

Malvina Stras Interview

September 1, 1999

Interviewing Malvina Stras on September 1, 1999. Can you tell me what your name was at birth and spell it for me?

Why? Would I have to spell everything?

No, Just your name.

My name Neiman, Neiman.

Malvina Neiman...

Neiman, Neiman. It's very hard for me to spell. Neiman. Neiman. I don't know. I could write it down, I guess, but I have a hard time to spell the names.

Okay. N... Okay, what is that? N-E-I-M-A-N? Okay, Malvina Neiman.

It's different letters. Neiman.

Okay. And when were you born?

1923.

And the date?

17 of June.

1923? In what city?

Szatmárnémeti. Szatmárnémeti. It was Hungarian

In Hungary?

I was born really, when I was born, was Romanian. And I don't know how much you know about that. Used to be a revolution war between the Hungarian and the Romanian. So we were taken over. I was born in Romania, but we were taken over by the Romania, was a fight, a revolution war. And then, the Jewish kids, they didn't even let the children to the schools.

Okay. We'll get to that later. What was the population of your city?

I would say maybe a half a million.

So it was a very, a pretty large city.

A lot of Jewish people there.

What was the Jewish population?

I, I'm not very sure of it. But it was a very big population there.

Several thousand would you say?

Oh yes, oh yes. Several thousand

Do you think more than five thousand?

Oh yes. Much more. I think...

Would you guess ten thousand, just to...?

I think, I personally think, I think it was maybe was a hundred thousand. It was a big city.

A hundred thousand Jewish, Jewish people?

Yes, yes! Was a lot of Jewish people there. Lot of Jewish, lot of business and everything.

What do you know about the circumstances of your birth?

What I know...? Well, I couldn't understand what you mean with that.

Do you what it was, were you born in a hospital? Were you born at home? Do you know what the circ-, you know, when you were born?

I couldn't think of it. I couldn't even think of it. Probably in the hospital. Where, I don't have an idea.

Okay.

I wish I could remember a lot of things.

What were your parent's names?

My father was Samuel Neiman and my mother's name was, they called her Roszika, Roszika Spiegel. Her maiden name was Spiegel [probably spelled Szpigel].

Can you spell it?

Not really, Spiegel, Spiegel.

And her first name?

Roszika. Roszika.

Roszika. And you can't spell that?

No.

And your father's name was Samuel Nieman?

Yes. Samuel Neiman. Neiman. Whoever going to write from that tape they can read it to, spell it probably, better than I would.

Do you know how your parents met each other?

No, I don't know. Because see my parents were very religious. I came from a very religious home like we didn't drive *Shabbos* or we didn't cook or do any kind of work that day.

Do you think they met on their own or was it an arranged marriage do you think?

I have a feeling maybe it was arranged. But I could not remember. No. I couldn't remember it.

Okay, can you describe your mother's role in the household?

She was a very, very, very good housewife. Well, we had a steady maid. We always had steady maid. And she was a good cook, and baked, just wonderful!

Your mother?

Oh!

Really?

Oh! Was very good. Oh! What she could do! I wish I, I tried to copy a lot of things when I came to United States. And my father was a businessperson.

She, so your mother's main...

She was a lot in the business, too.

Okay, but mainly she was a housewife?

She was a house..., she cooked...

She took care of the whole family and cooked?

Yes, she cooked and she had the help. And when we kids, we were five girls and two boys -- one boy passed away at home, young... We had to help because she said always and I never forget that, she always said ... we kids don't want to do nothing. You know how kids are, we try to run away a lot of time. She said, "We never know in life," because see we always said the maid going do it, you know, we don't have to do it, later. And she always said, that was always in my mind in concentration camp, she always said, "You never know what happen in life." She said "Maybe you have to know things. It's very bad when people don't know nothing. It's much better, maybe you get married, you don't going to be able to have a maid. You goin' have to do everything yourself. This way you watch while I cook, while I bake and you help me. Or you go and wash the, the, the meat dishes," you call it the *fleischige* dishes?

Uh-huh.

"And you the *milchige* dishes." And we all have chores, you call it? Like you have to do this and you have to do that, between the five girls. All we had to help. Even when we had to stand on a little chair to reach the table or we had to watch when she baked the *challahs*, she made beautiful *challahs* with braiding and everything. And I remembered her words all the way in the concentration camp. To survive.

Good lesson.

A lot of people couldn't survive because they were very helpless. And I never going to forget that, that was a really wonderful when the children know everything. They don't have to do it, wonderful. Or you never know what comes up in life. And I remembered that very well when she said, "You never know what happens in life." Maybe she felt it.

Wonderful.

You never know.

Did your mother ever have an occupation like before she was married or...?

She was very educated. She was very educated, my mother, in Hungarian, in Romanian, in German language, in Yiddish language. She had opportunity, that time, she went to school, you know. She was very educated.

Did she, did she prepare for anything or did she get married very young that she didn't ever have a job or a career or...?

No, that wasn't so Europe really.

Yeah, right.

Wives usually used to stay home, raise children, especially by the religious ones, and raise children and cook and bake and be a housewife.

Right. Okay.

There was the men. "Head of the table," they called it.

What was your father's occupation?

He was, he was in business, like I said we had grocery and we had liquor, liquor store. He was very busy. He traveled a lot. He traveled a lot. He had to travel because of the business. And we had quite a few people who helped out. Young men. Because, see, when you're very religious, the girls, my older sisters, used to be helping more in the business, we were downstairs a business, upstairs we used to live, a big home. And they didn't like it when we stayed downstairs, down, because, you know, liquor store, all kind of people come in. And they rather want to have a lot of young men to help, was also Jewish people, young men. And we went down, not alone, to stay there and take care of things.

And you helped out...

The older, the oldest, my sisters...

Is this is when your father was out of town that you did that?

Yes, when my father went out of town. And my mother went checking down. She was a very educated bright lady, my mother, very, very, very...

Can you describe the number, the members of your family and tell me their names, their ages, and their relationship to you, like your siblings, your sisters and brothers.

Yes, I had five. We were five girls and two boys and one passed away at home before concentration camp. And my oldest sister, we use to call her, in Jewish name, Shayndl, and the second girl...

Was she the oldest?

She was the oldest and I couldn't think how old she was. And the second oldest was Gittel what she passed away here. She survived very sick from the concentration camp. She never made it here. And the third one is in New York. Very, very religious. Her name is Tzipra. Tzipra, in Yiddish. And I have, and I come.

You were number four?

Tzipra and then I'm number four. I am Malka. That's the way I was called at home - Jewish name. Or Malvina, we had two names in Hungarian. That's the way they do it. The parents and the Jewish people they call each other in the Jewish name. Or when you went somewhere, you had another name, Malvina. That's why I'm Malvina. I wish I never, when I came to United States, I should say Malka, rather. So anyway...

It's a beautiful name.

Thank you. The youngest one is in Florida. I have two sisters. The youngest one is Devoyra.

Devoyra?

Ibi, Devorah. She's in Florida. So I have one, older sister from me survive and one is in Florida, younger a year.

So were the five girls born first and then the two boys?

Then the two boys.

Okay, tell me about...

The boy, the young, after that younger Devorah, was Froyim, what he was, I never that I know was killed, shot in the concentration camp. Somebody told it, saw it. And the little baby who died was Hersh Meilakh. Was a beautiful baby.

How old was he when he died?

He was maybe a year old, but we never know the truth why he died. It was a beautiful baby, it was very shocking to all of us.

How much younger was he than you?

The baby was a baby, I am in the fourth.

How old were you when he died, do you know?

I couldn't keep tracking back with the age. Or he was baby, that's what I can remember. Not much. But he was the youngest child between us.

Did you have grandparents?

I remember one grandparent. A grandmother. Used to live with us. [unclear]. Through my father the mother.

Your father's mother?

And very, very, just like in dream, I don't think I saw her even, from my mother, the mother and father. The father definitely. I just heard the name or I just think about. I don't even know what he looked like. My father's mother used to live, the grandmother, with us, that's why I know, I saw her. And she used to sit with her prayer book all day in the chair with her feet in the little comfort chair and she was sitting and praying all day long. And she never want to live with the daughters. She has, I don't know how many daughters, she had, I think my grandma had nine children, and all very religious. Or... I don't think anybody survived. Just some of the children from them. My grandmother died at home.

So you saw her a lot as you were growing up?

She was in our home.

What are your fondest memories of your grandmother?

Grandmother, I remember her. She was dressed in the long dress, you know. And she wore, a more religious, they wear not just a *shaytl*, that was called a *spitzel*, that is made from material and then she had even over it a scarf. She was very religious. And she was always very joking, you know, joking. And she liked the children very much. We had to respect her. That was, my mother said, "When Grandma just try to move in the chair you should be right there, she shouldn't fall." I could not forget that ever, because see what goes on here, in United States, they don't even heard a grandmother, don't see, they don't want to even talk to her. She was so respected by us and we had to hold her hand when she had to go, excuse me, to bathroom or she ask for a glass of water, or she wanted, not to let grandma to get up in the chair alone, she could fall. She was a tiny old lady.

How old, do you think she was very old at that time?

I think when she passed away... I don't know, maybe my parents used to be maybe between the forty-five or something, forty, and they went through concentration camp. So I don't have idea how old she was because I don't remember how old the older brothers was and his sisters. So maybe she was eighty years old and maybe she wasn't. Because, you know, people here live longer. That time, fifty years old, people was old. So I really don't remember.

Okay.

But she was beautiful and we had to respect her. And I never forget that because, first and always, I hear is grandparents are old and everything. That's all I can remember. The rest of the grandparents they passed away. I don't remember. Know names, I know the names of them. The one my mother was Hannah and the, her father was, the grandpa was Hersh Meilakh. And that grandma who was living with us was, the grandpa was Froyim. I can remember that. Certain things I remember and certain things no way I could get together. I don't know how many brothers between the sisters. I know, I remember nine kids. One was a rabbi.

Okay. What kind of a neighborhood did you live in?

More or less like Jewish people around. A synagogue. You had to walk. You couldn't drive to synagogue.

Was it more residential or a commercial type of neighborhood?

Like resident.

Like residential?

Like resident, I think I call it.

Can you describe your street?

I don't know how to describe it. I don't know.

Did it have...

We used to go and walk, you know, *Shabbos* or holidays.

Was it a busy street or a quiet street?

Yes, busy, or not like a highway. You know like private place where I couldn't describe, I couldn't remember much anymore.

Lot of trees?

Yes, beautiful. All beautiful kept. Clean. Here, it could not happen to throw cans and papers and all kind of bags on the floor what people eat. Trash, no, it was not trashy. It was very nice and clean kept. People kept pretty clean.

So it was a pretty nice neighborhood?

I think so. I think so. It was nice. My father had a, the rabbis here ask me, the Rabbi Friedman sometimes in the Chabad, my father belonged in the [unclear] somehow the Satmar Rebbe. Was a, they called him [the Rabbi] "Reb Yoelish," a very, very Hasidic rabbi. He had that rabbi, the Satmar Rebbe, and then he had, they called it a "Big Tzadik Rebbe," My father use to go, you know, you go talk about your family or somebody sick or so. And my father was very much a Rabbi's person, to discuss, he believed in it. He was very religious. He wear always a hat on and beard. The *payis* was not like hanging out like somewhere, like to here or so, because, you know, he is a businessperson. You couldn't just go to, you know, funny looking. So, he was a very nice, he was very loved by people. They loved him. He was a, I tell you, we loved our father very much. We loved our mother too. But he was joking with us, you know. He, he could make jokes with us and tease us a lot. Oh, it's just unbelievable.

Very happy memories?

I see them. I see them in front of me, my mother and father both. My mother was a beautiful woman. She wore a wig also. She was a beautiful person. Beautiful and good people. Very charitable people. And that's why I, before I would buy myself a dress I would rather give to the synagogue. I remember I used to go to the, where I live, I mean, not over here, to Beth Shalom when I want to donate. Before *yom tov* I used to donate for prayer books and the office girl sometimes said "Get out from here." She said "Let other people. You always just come. Go home and buy something for *yom tov*." It's in me always a charity.

Well you learned it at home.

Oh, I learned it. Very nice parents, they should be in peace.

What was the inside of your house like? Can you describe a little bit?

Not very fancy. Not very fancy. You know, some of the religious people don't look like that is important. This not more so. This I can tell you, she was very, my parents were

very unhappy, but we couldn't have education because they threw us out of school. Then they start to pull the *payis* from the Jews, you know. My father had to watch out to go in the street. And my mother always used to cry. "What's going to happen to my children?"

Well, did you have a lot of books at home?

Yes. Yes. Because, you know, you have a religious home, usually have a lot of prayer books and all kind of books there. And we had, and my mother, mother always used to talk, she used to sit down and talk about all the prayer books what, and ask you what.... Every Saturday afternoon, certain things, the *sedra* they called it. And she talked about, all about the meaning of it and how to grow up and know this and that religious purpose. She always was just very upset about education. She tried to have us meet private teacher. She... See, the problem was who was the private teacher? Non-Jewish Christian people. And I remember it so well. We had a Christian girl, a teacher, and we went to her private, what was a secret, that she wasn't allowed. And she would teach us, you know how kids learn and miss certain things or whatever. And we were frightened already, anyway, we were already, we living in fear, fear. And she used to beat us. And when she said to us, "When you go home, don't you dare to tell your parents. When you tell your parents, I'm going to beat you more." And kids, you know how kids...

So you didn't tell?

No, we didn't tell. We didn't tell.

Did you have electricity in your home?

No.

So how did you, what,

Wait a minute, no, we had, we had electricity already then. We had it, yes.

Did you have indoor plumbing and running water?

Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

Do you remember how many rooms you had in your home?

Let's see... I think we had, two [whispers]... I could see it and I couldn't, I think we had two or three bedrooms. And we had a dining room. That's very important. Like a living room type something. We didn't have a very big though, that wasn't the more important thing, just to have, able to set a beautiful table for *Shabbos*, the dining room, this was a very important...

I imagine you had to share bedrooms?

Oh yes!

Who slept in the same rooms?

You couldn't say, "I have a bedroom." We can see two girls in the bedroom sometimes four. You could have two beds in there and two girls sleeps together. That's was...

So you shared a bedroom...

Oh yes!

...with all your sisters?

Yes, we did.

And the two boys, and the boys?

And the boys – I mean the baby was -- the boys could have a -- one room. And the parents had a bedroom. Or this wasn't everybody had a room – that convenient -- no way.

So with that many children, there was lots of laundry. How did -- who did the laundry? How did it get done?

We had that maid –

The maid did the laundry?

She done the laundry.

She did all the laundry?

You know that time --- I don't even remember – we didn't have, I don't think a washing machine either. She done it by hand. You know they used to have that scrubbing –

Washboard –

Whatever -- she done that. The hard work like dishes – we didn't have dishwasher -- she used to do the hard work, really – cleaning and everything. We had to have everything -- whatever was going on in the house -- because the parents want to have it... She said, "Okay! When you going to able to even hire -- let's say, you have a maid -- and when you don't know nothing. How are you going to give her work? What you going to tell her what to do in your house?"

So you had to learn by doing, too?

She said, "You have to learn -- to able to -- when somebody comes in and tell her what to do. You're able to ... and the same time you never know what happens in life."

Would you say that your family was well off?

Not -- they would be when we wouldn't have in – with Hungarian-Romanian the troubles. We had a hard time.

But you would say that...?

They would be -- we had what to eat -- I mean in clothes, you know and stuff.

You had what you...?

We were not like rich, rich. My father – when we wouldn't have that fear hiding with a lot of things. We would be in a good shape or -- I grew up in fear. I mean that's what started from home. It's not just I went to the concentration camp and there are time to struggle. But we started to struggle -- there was a time already when they tried to beat the doors in and break in and come in.

We'll talk about it –

So, no, the hard time -- we were not rich, no. We had what we needed.

But, now, did you have any other servants besides the maid?

No. Just the girl who was -- she slept like in our place, like a study.

Did your parents own land? Other land, besides – other than --?

I don't remember.

Did you ever take vacations?

Yes. Or what kind of vacation we took -- we went to relatives. With big families, and we traveled in cities.

So it was mostly to visit family – to visit your family?

Always family. The parents wouldn't let us to go -- and everybody couldn't go away from the business. It's no way you can go, just leave everything. And she used to make us – take -- let us go. Kids sometimes -- two girls together and --

Just to visit relatives –

Yes, to visit relatives and stay with them -- one week, two week – and we stayed with them. Because they were the same type religion people like we were. And they came to us visiting. That was -- not like people take off here and go to Hawaii or go, I don't know, cruise.

Disneyland.

No – that's not -- no, no. And my parents couldn't really leave everything. That is just like -- we had to do even *Shabbos*. You know, my father -- we had to close the business. It was very hard. And sometimes we hired a non-Jew before *Shabbos*. You couldn't just discuss through the week -- and he came in and helped in the store. I mean he didn't do -- my father didn't go even in the store. We don't suppose to go in the business Saturday from the religious point.

What kind of food did you eat?

We had all very home grown, vegetables and everything. You could buy -- you used to go - - I don't know what they call it. I think you call it here -- used to call it the *piac*. I bet you they call it here the market – I'm sure that. You went out there and you had all the fresh vegetables. You never no cans. Who was thinking cans?

You brought all your produce fresh?

All fresh -- and naturally in the grocery we had everything.

You had a grocery, right

Yes! We had everything. Matter of fact, the grocery store – I told you how charitable my parents were -- and there were a lot of people who couldn't afford to have very much -- and he watched out for that people. My father and mother they watched. And they used to make delivery from this grocery. We know definitely the people are too proud to go and ask and know they have, you know, used to, more or less, a lot of children. One aunt even had twelve. They used to let in, they used to send out -- I remember it very well – groceries. Put it down by the door. No name nothing. And that's what is a *mitzvah* -- when you don't advertise in the papers and say "I done this and I do that." Not even -- they never know who send it. They find a big package there, and they could bake *challah* for *Shabbos*. They could cook for *Shabbos* for the family. And they never, my father, they never know who done it. Maybe they could figure it, or never was name and never was told.

You had good examples to follow, didn't you?

Oh, did I have.

What were some of your favorite things to eat?

Favorite? I, I wasn't picky. I liked, we liked everything. My mother cooked wonderful. And we had it, like I said, the fresh vegetables. And we had that – they call it, the Hungarian cook good. They used to make such a wonderful -- they cooked the fresh green beans, what I tried many years back to do that here, and they used to use sour cream to make a soup from it. And first I think, they salted it and onion, I think, and butter, and put that in a -- and I don't even think -- parsley or what she used to put in it. I couldn't remember everything. And also soup, the same way meat and potatoes with sour cream. Soups -- oh, delicious! And they used to use a lot of, I don't know how they do it here, a lot of fruit to make cold soups, special for *Shabbos* and *yom tov*, when they don't warm and cook. And, well, she was wonderful. She made wonderful potato *kugel*. She made wonderful *lokschen kugel*. And I did that too. People know me about that here too, or I couldn't do much anymore for myself. She made a lot of beautiful pastries, my mother. The *challas*, oh when you smell, the whole street smelled. The cooking and everything that my mother used make – gefilte fish and, oh everything.

So those are your –

Good cook! Or we didn't live in cans. I just learned it here. But I don't eat too much cans here, either.

Sounds wonderful.

So she was a wonderful cook. I mean that. We had always good things to eat. For *Shabbos*, the good chicken soup, with the noodles. And she used to make by the hand the noodles. Beautiful. And my older sisters learned how to cut very thin like a thread. I tell you we used to know a lot of things to do.

Yeah.

A lot of things, a lot of good things. And she was a wonderful cook, there is no doubt about it.

My mouth is watering – sounds wonderful.

She made food -- my mother -- I don't think that I'll ever find somebody like that.

What language did you speak at home?

We spoke Hungarian language between people, or when we were under the Romanian. Romanian -- I forgot all of them. In the house, to the parents, we have to speak Yiddish. And when we sit by the table, my father used to do that [sound of slapping a table] to the table. "*Sha!*" ["Quiet!"] he used to say, "Yiddish!"

Did you speak other languages too, besides Yiddish and Hungarian?

No. Yiddish and Hungarian and Romanian.

Were your parents involved in anything political?

This I don't remember. I don't know how it was, anything political. I don't know. I don't remember.

Described the schools -- you said you could not attend school –

No. They had schools. They had schools.

But the ones you -- now you tell me about the schools -- or your education –

We had regular schools. They had regular school. But they, they had the same, like, high schools and colleges. The people, they were educated.

But did you attend? Did you attend?

No, because –

You had private tutoring –

When they – Hungarian, the Romanian was fighting with each other -- they throw us out. “No Jewish,” was said. Just like – not just I went through the true Holocaust. Not just in Holocaust, when I went -- I went through in Hungarian the same thing. And they threw us out. “No Jewish,” they was said. “No Jewish kids can go. “

So you were not allowed to go to school?

No – no -- and we had some grades, alright. I don't think we reached even in the, the level of high school, you know, because I don't how the grades private was, you know.

But you had private tutors?

Private tutors, yes.

So, you were telling me about your teacher, that they beat you...

Beat us...yes, yes. And we couldn't tell the parents.

Was that... Do you know what, for what --?

Because we were Jewish.

Because you were Jewish?

She hated us, at the same time, and at the same time she wanted the money, you know.

Did you learn anything at all?

Yes. We learned from her. We had to. We had to, you know, something to read – or – figuring, you know. They don't have calculators then – on the hand to figure.

Do you remember going to public school at all? Before you were –

We start to go --

You did start?

We were in kindergarten. We started public, but we were thrown out.

Do you remember how the... Did the teachers there treat you any differently?

They really don't. They didn't feel like... This wasn't the teachers fault. I don't know what you call it...what was it they call, like the government or whatever. The people, the population, I don't know who were that told. We were just frightened, very frightened from everything. What going happen to us. And, no or they didn't do nothing harm to... They let us, they let us know we could not go to school. They didn't try to harm us.

What were you favorite subjects when you were learning?

I tell you favorite -- I would like to read and things like that, or I couldn't remember what really was. I couldn't say a very favorite because we were so scared, frightened. When they frighten you don't even have in mind what you want to do because you scared.

How, how far would you say you went in school? I mean, can you give me a kind of an age?

Maybe 'til sixth grade or so.

'Til sixth?

Maybe 'til sixth grade. And I don't know [unclear] because we had a private. And this was a very -- I tell you the mother and father was just crying about it, because they had their education ready, well, and they couldn't accept what happened to us.

That was a priority for --

Oh, very bad. Very bad. Or that's why we went through two Holocaust. We suffered, I don't know how much, because so many people asked me about what was in Romania and Hungarian. I told them we went through -- a lot of people don't know -- we had that revolution war there in, in, in Europe. Oh, we went through a lot...and the Hungarians. When they... I tell you, you never know how antisemitic they were. When they took us to the concentration camp, I tell you, they beat us like dogs. Kicked us. So they were very antisemitic. Very.

Well, but you did have, were able to have fun as a youngster at some point weren't you?

Yes playing --

Can you tell me what you did for fun?

Well, we used to go outside to play like kids do, with balls. And I couldn't say we had a lot of dolls, like here. Kids have a lot of toys, that much toys that kids have here. No way! We didn't have that because we had to more like study. The parents made us, or also with the Jewish, we had like a Hebrew school to go to.

So you mostly played outside?

Played outside like children like to do that. And helped a lot. Like I, like I said we had to help. You couldn't just run around freely. We didn't have a television. We didn't... Radios I guess was that time.

Can you tell me -- describe your friends?

Just like equal like we are. We had to have friends what works out with us, not, not what had to be that level with religion then we are.

So your friends were mostly Jewish?

Yes. Had to be because we could talk to Christian people, or not like having friends, the Christians -- like girlfriends. Because, you know, otherwise you had... They had to watch how the family is and who they are, the children. You take over from children and you turn very helpful, good to the parents, either.

Did you have any hobbies or did you belong to any organizations as a young person?

I don't remember what even the parents would belong, because I don't know how much they could go. I know they give a lot of charity, or how they done it I don't remember it, to how really they done it. I don't remember.

Now were your teenage years before the war or can you remember?

What you mean?

Well, I mean, before –

I remember myself. Since I remember growing up, I don't remember nothing pleasant, just to have to be afraid.

Do you remember your teenage years?

Yes.

So – so it was just living in fear?

Just living in fear. Because we always have to lock the doors, and, and they could break in, or they used to come to the door and just hit it, they want to break in. Just we knew we have to watch.

Did you, in your spare time, did you do anything, I mean....go to...?

You know my mother, she should be in peace, she never – she always said, -- maybe that's going to sounds odd here, it would be odd in the United States -- she said, "A girl" – in Yiddish she said, "A girl never supposed to go *leidig*. You know, like I don't have nothing to do. Just go here and I don't know what to do with myself. She used to say for a joke, "When you don't have nothing else to do, rip your hem in the dress and sew it back." Or what hobbies, you asked, we used to learn crocheting. We crocheted. We knit. We had handwork. We had to do that – that was really like, like a hobby or whatever, you have to be busy. You couldn't just go in the street and do nothing.

So you spent a lot of free time with, in doing handwork?

Yes, yes.

Okay.

We would know what to knit or crochet or used to other work know, to do certain work, whatever. I don't know what they call it. Beautiful work we use to do at home.

Did you have many friends of the opposite sex?

Boys?

Boys, uh-huh.

We don't suppose to date.

So you just mainly had girlfriends?

No. We couldn't, we couldn't date.

Okay.

We couldn't go. We couldn't go to a movie, theatre...

So you stayed home a lot –

I remember... I remember that one time we talked about it, with the three sisters, what is around. Somebody talked us in -- I never forget that. You know girls talk, and to go to a theatre, you know. And I don't know how that was. I couldn't remember, exactly. And we went and meet some girls, not boys, girls. The parents find out. That was not very exciting. Ohhhhh – it was awful. That's all that we went.

Only one time, huh?

Right! We don't suppose to go to a swimming pool, because we don't suppose to put on a swimming suit, see? You don't go in shorts. Long sleeves we wearing, decent necks, decent length in everything. Or, I remember once, we done -- you know how kids are curious -- we were just curious, that's all. We would see what that could be. But it was just one time. Just one time.

[laughing] Did you have a job, ever, before?

No.

Ok. How did you get along with your parents?

Very good. That's why I couldn't accept kids here. We had to respect parents, no doubt about it. Like kids say "shut up," or "I don't want to." And they bawl, "I hate you!" and I... No way. We had to respect them.

But you feel you had a good relationship?

Yes.

I guess they were pretty strict, would you say?

Yes they were strict, or I -- I -- we were not a prisoner in the house. I mean they done the right thing. They don't do things what weren't right.

Would you say they were strict or permissive? You would –

They were strict. Or, or -- not like I felt like it's not like it was awful what my mother do, does to me. No. We accepted it because we thought it's very nice how we learn. You see how she cooks and bakes and we help. I thought it's very nice. No, we never... We loved our parents.

Now you said you, you went to a theatre when you weren't supposed to. Would you think, or would you say that you were rebellious? Would you call that rebellious, or did you ever...?

No just we were curious. We don't want to... Why we hide? Because we don't want to hurt our parents. Because we know our parents going be very hurt and maybe going punish us with something.

They did find out, right?

Oh they did. I couldn't remember did they punish us or they just sit down and talk to us. They always believed in Europe to sit down with children and talk to them nice. Not just to holler "Get away!" and "What else you done!" No, they believed to sit down with children and talk. To explain what is right and what is wrong.

Were there any issues that created tension between your parents?

Between my father and mother?

No, between you and your parents?

No I don't think so. I don't think so.

Okay, now you said education, we're going to talk about values and standards, and you said education was very important to your parents.

Yes.

Okay – what other values did they stress to you?

We should know how to get along in life. What work is, because we saw what goes on in our business. And the two older sisters used to do a lot of things. See the two – the three older sisters, they still had a chance to have a good education, see, because they was older that time -- it was not thrown out like that. It was not so fancy, or they didn't throw strictly to kids. We, we two mainly were behind.

They obviously instilled in you *tzedakah* and doing *mitzvot*.

Oh yeah, I believe in it -- to help people and, and to respect people. And, and right now here, I have a tough life, because I'm hurt for a lot of things and the people here, you know,

I couldn't figure out. I got disappointed in a lot of people, you know, and I feel like I don't have, call it self-esteem. I never know that at home, what that meant, even. And here, all this, I think 'cause a lot of what I went through. I wouldn't say if that this is all involved in the concentration camp. It's a long, long story.

I wish we could get into that –

I wish we --

I really do.

I'd rather would have that because would I have a lot to tell about that -- what is -- and that would be more and more important for me.

Tell me a little bit about how the values your parents instilled in you affected your daily lives?

I couldn't even understand what, what you mean with that.

Well, I think maybe you've already told me that...like you know you had to help around the house –

Yes.

...you had to study. So I think we probably...

You could not sit around and do nothing. Or when we were little, you played with something or whatever or go outside to play. You have a time to go outside to play. And, like I said, we were busy because we had to go to like a He -- but that was also private -- the Hebrew school. See it was a private teacher.

I see. So the girls learned Hebrew to?

Yes.

What was religious life like in your general community? Was it most... Were most of them Hasidic like you or was it...?

No they were just like here – Conservative. They have temples, just like here, and they wear no hats and not *yarmulkes* or whatever, just like here.

So, pretty mixed?

Like a category in it, like, exactly like here. For me it's not surprise, the temples here or the conservative or -- I don't know -- the orthodox or they have the -- what goes on -- I don't know -- with Chabad – all kind of religion. What I don't agree here, right now, since I come to the Senior Citizen they have every Friday a Rabbi to speak or a Cantor. And I think about two weeks ago came a Rabbi....I don't know where you belong? I don't want to talk. Where you belong?

Where I belong?

Yes.

B'nai Jehudah.

You do. There's a Temple, a syna-, a Temple I think, in Main Street or where, there's a Rabbi -- I don't even remember his name -- and he came to speak. He have services, a Jew, Sunday. Do you know about that synagogue? You must know. It's a Rabbi there what have services just like a church. He's in, I think, in Main Street somewhere, or where, and he came to speak and he was just like out of line -- like almost against religion things.

Well, I think you've already kind of touched on this. How well were the Jews accepted by the general community?

That means, Christian or ...?

Yes, were Jews ever...

Never. Jews -- always was antisemitic, or they couldn't show it or heard it and talk about very freely. Sometimes -- back, you know, they tried to be nice or we know what they don't like us.

Can you give me some examples of some antisemitism that you experienced.

I think they always said the Jews has more. The Jews, they all rich, the Jews, I think. And they didn't like it really. I say you could tell they make like remarks or they just they were not allowed to say nothing or hurt us or something. Or they don't like us, I know that definite. They don't like the Jews.

The people would say Jew?

"Jew." We heard that - "Jew."

You did?

Yes. We heard that "Jew." We heard that "Jew."

Now your religious education—you went to Hebrew school?

Yes. To learn to pray.

How many days a week did you go?

I don't know, I think we went almost all afternoons -- every afternoon.

After your regular school?

Yes. I think we went afternoons. Yes, we went afternoons. I think, I don't... I think every day. I think was everyday – not just like once a week. We don't have *Bat-Mitzvahs* there. They don't believe in girls *Bat-Mitzvahs*. We had *Bar-Mitzvahs*. My youngest brother, he had a *Bar-Mitzvah*.

So your family kept kosher, I'm sure?

Oh, of course.

How did they celebrate *Shabbat* and the holidays?

Beautiful! The beautiful table set. The beautiful big *challahs* braided. I never learned to braid like my mother. I baked big *challahs* and braided or not even that. I don't know how many she used to braid – twelve -- I don't even remember. But the beautiful *challahs* on the table and the candelabras. And we had... That is very important, to make a beautiful table for Sabbath. I do it -- I am alone here and my table with the candelabra I put -- I don't need *challah*, I'm alone -- two bagels and cover up with the cover.

[Interview stops and resumes.]

Continuing the interview with Malvina Stras. And you were going to tell me how you celebrate *Shabbat* and the holidays. Your father went to *shul*?

He went Friday night, dressing up nice. Naturally, you have to be nice dressed for *Shabbat* and everything -- the kids too. And he went. When he came home - the women didn't go just *Shabbos* morning or *yom tov* daytime - they don't go in evening. And he comes home and he, all the kids he *bentsched* [Yiddish: "blessed"], put the hands on their head. Wait a minute, he put, I think, a scarf – not a scarf -- a handkerchief. Not a scarf, a handkerchief in the pocket, a white -- he put it on the head and he said – what he said, I don't remember. He said some prayer. And for all the children. And then he came in and he sung *Sholem Aleichem*. I still heard this song. Beautiful! I sing that at table. And then he made the *kiddush* and we eating. It was just beautiful. It's just -- I never forget, he had a beautiful voice. Was just like... and we didn't have just the one boy, so we girls all learned the songs. Oh, the room was just louder than loud. Beautiful. Beautiful.

Which holidays were considered most important? Was one more important than the other?

All of them. The *Shabbat* was very important. It's a very important day. And then comes natural to all the holidays. They all was -- High Holiday – oh, it just special, very special. Preparing everything, my parents. It's just, I couldn't even tell you what was going on. You felt so holiday – it's a holiday. You could feel, not like, sometimes I feel like I go to people in the house, Friday or Saturday, don't even look like *Shabbat*. Some people tell me, "Oh, you still light candles? I used to." Used to? Why "used to"?

Did you have any particular favorite holiday?

I used to love all the holidays. Used to love it -- or now, since I'm alone, I don't. I cry when the holidays come.

Did your family celebrate any secular holidays at all?

What it mean, secular?

Well, like community holidays. You know, like here it would be the 4th of July.

No, we didn't have that kind of holiday. This I don't know -- even Valentine's Day and all kind of -- matter fact, we were married on Valentine's Day because I didn't know what Valentines. When they said 14th of February here, I say I was married on. We don't have nothing, that kind of holidays.

Were there any kinds of Jewish culture activities that took place in your town?

Probably did, I couldn't remember.

You don't remember? You don't know if there was Jewish theatre, Yiddish theatre?

Yes!

There was?

There was a lot of theatres. Oh yes!

Yiddish theater?

We had theatres, yes. Movies and everything.

Music and art?

They had concert, everything.

Yiddish?

We had, oh yes, they had. Or we just couldn't go so many places. Such a places.

What impact did the secular culture have on your life? The culture of the general community -- did it have any kid of an impact on your life?

What means the "impact?" What is the meaning of this?

How did it affect you?

Oh, you know, it affects you. It affected me when they go against you religious. "Why you have to so religious?" "Why you couldn't go with us?" Because some of them are in a modern way. "Why couldn't you go to a movie?" "Why couldn't you do things?" You know, *Shabbos* -- turn on the light or cook or warm up. We had the special something on the stove or we had that girl, what she took care of it. See, we didn't have to worry about it. We have the help and she know already what supposed to be done. We don't tell her *Shabbos*, we tell her before Fridays what have to be done. So, some people they just don't

like it to see why you have to sit home in the afternoon *Shabbos* – not all afternoon. It might be called.. They used to call it *Tzene Urena* -- from the big book. Mother used to -- like they do it here when the Rabbi say. She was reading for us and explaining. She could explain like whatever she read in the prayer book. She could tell us what the meaning is of it. This way she'd teach us to understand what is the meaning of holiday. What we do, you know. So...

So the general community really didn't have too much --?

Some of them don't, and then they didn't like that, you know, to see...or some of them came in, they thought, "how beautiful that is!" They came in with the candles all lit and beautiful. Especially when my grandma used to live. She was killed. She would light, I think, nineteen candles.

Really?

Nineteen. Can you imagine the tables? And my mother lit, I think, twelve. See, when you would get married you light two candles. And then when the child is born you take a candle. So that's they way that works.

It must have been beautiful.

Beautiful. Just beautiful. So they call it *likhtik* [Yiddish, meaning "bright"], you know, everything. Oh, it was beautiful. I think about it a lot -- how different life is. Just was beautiful, I think so.

So your... were your family interested at all in anything secular? Or was it, it was mostly Jewish?

We were interested in... We were, like I said, we were very educated, very read people, you know. They were interested what goes on in the world.

Were they?

Sure! Oh yes.

Were they interested in secular art or music or philosophy anything like that?

They talked about it. Yes, because they were very educated -- very. Or we have a limit how far we go.

But did they encourage you in -- ?

They were not fanatics. Do you know what fanatic is?

Right. Yeah.

Not that way they were.

Did they encourage you at all in any relationships with people other than Jews? Did they want you to know...?

We can talk to them, be nice to them. It don't mean we go in and eat by them or take something what they, it was... No way. That couldn't happen. They told us not -- or we could go into a neighbor's sometimes, to talk to them or whatever. My parents never was a person what...they used to talk to the neighbors -- friendly, very friendly. They didn't show I'm a Jew and I don't want to talk to you because you are a Gentile, no.

Did they socialize at all?

Yes!

They did with their neighbors?

They did, they did. Or not like coming -- sometimes they came in and they said, "Oh, it smells so good! What are you cooking? What you baking?" That happen so many time what my mother did give something to them too to taste.

Oh, okay.

Yes, we were not like that. Or it's a limit how much you can do, because we were young kids. They don't want to have us to eat there -- we have to know what is the limit. No, they used to...we used to know the neighbors well, and other people too. We don't do that. Even religious we couldn't do that.

How did Zionism affect you and the Jewish community?

I don't know much about it.

Did Zionism mean anything to you at the time?

No. No.

You didn't belong to any Zionist organizations or anything?

No. I just heard it more here than I heard it at home.

Before the war did you work or have an occupation at all?

Before the war?

Before the war. Before you were...?

Are you talking about the Hungarian or the concentration camp? Which?

No. Before you, before you were deported, did you have an occupation or were you working?

No, we didn't.

You were still young? Okay. And did you get married before the war?

No. No. No. No. No.

Okay, so we'll talk about that later.

We didn't... I wasn't...not all of us. No, one sister was married, the older -- was killed, with children.

When and how did you first become aware of the Nazi presence?

How we were ...? We heard it. It was in the news. In the papers. The parents, we had papers.

How old were you at the time?

I couldn't remember, really I couldn't. But I knew it, I knew it was scary.

But, you were aware of it?

We were aware of it. Sure, because we heard, the parents would talk about it. And they tried to explain it to us.

They did?

We have to watch. Yes, we were aware of it. And, and then we...or I tell you, it went very quick how they came in, the Nazis, to us. We never expected it. They, like overnight... They came overnight, not -- what? -- direct.

Do you remember the first day of occupation?

In Hungarian? When coming? No, I couldn't remember a date.

Do you remember...?

No. I was taken '44, 1944 in the concentration camp. I remember when they came in, I think then we was already ghetto in Hungarian. We had a ghetto. We were kept there. This, this was probably '44, because '44 we went from the ghettos to the concentration camp. I imagine it was '44, the date.

And you saw the Nazis? Do you remember your recollection of first seeing the Nazis?

When they came in, the soldiers with the, uh... dressed up with the Nazi ... with the what do you call it? A symbol on it...

Swastika?

Yes. On the sleeves and on the...

Was that when they came into your town?

Oh sure! Regular solders. I tell you, they came in -- break in to us. He didn't know...

Into your house?

Yes! They break into us we all were asleep. And all girls they took. All through the house. And we thought they going to take us to kill. They took us all from the house, the Nazis.

Even your sisters?

Yes – the girls!

And your mother too?

They didn't take the mother and father. They were hollering, the mother and father. They thought they take us to kill. Or they took us away somewhere to rape. All the sisters.

They did?

Yes!

They did rape?

They took us away. They break in -- no way – you know, to break in. They break in a lot of places. And we try to run away when they break in, or they catched us, catched up with us. And my mother thought she lost all the children. Except the boy they didn't touch. I mean he was only a babe. Mother was crying. And they released us. We were taken away, they raped us, what they done in Europe, when they came this was the first incident to rape the girls. Get the girls. And then, I remember, when they came in, we were like overnight taken away in the ghetto. We was surrounded with soldiers.

That same night? The same night?

Same week.

The same week.

I don't know, maybe we were a week in the ghetto. We couldn't go nowhere. We didn't have no food. We were just crowded – crowded! From there we were deport... taken to a concentration camp. We had a hell of a time. We didn't know that going to happen. That was very quick. People would know -- they wouldn't go. They would rather suicide. We didn't know. Like overnight happened. Everything...

So they came and you were deported very quickly?

And we went very quick. And they said to us, "Take all you belonging. Take all what you can." Not all – but what you can. Take how much you can. That's all you are allowed, in a package. Or whatever we took they took away from us. What can you *shlep*? How much

can you take when you walk? And we went in the...oh, I tell you, what's -- a ghetto -- it's undecipherable. No food anymore. You were just fenced in like in a ca--, like in a concentration camp -- like fenced in -- with no, not nice way to go to bathroom and nothing. And everybody hollered, and food, and the children cried.

Do you remember what month this was in 1944?

No I couldn't remember. This was in May.

May.

May! 1944 in May -- yes. 1944 in May.

But you said that your parents had discussed the Nazis with you?

They talked about it.

They talked about it, but they, did they...?

They didn't know it exactly or they talked about it -- some war --

Did they envision anything like this, do you think? Do you think they had any idea that...?

No!

...that something like this...

No! Nobody! Nobody! The smartest person had no -- they done it so quick -- so tricky way what nobody in the world was aware of it. Because I heard them after it. They said, "We wouldn't know that -- we would take poison. We would."

Did you parents take any action or, or respond at all to the Nazi occupation?

No. We couldn't talk to them. You couldn't start nothing. You couldn't. Then they kicked you and beat you with that -- they used to have that rifle on their shoulder, you know, and guns in the pockets, whatever. They were really soldiers dressed.

What was it like to -- did you wear the Star of David? You had to wear this, and you were prohibited from going to...?

Anyplace -- we couldn't go no place. And wherever we go, they could kill us. No we couldn't go nowhere. We couldn't escape. There was no way to escape. Or just the trouble was we didn't have no food, no water, right, and barely food. And we had like no bathrooms [unclear] or whatever. And I don't even remember how we was sleeping on the floor. I couldn't even remember what was going on. This was so quick what was very hard to remember. To think about it -- what to do. We didn't have time to think about it.

How old were you at the time? Do you remember?

I don't know, maybe 15 or 16. I don't even know what I was.

Did any non-Jews help you?

No. No. They wouldn't dare to. They wouldn't dare to. They were afraid. They would not dare.

And you, you were deported to a concentration camp right?

1944. Me. Yes. And I couldn't remember how long we stayed in the ghetto...how many weeks, or a week, or days. I couldn't remember that. And we had to go. We walked and God knows where. We walked the whole day to reach the cattle train -- not the carrying to go like human beings -- the cattle train. And whoever couldn't walk, that was... You know who took us to the cattle train? The Hungarian soldiers. We talking about how the Hungarian help us. They had the bigger pleasure to kill us.

Really?

All the Hungarians. Also dressed soldiers with rifles. And natural there was sick people, weak people, who wasn't able to walk. They fall and they kick them. "Go -- when not you stay there and you will die there." They got up and fall down. I can't tell you what was going on...it's undescrivable. I don't know. At least a day we walked. Like in a forest we were walking. We didn't know we go, where we go. And they said to us, "You going to the *Arbeitslager*. You going to work camp. You going work. And you going be paid." That's all the soldiers said to us. Never happened. Never happened.

Where were you sent?

We were sent -- we went to that cattle train -- and we were loaded like cattles there. Or there's no place to sit. Just you can sit on the floor. And the parents with people together -- I mean you couldn't move a leg. And everybody was fainting and dying there. And "Water, please water, water, water!" But they rather die right there.

Where did they take you?

They take us to Auschwitz. We were in Auschwitz. Then I don't... There was the main crematoria in Auschwitz. And they took us straight from the train. When we arrived we didn't know where we arrived. We arrived in the Auschwitz. And there was a lot of people -- I think was Polacks -- who was dressed in striped clothes. And I remember, when we went down from the train, my sister natural was with -- the one sister who was married had two small children, a girl and a boy. And that guy said to my sister they were goin' to turn her away, because the kids was taken somewhere else -- and that guy said, "Give your children because you go to the crematorium with them together." My sister never give the children. She went with them, I'm sure. So she hollered and she hold onto them so fast and the kids was screaming. So she didn't let it loose. She went probably with them. And they said to us, we going to go -- we went to a big black... I don't know what it is. What a factory? Whatever was... We went there in a big place. I don't know in the world was -- showers and everything. They shaved me. They shave, shave our hair. And they give us -- everybody -- a long dress. Uniform they call it. And they had a number here.

Yeah.

We were not -- never called by name -- numbers.

So the -- yeah...

And that's what they give us and we had shaved the hair. And shoes -- one was broken, one was with heel, one was not heel. Who knows what? Not all shoes even we could get.

So this was at Auschwitz?

Was Auschwitz we arrived...

You know, it's very hard to stop here, because I really, it's very hard. I'd like to be able to go on. But, but we're -- right now, you know, we're trying to get your experiences before and after. As much as I hate to stop you here, I have to. But, I want to ask you, is there anything -- you know, this is the end of your before the war experience. Is there anything we haven't covered that you feel is important that we should know -- about, you know, before the war or anything about you're life you'd like, like to say?

I -- I can't say that much about my life. I couldn't remember if we had a life to be happy there -- to, to be there -- because we always wondered when they going to break into us and kill us. So, was not a happy life what we grew up. And that's why I say, I lived through two wars. And it's amazing how people can be alive and can be even talk about it. Or so many things is so blocked in my mind, I wish I remember, but I'm sure I could remember more from the concentration camp than I could remember that.

We'll have to do that another time --

Or I had a very bad memory from Hungarian -- I hated them. Because they were very -- very, very antisemitic. I would never know they are so bad to us. They really was worse -- just like the Nazis. Exactly. So, we have to stop?

For, for this part we do. I'll give you a break. Okay?

Okay.

[Tape pauses then interview resumes.]

This is continuing the interview with Malvina Stras. We are going to discuss the postwar years. Can you describe the circumstances leading up to your liberation?

I can. I was liberated very sick. I had head typhus, stomach typhus. I was so sick I didn't even know I was liberated.

Oh you didn't? You weren't aware that liberation was coming?

I wasn't even...wasn't even interested in anything anymore. I was laying very -- and they kept us in the hospitals.

Where were you when you were liberated?

In Bergen-Belsen.

Okay. And, do you remember the moment when you realized you were free? Do you remember...?

Yes, when I was in the hospital, they took us, and that was like a Red Cross. That was already English soldiers liberate us. And they tried to tell us “Don’t be afraid, we want to help you.” We thought they take us in the gas chamber. See, because they took us to the hospitals. We were high fever, we were just...

Was that -- when you were in the hospital, was that when you first realized you were free?

Yes, and they said we are liberated.

And how did that make you feel? What did you feel at that point?

No matter anymore, I didn’t believe them. I didn’t believe them we are liberated. I thought maybe just fool us. We were so scared, and we went to the hospital, we did. And three sisters we went in the hospital, see, and we didn’t know who, we are there – three sisters. One of the sisters felt a little better. She -- they didn’t even give her a nightgown. She was wrapped in her blanket. She was searching all the rooms. She find me. And then she got very sick, because caught from me -- typhus.

Oh, I see.

I had typhus. Stomach typhus. High fever, very high fever.

Do you know what date this was, when you were liberated, what month?

No, I don’t remember that. I really don’t.

Okay.

I don’t remember that well.

And how did your liberators treat you? You said they were English?

The liberators really tried when we were laying there, on the ground, sick with fever. They came - the English soldiers liberate - they came with food. You don’t have idea how much food! Beautiful things to eat, and that was the worst thing what they could do to us. Hungry people eating rich food. And people all got sick because of the food.

But they did feed you?

Oh, yes! They tried to have us to hospitals. They tried to help us, even, everywhere to help. Help. Didn’t matter to me because I was too sick to think of it. To be happy I am liberated.

So that you...because you felt too...

I was very, very ill.

So you were taken straight to the hospital?

Oh yes. I was.

And what did they do to you before you got well?

I had doctors. I couldn't even remember what...probably German doctors all, I guess. I don't even know what kind of doctors was. I don't remember what hospital was. Nothing.

Can you describe the medical help or the food you received?

No, I didn't eat nothing. I couldn't. I was in high fever, and just -- excuse me -- vomiting. And no, it didn't matter to me nothing. And the doctors used to look at me and kept telling me I look so wonderful. I said, "Look wonderful? I don't look sick." You know. But I was like a skeleton.

Really?

A skeleton. Oh, just, we hardly could keep that one dress. We didn't have underwear anyway. Hardly could keep the dress on us. And they tried to help. Then, I never thought. I didn't even care! Because I don't know what is going on with me!

So, your mental state at the time was... What would you call it? Uh...-

I was very, very sick, because I don't even know what goes on, because when you have high fever and then that sickness what I had -- that typhus -- that was awful! Because, see, that lice eat us up. I think that's cause of typhus. It could take the lice like this! Just the whole body was eaten up from the lice. And then, we just got too sick. Too sick. We find -- then my sister find out we are three sisters together. All, we all was very sick, all three.

So how long did it take you to get to the point that...

I don't know how long I was in the hospital! I don't have the slightest idea what they kept us --

Do you remember when you felt well enough to realize that you were free, and, you know, to think about it?

When I went out from the hospital, I don't know where we were. You know, I think we went -- we were in Germany. I see, that's anyway, I think we went to a place, to a camp. I think so. We went to a camp somewhere to work. I think when we were better. I think they called it Bad Salzsclirf, I think. We didn't have nothing to eat really. Nothing. We went there to work. They took us, they gave us, like, knitting for the soldiers.

Was that a DP camp that you were in?

I think that's what they call it, DP.

Displaced Persons?

They want to help us to see where we want to go. And, this was, we worked there. We worked there and we earned the money. And they give us food, like paying us with food. That's the way we survived. And we had a room. I lived with my sisters, you know, together, and we went to work this way. That's all I...

Do you know where this camp was, you say in Germany, you think?

Uh huh. Bad Salzschlirf.

And you knitted things for the soldiers? That was your work?

Yeah. That was our work. We had to work, make something to earn the food. That's the way they done it to us.

Were there any people who played an important role in your adjustment to...?

Like what?

Well, I mean, okay, anyone special you remember who helped you? Who helped you try to put your life together? Or any -- ?

They had like... They tried to have like an organization who take over, to lead us, to help us, like. We didn't have nobody. There were no parents, no relatives, nobody. Somebody have to help us to survive! To make something of us.

An organization was...?

Yes! Or they took over. I couldn't remember what an organization they used to call it. There was a name for it. I could not remember. And I remember, that we were working there and living in Germany, and that was very hard. And I saw German people with the children. And old people. I screamed. I see children and my, ours, ours is killed -- and the family. I couldn't stand it! I was just sick of it.

Now you went there with your sisters, is that correct?

Uh-huh.

How many sisters?

We were three together.

Three, and there were originally five, is that correct?

Yes.

Okay. And the other two...?

We were four sisters here. Or she came separate. I didn't even know she was alive. But one is definite killed with the children, with the husband. Or, then in the camp, we find out there's a *kibbutz*, in Geringshof, they call it.

You mean...?

In Germany.

You mean after the war?

Uh-huh. After it we used to live there, work there, and earn some money. And there is a *kibbutz* where we want to go. We didn't now want to go home. We didn't have a home. So, the Russians took it over, but we don't go -- where you go? We lost everything. So, my sister, that what died here, she went home and they wanted put her in jail. And she said, "I want my home back. This is ours. And the business." They said, "Nothing." The Russians. "Nothing is yours." Communism. She hardly could escape. Somebody escaped her. That boy who escaped her married her, really. That man escaped, made her, done such work who tried to escape people.

Did you try to look for the rest of your family, or she did, or..?

We try, or we never find nobody.

So you didn't find your...

That's all we have.

...your brother?

No.

And your parents?

Somebody – somebody who was together -- the parents I know they went straight to the crematorium because when they took us off from the train, then, the older people went here, the younger here. They go to work. And the children went here. Everybody went -- they throw in different places. They throw just, so quick! You didn't even, I didn't even see my mother to hug her or kiss her. I didn't know they take her away from our father. They throw her one side, and was too quick! So, so everything. So, I am definite I know they were killed. They went to the crematorium. I know that's for sure. Somebody who saw my brother was together, who... They shot him. I, I find out this.

Do you know how many people from your town might have survived?

No, I don't know. I didn't find really nobody. I have some cousins in New York, what they were different camps. Or I know some, quite a few cousins what I have in New York. That's all.

In the camp can you...did you have enough to eat there?

No, starving. No.

In the... that's after, the displaced persons camp. There wasn't enough to eat there?

In the concentration camp?

No, no, no in Germany.

Oh, in the Germany, then we did, we did. They give us canned goods and all kinds. We were not hungry there. We could manage there.

What about sleeping quarters? Were you...?

We had like apartments. We had pretty good apartments compared we had. I mean, I don't...it was good.

Were there cultural and educational activities?

No, no. Everybody was very, very depressed and very confused.

So, you, you worked rather than going to school.

Yes, we were confused. We were, we don't know where we belong. Or what was good, I don't know who told us there is a *kibbutz*, also in Germany, they called it Geringshof. Geringshof, I think. And, from the organization there, the leader, who there was leading, to go to *Aliyah*, taking children *Aliyahs*, and grown, we were already, became old, and they took us there. We went to a *kibbutz*. There was wonderful, like on the farm. We all had what to eat.

And that was in Germany?

All Germany. All in Germany.

Did your sisters go too?

I went with the two - we were three sisters. Three sisters over there. Because we were separated from that sister, the other who died here. Because they took her away separately. She was very slim. You know the slim people, to Germans, or to Europe, they are sick. Chubby people, they are good for work. That's, we were working, so that's the way, my sister always was separated. And we went, three of us, to a *kibbutz*.

And when you were at the, at the displaced persons camp or *kibbutz*, did you meet anyone there that you knew from before?

No.

No one?

Polish people, Hungarian, Romanish people -- all kind of people, we had there. And there was boys and girls, you know. And there older couple was there -- they were not even married. We called her -- supposed to call her "Mama." And the "Papa" was the man. Older man. They were leaders there, from us, what we have to do. We worked in the field. We had to work. And we -- some of them worked in the kitchen. I was more in the kitchen because I know what to do. And, we helped cooking, and we helped the washing dishes, and we had to do, wash the laundry. Everybody had a different job because we didn't have washing machines and the boards or whatever you wash. We had to wash for the men too. See, because the boys worked in the field, some farm work. And we had to iron. We had to work. Everybody had -- a few girls had to do this and this. And they had for all us some jobs. We was busy always -- busy, busy. Food was enough, was very good. The food -- we were not hungry anymore there. And we had nice people. And we had to sit together, at a table, in the dining room to eat breakfast and lunch and supper and singing and have all kind activities there. Was very nice. There was...

So there was cultural things?

Yeah, there was already a little bit feel like we belong somewhere. Was very nice.

So you were beginning to adjust a little bit?

Yes, and we know where we are going, we there to go to Israel.

So, now while you were there, did you talk about your experiences in the camps?

We talked to each other, sure, because they came also from camp.

So you all shared your experiences?

We have a lot in common. Oh, we find out where they were, because everybody was in different camps, had different experience. Nobody alike.

So you talked about and listened to each other?

Oh sure. Sure. We worked together. They called it *chaverim* [Hebrew for "friends"], you know.

Yeah.

I don't know -- you -- how much you know about *kibbutz*. And *kibbutz* is like a collective life, or what you call it. They give us the clothes, and they do, do everything.

How long were you there?

I couldn't remember. And I got married there!

Okay, but we're going to talk about that in a minute. Now, do you remember when you left there? So you went there, probably ...

I don't know how long I was there. I couldn't remember.

In the DP camp you don't ... in that time, you don't know how long that was?

Couldn't remember. No, I couldn't remember that. We waited all to see where we go.

Okay. Did you know where you wanted to go?

And then my husband find out he has a sister in United States.

No, but where did...did you know where you wanted to go?

I want to go -- we want to go to Israel.

Israel –

That's all we had in mind. Because, we didn't have nothing. I never wanted to go home for some reason. And that sister, she should be in peace, done a mistake, she went home. We didn't know, or she went home. Or I never want, because I know, to home, I heard it. We talked about everything. We said, they settled there -- the Russians -- and the Russians are the second Hitler. So I know I don't have parents, I don't have nobody to go home. And I know that home is going to be somebody's -- not ours. And that's what happened to my sister.

So you wanted to go to Israel.

So want go to Israel.

Okay –

And they caught a few, the English, with the transports. They caught the *Aliyah*. And then we stayed. And then I thought...I don't know what. What we going do? Or we still planned. Or that happened so what? You know boys and girls -- were very nice girls and boys there. A lot of them got married there.

So where did you meet your husband?

In the *kibbutz*.

In the *kibbutz*?

Uh huh. *Kibbutz*.

Okay, how did you meet him? Can you tell me the...?

Through working together. We eat together by the table. Working together. And talk together. And we had some time, we used to walk. You know, we used to have a walk or exercise, and things like that. So, we met. We all had a chance to talk. We weren't prisoners. We had to sit together and talk. A lot, a lot of girls got married there.

And what attracted you and your husband to each other?

He was a very nice young man. Very nice. He was very smart. He was a very educated person. He was a very smart, he was a very good-looking man. And very kind, good. He was not like taking me, like some boys, have a chance, they take a girl, and they have something in mind. They want to rape her or done something... He was very nice to me.

Had a lot of respect for you.

Oh, that's what I liked him immediate. He was so respectful. He would not touch me. I told him what kind of girl I am. I don't want he should think something bad. Or... I liked him very well, and then, somehow...

One thing lead to another...

Yes! And my older sister who is in New York, she was not happy. She was afraid. I think we don't trust anymore people. And she said "Don't go get married to him." His background is a German Jew. She said, "Don't get married to him. He's just – he's probably going just take you and leave you somewhere." So, and I trusted him, because I talked to him and we walked together and sat together in the dining room, and worked together. And I think he was a very nice young man. And that's what I...and the younger sister, who is in Florida, she liked him very well. She think he's wonderful. And I had a wedding in the *kibbutz*.

So you got married in the *kibbutz*?

In the *kibbutz*.

Can you describe your wedding for me?

Oh, the wedding was a very interesting wedding. Because we had a very nice -- what you call it? Like, not a rabbi -- they call chaplain, or what they call it?

Uh-huh, chaplain.

He was in army...army clothes. And beautiful, I mean was very -- I had 14th of February, and outside because, Jewish people, we usually believe in the outside *chuppah*, not inside.

Oh yeah, outside.

Outside *chuppah*, that's what we believe in. And was snow, beautiful outside, snow outside. Big snow. And we had a *chuppah* there.

What year was this? Nineteen forty- ?

Oh, I don't... Wait a minute, I got, 1947, I think I got married. '47, I think so. I forget everything. '47. And we had a...

So it was a couple years after liberation would you say?

Yes, when I got out already from that...

When you were recovered, and...

Yes.

Okay.

For like working. He was a soccer player. And I know him from that camp.

Your husband?

Not in the -- at home, he used to grow up, in school, to play soccer. He was... and he, he played soccer after the war.

Your husband?

Yes!

Oh.

In the, in that camp where we were working, you know. And they paid for him.

Oh.

I had a lot of problems in that camp, Bad Salzschlirf. You know why? Because I had beautiful blonde hair.

Now you're talking about the *kibbutz*?

Yes.

Oh – okay.

And beautiful blonde hair, and everybody thought I'm a German. And we had a big, like a big hotel. A big place. What they, nobody can go in to it -- just the Jewish people. The soldiers was standing from all Jewish people there, see, and watched us, so no harm. And my husband used to play. I wasn't married then. Wait a minute – no, I wasn't married. He was playing soccer, and he made money. They paid him.

Wow!

I mean, just so to live.

Not professional soccer player?

Yes. He played after we came to the United States too. He wanted be a professional. Poor guy, and I was against it. He should be in peace. Or anyway, I got married there.

So how many people were there would you say?

I don't know. Maybe was hundred or more. I don't know in that *kibbutz*. I really couldn't think. And I remember one of the girls, also she got married there to the one of the bosses from the *kibbutz*. She made me -- she was a dressmaker -- she made me a navy blue dress. And see, certain things I couldn't remember, and this I remember -- a dress what she fixed up little flowers here from the material, this I know. A short dress. And a little blue veil. I, I remember that. And certain things I could not remember. And then we had a nice dinner, see, in the *kibbutz*.

Uh-huh. What kind of food did you have?

We cooked also fresh fruit. We had vegetables all in the *kibbutz*. We had to raise that, you know, work with that -- work on the vegetables -- or meat, everything. It was a terrific *kibbutz*. Didn't have a choice, and terrific *kibbutz*, and that's what we wanted. But against that, or we had to be somewhere. We had no choice.

So was it, was it your friends from the *kibbutz* who mostly attended?

Yes, all, every, all of the *chaverim*. They all attended. We had dinner and was a wedding, you know?

And the chaplain married you?

Yes. Married me.

Was there music?

No, I don't think I had music.

Did you dance? Was there dancing?

I don't think so we danced. I couldn't remember nobody to play music there. I don't... I could not remember that. Or, I know there was a nice dinner afterwards. And what else was, I don't know. Certain things I just could not memorize. Or everything worked alright out with them. We didn't go nowhere. We went, we went -- there was also he was a boss in our *kibbutz*. They call it, you know, some of them in the grocery part, what we give to the kitchen. Some people, they were, we called them the *machers*, you know, who is in charge of them. They are in charge of certain things -- what goes into the kitchen, how much products comes in. And they were all big shots, you know. And they, somehow they liked my husband very well, and he was a German background too. And he was private living out in the city, Fulda. And we went there for a little while to stay with him. He wanted us to go there.

You mean after your wedding?

Uh-huh. A week or whatever. Or, everybody lived like brothers and sisters. We were -- that's the way you called the *chaverim*. And we got along beautiful with everybody. Everybody had, they told us exactly where we are in charge everyday. What we gonna do.

Did your husband, other than playing soccer kind of professionally, did he have an occupation there?

No. No.

Did he before the war?

No, he was a young kid then, he was 14 years old, or whatever was. He was thrown around in places. No, he didn't have a -- or a -- let's see what happened when we got out from the kibbutz...

Well now -- now from the *kibbutz*, did you still want to go to Israel, or did you change your mind?

No, we had to change our mind. He find out he has a sister in Israel -- in United States.

And is that how you ended up in America?

That's all, otherwise we would be in Israel. And I wish we would be see.

How did you travel here from Europe?

Ship. I wish I could remember the name of it. I couldn't remember. Oh was I sick in the ship! Ugh.

That's not so pleasant for a lot of people.

It was not like -- many years back was different also, the ships was just going. And the food was there, beautiful! I mean so much food in the ship -- beautiful! But who could eat? We just have to look at it. Who could go in dining room? Everything was going, just, just like turning over the whole ship. We was scared to death.

What were your first impressions upon arriving in this country?

Oh, beautiful. When I saw that beautiful light in -- the what you call it -- the Liberty.

Statue of Liberty.

Oh, I couldn't believe it. I cried. Just cried. I -- we arrived -- uncle -- he had a uncle in New Jersey, my husband. And we went to him. Were about four weeks with him.

You went... You lived in New Jersey for four weeks?

Yes, four weeks with him. With them. Like a guest. Till we figured out how to get to...

Then how did you end up in Kansas City?

Kansas City? Because there was a sister. And I am sure you know Hyman Brand very well.

Uh huh.

Used to know Hyman and Clara. We were very close with them, because Millie –

Was that your husband's sister?

Millie, no, Millie, Millie Kritzler grew up in that home. They raised Millie. She didn't want to be adopted. They wanted her to be adopted. And Millie didn't want to. And she – they raised her, and they made her – they got her married, she was married from there. Do you know the Kritzlers?

I know, I know Millie.

You know Millie?

Uh-huh. We'll talk about it afterwards.

Oh. So that's why we ended up...

So, what were your first impressions of Kansas City?

Oh, I thought it's beautiful. Beautiful. Even though, we came -

[Tape cuts off. Interview resumes.]

The post-war interview with Malvina Stras. What was it about Kansas City you thought was so beautiful?

I thought I see a light. A light. A home. A house. Clean. Somewhere. I always said when I go and survive and I going have a baked potato and a glass of water. I going be happy. And come in, you could buy. You went -- I went to work when I came to Kansas City. I went to work, and we, we stayed there by Hyman Brand for a while, or we had a room.

Where did you live? Is that where you first lived when you came to Kansas City?

We didn't live with them, stayed there for a while, or we had a rented room with some couple. Someone, I don't know was it in, far in Lee's Summit. I don't think I know where I was. I couldn't remember that, and I couldn't remember the people. Or wasn't very happy there. There was one room, and we used to go to Hyman Brand's to eat meals, you know, more or less, because we didn't have a job, nothing, no money. We came with plain, plain nothing.

Did you know English?

No. Not at all, no.

How did you learn English?

I learned here I guess. Talking, and I -- always they kept telling me, “When you don’t go and keep talking to each other English, just go and talk your own language, you never learn.” And I talked all kind of mis—I said so many mistakes and this happened to me, neighbors used to laugh about it. And I was very upset because you, you afraid to talk then, when people are laughing. And then I was brave enough, I said to the neighbors, I said, “You know what, in place your laugh, please correct me. I would appreciate that. You know, to laugh about somebody, I’d like to see when you would go in my country, and you just speak English, I would like to see how you would feel if somebody would laugh about you.” I said, “It’s not fair.” I took it really serious and I was hurt, because I think the right way is to correct people.

And did they? Did they correct you?

Nah. They said “I’m very sorry, and we try, try to correct.”

So did you learn English just by talking to people?

Just by working. I went to work. I had to go to work to earn money.

Did you go to school or anything to learn English?

No, I didn’t have a chance because I went to work. And I tell you, I had a hard time with my eyes. I still have. I have lost an eye in the concentration camp.

Oh, I see.

And I had one eye. And I went through so much. And I was -- what was the funny part -- nobody knew the secret from me. I thought it’s a – you don’t supposed to talk about it. It’s a shame. Nobody knew that I had one eye. Nobody knew I was hurt, and I have a problem with my right eye. I had removed cataract, and I still have to remove cataract, even it’s no vision in the left eye. So, what happened to me, I had detached retina. I know, you sure know what detached retina is a very dangerous thing for having. So, in both eyes -- and I had surgery. I went for surgery.

Is this when you first came?

No. No, I was already here in United States. Or I just want to bring it in how handicapped that is.

Uh-huh.

And I never tried to tell people I have a hard time with my eye, you know, one eye. So, anyway, I tried to, little by little, say that. So, I went to work, and was very hard for me. And right now I use a magnifying -- a big magnifying glass to read -- and my eye hurts very bitterly. I have a hard, very hard time. So, this was when I went to work, and my husband went to work. Or they paid him fifty-five cents, I think, for an hour. Can you imagine? Okay, that time was a different time, when we came.

How did... how did...?

1948 I think we came here.

How did you find your job?

Through, through the Brands. They...

And what was it?

... tried to find. They -- I went to the factory to work with clothes -- packing, and labeling, that's what, or what is it -- something, because I couldn't talk to people. So, there I picked up a lot. And pretty good I picked up when they talked to me, and they tried to explain to me, what that is and how that is. Or I was working in a factory, I don't remember how long, and I made the fifty-five cents, I think, per hour. That I could remember. And I think my husband the same way. He made -- he went somewhere to work, called the [unclear] -- or what was it, I don't know what he done -- with certain things I wasn't free to try. So, through Brands we had a job. We had to make, pay rent, and make a living, you know.

So that was your first job?

First job.

How did you adjust to your new country?

I was happy I am out of camps, and I, I am free. That was a lot to me to say "I am free. I can go in the street. I can eat what I want to when I have the money for it, you know." It was wonderful to go in the store. I go free, nobody watch you, I don't have to have a star and a long dress on me -- wonderful!"

What was your biggest challenges?

Biggest challenges? I couldn't understand what, how you mean like challenges.

What were the most difficult things for you upon coming here?

Because of the language was very hard.

The language barrier.

It's where you couldn't talk. It's so hard. It's very, very, very hard. Or I did pick it up pretty quick, I would say. All I went through it wasn't easy, because you don't make enough money to eat. Or they tried very hard to help us, the Brands, because Millie grew up there, so she... They tried to help us, with clothing. I couldn't afford to buy anything for myself. And we came with nothing, plain nothing. One dollar my husband had. A soldier give it to him in Germany, when he was liberated.

Did you face any discrimination when you came here?

No.

So, do you feel the language was your major barrier, was a major barrier?

It's very hard. You are lost, and especially, it's very hard when people laugh at you. And I had a lot of time, what people when I used to say something, they were. Because sometimes, I said it like backwards, you know?

Sure.

I didn't see the words right, put it in right way. And, people used to laugh, and I was hurt then. I was always hurt. I was embarrassed, and it hurts me, why I have to have people should laugh about me? Or I had very nice people who, when I worked, there was a lady -- what you call a lady, like a fore -- ? What is a foreman and what is a lady called? Not a foreman, a lady -- a man called...

I know what you mean, a manager kind of?

Manager, yes thank you. A manager is called. She was so nice, we got so friendly. And she liked me, she felt sorry because I couldn't speak, and showed me with the hand, and explained to me. And she was very -- she even came to mine apartment, when I had apartment. She was very nice to me. So I, I had people who I -- very hard for me to trust, even now. That is a big, big, mistake. Because, I feel like people don't like me. People just think I'm nobody, because I came from nowhere. People don't know me, and I feel like, just I am a no-good person because when you're always kicked, and said "Damn Jew," this what I grew up with. I heard that so much, I just don't feel like I belong between people.

So it stayed with -- stayed with you?

Yes, very much. I don't want to go to people. I was -- I don't know -- I just felt like everybody just hate me. They don't like me. They really don't want me.

Well, where did you find the strength to overcome these challenges?

Through doctors. I couldn't help myself. I couldn't go through to help myself. I said, "I am different, people think I am coming from nowhere." I came from nowhere. I came from nowhere from Germany, or I came from a good home from home. Or, I still don't have -- you call it self-esteem. When somebody gives me a compliment -- I dress up, I usually wear a wig. I don't wear a wig because I want to exercise here. I go exercise everyday because it's very important for me. And that's... I think, it's good for my nerves too. And I run into my own doctor who helped me a lot, upstairs. You know by any chance Dr. [unclear]?

Uh-uh.

No?

So you had therapy?

Was very -- he's a famous, was a famous. He's retired, a famous psychiatrist.

So that helped you get through...

And he was a great friend too, because my son and his son were best friends. And he sees me every – oh I feel very sorry for him because his wife is in a nursing home. Anyway, I couldn't help myself anymore, because, no, I don't trust. And I have, just I feel like, I am no good! What I want to say, I dress-up. I put on always a wig. Like I went to a wedding, put on a dress, a long dress I had on, and I put on a wig, you look different. Make-up. And he said, "Oh, you look so nice. Beautiful!" I was on the wedding, and I don't believe it. I hardly can. People say "Say thank you." It's very hard for me to say "thank you" because I couldn't accept when somebody say "you look nice" or "how nice, how wonderful we remember how you cooked, what kind of dinners you used to make." I did. I don't have no relatives, or I had a lot of people for *yom tov*. I used to have 20, 25, 30, 35 -- I used to have the whole KU college Jewish kids. My sons, both of them bring them in. They want to sleep on the floor. They just want to be with my sons and us. And cooked! Oh! Matzo ball soup! *Pesach*, what I didn't do! Baked, for weeks already -- prepared, everything. I done a great job and the kids, just the KU kids, enjoyed it.

And what gave you the strength to go on and do all this?

I had to keep busy. That's what the doctor said. Be occupied in something in my mind, to - - busy work, just busy. And I just could not -- never sit still -- and they tried to make me to sit still. And I, I am... Right now, I am, I have -- I couldn't help it, I couldn't do much because I couldn't stay too long on my feet. I had both my knees replaced. And it hurts. And people don't want to believe me when they see me exercise. They say "How can you walk on the treadmill?" I couldn't walk now, anymore, just on a treadmill. And, they don't believe me, because they see me on the bicycle, and I'm still try to take care of myself. Do a little cooking, or I wish I could more -- do more.

After you came here, did you talk about your experiences?

Oh I talked a lot about it, not write a lot about it.

Who listened? Did people listen?

People, some people, no, I didn't particular talk to people because they don't want to listen to it. Because I remember, I don't know who was it, said to me once, "When you going complain, people don't really like you. When you going cry, people don't gonna like you. When you cry, cry for yourself at home, and don't complain, because nobody going to want to be around."

So who did you talk about your experiences to?

I had to talk to the doctor. I had no choice, because when I talked to people, they didn't like to listen. Everybody had problems.

So you didn't discuss it outside of your doctor?

I didn't want to. I tried to always and, like here, when I come into the senior citizen's place. I talk to them, I try to smile, I try to do the best I can. I don't want to show them how many time I am so painful.

So have you talked about it since, or did you ever, ever start talking about it to other people? Or...?

I like to, or I like to talk to people when people don't going -- some people going right away tell other people, "Oh this and this, she's so-and-so, depressed -- or she's sick." And a lot of times I was very sick. I just don't want to live. I told the doctor. I came to United States and I told him I could not live. I just don't feel good and I don't want to live anymore. I'd like to just die. That's what I kept telling the doctors. And I was alive in the hospital and I -- a lot of talk. It took a lot of talk. And, and that doctor, God bless him, he's a retired one - he always said to me "Malvina." I cried because he said I didn't have opportunity to do a lot of things, you know with education what that means. That's why I always said to my two sons, "I would scrub floors just to have education." I couldn't afford it. Or, just be somebody, because the [unclear] when people are not having, for myself. And I was sick, I couldn't go schooling because I was very sick. And I just don't want to live. Nothing was interesting to me. Or I had a hard time because I had to go to hospitals always because of my children.

So what made you want to go on living and, and participate in life?

And I tell you what was -- I kept telling my husband, too. Just because the religion. You not supposed to take your own life. That I told the doctor always. This is my whole thing, why I kept going, I never could take. I have so many medications. I said to the doctor, "I could -- I don't have -- I have what to take to be finished." I could not do it until my mind works because I feel like it's a big sin. That's the way I was raised, and I know it. The religion.

So you feel it was your faith that kept you going?

Yes. Exactly! I know it. Definite. Or a lot of times I didn't want to live. And I just, happened so -- I have two sons, and what the biggest damage is to my life -- [crying]

The biggest what?

One son, the oldest one. Nice, he's educated, a good boy, everything. He was married, I don't know you know, you ever did know Yvonne Goldstein by any chance? She lives in Wichita now. She used to live here in Kansas City. She was very active. He married -- he was finished with college -- a daughter for Yvonne. Very rich people. Very, very rich people. And famous people and everything. Active. And married, and he's divorced.

Oh...

And was a very, very bad, tough divorce.

That was hard on you.

Oh, it's still not finished. It's the worst, and I don't know where he is. She made it so bad for him. And he had two beautiful sons. One just graduated from law school, my grandson, and he married. Is married two years. He moved away. He's right now in Nevada -- Nevada?

Nevada.

He moved there because he had a job. And, he went to Washington to take the BAR, you call it the BAR?

Um-hmm.

And he's smart. He always like, skipped, skipped grades. He's a very smart boy. And he, he is, he had a brother in Wichita in college. Two brothers. And my son never was by the wedding, never -- didn't know where he is. And why he does it to me, I don't know. I don't know in the world. He saw me a few times since the father passed away, he came. He couldn't come to the funeral because, he told me because his wife going be there. She said, she always said "When I get"-- Simon is his name -- "I call the police and put him in jail." That's all she talks about. And he paid alimony, when she got married, and then he stopped. Or he paid alimony, he paid the child support, and she just nags him to the bone. She loved him too much or she done a big damage. What she done to my life and to his life. Because, she nagged him day and night, and he, he just -- he said -- I said "Simon, why you don't want to be in contact with me?" He said "Mother, you love Andi you liked Andi always very much. You tell her where I am." Because he got married. He went away, he got married. And I know who was his wife. I don't know. She said the ex-daughter-in-law is divorced. I don't know. He's a such a business person. He was traveling. Wonderful child. And what he done, I don't know.

That's very -- it's very sad for you.

He came to his father, I said [unclear] when he was in the hospital almost dying with cancer. After all the *tsuris*, he -- I said, "Simon, please, just call me. You don't want to tell me where you are, call me. That's all I want you to do." And he used to write me cards for birthdays, wedding, he don't do that any more either. And I don't know why. I don't know. I think because -- I told my younger son -- I said, "Steve, I think because his father was too sick, he just couldn't see. He could hardly go to his father."

Maybe it was very hard for him.

He took it hard. The younger son, he was very good. He took over all the pressure, God bless him. All the pressure he had. And my older son feel like, he's afraid, like what gonna happen, a mother was so many times sick. He -- I guess he just don't want to pressure me. He used to tell me "Mother, how can you live like that?" Dad is years in -- he was there twenty years -- Walter. "How can you live like that? Make a life for yourself, Mother. You couldn't -- you're young." That time I was young, really. You know twenty years is a long time. And I think he took it, he took it very bad. Or my son, Steve, God bless him, I think he took over all the pressure and he's a very good kid. And were not him, he helps me keep going, or otherwise I...

So that's your inspiration, then?

That's all. And I pray every day to God my son should call me.

I hope so.

I want to have him back.

Yeah, that's tough. You know, getting back to when you came here, how did you meet new friends?

I, I like people. See I like people very much. Or I just don't like phony people, you know. And I don't like people when they try to question you, and get out secrets. Like, everybody has somebody to talk about to like, lighten a little bit your hard time. Because we don't have parents, we don't have family here to run to talk.

Who became your closest friends?

I tried to trust people. I have a few people. I have right now a Hungarian girl, what, more or less, I feel like I can – I talk to her freely, because I know she talks to me also. And I was the matchmaker for her. So I think we are very close. And when I have something, I tell her.

So are most of your friends fellow survivors would you say?

Yes. Yes, I think so.

Do you feel more comfortable with them, with a fellow survivor?

I don't know.

Do you trust them more do you think?

I don't know. I, trusting, I have a hard time to trust, I couldn't trust for nobody. That is a very bad illness.

But with a fellow survivor, is there a kind of unspoken understanding that you feel...

No...

...that you don't feel with other people?

No, I don't think so, because she was hiding, not even in concentration camp, that girl, that Hungarian. Her husband is a Polish survivor. Or I find out she, I think she's honest to me...

So you trust her?

...and she told me that when I feel like something, I'm hurt, to talk to her. Because I said I don't want to bother nobody with my problems. And I don't try to bother for things. I am too many things to, this way or another. And I don't trust people. I always think they don't like me, they don't want me. See, and this is very bad. This is, this is just in my head. You know, I couldn't trust because this has a lot to do with how I was treated, you know, in camp. Beaten, and I heard very much "damn Jew." Just "damn Jew," and kicked and beaten, and I was very much beaten for everything. So that's the way I lost my eye. They beat me.

I see.

So, and it's just – it's very...

It stays with you a long time -- forever.

Oh, eyes, how many times I went to the eye doctor. I was always crying. I'm begged him. "You have so many things you can do with eyes. Why couldn't you do surgery and I have my vision back?" They said, "It's damaged. The main tissue is damaged." Nothing they can do. So, I'm hurt. I'm hurt. Like people said to me -- sometimes I said I couldn't sleep, I have a hard time to sleep – "Take a book and read." And I never want to tell them I have one eye and I hardly can accomplish anything. Sometimes I have a hard time. I read something with my magnify glass hurts my eye, so badly. And matter of fact, here from the Jewish – here from the Center somebody from the vocation -- what they call that place where they help people?

Jewish Vocational Service?

Uh-huh.

Um-hmm.

Somebody came out from there once to talk to me, and she said somebody passed away. A very famous, nice man. He had a big, big – like a – almost like a, a computer, magnify. You can run under with light, and run under and such a big letters. And she said that man, before he died, he said "I want you to find a very important person who deserves that." It's a very expensive piece. Probably over \$2,000 cost. I looked at her, because I cried and I talked to her. I said "Then you have to find somebody." I said, "What you mean? I am a..." She said, "You are a very important person."

Yes you are. Absolutely.

She talked to me, and another fellow was with her. And I said, "No, I don't think I am good for anything." That's the way I thought. She said "You are important, that's why I give it to you." See I kept it – not...

Did you take it?

Yes.

And it helps you?

Yes.

Wonderful.

It's very nice.

You deserved it. She was right that you deserved it.

She said, "You deserve it." And he special made it, so she should find a nice person. That didn't work with me. When they say I'm nice. I don't think I deserve anything. I always feel like when somebody want to give something, I have to pay for it, or I have to do something for it. I couldn't accept something because I feel like I don't deserve it.

Someone else thought you did, and they were right and you have to listen to them.

I just have to work at holding myself. I just, I deserve something too.

You sure do.

Is coming for me something too.

Yes.

And I couldn't.

You have to believe that.

I have -- and somebody said, "Oh you look today nice." And takes me a while to say, "Thank you."

"Thank you." That's all you need to say.

Yes.

It's hard to learn sometimes.

It's very hard for me. Or that is very wrong. And I think, when I would have good eye, good eyes, I, I would go to a school to have a good education. That would do it.

Maybe with the computer that could help.

A lot. Oh, it's a lot of trouble.

That would be wonderful.

You know, when you are old -- when I go to the doctor, back and forth a lot, and he always keep telling me, "Just try to imagine, you stay on one foot 55 years, it probably going to be

worn out very bad. You know, you use that one eye for 55 years, or more already I guess, and, it's worn out. You are a lucky girl you can see brightness, and see something. You are not completely blind." That's what he said. "You're a very lucky girl."

So you have to count your blessings.

So then I couldn't complain anymore to him! See, I'm lucky, because some people are completely blind from that kind of surgery. So, I'm – or I hope to God I'll never get completely.

I hope so.

But all the vision is lost. I hope not -- never going be...

Malvina, when did you become an American Citizen?

After 5 years I came, because that's the way -- after 5 years.

So would you say, what, 1953?

It was --

After 5 years?

Yeah, after 5 years. Was a story – I don't know who I was I was talking to, what became citizens. It's very hard. You know they give you to study. And I studied, and my husband, and about the senators. And I used to tell neighbors what I have to know. I have to go to be a citizen. And I kept telling them what I have to know, and they looked at me like crazy. They said to me, "You know, we are born here in United States and we don't know that."

Was that a significant event for you, becoming a citizen?

Yeah, I wanna be, because, you know, you almost like have to, you never know what comes up in life. Or, I am happy this way. I know I am a citizen. Like I -- people couldn't tell me "Get out from here." You know. I'm happy I could make it, because was very hard. Was very hard to know it. Memorize! You couldn't read it, you had to memorize. You had to talk.

What other jobs have you had over the years after your first job? Did you stick with that job or did you have others?

I stuck with that job and then I couldn't remember where I was in a jewelry store – doing when my husband was already in a nursing home. And I was, and I don't remember what the name was of it, and where that was. I couldn't remember.

So was that the only other place you worked after that?

Yes, uh-huh. After that, that's all I worked. Because then my husband got sick, I had my hands full.

What, what kind of hobbies and recreational things have you come to enjoy?

I used to enjoy to crochet, and I did a lot of crocheting and knitting. I made so many afghans. I made so many boleros with sequins and shells. And I saw...

And what did you do with them?

You're not going to believe it. None of them I kept. I gave a shell, a beautiful shell, a gold, with gold sequins on it, beautiful. I took it to, I don't know what was it, Hadassah, some organization -- I belong to Mizrahi, everywhere I belong. And I took it there to raffle it up. So we raffled it up. In place I should wear it -- was beautiful keep it for myself. We kept raffling up, and made, I don't know, \$300 for the first time, and I said, "We gonna raffle it," and somebody said "no, I don't take it, lets raffle it one more time." And made, I don't know how many more -- how much hundreds of dollars.

From that one?

Yes.

Really?

Yes.

It must have been beautiful.

Beautiful, oh, is that a job! A tedious job! Work. Because with sequins to -- it's very tedious work.

Did you sell tickets to it, or did you auction it?

No, we did like a ticket -- I don't know, somebody just...

So how much did it go for?

I don't know how much -- the first time was \$300 and what, they done it twice, and I don't remember what...

So you made another one.

No, the same one.

Oh, the same one.

The same one. And quite a few hundred dollars they made.

Wow -- really?

I don't remember how much. And I was so happy! I said, and I donated, I didn't take that money. That was a donation. And, because I belong to Mizrahi, I belong to B'nai Brith, I

belong to, what, I don't even remember what all, Sisterhoods, I don't even know where I belong. When you would see my box – I told my son he should take it to his house -- whole box full with pins, for be mother in Israel, and sister, and who knows what, and just -- my whole world is that. To help, and at the same time, they says "help yourself first," because nobody works, and my husband didn't work for many years. Or I tried to. Tried to. I do the best I can. Believe me, I do the best that I can. And, I hope to God, I could see a little happiness from the kids. One grandson is married, and I have two still in college. One going to finish I think this year, this is Stevie's son. Do you know Marie Rosner by any chance? Oh, this is my *machetaynesta* [Yiddish – refers to the mother-in-law of one's son or daughter].

Yeah, I know –

Do you know? Oh, you know we were together there! You probably know more about the family than I! [laughing]

What, if any, postwar events had a great significance to you? Like the Cold War, the Civil Rights Movement, Vietnam, the 60s, assassinations, the state of Israel? Did any of these events that took place after the war have a great impact or significance to you?

Oh, very. What was, what was it, the wars, that two of them fought, what is that?

Vietnam?

No, lately, what they killed, and a lot of them came here to the United States to, I couldn't think of their names.

What, in Kosovo?

Yeah, Kosovo and the other one. What is the other one?

Bosnia and Kosovo?

Yes, what they -- oh, when I saw that, I felt like I am in concentration camp.

So it had a great impact on you.

[Gasp] **That done the damage to me. I cried and cried, and we were worse than they. See, because, they, at least had, they came with helicopters, bread, something. Bread, or something, when I saw that they have bread in their hand. They had what to eat. Least that they tried to give them something. Oh, that, that was a damage.**

It brought back memories?

Oh, that was so bad! My son kept telling me, "Mother, don't watch it, please." I cried. I just kept crying. I said...

You knew what they were...

And I went through much worse than that. And people -- you know, when I used to talk about the concentration camp then they always said "Don't talk about it, it's a past! It's the past!" So I asked the doctor, I said, "Why people don't want to listen to it? They should learn how good they have it here. They say 'it's the past.'" He said, "No, they should listen because it's wonderful, they could appreciate life in the United States, how much they have. Look at how much they have. People don't even know what hunger is. People don't know when they don't have where to live. So, why, why couldn't?" And some of them said "It never existed." And I was talking to people like that, "it's not true." Are not Jewish people. That was not Jewish people. They said, "This never was. Why do you keep writing always?" I was sitting in the doctor's office one day. I was sitting there, and a man is sitting there talking to other people, I don't know if he know them or not: why in the world they don't stop writing in the news, always from the concentration camps, and this happened, so happened, survivors. They should forget about this, never happened anyway. And I sat there, I thought I'd die. And I looked at that guy, I said to me, what should I say? I said to myself, and I was afraid almost. I said to him, "I - mister" -- whoever he is -- I said, "You know, I am survivor, and how can you say this never happened. How you know? You weren't in it. I was in it. You don't think we have plenty proof? Of it we have so much proof, just go to museums. We have a lot of proof." And he tried to say, "No, never happened, people should not always put in the paper, who in the world want to read that in the newspaper, and that's all we always have in the papers." So, here you are.

Some people you'll never convince, huh?

No. You never convince. And I tell you one thing, one thing what is missing now. Walter was my husband. He went to schools, poor guy, with the wheelchair, with the vans to teach the kids about the Holocaust. And he want, they want me to speak about the Holocaust too, I couldn't make it. That's the way I couldn't be interviewed, see? I just couldn't make it, I don't feel strong enough for... My husband, I went with him.

Maybe you will. Maybe you'll be able to.

I went with my husband a lot. When he -- when he was almost dying with the cancer. The end was, he didn't die from his illness. Cancer he got. Then he said to the doctor, the doctor always smiled, he liked him, Doctor Cohen. He always talked to him about the kids. He said to Doctor Cohen, "Doctor Cohen, I could not die, I don't have time to die, because I have to teach my children, the school, I didn't finished."

Remarkable.

Was not, I tell you, I could -- There's so much story to tell about him. Wonderful. He worried about me. He's there, in pain, he worried about me. Don't drive, don't come in sleet. Don't come, it's raining. It's the oil going [unclear] the car. And you go and check the car. He was too good to me. Too protective, and that's why I suffered too. I wish he wouldn't be so protective. And when, suddenly it became colder --

Because he cared about you, he cared about you.

Or he always -- nobody had such a good wife than he has. And I think I was good to him.

I'm sure you were. He was lucky, and you were lucky.

I don't feel guilty, because a lot of people thought I should divorce, and make my life. Or, I know he would not take it, and I couldn't take it either. I couldn't do it to him. No way. I could not do it to him. He was too good. And I have peace, and when I go to bed, I don't go with that "oh, I wasn't a good wife."

No regrets.

No, I feel like I done all what I could do. Really, I done. I picked him up every weekend from the nursing home, what they all said I'm crazy. I killed myself. The ladies, the nursing home. "How can you do that?" I had a neighbor who helped me to take over wheelchair, and put it -- next door to me. Otherwise I couldn't do it alone. Or, he stay. I brought him home Friday, and he stayed through *Shabbos*, and I brought him back Monday.

Well you did what was right.

I think so.

And you have no regrets.

I didn't have a life. I lived life -- be married and not to have a husband. Or at the same time at least I helped him, and he was happy, and I know I would kill him when I would divorce him. See? He said to me, "You feel sorry for me, I have to live a life like that." And sometimes people told him "You should let go of your wife." And he said, "I'd rather kill myself when she leaves me." See, I would never leave him. Never. I could never do that to him! I wouldn't be happy to be married and I know he's alive. Even I -- see how he's a wonderful mind? He has such a mind, what I don't think anybody had a mind like he had. She could talk a lot about it, that Zeldin -- what is her name?

I remember him too.

You remember -- you ever been in the nursing home to talk to him?

I think so. I think my husband was.

You don't want to tell me certain secrets. Maybe you have more secrets.

No, I don't. We'll talk about it afterwards, but let's finish our interview, okay?

You know, and I am very, very happy, or I just would be very happy when I would have my son back.

I'd like to talk about your children now if it's ok. When were they born?

One is 1949 -- '49 -- I think -- '49. And Stevie, I think, the youngest one, '51 or

What...?

So...

I am not sure exactly.

What was your older son's name? Simon?

Simon.

Simon and Steve. In '49 and '51.

I think so, '51. I think so. Can you imagine? If I could not remember that.

In light of what happened to you, how did having children affect you?

I wanted children. Oh, I wanted, because I come from a big family, I wanted children. I would like to have more children than that.

What were your...

My husband...

What were your emotions when you had children?

I was very happy to have -- I loved children. And I wish I had more. I wish I had more. And when my son would come home to me, or at least just to call me, I would be the happiest person. Very happy. I miss him so much, and I couldn't talk about it because, my son, Steve, he gets very upset, because he said I, I cry over something what maybe never happens, and I, just ruin my life. And I -- I have -- he's a very good kid, and that makes me to keep going. And I hope -- I hope he going to be lucky and happy. Both of my children, I have said that I live through all of my life with problems, and I hope to God they're going to be happy in life. At least they don't have to suffer.

That's what we all hope for, huh?

Because I told them already, "I suffered plenty for you. I went through a lot, so should be covered. They should be free. And I hope they will be. And I still -- I'll see him, Simon, dressed up, and be an [unclear], or why he done that, I don't know. I tried. I don't know why he done that.

Did you name your children after some family members who...

Yes.

...perished?

Simon, the Yiddish *numen* [Yiddish -- means "name] tried to have after my father, I [unclear]. And Stevie is from Walter, the grandfather's name. The Yiddish name.

Did you talk about your war experiences with your children?

Work?

About you war experiences with your children? Did you talk about it with them?

I done, I think, a mistake, I didn't do...

You did not?

...talk too much the beginning. You know, the beginning I think I don't talk too much about it, because I want to protect them. I was afraid. I was so hurt, and I said, I don't want to even have them to know what goes on.

How old were they when they first found out about...?

School, in grade school.

Grade school? Young?

Grade school. See, what happened to me, see Walter used to write to Germany and took care of things, with certain things about my eyes, you know, and because of the pension. And, here Walter made applications, certain things for Germany, and was all things written, came back something written, what all is going on: I don't see in one eye, and what all happened and what all I go through, and because of the pension. And I think my younger son -- or both of them, I don't know -- they find a letter I think on the table if I remember.

Did they ask you about it?

And they read it -- read the letter. And then they ask. I don't think I ever told them. And they ask, and then we tried to talk about it.

And what were their reactions?

That what I went through, they couldn't believe it.

Really?

They couldn't believe, no. Or they just -- I don't think they still can believe it so much. Maybe they say it what, I told them you see that war, what was going on right now. I said you can imagine what I went through. Or I think... I think they realize what I went through.

Do you think you raised your children differently because of your experience?

I don't know. You know I have very, very guilt. [crying] Because, when I was very sick, and through Germany, my husband, he should be in peace, he made arrangements. He made arrangement they should pay my hospitals, and they paid my hospitals. And I ended

up in Menninger's. I'm sure you heard about. I was there, I don't know. I don't remember how long. I was there because that was a famous place, and from the doctors here, they recommend I should go there, and that's gonna help me probably between the people. And did I guess, because they are from all over the world, people. So anyway, the children, they were -- Simon was I don't know, maybe he was that time when I went, 15. I don't know how old, I couldn't remember. And Stevie was before the *bar mitzvah* -- still not having the *bar mitzvah*. And I think I came from Menninger's home to have a *bar mitzvah* in the synagogue. And I have a feeling maybe the kid, I don't know Steve, I don't know, because I think, I don't think he holds it against me. I left him, in case, in that young age, they think mother don't want to take care of me. And the father took care of them. See, and I think he tried to make them responsible in the house and everything. And I have a feeling maybe I think about a lot of things. Maybe that hit my son, the oldest one, too a lot. Because the father made him to be aware of it, mother isn't home, not home, and you have responsibilities with your brother, because I am working. They went to school, they should come home and put away stuff or do things. So I feel like maybe they -- I don't know the younger one, I don't think the younger one holds it against me. Or the older one maybe. I don't know. I don't know what to think. I tried to figure out where I failed. Because I like -- love both my sons. When I have one piece of bread, I'd rather give it to him. [crying] To my kids I would give it.

What's that?

I love them so much, when I would have one piece of bread..

Oh -- okay.

...and I know I don't have what to eat, I would give it to them before I would eat it. So, I don't know. Or somebody would tell me, God forbid, I could help my son, something, is take out from my system something to help them, I wouldn't care when I wouldn't even survive, just help them. Just help them. I love them. And I don't know, I think, that was the mistake. [crying] When I, when they think maybe I left them because I don't care for them, or I love them. I could not handle, no, no way I can handle. I was so depressed. I just don't want to live. And took a long time 'til I -- I got in place.

Are you okay? Do you want to stop a little bit?

Maybe.

Okay.

[Tape stops. Interview resumes.]

I don't want to cry. Really, truly. I hate it when I cry.

It's okay, you just do what you feel like. Have you ever returned to your home?

No.

Okay. Why not?

I was afraid because I know the Russians are there. I find out the Russians are there, and no, I know I done it good, because my sister went back, and she was almost captured and put in the jail.

So you just never really wanted to go ...

No, I never wanted -- because I know nobody's home. And the home is taken over.

So, since the war, you have never wanted ...

Never.

...never wanted to go back.

No, I have never wanted. I would be scared.

Are there sounds or smells that evoked past experiences...

If you see something or smell something that makes you think of something?

Yes! Yes! You know, when I go by through that oil finery or whatever, in the smoke, in the big chimney, I always use to tell my husband, we went to Wichita, we went on the highway, I said, "That sure reminds of the crematorium." Yes...

[Tape cuts off. Interview resumes.]

You were telling me about the sights and sounds that evoked memories. Can you -- you said the sirens?

Oh, when the sirens blows, I feel like always, because that's all when the bombs falling. That's all we have to hear at night, the sirens was blowing so bad.

So what ...?

It goes through my body. I get like hit in my head right away. Sirens. I always think, or, we had them day or night in the concentration camps. Day or night they blow when the sirens comes.

So what other images haunt you?

A lot of things what it bothers me, reminds me of things. It just -- like with television, when I see, with wars, this affects me a lot. I could not take it.

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

A lot of people, you know a lot of people tell me, how crazy I am. Always I heard that word. "How can you believe in something? You went through so much hell, and here you are. And then, on top of it, with your husband, you still can be religious? Light your

candles, and used to go *Shabbos* even, drive anything, how can you do that?" And so many people, even now, they tell me I'm crazy. I mean it.

Did you ever stop believing in God?

No. See, when I would do that, then I would have nothing to live for. You see, I just feel like, I said that already to the rabbis, I probably deserved it, what happened. I don't know why, or I said, maybe deserve it or something. I don't know. But I just -- I feel like I am stronger believing in God now than I guess I ever did because I hold on to something. When I would have nothing to hold on, then I would not able to ...

So your faith helped ...

Yes!

... get you through?

That's all what gets you through, and I couldn't. And I'm very surprised, because that one sister in Florida, she's the opposite. She said "When God could see that, what happened ..." She not living kosher. She don't ...

So you raised your children religiously?

I tried the best, even they don't go kosher. Or I think I see my younger son was a very good -- he went for *kaddish* how much off days he had and every Sunday, and he finished that. And he still goes to synagogue whenever he is off from work, or Sundays, and I'm very proud of him.

Which synagogue do you belong to?

Beth Shalom. Beth Shalom. And he does a great job and I'm very proud of him. I hope, I hope they carry something. I told Barbara, my daughter-in-law, I wish she belongs to the Mizrahi at least, because I am there since I'm in United States. I was a very good supporter of it. I like it very well because it helps children in Israel. So, that's why I. Or I don't think she will because she says she don't have time.

Is there any particular Jewish holiday that is your favorite now that you're here?

I don't know, I just, it was, like I said again, all of them are favorite, or when it comes I get very depressed, because I know I would like to have a big dinner and do what I used to do, invite people.

So what traditions from before the war have you shared with your family here? I mean, was it the dinners?

With the family? What do you mean? Which family?

What traditions that you had before the war have you brought to your family? Did you bring ...?

I used, I used to have, they remember very well, at Passover I had other dishes, other dishes, and I have everything very, very carefully taken care, to not to mix together the dishes or whatever. And the kids, when they went to school, they didn't eat in school, and they took their *matzos*, and they asked questions there, and they were not embarrassed. What was very nice, the teachers and everybody ask them why they have that *matzo*, you know, sandwich, whatever he took along, they took along. They were not embarrassed about it. And I tried to tell them about the holidays, and I think they enjoyed it. I think so. Because if they wouldn't enjoy it my son wouldn't bring home so many students, you know. They were happy they were invited. You know, they are from -- I don't know from how far they come, or they were far away from home. And I was very -- I am very happy when even I think of it. And I told my son, that time, I said, "Least tell them to go to some friends to sleep." They said to me "No, I don't want to go sleep no where, take off the mattress and one sleep on a mattress box. We want to stay with Simon and with you." Can you imagine? So I feel good.

You made them feel welcome.

Yes! I treated them very nice, because I know kids are away from home, they don't have the mother or father, it's nice to have a nice holiday.

Yes, yes it is.

You know, nice food kids like, and the matzo ball is so famous, for him this is more important that everything else. So I am very happy I could do that, but I couldn't do it anymore.

Do you think you look at life differently than if you hadn't had the experience you did? Do you think your outlook on life is different?

When I wouldn't go through what I went through you mean?

Yes, yes.

Maybe.

How so?

Maybe would be different, maybe I would be different. Right now, what I went through is just, I don't live it. It's not the same in my mind. I'm not the same person. I couldn't accept things whatever happened to me and know to cope it. I have a hard time to cope with it. Like I said -- how should I say -- handled things?

Uh huh.

When I have a pressure, I couldn't sleep anyways sometimes, or I couldn't sleep, I get very excited, I go and able to do something, and I go and do the right things, or how that works. Oh, even with the wedding when I went. Oh I going make it, I am painful, I going go on an airplane -- pressures me. A lot things is a very big pressure on me. And I try to handle it. Like I said, when I go away from home, I go home later, then I am a different person, and I

try to handle my, my job. I think so. Is different. It's, everything is different. It's so different, it's just, I wish people could accept people who know, whatever they went through, you're not the same person anymore. And you couldn't.

So it does make you think differently?

Oh, sure. You couldn't be. Because you went through a lot of suffering, and that makes you just a different person. I am not the same than I was. I am sure I am not. And nobody, I don't think anybody can be the same. You think so?

No, I don't. I think your experiences have a lot to do with it.

Everything, everything in my -- See, what bothers me, sometimes I like to remember of names or certain things, and I forget it. And there, from the concentration camp, I see everything so clear. Where I was. Where I was sleeping.

But do you actually -- does life mean something different to you than it would have do you think, if you hadn't had the experience?

Probably would make different -- would be different probably. I had a ...

Do you treasure life more, or do, I mean...

I treasure life more, I can, because I see... When I don't have a potato, like I have a hard time with shopping to go, see, and I came home from the wedding also. And I don't have fruit, or I'm not going to ask nobody right now, and I have something, I have a dry fruit, I have a can fruit, I said I going to leave it through. 'Til I have a potato, I said sometimes, or bread at home, and the dry fruit or whatever, I am not hungry. I can manage. I can live. I couldn't starve with that. So I am not taking it serious. I appreciate it. I said that's they way, I thank God I can have a bagel, I can toast a bagel, and I put a bit little margarine on it, and a little marmalade, and I'm ready set. I am not worried about it. I don't making sure about it.

What does being an American mean to you?

I don't know. What can I say about it? To what its means about "be American." What -- what makes a difference? I am happy...

Do you feel American?

I don't know because I don't know I am accepted by people like American. Because, remember, they used to call all the *grine*, the *grine*, the *grine* [Yiddish word: means "green" literally; used to refer to newly arrived immigrants]. And I feel like people don't accept us like they are. They are maybe think they are better than we are from Europe. Some other people think from Europe, people are rather from Mars. They come from Europe, they think that the people don't know what is a bath, or what is a room, or what is a house. They think we don't have idea what clothes is, or food. It's not so. People in Europe, we used to live just so good than here in the United States. They used to have very rich people and very poor people.

Have you experienced antisemitism here?

I think they – they is Nazi groups here. Is true?

Well, but have you experienced any antisemitism here?

I think so.

In what way?

I think so. I think so, sometimes, how people make remarks. I think so. I can tell when people don't like Jews somehow. When I talk to them. Is that right word for, answer for you, what you asking?

Well, I just want to know how you feel if you have experienced it.

Or I am afraid when -- bothers me very much -- when I know that Nazi group -- I saw it on the 20/20, the Nazi group are accomplishing so much. And when they say that they don't hurt people, they couldn't do nothing to them, I don't agree with it. They should not let, never let a group like that. That's no good. Because they -- it's not going to work out for good.

Well, do you think Americans take their freedom for granted?

I think so. I think so. They don't know how good they have it. I don't – I think so they do. Because they have too much, some of... Even poor people, when they work, lets say they are the average people or -- how shall I -- people what can afford a house, or a car, it's just like nothing to them. I mean, they don't, I don't think they appreciate things. They have too much -- television, they have to have a computer, they have to have everywhere. I think – I don't think American people appreciate things very much.

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

I think you should appreciate your country. Appreciate it. You are here in United States, and you hope, you hope to God never happens that. You should enjoy, and be good to each other, people, and help people. I think so would be very important. Because you, in United States don't know, I think what means be hungry, and cold, freezing to death, and forced slavery, work very hard. You cannot know. Or you work, or they kill you. So, I think they should appreciate how good they have it here. They should learn about what -- because you will never know, God forbid, anyplace can happen. We never thought that the whole Europe going be destroyed, you know, taking all the Jews. So we never know what happens. They should appreciate and pray to God really that it never happen any more. And I hope it never will be. Because I wish for everybody the best because it's a shame when people have to do things like that, killing, and forced labor, slavery - oh that work what I used to do day and night. I did tell you, it's not sitting in your dresses, it's sitting in your body. I feel every bone. I used to lay, I don't know what you call it, what you make, bunkers? No, bunks?

Yeah.

And I was on the lower one, on stones, with no sheets, no nothing to cover, not to lay on. And I said that time to my sisters, we were going be liberated, “Oh, we sure going be sick.”

So we have to appreciate the life we have and be on guard.

Oh you have – every day to appreciate and not to be bad to each other. Some people are ugly to each other.

Respect, do you think?

Respecting people. And, and they should be happy they have a such a free country, what they can make when they want to work, they can make a living, and they can live nice. Because everybody couldn't be rich. Some people are richer than the others. Or, they should appreciate and work, and try to not think of bad things. Killing, and stealing, and just try to concentrate on it, to be educated. Educated, able to make something from yourself. That's what I think.

Okay. Thank you very much Malvina.

You're very welcome.

This concludes the interview with Malvina Stras.