

Olga Rothstein Interview

October 18, 1999

What was your name at birth?

Name at birth? Olga Stark.

When were you born?

1922, March 14.

Okay, March 14, 1922. And in what city?

Sárospatak.

And was that in, what country is that in?

Hungary.

Hungary. What do you know about the circumstances of your birth? Were you born at home?

Home.

At home, okay. What were your parents' names?

Szally [Sally] Stark. Herman Stark.

Describe the role of your mother and father like in a household situation.

They were both working really. We lived in a place where wine was the main thing, for selling, for growing. That's what we did. And my mother was very good in these things. My father was a very learned man and he studied more than he was working.

Mr. Rothstein: [barely audible] *Shoykhet. Shoykhet.*

Did they own their business?

Yes.

Oh. So they owned, like, a winery?

Yeah.

Describe the members of your family - their names, ages and relationships to you.

I had one brother and one sister. My brother is still alive. He's in Hungary. And my sister died in the Holocaust.

Alright. Are they older than you?

I was the oldest. [Phone ringing. Mr. Rothstein gets up to answer and can be heard in background talking.]

Oldest one. Ok. Can you kind of describe your neighborhood? Was it with streets and what was in the insides of your homes?

Regular streets, you know. The city was a college town, so it was very modern. It was very famous from the college.

You want to stop it? [Interviewer seems to be offering Olga a chance to answer phone. Tape pauses.]

How well off was your family? Did you have servants? Did you own land?

We owned winery. And servants - everybody had, you know, help in the house.

Did you have lots of acres for this winery?

Oh, I don't know exactly how much it was, but we made a living off it.

Did you ever take vacations? Where did you go?

Yeah. You know, in the country, different places.

They had like summer places to go.

No, we didn't go to summer places. My father was a very religious man and he didn't do those things.

Describe some of the foods that you eat, you ate there.

Hungarian food is all very good.

Name some of them off.

I do the same thing – rolled cabbage, things like that, you know. My mother was a very good cook. I never really cooked to tell you the truth. I wasn't that much interested in it.

Did you have any favorite desserts that they used to make there?

I really don't remember.

Did they have chocolate?

Chocolate, yes, yes. My girlfriend did live in a place where it was factories, chocolate factories. Szerencs.

Did you ever sneak some candy in there?

Well, but I was invited just 2 years ago somewhere and I see there a box of chocolate that what came from there from the town. I said you can eat the chocolate, but I want to have the box that it came in.

Did your family have any, you know, like political affiliations? You know, like we have Republicans and we have Democrats?

Yes, my father was, but you know I wasn't that much interested in that things, you know. Here, the kids I think are more interested in politics, or it's more advertised, and you read about it always, which party does what. But he had always two newspaper. If one of them says something wrong, he said from the two of them if I put it together, I can find out what really going on. Oh, well, that's a...

Okay. Let's talk about going to school. You know, what were your teachers like? Your favorite subjects.

I had very good teachers. I was a very good student. But I tell you the truth, I really wanted to go to higher classes and my father didn't believe in this time that girls should go. But when my brother was growing up, even if he was a *yeshiva* boy, he had a professor who came up and then he made exams in four times, I think so, and he finished University which was a big deal. But they kept him late in life under Communism, he was a mayor of the city and, you know, he, he was doing okay.

When he went to that university, I was just curious...

He didn't go to the university.

Someone taught them.

The professor, the professor...

Did he major in something? Did he take a specialty, like...?

To tell you the truth, I don't remember.

I was wondering since he became a mayor if he specialized in government?

Well, he was... He was - probably. He took something like that.

So as far as you go, did you graduate like elementary school? High school?

Yes and high school.

But of course then, you weren't allowed to go any further.

I had a cousin who was in the group where it was just let's say between 200 people, it was supposed to be 10 Jews maybe or 5 and he was one of them.

It was an exclusive thing.

Yeah.

What did you do for fun as a youngster like here, you know, the kids play in a sandbox or play jacks?

Same thing all over the world. The kids are playing the same games and they are having the same fun, you know. Same thing.

Did you have any hobbies or did you collect anything?

You know, life was always a little bit funny when I was growing up. It wasn't already... If I wanted to go somewhere, you know, my father always said "Well, right now is not the time." Even in the movies, he used to say, "We don't... Not one Jewish person owns a movie anymore. So we really shouldn't go and support them." So it wasn't very easy, you know. It was hard to understand why.

I'm sure it was. So I'm sure you had some girlfriends.

Yes. Life was exactly like it is here. You know, kids had fun. They make their own fun and...

Do you still have any of those friends?

Well, they are in different places.

Do you still have connections with some of them?

I tell you the truth. I am much closer with these 3 girls with whom I was together in the concentration camp because you were together day and night.

And your age that you probably were.

Yes. One of them is in Israel. We are very close touch. My daughter lives in Israel. But before I will see my daughter, this friend of mine is there at the airport and even if I don't tell her, she's in touch with my daughter and she will be sure that she's there.

Where are the other two friends living?

The other one is Elizabeth.

Okay. Elizabeth Nussbaum.

Yeah.

Okay. Let's see now. Organizations? Did you have any like Hadassah's or anything like that?

I wasn't involved in that.

Okay.

We had organization. My mother was involved, but not me.

Okay.

Youth organization, you know, in a small way, not here. Here is everything big.

What were your teenage years like? Did you... What did you do to spend your spare time? Did you work, or did you ...?

Spare time. I did learn sewing. My parents always worried that they think there would be bad times, you have to have something ...

Skills.

... but, you can do me that or earn money. But it never came to that.

Did you have friends that were the opposite sex?

You know, in religious homes, you don't, you didn't have boyfriends and you didn't go out on dates. So this was – we talked to boys, but from far away. [laughing]

That's interesting. So how did you get along with your parents? Were you close with them? Were they strict?

They were strict but we were very close. The whole family. You know my brother was always the favorite and if I said something, my mother used to tell me, "When is he mine,

he have to go away to the schools when he was five year old,” and it’s true, “and then to *yeshiva* then he studied and then he said he’s going to the army. After the army, he gets married. When do I get him?”

It sounds like you had a very liberated mind as a young lady that you could see, you know, what was going on.

Well, but this was the truth. You know, when I think about it now, it was the truth, he never was home, my brother. He was always away in school.

But it sounds to me like you’re still close with him now.

Very close. Yes, now.

Because you understood...

I don’t have nobody else. You know my sister died when she was young and she didn’t have a chance at all.

What values or standards were most important to your parents? You know, it can go into religion or the way they brought you up.

You know my father and my mother loved the children very much, and they were looking for our future. My father wanted me to get married when I was very young and he was a *Hassid* from one of the rabbis there. This rabbi sent always, you know, home the boys didn’t came to see the girls. The mothers came. So there came a few mothers and my uncle said always, “Don’t get involved in that. You listen to your father in everything.” That was his younger brother. But not to get... And you know what, that saved probably my life because if I would get married, I would have children and those women were the first ones who went right away to the crematorium. So really, he was the one, he said listen everything with your father said, but not that. Don’t get interested in these things.

I know that you’ve had a religious life. But were you religious in those standards there in Hungary too?

Yeah.

Okay, so it was a kosher home.

Of course. Of course. My father was ... he dreamed about it to coming to America and he said if we sell everything we can buy a small plane. He dreamed because we didn’t have nobody here who could send papers. So we said we buy a small plane. We give the plane to the pilot just to take us over there. So he learned to be a *shoykhet* because, you know, he was learned. He didn’t have to study that much and he was a *shoykhet*. So he thought that if we come here, we can make a living from that and he didn’t even know how good it was

because when we came to Kansas City, I don't know if you remember these times, but it was lots of *shoykhtim* here from different places. There was the packing houses

Mr. Rothstein: [inaudible but seems to be listing local kosher butchers]

And I always thought that time my father knew what he was doing because those people made a good living here.

How was Judaism practiced in your home? I think you've talked a little bit about that. You know, did you celebrate *Shabbat*?

Everything. Everything. The only bad *Shabbat* was when my father went for *Shabbat* to this rabbi. I really didn't like this rabbi because, you know, when Friday night my mother made the *kiddush*, we were crying because we missed, missed him. Yeah.

You missed him. It wasn't the same.

No.

Did you have Hanukkah?

Of course, everything like here. A little bit stronger.

Stronger. Were you around any secular holidays like Christmas?

Of course, I had non-Jewish neighbors. I was jealous the time that they had the Christmas tree with all the things and the gifts and everything and probably... [laughing]

Nothing's changed, has it?

Yeah. Yeah.

What impact did the secular culture have on your life? Here's, how are we're going to go ... Were your parents more concerned about maintaining Jewish identity or fitting in?

No. They didn't want it to fit in and just maintaining. You know I went to a Catholic school.

That's where you got your education?

Yes, and it was told to the teacher that when they say, of course I know all the Catholic prayers, but I didn't have to pray.

They didn't require you?

No. No. I put my hand on the table when they put it together and I closed my eyes.

You weren't the only Jewish child in your class?

I was the only one.

You were. But they respected you and...

Very much, and they used to tell me always "You are a good student because you are Jewish. All the Jews are smart." I heard that always.

Very interesting.

I was very good student.

Were you encouraged to develop relationships with all people, or ...?

Well, you know, I was friendly with them and everything and so much friendly, as much my father saw that it's enough for me. He didn't let me too close to the girls, not to learn something, God forbid, religious things. But I had very good friends in the next little town, what was a big college town and we belonged there to the synagogue. It was very close walking distance, so we really grew up both places.

Well, that's good. Another question is "Were you or your family interested in secular culture such as art, music and philosophy?"

That's again the same thing. You know, my uncle and aunt in the winter season used to go to Budapest when the theaters, and concerts and everything was and even as religious as my father was, he loved these things. But he said we are not supposed to take part. We are not supposed to support them. But they did very well without our support. So I grew up in a wrong time.

How well were Jews accepted by the general community? Did you experience any antisemitism?

No, no. My father was very... My parents were very much loved. I know many a times people came and wanted to sell things. They needed the money or they wanted to drink, I really don't remember. And my father said I have enough from what I can make a living and you kids are not going to come and cry for me that I took away from you the, your livelihood. So he was very much respected. Matter of fact, when the Germans came, the whole little city came out, the officials and everybody, and they didn't let them come into our home. They said these Jews didn't do anything wrong and he was always with us and you can do nothing. But you know how these things happen. One guy was there who was always drinking and I remember he was dressed up every day of the week and always visited us. So my father gave him a glass of wine. It looks like one time he didn't give him or whatever it is, but when these Germans went up, he said "How come you don't go into the Jew there?" And he said, "Well, this Jew is not very Jew." He said "That's what you think." So the next time when they came, they stopped right away by our house and the

people saw that and they came down and they said no, you are not going in there and they didn't let them come in.

That's very interesting.

It is.

I'm trying to figure out how old you might have been before war broke out. You know, right before.

Oh, I grew up in a wrong time either way because, you know, it was already bad, the timing since I was 10, 11 year old.

Because it says here what was your occupation before the war? But I don't think that affects you at all.

No.

Okay. Let me go on a little bit further here. Okay. Well, I think what's going to happen ... this is not applicable before the war, you did not meet your spouse before the war. When and how did you first become aware of the Nazi presence? I think you just gave me an example right over here. Okay. Do you remember the first day of the occupation when they came in?

Well, you know, I do remember one thing that my father was sitting on a bed and the bed, he was shaking so much that the bed was shaking.

Was that a premonition that something was happening?

You know, it was, it was horrible because you couldn't go out from the house if you didn't have a star and if you went with the star, they knew right away that you are a Jew. It wasn't happy times.

Any other experiences you want to share similar to that?

It just, we were born in the wrong time. My brother went into the..., it's not even the military, just helping. We thought that it will be a safer place than in the ghetto or whatever it is. You know, Polish people and Lithuanian people, they were in the ghetto 4, 5 years and the Hungarians were not even a year, because right away it was ending, the whole thing.

Yeah.

We were the last ones the Hungarian Jews.

So you probably had a lot of discussions about the Nazis because you...

We did and we thought to every country it can happen but not to, not to us. Because we were, you know, my father could pick up the telephone and talk to any senator and we felt we, we are citizens. And we were citizens. But everything...

So I'm trying to figure out... Apparently, it wasn't such a takeover like it was the others. Did you go right into liberation? Or was there some, you didn't go into a camp or anything?

We went into the ghetto.

Okay. So it was just in the ghetto. Okay.

And from the ghetto, you know, the ghetto wasn't like 3 years or 4 years. The Hungarians stayed in the ghetto 5 months, 4 months, or something like that. And I remember even there, we had something special because we were in in the first transport to go to Auschwitz. We were on a street what was designated that this will go. Somebody came in the middle of the night and told us, you move right away out from here because this place will be taken. And we moved to another place. Then when the second transport was going, we were again in the wrong place. They again came to warn us. But it wasn't even so good because they said that the 3rd and the 4th transport, they know that they saw Jews who had something and who were... so some of them were past that, from Hungary to Germany and they said you give us everything because you will have to give to the Germans so why don't you give it to us. So, you know, they started right away here till we went to Germany.

So some of these questions are really not going to, you know, affect you because it says, were you persecuted?

Of course everybody was persecuted. We lost every business, you know, and it was taken away all your privileges, everything.

Okay. You said you wore a Star of David?

Yes. [inaudible]

In some ways, you were talking about the non-Jews helping you a little bit. Until then later on, you said they had to give up on it.

We have to live, we have, we were living in a place where they didn't wait for these Jew to leave everything to them. They had enough themselves. And they were proud, of course some other Jew couldn't settle down there. I remember one of them was fighting so bad. He wanted to come in there, and they didn't let him. But this one Jew they respected. They loved him and they were good to us. The one Jew, but they didn't needed another one.

Were you ever deported to a concentration camp? I think we talked about that. Did you ever try to escape it?

No. We were the first family in the concentration camp, in the ghetto. The first family.

Mr. Rothstein: [speaking but inaudible]

[Tape pauses and then resumes.]

We went to Auschwitz and from Auschwitz, they sent us Buchenwald, I think so, and Dachau, and we were liberated... I never remembered that town.

Mr. Rothstein: Wolfratshausen.

Wolfratshausen.

Yes. Describe the circumstances leading to your liberation.

I don't think so. They moved themselves exactly what goes.... I don't know. We were marching for I don't know how many days and when it was alarm, the German officers running to the...

Mr. Rothstein: Forest.

... forests and we were staying there. We were waiting that they should come. And food wasn't nothing there. They had on a wagon, something, I don't know, a few bread. It was a bad time and we were liberated really by the Russians, and we begged them...

Mr. Rothstein: [whispering] American.

... Americans. So who came to be so the Russians that do...?

Mr. Rothstein: [whispering and inaudible]

Because I remember that when we were liberated in the morning, we saw hanging the *Lagerführer*. You know Americans don't do that but the Russians didn't think twice about it.

Is that when you really realized you were going to be free?

That's what we knew that we are free.

And you've said by whom. Where were you taken right after that part about being liberated?

Oh, one of the little towns there. I don't think I remember the name. You know...

How long were you there?

Mr. Rothstein: [Whispering to Olga but inaudible]

You know he [referring to Mr. Rothstein] was in the same *Lager*, same camp so he remembers more of these things.

Is that when you met your husband?

No. I saw him in the concentration camp. He... I was working in the kitchen, and he came in once in awhile for extra food because he was working in the *tischlerei* and they gave him permission to if there is leftover food to come and get some.

What... how was your physical condition at that time?

I don't remember ...

You weren't sick or anything.

No.

You didn't need any medical help or....

Oh, we all needed. You know, we were, we were just skeletons.

So you needed food, okay? And your mental state, were you...?

You know, when you are young you think different, you know. Everything is just different.

Okay. So where did you go from there? When did you realize your family was gone?

I was together with these two girls always, all through the concentration camp. Matter of fact, we slept in one bunker on the top. Of course, it was, I think so, six or seven people over there. One wanted to turn, all five or six have to turn the same way. And we were liberated in Wolfrats...

Mr. Rothstein: Wolfratshausen.

...hausen. And we got a room, the three of us, and we were always nominated that we kept the cleanest room and the nicest room.

So after that, did you go to a displaced persons camp?

We were, you know, Israeli *chayalim* came there and we were over...

Mr. Rothstein: [whispering and inaudible]

... we were in the Flak-Kaserne. There came some Israeli *chayalim* and they said that we can go to Israel. So that was, we find out not one of us had anybody left over. I didn't

know even from my brother that time. The book, I started to work with the Blue Cross book...

Red Cross.

Red Cross – and they find him.

So when did you meet up with your brother after the war? I mean, when did you...

After the war, we brought him over once to America.

But, I mean, did you...oh so you didn't see him all that time?

No. No.

Okay, we'll talk about that a little bit later. Because I don't want to catch up with that. That's post war. Okay. So you didn't really... So how many months did you spend in the displaced camp before they moved you to ...?

You mean, in the ghetto?

Well, we're talking about after the war.

After the war, we went from Germany to Italy.

Italy, Italy, okay.

And we thought that this *chayal* said we can go to Israel right away, and we were ready to go, but they didn't go so fast. You remember the *Aliyah*, they weren't going that well. We got married in Italy when they said that the women with the..., who are pregnant can go now, I became very fast pregnant. Then it came a new story that it's not that easy to get in in Israel. The women who are pregnant can't go, it's too dangerous. You know when it's not meant something to happen, it doesn't happen. So we didn't go to Israel. But we spent, we sent the little *shmatas* what we had, the little things, everything to Israel. We were ready to go. So we couldn't go.

So how long did you stay in Italy?

In Italy I think so three years, four years?

So let's just kinda back up a little bit. This is when, you know, you got out of the camps and then your husband and you got married...

Yeah. I think so, we, it was marriage the first night.

Really? Right. And then, so tell me, I know you talked about how you met him, but what kind of a wedding did you really have?

One friend, I think so, paid for coffee and I don't know if I had cake or something. We had something, but what was the most interesting things, my husband had 3 brothers and 3 sisters in South Africa and the rabbi who gave us *chuppah kiddush* was a South African rabbi, and he knew his family. Now that's really something.

That's coincidental. Unbelievable. Well, that probably was meant to be. That was good. So what did you do for those four years in Italy? What kind of work did you do?

I didn't do nothing, but my husband was selling, you know, people got from relatives old *shmatas* from America, from Canada, from I don't know from where, and with Nussbaum they were selling these things. Traveling by bicycle and they were selling, I think so, cigarettes, small things, clothing, yeah, I said clothing.

So were you... Well I'll ask you more questions about that.

They did feed us, you know, that UNRRA had a kitchen where they were trying to take care of us.

So you had a child?

I had... Ann was born there and Italian people were very nice, very nice people. You know, there is two category in Italy, rich or poor. We were living between the poor people.

What city was that?

By the boot of Italy. Santa Maria. Santa Maria.

Was it by the water? Was it by the ocean?

Yes, by the ocean. You didn't have to dress up. You just had to go around in swimming suits.

So the weather was good?

The weather was good.

The food?

The food, if we had for *Shabbat*, we had chicken. We sure had a good *Shabbat*.

So as soon as you were together, did you both have the same thoughts about your religion?

Yeah.

Did he come from an orthodox home too?

He was a little bit more lenient, you know. He went through more than I did. I was one year in the ghetto and they were four years or five years. So it was a little bit different.

So you were raising your child, obviously, staying home and he was working. What kind of ...did you have a social life, or I mean...?

I am telling you that I was with the Nussbaums together all the time, you know? And this other girlfriend who lives in Israel. That's what this is about, you know like you are talking about sororities or whatever it is. This is not exactly a sorority but is the same thing that we went through, all of us the same thing and you just can't forget it.

So here you are. You're ready to go to Israel. Is that your next step?

[Unclear] **I don't go any place. We don't travel any place because we go every year and sometimes twice a year. Then Ann had the children, we went twice a year.**

But let's talk about, like, right after you left Italy. Where did you go from Italy after those four years, or four or five years that you were there?

In Italy? Well, we did see the whole Italy. Traveling from Italy, no. We stayed in Italy, but we went to Rome or we went to, you know, to the bigger cities to see them. I was sent somewhere because I was very undernourished and I had to recuperate. So, this ...

Did that affect your pregnancy and your birth?

I had a very bad birth because, you know, I needed blood. I needed blood, and this was after the war. It's not like here that it's ready blood and I remember that when I was in the bed, it's, people were crying because they told them I will die. But I had a wonderful... God is always there. A wonderful doctor whose blood matched mine and he didn't say, and he liked my husband, but he didn't tell him. The nurse said "You know who saved her life? He gave you his blood."

That's interesting. Alright. So let's ... We're done with Italy and then where do you go next?

From Italy, we were ready to go to Israel, like I told you. But it came, you know, they had trouble, the boats to come in. You know the history and meantime, the Nussbaums got paper from America to come here and when they came here, they made papers for us to present to the people and we came to America. We wanted to go really to South Africa. He had 3 brothers, 3 sisters there. And they said we are not close enough like family. A father or mother could bring a child, or a child could bring a father or a mother, but brothers were not close enough.

Who made up those rules?

The South African government. And Mike was very upset. You know, a war like that, and everybody your family died, you have brothers and sisters, of course you want to see them. To be honest with you, I wasn't that anxious to go. Even for me, six brother-in-law, six sister-in-law probably would have been too much. [laughing]

So here you are, you left Italy and then where did you travel to get, you know, to leave for the United States? Did you go from Italy, or somewhere...?

From Italy, we came with a boat. It was a horrible boat ride.

How long did it take?

Don't remember ...

[Mr. Rothstein] 13 days.

13 days? He remembers.

13 days. So how was this boat trip? Lots of people.

Well, yeah. It wasn't a boat trip like today, you know, when you are sitting.

Not a cruise.

I was sitting under the steps, I remember, because I'm very, I get seasick...

You don't go cruising?

... and finally we came to New York and in New York, we said that we are coming to Kansas City and they said, "Kansas City?" Some of the New Yorkers still thought that the cowboys and the Indians are here. They said "Do you know where you are going?" And we thought, when we came, Mike always tells the story for everybody. He was looking for the cowboys and Indians, and these were Jewish, intelligent people, but you know, when we are today in Florida we says we are from Kansas City, they say "Kansas City. Are Jews there?"

Did you say you came to Ellis Island?

Yeah.

Can you describe coming to Ellis Island? Seeing that Statue of Liberty?

It was everything very exciting, but in the meantime my daughter got the measles. So you know I didn't look around every place because I was confined to the room. I couldn't go up. They didn't let me go anyplace.

Were there other children there with measles, too, at that same time?

I don't remember. You know, I was so busy with myself that I ... But, we got a room because of that for ourselves. Otherwise, you know, 10 to 15 people were in a room on the boat. But we got the room because nobody wanted to catch the measles.

So you've come to Ellis Island, you know, New York and then how long did you stay in New York before you got to Kansas City?

I think so, just a few days.

Then how did you travel to Kansas City?

[Mr. Rothstein] Pullman.

With a train and we had a...

[Mr. Rothstein] Pullman.

Pullman.

So how long did it take you to get to Kansas City?

How many days? [seems to be asking Mr. Rothstein]

[Mr. Rothstein] Overnight. Overnight.

Overnight.

So when you got here, the Nussbaums were there to greet you.

Yeah. Yeah.

Okay. Tell us a little about that.

Well, you know life wasn't that easy. That was after the war. It was very hard to get even an apartment. We got one 709, 709 Paseo, an apartment and then many a times, you had a surprise in the morning. You put down your feet and it was the water stand there because it was a basement apartment and the water just came in, you know ...

From rain.

...from rain, yeah. But it was fine and we knew that we were in a place and it will be better and better. I remember when my husband find a job. How did he find it? Even the agency couldn't find a job that time. But he spoke a little Italian and there were the Messina Brothers, a company who hired him and they were very nice. They really didn't need that thing that badly but they wanted to give him a job. And you know, people are complaining today. One day a guy said to Mike, on the job - Mike said to him "Why are

you always so upset? He said “Wouldn’t you be upset if you have to work?” And Mike was going to work with a black guy sitting in the back of a car, had to sit in the back.

Mr. Rothstein: A rumble.

...a rumble seat, whatever it is, because they said I can give you a job but you’ll need something to go to the job because he has to carry tools. And buses not going there.

The bus didn’t go that route. What kind of work was that?

Carpenter work.

Okay. We’ll get more into that later. Okay, so did you know any Italian at all?

A little bit. A little bit, few words stays with you. But you know I was most of the time home with the baby and he had to know a few words if he wanted to sell something or buy something.

Well, let me ask you something. How did you guys communicate?

Yiddish, you see. The Hungarians are not perfect Yiddish. But Polish and Lithuanians, that was the language.

That’s right. That’s right. I’m going to end this because I see it’s coming to an end here. We’ll just go a little bit further. Okay, so when did you start learning English? Did you pick it up on your own, go to classes?

I... We lived on 709 Paseo and I remember I had a neighbor. He saw that I’m holding the paper and reading. He said, “You can’t speak a word. How do you read the paper?” But the paper was written in, the Hungarian words are the same, so I was reading from morning till evening. I didn’t know what I am reading, but I was reading there. And you know, I went to school not too much because we had children and thank God.

How old was Ann when she came to the United States?

2 ½.

2 ½. So you had to be home.

Uh-huh.

So let’s talk a little bit about ... let me just end this here. Okay, so it talks about how did you adjust to your new country. What were some of your biggest challenges?

The language is the biggest one. You know, when you know the language, then you are able to communicate, but we talked Yiddish to each other. You know, most of the people

knew Yiddish. We didn't... I didn't speak too much Yiddish home. My father talked to me in Yiddish, and I answered in Hungarian.

Did you have any, did you face any discrimination yet? Any antisemitism?

No, I don't think so. I haven't had anything. And after we went through so much things, you know you don't take it so seriously, probably.

It talks about ... okay. Well, you already had some friends here so you became closer and closer to them, the Nussbaums, and were they fellow survivors? Yes.

Also to my synagogue, I was very close. You know I belonged to the same synagogue since I came here and I was Chairman from Beth Israel for about ten years. I was President from the sisterhood, President from the couples club. So you know, we adjusted pretty good.

Now, was there, this synagogue. Is this the same synagogue you were at when you first...?

I still belong to the same synagogue.

So they had a building somewhere down there?

No, but after that I moved from there, I didn't belong to anything when I was on 709 Paseo, but when we came down to 36th Street, then I belonged to there too, I don't remember even what was the name that time of the synagogue ...

[Tape cuts off and then interview resumes.]

... Beth Medresh Hagadol.

Was that a real...

Orthodox.

Orthodox, where the women sat separately from the ...?

And then we went to Beth Israel Abraham, and since then we've belonged to Beth Israel Abraham.

Are you one of the founders of Beth Israel?

I wouldn't say a founder, but we do belong to it for many, 50 years.

Okay.

I changed my places, you know, just now, our synagogue is here on... Where is it, 90...

Mr. Rothstein: 1999.

Yeah. Four times since I'm here, because we build a house on 83rd and Cherry and from 83rd and Cherry, we moved three times here just to be close to the synagogue.

It seems like the synagogue is a very, very important part of your life. Did you ever work in the United States, or you just brought up your children? Well, let's talk about when your other children were born?

Steve was born in America, so we are a very interesting family. My husband is Lithuanian. I'm a Hungarian. Ann is Italian. Steve is an American. My son-in-law is English. My grandchildren are *Sabras*.

You've got it all.

This can happen to a refugee family. That's all.

When did you become an American citizen?

Which year was that? In the regular time when you are supposed to be.

Did you take classes?

I went privately.

You had someone come to your home or you went to them.

I came to somebody.

And they taught you?

What was the old lady's name? Mrs... ?

Mr. Rothstein: You went to night school.

I didn't go to night school.

Mr. Rothstein: Yeah, we went. Right across the street at the Temple.

Did the center have something going on to help you?

Mr. Rothstein: It was going to the Temple.

The Temple. I don't remember.

Mr. Rothstein: [unclear]

Yeah. Probably.

In light of your past experience...

Mr. Rothstein: [whispering] Mrs. Brock.

Mrs. Brock.

Mrs. Who?

Brock. Do you remember that name?

The name sounds familiar.

Yeah. Mrs. Brock was teaching.

Where did she have the classes going on?

She had it all over. She was terrific. She was very nice to all of us and it was a pleasure to learn with her.

So what year was it when you got your ...?

It must have been that my daughter was already 2 year old or something like that.

So pretty soon after you came here.

Yes. Pretty soon.

Mr. Rothstein: 4 years later you got it – you became citizen.

4 years later we became citizens.

Citizens, right.

[Mr. Rothstein] 4 or 6 years.

Did you ever go to the Jewish Community Center, spend any time there?

Yes, not too much. You know, I had 2 small children. That time you didn't have baby-sitters. I went with the kids certain places. You know, they... If you remember that time also was a *yeshiva* for kids. Do you remember that?

I've heard about it. I've had people tell me about it.

So the kids went there. And ...

So the children went to school there eventually or did you move before that?

The children went to school, I tell you, at 36th, [unclear], 39th? Or, where was that?

Mr. Rothstein: 2016 West 40...

It was somewhere in the neighborhood.

So they didn't go to that *yeshiva* school?

They went for...

They did. Okay. Oh and they went to an elementary school.

When they were very small.

[unclear as both Mr. and Mrs. Rothstein are talking.]

Okay. Let's see. So, in light of your ... Okay. We've already talked about the names of your kids. Did you talk about your experiences in the war with your children?

Yeah.

Did they ask you questions or you just on your own...?

They still ask questions, you know, and I was trying to tell and my daughter read a lot about it, so does my Steve. They are reading whatever they can about it and they ask still questions.

How do your Holocaust memories penetrate your life today? Are there any sounds or smells that evoke a past experience?

You can never forget it. You can never forget it. Any little thing can bring up a memory and it just, you leave me that, but you never forget it.

Did you ever think about not to believe in God or...?

No. I don't think so that was in my mind. I know lots of people got very disappointed, but I never... First of all like we said, the Hungarian Jews weren't that long, you know, Polish and Lithuanian Jews were just in the ghetto 3 years, and 4 years. So that itself was a concentration camp. We were the last one going in the war, the Hungarian Jews.

What does being an American mean to you?

Freedom.

Do you think most Americans take their freedom for granted?

They do.

You don't?

I do... I don't. No. Because I think so Europe, it can happen again anytime.

Mr. Rothstein: It can happen here.

Do you think it might or I know you don't want it to happen, but do you ever think that circumstances...?

If they have an opportunity, every place it can happen, because we always said that when we knew already that the Polish Jews were in trouble, it can happen there, but never in Hungary. The Senate it was Jewish people. The Jewish people were leaders, and, you know, we said we are full citizens and everything. So it can happen, because we could have done something in the last minute. You know, one of my relatives was a head of the Youth Aliyah. We could have gone to Israel, but then we were thinking, how can we leave the parents? We are going to run away and leave the parents? So we just didn't believe it that it can happen in Hungary and it wouldn't happen, probably. But everybody wanted to have Jewish things.

Okay.

[Tape stops then interview resumes.]

I had a question I wanted to ask you. Tell me about your surviving relatives that you do have.

I have my brother in Hungary. I have a cousin in Israel from my father's side and one cousin from my mother's side in Boston - not Boston - close to Boston.

I know your brother you see.

Yes, and my cousin we are very close and so is this cousin in the States. His daughter just was here for a meeting. We are very close with all of them.

That's good. Okay.