses and packages, and since I speak so many different languages, this lady she said, "I'm come from here," and then I talk the language. So they were just like family to me. They were buying up from me and I was very successful and I made big money. But I didn't drove. I didn't have a car either. But you see my husband had a carpool and car was standing here for two weeks and I was walking. And he didn't want me to drive because he was afraid I'm going get killed. So what I did, he didn't know anything about it, I went to city, take the written test. It was hard for me because I didn't understood what I was ... what is all about it. Three miles before or five miles or lights. But I went few times and I passed it. Very good, 95%. I learned.

You were determined?

Yes. Then I went ... and he still insist not for me to drive. I went to school with the children, high school, Westport, to learn how to drive. He took me over there. It was written test and then they pick me up at first. I had only six lessons. That means I was ... there was five people in the car. Wait a minute! I drove 20 minutes only at a time. All together I drove one hour or two hours and I was already old lady. But he couldn't take me for test because he was working. So I asked one of my customers if she could take me and whatever ordered she'd get free. She did. And I barely made it, 71 points.

But you were the driver now?

Yeah. 71 points, I made it. No more.

Well, that's ... you know, that did it. Did the trick. Did... did you ever face any discrimination here do you think?

I tell you what. I was very open-minded. If somebody told me something, I just told them off and explained. And explained how that was and how it is. And if they were talking the religion, I had a good background and I knew what I was talking. And I told them Christianity is beginning of Judaism. You came from us.

How did you find the strength to overcome the challenges? What gave you ... what gave you the strength to go on after your experiences?

I don't know. I knew that I had to do it. That was all. I was working very hard. I had the two children and I was working at nights and my house was just the same like is now, clean and wash and iron and go to work.

Just did it, huh?

And I just did it.

Did you talk about your wartime experiences at all?

Nobody would want to listen. Once in awhile to doctor was coming one man and he tried to talk to me about it but he stopped ... I don't know what he was. He started to talk. That's supposed to happen that way and so ... and then I didn't want to talk to him anymore. So I told him, "Do not come here because I'm not allowed to talk to you because I have cash register and I have responsibility." So ... but I told off everybody. Whoever was trying to talk something against Jewish people or my religious, first I tried to explain how and what. And I never feel under. I felt always superior to others. I don't know why. But that's the way I felt.

Who became your closest friends?

Here I had ... she's still alive. We used to live on Troost, house to house.

Were they fellow survivors? Were they ...

Of course.

Most of them were your ...

Yeah. We keep very close, all the survivors. When there comes wedding or funeral or unveiling, the rabbis will tell you, even there are older people already and there is more people on the funeral than anybody else would have it.

Do you feel ...

They are keeping together.

Do you feel more comfortable with fellow survivors than you would with other people?

Not especially because, you see, I blend in very easily with other people. In fact, in Jewish Center I associate with everybody. But I feel ... you know, the survivors, we are closer because we went through the same thing.

Were there any other people besides your aunt that helped you to get settled or find a job?
Nobody. Nobody.

You did it on your own?

We did all on our own.

And you went to school to learn English and you went to Westport High School to learn driving?

Yes.

Okay. Did you go to any other school since that mainly?

Not here in United States, just English. I read and write. Of course, on spelling I have to go to my encyclopedia.

When did you become an American citizen?

Eight years after I came here.

Okay.

That was ... I think it was five years. I'm sorry.

Five years.

It was five years ago.

Was that a significant event for you?

Yes. I was happy. We were happy after we became citizens because we thought our citizenship Polish. We just didn't want it to have nothing to do with Poland. And, of course, I got a lot of letters from Polish consulate. We want you. We do this. But we wanted to be ...

So you were happy to be an American?

Yes.

Okay. Did you have any other jobs other than Avon and your cashier's job?

No. I was working quite a few years. I was working 15 years for Avon.

Okay.

And then I, you know, ... before I had a job I babysit. Make some extra money because it was tight here. It was ... you see, now to the Jewish people, the Russian, they are getting help from every place. We never got nothing. Nothing. Completely nothing. And ... but it's good because we did on our own and I am very proud of it.

You have a lot to be proud of.

Nobody helped me. Only my aunt, which was a relative.

Yeah. What kinds of hobbies and recreational pleasures have you come to enjoy? I know you needlepoint. And you make ...

Yeah. Here in United States, needlepoint, handwork and ... I don't know. I was always busy with something.

How were you introduced to your hobbies? Did you ...

I went to once ... she was my customer in Medic Shop. She was a good customer. And once I deliver her order to her own house and I saw the house full with most beautiful pictures. You couldn't see the walls. There was colored out with paint... with the ... with the needlepoint and the rugs and the floor like I have.

Hooked rugs?

Hooked rugs. But I had one before the whole floor was covered with rugs just like her house because I just went into her house and I said, "Where shall I walk?" And she said, "Just walk on them because they are washable." And so I started to do this needlepoint and I play good checkers and cards.

What kind of cards do you play?

I used to play Bridge. And any kind of game I play and very good.

Rummy Cube.

No Rummy Cube. This kind of new to me and you know ...

It's fun. I like it too.

And whoever sees me, very hard to win from me.

I'm going to challenge you some day.

Oh, I would love to. I would love to. Really. Because a lot of people come and when they are swimming ... wait a minute. You know them. I can't think of her name. Tall lady. She wants to play with me because she wants to learn how to play.

What, if any, post-war events have had great significance to you?

Getting together with those old Holocaust survivors. We made dinners together. We collect money for Jewish Center. We collect money for Israel. And dancing we have together. Dinners and dancing, we were socialized together.

Okay.

Very much together.

Were there any world events or national events that have had an impact or a significance for you since the war that, you know, you especially remember?

Yeah. I remember all the wars and I can even ... I feel sorry for what I read. You see I have the paper every day. And when I read I just ... I just remind myself.

The other tragedies that are going on in the world?

Yes. How it was. So.

When were your children born?

One was ...

And what are their names? Tell me their names and when they were born.

My Stephen, he passed away.

Oh, I'm sorry.

He was born in Sweden. And then my daughter Rose ...

When, when?

In 195- ... '53. That was quite a ... because we didn't want to have any children from beginning. You know, we were afraid. Too afraid to have family, what may happen to them.

And when did he pass away?

He was 31-years-old.

Oh.

Yeah. Then I had a daughter. I have ... she's 41. Rose.

She was born?

Here ...

Here?

... in United States. And she and me, you know, kind of hard time to live with those, you know, as survivors because we are different. We are different. We are not always happy people, you see.

Did you talk to your children about your experiences during the war?

No. No. Because we didn't ... we didn't want them to, I mean, to feel bad. But when they started to have in-school interviews, especially my daughter, she interviewed me. She was in college. Of course, I got other interviews but when she was in University, she interviewed me and my husband. She got an A+.

How old were your children when they first found out that you ...

She was already ... oh, they knew that I was in camp except ...

Oh, you just didn't ...

Because she was asking, "Where's my grandmother?"

Oh. In light of your past experience, how did having children affect you and what were your emotions about having children?

I just wanted to have to make my husband want any of them. I wanted to have children. I wanted to have ... but we were afraid to have them.

But when you had them, were you ... did you feel you were carrying on?

Yes. I did everything good possible.

Did you name them after relatives who had ...

Yes.

... perished? Who?

They were named after my parents and his ...

And your husband's parents?

You see, my father, you see first born. The man use the other [unclear]. But, you see I didn't have no brains yet then because I should have changed the name for Abraham. But my father was Adolph. I remember my mother was calling him Adolph. And I didn't want to name my child Adolph. So I give the right to my husband to name after his father.

Oh, I see.

Because of that.

I see.

Yeah. But, you see, now I know better. But I didn't know at the time.

What made you open up and start talking about your experiences?

Different people were coming interviewing. So many interview I had. And I didn't ... I mean, it was hard for me to start to talk about it. But they said we needed this.

When was this?

That was, oh, maybe 15, 20 years back.

So like in the late '70s or ...

Or '60s.

Really?

I started to get interviewed so much.

So then did you talk to your children then?

Oh, they knew it.

They knew?

They know it. And once in awhile my husband said about his family, you know. His friends, you know.

Have you ever returned to your home?

Oh, no. I will never go home.

Okay. Do you feel that you've raised your children differently because of your experiences?

I think so.

In what way?

More strict. I raised them the way I was raised, you see. When they came in, they wanted to go someplace, they had to bring the people with whom they were going and where they're going. And they had to be home on certain time. And I thought it was the right thing. And they did do it.

Was that because you feared for their safety?

Yes. For their safety and yes, that was the main thing. But I thought I did it the right thing at the time, you know. And there was ... you know now people are allowed so many different things. But we didn't.

How do your Holocaust memories penetrate your life today? Are there sounds or smells that evoke past experiences? Or make you think back certain things you may see on a daily basis?

Yes. I do.

Like what? What would ...

Live with it.

But is there something that makes you more aware that you may see around you?

Yes. And when I sleep, I dream still about it.

What images haunt you?

You see, when my husband was alive, sometimes I was sleeping and start to holler because somebody was running after me, shooting me. And he had to wake me up hard. I was sleeping hard. And now I don't know what I do at night. I am alone. But you live with it.

How did the war affect your attitude of your practice of religion?

From beginning, I was out of religion completely.

Did you ever stop believing in God?

Yes, completely.

Do you believe in God now?

Yes. It was hard to come back to it.

What brought you back?

Just myself. My background.

Do you ... did you raise your children religiously?

Not so strictly religious but they went to Hebrew school and they learn how to read and write Hebrew and they knew about the holidays. But, you see, here it is different. We tried not to ... you had to work ... no man has ever do work on holidays. And we tried to have dinners together, you know, on the holidays and *Shabbos* candlelight, the *Shabbos* candles, and they seen that. But I never believed in kosher. I never did. Even when I was ... before the war. I taught that this is something not right for me. Of course, we had a kosher house. I had to do it what has to do. Be down. But myself, I never believed in it. But if my parents would be alive, I would keep it.

Do you belong to a synagogue or a temple?

Yes, I do.

Which one?

Beth Shalom.

Okay. Are you active there?

Not, not, not anymore. I used to ... we used to belong here. There was then Israel synagogue, just walking distance. So I was very active over there. I was working over there constantly. But then they move out to Kansas and we switched to Beth Shalom and in Beth Shalom they don't need me. They have so many people over there working.

What's your favorite Jewish holiday now?

None. I don't like no Jewish holidays. It's too much memory.

Okay. What traditions, from before the war, did you share with your family here?

We did share, you know, all the holidays. The Yom Kippur, we went to synagogue and... Passover, change dishes and everything. But now I don't like them anymore. No holiday. It's too much memory.

How do you feel ... do you feel ... do you look at life differently having had the experiences you've had than you feel that you would if you hadn't had them? Do you understand what I'm saying? How did your... how did your experiences make you look at life differently?

Now?

Or do you look at life differently because of your experiences?

Yeah. I am different and wiser. More experience in life. And that's all about it, you know. I look differently because I have ... I'm more relaxed. I have more time and before I do anything, I think before I do anything. And I try to tell my daughter, "Don't do something where you will regret late."

What would you ... to what would you attribute your ability to adjust to a normal life after the war? What do you think helped you be able to do that?

I don't know. My strength, inner strength. My inner strength. That's all what I can say. I had to do it because nobody else to do it for me. And if I want to be alive, this is the only way. To work and go out in the world. That was my motive.

Was does being an American mean to you?

Freedom, first place, and then good life, easy life. People are complaining this is expensive and that is expensive. It's just, just nothing. They don't even know what expensive is. I live in Sweden and I know how much we spend money for food, one-tenth of the income. And when I came to this country, I said, "Everything is almost for nothing." You see. You spend one-fourth ... I don't know if you spend that much from your regular income, weekly income, on food. Now is much easier life and comfortable life.

Do you feel American?

Oh, yeah.

Why?

I don't know. Probably I don't feel nothing to Poland. Sweden was very nice country for ten years. They were just wonderful to us. They took us by hand and show us how to shop for grocery, what is what. And they were good to us. Very. But here, I just don't know. I just feel American.

Do you think most Americans take their freedom for granted?

Yes. They do.

Why do you feel that way?

All they think about themselves. All ... how to spend a good time. What to eat. How to clothe. And this is to me minor things, you see.

What are the most important lessons we should learn from the Holocaust?

The Holocaust exists ... did exist, first place, because of other people don't think that it did exist. Something like that. For one we learn not to repeat anymore of the same thing. That should be learned. And that's why I had this interview and I had a tape recorder before and that's what I feel really.

If people know that they ...

They think about what to buy for Hanukkah, what to buy Christmas and they think about themselves. How to improve, how to get something out of somebody else. I don't think that way. I think how to help somebody. You see, I am 76-years-old. I was working ... three years ago I quit it. I was working 11 years for geriatric. I was a volunteer. Now I'm buying ... helping other people to buy grocery and run their errands. That's ...

That's wonderful.

That's what I try to do.

Okay. Anything else that you want to say? This concludes our interview. Is there anything else that you'd like to ...

No. Nothing. I don't have ... I mean, my life according, I have everything that I could dream of. I have good life here, but I am not happy. I don't have happy.

Because of before just won't let you be happy? Okay. This concludes the interview with Ida Loeffler.

Thank God!