

Bronia Roslawowski Interview

August 25, 2000

I'm Karin Golden and I'm here with Bronia Roslawowski and today is Wednesday, August 25th and we're visiting in Bronia's home in Kansas City, Missouri. Okay, Tell me again if you would the date you were born.

12/23/1926

1926, okay. And you said you lived in...?

Poland

And the community?

Turek. This is *Kreis Posen* [Yiddish: province of Poznan]

Do you remember how big of a community that is?

It was a good size, it was a good size town. Believe me, I don't remember so many people who lived there. It was a very nice community. We lived very peaceful, very happy.

Were your neighbors all Jewish?

No

Did you live in a community that was very mixed?

We had to mix... We lived up on the outskirts of the city. We lived like you live in Mission Hills or something like that. We had our own house, a built, a brick-built house. We had a big garden. We...

Who liked to garden?

Well, we had a big garden. We had a man, a gardener who was planting all our... We had all our vegetables, and we had fruit. Fruit trees. We had everything.

What were some of your favorites?

What was my favorites?

What did you like as a child? Did you like to go pick things off the trees?

Yes we picked stuff off the trees. We also... had... all the children had a piece of ground and we'd watch it grow. We would plant. We used to love the sweet peas. This what I always used to plant.... And radishes.

So you got to have your own little plot of land for farming?

We... a little... Yes, with all the children. And everyone wanted to raise, have a prettier, a prettier garden.

[Phone rings, tape briefly stops]

No

I don't either...

It's not nice.

Yeah, okay we were talking about your garden.

Yes we used to have a garden we would water it every night and sometimes twice a day: in the morning before the sun came out. They wanted us to know everything. When we were children we were raised to do to be able that we should be self-sufficient. That we wouldn't be bored. You see in the United States the children are bored. They have so many toys. They have so many things. We didn't have any time to be bored.

What else did you do besides garden as a child?

We used to make our own dolls, make our own buggies.

How did you make a doll buggy?

How you make doll buggy? We took a cardboard box, a paper box what you put in shoes, we would make that, like an umbrella cut out from another box and made a, clip it together or take some tapes, and we would cut out... We took a circle and we would cut out some wheels... and put in a string and it, it took, you took a lot of pride, pride in your work. The parents you know, in Europe... We were not able to, we were not poor but we were not able to buy so many toys, and we didn't... My parents didn't believe in it. I had my own bicycle. We had our own sleigh. I had a sleigh. What dog used to, we had a dog by the name of As.

Say that name again, a-s As?

As. He was a big Russian husky and he had like leashes and I, he was... only me.

He would pull you on your sled?

He would always pull me on the sleigh. Only me. Nobody else. Somebody else he would turn them over.

Yeah, I know from watching the videotape that you had two brothers and two sisters. Is that right?

Yes. Yes. Yes.

And where were you in the line? Were you the oldest?

No. No. No. I had an older sister five years older. I went to the camp for my sister.

That's, that's what I'm just remembering as you just said that.

I gave my life, I gave my life for my sister and unfortunately my sister is dead and I'm alive.

Where was she when she died?

Well she. Well I don't know. She was in Chelmno. She went together with my parents. But you see she was so delicate. She was such a fragile girl and I told my mother, "She's not goin' live, she's not goin' live two weeks in the camp."

When you were young girls and she was your older sister...

I was and I loved it.

Well tell me what it was like having her as an older sister when you were children.

Well, we looked up to her. The older sister, you see in Europe when a sibling is older than you have to be respect to them. We would, we would never fight. My parents would never tolerate. We couldn't have mouthed... you know, argued. No. My parents would say, "Don't do this way. That's not the way siblings are supposed to..."

What kinds of things did you and your sister like to do together?

Well she used to write poetry for us. When we were children, we would make plays and during the summer time, we had a big house, you know we lived in a big house, in a private house. In Europe not everybody...

Is that, that was unusual for you to be able to have your own home?

No. No. My parents were pretty, pretty wealthy. They were not rich. No way. No way. We didn't have a car. We had a telephone with a ringer.

Uh huh, the crank?

I remember the crank. We couldn't use it. The parents could use it but we couldn't do it. We used to have a mike with a phonogr... what you call it that was?

Oh like a record player.

Yeah. A record player, yeah a ph... You know it was, still it's already 60 years after the war. Almost 60 years. In September it will be 60 years. That's a long, long, long, long... I'm over 70 years old. I'm 72. I'll be 73 in December.

That's a good long life.

A long life that's right. I never believed that I would live this long. So I had a very very happy childhood.

So it was your older sister and then you?

No it was my older sister, then a brother and then me.

So you were right in the middle?

I'm right in the middle. And then there was a girl. She was not really my sis... She was an adopted child but she was my sister and then she, and then I had a little brother. He was seven, eight years. A little boy. And I used to take him when we used to go to the farmers, to the countryside during the war. My older sister didn't want to go. She was afraid. I wasn't afraid for anyone.

Were you the only one of your siblings that really had that fight, that spirit?

Yes, I took matters in my own hand. I did everything. I helped my parents a lot because I spoke perfect Polish. I had lots of friends, lots and lots of all kind of friends. You know, I had Gentile friends, I had Jewish friends, I had German friends because I was really, I was a likeable child. I was pretty smart in school, and...

What did you like best in school?

I was a very good mathematician. I used to love geography. I used to like all my subjects and I went to private... two schools. I went to public school and I went to a private school, a Hebrew school. After we came home from public school we had to eat up quick our dinner. In Europe we used to eat around 3 o'clock. And we ate.

That was dinner. The whole family was sitting down and we ate dinner together and...

And then you'd go to Hebrew School after?

And then we'd go to Hebrew school and come back around 7 o'clock or something like that. Then we studied. We'd learn how to dance and you know sing and all kind of very glad. I had a very. Maybe that's why I survived the war too. You know you... I was 14 years old when I was taken away from my parents, from the whole family and came with a bunch of strange people. People who whew! Some of them were you know you don't you know what background they had you know the language. Either you were brought up with kindness, with... And sometimes they would call your name and you wouldn't even know what the meaning of it was. It was horrible. You know it's like...

It sounds like you feel then that because you were so interested in the world around you growing up as a child that that gave you a better sense of...

A better outlook on life.

Of how to deal with it?

You see I don't remember a lot of things what other people tell me. I didn't feel about any antisemitism myself.

You didn't feel any antisemitism?

No I didn't even know what it was because my parents got along with all the... Because were business people.

And you said you lived in an area where there was both Jewish and non-Jewish.

Not so much Jewish were there anyway. During like when we had vacation time, all the girls would come to our garden. It was a big, big garden. Maybe you call, an acre, an acre and a half.

That is big!

A big garden. It had peach, no peaches. Peaches didn't grow where we were. We had those big black plums. Like you call Italian plums, the long ones. And we had apples and we had pears and we had gooseberries and we had raspberries and then we had huckleberries, you know those small ones. We would pick, you know everybody who came to the garden they were welcome to...

So your mother. How did your mother run her household? What kind of a mother was she? How would you describe her?

A good mother. A wonderful mother. Never, never, never I heard from my mother a bad word like some parents will say a name. My mother says "A blessing should come on your head." Or something like that. "You should be blessed." Because I wasn't such a real easy kid either.

You weren't?

No no no no no. I had a mind of my own. I saw, I saw the world different than other people. Entirely different. I wanted to see the way I wanted to see it. I don't know if I was right or I was wrong, but to me everybody was a person. When I was a little girl, if I would go in the, in the streetcar, we used to have those streetcars, and if I would hear somebody speaking a different language I would just stay and listen until I would have to ask you, "What kind of language do you speak?" I loved languages.

Well I remember from the videotape that you said you spoke perfect German.

Yes. I speak it perfectly.

How old were you when you learned to speak German?

Well my parents spoke a lot of it.

They did?

And we had lots of friends, lots of the *Volksdeutsche* [German: ethnic Germans living in Poland]. And they would, even I would go out from the ghetto. Get out when it was still in Turek. When the ghetto had four houses, you know. One on this side, one on this side. In four corners. You know like four corners and some of the Germans would know me you know and I used to play with their kids.

You played with the German children?

Before, when the war wasn't there.

Oh prior to, yeah.

During the war, it was a big, they didn't know you anymore, they were afraid. Everybody was a...

Do you remember the first time the children you had played with - the first time they stopped speaking to you? Do you remember?

When Hitler, when the Germans came into our town and when they put that...

When, when your friends that you had played with for so many years, when they stopped speaking to you?

They didn't specially stop speaking to you. They would say, "We cannot play together anymore. But I still like you."

So you did get a sense that the children...

Didn't hate me...

Were still your friends?

Yes, but we cannot do it. You see we were young.

And you did what your parents would tell you.

Absolutely, but I went out from the ghetto and I never wore a Jewish star. I never would put it on.

Did you grow up in a particularly religious household?

We were. Yes. In Europe it was very simple. Almost everybody was not really religious but we were pretty, you know we were observant. We observed Sabbath. Absolutely. Business was closed on Sabbath.

What was your father's business?

We used to have a [*galanterie* and *manufaktur*?] It's a big store. My father got rich when I was born. He was playing the lottery. He was playing and four people won one ticket. They won a million zlotys.

My goodness.

And my father became... We were not rich before that but he won a quarter of a million zlotys. My father had a small business then. It flourished.

Tell me again what the business was.

Like you could walk in and buy a needle and you could walk out with a Persian rug.

Oh...

OK? People would order. They would order. We would never buy any extras because it was very expensive.

A good businessman. He didn't have excess inventory.

Yes. Yes. Well, we were, we were well, of European, of European style, you know like Europe. Europe is a poor country, it's not a rich country.

Did your father have business partners or was he in business himself?

No no no. A partner is a husband and wife.

So your mother worked with him in the business.

Oh yes. We had a girl who took care of us, a girl from the country. Three sisters when one got married another sister came. And my mother made their weddings. They were, the father was, they were like dairy, like they were [pastures?]. [Pastures?] means people who make their own cheese.

Like dairy farmers?

Yes, something like that. We used to go out to the farm with them to sleep with the cats and dogs. It was fun.

How old were you when was this all throughout your childhood that you visited??

Most of the time. They would take us out with them.

And was this family Jewish?

Yes, they were Jewish people because my mother wouldn't have anybody cooking you know

Oh yes, of course.

Help cooking. My mother wouldn't. My mother wanted to cook by herself. She was real particular. Baking and everything had to be so. She loved to do it herself. But lots of times the girl would learn from my mother and my mother would let her do too.

So when your mom was helping your father with the business sometimes it sounds like if she absolutely had to she'd let someone else do the cooking or she.

Maybe she would cook the night before. She'd prepare or she would tell the girl what to do and she would do it but most of the time she had time, she had always time to prepare the meal. You know she used to make cakes, everything.

Did you have aunts or uncles or grandparents in the same community.

Oh yes. Everybody.

How big was your family?

Well, my father had, Esther went to France when she was 16 years old. She left Poland. My father's younger sister.

She left before the war?

Before the war, I think in 1933. Maybe even before that.

What was her name?

***Tante* [Yiddish: aunt] Esther.**

Tante Esther?

Yes *tante* is an aunt.

I went to her funeral in France, in Belfort, She lived in Belfort. From the United States. They called me one night on Saturday and I was... Sunday I think Sunday or Monday was the funeral and I was in France. I went to see her because she came to visit us you know after the war and she wanted me to go to France. I said I would not go anyplace only to the United States. I don't want to have any part of the European soil. The Americans liberated me. They were really good to me. They were just like good fathers to children. They were wonderful and we should honor those soldiers who liberated us. They were so wonderful.

One of the things that I liked on your tape that really struck me was that you talked about after you were liberated you were shown a map and you said Truman is from Independence and this should be a good place. Missouri is a good place.

Sure. Yes I did that. Yes, when we were in New York they told us that we couldn't stay in New York. New York was overcrowded. I said, show us the map. I did the same thing in Germany when I was liberated and when the Americans... the Americans who liberated us in Salzwedel in the lower part of *Saxonia* [Saxony]. And then after four, I don't remember how many weeks, the Americans stayed, the Russians came in so the Americans moved out and the Russians took over that part because it was closer to *Elben* [referring to the Elbe River], closer to Eastern Germany and then so we moved to Braunschweig. And I told the Americans, "You're my father. You are my mother. You're my brother. You're my sister. I'm not staying on European soil." I still found, I knew my grandfather had a brother in England."

Yes, lets go back and talk again about your family. You said your brother's sister was in France. Did you father have any other siblings that you recall.

This was not my father's.

Oh, *Tante* Esther was not your father's

***Tante* Esther was my father's sister. Yes.**

And did he have other siblings?

He had a lot of siblings. He had, the whole family's wiped out. I thought that one son should be alive. His name was Arye Wolf Kibel and he was in the Polish army. He was a soldier and he was kept in the Polish army and he got shot through his leg and he was limping and when the Polish army, you know they lost, he came back and he wanted to take our family to smuggle through the Russian border, go to Russia and maybe we could be saved. And my father didn't want to go to Russia. My father didn't believe that Hitler would do such a thing. My father would say, "It's going to be a war. It will take a couple years. And then they will put us in a camp and we will work, so why should we go to Russia?" He's not going to open a ocean and through us all in. This is the way my father believed and in Europe you couldn't talk back to your parents. I wish I would have.

So your Aunt Esther is the only one of your father's siblings to survive the war?

Yes. She was hiding out in Vichy. She was in France and she had two sons and I have two cousins. They live one made *aliyah* [Hebrew: meaning to rise up; specifically, re-settlement in the State of Israel] to Israel. Louie. He's also an old man already you know. And [unclear] was in Casablanca. He was also in the French army and he you know, he survived. My aunt and my uncle Bernard was in the French Resistance Army but Uncle Bernard died and *Tante* Esther died too but *Tante* Esther died several years ago. And there I went to the funeral.

What about your mother? Did she have siblings also?

My mother had one sister and she didn't survive.

And did she live in the same town you did growing up?

Oh yeah, we all lived in the same town. My, the sister lived and my uncles and aunts. Everybody lived in the same town.

And grandparents?

And grandparents too. I had a grandfather who used to walk... there was a place where, where we would go to on ice, on a [?]. It was a water. Man-made.

Like a man-made lake?

Man-made lake yes. And we... But it was built like a pool.

Like an ice rink it sounds like.

Something like that. And we would go in the wintertime and would... And my grandfather would walk with a little stick in his hand and was ice-skating right with us kids.

So you were ice-skating with your grandfather?

Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Oh the kids we all did.

Do you remember what kind of work your grandfathers did?

Yes, I remember what he did. He even taught us when we were little kid. He wanted us to, he was making hats.

A haberdasher. Is that the right word?

Yeah. Man's, man, man's hats, yeah. With baskets and he would teach us how to cover them up with the material. They always...

This was your mother's father you're talking about?

No that was my father's

Your father's father was the hat maker.

They lived in like the pretty part of the city. Like the Plaza.

What was his name

Bear. Grandpa Bear. Like a bear

Like a big bear.

Yeah, but his real name was Baer. My grandmother was such a good lady. Also always smiling, always happy. A real good lady. She used to work, like you know in Europe it's a great honor to be president of the *Khevrá Kadishe*. Do you know what the *Khevrá Kadishe* is?

Uh huh, burial society?

Yeah, and she was the president of it in Europe. She was a lady, a charitable lady. I saw this in my home. I did exactly the same thing like I used to see and my children follow my footsteps the same way. All of my children are volunteers where ever, where ever...

So that part of your family is the legacy that your grandparents left you and that you've passed along is doing things for others in the community.

Yes, we did, my parents, my mother. My mother would, there was an old man by the name of [Reb Yakov]. We used to call him Reb. He was a real old gentleman, a very kind gentleman and he would come to people some people didn't have money to make *Shabbes*. You understand?

Yeah.

So my mother would, would bake *challahs* for them, cook soup and meat and [Reb Yakov?] would come and pick it up and fish, and she would give it to [Reb Yakov?] to take it to a family who needs it. We didn't need to know who.

That's wonderful.

I did the same thing when we had the bakery when the new Russian people came and the Polish people came beginning you know in the fifties or '55, '57 '60. I used to go ahead and fill up a sack of food. We had a bakery.

What was, where was your bakery?

We had a bakery on 31st and Woodland M& M Bakery. I would fill up a bag of food and ring the doorbell and then run away.

I like that!

**I did that to many. Lots of people tell me. They remind me. They remind me. They do remind me. A lot of people come and tell me, "I remember when you did that." I didn't want
Somebody knew.**

Oh yeah.

Talk to me a little about your neighborhood. You mentioned that you were fortunate, that you had a very nice home that you lived in, you had a telephone. I'm assuming you had electricity.

Oh yeah. And then we...

What was your neighborhood like? Was it just a lot of houses lined up like this so you neighbors that you played with around your neighborhood?

Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. One time, I'll be honest with you, I was a little girl and we were jumping rope, you know and I was singing a song which wasn't very pretty. I

didn't know I was a kid. What did I know? I didn't mean to criticize. I was in *Kashke Marishka*. Really nothing. But one neighbor didn't like, and she came, didn't like what I was singing when I was jumping the rope, *Kashke Marishka room toom toom*.

Can you translate that for me? Do you know what that means?

Kashke Marishka. Kashke. A girl's name is Kashke. And Marisha is marisha. *Room toom toom*. She sold potatoes. She was selling potatoes. Really, it doesn't make any sense.

Just silly things yeah?

And she didn't like it. She came and told my mother and my mother would never give you the satisfaction that she would scold me in front of anybody. "Ahhh, when she comes home, I'm going to give her a lesson. She's going to get punished." The woman thought that maybe my mother would spank me. My mother didn't spank me. She never spanked us. She talked till we were blue in the face. I wish she would sometimes spank me. Do you understand what I'm saying?

Absolutely.

Oh yeah. Oh yeah. And I did the same thing to my kids.

That's wonderful. And do your children do it to their children?

I don't. I bet you no. Oh yes they are.

They're good at talking to though.

Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

Did your parents speak other languages?

Oh yeah. Oh yeah. My mother spoke Russian, Polish, German. I think she took French in school too. My mother was well-educated. Very well-educated.

Did you all travel to other countries?

Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

Where did you travel when you were?

We used to go to Holland, to France, to Belgium. [Unclear] close.

And your father would go with you on the family vacations.

Oh yeah, oh yeah. Oh yeah. Every place they had relatives.

So when you were going to visit these other countries, you were going to visit family?

Families, yeah, maybe. His cousins. But I paid attention. If they had kids we played. But you know kids don't. Because when I came to this country there was a family by the name of Kibl what my name, my maiden was.

What was your maiden name?

K-I-B-L, Kibl. And Mrs. Kibl. I think she did sign an affidavit. Because they saw Kibl they sent an affidavit for me to come also to the United States. But I didn't stay with the Kibls because they wanted us to stay in New York and the Joint asked us, told us it is overcrowded so they showed us the map and we came to Kansas City. President Truman was from Missouri and that's where...

Talk to me a little about school. You said you really liked learning.

Yes.

Did you help your siblings with homework?

Oh no. That wasn't my job. That was the oldest sister's job and my mother's job.

So you guys just enjoyed doing your own homework?

Oh yeah. Oh yeah. We all did our own homework.

Did you have. You said that you enjoyed so much of it. Did you have a favorite subject?

Subject? History was a favorite. Geography. I wanted to learn. I admired the world. I admired the beauty. Anything. I would see a beautiful painting. I was interested who painted it. By who. You understand what I'm saying?

Just curious.

Curious! Everything. Everything interesting. Even now I'm an old lady. Maybe because it was preached to me when I was little. My mother used to say, "One time you can see anything. Everything. And you be the judge. If you want to, you can go again or do.. But one time you can do anything you want to. You know. It presented to you. Educational."

Did you have hobbies or groups that you did things with, I mean You mentioned that you went to Hebrew school in the evening. Did you have other organizations that you did things with?

Oh I played the violin for years.

Yeah?

Oh yeah. I was a good violinist. Now I wouldn't even touch it. You know why?

Why?

Because I was a mischievous little devil.

You say that with such a straight face. Tell me what you mean by that.

I was mischievous. Now I can say it. Then I didn't have any brains, because God gave me brains, but I didn't use them. I broke my mother's heart.

What did you do?

My mother made me practice, practice, practice, practice, practice. I was good. I was gifted. One day she caught me on the wrong edge. And I practiced maybe two hours before. And she said you have to practice because you're going to have a recital. I said, I'm tired of practicing and I want to play with my friends. And I came in with the violin. It was an Italian violin. In Europe, 500 zlotys was a lot of money. I took the violin and the edge of the table. The wooden table, took the violin and broke it in two. Never going to practice again!

And I guess with the broken violin?

I broke the violin in two.

You can't practice. What did your mother say?

And my mother went in the other room and she was crying and she said to me, "The way you make your bed, the way you're going to sleep in it." And I will never forget those words.

How old were you?

Maybe twelve.

Do you remember what you felt like?

I felt bad. I felt bad because I saw my mother cry. Because I didn't want to see my mother cry. I loved my mother very much. Do you know I don't remember what my mother looked like, or my father.

You don't have any photographs?

Never. No. No. That's so painful, you know but I think I must have blocked it out, because I loved them very much. Because in Germany when I was, there was a man by the name of Judah Katz. He worked with the JWB.

I don't know what that is.

Jewish Welfare Board. And he worked with the soldiers. The JWB was a club. I used to be very active. I used to help with anything.

To help out in the club with the soldiers?

Sure. Sure. Sure. Why not. They were nice to us anyway.

And that was when you were in your early teens?

Yes.

Twelve? Thirteen-ish?

No no. No that was after the war.

After the war?

After the war. After the war there was a man by the name of Judah Katz. He lived in New York. Had one daughter and she was about my age. And he wanted to adopt me. And I told him, "I don't want to be adopted because I will never be able to call another lady "Mama." Because I loved my mother and father very much and I want to be honest with you." Those people were, they were very nice. They really liked me. I was a quick learner. I studied by myself. And I had private tutors. I tried to make something out of myself. I didn't want to come to America being a dummy and not being able to speak the language. I spoke not a fluent English, but I spoke a pretty good English when I came. I had two years of English training in Heidelberg. I put off my papers for two years. I could have come in 1945 to the United States and I put it off and put it off until the CIC when they sent the papers for me to go to the United States for the third time. I say, "OK. I'm going to go." Because they said, if you're not going to go now, you're never going to go. And I was married with Willie so...

Your parents, you talked a lot about how much it sounds like you really respected as well as loved your parents.

Oh yes!

Was there a, how did they discipline you? You said that your mother didn't spank you. Was it just talking?

My mother my mother needed to give me a dirty look on the face. I used to give a dirty look on my kids face.

That's all it takes?

It takes to talk back to my husband sometimes. They knew what I meant. They didn't do it. I went ahead. I didn't have enough money to buy another TV because my husband loved to watch the football game and the kids didn't like that so I didn't have money but I went ahead and bought. I still have the television upstairs, a black and white television. For \$45. I bought a television for the kids and let them watched and not to have a war in the house. I didn't believe in it.

You mentioned that you were pretty headstrong as a child and that your older sister was not. How would you describe her, you described her as delicate. What was her personality like?

She was very smart. Personality? An angel.

What about your other siblings?

All of the children were very good people. Really. All of them. I wasn't headstrong. I saw things that, well, if, I was young but I was different. Like if I would see an old person walking in Europe. They would walk and buy in a little basket some potatoes and some wood. I would see an old lady walking I would run in front of her and take away and I would carry it home for her okay? So I had respect, didn't I?

Yes.

My mother didn't have to go buy wood. My mother had a special... We, In the winter we would fill up the basement with potatoes and carrots so in the winter when the weather gets bad we didn't have to go. In the, on the attic we had a sack of sugar, a sack of flour, a sack of beans,

So in a way, your telling me your mother's life, in terms of keeping a home, was made relatively easy because you had access to so much.

Sure. Very easy. Sure because we used to buy for the winter. We'd prepare. We had coals. We didn't have to buy coals the whole winter. We didn't have to buy coals like other poor people had to do it.

Did you and your other siblings have chores to do around the house?

Oh yeah.

What kinds of things do you remember doing?

Oh we had to help. They teach us how to wash dishes and if we didn't do it clean, my mother would put the dishes back in even the ones I washed. Which I did the same thing to my kids. They tried to teach us clean. Cleanliness is next to Godliness. That what my mother used to say. And she used to say, "Uh uh. You didn't move away the furniture. You scrubbed the floors, see. With a brush." They teach you how to scrub the floor too, oh yeah. I didn't want to learn how to sew.

Did your brothers have the same kind of chores as the girls or did the boys and girls do different things?

No the boys, no. The boys didn't, the boys maybe did help with something else. But not special. Not in the kitchen. In Europe you don't... Boys don't mix in the kitchen. No no.

Did you share a room with your sisters?

Yeah. No, we didn't have private rooms. No no no, Not this ritzy. Older sister. Older sister had her own room. She was the oldest daughter so she had a private room. Well she was when the war broke out, she was eighteen.

And what about your brothers? They shared a room also?

Two brothers, yeah. And the other, other ones...

Did you played with your brothers?

Oh yeah we played, but not too much. They had their friends. We had our friends. But we got along all right. We didn't argue. Because we didn't have cars. We had horses and buggies.

You mentioned that you really didn't feel any antisemitism?

I didn't know what it was because.... And maybe some people go around with hate. When I told the people that I don't hate the Germans, the refugees, the people who came here... I said, "I pity them that they had such a poor psychology. That the, so inhuman. The SS. How horrible they were. And I don't hate them. What, what will hate give me. What do you grow up, then you pass it on to your children and your children pass it on to their children. And there's hate in your family by itself. You don't do that. Now this is my, you see, now this is my reason. Anybody else can do what they want to. I'll never forget when Benny Edelbaum who wrote the book *Growing Up in the Holocaust*. No, did he? Yeah. I think Benny wrote. Yeah. *Growing Up in the Holocaust*. He used to, he argued with me. "You don't hate them?" No. I

said no. Hate is going to eat my stomach up. I will have a good ulcer. I don't want to hate.

So in the years before the war, before the Germans came in, when your family did things, did you

(End of Tape 1, Side 1) (Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2)

I'm checking to see if it's still...

I better turn down the television...

We better get this moved a little bit closer because it doesn't seem to be... Okay, Now which daughter's home are we in now?

Alice's

This is Alice's home. So do you babysit for the kids and help out a lot?

When they need me, yes. I raised her.

Yeah. She looks like you

No.

Yeah. I think... No?

Maybe, I don't know.

Okay, I don't remember what we were talking about so maybe we'll just go from something new. What, what did your parents teach you about Judaism?

Oh. We studied. We were very well educated. I was very well educated in Judaism. I studied *Chumash* [Hebrew with Yiddish pronunciation: Pentateuch] You know what *Chumash* is?

No.

The five books.

Oh, okay, yeah.

This is *Chumash*.

Okay. That's a word I'm not familiar with.

B'rayshis, Sh'mos, Vayikra, Badmidar, Dvorim. [Hebrew with Yiddish pronunciation: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy].

Did, did you study as a family?

No, in school.

Just school?

In school.

And what about Zionism? Was that something that your parents talked of at all?

They used to say that we, we have to build Palestine and you know. Very much so. My father was in Israel with my mother when they first got married, in 1920 or something. In 1918, they went to Israel.

They were married?

Yeah. To build Palestine.

And they were married there?

They were married in Europe, in Turek and my grandfather wrote letters to my mother. He didn't have more than two daughters and he said he is going to die is she doesn't come back. And my mother went back.

So how...

Mother and father went back. They were two, three years in Israel.

And was your sister born in Europe?

She was born in Europe

She was born after they moved back?

Yeah. I think she was pregnant with her. Yeah. I think so. In '21. 1921. My sister

Tell me again when your parents were married?

I think in 1918. Right after World War I or something like that.

Was. Because it sounds like Judaism was so important to your family...

Very much so. Very much

Was it something that you shared with your non-Jewish friends?

Oh sure. Sure. We used to they would come when we would light the Hanukkah candles and I would go when they would put up the Christmas tree. Oh yeah.

So you shared your holidays and you learned from each other, and you learned from each other?

Oh yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah. I didn't tell my mama that.

No? That would have upset her you think?

I don't know. Maybe not. My parents were very level-headed,

Open minded?

Very open-minded. Very much so. We respected. My mother used to always say, You respect other people. When we went on the wagon with the horse and buggy, my mother used to teach us when you ride with a Polish man, on a horse and buggy and if he passes through a cross and he don't take off his hat you're not supposed to ride with him because he doesn't believe in God. In his God. We were taught that. Yes.

And did you ever have an experience like that?

No. No and he wouldn't do it. My mouth went really quick. You don't believe in God? This is your God.

So you weren't afraid to just bring up anything?

I wasn't afraid for anybody. I was not afraid of the Germans.

Well, tell me when the Nazis came to your house. You were how old?

Thirteen years old. Yes. In December I was 14.

Tell me, tell me what you remember about those times. Was it just an onslaught of the Nazis in all at one time. Or was it a slow progression of Germans.

No, in September the 1st, the Germans came into our town and they shot three times in the air.

To announce their presence, you think?

That they were coming in and the Polish people went ahead to hang out white. They tore up the sheets and hang them out, and if you hang out the, a white flag that means that you were surrendering. So they did not bombard. In 1939.

Oh so the people knew if they hung out the white flags they wouldn't be shot at.

They would not be, they would not be, they would not be, You know that the houses would not get bombard.

Oh, ok, so did the whole community responded like this?

The Polish people hang out the white sheets. I saw it with my own eyes because my father and my sisters, they left they left Turek because they said that the battlefield would be right in, in Turek because we were the Third Reich. And that is Hitler's heart.

How do you, what do you remember your parents saying at the time this happened? What did they tell you?

My parents were going to run away to go North.

As soon as the Germans got there, your parents were...

Before - before the Germans came.

Before they got there your parents wanted to leave?

They were going to leave and I said, No, I'm not going.

How come?

Because I would watch the house. I saw how hard my parents worked. I was going to be the watchdog.

So you were going to stay there to protect the family.

I was going to watch... to protect the family. So my mother and father had a discussion and my mother stayed with me and my father went with the rest of the children. So I watched the whole war. To me, it was something special.

For a woman with so much curiosity, yeah.

When the motorcycles came in, three motorcycles came in with the German SS. And then big tanks started coming in. I watched the whole...

What did your parents tell you about... about the Nazis? Did they...

My parents didn't believe that such a Holocaust would ever happen.

So they didn't really warn you to beware of anything. Just do what they ask of us and we'll be fine.

No. No. No. My parents said... You remember when I told you my cousin came. When the war, when the war was going on and the Polish army, [Andre's?] armies got or the soldiers ran away because they didn't want to get killed by the Germans. So they put on I guess civilian, I don't know what they did, they put on civilian clothes and came back home to help. Tried to get the family escape to go to Russia.

So where was it that your father took your siblings then when they left?

They went North to [Wincentow?], Linchits [Yiddish alternative name: Leczca]. On the other side, on the other part. We were Third Reich and on the other part where it was North where it wasn't Third Reich. Like a *protectorate*. And they were going away for two, three weeks.

Oh, just for a few weeks.

For, when the Germans were here and we were Third Reich because the Germans were throwing bombs on the civilian population. Lots of people got killed. And people walked away. The farmers walked away with their cows. You know they took their belongings with them, their living. Everybody was marching away and I told my mother and father, "I'm not going." They could kill me, but I'm not going. They didn't ever touch me. But my mother stayed with me because my parents went in another room and they said cannot leave a child by itself.

How long were you and your mother at home by yourself?

Two weeks.

Just two weeks?

Two weeks.

And then what happened?

And then my father came back.

With all of your brothers and sisters?

Yes, nobody got killed. We were fortunate. And then pretty soon, pretty soon, maybe four or five weeks when the Germans were in our country, they made the whole town, all the people get out from the town and they made a gallows to hang twelve, ten or twelve people, I don't remember exactly.

They pulled together just the Jewish people in your town or was it just... [something falls] ...Oh careful, are you ok?

Yes.

Okay.

All the Germans, all the Polish people, the Jews, everybody had to watch how they hang 10 or 12 people. And then when they came in, they went in our warehouse. My father had to load up those trucks, those heavy trucks. They took out everything from our magazines [colloquial expression: warehouses], about 10 Persian rugs and there were four or five SS men staying there saying “Out, *schliess*” with the guns. Oh it was so brutal, ugly. And then they would say, “[unclear]”

What were the children, what were you and your siblings doing while this was going on. Were you also helping to carry things out of your home?

No they didn’t make us to.

Where were you, do you recall?

Maybe we were hiding. I don’t know. Maybe we were. We didn’t know what. We cried.

So you weren’t...

We saw, we saw my father being abused. You know with the gun, and yelling stop and they were hanging, after they hanged those people then they went looted, took out whatever they could.

[Someone exits] **Be careful sweetheart, remember...**

Person: “I will”

And where did your father go with your belongings? Where did he take things?

Loading up their trucks.

Oh, he was loading up the trucks for the Nazis.

Nazis, yes.

So were you allowed to stay in your home after everything was taken out?

No then they run us out in the ghetto.

You were moved into the ghetto in your community.

Sure. Sure. We were thrown out from our house.

What did you, what were your neighbors doing?

The neighbors were afraid to do anything. They were scared for their life.

So there really wasn't anyone in your community that stepped forward...

Nobody to help. Oh no. Nobody, everybody was scared. People were frightened. It's a war. They made food on carts. Bread. We went to the butcher. Couldn't get no meat. You went to the bakery. You had to stay in a big line. I couldn't get go out from the ghetto. They would bring in bread in the ghetto. They would bring in a certain amount and nobody was supposed to get out. I got out from the ghetto. I did not stay in the ghetto.

How did you get out?

Ha Ha. I put on four pairs of socks, didn't wear any shoes in snow and cold weather, maybe four pair of wool socks and walked to our Polish friends. I brought eggs, I went to the farmers. The farmers would cross their heart that it's Kosher. Oh yeah. Because I wouldn't eat anything. It wouldn't, oh yeah.

So your family friends. The people that you had know before the war were there to help you.

Oh yeah. Yes. The Polish. The farmers. Oh. We were liked you see. There's always somebody you hate the other person but you like another person. We were very ...

They were afraid, It sounds like they were afraid, but they were still willing when you showed up, they were still willing to...

They were scared. Everybody was scared. Oh yes. They wanted to save all three of us girls too. Some of our German friends. The *Volksdeutsche*. And Mr. Pegler. I remember his name. He wanted to save us. He said we would work on the farm for him. But the boys he didn't want.

Do you know why?

Because, you know why because of SS men, because of the circumcision.

They would be seen. It would be more obvious that they were Jewish.

Sure. Sure. Sure. And we didn't look, really, typical Jewish, you know. We spoke a perfect Polish. We were, we were on top. All of us. We were you know. We spoke German, we spoke Polish. We spoke Yiddish. We spoke Hebrew. We, we were not...

You said earlier that you did not wear, you didn't wear the Star of David.

No I wouldn't put it on.

Even in the ghetto?

Even in the ghetto. No I didn't. No. I took it out. One time an SS men saw me but he knew me. I was playing with his daughter. Mr. Kaiser. His name was Kaiser.

And what did he say when he saw you without the star?

“Oh! *Du kleines Judische! Wo ist dein Stern?*”

What does that mean?

“You little Jewish girl. Where is your Star of David?” I said, “You put it on.” I didn't know better. I was an idiot. I was a dummy. I was a dummy. “You put it on. Why should I put it on?”

How long did you live in the ghetto before your family was sent to the camps?

Well, my family wasn't taken to the camp. My family they then we stayed in the ghetto and they gathered all the Jewish people and they ran them out from their own homes. We're in the ghetto a few months. Maybe two months I don't know how long, don't remember exactly. They put us out on the countryside.

The Germans moved you out of the ghetto into the countryside?

They made us, yes, go to the countryside. It was maybe eight or ten kilometers. Where the soil was, a sour soil, you know nothing would grow on it. There was a big mill. I remember the mill. You remember what the mill is? And we lived in little shacks.

Did you have to build your own shacks?

No. No. The shacks were already there. Maybe they throw out some of the Polish peasants. I don't know what they did. We had little houses. Maybe ten people lived in the little house. No toilets. You know

So you were living with other people at that point.

We had some other people, yes. Maybe 10 people lived.

Were they people that you had know before the war, before this happened?

Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah. We took in some... a woman whose her husband was taken away and her son was taken away and she was a helpless... She was a rich lady. They were rich. We were not poor. We were comfortable. But she was from a very rich, you know they had, they had wheat and stuff. Very very wealthy. And my father was a best friend with her husband so he had to have mercy. They were helpless. Really helpless. The girl was my age and she wouldn't, she was scared to death for everything and I wasn't scared for nothing. I wasn't scared for the devil. I walked right into the devil's eye.

How long were you living under these conditions.

One time, this is interesting. One time I was I went out from the ghetto to get a loaf of bread to stay in the line like the Polish people were staying in line. The Jewish people couldn't go out.

But you weren't wearing your star and so.

No so I got into line. This Polish girl and she went to that SS men and she said, "She is, she's Jewish." And she thought that he would pull me out and beat me up or shoot me or whatever. And he slapped her face on both sides and pulled her out the line and put me in her in the line.

Why do you think he did that?

Because he knew me. He knew me. I said "My parents don't have any bread and I'm hungry."

So the German officer helped you?

Sure. He put me in, and he put her, make her stay in the back. So you see...

There were people who...

Human beings. You cannot condemn a nation. That's why I say, I don't hate. Wha, what will it give me? Tell me, what will it give me? I will have an ulcer. I'd be sick. I'd be a miserable person. I'd be a bitter person.

Yeah. How... Once... Help, help me get a sense of how you got from the countryside where you were living to

When the countryside. In the countryside they gathered all people, they had, they all the Jews in one place.

Right. And then were all of you all dispersed at the same time or were people pulled out and sent places intermittently?

They were pulled out. Yes. Yes. They started taking from each, from each family one person.

Only one person was taken from each family... yeah?

In 1940, they started taking. They took my older sister. She's 18 years old.

This is the sister that you...

Yes. I gave my life for

...Stepped in for?

Yes. And at that time

So you were the first one in your family to be separated.

At that time, at that time in 1940, excuse me, in 1940 you could exchange a head for a head. So I said to my mother. I said "Mama she's not going to live. She's not going to live two weeks in the camp." And my mama said, "But this is her destiny. Maybe you are here. You might be able to help her. Because I used to go out to the farmers, and we were building in the mountains. Like, like hiding place. And I was able to do that. I wasn't afraid. My sister had fear. And I said, "No mama, she's going to die. I be, I'm strong and I will live." And I packed.

So after you left do you know how much longer your family was there?

I think maybe two, two years longer I believe. I cannot tell you exactly but I do know that they had - they went to Chelmno. And in Chelmno they had to... dig ditches out and they used to put them in alive.

You're entire family when to Chelmno together?

Yes. Yes. Yes.

And they?

They perished. [Unclear], they built a ditch, and the Polish people say the soil was moving that the people were not quite dead.

Because they were burying people while they were still alive.

Yes. Yes.

Where did you go when you took your sister's place, where were you sent?

They took me to Hohensaltz.

I'm not familiar with that.

In, Hohensaltz, that is, it used to be German soil too because the Germans took it away from the Poles. The German's occupied it. When we went in, in the camp, they had whips and they would beat you. When you walk they would beating you. When you run they beat you. They tried to intimidate us and then they took us to Gnojno. I know that was the name. I don't remember what other name it was. You saw Gnojno You memorized Gnojno. Somebody told me it was some, a different name. But I saw Gnojno. I know what Gnojno was. I know what Hohensaltz was. I read on the... You know when we came to the top.

Do you recall how many different times you were moved?

Yeah, I was five times at different camps.

You were at five different places?

Different camps. Yeah. Then from Gnojno I worked two three years, probably two three years. And then we did farm work. We cleaned the rivers. We carried bricks.

Where were you...

In Auschwitz. I was in Auschwitz

You were in Auschwitz when the liberation...?

Ah yes. 1940.... No I wasn't liberated in Auschwitz. I ran away from Auschwitz.

You ran away from Auschwitz?

I didn't run away from Auschwitz. I saw a German man picking up 200 people in 1944. Healthy young woman who just came from Hungary in 1944. Hungarian people came. They were still at home. You know. They still were with the families together. Young woman. They brought them into Auschwitz and they picked out, because they lost so many soldiers in Leningrad.

So this man was there to take women to work?

There were, 200 yeah. 200 I don't remember. 200 or 250 people. He picked out... But I was already, I was no... a prisoner. I was already in Auschwitz more than a year and I was already a dead woman [unclear]. I weighed 65 pounds.

And how old were you at this point?

16 something like that.

And you were able to get that German man to include you in that group?

I walked over to that German man and I said, "I'm a diligent worker. And I have never been in Germany. I would like to see Germany. Please let me go to Germany." So he did with the finger like that.

And where did you end up? Where did he take you?

They took us to Reichenbach. We worked in Telefunken in a factory. In Europe, it was Telefunken radios were the finest radios in the world.

So you were working in a factory?

In a factory we did probably, it was transformed to ammunitions. You know. There was a round machine and one girl was putting on wires and one girl was putting in glass... with like a little hole in the wires. I don't remember. We were four. I don't remember what another one did something else. And I was inspecting... I was by the heat. They had to control the heat. It was a certain amount of heat... was supposed to press down and then it came out like a screw what you'd use in a big lamp or something like that.

How long were you there working in this factory?

In Reichenbach I don't remember.

Were you there at the time of liberation?

No.

Where were you at the time of liberation?

Time of liberation we were taken... We were walking on a dead march. They were bombarding... You see Reichenbach wasn't too far from the Polish borders. And not far from Krakow. I don't know how far, but... And we hear bombarding. And, and they took us for a dead march, maybe 8,000 people. And they shot so many. Some of them couldn't walk.

And where did you end up then?

They took us to Bergen-Belsen, but the Bergen-Belsen said the camp is closed. They took us all over Germany.

Just trying to find a place.

Trying to find a place to where locate us. And finally they found a place in Salzwedel, In the lower part of Saxonia. And they accepted us.

How long were you there then before

A few months.

A couple of months? And were you aware at this point that the war was...

We knew it yes

How it had progressed?

How did we know it? We would see airplanes going through and marking, marking the skies.

So you knew from the airplanes and all of the activity that something was about to happen?

And we saw the Germans, that it was, an alert. When we walked, you see they, they made us get in barns in the night. In the night we slept in barns... on the straw. And then when it came dawn we marked again. And lots of people couldn't walk so they shot them.

Do you remember the day of liberation?

Oh. Definitely. Oh. I never will forget.

Tell me about that day.

The 14th day of April, 1945. I was liberated in Salzwedel, Germany. That is the lower part of Saxonia. When the Americans came in, they liberated us. And we took out a table. And one officer, a captain was standing up on the table and he said, "You're free." We have not taken the camp. We have not taken the town of Salzwedel but we came to liberate you because you are on the mines. At 12 o'clock they were supposed to, supposed to explode the mines.

Oh so the Nazis had, had rigged the bombs, the mines to go off to kill....

To kill the 3,000 people

After they had left? I see.

Yes, that's what I guess. So, there were, there was a prison camp across from us and they were watching and I think they helped the Americans to tell them where the mines were.

So how long, once the Americans got there, how long was it until you were out of the camp and in what you felt to be a safe place?

Well, when the Americans came in they told us, "You're free." We have not taken the town of Salzwedel and the soldier who spoke German or Yiddish. I don't remember what he spoke but I think it was German. And he said "You're free." And "We liberated you and they're not going to kill you anymore and we're going to watch over you." They were very good. They were so wonderful. Such beautiful people... And...

Did they bring food and...

Oh Lord yes. Oh yes. They went ahead and burned the camp because we were full of... They used DDT. They sprayed us with some disinfectant, because we had lice. We had everything... We didn't have a change of clothes. We didn't have anything. And they burned, they burned the camp and they put us in the German *Kasernes* [German: barracks] you know.

Oh, in the barracks that the German officers had used?

In the barracks that the German officers were using. And then, then a few weeks later the Russians came in and took over... took over that part because that part belonged to the Russians. You see Germany was divided into four parts.

Right

Americans, English, French and Russian. So when the Russians came in the Americans said to us, "Why don't you go back home. Maybe somebody left." I knew nobody was left. And I was afraid...

You already knew at that point that your family had died?

Yes, yes. Because my brother came in from Lodz, from Lodz ghetto. My brother ran away. They were going to send him to the crematorium too. And he had ripped off two boards in the Lodz ghetto. They put them into the Lodz Ghetto. The *Muselmann*. They used to call it the *Muselmann* the people who were already wore out. I think he came in from Posen or someplace, then he was working in Lodz and he ripped out two boards and went someplace. He knew somebody, and they let him sleep and then they discovered that one of our cousins was in charge of the jail. They put them in the jail, about 60 people from Posen, from Posen... where he was there. They were supposed to go to Auschwitz so they put them in the Lodz Ghetto and then with the transport from the Lodz Ghetto, they put them to the crematorium. So my brother pulled away two boards during the night when it was kind of dark, dark, and he went over there, there was the cousin. And he let him sleep in his house, but they didn't have any food for him so the cousin told him, "Koplovitch was in charge of the kitchen. He will give you... ask him to give you a job." So my brother went over, because he married a cousin of mine.

So your brother survived the war?

My brother my, yes.

Any of your other family members?

No. No.

Your brother was the only one?

The only one. I saw him in Auschwitz...

This is your older brother or younger brother?

Yeah the older brother. But he's a sick man. Had three open heart surgeries, so many surgeries. Very sick, very sick.

How, how long after you were liberated did you move to the United States?

I came two years after I was liberated. Not even two years.

Not even two years?

No. I could have came '45 like I told you.

Were you had you married while you were [unclear]?

I was married the fifth of January, 1947. I was married. October 28th my daughter was born. Ten months I was married. I had already a baby. I was pregnant in Germany.

And that was... So was your daughter born here in the United States?

All my children were born in the United States. I told, I told the Counsel. They were afraid that I might abort because of the boat. You know, when you ride on the boat you get sick. You have sea, sea sickness. I had to sign a paper. I said I will not have a child in Germany. And they let me go through and I had to sign a piece of paper. That in case I have... on the boat that they are not responsible. Because they tell you to bend down and you know [and ask you?]]

How did you meet your husband?

In Heidelberg.

And you met him after the war?

After the war. Sure.

He, he wasn't from the same community?

No. no no. He was from Berlin, Germany.

Yeah? How did you all meet?

We met in the JWB club.

Where you told me you were working, helping out.

Mmhm. And when I got married, they said "The jewel of Heidelberg." And I got married in Heidelberg on Klingenteichstrasse Vier [Klingenteich Street number 4]. Right by the castle. Not far from the castle

And how long after you moved here to the United States was it Judy or Ellis your?

Beverly. My oldest daughter.

Oh, I... you have other children I don't know about. How many children do you have?

I have three daughters and I have a son too.

Three? OK.

So I have four children.

So the first one born was your daughter?

Beverly. Yes. All three daughters.

And was she born in New York?

No Beverly was born in Kansas City.

You had already made it to Kansas City.

All my children were born in Kansas City at Menorah Hospital.

Oh that's where I was born!

By the same doctor. Dr. Bela Kim.

That was, I think who delivered me. I believe so.

He was a good man. He was a wonderful person.

So you weren't in New York. You and your husband weren't in New York very long.

I was... Yes we were in New York maybe a month or two months. Something like that.

So not too long?

Not too long. Mrs. Kibl was beating her head against the wall. She fell in love with us. She loved us. We were the children she didn't have.

How nice.

She did have two children. One son, he's a big man I bet you. He's an architect. I think he was a, I think he was a... but they were very upset that we left New York.

Do you know... Let me back up a bit. Do you know if there were other people from that you knew from your community growing up that survived the war?

From our community, from our town maybe 10 people survived the war.

Really?

We were the first victims who suffered. In 1939 we suffered already. When they first came in. They hanged the rabbis and the doctors and the lawyers and the engineers and the architects and the chemists. They hanged them. Then they hanged a priest too, *kruszon prefekt* [Polish: bishop prefect]. I don't know why. I was too dumb to know why.

So after... Before you got on the boat, before you got married where were you living?

I lived in Heidelberg, Germany.

Was it, but was it... Were you in an apartment with other people?

No. I lived with a German family. When we came, when I came to Heidelberg... You see the army moved through Augsburg, the headquarters was in Augsburg. I told them that I want to go. I told them to show me the map of Germany. When Americans moved from Salzwedel... When the Americans had to leave Salzwedel... the lower part of *Saxonia*, They had to go to Braunschweig. Americans called it Brownsweig... Braunschweig. So we were moved to Braunschweig. In Braunschweig, the English came in, so the Americans had to move from Braunschweig and they were going to Augsburg to the headquarters.

So you followed the Americans.

I followed the Americans. I told the Americans, "You are my father. You are my mother. You are my brother and you are my sister."

Did you spend any time at all in the displaced persons camp after the war?

I worked in a displaced person camp too.

You did?

Oh yeah! I worked in the UNRRA in Lampertheim. Lampertheim, Hessen [referring to the city of Lampertheim, in the province of Hesse]. I used to travel, I used to get up 5 o'clock in the morning and I would go Heidelberg, Mannheim, Lampertheim, *umsteigen* [German: referring to getting off the train]. With the train I went. Every day. Five or six days a week. I had to make some money too, I had to live. I had a friend...

When did you, when did you reconnect with your brother?

With my brother. When when I was in the unit... No. I connected with my brother when I was still in Germany. We were walking in Heidelberg on the main street, *Hauptstrasse*, that's the main street. And we were a bunch of Polish girls you know, we're singing Polish songs, after all we're free. And there were two brothers, and they were both doctors in Poland. Dr. Ocelka. Two brothers. One's a dentist. I saw both of them. And we were singing songs and they stopped us and they said in Polish, they asked "[unclear]". "From where are the young ladies?" I said I'm from Turek and I should have a brother alive. I thought, I knew he should be alive because he came into Auschwitz.

Oh he did?

And I walked over to an SS man who was eating people alive and I wasn't afraid and I said, "*Herr Oberschärführer, Häftling sieben und fünfzig drei fünf und sechzig mächt es gerne sehen ihr Brüder ist gekommen fun Litzmannstadt.*" I said it in German, "Prisoner 57365 wants to see her brother. He came from Litzmannstadt." That's from Lodz. Because I was laying under the wire when I saw the transport go through. And I would hear, is a Polish Kibl there? Because I figured my brother's alive and, and that, that man in Heidelberg, the two brothers, the Dr. Ocelka. They were still, they had to take some classes in order to get to the United States to get their MD, and they told me that my brother's alive. And when they told me... So when we came to... when we came to Heidelberg, they gave me a sergeant with a jeep and he told me he might be in Landsberg or Feldafing. The GI drove me to Landsberg and to Feldafing and there was a young man sittin', sittin' by a desk. He had lost his arm, a young boy, maybe 18 or 19 years old, and I said, I came to see my brother, [Wolf or some diminutive of Wolf, a Jewish first name?] Kibl. And he said, "He left already to Nuremberg" and I went to see Nuremberg. He wasn't there, and I was in Feldafing and he wasn't there, and he already went with the *Haganah* to Italy and he was in [unclear] so we did connect.

But it was after he had already joined the *Haganah*?

No, he didn't join the *Haganah*. He was studying. I don't know what... No not the *Haganah*. A bunch of fanatic, really religious Jews took the young... You know he was still a young man. He was about 20 years old. So he took them in, and they studied Talmud, and he didn't want to come to the United States.

So you saw, the last time you saw him before you came here...

No I did not see him. No no. I saw him in Auschwitz.

That was the last time you had seen him?

That was the last time I saw him and then I didn't have any money to go to Israel. You know, it took a lot. You know. We didn't have nothing. I came and I had three children. You know we barely made it.

What did you and husband got to Kansas City? How did you make a living? What did your husband do?

Oh right away we got jobs. We spoke English. Not really a perfect English but we spoke English pretty well. We could speak both. He was engineer. He went to school, an art school and he learnt engineering in Mannheim and Mannheim was 15 kilometers from Heidelberg. And he was a very capable, a very smart man. So we both, we both went to school. I went to school in Germany too. I want to make something out of myself. I didn't want to just waste away running around with the boys and.

So you were about 18, 19 years old when you came to the United States?

I was 20 when I was here.

You were twenty when you got here?

When Beverly was born I was 20.

And you said you came on a boat. Which, do you remember which boat?

***Ernie Pyle*. I remember very, very well.**

And what port did you come through?

I came through to port of embarkation.

In where? New York?

Brooklyn. Right into New York. Brooklyn, oh yeah.

And did you tell me that you had family or that you knew people here who sign.... You know people in the United States...?

In New York, somebody by the name of Kibl too.

Did you know anybody here in Kansas City when you came here?

No.

Where did you live when you first came here?

When we came first to the United States we lived in the...

(End of tape 1. Begin Tape 2 side 1)

We lived about two weeks in the Commodore Hotel. And then they gave us a place.... I think it was on Virginia if I'm not mistaken.

You say they gave us a place. Who?

The Jewish family...

The Jewish family and children services?

Yes. Uh huhh. They gave us... We just had one room and we shared the bathroom and the kitchen with a lady by the name of Mrs. Angle, ...

And what are you going to tell me about Mrs. Angle? You're making a face.

Mrs. Angle was a very nice lady. She had about I don't know about how many kids, about five kids. We entertained them. We were full of life. I was happy go lucky. We didn't care. We're away. We are not anymore in the concentration camp. We're in the good old USA.

Did she help you take care of your daughter?

Oh Lord no. I wasn't, didn't have a daughter yet. I was pregnant. And she told me, she told me that she cannot stand a child crying and I cannot come home with a baby in her house. And I told her. I thought, "You poor lady." I thought this in my mind. I did not say it. You're not going to see my baby. We find a way. Well, the Jewish Family Service want to give us a place on Paseo - 8th and Paseo where all the people were living, and the rats ran around in the basement and my husband he wasn't quite ready for that. He didn't come to America to live...

In that kind of condition.

In the condition like that. He was a rich German-born Jewish boy with a father who had a factory from *Maschinenbau* [German: machine manufacturer]. They were building machines. They lived on Neuhohendorf [refers to some kind of neighborhood]. You know they were the *Jaksöhne Brüder*, the Jackson brothers. They were wealthy people, pretty wealthy people.

So if he wouldn't accept that apartment where did you go?

Well, we met somebody, some people by the name of Bob Goodfriend and Gloria Goodfriend. We met them and they became real dear friends of ours. They said, "Don't worry about it. We know somebody who owns apartment buildings on 45th and Main and we're going to help you get an apartment. Don't worry. Because I told them, the woman told us we cannot come home with the baby in her house because she cannot stand the baby crying.

Who else, who else was your support system when you first moved here?

We met a lot of real nice American people. Rose Eveyln Sporn. Her daughter Beverly, and Wendy, yeah.

Yeah. I'm friends with her family, good friends with her daughter, Debbie.

Debbie, oh she's a nice girl.

Debbie, she's in St. Louis.

She's a teacher. Yeah, she's an adopted daughter.

Yeah

Wendy's a nice girl. Wendy took one time a pencil and tried to aim in Beverly's eye.

You're generous. You're still calling her a nice girl.

She was a nice. She was a ba... she was a baby. What does a baby know. But I watched it. See I don't trust kids.

Well, kids are kids. So how did you meet new people. You mentioned Jewish Family and Children Services. Did they have gatherings to bring people together?

Oh yeah. They had parties. They had, they had parties, they had dances. They tried to make us feel very, very welcome. They were wonderful. We had jobs right away. I was pregnant with Beverly. I was a nurse. I graduated from nurse training in Heidelberg. Why sure. I went to school here too. The Jewish Family Service helped me too. I paid them back every penny. They borrowed me \$450 to go to nursing

school and I went here to in Kansas City. I took training at General Hospital too. And I worked at Baptist Hospital too here with the newborn babies which I loved.

Once you're children were born were you still working?

When my children were born I stayed home and took care of other people's children. I said "God blessed me with children. I'm going to raise them myself." And I was making a little money what other women went to the factories to work. I never worked in a factory in my life. And when I wanted to work, and when my kids got a little older, when Beverly got a little older, I found some real good neighbors in the apartment building who were happy to take care of Beverly. But my husband didn't let me work. I did work a little bit. I worked for Hartzfeld', I used to work in unit control and did... mathematics, mathematics. And I wasn't hard to learn at all. I used to work with Larry Newhouse. Do you remember?

The name is sounding very familiar. I'm not sure why.

Oh yeah. He used to work Larry Newhouse was the manager for purses. We used to marking the purses, figuring out certain percentages, I knew mathematics so

How long did you work at Hartzfeld's?

Just a few months when my husband let me work.

And what was your husband doing at the time?

Who?

Your husband.

My husband. He was working I think for Ford. He had good jobs. He was smart. He was smart man.

How long had you been here before you started the bakery?

The bakery. The bakery is a different session.

A different session? OK that's fine.

It's OK. The bakery. We opened the bakery in 1962. It's another chapter. A big chapter. Sometimes it's not necessary to talk about.

OK. What did you do for fun in those years when you first moved here and your children were small.

We didn't have any money. I would get a load of people who lived on 45th and Main. None of them had any money, even the American people didn't have money. I used to say, "Why should we feel bored. Let's play Bingo. Let's play cards. Let's play Monopoly. And we would in everybody else's house we would just buy. I was the organizer. I would cook something. Everybody wanted to taste my food. I would buy a bunch of bones. We didn't have the money to buy meat. I would buy a bunch of bones and cook barley soup and everybody, they smelled it.

It sounds like your mother lives on in you.

I did a lot of different things.

In your early years here in the United States, what kind of social events that were going on around American had an impact on you. What do you recall?

Well, it was very upsetting when I had a black lady taking care of Beverly and my neighbors, my friends say, "Oh, you sit at the table and eat together with her?" And I said, "Why not?" "We don't do that here." And I said, "Well you do what you do and I do what I do." And my, Beverly used to call her, what did she used to call her... Grandma Zola. And then Beverly decided she would ask me, "Mama, all the children have grandmothers. Why don't I have a grandmother?"

How old was she when she asked you that?

When she was two years old. I said "Darling, you have a grandmother." You know what I did? I went to an old lady by the name of Leena Glazer. And she was the first one who met me at the Jewish Community Center. And she said to me, I say to her, "Leena, my children ask me what they have a grandmother? I cannot tell a two-year-old child that Hitler killed them. I adopt you and you adopt me and this way my baby has a grandmother."

How old were your children before you felt you could talk to them about..

When they were maybe eight, nine, ten. You know when they got enough brains. Slowly, you know. You don't break it in one because it would be heartbreaking, because they would come home and say to me, "This little girl has, has three grandmothers." So I say, "Darling, you have a grandmother. We can, we can call her up." And Leena would... I helped that lady a lot. I did a lot for her. I even didn't want them to put her in a home. I told them I would take care of her, but her children wouldn't let me. You know, she had sons and daughters, you know, they wouldn't... But she loved me. Before she died, she died before *Rosh Hashanah*, you know what *Rosh Hashanah* is?

Oh yeah. It's coming up pretty quickly.

You're Jewish right?

Oh yeah.

OK. Steve Pack. You know Steve Pack?

I know who he is.

He is married to Karen Devinki. Steve Peck and I, we went to see *Bubbe* Layka, because she was my *Bubbe*...

You adopted her.

...She was my mom. Yeah I adopted her and we went to see her. And she died before *Erev* [Hebrew: eve]... Before Rosh Hashanah. After she saw us, a half an hour later she died. I was there and Steve was there, he can tell you that. And I was, the children were nice to me. I made a lot of real good American friends, really good American friends. Mostly I associate most, I associated with our *grine* [Yiddish: green; colloquial expression referring to newly arrived immigrants, especially immigrants who arrived after the Holocaust]. But I have lots and lots and lots of American friends.

In your first few years here, did you experience antisemitism in the United States?

Well...

Either in your brief stay in New York or here?

I didn't observe it. No, no. I didn't observe it.

You really didn't.

No No. You know. You didn't have time. You know every three years I had a kid. I have three kids and I took care of three others so I had my hands pretty... and I don't

So you really didn't have a sense of antisemitism.

No. No. No No I didn't know any antisemitism... no no no no no.

Did your children when they were growing up and going to school, did they ever?

I don't think so. My children took the menorah to school. They went to [unclear, name of local school]. They sang *Ha-nayros ha-luli* [Hebrew with Yiddish pronunciation: refers to a Hanukkah prayer]. And, you know I let them, I let them also say, the teachers wanted them to sing Christmas carols. I allowed that too because I am not an idiot. We live in a country, we give a little bit, we take a little

bit. If you want to have respect other people respect you, you have to respect them too. But you have not to be ashamed. You cannot be ashamed. Lots of Jewish people in beginning when we can here, some of Jewish people were ashamed that they were Jews. I knew it. Now I saw it but, thank God we have a, we have Israel. We do have a country. This is why we must, we help them.

What lessons do you want your grandchildren to know from your experience?

Never let racism, never let people hate one another. Never let anybody when you see somebody's trying to lift up, lift up against another person, leave. Try to work it out. Talk about it. Don't fight. Talk about it. Get discussions. Fight don't get you nowhere.

How did you reconcile, you touched a little on this earlier, but tell me how you reconciled how some people who survived the Holocaust feel that God wasn't there. You said earlier that that wasn't something that ever crossed your mind.

No never. Never.

But how do reconcile... that it.

OK. I changed a lot of people already on this subject. I was in Australia several years, not too many, about four years, about four years ago I was in Australia and I came across a lot of people who don't believe in, you know...

Just don't believe in God?

No. I was taught and I believe with my heart and soul in God. I used to lay on the [unclear] in Auschwitz, on the bed, maybe six or... six people were sleeping on one brick and I would say the *Shema* [Hebrew: prayer name], and all three *parshes* [Hebrew with Yiddish pronunciation: refers to chapters of the Pentateuch], you know, you know, you know *El melech ne'eman, shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheynu Adonai echad. Boruch shem k'vod malcusoh l'olam va'ed. V'ahavta es Adonai Elohecha b'chol levovcha u'v'chol nafshecha* [Hebrew with mixed Yiddish/Hebrew pronunciation: quoting a prayer from Deuteronomy]. I said all the prayers, I said [unclear, but possibly quoting more Hebrew prayers]. I, I know it by heart, that I know it...

It's part of you.

Yes. And all the girls used to pray with me and when they tried to talk, "Where was God." Lots of, lots of people after the war. I said, "Without God, you cannot cross this. You must believe in God because if you don't believe in the [unclear] you are nothing, you are not a human being anymore." Because then everybody has to have something to be able to look up and [inaudible]. Because I used to... [Tape cuts out for several seconds] ...and she was Dr. McLeningham's mother, her mother, the

wife. And she said to me, she said to me, she didn't call me Mrs. Jacks. At that time my name was Mrs. Jacks. She called me Jackie. Jackie what they called me. She said, "Jackie, I'm dying but I'd still like to live." I said, "The good Lord is going to let you live." I knew she's dying. Anyway and she died when I was braiding her hair and I was even making a joke with her. Oh, I wish I had the beautiful hair you have because they ruined my hair in Auschwitz. They put it in Clorox, not Clorox, in... like ammonia whatever, and lots of girls got blind. You know they throw your head in a bowl and lots of girls got blinded and they put them right away in the gas chamber. I was lucky. I used to go out in the free skies and argue with God too. I did. And I'm going to tell you the truth like it was and I used to say it. *Reboyno Shel Oylam* [Hebrew with Yiddish pronunciation: Master of the Universe; refers to God]. "What are you doing? You promised us that we're going to be *Mikol ha'amim*" [Hebrew: "among all the nations"; refers to the chosen nature of the Children of Israel]. You know what that means don't you?

Yes.

See I learned not Hebrew like they speak now. I learned *loshn koydish* [Hebrew with Yiddish pronunciation: holy language; refers to Hebrew]. Do you know what..?

Uh huh. Yeah.

That's why it's sounds different than you... But I do understand Hebrew still because I had studied word by word Jewish trans, the translation from Hebrew to Yiddish. So I still remember. God blessed me with a good memory. I don't have too good memory.

Yeah you do.

But still I, I am thankful to God. I used to have a good memory. Now it's slacking.

What synagogue do you go to?

I go to Beth Shalom and K I. I'm a member, a member at Beth , at Beth Shalom, an associate member at Beth Shalom and a full member at KI. I do it... I was always a member at Beth Shalom, but when they

That's where you and your husband brought your family up?

Yes, but circumstances sometimes in life, when the synagogue moved from 34th and Paseo. I didn't have any transportation. I came back. That's why I said it's a different chapter. (Sigh). I'm strong like iron.

I can tell.

What I went through. Ahhhhh. Anyway.

How do the memories affect you day-to-day? I mean is it.

I don't live with the past. Lord no. No way. No way.

Not there?

You must not forget the past, but you cannot live with the past.

But you don't live it?

No. Never. What I did in Heidelberg. I was walking on the bridge at the [?]. And I was frightened because I lived on *Wertherstrasse 72* in Heidelberg on the fourth floor with Mrs. Neuman. We shared a room. The bathroom and the kitchen with a German lady, but I got along with her.

Have you been back since the war to see some of the places that you where you lived with your family or where you lived after the war.

Nope. In Poland? Never. I would never go back there.

You would not go?

Unless one of my children wanted to go. With them I would do it.

For them you would go?

For them I would sacrifice. But otherwise, no desire. No. Too much. Too much. My brother went back. He wrote a book too.

Yeah? What book did he write?

In Hebrew. I cannot understand.

Was it a book about his experiences in the war?

I don't know what he went through. He never, never... talk to me.

He wouldn't talk to you about it?

No. And I don't know nothing about it.

Have you always been so open about and seemingly comfortable with talking about your experiences?

I made everybody do that.

You made people talk about the war?

I made people start talking. I was one of the first ones who started. I have been doing it for... At William Jewel College, I bet you for 20 years. [Atchistein?] came in to eat some sandwiches in my bakery and he would see the number and he was a very fine gentleman. And he would say to me, "Can I please ask you? Is this what I'm thinking?" I said, "Yes." And I had to talk to him and he invited me and they named a class one time after me.

How wonderful.

[Unclear] Yeah. They had big... I used to go to the reunions and everything.

Okay, Is there anything I haven't asked you about that you think is important for me to know?

What ever you want to. I don't care. Whatever you'd like to. I had... Whatever you want to.

We've covered a lot of ground today.

I think so.

I appreciate you visiting with me. I've learned a lot which is one of the reasons why I wanted to do this.

So you see what I did. I started talking about the bridge in [unclear]. And I was scared? Do you know why?

No.

I know why. Nobody else does. Because I saw how they were putting dynamite and explode those bridges. And then I said, you idiot. What are you afraid for?

The war is over.

The war is over.. I start jumping up and down on the bridge. Never was scared. I didn't have a mother to take me to a psychiatrist to find out why. I was my own psychiatrist. I did a lot of things, believe me.

Do you think that because you chose to talk about your experiences, that's part of what's gotten you...

For five years, I couldn't, if you asked me anything about my family, I would choke up here and I would start crying. Then I said to myself, What is going on? If you're not going open and tell people what happened, no one is goin' know. We must tell the world what had happened. And slowly when Benny was writing his book, he

brought in two pages... What he started and I said, Oh, Benny, that's wonderful. You write a book. You have style. You know what you do. And I could see he needs to get it out.

So even though your brother wouldn't talk about it with you he did find a way.

Yes, oh yeah. He wrote... his grandchildren made him. They helped him I think.

Well Bronia. Thank you very much. I appreciate this more than you know.

Now what is your... How do you?

END OF INTERVIEW