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Mina Nisenkier Interview
December 29, 1999

What was your name at birth?
Mina Nisenkier.

Nisenker wasn't your maiden name.
No. No. No. Markavich.

When were you born?
1924. 10/10.

In what city?
Lodz, Poland.

What do know about the circumstances of your birth? Were you born at home?
I cannot tell you that. I think so.

What were your parent's names?
My mother's was Deborah; my father was Samuel. Shmuel.

Describe the roll of your mother and father in the household. You know - what did your father do? Did your mother work?
My mom didn't work. I have, let's see 4 sisters and 1 brother. She had plenty to do without working. Cause mothers did a lot; you know shopping things, whatever they could.

And your father, what did he do?
He was a tailor.

Now you told me that you had 4 brothers…?
Four sisters and 1 brother.

Tell me about their names, their ages.
My brother was the youngest. Then my oldest sister, she's not alive. She went to Warsaw and that's where she perished there. Then I have a older sister that I was and she didn't survive either.

As you go along tell the names of them too so we can identify them later.

Tobi and then was Bena and then was Zina and then I was.

Ok, that's the order, ok.
Then [inaudible] like they call me, and Maria, the youngest. There was the five. And my brother.

He the older or younger?
He's the youngest.

What was his name?
Kopel

What kind of neighborhood did you live in? We're going to talk about the streets…
Well it was uh, sort of Polish. Not too many Jews lived there. Just like they call it our Jews, just you know not too many, but they treat us nice. But they didn't treat so nice, the others what they came, of course you know. But I suppose it was nice.

Talk about the inside of your home. What did your home consist of?
Well we had, we lived in a nice neighborhood. It was um, wasn't a very large home, and one big bedroom, that about three of us slept together.

Is the kitchen a separate room or within one of the rooms?
It was separate.

How well off was your family? Did you have servants? Did you own land?
No. No servants, no land.

Did you take vacations?
In the summer.

Where?
It was the country, because it was so hot, in Lodz during the summer. That's why we went to the country for 3 months.

Did your father come up, you know sometime during the week or the beginning…?
He came for the weekend.

What kind of foods did you eat? Tell us about some of your favorite foods?
If I would tell you I didn't like anything.

You weren't a very good eater?
No.

You weren't?
Yeah. Well just normal Jewish people eat. Chicken soup, noodles, uh, rice. Like everybody else.

What were your family's political affiliations?
They were Jews, I don't think that they have politics at all.

Now we'll talk about growing up. Describe the schools you attended? Like your favorite subjects, the teachers, the students that were there.
I attended school with, not just Jewish children, it was mixed. But we were treated nice. The subject I studied, like you know to be everything like here, but we started about 8 o'clock in the morning. We came back 3 o'clock, just like here.

Did you have recess too? Did you go out and play?
No. No recess, no recess.

I don't think you graduated high school. How far did you go in school?
Well when in 19--, they came in at 1939, the Germans and then it was no school, no more nothing. Just like the war stopped completely.

We're back before the war, what did you do for fun as a youngster?
Like all youngster, even here we had a lot of friends we came together, that was normal, a normal life.

Describe your friends. Some of the hobbies. Did you belong to an organization?
Not really, because to belong we had to go very far to there, we'd have to take the streetcar, thing like this. But in house we had fun.

You sound like you had a pretty nice childhood, fun.
Yes.

I'm not sure how this affected your teenage years, because it's been in wartime. How did you spend your spare time? Even if you couldn't go back to school you were still with everybody – right?
Yes, I was with everybody, it was like …. I was involved and we were between us we were just trading books and we just…. we did what we could. If you want taken to work… we have to be like… they are came into us and saw us…somebody that didn't nothing…they took us to work. Like to scrub the floors and do anything all their do work.

Who was making you do that?
The Germans.

The Germans already, Okay.
They came in in 1939.

You said you like to read. Let's just talk about you before the war. Where did you get your books? Is there a library?
Library - oh yes. Yes, in fact, I had an older sister that she loved to read too. And I should never read her books, but I stole her books. I read them first then she did.

Talk about your good friends you had, you know in your younger years. Did you have some best friends and boyfriends?
Yes, very good friends, and we also stay in the, you know the beginning… not in the ghetto, because it is was like far. From there you could not go. You cannot walk after 5:00, and you didn't have any subways or street cars or anything that you can use during the day.

What did you guys do at that time?
We played cards, we had [inaudible]. We just ran from one place to another because still the fences…the wooden fences…and since we needed to… to heat our homes because it was so cold… we put apart the fences to go to one another. [inaudible] but we had to be back 6:00.

Did you always listen…I mean you didn't try to get in trouble or anything did you?
No. No. No, because like I say, if we were out a little bit later we just went the back yard and they were open.

At that point you were still with your parents? You know your parents were still…were they doing hard work too?
We didn't have any, they could not work. Then my father got sick and he could not work too much anyway.

What kind of disease did he have at that time?
He didn't have any disease, but he was just, you know…concentration he could not eat anything.

Malnutrition?
Yea. He started to get his own diarrhea and something like that, but he fought disease.

So you got along very well with your family and your parents. Were they strict?
No. No, I have a large family. My father had uh, 10 brothers and sisters, and the family was very close.

This is your father that had all the…..
Yes, my mother didn't have anybody.

They all there with you too, these cousins and all at the same time?
Yes, at that time, we were together at my grandmother's house, like this was a must. It was a lot of guests, but it's not like we kids from here, wild and everything…you know respect and everything.

Well, that's something. We're going to talk, it says what values or standards were most important to your parents. Let's see you're talking about being respectful.
Oh yes.

And not as wild as the kids today. And how did these values affect your daily life? You know you get along, obviously you didn't try to get in trouble.
Well, we didn't have daily life right then because we were afraid to walk out…they saw somebody like, you know like a young person they grab me on the street or came to the house took me out for a walk.

Were you able to practice your religion? This is mainly before the war too. What was your religious life like in your general community?
Well, we were Jews, you know like a - my mother was more religious than my father, but he had to you know, every Saturday he went to the shul and he had to walk far, very far.

How many shuls were in your area?
Lodz was a big town.

Right, right so they had a lot of them, but it turned out where you lived in relation to where the synagogue was far.
Yes, [inaudible] but you walked it.

Did your family celebrate Shabbat?
Oh yes. Like I say my mom was religious.

Did you go to your grandma for this?
No. To my grandma you went after Shabbat, you know.

So you had Shabbat first?
Yeah. Then for Saturday night we went to my grandma.

What did you do when you were over there? I know all the kids were playing, what was that like.
No, we were very… have to be very quite… she prepare some supper and this include potatoes and some either wurst, herring and something like this, I remember.

Did you like any of that?
We were used to it… I didn't like herring, potatoes with something else.

Did you – your religious education, was there Sunday school or Hebrew school?
No. Just the boys mostly.

The boys. How did you feel about that?
Well, I was happy about that, because a Rabbi came to our house to tutor my brother and also my sisters and myself, but I didn't like the Rabbi.

Did your brother have a Bar Mitzvah or was he too young to have one?
No. Yes, he was the youngest in the family. He was taken away when he was not even 13.

Were your parents more concerned about maintaining a Jewish identify or fitting in, in your community?
No. A Jew was a Jew no matter what. They knew that we are Jewish and but if it comes like Easter… we're afraid to go out because you how it was… they say that the Jews killed Jesus, something like that and they were bottles of water today… start to.

So you stayed away?
Yes.

Was it Passover during that time, too?
Yes, uh-huh.

So this is discrimination that I'm hearing from you. You were discriminated?
Yes, in a way yes.

For religious faith?
Yeah, but we were use to it, you know. We didn't make a big deal of it because this is the way they were and this is we were.

What about like Christmas time, did you notice anything different at that time towards you?
No. We celebrate Hanukkah like everybody, my grandma use to make some wine from raisins. You didn't get any presents or you got a little Hanukkah geld, you know, but not a – not presents… and everybody, my grandma used to make, like since she made wine that time and she gives us raisins, everybody get that big raisins.

Would your family, I think I believe you were telling me, you family were they interested in any secular cultures, such as music? I know you talked about that.
My father, my father was playing the clarinet. He was in the Army, the Russian Army and he was in the band.

Did you take any music up?
No, because it wasn't then that we can afford to do things like that and it was even hard to go some place.

Did you have theatre or anything that you could go to? Was there anything like that available?
We got movies, yeah. We had a lot of friends that we got together, you know a different life than here, but we enjoyed.

Ok, we talked about antisemitism, ok. Now we are going in – this is all before the war – but I don't think this will apply to you because, um, you were young.
That's right.

How did you meet your husband? Oh, wait, wait, wait, this is before the war. Let's skip this – wait a second.

When and how did you first become aware of Nazi presence?
1939 when they came in.

Did you have any awareness before that time? Were you aware of any problems?
Well, most of my father's family they lived Germany, in Berlin, even my father was living there at the time. And we knew it was not good there, but one of my uncles escaped to France. Two uncles went to Brazil.

One went to France and two went to Brazil.
Um-hum.

Did you ever see them?
Yes.

In France?
Because after the war I went to Paris.

What happened with the Brazil?
With the Brazil… I got some….

Did you ever see them again?
I didn't, but I just, I telephoned them.

Do you remember the first day of occupation, you know in 1939 when they came in?
Yes.

What were your experiences, your feelings? Were you scared?
We were scared because they, you know they planes, they were all over us and it was, you know it was very scary since we lived very close to like a train and places something like that. We had to run away from there and we were lucky to have a sister that she lived farther in town, she was married and then we just… I think we took the last streetcar that went.

Who was it what was married? What person were you talking about?
Tobi – she was married.

She was already married?
Yes. She have a child.

So she was your oldest sister and she was the one that was married?
Yes.

So you had somewhere else to go other than just your home?
We stayed there about a week. And then we had to go home because we stayed there as long as we could.

What were your impression upon first, when you first saw Nazi, first seeing them? Did they seem threatening to you?
Oh yes.

Could you tell us some of the things that happened?
Yes, well, they, it was there… a grocery store, it was a friend of ours, Jewish people. They went in there and start to stop this woman… and they ask him what she is. And she tell this name and she say… she was supposed to say, "I'm a Jew, I am Jude", but she didn't say – next time she say something else she was slapped. Next time we decided to just run away from there. And we went again to my sister there and we stay a few weeks and then not long later they just take us, you know sent us to the ghetto. We took our a few things what you could with us you know, we look like we had a little, I don't know from where, a wagon that you pull on it, you know.

Like a wagon?
Yeah, something, yeah. We pull something whatever we could….and we just walked very far.

When did you start wearing that Star of David?
Just right away from the beginning.

You were given one?
Yeah.

Did you have to wear one on your arm and some place else?
First on the arm and then we had like stars, Jewish stars and we had to have sew on every piece of the clothing that you wear that it was visible from the outside. Has to be in the front and one in the back.

So you didn't have to do the arms after a while?
No.

Did you have any non-Jews that tried to help you?
Just was a few, but we didn't want to get them in trouble. We were in the ghetto already that a neighbor came and she brought us something like a loaf of bread or something. But we were scared to death for her, we told her not to come anymore.

So you didn't want her to risk her life either?
No. Because it would be very severe for her, you know that they would try to help Jews.

Were you ever deported to a concentration camp?

Yes. I was – first I, we were working, they had factories and that whatever somebody could do, they'd take them like sewing - or they get straw [inaudible].

What did they do with that straw?
Well, there was just straw, a big pile of straw. We had to wet the straw and then braid it - braid with my ten fingers it was very hard for me and from the braids we made some boots for the Germans to wear over their boots.

What did it do for them?
To keep them warm on the field where they were.

Was that the only kind of labor you were doing? Were you doing some others?
No. Then it was too hard for me, like I say. Then with protection, always good to have somebody to help you out. I went to another factory.

What did you do there?
Uh, *zotler* – you know what a *zotler* do? To make some saddles for the horses. We were making the saddles to put on the horses.

So was that leather, was that harder for you to work with?
Well, they got some tools that make those holes and then they helped. [inaudible]

Describe the circumstances leading up to your liberation? Where were you when you were liberated? Where was everybody, like your family? You know go into that.
My father passed away right after he was sent away. We were sent away because we were working and we stayed in the ghetto and it grows even worse then somebody in a concentration camp. Because whatever they want they came and they just took out some people and some children and just send them away, take them away. We always been in hiding and we didn't have food. Once a week maybe we get a bread that we have to share, you know. This was very hard. Then in 1944, the end of it well they close the ghetto and they send us to camps. I was sent right away to Auschwitz, you know and the wagons for the cattles, what they called it, that we were in, like packed one another without food with nothing. We were there until we came to Auschwitz they let us out there. And we were, at first we were in Birkenau. This is where – that's - everybody comes and they selecting where the chambers were. The gas chambers. The one that survived that we all had to go in that it was like a, a shower there and all and we got everything what we had with us they were taking away right away we didn't have anything just to take what you wore. Then they took this away and give us one thing. I have a [inaudible] this is probably from a very old woman. A black one. A top falls like a German top - I will never forget that. Some circles around thing - It was, skirt was too long and before that when we came to Auschwitz my hair was cut off completely because I have nice hair. And the girl what she, she was from I think from Czechoslovakia and she was mad because her sister had hair like I have and then she was sent to the oven. Then I didn't have any hair. My sister when I was with her didn't recognize me, but not long everybody got their short hair. And then from that on we were there about a week from Birkenau. They send us to Auschwitz. This was like, um, this was walking distance. My sister was very, very skinny. She was like a skeleton,

because from the ghetto she could not eat, she could but we didn't have anything. And, uh, they choose to take her away. Then I told to this German, like when we came back, I says – my sister, you took away my mother, you took everybody away. Leave me my sister or not take me too. He give me a slap with a whip and he say you can't have your sister – if I won't take her somebody else will. Then because of that I had to stay, maybe I would go from that, you know from there maybe two weeks before but because of that I had to stay another two weeks and I was in Auschwitz. And they put us, uh, in like a, they make like a – don't know how to explain, it was like a – a cage but not a closed one with around it and six people were in one of the place one on the other. See if I was sleeping here that one [inaudible] was on me.

Overlapping.
Yeah, overlapping, yeah. And we got there like, like they give one pot of soup. The first what was sitting, they kept the first sip and then you have to get the other's one, and this was like 5 rows in it.

So you shared?
Yeah.

So, what you are talking about here is leading up to lib…, where were you when the liberation happened?
I was in Bergen-Belsen. In the meantime, I was in Auschwitz. Then finally we get somehow we took my sister between us when they sent us out to another camp then I was in Hamburg. Harburg was the place before Hamburg.

Is that the last place you were at?
No. Then after that they sent us to Bergen – Belsen.

And that's where you were when you got liberated?
Yes.

Ok, was your sister with you at that time?
She was still with me.

One of the other ones wasn't with you.
In different camps. I didn't know where they were.

So you didn't know where they are? So here you were, you were free and how did the liberators treat you?
Well they were, they, we were liberated by the, let's see – the British.

Ok, did they treat you well?
Yeah. They came with some food right away, with some water and some, some food. My sister was always hungry and she start to eat, and she got right away she was sick. And they converted the places where the German's stay as hospitals.

That where the let you, that's where you went once you got liberated you went to these wherever these Germans were living?
Yes.

So you stayed there. How long did you stay there?
Probably, let's see, about two months, or three months because during the time my sister we were staying in different places already but the hospital was there. And when I found my sister, she found me I told you about it.

Keep going, tell me
Once she was, I was looking for her I think I find her, because they took her away to the hospital and they could not find her anymore. They were sure that she's not alive. Then one thing I was in that place, nine girls in one room because we were so close to each that we didn't want to separate. And one come run in and you know, she say that she is your sister. She didn't recognize we were. I ran out, of course this was my sister, she was a skeleton like she was.

So she was in the same vicinity?
She was but she was in a room, they didn't have enough space in there in their places and that she was someplace else.

But she had no idea that she was there in the same place?
No, but she found me. She was not even well then she run, she say that she's okay, and the doctor say okay go, and they send her down where we were living there with people.

So she got out of the hospital and they said she was okay?
Yeah, she looked, I'm telling you, she was wanting to go because the American people send clothes from [inaudible] you know, like you know, they give away what they don't want and she was wearing a long coat with a scarf around her face and so skinny and she looked terrible. I took her in and she was always [inaudible] give her to eat. And she got a relapse, like maybe two days later they took her back to the hospital then I knew exactly where she was and I walked everyday two miles, one way down it to bring you some food to see how she's doing. This was like this and she there maybe a month or more then I went to find out if somebody's alive.

Your other parts of your family?
Yeah. Then there was a place there that it was [inaudible] or something like this, I don't know, that everybody went and they got – they say that they have lists, you know from the survivors and I found there a friend of my, a friend of my friend. That she is really a sister-in-law…[interview interrupted by ringing phone]

That somebody approached me, that girl, she say I know you. You know, you are my sister-in-law's best friend. I say yes, is she alive and she say yes she's alive. She was already sent there to England or something I didn't see her.

Who was sent to England, your sister?
No. No. Her sister-in-law.

Her sister? Okay.
Well that she say that [inaudible] Landsberg this was not far from Munich a place, a smaller place is that she lives there and she was working really for her husband, then she was there at the place. And she said that she was going back to Landsberg. I say I am going with you. I get word to my sister that I'm leaving that I heard that her sister is alive and that I will be back after her. In meantime, it took us a whole week to go on the trains and everything was…the Germans had a bad time too, you know. And we had to go –this was the liberation - and it was a lot of soldiers. Well, we made it in a week to go to Landsberg. To, um, yes, to Lansdberg.

How did you get there?
On trains. We went as far as Nuremberg. And it was pouring - everything was open because it was also they were, you know – it was very bad we didn't have a place for us to stay.

Were you by yourself?
No, I went to all with 3 girls and there's 2 two guys with us too. That they take us, show us where. And we stayed there overnight in the rain. This American soldier was nice and kind to us and he say to me, come on I give you a place where to go for the night because the train won't come in the morning, this was the morning. Then at the place where the soldiers, the Americans for them [inaudible] he say, I cannot be here until 12:00 then you can stay, but I will tell the others to let you because you are, you know and since I was there with the 3 girls whoever could come in that came in we stayed together all night there.

Did you feel safe?
Yeah. Oh yeah, we were not afraid because everybody was in the same…. And then finally we have a train the next day and it was with soldiers, that they were liberated too, they went home. Took us, we were on, we went from that train from coal we were just like, like uh, like negros – black from everything. It took us a whole week to come to Landsberg and this is not far from Munich.

So you got there?
I got there and she say come on and you come to my apartment and you can take a bath and everything. She give me something else to wear, because I was wearing just a little summer dress that I make myself, even I could not sew, you know and this the only thing what I have to wear. And she gave me something else to wear and she went to my sister and everything and she came back my sister was screaming and crying, you know. Are you sure this my sister, she say are you sure this my sister? I say well, she say you came so far go up on the steps and she saw me. You can't imagine.

Now you know where you are, your sister and this sister?
That's it, yes. And then I know that two of them dead there.

You already knew two were already dead, you knew that?
Yeah.

And then your brother?
And my brother, I didn't know about him.

Didn't know yet?
No. Then we were…

Later on you…
…**later on we went to, like I said to Landsberg and from then on we went again to looking.**

You were still convinced he was alive?
Yes and I found him too.

And he was in what city?
He was in Lodz, in Poland.

He was back in Poland?
Yeah because he talked at me, he will find somebody there.

So did you go back there or did you ever see him?
No, no, no, but he came….

To you?
Yeah because like they… I had his name… they took our name and he came to Landsberg.

How was it until you realized he was alive?
It was… in fact I saw him just maybe three times… when he came he was very sick. They took him that way to the hospital. He was a very young boy when they took him. He was walking like in a coma, he was about 13, 14. He was lucky that he survived because he was the youngest. They didn't give him food, but they gave him cigarettes to smoke. Whatever they could they helped him.

After you left… after you finally found everybody where did you go then? Go back to where your sisters were, in the hospital?
Yes…. And then I was with the two sisters.

So, they came back with you?
Yeah, they came back with me and we stayed there until 19-, let's see, it was already 1945. And then it's almost '46 when my brother came. Then I got married by then.

Let's talk a little bit about that. You… You met your husband in …
In Lansberg.

Right!

This was a canteen there as everybody went to see everybody else.

Could you tell me more what happened to his family and all that.
He was uh, he had a very large family. He was a sole survivor.

Out of how many brothers and sisters?
He had six brother and sisters. And a lot of - the whole family was dead, the father, the mother and even a brother was married and the triplets. They had triplets and a lot of children. He was the sole survivor.

What was he doing in Lodz at that time? Or did he have other plans of what he wanted to do?
Yes. He didn't want to stay in Germany. He want to go to France.

How come?
Because he didn't have anybody, but he found out that some people that he knew that he knew his family, they had been friends. And he say that his family, his father even give him some money to go before the war, to go to France.

But, he didn't do it?
Not him, but the people…

His family? Some other family?
No, not family

Oh, friends?
Just friends. No family. He did not have any family.

So did you get married before he decided to go to France?
Yes.

Tell us about your wedding and what you wore?
I didn't wear nothing. I just wear a dress. To survive I had one dress. You know, you know Bertha Gutovitz? She had one dress and I have one dress. The for bread, because we were all in the camp we had some bread…. For bread I could find a dressmaker, German that she would make me a dress. Mine was a black dress with a white collar. A very nice dress, and her's was a burgandy. We went out there and sing and things like that, this was before we left. One time I was wearing her dress, and she was wearing my dress.

Do you want to explain your relationship to Bertha?
Bertha - Bertha Gutovitz was my sister's sister-in-law. My sister at that time was already married. She got married - Bertha, my sister, and there was a third sister-in-law that they met also there and they all had together - a wedding three couples. And the whole, the whole camp was invited to it.

That's Interesting!
It is because this was before we left. And then my sister, my older sister, was also a Gutovitz, like her sister-in-law.

What was her first name again?
Bena. Then she had a baby, she was married, she had a baby.

And which child was that, that she had?
This was Patsy. And since they didn't want to put her over in the hospital there she delivered the baby in there, in home. And she fell in the (what you call it) basket, I don't know, in the meantime I run to the doctor, because she supposed to be in hospital and run and run to hospital. I was and until they told him you are here and, you know…. I let them have it, because I found him on the third floor there. He had a woman and if there something gonna happen to the baby you'll have to answer for it, you know? And he was mad, he say….run - show me where. I run and he run after me and we went to there.

She couldn't get to the hospital fast enough? Is that was it is?
No. She could of if they let her in. Because she, she was married, [inaudible]. The hospital this was just for emergencies.

Um, I see, because most people did have babies at home.
Because she had to go to the hospital about 40 miles away and my brother-in-law didn't want to. He say he probably pay them something, you know. That's the way…. Pay and…

Then you get what you want?
Yeah and that's way it happen. We think that Patsy, that's why she was. She's the way she was.

She wasn't taken care of right away, maybe oxygen was missing for a little while?
Probably something here.

That's because the care wasn't there right away.
No, she's without it.

Let's go back to your wedding and who was there at your wedding?
Oh, just, just a few, just a few relatives. And I do, you know and then you know, was a rabbi.

Did you have a rabbi?
Yes, it was there a rabbi, yeah, and then because I had to go to be married tonight I didn't want to otherwise. Then my husband left first and then he sent some, some people for me. Because this has to be gone, you know through…. Because this was unlegal.

For you to leave the country?
For him too.

Yes, but he had already left and now he wants to get you?
Yeah, he was there already a month.

Did he get work right away?
Right away. The first day he came he got already work. And he already got a little apartment that was like a closet – like a walk-in closet.

A small little 2 by 2 whatever?
Yeah, with one bed, with a table, with a machine.

A sewing machine?
Yeah, but he worked someplace else, in Paris.

As a tailor?
As a tailor.

Did he have experience as a tailor before?
Yes.

That's the background that he had?
Yes. When I was…. When I came… it was a hard time to go you know, to the border and things like that.

How long were you away from him before he sent for you?
It was about a month.

A month.
Um, hmm.

Then he sent somebody with the money.
The people what they call them – where they take me and some other people to the border there. We had to pay and then we stay by the border at the gypsy place.

So what happened when you were with the gypsies?
What happened when I was with the gypsies - I say well …. She say we have to go today out 4:00 in the morning and she say why don't you take a nap the way I was for hours in my dress shoes and everything. And I have a purse. My husband send for me some money. You know to…

Get the train…
Get the train and some food or something. I got it in this purse and got some pockets.

Hidden?
Not hidden, just in…. and I put in the morning and what did I know that is will be taken. We went to the border, we kind of got to … they got some whiskey for the soldiers, you

know. Ok go, we went together with some people that he went to work from Germany to France to the border and then you went with them and, and then we came to that little town. Then, he want to buy a paper. It was about 7:00 in the morning, and…

[tape ends side 1]

[Audio picks up mid-conversation]

And then he knew, and other people know that they that there is a synagogue there because this is the way they were – went - all the time. We were not the first one that they transported there.

When did you realize you didn't have any money for the train?
When I came to the border there that he wanted to buy… he say could you give me some money I would like to buy a paper, a newspaper, and I go and put it in the pocket and I say I don't have the money.

So how did you guys get to France?
Well then he thought that - then he say, that, uh, you know they say that there is a synagogue there - they been there before and he find out where the rabbi was. And it was very cold you know already and the Rabbi he went there and [inaudible] that he would be there. In the meantime to go to the synagogue because there is somebody that waiting, you know, the heat and everything. He didn't never think to wait for the Rabbi. We went there, the Rabbi came shortly and we waited, of course the congregation came, but not as many as here, you know with the people were there and they were around us and they were very nice I think and we were at the service and then I told him that I would like to wait here in the synagogue, and the Rabbi suggested to go to his house. Well, the Rabbi's wife was not too….

The Rebbetzin?
The Rebbetzin was just…

Nasty?
Very. In fact, I went to the toilet, and she went after me and she asked me if I know how to flush. And I got so mad. I was, you know, tired and everything. I wanted to tell her that maybe I saw it before you did, how to operate, you know? Everybody, knew that you have to …

What was she so worried about?
I don't know.

Just being mean?
No, no, no. Because I told her, I think, I told her that we are already a whole week in - as it was, you know and the way she was thinking I am [inaudible] from her. Well, we went, and uh, know the shop and the think and change because I got something to wear and that's all what I had in my suitcase early when I came to Paris. You know, I had a few

things of mine, I had, uh …. One thing that I will never forget in my life, that I took with me an iron

An iron?
An iron - so what if I have to press something and this was more heavy - a few things of what I have. And, uh, and that's the way I came to Paris.

So finally you got away from that synagogue, and you got on the train and . . . how did you get money to get on the train?
Well they make like a correction there. They got rid of me and they got money for us.

So are you on your way to Paris . . .
Yeah, we didn't even want to come back to the rabbi there or anything. We waited in the synagogue we went to the café we, you know, waited to have a cup of coffee, then until the train came, we went to Paris. That was a whole night in the train and of course in the morning, we came on, my husband already knew, he been there.

He was waiting for you at the train station . . .
Oh sure, sure. And he already rented a little apartment.

Were you scared? I mean . . . .you know . . .
I was scared to death!

Here you hadn't seen your husband for a month and traveling the way you did . .
Yeah, yes but before that we stopped in that place, it was in Nuremberg, in some place, I don't even remember now where. And when I, that we stayed there overnight before we went to the, you know, the train. And then I get a letter from my husband. They, because they knew where they were going to stay. This was Nuremberg, and we stay there, it was everything, it was no houses.

There was all bombed already. .
Yes, and it was one, and they it's one white house. Just go on the streetcar, just go as far as you will see a white house and this is the place where you will go down and then I supposed to go down there and he met when I went there. Some people were there already, what they also . . . . .

Were told the same thing . . . . .
Yeah, uh huh, and I have a letter for me there, from my husband. You know say that he wait for me and things like that. In the letter was a few dollars too.

Is that the money that got stolen when you . . .
No, no . . . this was, this was, you know, after.

Oh this is to get from, after you left there to get to Paris?
Yeah, yes that's right. This was the money what I have with me too.

Oh, OKAY . . . that's what I thought, yeah.
And that's what it is

So here you are, you're in Paris and you have never seen a place like this, tell us about what you thought about the city?
I tell you what I saw. It was beautiful. My husband had already, a little apartment, a little room.

The small one that you had talked about?
A small, yeah very small. But it was better, a little table and no curtains, I had told you before. I said well, nobody can look in, you know. But here I want, we went down without talking we knew it what they say it's a place that they can find everything. And he find some, to make some curtains, some you know . . .

Some fabric to make it?
Yeah, and he made it and he put it down and this was a plate, on a little table was a plate that you could cook some, that I cooked on it. And like it was on, it was a gas little plate and my curtains just went to the flame

On fire?
Yes, no curtains . .

Well, how did you put the fire out?
Well it was – put some water on it.

That was a good experience . .
That's right! And yeah, in my suitcase I had one set of sheets and I put one on the bottom and one to cover and this was my bedspread. You see, that's how poor I was.

So here you are, you're poor, you're happy, you're with your husband,
That's right

And so your life begins.
The next day he had to leave me there and he went to work.

What did you do?
And I see that he showed me, here is the subway just when we went out was the subway. And he told me where he's working, you know, the address . . .that's all. I went there to the subway and I didn't know what kind of ticket, because he didn't know that I would go there.

What made you do that?
I just thought . . .

Just like to investigate, to find what the city's all about.

Yeah, even the subway. I went down and I wanted a ticket, then I say, like one ticket. They asked me one way, two ways, I say two ways.

That was your way of learning French. . . .
Oh yeah, I learned fast. And then she give me. I go there and she say that this is not the right one! Well then I see somebody with a booklet for all week, [inaudible] because he give me some money every week and bought that.

So you learned to buy quanity . . .
I bought three this kind of thing, show me which one you want, take it. And then they get some, you know, like you wanted to go some place, I know the address, the name of the street and I just push the buttons and I saw which one to go, you know. And I was smart then and I look and I say, I tried. And I found it.

Did you go in?
I went. I went there and it was a long, he told me that it's a, you know, it was like a lot of stores there, it was inside, but you know like little . . .

Like inside a little…..
Yeah, and I was walking, and walking and walking and then I saw there was a tailor. I went in, knock at the door and he . . . .

What were they making there in that, is it a factory or . . . .?
They making the Gabardine Coats

What? Gabardine Coats?
Coats, yeah. For man for woman . . .yeah

So did you surprise him when you . . . . what was his reaction when he saw you?
He say, you know what, she did this, that she's wanted for you to have a day off. They give him a day off and he, we went back home. I am telling you! And then we went shopping for grocery.

It was a grocery store nearby?
No. Somebody went with us. And we say okay, because of that I go cook a good dinner. I came home with everything, I forgot to buy salt.

So you couldn't cook without salt huh?
Where can you buy salt, I don't know. I go out and I see this older lady there walking. I asked her if she speak Yiddish, she speak German, she speak French, she say, I speak German. I say yeah, I need some, I told her I need some salt. I didn't speak a word of French then. And she say you see, she showed me just across the street a little boutique, a little store . . . .

And you were saying that everybody so separate everything there . . .

That's right

It wasn't like one grocery store and everything was in one place . .
No, no, but this was just a little boutique that you could find some salt, some, some, some . .

Spices?
Spices, some everything and go in and say sell. Sell a salt. Well, I go in and I told him and he say [inaudible]. **I say sell. Probably ask how much. Sell. The she ask me [inaudible], the big one, [inaudible] I, I don't know, I don't say nothing. And then he probably say, this was a younger man, then he pokes his father and he say she** wants [inaudible] **he say maybe she needs a lot of salt. He bring me out a bag with the you know, with the, that say kosher salt, you know. And I pay for it, it was maybe five pounds in it, who knows. And I tell [inaudible] I have salt. When I left France I just left the salt. This was my first experience there.**

How long did you live in France?
Ah, I lived there eight years.

Eight years, and that thing lasted for eight years?
For the eight years, yeah. And, you know, I got, then he moved to another apartment.

Did you start working right away when you, you know. . .
Well I helped him. No, then I didn't yet. And then he decided to work at the place where we lived. He bought a machine . . .

So tell us about it, how you got the place and what was it like.
Well he bought it, he bought the place he just was just like . . . .

So he had to save a lot of money to buy it.
Twenty, twenty I think paid for the place and he, I think like twenty, twenty something. It wasn't his, just for rent.

Right, so he bought a place, he bought an apartment
[inaudible – talking over each other] **And then, this was a small place, a very small, nothing just for this and then he bought a machine, he bought a machine.**

Was that expensive?
Ahh, well . . .

Was it used?
That he was working, yeah, it was a used one. Oh yes, but he wasn't working, he maître d' at the time when I came he got already money in his pocket.

He was saving it.
Yes, and he bought the machine and he start and I start to help him.

But you knew how to sew didn't you or did you?
I didn't but I learned.

You learned how?
Yeah, and then it was we stay at this place. Ahh maybe a few months and he got this that he kept that to work in it, and then we rented a better apartment.

Right, so you got next the second one,
Then I don't have anything. We don't have any closets like over there, here. We got nothing in it.

It's just a square room!
A square room, windows and then my desk and one room also. And it we get it was nicer, it was nice. But we didn't have anything. I needed an armoire at least to put some things in and he bought a little table. And we didn't talk but he get the money and he knew, you know some neighbors, where he can go and buy and we went there and, I choose an armoire, it wasn't finished, you know, had to paint it ourself and a little table and a bathtub we had, you know. And that's what we had. And then we didn't know how much he want. We took out the money, they took this, but they were very honest.

Really?
Yeah, they wouldn't take a penny more. And they took that, we even gave them a tip and he put it in the apartment. It was a nice room and I have to find out that I get a Jewish neighbor there [inaudible].

Did that person come from the war too?
No, she was a native, but I could communicate with her.

That's great, yeah . . . sure . . . that helps
And then she had a Polish husband. He wasn't Jewish, a Pollock. And, I, this I was home, you know, I could talk.

So you basically was home all the time. You didn't really work out of the home or anything?
Well, I went with him to work.

You did go to work with him?
With him, oh yes, I did that.

How long did that last?
That last, when I had already second apartment. That was oh maybe, maybe year and a half, because I got pregnant then.

Okay, okay. . . So you're going to start your family.
Yes, then we were lucky, we found a big apartment and we saved up some money.

Then you got your dream, dream apartment.

Dream apartment . . .yes. It was everything in it. We didn't have to put in a furniture . . . gorgeous! We had a marble kitchen table.

It sounds like you were doing quite well.
We did well, very good. I helped him, you know. We took in work from this and then took it back . . .

You took it home?
Yeah

So, here you are, you're pregnant and so you're going to have your first child. Were you at home when you had he baby? Or did you go to a hospital?
Well it happened at my neighbor. It was there that I knew that also had the baby there and she took me to the American Hospital, that I have a doctor that he speak, see he speak German but a very nice doctor. You know where Onasis died in that hospital?

No, is that the same one?
That's the same one, that is the biggest, the nicest. It was American hospital.

This is in Paris.
Yeah, it's far from you know . . .

But she wanted you to have the best care . . .
The best care but I didn't know because she went there. She told me that's, that is what I wanted to do and then when . . .

So the baby was born in that hospital . . .
Yeah, well I have a friend over that also had a baby, you know and we were talking and my husband decided to go to a movie with her husband and she was with me. And then it got late and she say "you know what, I will go home." I said go home to baby. Her baby was already [inaudible]. And she left and I close the door and my water broke.

Ahhh, here you were alone,
Alone. I was lucky that I got next door, like I told you. They knock the door, she came and they called ambulance and they took me there to Neuilly that was a different, it was very far where I live.

You couldn't go to that, you never made that hospital then.
I did!

Oh, they took you all the way to that one?
Yeah, because they knew where my doctor. I came there and that's where I had a premature baby. And my husband wasn't back yet and he came back, that I left him a note on the door that I had gone with the hospital. But it was up in the window, they had a window there [inaudible – seems to be gesturing] but I was lucky that the neighbor . . .

Knew
Yeah, he was waiting. He was sitting he was scared to death, he didn't know what do. Finally he came when he say "you wife is in the hospital." Come on, I'll take you there.

So they went?
And they went . . .

Did he make it on time for the baby to be born?
No, when the baby came . . . the baby was already born.

Okay, so this is your first born, which is Henri.
Henri, and he was a premature baby and he weighted three pounds.

Un huh . . . okay . . . so apparently they had good medical care at this hospital.
Yeah, they didn't put the children into the incubators because the doctor didn't believe in it, because a lot of children, that time, this was 1948, they, you know, they got the light.

Oh really?
Yeah, that time . . . .

They had a concern about that
Yeah, and he was a . . . that was a whole week and they put him in warm bottles next and he was wrapped in cotton and I was sent home.

So then, um, Henri was the only on that was born in, in uh . . . .
No, no

Danielle was too?
She was.

How many years later was Danielle born?
Three.

Okay, and you were in France for eight years. So Henri was eight years old when you decided to go to the United States?
Six

Six. Okay. So let's talk about, so basically you had a normal family life, two children [talking over each other – inaudible]
Yeah, a very nice beautiful apartment . .

You had friends . . .
Friends, a lot of friends

So what happened, what made you come to the United States? It sounds like things were going pretty good.
Okay, then I have family, the only family that I had that wasn't in America. I had my brother . . .

Who was already in the United States.
Not he, he was, he came to Paris .

Oh, your brother also came to Paris.
Yeah, and my sister too. The younger one, you know.

Okay.
And my oldest sister, Bena Gutovitz, she – they got an uncle – her husband had an uncle and they send them papers, when she

So that means Bertha and her were all going to go together . . .
Yes, Bertha, her and this was a third one . .

Oh, there was another one too?
Yeah

And they all decided to go to Kansas City?
Yeah, because, he, you know, he send for them

So this is, so there are all there of them are now in Kansas City? Well, excuse me, you know your sister is, your sister out of those three is in Kansas City? So then what happened to your other sister and your brother?
They go, they go in Paris

They were also in Paris?
Yeah, my brother and they came to Paris. They were in Paris. And they decided to go to America. My sister was married too by that time. And my brother was married, with a French girl.

Why did, why did . . Okay, I understand why one of them went because her husband's family went.
Yeah, and then everybody decided to, they say to make some papers . . . go to America. Again, when the time comes you have to go, if not you will be never able to.

Did you think you'd ever get back over there? You were told that this is your last chance to get to the United States.
Yeah, because when the papers come and I have told them that maybe I can postpone because I have everything there. In the meantime my brother was already there and my other sister too. I was alone and my husband was so retarded, he say you will be never happy here, even you got everything.

Did he think that?
He think that. He thought so, but I say well we can go there, to visit.

He was worried about the United States then?
Yeah

You didn't really want to go . . . he didn't need to . . .
No he didn't need to. He have a good life there. And, you know it's everything, here he got everything, a beautiful apartment and we had already two children and Henri was already in Kindergarten and she was three years younger.

So what convinced you to finally go besides the fact, you know. . . .you finally decided that you'd better do time, or did you go visit first?
No, no I could not! [inaudible – talking over each other] They wouldn't let me in, and then they say, then I had went to lawyer and he say "good thing you was refuse now, because you got, then I don't know you will be able to go later. Then you say your whole family what you have is there, and I don't want you to be on my conscience." Then we decided to go.

That was a big decision to make.
A big decision, a big decision.

You hated to leave everything . . .
I hated when I came here.

So you finally got to, you came to New York and then finally got to Kansas City?
Yeah.

Okay, so then, here you are, you have to kind of like start all over, [interview interrupted by ringing phone] and you really have to start all over again.
Uh huh, I was looking for apartment, whatever I look, I didn't like it. You know . . . I didn't like it because it's never compared to the one that I have in Paris.

But you had money here – I mean you could…
I didn't have too much money. The only money what I had is from the apartment, because I went in to the apartment I had to pay, you say to three thousand dollars. With the three thousand dollars I get back from my apartment, that's what I have.

So you came with three thousand dollars, here you were, you didn't know the language again, you had to get a job, your husband had to get a job . . .
He just had a job the second day what he want, he say I have to go to work to support my family.

Where'd you get a job at?
Factory

Which one? Do you remember the name?
I think Brand-Puritz or something like that, and he never was happy because over there he was his own boss, something like that. But he worked, he make fifty seven dollars a week.

And you found an apartment . . . where was that?
On 38th and Troost. And I didn't want it on the second floor – first was the, you know I say was the concierge level. Then I took the third floor. And it was very hot, but it was nice apartment, you know it didn't compare to… never.

To France?
Yeah and I didn't have any furniture or nothing, then the first thing that I bought was a television. Because, I say, I have to learn, and just from the radio, I can not learn because I have to see what, and then my children start to go, not the children, Henri, to Kindergarten.

What happened then?
Then he was, he wasn't treated nice here.

Because he didn't know the language?
No. The children call him "Frenchie" and he thought it's an insult.

Did you have him dressed like a little French boy too?
Oh, yes . . .

And that bothered…
and he get curls, look like a girl. And he, now, you know, the boys have longer hair than the girls, and short pants and knee socks and like a French boy. And then he get sick, have to go to the hospital. And he lost his voice and it was, you know . . .

Did you have a pediatrician to help you?
Yes it was, it was Doctor [name unclear]. And he didn't know this, but I was talking and he, you know, and finally they call Japanese.

A Japanese doctor?
Spoke French.

Was this at Menorah where you were at?
Yes at Menorah. And that he explained to me and I told him what it is, and everything, he asked me when and I told him everything in French. And then I say - I was very mad - I say "In France, the doctors, they speak several languages, not just French!" And here American doctor, that's all he can is American, and he repeat this to the doctor. Because you could see a Chinese who spoke French, you know. And yeah, he repeat this to the doctor and the doctor say "well, he say, because in Europe they don't know anything but languages." You know. Just like that. I didn't say anything when he repeat to me, I say, let it be, you know. And then I explained to him what has happened and everything. We

stayed there for three days and then be back. We start to talk. And he say he will never speak French again, and he will never wear short pants. He want jeans like the others.

He want to be like all the other kids.
Yeah.

Okay, so that, then they started talking again.
He start to talk again.

So he was okay. Um, so you had Henri in school, and then your husband's working, and finally you could see your family. They're all here.
They're over here.

So they have, they started making their families and having children.
Ummm, I was very unhappy, it was, you know . . .

It took you a while to get use to it, but it wasn't so bad . . .
Sure, Iooked down, we lived on Troost, I looked down the street and didn't see any people walking. It's not like Paris – people walking you know. Did you ever been in Paris?

No, but it's a different type of living out there, you know – a city and everything.
People walking – you know. You got cafes on the street and you want a coffee you will sit, and you know, it's nice. When they, and I was counting the people when they walking. I didn't see anybody. It was just very unhappy. Then he was in a factory, you know, didn't, well, but we made it. I start to read to get a little children and I have to learn fast. But here it was easier for me go to a grocery store, you know, and you see what you want. Yeah, over there I need a bread, I have to see the name of the bread, you know.
So you adjusted quite well and you got over the language barrier. Did you become a citizen?
Oh yes .

How many years later did you become a citizen?
Five years, but I did it with…

You said you didn't go to classes or anything, you did it on your own.
Well yes, I did it because, you know, I have three children to take care of but I did it very well.

Great . . .
Yeah

So how did you start meeting friends here, did you go like to the synagogue? Did you join a synagogue?
Right away, joined Beth Shalom.

That was down the block from you . . .No, that was on Paseo, you were on Troost.
Paseo, it was not too far. Yeah and you know.

Did you join the New Americans Club?
Um, hum.

What year did that start?
Well about, I don't remember . . . .

Was it '60?
I don't know exactly but maybe '57, something like that . . .

So you had your Jewish Community Center
Yeah, and that's right and I was right away, in the Jewish Community Center, I was a member right away and I took the children there. And I met people there too.

So things start getting a little bit better.
Yeah, a little bit better. Yeah.

Did you ever go back to Paris?
I went back three times.

Three times.
Yeah. The first time I went back when it was, uh, it was a year before the Israeli war. Because I went to, I - we found out that my husband had a cousin there – that's the only one from his whole family that is in Israel – and we decided to go to Israel that time and we stopped in Paris.

And then when was the second time you went back?
And then I went the second time – I went with the children, with Danielle…

Oh, you took the kids?
Yeah, Danielle and Butch, went with me in 1971.

Danielle and whom?
My youngest son.

You have to tell us when you had the youngest. How many years after coming to the United States did you have your third child?
In 1951 – no 1959. Henri was born in 1951.

So you have a nine years difference between Henri and him? Ten years, whatever. That's not uncommon at all. So you took them back and then you said you went one more time?
Yes. And then in 1971 I went with the children and I wanted them to meet my family there – his family. This was a cousin with her husband – she was the cousin.

So here you are – your husband was working in a factory, but eventually he opened up, you both opened up your own business. Tell us about that. That's a big accomplishment.

Oh yes, it was, let's see, when did it open? I think 1963.

And where was that? Where did you open at?
In Mission on Johnson Drive.

How many years did you have that business?
Oh, till my husband got sick and passed away in 1978 and I kept this business. I did everything by myself.

Did you have any hobbies or recreational pleasures – you know after you came to the United States?
Well, when my husband opened the shop, I worked with him. Then when he passed away in 1978, I took over and I worked there by myself and I had somebody to help me, and I sent my youngest son to college and I worked there, um, let's see, until '91 by myself. And I support myself and my children.

When your husband was alive, did you take the kids on vacations in the United States anywhere?
Oh, yes. They loved Colorado and we went all over.

So you traveled quite a bit?
That's one thing that we loved – this is to travel – the same thing what in France, you know. People they didn't have too much, but they took the children and they went to the beaches, even on a bicycle – you know especially in summer – but here I wanted them – I have an uncle that he lived on the French Riviera (the uncle which I told you he was alive) and we went there quite a few times to Menton.

Are your children named after any family members who perished?
Yes, Henri was after my husband's father.

And what was his real name?
Hershel.

And he's Henri, okay. And Danielle?
Danielle was after my mother.

And her name was Deborah?
Her name was Deborah.

And the third one?
Martin Jeffery was after my husband's younger brother.

Did you ever talk about your war experiences with your children?
Yes. Did you see, this is what she did.

Tell us about that. This is something very recent that your granddaughter did.
She won an award for a 1999 "Celebrate American Heroes" essay contest. What did she write about?
About a hero.

And who was that?
"My grandma."

You! She talked about…
She asked me about – because she wanted – Anne Frank – she read the book. And then they told her that she had to have somebody that's its from America. Then she said, I have somebody – that's my grandma. And she wrote that essay.

So she asked you questions and then –
And then I thought if she have to write a thing like this, that she's very bright.

That's a very beautiful thing here. How did the war affect your attitude and practice of religion? Did you ever stop believing in God?
Yes, at the end when I was in camp, we didn't believe. You know like I was with eleven girls in one room and we were talking about because it was to the end because we didn't believe that we'll survive – and one girl say then we were talking. What you think – she said I wish that I would live long enough that I could have a bread on my table with a knife and slice it and eat as much as I want. You know, they just, in camp it was very hard – in Auschwitz here, and in Bergen-Belsen – you know, we were, it was terrible.

It seems like you renewed your belief in God once you got to the United States, or even in France?
In France, yes. After that, I say well if I survive and I have a husband and I have a child that almost didn't make it and made it, and things like that that I believe.

Did you, um, in France, were you ever a member of the synagogue there? I meant to ask you that.
Well, we were not members but we went to synagogue – just like on the holidays.

Just on the holidays?
Yes, like Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

How do your Holocaust memories penetrate your life today? Are there any sounds or smells that evoke past experiences – any images that haunt you?
Well, I lived with a choking sensation.

A what sensation?
A choking. Right after the liberation I started to shake and cough when I went to bed to sleep – no matter what. You see I always had the glass of water with me and I have to – I was on medication and really nothing helped and even now, if I am, you know, a little bit

[inaudible] I know what to do. I get a drug, a candy or some water and this never went away.

Do you think this is kind of a psychological thing back to the war?
I think so because nobody could help me. I went to so many doctors, you know, and this happened just right after the liberation. I went – I laid down and I started to choke. On top of everything, I didn't – or my husband didn't – get any, you know, like *Wiedergutmachung* like that - I didn't get anything and my husband didn't.

Is there anything else you want to add to this conversation?
No. Not yet.