

©2013 Midwest Center for Holocaust Education

Transcripts of interviews may be used for individual research with proper citation. All other uses require written permission from MCHE.

Lilly Segelstein Interview

October 27, 1999

The date is October 27th and my name is Jean Bratt and I'm interviewing Lilly Segelstein. Is it okay for you there? Okay, so, what was your name when you were born?

I was born Lydia.

Lydia?

Lydia. I changed it since then because it's kind of hard. Lydia Lebovitz. L-E-B-O-V-I-T-Z.

And is it Lydia, L-Y-D-I-A?

Yeah.

Okay.

And then I changed it to Lilly because it's a funny story.

Go ahead.

Our neighbor had a dog who named him Lydia. And my brother used to tease me, always say, "Come here, Lydia. Come on, come on, Lydia." And I was crying and I told my mother, "I don't want to be Lydia anymore." So he said ... she said, "Okay." She said, "We'll see about that." So they changed it to Lilly. L-I-L-L-Y.

At what age was that?

I was about ... at that time, I must have been about six or seven, close to that. And I was ...

And where were you born?

I was born in Czechoslovakia. I was born ... it was called Klucserka.

Now, can you spell that?

K-L-U-C-S-E-R-K-A. But when I was about ten years old we moved to a bigger city. It was, uh... We moved to Munkach [Munkács]. M-U-K-A... M-U-N-K-A-C-H.

And what year were you born?

I was born in 1928.

In what year?

May 10th.

May 10th?

Uh-huh.

And what year did you move?

We moved when I was about ten years old. I would say ... in about '38 ... middle of '38, to Munkács, which was a bigger city. We moved there because life began to be ... this was a small place where I was born, and life began to be difficult for Jewish people. There was antisemitism. So we moved to this bigger city because there were a lot of ... many Jews lived in that city. So we, we thought there wouldn't be ... we wouldn't feel antisemitism as much in the bigger city as we did in Klucserka.

Okay.

And it was ... in Klucserka there were many Jews but not as many, I would say. It was a very small area. It was actually like the suburbs of Munkács.

And what were your parents' names?

My father's name was Jacob Lebovitz, and my mother's name was Gisella.

All right. How did your parents meet?

Oh, I don't know. I really don't know.

Okay.

In those days, you know, they were so old-fashioned. Most of the marriages were ...

Arranged?

Arranged. Yes.

What was your mother's role in the household?

My mother was a dressmaker. She was sewing. And, so she was sewing in the house. In those days, most people who had smaller businesses did in their own homes.

And what was your dad's occupation?

My dad was a furniture maker ... cabinetmaker, furniture maker. And he also did it in the house. We had, we lived in a house. We had three ... two bedrooms, a kitchen and an extra room. And in that extra room he had his shop where he was building furniture and he was, he was doing everything that had to do with wood.

And who else lived in the house with you?

We had ... we were five children. So ... the family.

And what were their names and ages?

My brother was two years older. He was born in 1926. His name was Shimi. That's May 5th. It's Simon, but it was Shimi. It was spelled S-H-I-M-I. And he was born in 1926. And I have a sister who is one year younger than I am. Her name is Leah. She lives in Israel now. Just the two of us survived. She, she was born in 1929 in May. She is exactly a year younger than I am. And I had a brother, a younger brother, whose name was Shloime. S-H-L-O-I-M-E. He was born in 1932. And then I had a little sister who was born in 1936 and her name was Feige.

Was it ... Fay?

Faye. Yeah. She was six-years-old when we lost her.

Were your grandparents living?

One set of grandparents. My mother's parents were living. My father's parents died before I was born. Actually, I'm named after my grandmother, after my father's mother, and Shimi was named after my father's father. But they were deceased before we were born.

But your grandparents didn't live with you?

No. No. My grandmother ... my mother's parents lived ... I forget the name of the town. It was kind of a funny name. In Europe, you know, they had all those funny names. They lived about, I would say, 50 kilometers away from the village.

And did you see them very often?

I saw them quite often. I used to go there in the summer. And I, I spent there a lot of time because they had a small farm where they lived. And they had a lot of fruit trees and a lot of walnut trees. And it was not ... and they lived ... it was a small place, but they had a little creek running down right behind their house. And it was such clean water, and we used to love to go there and soak our feet and walk through across it. And ... So I loved to go there when *shul* was out. That was before we moved to Munkács because we were still ... things were still pretty good most of the time.

When you moved, were you able ... still able to go visit them?

I was able to, but my parents wouldn't let me anymore. They got sick and, actually, I think I was there maybe once after I moved. And, she ... they had chickens. They had cows. They had the sheep. It was such a nice life. They were, they were working hard, but in those days everybody worked hard. They didn't know that there was such a thing ... nobody had to go walking or exercising because they exercised enough by doing their chores. So it was a good ... We used to get together there. They had a little hill where my grandmother lived. On *Shabbos*, the kids used to come. The neighbor's kids over there used to get together and play and do things that kids do. Then, of course, they came home from *shul*. Everybody went to *shul* in those days. It was natural. I was just thinking back not too long ago because here we have refrigerators and all that. They didn't have refrigerators. They used to cook Friday because they're not supposed to cook on *Shabbos*. And they put their food in the creek in the side because that kept it cold. The cold water kept it cold so we could have it for *Shabbos*. And then the stove stayed on, a little fire to warm the house. And they were not overly religious. But that's just the way it was done by the Jewish people in those days.

Tell me a little bit more about your house. Did you have electricity?

No, we didn't have electricity. We didn't have running water inside, especially where I was born in Klucserka. We had a ... first we had a well and we could get the water from the well. And then we got the well modernized so we had a pump and we pumped the water out. We also had an outhouse. There was nothing inside. So ... but most everybody at that time over there had an outhouse.

Did you say you had five ... there were five children?

Yes.

So did you five sleep in one bedroom and your parents sleep in the other?

No. We slept ... well, three of us ... three kids slept in the same bedroom where my parents did. And two boys slept in the other bedroom. There was a ... it was not a big bedroom. It

was a small room. But they slept over there. And we had a big bed and my sister and myself slept in the bed. And then the little sister came and for a long time she slept in the cradle. And then when she was already five or six, she slept with my sister and myself in bed. And my parents had the other bed. So we had like the one side for my parents and the other side for kids.

And how did you do laundry?

We, we had a wood stove. And once a week ... actually once in two weeks ... we had a big wash. We got together all the sheets and all the towels and whatever you had, and they had a big wash. You heated the stove with a big kettle like ... you know it was like a big kettle like that, and boiled the water. And instead of using, like you use chlorine here to make them bright, you separated the whites over there. And we washed them first and put them in that kettle and boiled the clothes. We boiled enough to make it look ... to make it clean and to make it disinfected. And, this might ... you may not believe, but this sounds funny. The ashes from the wood ... when we collected the ashes from the stove ... the ashes fell through right in the bottom. And we would take the ashes and boil them out, and the water from that is so soft that we would put that water in the clothes and it would make the clothes white.

Oh, did it?

Yeah. And, so we washed ... they washed that and then they had outside like, like a big ... what do you call it? Like a big thing that you could put water in and all that. I don't know what you call that. But you could put the clothes in and get some cold water and then pound the clothes. And we ... and then they pulled out a big rope to hang up the clothes. They hung the clothes outside. It was like a nice thing that everybody's clothes [unclear]. It was like two long ropes pulled out and was hanging them. Then we took them in and ironed them. In those days, you ironed everything. It was a big chore. Otherwise, we washed like every other day or so, we needed to wash. We washed a lot. And we didn't have a sink. We had a little ... what do you call them? Like ...

A basin or something?

Yeah. Yeah. Like a basin. So we ... I remember we used to sit in the basin and every Friday take a bath there. Otherwise, we just washed ourselves and brushed our teeth not that often. So, it was a different life. And you know we didn't know that we are not, that we are not comfortable.

Right.

We didn't know it's not convenient.

So what kind foods did you eat?

The food was healthy, very healthy, even in Munkács where I lived and in Klucserka. We grew our own string beans, potatoes, vegetables like cucumbers and peppers and tomatoes. That was our ... it was healthy food. There was no pesticide. That was ... We worked it ourselves. Corn, we also grew.

Did you eat meat?

Yeah, but meat was not so... we ate meat maybe twice a week. We had ... we grew our own chickens. So we had a, a *shoykeht*...

Yeah.

...come and *shoyk* the chicken as they say in Jewish. But there was a kosher butcher and we used to go and get some meat. But it was, at our standards, it was expensive to do. So we had our own chickens and geese for *Pesach*. We raised our own geese. And you know, at that time, it wasn't illegal to stuff the geese so they got fat. And they had a lot of *schmaltz* they said because ... you know what *schmaltz* is.

Yeah, I know *schmaltz*.

And it, it was healthy food. So we cooked a lot of beans. We cooked potatoes. We used to make potato soup. Everyday was like something else. It was a regular thing to make on Thursdays, beans ... bean soup with ... they called it [unclear]. It was little ... like little square noodles to put in there. And they make a roué, you know, to make it taste good. And it was a good dish for kids. And then it was also protein because the geese had a lot of protein.

Sure.

On Friday nights, we made chicken soup. And it was a regular Friday night meal. Mother baked bread. We baked our own bread. We, we had *challah*. We baked *challah* for, for *Shabbat*. Then everybody made a *cholent*. Do you know what the *cholent* is?

Something that sits on the stove for a long time.

Yeah. But it didn't sit on the stove. We heated ... we had a big, like an oven. It was built ... it was something that you bake the bread in. It was built like a big one and then you put the *cholent* in, you heat it up, and the neighbors get together and they bring their pot with all of these seasonings and fixings. There was beans and barley and beef, and they made a little *kugele*, you know, a little *kugel* like from just flour and water. It seems strange to you now, but it was different over there. You know, I don't make it now anymore either. They, and they seasoned it, put the water in and covered it good. And we put it in the oven. Maybe four or five neighbors always got together. And each time it was in somebody else's

house. And then on *Shabbos* when we came home, my father came home and my brother's came home from *shul*, we went to get the *cholent* from the oven, and it was nice and hot, and it was the best thing. At that time we didn't worry that it has too much fat or too much cholesterol, all this stuff that we are afraid of right now.

Right. Right.

And it didn't have any, any chemicals. So it's healthy.

What language did you speak in your house?

In my house we spoke Yiddish.

What was the language of the country?

The language in the country ... it was very mixed when I was born. First it was ... I was born, it was Czechoslovakia. After the 1918 war, Czechoslovakia, the place where I was living, became Czechoslovakia. And it was Czechoslovakia until 1939. That's when the Hungarians took it over. And that was ... so we spoke Yiddish. We spoke some Czech. And we spoke Hungarian.

So if you went ... if you were going to go out of your house and go to a shop or something, did you go to shops that weren't Jewish owned?

Oh, yeah.

And so you would speak Hungarian or Czech?

Oh, Hungarian or Czech or Ukraine. Ukraine.

Do you speak those languages now?

I speak Hungarian. I speak a little Ukraine and a little Czech. But Hungarian I practice because I have friends here who are Hungarian. And Czech ... my husband speaks Czech much better than I do. I don't speak good. I understand most of it. But I speak, no. So I ... And then, of course, after the war, we were in Italy, so I learned a little Italian. So we are kind of multi-lingual, not perfect, but we understand. We understand German. We understand a little bit of everything.

Were your parents involved in anything political?

No. No. They didn't want to be. My father was a politician ... a secret politician because before, before '39 it was okay. But after '39, the Hungarians were very antisemitic and we were afraid. We were very much afraid. We ... Between 1939 and '44, until the Germans came in 1944, the situation was very tense. We were, we were afraid. We were not sure

what's going to happen. It was very hard for the Jewish people to exist. Even with myself, after we moved to Munkács, I was going to school there. But by time I became to ... started going to sixth grade, they were already talking about the dirty Jews. They, they even had a song in Hungary that was against Jewish. It says like "Jew, Jew, you dirty Jew. Why don't you get out of here?" I went to sixth grade maybe half a year and didn't go anymore.

And so, the school that you went to ... did you go to Jewish schools or public schools?

No. No. Public schools. There were Jewish schools, but when we moved to Munkács it was, it was expensive.

You had to pay to go Jewish schools?

Yes.

And was that the same way in the town that you came from?

The town that I came from didn't have a Jewish school.

What did you like to study?

Well, I liked math a lot. And I liked, I liked history, which wasn't, I wasn't very good at it, but I tried. And, in general, everything else that was compulsory.

Were the teachers nice or were they antisemitic also?

The teachers ... I can remember like when I got to first grade, second grade, was very nice. Third grade also. And then after fourth grade, everybody was antisemitic. You kind of ... You could feel that the teachers ... I was too young to even realize it., but they were not very nice. And lots of Jewish kids stayed out. They didn't want to go anymore. You couldn't go anymore after '39. You couldn't go to *gymnasium*, to a college or high school. Let's see, junior, like high school ... you could go to junior high but you couldn't go to high school anymore if you were Jewish, and they were kind of against you going, I mean ... But there was not like here, that you cannot discriminate or anything. If they wanted to discriminate, they could. And we were afraid.

So you only went to a half a year of sixth grade and then you quit school and you didn't go back?

Uh-huh.

What did you do after that?

Well, I went to learn how to sew.

Oh, okay.

I went to a ... not by my mother, at a, a regular shop, a regular tailor shop, a dress making shop. I went there because at that time when I was already old enough to go to learn how to sew, my mother had slowed down. She didn't do as much work anymore as she did, as she did before. So, well, I was 14 actually when they ... when they took me. I was 14. I didn't have a chance to go to school.

Well, what, what did you do? Did you have spare time and did you have recreation? What did you do?

Well, the spare time, I did everything in the house. I had to help out while my mother was ... my mother was a little sickly and she was working and I did everything in the house. I cleaned the house. I prepared the food. My mother told me how to prepare it. And, actually, when I came home from school, while I was still going to school, most kids went out to play. I had to stay in and help in the house. My sister was a little spoiled. She says, "Lilly will do it. Why should I do it?" You know, and I did it because I was ... I tried to be the good one.

The oldest daughter. Did you have girlfriends?

Yes, I had girlfriends.

And what did you do with them?

After I was done working, we went out when we were still ... we were playing. We would, got together. We were singing and talking and just, in general, what young teenagers do. There was ... we didn't go shopping because there were no shopping malls like here. They had stores but my mother used to make our clothes, all our clothes.

And did you go to parties?

Not really. They didn't do parties at that time for teenagers.

Were there clubs or organizations you could belong to?

There were organizations but I was too young to belong to the organizations. When I was ready to be able to belong, we were afraid to go out at night already, and it's hard to understand ... it's even hard for me to understand now that I'm here of how come kids don't have their organizations or clubs or do some activities or do some sports. We didn't. We did whatever we needed to do in the house.

So you said you were picked up when you were 14. So, you worked in the ... you were learning the sewing ...

Well, before, actually, before I ... before I went to camp, we needed money because there was not enough work for my parents. So there was a, a factory not too far from us, and this was already in Munkács. They were making things that sharpen knives, the sharpeners. They were making those stones.

Oh, yeah?

And I worked there for about, oh, I would say a half a year or a year. I forget how long I worked there. And then they didn't need anybody and we thought because I was Jewish they didn't like me. It was, it was very ... they made you feel like you were Jewish. You know, you knew that if you went by and there were people who were not Jewish, that they looked at you. "Look at that Jew," you know. So, that was ... life was hard the last few years. Life was nice until I would say 1939. We had a normal ... normal childhood, normal life and we were a close family, loving family.

Did you get along with your parents?

Oh, yeah. Yeah.

You didn't fight with them or anything?

You didn't do that at that time. [laughing]

Well, what values ...

Excuse me. If my mother said, "Lilly, would you do this or would you do that?" Of course! You don't say no. She said, "After you get this and that done, then you can go out and play with the kids." So I just did it.

Okay. So what values and standards were important to your parents [unclear]?

Well, my father was a very cultured man. Not as much as my mother. He read a lot. Every night he used to sit and read. We had candlelight. A candle would be at his bed and he would read all the time. So he thought it would be good if we had to kind of learn to keep up the culture, which was, was not very easy because we didn't ... I didn't think at that time it was important. Judaism was important. As I said they were not religious but the regular religion ... kosher, was definitely. Every Jewish house had it. We prayed in the morning. Said the *Modeh Ani* every morning, and went to the bathroom, washed hands and said the prayer after washing hands. That was a, that was a regular thing. It was not just because we were more religious than other people because there were some people who were not, didn't keep it at all, but very few that I know of.

And you went to *shul* every Friday and Saturday?

Only my, only my father and my brothers went. Girls didn't go. We only went on Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur or other holidays. But ... And my mother went every month to the *mikvah*. Do you know what a *mikvah* is?

I do.

Yeah. Every month she would go. In fact, when I was a little older already, she had a girlfriend and they were very close and they used to the *mikvah* together. Even if the other one didn't need to or this one didn't need, because they did it after their period. But they went with each other. So a couple of times they took me to see what they do and all that so I know exactly what's done to do that. And, after ... I'm just ahead of myself, but I want to tell you this.

Go ahead.

After the war, I didn't find anybody that knew me as a child. I mean when I came to this country. And then one day I get a phone call and this man calls me and he says, "Lilly?" I said, "Yeah, who is this?" He said, "This is Milu." "Milu, who?" "Milu Katz." I said, "Milu Katz?" My God, that was the son of my mother's best girlfriend.

Oh, gosh.

He stayed in Europe after the Russians took over there. He stayed there until about, I would say, six, seven years ago. He went to Israel from Europe and he met some people over there who I've never saw and they said that Yankel ... Jacob was my father's name but they called him Yankel. Yankel's two daughters are alive. One is in Israel and one is in America. So he is the kind of person that he dug and dug until he found my sister in Israel and from my sister [unclear].

Wow!

I can't even tell you.

What a wonderful thing!

So he asked my sister for my phone number and then he came to this ... he went back there to Europe. But his two sons came ahead of time to America and they became citizens here and then they were able to bring their parents to this country. So when they came to this country, the first thing he did was he called and he said, "This is Milu." I, I almost fainted. And he told me stories about my parents and about my family more than I knew.

Was he older?

He's a year older. But he ... some people observe.

How wonderful.

Some people have memories. I don't. My memory is gone.

You're doing fabulously here.

He said ... he called and he told me, "Remember when Shimi did this," or "Remember when your father ... " My father came ... My father was the kind of person, which my mother was always angry about, that if somebody didn't have money, they needed somebody to co-sign a check, so he always co-signed and sometimes he ended up paying for it. So my mother was always ... she said, "We don't have ourselves." He was a good person. So he was telling me lots of things. So after he came to America, after they settled, he said, "I would like you to come and meet us." I hadn't seen him in 55 years. So I ... they live in Columbus, Ohio. So I went there. I said, "I'll come on a Saturday." They are *Shabbas* keepers. I said, "Do you mind? Do you drive on Sabbath?" He said, "If I have to I do." I said, because for me, I was still working at the time. I said, for me, this was about, I would say, two years ago. I said, "If it's okay with you, I'll come *Shabbas* and I'll stay 'til Sunday night." I didn't want to stay longer.

[Phone rings.] Do you want me to stop and you can get it?

Yes.

[Interview resumes.]

I went to visit them. As I said, I didn't want to make it longer because I didn't know what they were like.

Right. Right.

He was married. He had ... but I got there and I got off the plane and he looked ... we were kids and now we are grandparents. So I spotted him, and his wife, he didn't spot me, but his wife, which I didn't know at the time, she said, "That is her." So, anyway, I came down and we met and we were happy to see each other and I went their apartment. Right away we had that connection like before.

Right.

And he told me stories about many people, like our old neighbors. And some of them live in New York and one lives in Chicago. Actually, I've talked to them since then. It was such a small world and I was so happy to see him because he was like a brother to me. And then they came here last year.

Oh, that's so nice.

He's got a lovely wife, really nice tempered, friendly and nice people. Both of them. They are still, you know, they still speak Yiddish. They are just learning English. They are only here for six years or so. And so it was nice to find somebody from home.

Right.

So it just ...

We're going to back here. That was a great story, though.

It was, okay.

Did you celebrate any secular holidays?

Like Christmas or something?

Oh, were there holidays like Thanksgiving or any types of holidays that weren't religious but were not Jewish?

We did not have ... in Europe they didn't have Thanksgiving. And in Europe, they didn't have ...

They didn't have national days of celebration or anything like that?

We did, but I don't ... they celebrated, of course, that was already when the Russians came, May Day, the 8th, the 7th I think or whatever. We did, I don't remember.

That's okay. Did you ... were there cultural activities in your town like Yiddish theater?

Yeah. But they had them in Munkács, they did. They had a lot of Yiddish theaters. They had ... See, I can't remember because I was so young at the time.

You were young at the time.

... but I know they had Yiddish theater. They had a lot of ... very, very famous Munkács rabbi who was famous all over, and I don't remember his name, but everybody knew him and everybody went to him if they needed advice or help or some counseling. So they had a rabbi to go to. But I don't remember other cultural. I'm sure there was, but I can't remember.

That's okay. Did you have any relationships with non-Jews, or were you just focused on your Jewish friends?

Beginning we had. We had, we had non-Jewish neighbors. And we were, we were close. We talked, and we would see each other, but we didn't associate together. And ... we ... I remember when we still lived in Munkács, I mean in Klucserka we used to get together in the evenings with Jewish friends but there were a couple of non-Jewish friends who played with us. And we used to do in the evening, creamed cabbage. We made sauerkraut. They made it in big barrels and which stayed for the whole ... it was funny the way they did that. They cut it and they put it in the ... and they cut it up and put it in the barrel. And, I don't know if you ever saw how the Italians make grapes. That they wash their feet and they stomp on it.

Stomp on them. Yeah.

Well, that's what they did. That was my job. They had to wash my feet, practically sanitize it. And when they put the cabbage in the barrel I had to step on it and stomp on it to get it all the way down. And then they put in the kind of stuff to make it sour. I don't remember exactly. I know they put in some like sour bread. That kind of made it sour. And it stayed about ... it stayed through the whole winter. But it took about two to three weeks for it to be good enough that you could start eating it. It was the best sauerkraut that I think I've ever had. And then in the evenings they used to get together. We had, like I told you, geese and we had also ducks. And they used to pluck the geese and the ducks. And then the new feathers grew in. And in the evenings we got together around the table and they were cleaning the feathers. You know how the feather is like that?

Uh-huh.

Like you pull off the side.

Right. Right.

And leave the middle stem, which is not good. Only the sides were good. And put it aside. And then they also had ... what's that very fine feather?

Down.

The down. Yeah, from the duck you have down. So we used to do that. Also neighbors used to get together and they used to make ... either somebody baked a cake or they used to make toast, garlic toast. They toasted it and they put oil on it, which was fresh oil. We went to the mill and made our own oil. And make some tea. And they had tea and toast or tea and cookies for the people who came to the house in Munkács. And they did that in the, in the wintertime, because at that time, it was already like harvested by that time. So, those little things were ...

You said you had the non-Jews that at first you were friends with them and then ...

Then, we moved away from there, from Klucserka, and in Munkács, we had non-Jewish neighbors. I remember like, the neighbor across the street, they had a bigger house than ours, and they were not too friendly. They said, "Good morning," and "Good evening." But not ... didn't even stop and talk very much. We had one neighbor next to us who lived on the right of ... on the left of us there was a Jewish family. And on the right of us, there was a non-Jewish family. They were very polite because when [unclear], you know, they were neighbors. So, "Hi, how are you? It's a nice day." Very, very just short talk and they were not too friendly.

Okay. So we're going to go [unclear]. When and how did you first become aware of the Nazi presence?

It must have been in ... well, in 1942. It was already very, very visible and we felt it. The Nazis ...

In what way did you feel it? How did you feel it?

They were ... They boycotted the Jewish stores. They, they made us ... they made people who didn't have a store because we didn't own the house. We didn't have too much work anymore because my father worked for Gentiles, a lot of Gentiles. He didn't have too much work anymore. We ... the stores kind of ... business went down a lot. We noticed that. And the Hungarians were very, very antisemitic, the ones who came and went over the place where I live. It was ... life was very difficult. We couldn't get, couldn't buy as much stuff as we wanted. We couldn't get it anymore. After awhile, when my father didn't get any more work, I had an uncle who ... well, we had a house. And in the back of the house, there was a little, like a little building which was one room and one small kitchen. And that's where my uncle and his wife lived and my mother's brother. And he was in, what do you call the clothes? Fabrics. He was, he had a little store and he was selling fabric. And he told my father if he wants to, he could help him out. So he helped him out selling fabrics, but it was not much of a living at the time. It was very much felt already that they were against the Jews. I noticed it that, you know, we couldn't buy ... we want ... we had to buy... my mother used to make the bread, but at the time it was ready, until we harvested our own flour, we had to buy. We couldn't buy as much as we wanted. It's hard for me to remember.

Did you have ... did you hear of discussions with your parents of the Nazis in your home?

Probably it must have been already in 1943. In 1943 some antisemitic people came to the house. And I can't remember why because my parents made us go to the other room because they were threatening them about ... I don't know why. They were threatening them and they wanted ... they told them they can not do something or other, and they wanted some money, and my parents didn't have the money to give them, and they gave them what they could, and they left. And we used to close our door. We didn't have shades but we put like a cloth on the windows. And we didn't have electricity. We had lamps.

And we turned down the lamps, we went to bed early. We used to go to bed early anyway because we got up early over in Europe to do some work. I don't remember too much.

Were you afraid when those people came to the house?

Yes, very much so. Very much so. And my mother ... my parents were afraid. My parents were afraid for us to go too far, just play around. You know, we played in the front yard or in the little street next to us so they can ... we could be close if something happened. We could go right away then.

Was there a time when the Nazis marched into the city?

Yeah, they did, in 19- ... in late 1943 or early '44.

And how ... what was that like?

That ... well, actually, in '43, it was. [sic – German occupation and ghettoization began in Spring 1944] That was very bad because then we already, in late '43 we had to go to ghettos. We had to be all congregated. There was one street where they made us that was for the Jews and it was closed off. And we were already... we were not supposed to, we were restricted from going out, and ...

[END OF TAPE 1 SIDE 1]

They said that we would have to go to a ghetto, and they gave us ... they took over a few houses there, where we moved in, and we moved in with a lot of people. It was a big building, it was maybe, I don't know, a three or four story building, and we were in a small apartment. We had to stay there. We could only go out ... not go out after 6 o'clock and then we had to start wearing a yellow star. So they, they knew that we could only go in a certain area. If we had to go and get some food, they let us go out of the ghetto and get food but we had to get right back.

Okay.

And we couldn't do any work or anything anymore.

Did your parents do anything to respond to the Nazi occupation? Did they meet with other people? Did they resist at all?

No. They didn't resist over there. They meet with a lot of people because, a lot, only Jews lived in that house, and we knew each other, and it was ... There was like, downstairs, like the ground ... not on the ground floor but like outside, like a, like a front yard or something. So we all used to go down there. The kids were playing. The parents were talking. But everybody was afraid to say something, because there were already ... they

would get somebody here and there and beat them, and they were, they were afraid. And then the Germans were there all the time, walking around, coming in or outside we saw them going around. So we were very, very, very restricted of what we could do. So we stayed in that ... we stayed in that area. Nobody, of course, no school or anything, for the Jewish kids anymore.

What did you do all day?

We were ... maybe we were reading probably. I don't know. We didn't ...

Were there organized activities at all or anything?

No. No. We didn't. We were just ... everybody was for themselves. They were so ... we were so scared that everybody stayed with the family.

Were there any non-Jews who helped you?

Not our family. I know there were a lot of people that were helped. Not our family and not the people where we lived because the non-Jews that lived close weren't with us when we had to go to the ghetto. And we were in this area in the city and then they took us to a ghetto, which was right there in the city. It was a, a brick factory where they took all of the Jews there from the whole town of Munkács. And there were about 3,000 Jews in that city where we moved to Munkács. And they took them to this brick factory where they set up barracks. And we lived in barracks and on the floor they had like mattress ... not mattresses, just like blankets, where we were supposed to sleep. And the kids, we could go out in the ghetto and walk around. But it was all fenced around. And then there were ... and there were the guards who watched us, you know. But we were just going around, the kids playing, talking, just, just getting together.

And how long were you there?

In that ghetto, we were in the brick factory, we must have been about, I would say, that was already in '44, about a month and a half or so. And this was when it was cold. This was already February and March, so it was still very cold. And then at the end of March, beginning of April, in '44, they started taking us to the big trains and shipped us. I was shipped to Auschwitz. A few others were shipped to Auschwitz. I don't know who, everybody else.

Were you shipped ... did they ... they took you in waves? You didn't all go at one time? They took a few at a time?

They took us in big trucks and they took us to the station, to the train station, and we tried to stay together.

But, I mean, did they take everybody out of the brick factory at one time?

Not at the same time. No. No.

So, what ...

Like everyday, everyday they took ... within a short time they took them away. Everyday they came trucks and took the people.

So within a week or so you were taken?

We were taken. Yeah. We were all taken away to Auschwitz.

And you went to Auschwitz?

Because I got to Auschwitz, it was the end of March or the very first of April, because *Pesach*, I was already in Auschwitz and *Pesach* is in April. So the very beginning of April.

And did your whole family go to Auschwitz with you?

We all went. We were all in those boxcars like ... like, you saw *Schindler's List*? Those big boxcars? The one on top of the other? That's exactly. When I saw that movie I saw myself in that boxcar. And, we all stayed together. But when we arrived in Auschwitz it was dark. It was in the evening. It was very cold, very dark, and all you heard was dogs barking like crazy. And there were the SS standing there. And as we got off they went, "You go here, you go here and parents go there." So my sister and I went together. My mother and my little sister went together. And my little brother, I have no idea where they put him. And my, and my sister and myself. I didn't know anything anymore. They didn't let you ask or talk. I would yell, "Mom! Mom!" My mother was yelling to us, you know. And we couldn't ... it was dark. We couldn't do anything. They just kept on hitting, you know, yelling in German, go here and go there. And they took us to a, to a big, like a barrack. Like a big wash room. And right then and there that evening they made us strip completely. Everything we had to take off. And they said, "You have to take a shower." But first we had to go to a different room, naked. Men walking around, SS, just ... They shaved off our hair the first thing. And when we came out from shaving off the head, we could take a shower. And they gave us, the girls ... that was the girls separate ... they gave us those long striped dresses. So my sister and I and some more that I knew from our town were there and we were shivering, we were crying and we were just standing, hugging, cuddling together. But when we got through getting shaved and all ... you have no idea what a person looks like when you are shaved off. I was yelling, "Leah! Leah!" And she was yelling, "Lilly! Lilly!" We couldn't recognize each other.

You didn't recognize each other.

And, of course, we cried. We cried. And, and we kept ... and people who were there before us who were supposed to help work us, you know. These were all prisoners who have to do that.

Right.

The SS made them do that. And they said, "Don't worry. You'll see your parents later." They wanted us to relax because we were kids. And after that, that evening, we were staying, standing. They still had to count us. We were tired. We were hungry. We were cold. They put us in a barrack, finally. And, so that's where we stayed. We were in barracks. And, and this one barrack was like, I don't know how many, but we had like bunk beds.

Uh-huh.

Three tiers.

Lined up? Uh-huh.

And on each tier were five people. And it was hard. They gave you ... they put some, I think there was some straw underneath with a blanket on top of it. And we were ... if one had to turn when you sleep, everybody has to turn. So it was ... it was rough. But I stayed in Auschwitz only three or three and a half months.

Okay. Now I hate to interrupt because I really want to hear this. Unfortunately, they want me to skip over this part.

Yeah. Okay. That's good.

And go to the liberation. I'm sorry.

No. No. No problem.

You've been wonderful. I don't know why you say you don't have a good memory. You've given me so many details. Okay. So now we're going to go to the end of the war. And tell me what led up to ... no, well, where were you at the end of the war? Were you in Auschwitz or were you someplace else?

I was someplace else. From Auschwitz, they took us to Reichenbach, which was in Germany, Oberschlesien. It was like 50 kilometers from Stuttgart. It was a camp there. And we, we were there. We used to go to work every day to a munition factory. But I stayed there 'til May ... the last day of the war, until May 8th. We were liberated in 194-

Five.

Five. 1945, May 8th, we were liberated.

And that's where you were?

And that's where I was. In Reichenbach.

And tell me about the circumstances that led up to your liberation. Did you know something was happening? Did you know the tide was turning and that liberation was imminent?

We didn't know anything. We didn't know anything. We couldn't have radios. We couldn't have news. We couldn't ... even when we were working in the factory there, they would not let us listen to the news.

And the people, the SS, those people were not acting any differently?

No. No. Maybe like the day or so before we saw something ... they were running around too much.

Okay.

Just a day before or so. And the day ... the Russians liberated me ... when the Russians came in, we still didn't, didn't know what's happening because we had no idea that the war is over.

Did the tanks come in? Did you see their tanks?

Their tanks came in and then the Russians, the soldiers, ran in. And we just saw that the Germans were running out, running away. Of course, the Russians got most of them. That morning, when we got liberated, we got up and nobody made us get up and go to work. So we knew something was going on. But nothing up until maybe a day before that we saw that things were kind of slowing down.

So how did you feel when you realized who these Russians were and what they were there for?

We didn't believe it. We didn't believe it because they opened up the gates to get out and we still, some of the ... there was a man camp about, oh, maybe one or two kilometer away from our camp. And the men from the camp also ran out, and we ran out, but we weren't sure if it's okay. There was no Germans. The Russians were there and they said, "It's okay." But we went out and, even when we left the camp, we still looked behind ourselves if there is the ... if there is the Germans.

And this was May 8th, 1945? And were the Russians nice to you?

Yes. They were very nice.

They were kind?

Very kind. Very nice. I didn't ... lots of people experienced some of the Russians raping them or something, but not, not the group that I was ... they didn't. I guess we didn't look good enough or something [laughing] because they didn't bother us. They took over and they said, "You are free. You are free to go." And, so we left the camp. And there was a group of us, maybe, I would say 15 or so of us, got together and we went into town in Reichenbach and we didn't have enough ...

You walked there?

Of course, we walked. Yeah. We used to walk to work every morning and walk back because five kilometers from the camp. And we walked in the wooden shoes, you know, those Holland shoes? God, that's a different story. We got together and we ... the Germans ran away from Reichenbach. A lot of them left their houses. They were scared. And they, vacanted, all ... a lot of buildings there. So we moved into ... there was a villa, a big German villa. And there was, as I say, 15 or 20 of us. I forget. And we lived there for about a week or so. We didn't have food. Whatever they had in the house, we used. Whatever food ... there wasn't much but we did.

And were you with your sister?

Yes. Yes. My sister was ... the whole time we were together.

And so they just let you leave. I mean, the Russians didn't say, "Come on, we'll take you to another camp, or we'll take care of you."?

No. No.

They just let you go?

They just liberated us and they let us go.

Okay. So you ... okay.

So we were on our own. And we were ... we had a very hard time because, when we were liberated, we stayed in that villa for a while and some of the guys who were together with us who were liberated in the next camp, they went out and they ... I don't know how they got some food. I think they went to some Germans and begged for some food, that we should have something to eat. And we stayed there until we kind of got ourselves a little bit stronger.

What was your physical condition?

I was very ... I was very thin. Very, very weak. We looked like ... we practically looked like skeletons, all of us ... my sister, myself.

But was there anything medically wrong with you? Did you have any disease? Did you have any illness?

No. No. Thank God, we didn't. One time I got very sick when we were still under the Germans and they threw me in a place like a dungeon. And if you stayed there two or three days, you didn't get out of there, then they took you right away to the gas chamber. So I was there a day and my sister came in the next day. We used to get a piece of bread everyday, with I don't know what. So she didn't eat. She brought it there. She says, "Eat it." I said, "No, you eat it. You're still okay. You eat it." "No, eat it. I already ate," which I knew she didn't. And we ... we ... I got better. And she said, "You'll have to get out of here." Because we knew that if you were sick they'd take you away. And I got out of there. And I was very weak but, you know, you force yourself.

Right.

So we were ... we were, we were very thin, we ...

Thin but basically healthy?

Basically healthy. Yeah.

So where did you go after you left the villa?

After we left the villa, we were walking. We walked ... we were walking back to ... from Germany we were trying to walk back but there was some organization that could help us get back home.

So you were walking to where? Did you know where you were going?

We didn't know. Some, some people who were asking questions, and they told us we were going to a ... there was a, a organization. Somebody came. I can't remember. And told us there was an organization in ... I can't remember the place ... in Poland.

It was out of Poland? Okay.

That if we go there, they'll place you. And they'll place and they'll help you get where you want to go. So we were walking. At night we didn't know where to sleep. And we used to go into a, like a stable where we found, so we would sleep there. Some Germans who were still home in the smaller towns would let us stay overnight out there. And some didn't, so we kept walking. And we walked through minefields and everything. And this minefield, there was one that had a lot of mines and one of the girls who was with us stepped on a

mine and she died right away. And she was with a sister, and the sister lost her mind at that moment. So there are lots of stories, you know, that I can tell you. We kept walking. I'm trying to think of the town in Poland where they had an organization. A little bit we used to get on a train. They let us get on a train to get there without money. Some of them knew that we were refugees. We did an awful lot of walking. There were some clothes in that villa where we stayed, so we took some of the clothes. Some of us had the shoes that fit so we could walk, and ... We made do, whatever we could to help ourselves.

So how ... did you eventually get there?

We eventually got there.

About how long did it take you to get there?

Oh, it took us about, about three days or so to get there. And first they had a registration. You had to register. And they had a list that you could look up whether anybody from your family was left alive. We ...

I'm sorry. How old were you?

I was at the time ... this was in '45, and I was born in '28. So I was 15? Let's see almost 16, 17, 16. Just past 16.

Okay. Okay.

We ... I can't think of it ... we registered. We registered, and we looked at lists. There was no list. So they placed us in a camp and then they gave us enough, then they gave you some kind of a paper that you could ride the train for free. So I rode the train back to Munkács to find out if anybody came back to our house. Well, nobody came back to our house, but they had an organization in Munkács where they let you go in and see, whoever came back, to register there. And I went in, my sister and I, and there was nobody but my one uncle, my mother's brother, was there. And he was living in Munkács. So he ... they called him or they let him know. I don't know how they let him know. And he came and he got us. So we lived with him for, oh, I would say, a couple of months. But, after that, he was a single guy. He lived with some woman. That woman had a child. And we were not ... we felt we were not ... we don't belong there. So he took us to a *kibbutz* in Budapest. There was a *kibbutz* getting ready ... we wanted to go to Israel because we had an aunt in Israel. One of my mother's sisters lived in Israel. So we went to the *kibbutz* in Budapest. We stayed there for a while. From there, they shipped us to Graz, which was in Austria. And from Graz, they shipped us to Italy. We lived in Italy for about two, two months or so. And from there it was still illegal to go to Israel. At the time, we could not go to Israel yet because the ... that was ... yeah, that was after the war. Because the England was there and they didn't let the Jews come in and all that.

Right.

So, we couldn't go. They were trying to ship us on the black market illegally. But then when I, when I came to Italy first, I came to ... we came ... we were in Yugoslavia first. We traveled from one place to the other.

Where did you stay in those places, when you were in Italy?

They had camps. In Italy ...

Are those like displaced persons camps?

Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

And what were those like?

Those were okay. Those were all right. I mean, we had our room. But we lived together with other people, but we were young. We didn't care. You know, it was nice.

But there was food and it was clean and ...

There was food. We used to get food. We used to go and get, you know, breakfast, lunch and dinner.

What did you do there?

We didn't do anything. After a while, when we were in Italy already, they had a little, like a sewing place if you wanted to go and sew. So my husband went and did a little bit. But I, I didn't do anything. We just roamed around.

And did you meet anybody? Did you run into anybody from your hometown there?

Over there? Yes. Yes. But after that somehow everybody had a different ... from Italy... When we got to Italy, first we were in Bari for a while and stayed there in a camp. Then we joined a organization, a *kibbutz* organization. *Shomer* ... I can't really remember the name of it. We were in that organization and I met my husband in Italy. And my husband had some family in America. His aunts and uncles were in America. And they already knew that he was alive because they got lists from the Red Cross. So they made already affidavit for him to come to America. Well, meantime, he married me.

You married in Italy at this camp?

Yeah. We married in Bari in the *kibbutz*.

In the *kibbutz*?

Yeah. And when he met me, his aunt and uncle sent the papers, he wrote back he cannot come because he is married and he and his wife want to go to Israel. So then they wrote back that we're just going to add her name to the affidavit and we want you to come here. So the people in *kibbutz* were very angry because they were very patriotic. They wanted to go to Israel. And actually, my husband wanted to go to Israel too, even though his family was dead. But I heard about America that was so much that I said, "I want to go to America."

The streets are paved with gold.

Yeah. Exactly. And now my sister was in *kibbutz* but that *kibbutz* was shipping already somebody to Israel. And she says, "You go and I'll go to Israel." And I ... we were too young to know that it's going to be forever.

Was that hard to leave her?

It was very hard to leave her. But she said ... she had a lot of friends in *kibbutz*. Boris and I were married already, so we were kind of separated from the young, from the single people. But she was single, so she went with them and, of course, she went through a lot because they had to take her to Cyprus island and then to Israel, but we stayed. And then we stayed in Italy two and a half years to wait for our quota.

Oh, my gosh.

Yeah.

What'd you do then?

We ... they gave us food.

Did you work? Did Boris work?

Boris worked. I don't remember what. He did some work. But we were just ... we had friends and we just ... It was not a hard life because we had food. And they even rationed us clothes, you know, in the camp.

Oh, my gosh.

And they were waiting for everybody to go. So he ...

Tell me about your wedding.

We got married in Italy in the *kibbutz* and there was another couple that married. It was a double wedding. And there were, there were just ... I didn't have a dress, so there were some Italian people, not Jewish people, who we knew as we were living there. You know, lived around there. And one of their daughters had a wedding dress, so she lent me her wedding dress. And it was just a simple. They put up a *chuppah* and towels on top with four sticks holding it up and one of the people in the camp who was ... I don't think he was a rabbi but he was a religious person that could marry you, and he married us.

And what ... did everybody in the *kibbutz* go? Was it that kind of thing?

Well, it was, in that building, in that *kibbutz* where we stayed, there was ... We must have been there about 60 or 70 people. So they were all there.

And was there food and music?

Yeah. They had, no music. There was food. And there was singing and dancing, you know, because we're all singing Hebrew songs and singing about Israel because all of ... everybody over there was waiting to go to Israel.

And you were 17?

And I was ... actually I was already almost 18. I got married on my 18th birthday. So I was already because we were, it took us a year to travel from one place to the other so I was already 18. And, we, it was ... my birthday is May 10th and we got married May 19th because that was in the Jewish religion, that when it came out when we were supposed to marry. We got married.

So you got married and ...?

And then we went, we ... when our quota was ready, but we still have to wait about four weeks, they took us to Naples, Italy. And we stayed there for about two weeks. Also they put us up, the HIAS, the Jewish ... they paid for that. And we came to America.

Did you get here on a ship?

We got here on a ship.

How long did it take you?

It took us eight days. It was *Sobieski* ... the ship's name was *Sobieski*. And it was a Polish ship. It was a nice ship, only I was sick through the whole time. And when we came, everybody ... I don't know if you ever saw from a TV or a movie how they wait for people to arrive. Well, our family was there arriving and we, we came with nothing. A little, a little bag of nothing, you know. I think we had like two dollars to our name, which they

gave us there. And the family took us in right away. We stayed with one of the aunts and uncles.

In New York?

In New York. And we lived with them for, oh, I would say, we came in 1948 and we lived there 'til ... almost a year, with the family. Very nice people.

What did you do? Did you work?

I worked. Yeah. I found a job. I was sewing. I was sewing buttons, piecework. So, I mean, my husband was a ... He was a tailor and he was learning designing. So when we were in New York, he went to designing school. So he wanted to become a designer.

But what about the language? Was that a problem?

It was very hard. It was very hard for him. Actually, he didn't go right away to school. He worked for a while until he picked up a little bit. He speaks better English than I do.

Yours is wonderful.

He is more particular. Now if I ... my kids bought me a computer. So if I work the computer and if I send them email, I'm not so worried if my spelling is not right because they know me.

Right. Right.

But my husband, he is not going to write down anything. He is going to have the dictionary there and he is going to be very exact. If I speak with my friends, I speak with them, my girlfriend, Olga, she is Hungarian. We speak Hungarian, and I throw in a little English words, sometimes a Yiddish word. He says, "Either speak Yiddish or speak English or speak Hungarian. Don't mix in all the words."

I think everybody does that, though. When I hear the Israelis speaking, they're putting in a little English.

Yeah.

I think that's cute.

Some expressions ... you cannot express in English what you express in Yiddish.

Right, right.

So it's kind of hard. Anyway, we came to New York. We stayed with our aunt and uncle. It's getting late.

No, we're fine. We're fine. I want ... we want you all the way here. So, go ahead.

We stayed with our aunt and uncle and then I got, I went to work. I worked for a while. Then I got pregnant with David. And it was very hard to get an apartment in New York at the time. It was expensive. So my aunt's son lived in an apartment in the Bronx. It was like a walk-in apartment. Finally, they got an apartment in Manhattan what they wanted, because he was already a big shot who worked for NBC television.

He was? What was his name?

Irvin Segelstein. He was in the programming. He already got a bigger, better apartment and he let us have his apartment so we didn't have to pay for it. So we moved in there and Boris was, Boris was working and ... He was going to school and he was working for a tailor, tailor shop, which did custom made clothes. So he was making a living and yet he was going to school to take designing. So he ... and I was still working while I was pregnant for, I don't know, maybe five, six months. But we kind of managed. And you know, we didn't ... we watched what we were spending. So I stayed home after a while when I got in the higher months of pregnancy. And he became ... he went to school and then he kind of graduated as designer and he worked someplace in the city, over there in New York as a designer. And somebody from Kansas City was looking ... no, somebody from Cleveland wanted a designer. A friend of ours who was with us in Italy lived in Cleveland and his uncle had a factory that made the clothing was named Lampone, dresses that were, at that time, very popular. And they asked Boris to go there to work. So he went there but he didn't like it. He didn't like it.

[Telephone rings. Tape turned off and back on.]

Yeah. I may not say the right thing. I'm sorry.

Okay, so he had a friend ...

In Cleveland.

... in Cleveland.

Yeah. And then they, Boris was working in Cleveland for a while. And he ... it just didn't work out. The people he was working for they believed even with our friend, which was their nephew, you start at 75¢ an hour and work yourself up, which was fine because you appreciate what you make. But we were already a family. We already had David, and three of us and I didn't work in Cleveland because I ... we didn't have a car there. So we couldn't commute to work, go back and forth to work. So, somebody was looking for a

designer in Kansas City. At that time it was Slagman, Stern Slagman and they brought ... well, we went back to New York. We stayed in New York. They were looking for designer. They brought Boris. They paid his expenses and they brought him down here to try out. So Boris tried out and he liked it. He liked the city here and he lived here without me for about, oh, I would say a month or two and he, he liked it. And then he had me and David come down here. And we, we, we lived ... actually we didn't have an apartment yet. He lived in a little room. He rented a room. But then we ...

Where was it? Where was the room that he rented when you came to?

He lived, I think, on 74th, east of Troost. At that time, the area was still good.

Yeah.

But, when I came here, the company said, "We will pay for the hotel until you find yourself a place." So they would pay like for a week or two, a hotel. So the three of us stayed in ... it was Sans Souci Hotel on Linwood.

I know exactly where that is.

You know where it is?

My father had a grocery store at 31st and Harrison.

Is that right?

I know exactly where that is.

Well, in those days, in those days ... this was in 19- ... this was in 1954. So it was not so bad yet. And we lived there for a while, and then we, my girlfriend Olga had a house on 36th and Euclid. You know that where it is too. And she had upstairs a nice area and downstairs and she had the whole kitchen upstairs. She says, "Why don't you move in with us?" So we did. We moved in. And she has a boy, Steve, who is David's age. Steve Rothstein.

Oh, Olga Rothstein is who your friend.

Yeah. Yeah.

Okay.

So we moved into the Rothsteins and we lived there for, I would maybe say six months or so with them, until we found an apartment in President Gardens. And Boris was working for Stern & Slagman for, oh, for quite a while. But then there was another factory here,

Lewis Walter Company. I don't know ... it's probably, not before your time but you were too young for it. So he went as a designer to Lewis Walter. [an aside to her husband Boris] You cannot mix in because it's being recorded. Okay?

I can stop it if he wants to ask you something.

Okay, you want to ask me something?

[Recorder turned off the interview resumes.]

Anyway after that he went to work for Lewis Walter and he worked for Lewis Walter for a long time until they moved to ... as a designer actually. Until they moved to California. And we didn't want to move to California. So it was rough. We already bought this house and we were already, had already the kids. Yeah, we already had Cookie and Cindy. Then he ... somebody was looking for a designer in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. So he went there for about a month but he says, "I went there and I didn't like it too much." And the pay was not that good, because everything was more expensive over there than here. So he came back and he worked for Leon Karasen, Leon, for Leon Karasen, Julius' brother, who had also a factory. So he worked for Leon Karasen until he retired in 198-...as a designer ... in 1985, probably about '86 or '87. I'm not sure. He's been retired for over ten years, so it must have been a little later than that.

And did you work when you came here to Kansas City?

When I came here I didn't work. I raised the kids. But when the little kids, Cindy and Cookie, were already in public school, they were already maybe in third or fourth grade, a friend of mine and myself, we opened up an alteration shop in the Waldo area. E & L Alternations. I don't know if you ever heard of it.

Oh. Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah? Well, we had that shop for 29 years.

Oh, my gosh.

Yeah. We just retired two years ago. And Boris gets mad if I talk about it. But I wanted ... we wanted ... I wanted to move from here. I said, "The kids are gone. The house has been paid for for a long time. Let's sell it. Let's move out either someplace in Johnson County or even a little bit south of Kansas City. Bridlespur is fine for me."

Yeah.

We already almost bought a house and he came back here. He says, "No, I'm not moving. I'm not moving from this house. We've built this house. This is the house I want to stay in. I don't care who lives where." And here we are. He won't move.

Well, now, did you move ... you stayed with the Rothsteins.

And then we moved to President Gardens.

President Gardens. Right. And then?

Moved here.

So what year did you come to this house?

This house we came in, let's see, Cindy was six weeks old. She was born in 1959. '59 or '60, let's see, '59 or '60. Yeah.

So ... but how did you like coming to Kansas City? What was it about Kansas City that you liked or ... ?

I liked ... because first we lived in New York when David was little. And it was like concrete city. You know?

Oh, uh-huh.

You just go out and there's not much ... where you live there is no greenery. There is no trees, no front yard. When we moved to President Gardens, there was ... it was a lot of grass, trees, shrubs, flowers. I felt I loved that. And it was a slower pace.

Right.

And you could get places where you wanted. You know, then we finally bought a car. We had a car. In New York, we, we walked. We took a bus. We took the subway. It was just ... even now, if I go to New York, I don't like it.

Where did you know Olga from?

Olga I knew from Italy. From camp. We were together in Italy, in, in Bari. Actually not in Bari, in Santa Maria. It was another little town where the people, displaced persons were.

And you kept in touch the whole time when you were ... ?

We were friends there. And we came here in 1948 and they came here in 1949.

Oh, so you were here first?

And when we heard that transport came, we went to the HIAS office where the new refugees came, where they placed the new refugees, until they placed them where to ship, where to send them. We went to visit them. We didn't know where they were going. We didn't know where they were going to ship them yet. When Boris came here, somehow he ran into Olga or Olga's husband. I don't remember. And they were so happy to see each other. We had no idea that anybody that we know is here. And Elizabeth Nussbaum, you know the Nussbaums?

Absolutely.

Well, Elizabeth Nussbaum was there in Italy with us, and I knew them through all these years. So when we found out that Elizabeth was here. Actually, Elizabeth came first, and she ... they brought Olga and Mike to come to Kansas City. You know, each brought somebody to live there.

Were there other people ... anybody else? Elizabeth, Olga, anybody else?

That I know from Italy? Not here. Not in Kansas City. But I ... when I found out that Olga was here and Olga found that I was, we were already in the hotel there, we were so delighted to see each other that it was like, it was you found one of your family because we don't have family here. My sister was in Israel and that's all I had left. So we were ... and we are friends ever since.

That's wonderful.

Yeah. Olga used to live next door here. But she moved to ... she lives on 103rd and Antioch because she is religious and when the synagogue was here, she used to go to synagogue up here. When synagogue moves, she wants to go *Shabbas* to temple, to synagogue. So the synagogue is there now, so they move there. That's why they moved.

Did you become an American citizen?

Oh, yes. Definitely.

And when did you do that?

After five years after we were here. Yeah. We became citizens and we passed, thank God!

Was that a significant thing for you?

Oh, I'll tell you. You don't ... I mean, I'm already used to this but I used to tell people you don't appreciate this country. You don't know what you've got here. And because I went

back ... because I went back to Europe six, seven years ago and it's rough, very rough life there. I appreciated we, Boris and I, and all the refugees, I think, appreciated every step, every, everything in America. And I still do. Believe me, I have this small house here and I don't live in Johnson County, which I could if my husband would move. He's ... he has ... I'll tell you what he said, which was so ... I won't say what. He, he has a great big table downstairs and he does some designing, you know, some pattern making just for himself. He made a suit for Cindy. He makes a suit ... he used to make a suit for me but I don't want anymore because you have to stand like a dummy when he pins it. And he says, "If I move, I don't want to move this table. I'm staying with this table."

It sounds like he moved enough. You did quite a bit of ...

And he says, "I don't care," he says, "for that." We have nice neighbors. I have a black neighbor here. And, Jean, if any white neighbor lived here couldn't be nicer. And they keep the yard. You can't tell now because with the leaves and everything. Everybody in the neighborhood, the grass is beautiful because he keeps it like that. He is so neat. A young couple. And they are nice. So he says, "What's wrong? So they are black." Because when I heard that the lady who was living next door was selling, I said, "There's going to be black people here. I don't want to live here." So first, he said, "Okay." So we went to ... I don't know if you ever knew Hannah Rock. She died way back, but they had a son ...

Morty Rock.

Morty Rock. Well, that house, we went through. We almost bought it. Hannah Rock used to live in [unclear], but she died and her husband, I think, just died not too long ago. We were going to buy that house and already made the deal and everything and he came back. "No," he says. "I'm not buying and I'm not selling."

Oh.

I says, "If I had money I would buy it myself." But, you know what? It doesn't matter now anymore. It mattered to me 15 years ago.

Right. Right.

The kids were still, you know. But now it doesn't. So we are doing fine. Thank God, we are healthy.

I'm going to stop here.

[END OF TAPE 1 SIDE 2.]

Okay, so how Americanized are you? Are you ... do you have hobbies and things like that? Activities?

Jean, you wouldn't believe it. I'm very Americanized. I was ... until I was working I was busy. Right now I'm working the computer a lot. I love the computer. And ... I go to the Jewish Center and do some workouts, some exercise there. I walk every morning and when the weather is bad I drive all the way to the Jewish Center and work out there. I still ... I go pick up my grandson a couple times a week, take him to karate or bring him over here. I ... let's see. What else do I do?

Do you belong to organizations?

No, I don't. I belong to the synagogue. I don't belong to organizations yet. Yesterday, actually, they called me about a couple of weeks ago from Beth Abraham Israel, if I would help work with the kids.

Oh.

If I would help out. So yesterday was the first day I went to work as a ... I love kids. I love little kids and I enjoy them. I worked there for about six, seven hours. And I had fun.

Okay.

And, I keep really busy. And once in a while ... we had a lot of sewing machines and dressing things. So my girlfriend who was my partner, they live on 99th Street. So she's got a finished basement. So we put a couple of machines there and the ironing, the steam iron and everything and she has a big table and we do a little alterations just for some of our very favorite customers ...

That's nice.

... who are calling us. So I keep busy. Between doing a little bit alternations, now doing a little babysitting, I mean, working with the kids at daycare, and doing my computer and doing my grandson and doing the Jewish Center, and once in a while, my girlfriends and myself go out to lunch. So I don't have too much time.

You've got a busy life. Now you have David who is going to be 50.

David will be 50 in December. Cookie was ... Marlene, her name is Marlene, but we call her Cookie. She was 41 in June. And Cindy was 40 in July. So I've got ... and then I have four grandchildren.

Do you ... I'm sorry. Tell me about the ages of your grandchildren.

Cookie has 2. She has a little girl who just turned 11, and a little boy who is 8. Cindy has a son, Zachary, who is 10. And David has a little boy. His name is Jonah, Jonah Douglas, and he is 5.

Do you ... did you talk about your experiences with your children?

For a long time, I didn't. I just started talking to them maybe three, four years ago.

Why didn't you talk to them?

I told them what happened.

Why didn't you talk to them?

Because I ... first of all, it was very hard for me to bring back old ... I was, I was kind of suppressing it. I was in denial. It didn't happen. And I was very busy with the kids. I was a crazy mother. And being I went through what I did, I was so protective of them and so that I was constantly with them. And, I didn't want to ... I wanted to spare them.

But they knew.

They knew. I didn't know that they knew.

Oh, really? How did they know?

They knew. I mean, they didn't know my personal story.

Oh, right.

But they knew of the Holocaust. They knew of the ... they used to ...

From the beginning, from when they were tiny?

No. No. Probably from when they were, I don't know 10, 12, 15. Something like that. They knew but they didn't know my story exactly what happened to me. They knew that I was in a concentration camp. They knew that the Nazis took me. And they knew that my parents ... [Telephone rings]. He's going to get it downstairs. They knew that my parents were killed over there. And ... but they didn't know details. Right now, Cookie, she is the one in Connecticut, Marlene. She is so involved with the second generation with the Holocaust. She reads every book there is to read about the Holocaust. She is looking it up on the computer. She keeps in touch with ... there is a group in where is Yale? What city is Yale in?

New Haven?

New Haven. Yeah. She went to school to Yale so she's got a lot of people that she knows there. She has a group in Yale that they get together and she's on the Board, that they see each other, I don't know, once a month or two months about what is happening. And she is very much involved in the Holocaust thing, and that's ... and she tells me, you know, she told me to talk to, when Spielberg sends some people to talk to them. And she ... actually, I started typing on my computer a few things about my life, you know, but I can't put it together the way I should, you know, like I'm not a very good letter writer, you know. So I can remember a little thing here, a little thing there.

You're telling a wonderful story right now.

But I'm trying to put it on the computer even though they have it on that tape. And I don't know if I might get a tape from here so I could give it to them. Because she sent me ... oh, quite a few years ago, she sent me a tape recorder with tapes and she said, "I want you to tape it." And I never did.

I'm sure you can get a copy of this.

Yeah, you think so?

I'm sure. I'll tell Jean that you would like ... that you would like to have it.

Okay, because my kids would love to have that.

Did they ask you about it and you not want to talk about it?

They did. Yeah. They were already older when they asked. They were already maybe in their 20s or 30s. And I said, "Oh, I'll tell you." And somehow I always ... I just couldn't get myself to talk about it. It was very hard.

Do your memories come back to you? Do they ... do they have a part of your everyday life?

Well, sometimes it does. Sometimes it's very hard, because sometimes when I, when I see ... I don't know why, what pulls me. [Telephone rings] But I get ... I always want to see when there is a film about the Holocaust. Like after *Schindler's List*. Then there was this, *A Day In My Life*, or something. It was in Fairway. My husband went to see it at the Truman Library ...

Oh.

... but I went to see it in Fairway. Then *Jacob the Liar*, I went to see. Somehow it brings me back to that and then after I see this I bad nightmares.

You have to see it and then it's bad if you do.

So, I didn't want to tell my kids, because I didn't want to cry. But when I went to see *Schindler's List* Cindy came with me. She wouldn't let me go by myself. So we watched the film. We went out of there and both of us broke down crying that we had to sit down downstairs in Ward Parkway on the bench and sat there for about ten minutes until we calmed down. So I wanted to spare my kids from that, even though I should tell them, they should know. They want to know.

Has your 11-year-old granddaughter asked you?

Yes. She asked me and she knows a lot. And Zachary also, my 10-year-old. He doesn't know details but he knows that the Nazis killed his great grandparents and he knows that I was in a concentration camp. But I did not tell him details. My granddaughter in Connecticut she's a ... every grandchild is a bright grandchild.

That's right.

But, she's very bright and she wrote a story. She was supposed to write a story about anything she wants for school last year. And she was, she was only 10 at the time. And she wrote a story about her grandmother, about me. And she wrote, you know, I was born ... when I was born and what my name, and where I was born and then about the concentration camp. As much as she could put together. And I was very surprised how much she knew. So they know but still too many details I still couldn't tell them exactly everything.

But you know, you're such a valuable asset for us to know, so ... I mean, I want to know. That's why I'm doing this. I want to know. I've read a lot, too, but you guys are such a wonderful resource.

We went, we went ... yeah, we went through it, so we can ... see I can't go to schools to talk. Like, I don't know, Sam Sandberg, did you know him? He went to schools a lot. He taught first grade.

No. I know him but I didn't know he did that.

Yeah, he went to schools. Sam Nussbaum goes to schools and talks about it.

He does?

Yeah.

Ben Edelbaum used to do that.

Yeah. He was a wonderful person. Yeah.

Well, let me ask you a few things about that. So after the Holocaust, did you lose your faith in God?

No. I didn't. My husband did. My husband's family was much, much more religious than my family. And when we got married I told him, "I want to keep kosher. I want to ... I don't want to be fanatic, but I want to, you know, be regular like any religious Jewish people who keeps their faith." And he ... first he promised, okay. And then he said he starts to explain to me why not, why he doesn't believe in the Divine Presence. And he still doesn't believe in it. I am very traditional. I'm not kosher. I'm not ... I don't ... I drive on *Shabbas*. But I keep every tradition, you know, Passover, whatever there is. Just to keep the memory of my parents.

Sure. Sure.

And the tradition of my ... of the Jewish faith.

Absolutely.

So that's ... he lost his complete belief.

Do you belong to a synagogue?

Yes. Beth Shalom.

Beth Shalom? And are you active in it at all?

Not ... see, when I was ... before I was working I was in the Sisterhood. I used to belong *Hadassah*. I was in *B'nai Brith*. But after I started working ... so between the kids ...

Right.

... and work I couldn't. And I just quit, oh, as I say, a year and a half ago, we retired. And I've been so busy since then, that I ...

So busy since you've retired. Right?

Yeah. Busier than when I was working.

Do you have traditions that were active in your family that you bring ... that you brought here to share with this family?

Like what?

Like, I don't know. Did you ... were there traditions that you grew up with that you have extended or that ... mostly the Jewish holidays type stuff?

The Jewish holidays type, and I tell the kids what we did when, you know, at home, we used to ... what we did on *Shabbas*. We couldn't even tear a piece of paper. We cut up paper. We weren't supposed to brush our hair because it pulled out the hair on *Shabbas*. So I would tell them, but I don't keep that. But they ...

They know what your life was like?

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. They know. And they know, you know, that we do a Seder. Even Cindy brings his ... her husband, who is not Jewish, and he has to keep Yom Kippur. And they come here on Rosh Hashanah and they come to synagogue Rosh Hashanah. He only comes on Yom Kippur because he, he works. Cindy, Cindy takes off and she is a counselor for Rosh Hashanah services.

Why were you able to survive?

Because God was with me. But we, we were young. You endure more than when you're older. We ... actually when I was in Auschwitz, when they picked, I was ... we were destined for the gas chamber there, which was taking group by group. They picked out 200 people of 30,000 in that camp. There was A *Lager* - A camp, B camp and C camp. Each camp had 30,000 there. So my camp ... I was in C camp ... had 30,000. So they lined up all the people and they picked out 200 girls to go to work for a ... to Reichenbach for a munition factory. And it just so happened we ... when they came by we made our cheeks red to look healthy and kind of, you know, so they'd pick us because we wanted to get out of there.

Yeah. Right.

So my sister and myself, they picked us both. So we were lucky to go to that ... to that camp to work. It was very rough. It was ... we didn't think we would survive, but we did. And, I ... I never lost faith. Lots of times, you know, Boris would say, "Where was God when they burned the Torahs? Where was God when they pulled the rabbis by the beard and they shot them?" There's no answer. There's no answer. And I, I would say, "Where was God when they took my parents?" My parents died. My little sister, innocent six-year-old child. And until I had my own children, I didn't realize what those parents went through. Right now I'll go to the end of the world for my grandchild. How would they ... how would they ... how did they ... they couldn't survive that. So what happens?

What does being an American mean to you?

Everything. I, I thank God that I am here, even though ... I shouldn't say it. I would like to be in Israel. I would love to live in Israel and when I went the first time to Israel, which

was right after the 1967 War, the kids were little. I had the kids with me. I took Cookie and Cindy with me. David didn't go because David was already in high school or whatever, yeah. And, I came back. I said, "I want to move to Israel." I loved Israel. And it's ... it's our country. It's where we belong. And, of course, my sister lives there. His brother used to live there, but his brother died since then. He was also very, very patriotic. He said, "If he wasn't my brother, I wouldn't forgive him for going to America because every Jew belongs to Israel." So, to me, I love America. I love the life in America. I'm not ... I don't live a real luxurious life but I live a content life. I'm happy with what I have. I don't need big things in my life.

Okay. This is my last question. What lessons can we learn from the Holocaust?

A lot. First of all, I have a hard time with this because I ...

You don't have to answer it if you feel uncomfortable.

Yeah. I have a hard time because it is ... it's ... it's very hard for ... not just for people like you, for my kids, to understand what went through and what to, what to learn about. If my kids would understood, she wouldn't be married to non-Jew. My both daughters are married to non-Jews. The only thing, the one in Connecticut, is married to man who doesn't believe in any religion. He's never been to a church. He's never been to a ... he goes for a Christmas dinner to his mother. But they don't believe in anything either. It's with them tradition, like with us, it's traditional holiday. But ... and this guy also who she is married to, is not a churchgoer or anything. He never goes to church. And his kids never go to church. So he's ... they come to us for the traditional dinners but they go to Dad's. But, as I say, if they would feel the way I feel, they wouldn't be married to non-Jews. And I think ... I think we, we should support each other, the Jewish people, and if there is some problem, we support Israel as much as we can, as much as we can afford. But, we should support Israel. That's ... I, I ... there's so much ... so many things that I could say, but I can't think of it. It doesn't come to me right now.

That's okay. You've done a wonderful job. Let me...

Thank you for interviewing me.

Oh.

[End of recording]