

Good afternoon. I am Joseph Preil, Director of the Holocaust Resource Center here at Kean College of New Jersey. This afternoon Wednesday, February 22nd, 1995. We are privileged to have with us Mrs. Nella Anguillara Bergen, who will tell us of her experiences during World War II, as a resident of Rome. Mrs. Anguillara, first of all, thank you for coming down. And in order to get started, can you tell me where and when you were born?

I was born in Rome, in 1921, March 21, 1921.

All right. What did your family consist of?

My father and my mother had six children. I was the last one.

All right, so you're the youngest of six children?

Yes.

Your parents were also born in Italy? In Italy?

Yes, yes.

In Rome?

Yes.

All right. How many generations back do you go?

Many, many. I mean, centuries, I guess.

Can you tell us about life in Rome before World War II?

Was a normal life. Everybody worked. I was going to school. And my brother, Franco, stopped to go.

When he was 15, my father took him out of school to put him in the store. But he was going to evening, to school. And I was making a regular school. I was good in school.

What did your father do for a living?

We had a store. It was selling fabric and making custom-made suits and ladies fashions.

Was the family comfortable?

It was all right, concerned, you know, six children is a lot. So nothing was missing. But it wasn't really rich.

Yeah.

Was just still working.

What was the Jewish life in Rome, at that time, like?

Ah, I think was a normal life, in the sense that my sister, because I was the last one, was a big difference of age between my brother, my sisters, and myself. So they were going to dances which happened, and with my mother.

And then they got engaged. And then they got married. And the way used to be in Italy, my father didn't let them go alone with the fiancée. So I was going with them. And my brother was going with them.

Yeah. That's all right. But can you tell us something about your Jewish upbringing? Did you get a Jewish education?

All right.

And what kind of observance was there?

Right. We were observing the Holy Days. When my brother was preparing for the bar mitzvah, I went to Talmud Torah with him. So I learned then. And then we were celebrated the holidays, and all family, together, going to synagogue.

When did you go to synagogue?

Friday nights, sometimes. Sometimes Saturdays, sometimes near holidays. Holidays, for sure.

Mhm? Was the business open on Shabbat?

Yes.

Yeah?

We weren't so Orthodox.

I see. All right. And all right. Your family was all saved during the war?

The [? strict ?] family, yes. Some cousin were taken. But my [? strict ?] family were all saved.

How many cousins? About how large was your own family? Your immediate family was six children and two parents. That's eight people.

And their husband and children.

Yeah. Oh, OK. Then they had more. All right. So as far as you're concerned, you were a girl at the time when World War II started. So your immediate family was 8 people, yourself and 7?

Yeah. Then my father and my mother died in 1941 and '42.

All right. But I'm talking about 1939.

Yeah.

Now, how many other members of the family were there, would you say? Including the husbands and wives of your siblings and through first cousins?

One cousin with one, a male cousin, with the wife and the children. Another cousin wasn't married. And because of the great difference of age, I was not cross so to the other cousins.

But you say some of them disappeared during the war?

Yeah, yeah.

About how many did you lose?

That I know of for sure, I know all three. I don't know more.

Oh. So in other words, your family, in terms of Holocaust, might have had certain difficulties and so on, which you will be telling us about. But in terms of perishing in the Holocaust, about three?

Yeah.

Three cousins?

That you know of.

That I know of in Italy, we were 30,000 Jew. About 1 per 1,000 Italian, Italian Christian.

Wait, you were 30,000 Jews in all of Italy?

In all of Italy, and they killed 10,000. So they killed 1/3,

1/3. But in your family, they didn't get 1/3?

No. Because also, because I was the youngest one, and maybe some uncle and auntie, they died already, of old age.

Yeah. And in your family, you were fortunate, as you told me a little while ago, that you all managed to hide out with Italians?

Yes.

Right. Now, what was life like, in terms of Jews living together with non-Jews in Italy? Before the war, during the war?

That is, for example, when was a student, I was exonerated from the religious teaching, all right? But some professor wanted me to sit-in the class, even though I shouldn't because they thought so it would penetrate something. In fact, I know a lot about the fact of of religion more than some students, that I could tell them what to say.

But at the same time, the professor said, that you go outside for this hour. And then everybody, all the professor was passing by. Are you in punishment? What did you do? You know, one word to say that you were Jewish is not so easy.

Yeah. So might have been a little bit uncomfortable at times.

Yeah.

But you manage fine. That is what it sounds like. When did you sense a change taking place?

After 1938.

What happened after 1938? When they started the racial laws. You couldn't go to school.

The racial laws?

Yes.

What were the racial laws? All the professional people were out of work. The store had to be closed.

You couldn't be listed in the telephone book. You couldn't have anybody to help you in the house. You had to go and register to the police station that you were a Jew.

The rights, the rights, as a citizen, have been abolished.

Yeah.

They could arrest you.

The rights as a citizen. And also, the ability to make a living.

Yes.

So it was economic also.

You couldn't even go in the hospital, get a doctor.

You could not?

Do anything.

That started in 1938. The war started in September of '39. Italy was on the side of Germany.

Yeah.

Did anything change in your status when the war started? In September '39, when Germany and Italy were together? I think that the German occupied all of Italy, in 1943.

That, in 1943, is when the Germans occupied all of Italy. But so as far as you were concerned, nothing changed?

This was a continuous daily hammering by radio, by newspaper, everything, everything, against the Jew.

Yeah. Did all the Italians take it seriously?

All the fascists, most of them did. Now, there is a-- I don't want to say peculiarity, but a certain way of thinking of Italian people, not to listen too much to the authorities. OK? Keep to their own mind.

Yeah. And that was helpful, very helpful.

Right. And there were enough of them to make life bearable, is that it?

Yeah, to help.

Yeah. So from 1939-43 is one period that you had to go through when the Italians were still, shall we say, independent?

Yeah, partially.

To a certain extent. And the other phase of the war certainly, as far as Jews are concerned, is from '43 until the Germans were out of Italy. What month in '43 are we talking about?

Well, the American arrive in Milano April 25-- no, April 22 or 23. For 3 days, they stayed around Milano, so to leave the fascists and the partisans to kill each other. And then they came in. And then we were liberated April 25, of 1943.

You were liberated?

By the American, April 25, in 1943.

In 1943?

No, I'm sorry. '45, I'm sorry.

All right, in April '45?

Yes.

April 25 in 1945.

In Milan?

Yeah.

When was was Rome liberated?

1944, in June, 1944.

All right. And when did the Germans come in, in '43?

When?

Yeah. I think it was September?

September 8, the king called Mussolini. And relieved of his position as the prime minister and had him arrested. And they was put on top of a mountain, Gran Sasso, which is in Abruzzo. But the German went with an helicopter and free him and put him as the head of the New Republic, the Fascist Republic.

So in September '43, the Germans are in charge.

Yeah.

To the extent that they could be in charge?

They didn't have to answer. They were all the authority

They were all. All right. You were in Rome, at the time?

Yes.

Did your life change after September '43, when the Germans came in?

Yes, after a while, I left the apartment where I was. No, wait a moment. After the armistice, the Germans, they took it all away from the Italian soldier.

Then they were making radial in the cities all over. They were circling this part of the city and taking all the men. And they were saying--

Which men?

All the Italian men. Italian, but especially Jewish, if they knew that you were Jewish. But otherwise, all young men had to go to Germany, to work. They said to work.

But then, when they took the Jew, They told it was to working. But it was to kill them.

That was as far as the people that they took away from Italy to Germany?

Yeah.

To Germany. Or even to the murder camps, like Auschwitz?

Yes, sure.

But you remained in Italy?

Yes. Did the conditions of your existence change at this time?

Yeah. It was very difficult to find food. We had the black market. If you could reach it, if you could find things. People could not congregate together, more than two, three people.

They were stopped by the police. Even in the food market, you couldn't stop and talk with anybody. The radio was always saying that we were winning the war.

But one thing did upset me is this one. I was a young girl. I couldn't go to school if I didn't belong to the Italian Fascist girls group. And when you traveled to Italy, in every house near the station was written phrases of Mussolini. And Mussolini said it's better to live 1 day as a lion than 100 as a sheep.

Now, Mussolini was taken by the Partisan, dressed in a German uniform, in a German car, with all the gold that had been taken. So that's the big leaders, that the young people believe in too.

Mhm. You lived in the same apartment after September, 1943, that you lived in before September '43? In other words, during the first four years of the war?

I moved into my sister house. I moved to my sister's house. Then I went into the thing that I was there.

All right. Let's get it. During the first four years of the war, you lived in your own apartment. The family lived together?

No, my brother and I.

Your brother and you?

The other one married.

The others were married?

Married, yeah.

Oh. What happened to your parents?

My mother died in 1941. She had a stroke. I finish the school in June of 1939. And my mother got the stroke in September, '39. She live one year, live. And then she died. And my father was six, seven, eight months and then he died.

What did he die from?

Atherosclerosis, the heart.

Mhm. So you being the youngest one, were you the only one not married in the family?

Yeah, me and my brother Franco.

You and your brother, Franco. So after your parents died, and it's 1942, now?

Yes.

Where did you go?

We stayed for a while in that apartment. And then we went away. And we went to my sister. And then, when the German ask for the gold, and I understood it was time to move. And I went into the family who hide me.

OK. Now, that means that as long as Italy was fighting in the war together with Germany, you were able to live in your apartment or your sister's apartment?

Almost normal.

What? Almost?

Almost normal. But not really. Because it was the rationing of the food. You had a curfew. You couldn't do this. You couldn't do that. And you couldn't find the shoes. You couldn't buy clothes. You couldn't do any--

Did everybody have the curfew and the rationing?

Yes.

All Italians.

All Italians, yeah.

So you didn't suffer because you were a Jew?

Of course, if you couldn't work, if you couldn't do anything, you couldn't go no place. Always afraid that a policeman can arrest you. When I came to America, and I was told that you teach the children to trust, in case they get lost, to trust the policemen, for me, it was very hard to understand. Because I was thinking back, when a policemen could arrest you and send you away.

Uh-huh? So there was a fear that had?

Sure.

But it was also, in your case, you were able to live?

Yeah.

You weren't really free. You had concerns about your safety.

Yeah.

But it wasn't like somebody was coming in middle of the night, knocking on the door, and taking you away to a camp?

No, that happened later on.

What's that?

It happened later on, to other people, not to me.

So later on to when the Germans came?

Yeah.

So that's what I'm trying to do. I'm trying to get that division.

Yeah.

That there was a difference between the four years of the war under the Italians, as compared with the year and a half under the Germans?

Mhm.

All right. Can you describe what happened different when the Germans came in? That was in September, '43.

[SIGHS] I said I was ready for a streetcar, going someplace, at 12 o'clock. Then I saw tanks coming in from the [ITALIAN], which is the big road where all the Roman, the emperor used to come when they were victorious. So I saw this tank coming in.

It was just right after the armistice. I thought they were Americans. And instead, they were Germans. Now, because in school we were already taught that the Empire, Austro-Hungarian, had mistreated Italian. They're taking part of Italy, France, and Greece, and so on. I thought that for sure, the Italian will send them away. But instead, they have infiltrated from a long time before.

In two, three hours, they had all Rome in their hands. Somebody some military assistance, but they took the arms off from the Italian soldiers. And it was a moment--

They took what from the Italians?

The arms.

The arms.

For the Italian soldier.

Yeah.

Then was a moment, a period of chaos, I suppose. Because the officer, they saw the German were taking their arms.

They wouldn't have any know what to do. So at that time, some of the Italian soldier, when they tried to reach their homes, when my brother had yet the store open and was giving them clothes for free, of course, to get dressed, so that they could go their home.

To the Italian soldiers?

Yeah.

Yeah. Now, did your living conditions change after the Germans came in? Yours or other Jews?

Yeah. So when it came the order from Germany, to the chief of police, of Germany, Rome, came the order that all the Jew, regardless of age, sex, condition, whatever condition, they had to be taken, send to Germany, and be liquidated. But to the able to do this they stress that it should be as a surprise.

So the Germans were told to act nicely and don't make any problems and so on. So the Italian wouldn't get suspicious.

And that's what's happened. The first that they went there, I don't know, the 12 or 13 October, 1943, they went where the synagogue was. went all around the synagogue.

And because of the administrative office of the community, the Jewish community, was in the same building of the synagogue. So they went upstairs. And there was a library with important papers that there were there from centuries, important. And many books. And then, 2 million lira.

They say to the secretary what's there, we see the way what you had. We want to come back tomorrow to get it. And if something is missing, we kill you.

So poor woman, she spoke with the director of. And he said, don't give the key to nobody. Not even to me. Just don't touch anything. And the next day, they had-- I don't know how you call it. The things that the streetcar goes on.

The tracks.

The tracks around. And they had the trucks. And they took everything out. So some manuscripts and some things, were very valuable. But you know, the German thought that they will liquidate all the Jews. And they will have this as a lot of civilization papers, that it would be very valuable to them.

Yeah. So what happened to the Jews, themselves?

In the October 16, they went to the ghetto. And they put armored soldiers on every door so nobody can come out. it was 5:30 in the morning.

Where was this?

In Rome.

Yeah, was this in homes or in the synagogue?

In the homes.

Oh, they imprisoned them in their homes?

Yes. They went. They put the soldier down the door, downstairs, the big door. And then they went inside with the arms, to knock-- "knock," with a foot, open the door.

And then they said they show a car. They write in Italian and in German. In 20 minutes, you got to go outside. Bring your money. Bring some food.

20 minutes, what can you do? You didn't expect it, so on. First thing that they did, they cutted all the telephone wires so nobody could tell anybody else.

Yeah.

And they put them downstairs. It was raining and it was cold. Some of them were in nightgown or pajamas.

And they put them in trucks. And the trucks went to a [ITALIAN] station, another train station. They have trains over there. They, from the trucks, they put in the trains. And they lock the train from the outside.

What kind of a train was it? Was it a passenger train or a freight train?

A freight train.

For what kind of freight?

I don't know.

I know that--

It sounds like in Poland, and in France, they had cattle cars.

Yeah, there were many cars. Yes. And then they didn't let them go out.

You really don't know what happened, from that minute on?

No. I read about. But I don't know, personally.

Yeah. Now, what was the Jewish population of Rome, at the time? Do you know?

No, as I say, there was only one Jew for every 1,000 Italian. I don't know exactly.

OK. Did you know many people who were taken away, at this time?

Some.

Some. In your family, nobody was taken?

Not immediate family, no.

In your brothers and sisters?

Immediate family, no. And then, did that change your minds, as to what you should do, to be safe?

Yeah. I find out later, for example, that a friend of mine when the German knock on her door, she threw herself out of the window.

A safe?

She threw--

Herself?

Herself, out of the window. And she landed on a terrace underneath.

Did she live? Because she was for eight or nine months, with her, first.

OK.

Now, what happened to you and your brother Franco and your sister, where you were living? So my brother, Franco, went to hiding in Latina, a small town near Rome. With a friend, Filippo.

They lived in a hut that was where the tools for a cave, of a quarry cave were kept. They slept and they lived in there.

And because it was very difficult to find food and so on, when it was possible, [SIGHS] was possible when the store was already closed. But I had a very good friend that had worked with us. So she was going in the store, take a few, two or three raincoats.

And then goes again, and come. And I was so I would say stupid, naive, waiting for her in same street, in another place. Then I would take the raincoat.

I would bring in another section in Rome, to a tobacco store. And they would give me cigarette. And I would send the cigarette to brother Franco. And he will give it to the farmers. And the farmer will give him bread.

Did you have enough to eat? When I was hiding in this lawyer family, they were very good. They made me feel welcome.

They were hiding their own two sons. And one was 18. And one was 20. And I would never forget, that it was so hard to find food. Even on the black market.

But one day, they had a small piece of bread like this, extra. And they divide it in three part. One for the son, one for the son, and one for me. So that's, the son did.

So you did have enough to eat?

Well, you were already a little bit hungry. But you had the bread, it was this color of this table. Was brown. It was bitter. And they gave a quarter of a pound of butter a month. A very small quantity of oil. it was terrible. I mean, it was very difficult.

But in Poland, they went around with hunger pangs all the time.

Yeah.

They starved to death, really.

Yeah, I know.

That wasn't the case in Rome?

Maybe for somebody. Not for me.

Right. So you were quite fortunate, really?

I was fortunate. God bless this family. Now, this lawyer and his wife died. And their son, one is Giorgio, got married.

He has two-- he had three son. One died. He has two sons. And another one is Alfredo.

And he is also married with children. And when I went to Rome, I wanted to visit them. And they are wonderful.

This man who saved you was a lawyer?

Yeah. And he and his wife agreed that they're going to do this?

Yeah.

Did you ever understand, how did it come about that they this did? Did your sister know them beforehand?

I think that my brother-in-law, they asked them to take his wife. But then, with the children, all was difficult. So they took me in.

When I was to Rome, this summer, I went to go visit Giorgio and his wife. And I said, I think if I recall, that your father save also the Fascist. When the war ended.

His father was what?

He save not only the Jew. When the war ended, he save the Fascist. When the people wanted to kill the Fascists there, they made.

Really?

He said, but of course. He meant that they helped anybody in trouble. Without making you, yes, you, no.

Do you understand him? The father, the lawyer?

I was surprised. But I think I understand.

Does this say something about what kind of a person he was?

He was very moral, very ethical. He was shocked. One day, he came to lunch. And he was very shocked, very upset. And I said, what's the matter?

He said, I was talking with another lawyer. And I said how you doing? You know, because of the food scarcity and so on. And this other lawyer said, "Oh, I find a way." "Yes? So what you do?" "Oh," he said, "I denounce one Jew and month. 5,000 liras.

5,000 liras. At that time it was a lot of money, but still.

What kind of money are we talking about? How would it be in today's?

Maybe \$5,000, I don't know.

It would be like \$5,000 over here?

I suppose.

That's a lot of money.

And then, when--

And you have the impression that many people did that? [SIGHS]

They did, for me and my brother, they did in Rome, the time that I told you about the Partisan, they did-- oh, I didn't tell you this. Before we close the store, we have lots of merchandise.

So we had a basement. So we put lot of merchandise in the basement. And we were so naive. And we put in the suitcase, everybody of the family, silverware. Put in the suitcase. They put in the basement.

Then made a wall, had a wall made, and so on. And somebody spied. And they said, why don't you look at the floor? I don't know how you call it. And so they did take everything out.

And then, when we were in Milano, somebody else also spied on us. But because there was a few days before the American arrived, they didn't do anything. But I mean, good people and bad people in every nation, in every place, I guess they are.

But you seem to have had quite a few in Italy, of the good people.

Yes, thank God.

Because a lot of the Italian Jews were saved?

Mhm.

And your whole family, that's remarkable.

Yeah. Ah, but--

You're thinking of another story that took place?

If you don't mind. When we were in Milano, first of all, we went to-- well, I want to say this, yes. [SIGHS] The lawyer told us the name and the address of the family he knew.

Then my brother-in-law was a salesman. He was a representative of manufacturer. So he gave us the address of the manufacturer. So when Franco and I arrive in Milano, we went to this family.

And their apartment had been bombed. So part was still standing. And they rented us that part because they had gone in the country. And then we went into this manufacturer.

We asked if it was possible to go to Switzerland. And they said don't. Because recently, the guys did take the money and left the people in the mountain. So my brother started to work as a salesman of soap and toothbrushes and toothpaste. And I was making the deliveries. And it was very difficult. Because sometimes when you are in the street, the bombs were coming down.

Then, at that time, they were not used to see a young woman going around. And somebody made bad jokes and things. You know. Anyway,

You said, a little while ago, something about did Franco, your brother, have a store during the war?

That was our father's store. But then he had to close it when we had to close it.

When did he have to close in?

I don't want to make mistake. Probably between 1943.

1943? Before the Germans came. Before September. Or after September? That would be a difference of months. I don't recall. My father died April 5, 1942.

Mhm?

So between '42 and '43.

Right. Now, when did you go from Rome to Italy-- to Naples? To Milan?

To Milano.

From Rome to Milan? Milano is Milan?

Milano, Yeah. All right. When did that take place? From what I read, the American came to Rome. Wait a moment. Yeah. The American came in Sicily, in 1943.

Yes.

They went into Rome, in 1944.

Yeah.

When in '44?

1944.

What month?

June.

June. We were waiting for the American to come. We waited seven months or so. Because they were held on Cassino Mountain. Because there, the German were very strong in there. They couldn't pass through.

When it happened that we spoke before, about my brother and I were stopped by a Partisan. And my sister had been seen by a classmate, that she had the rationing cards with another name. Then we decided to go too, away from home. We thought about Forenza.

Why did you decide to go away from Rome?

Because somebody had spied on us.

Yes? Or because they saw that if she had another name, it means that she was Jew, right? So we thought to go away from Rome.

Yeah.

So we thought about Florence. But Florence, they were, the Partisan and the German were fighting. So we didn't know where you go. You find a German, you find a Fascist, who you'll find. So we decided to Milano.

Meanwhile, Mussolini, New Republic, the Fascist Republic, had the central party in [ITALIAN], which is near Milano, near Lake Como. So when Franco and I arrive in Milano, well, first of all, my brother-in-law, his wife and the two children, and Franco and I, we made an agreement that when we arrived in Milano, we would walk on the gallery, it's called, near the Duomo. See each other, but not talk to each other, just to know that we are all right.

This, we did. Then we rented an apartment, as I said, that was partially bombed out. And so my sister and her husband and the children did that too.

Your brother and you worked the whole time after the store was closed?

No, he was hiding. And I went hiding.

Right. So who supported you? Who provided you with food? You were hiding with a family. So the lawyer gave you food?

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

And your brother was where?

Was in the country, hiding.

With whom?

Latina, near Rome, I told you.

Yeah, with whom was he? With Filippo, a friend of his.

And they provided him with food?

I don't really know. Because maybe my brother had some money with him. You see, I want to explain you something.

I was a young girl. When I was going to school, my father didn't let me go in no place with nobody. I had no friends. Just the one girlfriend, I could go to her home to study. Didn't let me go with nobody.

When my mother died and Sunday morning, I was going to the cemetery, he resented that, didn't want to let me do that either. He didn't want to. I had to say all the way, home with him. So between the school and between being all the way in, I was so naive that I suppose that a girl of 10 year, 12 year old now here knows more than what I know when I was 18, 19, and 20.

And we had no idea what's happened in Europe. Now, when I was, as I said, we couldn't hear the radios, word of mouth. When I went to the lawyer family, they had built an antenna, maybe like this, with the green. And if they find that you were listening to Radio Londra, London, you would be killed. But they encouraged, this lawyer.

And every night, almost every night, we heard the radio, Radio Londra, maybe it was a Radio America, I don't know, that was Fiorello LaGuardia. They were saying Italian, [SPEAKING ITALIAN], Italian, go ahead. And with courage.

And then they were saying many phrases that it didn't seem to have any meaning, but they were things done for the Partisans, to tell them what to do. Fascinating. So there were a number of really, you didn't have trouble finding good Italians to take care of you and your brother?

Free-thinking people, Yeah. That's one of the thing that I, when I am asked what should we tell to our children? What should we tell to our student, I say, first of all, you got to show them proof that the Holocaust happened, and what happened.

Show pictures. Show movies. Show books. Show testimony of survivors.

Then teach them to think, to be freethinker, not to take only what comes from the authority. To think of their own mind. And to have a sense of responsibility for themselves and from the others, and the ethical principle.

That's a beautiful statement. You were talking about the synagogue where the Germans brought many Jews in 1943.

Yeah.

Was that the Great Synagogue of Rome?

Yes.

That wasn't your synagogue, though?

No, I was going to a smaller one. But for example, in Yom Kippur, we would walk to the big one.

'Cause that's where everybody was.

Yeah.

All right. What did liberation mean to you? You were in Milan. Now, you say Rome was liberated in June, '44.

Yeah. Which I didn't see. I didn't know.

You weren't there. Milan was where? Was liberated when?

April 25, of 1945. And I saw--

What did liberation mean you? Did you celebrate?

No, I want to tell you this. Franco and I had to moved from one apartment into the other. Also a bombed-out apartment. When we were living there, we made friends with a family that was living underneath us.

And when the American arrive, we told these people that we were Jewish. And we made it barely in time to tell them. Because they were Socialists. They suffered a lot under the Fascist.

Because so many fascists from Rome had to go into North Italy, they thought that we were Fascists. They already had made plans. I don't know if it's to kill us or to do what, to arm us. We just made in time to tell them.

So when the Germen arrive, I remember one thing. That I saw a truck with four women in it. And then they cut all their hair.

Because these were the women that had gone with the German soldiers. Then we went to the Jewish Community and gave our false ID. And we said we're a Jew. Our name is so-and-so. And so also, they registered us.

And we stayed in Milano one or two more months. Then we came back to Rome.

Yeah.

Franco and I, I mean.

After April, '45, so you came back to Rome in June, '45?

Probably. Don't know exactly, the month.

What did you do then? There, they're taking every-- June, '45, the war is over already.

Yeah.

Yeah. So I say, I don't know if I was in Milano one more month or two more months. I don't know.

Yeah, all right. So when we came home, we found that they had taken everything from the store. Meanwhile, my brother, had given what do you call it? Permission to the lawyer, to do our own interest, whatever he thought would be there.

So he had rented to somebody. And there were three Jewish sisters and brothers, and so on. So they were selling things, doing things. And so they said that they wanted to be there and be part of it. I said to my brother, I can help you. I can. We don't need.

Well, one of them fell in love with my brother, so they got married. So we started to build up our business. Because my father was very honest, had a good credit. And the manufacturer said take what you need. When you can, you pay. So that's what we did. In the same time-- I'm sorry, I lost my--

Your brother took over the father's business.

Yes.

It sounds like he started it?

Yes.

And then you said at the same time, what happened to you?

In the morning, I was making food shopping and cooking. The afternoon, I was going to help him in the store.

All right, this is June '45. How long did that last? So you resumed your lives, in other words.

Yeah. You went back to your lives before the war. Is that it? Mm. [SIGHS] I was a young girl. And I was going to visit a Jewish family. They had lost their son, the young son.

And they, in memory of the son, they were having young Jewish people meet them once a month, once a week in their home. And I was going there.

So you met somebody? No, no, no. If I have ever been Catholic, I could have been just a nun. Because of the way I was kept, I didn't know anybody. I didn't see anybody, and so on.

Then, [SIGHS] I had a niece that was seven year, that is seven years younger than me. And she said, Aunt Nella, they're having a dance at such circle. And do you want to come?

And she said, these are the Jewish soldiers that were part of the British Army of Israel, British Army. And so I wanted to go. My brother, with the Italian, the way the woman is to stay home and no, no, no, no, no. I said but the mother of so-and-so is coming. So he let me go.

When I was there, I dance one dance with my husband. Then he said, would you like to have a cup of tea? And we went another room to have a tea. And he started to tell me about the concentration camp he had been.

So I was hooked. [LAUGHS] When I heard all he went through, then we told him to come. My family and everybody welcome him.

It didn't take long and you were married?

How long?

It didn't take long?

No. My father had called my brother. I was 17 at the time. He said, I leave you the store. But you have to promise you are going to take care of your sister.

So when I got engaged with my husband, my brother put up the store for us. And we were selling fabric for men suits, and having a tailor was making suits custom made. And that was where we started. Then we got married in March, 1946.

So you were about 25 at the time?

Mm. Of course, I have been hiding for a long time. Then, the Jewish boys saw my age. While I was hiding in Milano, they got married. They lived their life.

All right, this is 1946. What brought you to America?

OK. My husband family had been killed, all of them. He was the first son of the second marriage, of the father. So he had many brother and sister, brother and sister.

But they got, all, killed. And he thought that he had nobody. Then, one survivor told him that he see his brother trying to escape from a camp, but the German fire on him. So he thought that that was dead too.

What's happened was, one day, walking in Rome, he met the brother. So the brother had applied to come to America. They had two uncle and an aunt in America. So my husband wants to come to America.

I had a beautiful apartment, nice furniture. We had the store. We had a 3-year-old son and I was expecting my daughter. My husband wanted to come. And he said, you come with me, or I'll go alone.

Now, with a 3-year-old son, expecting the second, what do you do? So I left the family. I left the store. I left everything. And I came to America. I didn't know one word of English.

Where did you live, when you came to America?

Wait a moment. Before that. The bad thing was, that first we have to go to Fossoli, I think it's called. I mean South Italy. From there, we took the train. And they brought us to Germany, to Bremen. And then UNRRA came. You know, the American?

Yeah.

And it was terrible. With a small child, expecting, couldn't cook for him. I had a small, you know, the little something like that, I could cook a little pastina for him.

My husband had the bad idea to make my son eat some herrings. You know the Ashkenazi way. And he got sick with the stomach.

So he went out and rented a room in a German house. I didn't know any German. I didn't know that I was going to Germany. I didn't have a dictionary or anything.

In the afternoon he brought me there. He say tonight, come to the DP. He never came.

I saw on the dresser, the photograph of the landlord was an SS. Cannot tell you how I felt. Was night, all night, not sleeping. He never came. I guess that--

Your husband never came?

Yeah. He never came. Because, he met so many women, so many people speaking Yiddish, that was survivors and so on. He was talking. He was doing. Anyway.

Then we came to America with a military boat. In the morning, when I got up to go to eat, the smell of rotten eggs was so strong, that I was throwing up. I was five days without eating, until they put me in the hospital. My husband--

Which hospital?

In the boat.

In the boat?

For the ship.

Meanwhile, I don't know if my husband didn't take good care of the son, over there. But poor guy, 3 year old, we old

people he didn't know, the language, he didn't understand. So my son got sick with salt rot, or whatever.

So my son was in the hospital. I was in the hospital. My husband came five minutes at lunchtime, and that's it. I left the family, I left everything for him. That's was the way. [SIGHS]

When we arrive, with the help of the Joint, you know Joint. And they give us a table, chair, and a bed. And they wanted to give me dishes or the silverware. I said no, I have this. Thank you.

And [LAUGHS] when we arrive with the boat, I had brought my mother dishes, China dishes and crystal glasses. And the man that was putting these boxes down wanted money for a drink.

We did not understand what he wanted because he was speaking English, and we didn't know it. So he threw the things down. So most of the things got broken. So [SIGHS] we went then, to live in Trenton.

That was your first place?

Yeah. First of all, had to go to Kentucky, you see, now. So we went into Trenton. My husband--

Why Trenton?

My brother, the older brother, had come in America in '38, '39, and was living in Jersey City, New Jersey. So we went to Trenton. Because the Jewish community said you go to Trenton.

My husband spoke with this landlord that was speaking Yiddish. he rented an apartment to us. Unknown to us, because it was April, that the heater wasn't working. When it was winter, the doctors said, you cannot live here. Son is getting sick.

I don't know if I should say this, but my son got sick with the chicken pox. I didn't speak any English, I couldn't know to have a doctor. So I called a gynecologist that spoke Italian. He said it's chicken pox.

So I cook something for my son. He didn't want to eat. So my husband was the kind of person that when something was wrong, he would get mad. So this was the first time he gave me on my face. And I thought, oh my God, how low we have gone.

Then anyway, when the doctors say that my son was not eating well-- ah. On the beginning, because it was summer, I put my son in then, with the rest of the Jewish community, in a nursery school.

This is what year?

'51.

Uh-huh?

And I called the teacher to know how he was doing. Because he didn't know any English, the poor guy. And I had to give a dictionary to the lady.

I know that the tape is going to end soon. I want to get, you're in Trenton. Where else did you live in New Jersey?

In Jersey City.

In Jersey City?

Yeah.

How many years did you live in Trenton?

One.

One year. And in Jersey City?

From 1952 to 1973.

Yeah. And your husband found work to do?

Yes. He was sewing. He was a tailor, so he was sewing.

What did you do? Did you work or did you stay home?

Oh, I stayed home with the children.

With the children. And one time, we had bought a house with my sister-in-law, the brother of my husband, together. So one day--

I just want to get at certain points--

Oh, I'm sorry, yeah.

--before this ends. I know you went to college.

Yeah, that was--

Where did you go to college?

I went to St. Peter College, but this--

When did you go?

19-- I was-- wait a moment. I graduated in '75, from the master. I graduated in '73, I think, from St. Peter's.

Yeah. So you graduated with your bachelor's in '73, from St. Peter's.

Master.

And you had a master's in '75, from where?

Trenton State. How did you get to Trenton State?

That was a special program, that we were meeting one day a week. And so two colleague, they were Black, big tall men, they were Black, and I, they were picking me up with a car and bringing me there.

And I found out later when the other students saw us arrive, they were calling us the Oreo cookie. Because I was the white and I was in center with the two Black men.

I see. All right, so you manage to do a great deal over here.

Yeah.

Let's see, you were talking about the Holocaust. When did you learn what really happened in the Holocaust, in the rest

of Europe?

First of all, when I met my husband.

You really didn't understand what had taken place until then?

Then--

So that, that first night at that dance, was an eye-opener for you?

Then we went to see a movie. And I saw.

So as always an Italian Jew, you learned about the Holocaust when you met a Polish Jew?

Yeah. [LAUGHS] No, of course, then after we came in Rome, and started to hear about, you know, what.

Yeah. But your real education came when you met him?

Yeah. And I read books about.

Yeah.

And I saw movies.

In terms of what you experienced in Italy, and in terms of what your husband experienced in Poland, what did you learn about human nature?

[SIGHS]

How can people be so bad or so good?

It depends a lot on the way they are taught, when they are young children. And later on, from whatever government they had. Schooling, education is very important. So you think that lawyer who saved you was brought up that way, was taught that way?

Yeah, he had, as a young man, he had to have a life. His father died when he was 12, 13. And his mother wanted him to support the mother. So he, he did a lot on his own.

Yeah. But do you understand how it is that people could be so terrible to other people? Like to kill them the way they did in Auschwitz, and the other camps? And all the communities?

I wonder sometimes, what could have been the reason that made Hitler that way? I don't know. For example, for example, when I went for my master degree and I got an interview from a Black professor, teacher. And while I sit there, she's supposed to interview me and she went away.

And then, I found out later she was being very unkind to me. She was saying I didn't give her the work, and so on. And she say that because some Jewish landlord had treated some Black people bad. That's why she couldn't handle me, that I was Jewish.

In fact, when I gave her my thesis, she said I didn't give it to her. And I was so naive again, that I didn't make myself a copy. And then I went into another professor. And I said, listen, I'm going to sue the school because I gave it to her.

So you got it?

I got it.

OK. I see our time is about up. And this was a very important interview. And we appreciate very much, that you came down and shared with us what you lived through in Italy.

Thank you.

And you told us about the Italian experience during the war.

Thank you for listening. Thank you for listening.

Thank you very much.