

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Helene Barac
February 6, 1995
RG-50.030*0302**

PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Helene Barac, conducted by Randy Goldman on February 6, 1995 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

HELENE BARAC
February 6, 1995

Q: Okay.

A: My name is Helene Barac, Helene D. Barac. I was born in Belgium in 1933 in April. I was born in Brussels. I know that my parents at the time lived in a town of Namure (ph) that's it.

Q: Your parents were from Belgium?

A: No, my parents were both Russians. My mother and father were both born in Madava (ph), which at that time was Disrabia (ph), and came to Brussels, I guess in about 1928. So actually on their way to South America. My father had a Ph.D in chemical engineering and was a paper expert. And they stopped, had dinner at somebody's house, who had invited a man who is in charge of the paper mills in Belgium, they were naturalized. And, this man and my dad got along very well. He offered my dad a job and asked my mom how she liked the country, and she said she loved it, and there we were.

Q: What do you remember of your life in Belgium before the war?

A: Normalcy, a great deal of normalcy. We lived -- it was very old fashioned but the people who worked at my dad's factory were separated between the workers and the -- what do you call them -- the managers. And they all lived in complexes, and where we lived which is where the managers would live, was the street with a mountain behind it and a square, not too far away. And I was not allowed to go play on the square. And on Sundays we would climb up the mountain. And other than that, I was allowed to talk to people on my street and play with their dogs. None of them had children. I went to bed at the same time every day. I got up at the same time every day. I was fed basically the same food every day. Very, very normal untramatic life.

Q: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

A: No brothers, no sisters. I had a lot of cousins who I saw quite a bit.

Q: What about school?

A: Oh, I don't remember much about school except that I loved my teachers.

Q: Was it a public school or a _____?

A: I don't remember that there were any other Jews in that town. It was a suburb of Manue (ph) where we lived, and I know there were no other Jews in that town from the things that my parents have said to me.

Q: And did that cause any confusion?

A: No. My parents were both _____ and I was brought up with no consciousness of being Jewish at all. One of my sets of cousins was terribly terribly Catholic. And, I remember thinking it's kind of a silly waste of time to have to spend so much time praying and going to church and all that, because it's their business. And my other cousins who weren't Jewish were really not practicing Jews in the same way that we were.

Q: Was there any conscious -- political consciousness about _____?

A: No, my parents were both -- I guess they both felt -- especially my dad, that they belong to the Russian Italian Embassy. I guess that my mother didn't. My mother was really very high politicalized person, but she was much broader, my father was not. And my father belonged to that category of Jews who had aligned themselves with the Russian Communist Party to a great extent. And really thought of themselves as Russians not as Jews. And felt that they had been totally accepted in the world of Russians on _____. That is what he felt. And so one of my uncles had gone to Pakistan and came back and was disappointed in it. I never met him really from the time I was a child until the time I was an adult, I was never really able to talk to him about his feelings or his experiences in Pakistan. Now my other uncle had run a communist army and went out and fought in the army and stayed in Russia.

Q: The reason I am asking this is I am trying to get a sense of how the _____ weren't practicing at all. What really -- how you identified with being Jewish?

A: I didn't. I didn't until I was in my teens. Until way way after the war. As far as I could see there were the Germans and they were the enemy. And then there were all the French speaking people. And they were the good guys that included the French and the Belgians. And then of course, the Flemish (ph) Belgians. And, I wasn't really too conscious of the Dutch. But I was conscious of the British as being the good guy which was a little bit confusing later on. Because, I knew that Wellington was the bad guy. My historical concepts got very very mixed up. But at that time the British were good and the French were super good and the Germans were super bad. And so I really put down all the horrors of war to the conflict between the good guys and the bad guys. And I wasn't really conscious of the bad things that they were doing to the Jews because they were equally bad things to people that I knew and saw around me. Now by the time we got to the South of France and I got myself situated or I didn't, my history did. I got me situated in a village where there were many many Jews living as well, even though I still considered myself French. I began to get a sense of the bad things that were being done to the Jews and -- but I still wasn't clear that I was a Jew at all. I just thought that these were poor people _____ who were being treated shamelessly, and so it was kind of difficult. But later on -- oh, maybe about seven or eight or ten years ago, but no more than that, I met somebody in New York City. Quite by accident, who had been the daughter of one of the villagers in one of the smaller villages that we lived in. And she and her husband had been running a restaurant in New York City and distributing leaflets to their restaurant in front of the tickets booth on 42nd Street. And, I

was reading a French book and that got us into a conversation which finally ended up by telling her where I was from and she said "Oh my goodness, she was from there. When did I live there?" Very suspiciously she asked me this and I told her and she looked at me and she said "Oh, were you the Belgians or the Jews?" So which really brought home to me the fact that I wasn't the only one that considered myself not a part of this Jewish community. Because there were many -- I don't know, there were quite a few maybe 20, 30, Jewish people who were living there, you know, under village arrest.

Q: You were aware that you were Jews but you weren't aware of the double risk?

A: Absolutely not. I didn't realize that anybody was at a double risk. And I was a small child and quite innocent. My knowledge of war came from literature. And in literature there is no such thing as this. At least not the literature that you read when you are six or seven years old. There are good guys and there are bad guys, and that is basically it.

Q: Let's go back to Belgium. I want you to tell me a little about what you were, your family knew about Hitler or Naziism (ph) before Belgium _____?

A: I knew nothing. My father, I really don't know. My father obviously knew everything that my mother did because she would have shared it with him. My mother was a clinical scientist and she said that when I was born, she cried and cried and cried and cried because it was 1933 and she could see what was coming. So she was very aware. And I know that when I was a child there had been many many conversations about immigrating. And my father kept saying no, we will be okay and my mother kept saying, no we got to go. At one point they -- my mother and I, went to Romania (ph) where my maternal grandparents were living and we went to _____ where my maternal grandmother was living. You see my maternal grandparents and my maternal grandmother were living and to try to get them out. At one point my maternal grandparents did leave Romania (ph) and they went to visit their son who at this time, that's the man who had gone to live on _____ at one point. And he was now living in Argentina with his wife and two children. I guess maybe that he didn't even have two children at that time. Yeah, but anyway they went to visit him and they decided they really wanted to go home, they didn't feel comfortable. They felt that maybe they were too old to take on this culture. My mother and father argued with them that a Spanish culture was something very foreign to them. French or Belgium culture would be something they would be much more familiar with, at least through their education, etcetera etcetera and tried to convince them to stay in Belgium. They declined this as well and went on back. And then in 1937 my mother and I went to Romania (ph) and Russia, and tried to get my grandparents to leave, to no avail. So that is how much my parents knew, a great deal, a great great deal.

Q: What do you remember about this _____ when it happened, how things started changing?

A: Well, we didn't stay. But how it happened was very sudden, it happened overnight. It happened in one or two days. And I went to school one day and the school teacher told us

that they were passing out flowers in a corner and we should take these flowers and take the petals off of them and put them in baskets. Because, the next day our armies would come on through on their way to fight the Germans. And so we did this to the flowers and a great deal of hooplah and horay horay, we are going to be saved. The next day we were excused from school. And, my parents house was on a main road which was a two-lane highway but was still a main road. And, the troops came marching down the main road where everybody who lived anywhere near was out on the streets. And people had bread and they had cheese and they had wine and lots and lots and lots of wine which they gave to the soldiers wishing them well and wishing them luck and children would throw petals on the soldiers marching by. It was very glorious and very very glorious and three days later they came back or four days later or something, you know. The war was won, the Germans had walked all over them.

Q: How was the mood?

A: Well, they went from total elation to total defeat, I mean not good. There is a very very powerful poem written by -- I believe it is _____. It just basically sets the tone for this you know, it says: The month of May was the month of roses and the month of lilies, and the month of June had a dagger in its heart.

Q: Were the people in your town trying to deal with this in any certain way?

A: I don't think -- I may be wrong. But I really don't think, apart from the political groups, that people in Northern France and Belgium and maybe more France than that to, were really so aware of the Nazis as being different from the Germans. Don't forget that the French and the Germans had these conflicts for centuries. And the most recent one was in 1914 and it was a question of land grabbing and wanting more power and this had already been done through the Eastern Army that was what Poland was all about. And that's what parts of _____ were all about and so I think, although I have no reason to say that, other than what I have read since. But people were probably more conscious with the fact that this was another devastating war that was going to take place. But, I don't think that anybody thought of it as strictly political war or even any political overtones. I think that came quite a bit later.

Q: Now, while you were in Belgium, did you come in contact with German troops?

A: No, not at all. While I was in Belgium and when my father went to work one day, oh -- within a week or so of the occupation and his boss said to him that he felt that my dad should take his family and leave. That he wasn't a Belgium number one, and that he was a Jew, number two, and that he was at great, great risk. So he gave my father what amounted to six month salary and he said "God Bless You," and when he gave my dad a letter of introduction to his sister factory in _____ and we left.

Q: Let me just ask you one question while we are on that.

A: Sure.

Q: So even the short time and we are talking a few weeks --

A: No, we are talking -- yeah maybe two.

Q: Were your activities restricted?

A: No.

Q: Was there any sense --

A: No that is what I was going to tell you. Yes, things changed terribly from the day of the petrol throwing to the day that we left which was somewhere between seven and ten days later. I mean we are talking about a very short period of time. What happened is that the routine my life had followed until that day became nonexistent. Nobody seemed to care whether I was fed or not. I had a maid, my parents had a maid who was usually about 17 years old or so that took care of me. So she was more or less like a mother's helper more than anything else. Anyway, this young girl had gotten quite sick with _____ and she had gone to live with her parents and I think she died. I didn't know very well what had happened to her but I know she was a nurse so she wasn't taking care of me. So for the first time there was nobody but my mom to take care of me. My parents and my neighbors were crouched over a radio most of the time. Certainly in the evening from five or six o'clock on there was this crowd of people a holding on to this radio. I could go on and do whatever I wanted to. I could go to bed whenever I wanted to. I remember staying out and watching it getting dark and I've never seen it get dark outside before. I continued to go to school, nobody at school seemed to care about what was going on. _____ It was a terrific change for several days and after that we left and we went up and took my mothers bicycle and I can't remember if we took my dad's bicycle as well, I think we did. And we took a suitcase and we took my mothers -- my mother had an old battered fur coat which her mother had maybe given her ten years before or so. It was pretty battered up and we took that. And so we were traveling very light and we were using the fur coat pretty much as a blanket or a mattress or whatever we needed to use it for. And, we left. During the _____ out of Belgium and I guess the _____ also rode into France and _____ I was bringing movies to sort of back up some of my stories as the French movie which was made oh, maybe in the 1940s or early 1950s called "Forbidden Games" I don't know if you're familiar with that. Anyway, it is a magnificent movie but one of the things that it shows it is about a girl whose parents are in one of these lines and she escapes dying after she runs after her little dog. But it shows very, very clearly this thousands if not hundreds of thousands of people in a line just moving down a road. And some of them are on foot and some of them are on bicycles and of course some of them are in cars. But of course there is no gasoline as the ones in cars go so far. And the, the ones in cars get abandoned and the streets the roads are _____ with cars. And maybe every two or three minutes _____ begins and so people dodge for cover and they dive into the ditches and the sides of the roads. And sometimes the people get up and sometimes they don't because a

certain amount of _____ are successful and people are just down dead. So it is just an unbelievable sight you know. And this went on for a long time, it went on for about two days, I guess.

Q: Who were all these people _____?

A: People, people. Belgium citizens, _____.

Q: Where were they going?

A: They were going away from trouble. They were being bombed, I think. And you know the Germans had occupied Belgium.

Q: Where were they going _____?

A: To the South, there was no other way to go because on the one side was the ocean and on the other side was Germany. So they all had to go to France.

Q: Would you find this _____ or somewhat an adventure this _____?

A: I don't remember how I found it at first. Eventually I found it terrifying at first. I don't think that I was terribly frightened, I had my parents with me and I felt very comfortable and comforting when my parents. They were good parents and I was a good child. We all got along very well you know, so I trusted them. And pleasantly I guess I would not have to be so terrified as other people might be. But then something really bad happened and I got to a spot where my dad decided that he just couldn't take it with the three of us across so what he said he would put me behind this tiny little wall, it's a kind of open wall shelter, you know. And he would leave me behind this wall and take my mom. I think what had happened is that we had lost one of the bicycles, I think that it must have been that. And so he decided that he was going to take my mom and bring her somewhere down south and come back get me and bring me back there. And at that point, I got terrified. Because that is where the _____ started and I had to hide behind this wall that is probably no higher than this. (indicating) It was just panics then. But my dad did come back and he said that my mom was okay and he picked me up and brought me to where they were. So we wandered on and on and on and on and eventually we got to _____. And that must have taken us two, three days, not that long we were all good walkers. Another thing that I would really have to say at this point is really that physically very good shape my father and my mother were bicycling for years and years, they were great walkers as well. They lived in suburbs and not in the city. So I think that they had it over the people that came from the city. But other people that lived in the suburbs were just as well off as who lived in that country. So anyway we arrived at _____. And my father went to present himself at the factory where they kind of laughed at him and said "Gees we would love to take you, but the Germans had just taken us over. So I don't think that you would feel very happy here." So that was one of our hopes gone. So by that point we lived pretty much by my parents wits. And we went from LaMoss (ph) to Paris

which of course, was occupied at the time. But my Argentineans (ph) uncles sister in law lived in Paris so we went and lived with her. We went and stayed there maybe about a month and a half and it was very, very strange because people were wearing gas masks and all I remember Paris is playing on the _____, which was _____. And the gas masks that people were wearing were very strange. It was kind of a unpleasant time. So after Paris, we went to this --

Q: How long ago?

A: About a month and a half. Until after Paris then my parents decided that we ought to go to the South of France. And I guess this must have been in July or the end of June or July. In putting it all into perspective I thought that we got to ___ in June because everybody went to _____ in June but, I think maybe it was in July. When I say everybody I really mean everybody. The whole country was heading for _____. It was the big free city it was still the third or fourth largest city in France at the time. It was free, all the great movie stars were there. All the great singers the popular singers were there. Everybody who was anybody who had any rights to anything was there. And the whole population besides that was there and all the refugees were there. The city was bursting, there was no room anywhere. When we got to _____.

Q: How did you get there?

A: How did we get there?

Q: Yes.

A: It's difficult. My mother was pretty much the brains behind our organization of that particular trip and she said that we had to leave, so we went on to _____ the southwest. And we got to _____ and along with a great, great many people, we tried to cross the river a couple of bridges and we got to one of the bridges was already overfilled with people and the Germans were still _____, they were bombing badly. And we barely did not make it to the bridge. But then we finally did. And we pushed and we shoved and we pushed and we shoved and we moved to the other side of the bridge. And we pushed and we shoved and we got off the bridge and the bridge went _____ into the river. So I guess that was a very scary experience that was in my life, because then we are really talking about maybe a minute, maybe less. The difference between life or death you know just so visible and just so terrifying to see all these people. And then we left and then my mother decided that we had to take the train to go to _____, and she managed to get us on the last train leaving through free France from north to south. There wasn't an requisition by the Germany army. I don't know how she did but I can still remember her screaming "my child must get on this train." The train was just _____ and my mother had a lot of _____. She got her child on the train and then she said "that no child can ride on the train without its father." So she got my father on and then she said something about we can't travel without a bicycle and then she finally got on. So the four of us once again we _____ on this train. We went for quite awhile

and then the train was stopped and everybody had to get off but we didn't have a bicycle. So we never made it to Rome. Though, we were _____ to Central France then we went on to LaRuse (ph).

Q: _____?

A: Yes. We got to LaRuse (ph) which is, as I say, was a total mad house. And you know how French towns are with the squares in the middle, every tree on that square was filled with notes. You know family so and so looking for so and so and looking for so on. But in 19-- maybe it was 1983, '82, something like that, I was stuck at the airport in Miami because of a huge snow that developed in the North, that was getting back to New York City. And I was stuck there like for a day and a half, and turned out I was sitting next to a French family there talking away in French. And my father and I had just gone through a part of his history and I was writing it down. And he had just told me about his episode in LaRuse(ph). You know how everybody was blah, blah, blah. So these French people were there and I asked if they were about my age or a little bit older. Actually maybe ten years older than I was. And they were at about the right age to remember everything. And I said to one of them after we made friends, and where were you in June of 1940? He said "Madam, I was in LaRuse (ph) like everybody else." And he described to me the scene exactly as I have described to you. So that's -- I found that very interesting, indeed.

Q: When you were traveling, did you have food?

A: Where did we stay? We always stayed with somebody, somebody always put us up. I mean we were -- I think by this time France has sort of polarized itself, you know, pretty much. The poor Germans and the _____ Germans and the _____ for the most part were communists. And they tended to be for the country people. And not necessarily everybody. But that was still at the very beginning of the war, don't forget this was 1940. So people were still not thinking of it so much as the Nazi party versus other things. As they were still thinking in the terms of 1930s when the Spanish Civil War -- as a war of where the classes sort of got mixed in. You know, and the French Communist Party were pretty strong in the country and my parents being Russian of course works as a very very big plus. And they're speaking French as well as as equally a plus so they had it on both sides. So we always had somebody to stay with and we had money. We had money but it wasn't worth very much. But we still had all this money that my father's boss had given him. Then we got into LaRuse (ph) and then in LaRuse (ph) we found my cousins who lived in Brussels who were Jewish cousins, who had made it down there with a car. Two families, one of them with one child and a grandmother and the other one with two children. So there were eight people in one car who had _____ their way down to Belgium.

Q: How did they find them?

A: By putting their note up.

Q: On the tree?

A: And so had they. People find each other like that, you know. It's the same way they found themselves after the war was over in all countries. They put up notes and advertised in newspapers. People just combed those lists, you know, and if you knew somebody that was looking for somebody, you found the name and you pass it on. When people are determined, it's not very hard. All you have to do is just comb the lists. So anyway, we stayed with a very nice family in LaRuse (ph) the man had been _____ I guess he had a place that done weddings and receptions and what not, so there were grounds -- very nice grounds. And little gazebos and a very, very lovely large restaurant and barns and what have. And most of his family was there and some of his friends were there and we were there. And after that I have no idea why we were there. But I know that my parents and he just got along just famously and he had a nephew who was 15 who's _____ my life and other than that it was a really nice place to stay. Oh there were some _____ and other nice things in cages, you know. We had enough to eat there, it was okay. So we stayed there for a while and the Germans took us and put us in a series of villages where we were under -- well, one place we were under a village arrest and eventually we were under house arrest, but that comes later.

Q: This was in villages?

A: Yes.

Q: _____?

A: Well, this wasn't free France for very long. Okay. It was free France when we first got there and then after a while, it wasn't. So then the Germans took us and we were on a list and then we went where we were told to go.

Q: Were you on a list because you were Jewish?

A: Yes, yes. Well, I still didn't know that I was considered Jewish, I just thought that I've been captured by them.

Q: _____?

A: Yes.

Q: _____?

A: With passports and what not, you know. They didn't have Belgium passports my parents hadn't been in Belgium long enough to become Belgium citizens. I think they were lacking two _____ or something. Which happened to change most of our life. Anyway, my father as I said, I lived in Disrabia (ph) and he done his military service in Disrabia (ph). Disrabia (ph)

changed back and forth from 1914 to 1940 between Russia and Romania. And in 1940, I was given over to Romania. Romania was part of the axis, so therefore I thought it was part of his military service under an allied country or an unallied country. Which caused a great deal of problems to the Germans who were very, very rule bound as we all know. And, he didn't know what to do with us. So they simply put us under house arrest and they sent out for more instructions. This was -- I skipped over one town that we were in all together. That is the town where I lived -- the woman I told you about earlier. Anyway, we are in a little town called _____ which was outside LaRuse (ph) and that is where the Germans had problems with my identification, my parents had classification and they put us under house arrest. And we would leave at night and we would go stay in the yard, mostly in barns and then we would come back in the morning. Anyway, one night my parents had organized a group of maybe about 17 people or so -- all Jews, and with children unfortunately. We left one night to cross the _____ to get into Spain and because the shepherds in the hills were very, very friendly. They kind of considered everybody to be part of _____. And which we certainly weren't. These three salted the milk. They salted the milk so it wouldn't go sour and they welcomed people to use their huts. Well they weren't really huts they were more like stone _____. I mean great big stones. We arrived in one of those and settled in and children cried and screamed because of the salt in the milk and they were hungry and tired. So my father put it in cold water down stream but he didn't -- the Germans running an expedition found the milk and us and brought us back to the village. Of the 17 people that were there, 14 of them were sent immediately to a concentration camp.

Q: _____?

A: Well _____, I don't know, they were just sent. And they didn't know what to do with us. So the next time --

Q: How come you didn't go with the other 14?

A: Because they didn't know what to do with my father's papers. My father had done his military service for the route. So he now has the right and they didn't know what to do with us. So if he had been German and had done his military service, there would be no problem that was covered. So, it is nice not to be covered. So anyway, we were put under strict house arrest except me, I still had the freedom to go around the village. I still don't know why I did that. It was a very small village, I don't think there was a 150 people in that town, that village. We left again, this time we left the two grown men, two brothers and we crossed the mountains and arrived in _____. I was kind of terrified that we were caught by soldiers on the way up but they were French soldiers so they let us go. I think my father gave them some gold. We also had a guide, my father said that he knew the guy that was going to kill us or try to kill us because that is what a lot of the _____ guides did. They killed the people for gold or whatever they had and went out and got more. My father said that he knew that he had to stay up all night and watch the guide and if the guide was going to make a move, my father had to make his move first. And he said that he really didn't know if he was going to be able to do that. You know kill in cold blood like that. But he said that the guy just gave up

after a while and disappeared, he just ran off. So then there was just the five of us.

Q: _____?

A: And he had a very, very Jewish last name -- I forgotten what it is anymore, a very nice man. So we arrived in _____ and I remember that my father -- my father always liked his title-- you know he had his PhD and always calls himself doctor so and so. How wonderful a doctor, we have a very sick young person so my father instead of saying well, I'm not really a doctor said ""Hum, okay I'll try." So I remember him performing some sort of a very minute operation on this patient who had been through a whole thing -- I don't know if it was a very bad splinter or something but anyway something of no big consequence but he was able to deal with that very well. And we spent the night there and then the next day we went on -- or the next night we went on to Spain and in order to cross the border between _____ and Spain to go over some treacherous _____. And a path that ran between a very, very steep _____ on one side -- at least it seemed very steep to me. And I forgot what holds them open. The body of water on the other side and dogs were howling and the guard dogs that was really scary too. So I remember the bridge and this first incident that I told you about my dad, leaving me in this little walk was one of the most scariest things that had happened to me during the war. And they are all very, very physical things, you know. Anyway, we made it through the border and we got on a train and we headed out to Barcelona (ph) and we went to a hotel that had been given to us as a safe house, which it wasn't. And the next morning at about six in the morning we -- the police came by picked us up and took us to jail. But that was okay because even though we didn't know it at the time, our troubles and perils were really over. That by now this was 1942 or the end of 1942 and nobody was ever going to try to kill us again.

Q: You felt that?

A: No, no. But I know that now. So we were fitted into a jail which was the perfect jail and so kind of like a precinct jail and all kinds of people were there. And we stayed there for about five or six days.

Q: _____?

A: Well, you watch cops and robbers -- those shows on television, that's what I mean.

Q: Where were the people from?

A: Mostly they were Spanish.

Q: They were actually criminal prisoners?

A: Many of them were. There was small time criminals, there were prostitutes. There was the occasional political prisoner there was the -- mostly they were criminal _____.

Q: _____?

A: No, not at this level of jail. And of this level of jail, of course, we were sorted and put into other jails. The women went off to the women's jails and the men went off to the men's jails. Now the men's jails was just more of the same. It had political prisoners, it had political prisoners that were left over from the Spanish Civil War. It had criminals, it had big time criminals, it had small time political prisoners. And those jails was the men's jail which was the main jail in Barcelona (ph) which also was filled to capacity. Anyway, I am trying to remember exactly what -- I went to the jail a number of times so I'm trying to remember what it looked like. It had three sides with a bench of a stone bench built inside to the side of the cell and the door or whatever and I think that in my father's cell there was nine men with a place for three men to sleep. So they took turns, you know. And my dad tells me that one of the men who was a political -- I'm sorry who was a political man, a wonderful, wonderful story teller. And I know that one of the other men was a political prisoner who -- a Jew, a French Jew who joined the French underground. He's a psychiatrist who been caught and sent to _____ which was the terrible concentration camp in Spain. And he had been taken out of Miranda (ph) and put into this jail. Eventually he got put back into Miranda (ph) and stayed there until the end of the war. At which point my parents found him quite accidentally in Montreal (ph) and he came to stay with us for a couple of months. And he was still practicing psychiatry, he was almost ninety years old. Years ago, child psychiatry at that. Obviously, something is wrong somewhere there, I think. Well, I don't think _____ should be practicing child psychiatry -- anyway, there was this highway man, and this psychiatrist and my father with a PhD in chemistry and I'm sure that there were some ordinary and I mean interesting criminals there as well. And I know that there was one Spanish Jew, because my father kept in touch with him for many, many years. He was a middle class person. So -- well, the women's jail was far less interesting in the people that were there. There was the great majority of them were petty thieves and prostitutes. And as I say that jail was in uncommon because the jail -- the women's jail had been _____ filled. And that is where my mother stayed and I stayed with my mom for a very short period of time. No I didn't, I didn't stay with her at all. I was in a _____ jail, a precinct jail. When these people came by their name was Hartock (ph) and they had been given my name by the joint. And they had no children and they wanted to take care of me and look after me. They wanted to take care of me and they were a Swiss-German family, and they had a dog and they were very nice. They loved their dog and like I say, they had no children. And, I had just been through several years with no food on the table and I was very perturbed by that situation. I was very perturbed by the fact that they were Germans and I tried to set fire to their house. And I drowned their house and I tried to kill the dog. I was just doing the best after the war you have to understand, I mean we had things so good after all these things. And they were wonderful, they put up with me. They weren't very understanding because they put me in a private school and they put me in a Swiss-Deutsch school. You know, instead of letting me go to the local school and learn some Spanish. So things did not go too well. I stayed with them for two or three months until my parents got out of jail and my mother got out of jail.

End of Tape #1

Tape #2

A: Okay. Well I am going to go back in time now and tell you about my life in France. Because that will give you a sense on how people did live. The first town that I lived in that I can remember very well was Paris. Paris as I remember was a fearful place, not a pleasant place. A very -- maybe science fiction type of place because of the gas masks. And they are really fixed in my memory. And I don't know if they really looked that way or not but as I see them, they had these two things plopped over your eyes. And then this nozzle which came out and I think, plopped over your mouth. So it really looked like an anesthetic-type contraption, you know. As I said, I don't remember if it's true or not, maybe that is just what I see in my mind's eye. But, I didn't have any friends there where I used to play on the Chamuse (ph) and under the Eiffel tower. And I just don't remember anything except life was not pleasant. Life was definitely not pleasant. We had the run of the town, there was no food to be had. The Germans were there and there were lines everywhere. There were coupons for goods but even with coupons you couldn't really get anything, so that takes care of Paris.

Q: What was the German presence like?

A: I don't remember, I don't remember anything except what I've told you.

Q:

A: There were curfews and there were blackouts and yeah, the curfews were very long. I guess they were from six to seven or eight or something like that. So all night long -- a lot of sirens, a lot of sirens and a fair number of fires.

Q: Did you stick with your parents most of the time?

A: Ah-huh. Sure, sure. You know if I had any brothers or sisters, I don't know if we would have made it or not. It was so much easier because they shuffled me around from one parent to the other one and they were both parents together. And so I always had somebody protecting me. And they only had one person to take care of. But with brothers and sisters, I don't know if we would have been able to manage it. Because I have four children myself and I think about how difficult it was to travel or to go anywhere with them when they were small. And I just don't know how they could have done it. Anyway, the next town that I remember -- well, you asked me at one point how people helped us and how we lived in terms of food and everything. I remember that we went to another small town where we lived for maybe two months or so. I don't even remember the name of the town -- if it would come to me. _____ was the name of the town. Just _____ and the _____ river is where it was. And from now on, I never lived in another city, except for Deruse (ph). We only lived in small towns. And I already told you about Deruse (ph) and finding our way through and finding our relatives. And the first time the Germans found us, they sent us to _____. That was the first time that we were registered.

Q: What happened to those relatives?

A: Ah, those relatives. Those relatives most ingeniously, I don't remember. I call one of them, his name is _____. I call him my uncle, he's not of course. He is my father's second cousin who married my father's first cousin, who was his second cousin. And who presently lives in New York and I call him my uncle. It has always been much easier. Most ingeniously, he said to me one day, oh Helene I knew it you know. I said to your dad, we have money, we will get out of it somehow. You have no money, but you have brains you'll get out of it somehow. So they did, from Laruse (ph) they vanished with their money to _____ and then from _____ to Cuba. And they spent the rest of the war in Cuba with families. I think the other family stayed in Cuba throughout the war and eventually went to Mexico. That family's business has been tan, tanning furs, or tannery. And all _____ business had been fur brokering and after the war _____ and his family went back to New York, which is where I ended up. But that is the end of this story.

Q: So back to _____?

A: Back to _____ to _____ where we stayed for about two months. We remember the first time that we got there, it was late at night and the food was piled up on the table. And so was the drink, and what we were drinking there, it was hot apple cider. And --

Q: Where were you?

A: We were in the South of France.

Q: But whose house?

A: Oh somebody. Just like that.

Q: _____?

A: Just like that, somebody's house. You asked how people took care of you. People took care of you because there was this very very strong feeling about the pro and the cons the good guys and the bad guys. People took care of whoever happened to go by. They had such a strong feeling of -- with having my parents being involved with _____ at one point. You know, and they started transporting food and stuff, I mean but anyway, a little later that comes in. Anyway, I remember these people in whose house we were supplying us with food and drink. And I remember that I fell asleep and I was, according to my parents very very drunk. And they put me to sleep and the next day somehow _____ were found. Somehow clothing was found, I remember the clothing was found because it was not clothing that I could identify. And then I have a picture of me wearing this clothing. We set up with a little boy who was also from a Jewish family, who was my great friend. And he was only about four- five years old, maybe three- four years old. Anyway, we stayed there a couple of

months and I remember this was the first time when I really remember my dad taking me out for walks and becoming the great philosopher, you know. We saw a field of daffodils one time; words could not have been any prettier. It was in an oak field tons and tons and tons and tons of oak and mistletoe growing from the oaks. And just tons and tons and tons and tons of daffodils. Oh gosh, this must have been 1941 right, because of the springtime. And it was so beautiful, I remember my father telling me that marriage was a terrible institution. And he was very, very lucky because he had found himself a very nice wife who had not conned things out of him. Not just the fact that she was his wife but, the only way to live is for two people who adored each other to live with each other, without the unsacred _____ of marriage and on and on and on. In his very procommunist fashion we went on and started talking to me about politics. About how the communist regime was the only thing that made any sense, you know and blah, blah, blah. And I remember being very struck by how much sense this made _____ daffodils. So then -- those are the sort of memories that I have about that time. Anyway then we were sent from _____ to _____ to _____ and I think we were transported to _____ if I remember correctly by bus. Just as I told you there were no more railroads because they were all taken over by the Germans. And they were used for military transport to people outside France.

Q: The Germans were _____?

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you know why, was there any reason?

A: Because we were on the list of Jews.

Q: So they were _____ some place?

A: They put everybody that they could into concentration camps, in France. Most the concentration camps that they put people in were either too full or too far away. So what they did, and I think a lot of people don't realize that, is they invented concentration camps. And the places, the two places they sent us afterwards, I forget, was an invented concentration camps. They didn't have the horror of a place like _____. Plus there are these three levels of concentration camps. There were the ones that we never experienced were the death camps. Then there were the ones that I never experienced which was the _____ and I guess to some degree the concentration camps in Germany and Poland were like that too. They weren't death camps because you weren't killed there, but you died there. You died of starvation and mostly you died of disease. Because you can deal with starvation to some extent, better than to deal with disease. And then there was the third kind which were like the ones that we were in. Where if you could manage somehow to get a little bit of freedom and to deal with the people in the town, you manage to survive. And then you were put under village arrest sometimes and house arrest other times. If you were put under village arrest, that was really good. If you were put under house arrest, that was pretty bad. Now since most of the people found their way to these camps -- for Eastern European Jews, who

had moved to the South of France warmed there way, but still didn't speak French -- we did. We were accepted by everybody, everywhere that we went as being French speakers. I told you about that woman that I met who asked me, was I for Jews or Belgians. We were for Belgians, we were one of them. And so it was very different and I could go to school and make friends with my teachers and make friends with my school mates. We read the books and we get benefits of going to school. So my life was normal and then just totally disrupted. Was totally different, but at least there was a base, a connection in my life. I never felt unconnected.

Q: _____ you talk about _____ being a concentration camp, I'm trying to understand about how it was set up?

A: It wasn't.

Q: Also, so I don't interrupt you again, what's the difference for you between house and village arrest?

A: Okay. House arrest under which I found myself in for a very short time, you had to stay in your house. You were really -- and the villages were very small. We are talking about a village here where a large village is maybe a 150 people. I mean 500 people is a large village and a 150 is pretty normal. You're talking about a village where -- which is very, very primitive. I mean some people have privies and not have to go out and use the fields. You're talking about people where some people have _____ and some people have to stand behind the plow themselves plowing the field. You know when we get into the town that I went to in 1953, I was just 20. And they had just put in running water the year before and they were talking about now electricity. And you're talking about a town -- I mean it was 15 kilometers on one side, the fourth largest city in the country. You're talking about very, very primitive stuff here. So when your under house arrest in a place like that, you're going to go crazy. That is like being in jail. And the people who would oversee this house arrest were Germans because there were German patrols, very few of them. Which, had been installed in the villages. I keep saying towns, but villages is such a strange word to use in the United States, but I always mean village when I say town. These people were the ones that were supervising us, you know. And I don't know what the penalty was for breaking the law, but I imagine that it would be very severe. Like instant removal to a real concentration camp. Now I say here concentration camp but there weren't concentration camps, they were holding places. That is what they were, holding tanks.

Q: How many people were in these holding tanks?

A: Well, I don't know. I think maybe about 20 to 40 maybe.

Q: All Jewish?

A: Ah-huh. All the people there not living there who were not Jewish, were townspeople. Now

I remember where we lived and how it was. We lived in a house that belonged to the priest and I guess he had rented it. I don't know if he rented it to us or the Germans or whatever it was. But you seen pictures of Welch Villages where the street is like this and then the -- kind of a side street like this, with a wall and then the house is behind the wall and there's this walking place, then we lived in one of those. And next door to us, there lived an old _____ lady who was suppose to be totally incontinent, the feces had made a whole in her bed and I remember the interest in that you know. An eight or nine year old this was fascinating thing to hear. And next to her lived a family who had a boy that was a couple years younger than I was and his name was ____ and he was my great, great friend. And we went everywhere together, he is the one that would tell me stories about this incontinent lady. And we lived in a house with two big rooms and my parents put me in the front bedroom because it had curtains, no material to make any curtains or anything so in order for me to have my ____ body in its nightgown or pajamas or whatever were exposed than for them to be in the front room. And I don't remember, but anything about the kitchen, except obviously we must have had a wood burning stove and in the back we had a beautiful, beautiful, beautiful garden. And we had some pear trees that were ____ those pears that -- I can still smell them. And we had a huge plum tree, huge, huge ____ plum tree and not ____ plums, Italian plums. And behind the house, we had a ____ bush and it just smelled so wonderful and we had -- there were almonds and there were walnuts now of course, nobody ate the corn in France at that time it was all for animals, if you could grow corn. And that's the town that we grew wheat but, the Germans of course took everything. I mean we grew all that stuff, we know but the Germans took it all. Anyway, I remember one time the bakery decided that he was going to save as much wheat as he could and hide it. And when a lot of people were cleaning and we clean enough that he didn't have enough sugar, but he said that he was going to bake cookies for the children. And which we were gone for five hours, outside the bakery but we all got a cookie. That was the only thing sweet that I ever ate during the war.

Q: Did the Germans, who guarded, were they _____?

A: I don't remember, I think I put a lot of that out of my mind and really buried it and refused to deal with it. Just as I refuse to deal with the fact that I was Jewish. I don't know if I knew that I was Jewish or not. The first time that I remember knowing that I was Jewish they said that I was 13 or 14. And I think that I just buried all of that. Just didn't want to deal with it.

Q: But you must have seen soldiers, did they have dogs?

A: Oh yeah, yeah, but I put it out of my mind.

Q: So you can't remember it now?

A: No. I can't remember anything except the pleasant things.

Q: ____?

- A: Um-hum. I remember my school teacher, I remember the school was divided into two parts, the boy's side and the girl's side and usually in schools then -- country schools like that the husband and wife would teach school. And I remember going -- when I went back to see them, I was 20 years old. I'd teach at this school and one of the teachers said "Ah, that's little Helene, who wasn't always very good." You know, I remember reading novels for the first time. I remember I was very young reading a *Mid Summer's Night Dream*. Which, I thought wonderful. But then I remember reading a _____ story which _____ really was not a child's story. And I remember the plot of it perfectly well. So then when I read it as an adult I said goodness, I really did remember that story, you know. What did we have to eat, I remember on my birthday in 1941 when I gathered about 25 kids that was -- I think is what the village had. And I brought them all to my house for my birthday. And my mother produced a couple of onions, which is all she had. But, it was okay. I mean I was very disappointed, I mean very, very disappointed, but it was okay we got the onions, you know.
- Q: When you talk about this time in the concentration camp, it doesn't sound much like a concentration camp?
- A: That's what I keep --
- Q: Sounds like you had a nice little life.
- A: That's what I keep telling you it wasn't a concentration camp, we were under village arrest.
- Q: You had to live in this village until --
- A: We could not move out of it. Okay. Now eventually we left and we tried to escape but when we came back we were put under house arrest. And that was very very bad. When we were in village arrest my father went out and -- you see my father was brought up on a farm when he was a child and he's very clever with things and he knows how to make things grow and to _____ with machinery and make it do whatever he wants it to do. He's just one of these people that just seems to have a way with everything. And so he became friends with some of the farmers and he would work for them, of course it was for free. But it was never for free they would give him a pregnant rabbit, a duck with some eggs. Though we always had things, and food and at one point we had these neighbors who lived -- I guess that is when we lived in _____. We had these neighbors who were very Jewish, I mean the man was a chauffeur, they were very religious and they had a grandmother who really couldn't _____. So my father decided to build her a little privy (ph) which she put in the little shed in the back, which she had to share with two goblins. Turkey goblins, which my father had gotten. Again from some farmers which and we had gotten a _____ who we called Hecter (ph), I guess we called him Adolf, not Hecter (ph). And one day there was this wonderful feast and usually when they killed a pig, you know, the slaughtered a pig, the children from the house when the pig was slaughtered the kids would be allowed to stay home from school, but I wasn't. And I remember just hearing that pig just squealing and I was in school and I had to stay there. Anyway, eventually I came back. And it was wonderful, people would recite poetry and

people would get up on the table and let go and sing. You know, and there was a lot of wine flowing. There wasn't food, because we didn't have food because the Germans took much of that. But we did manage to secrete enough of the pig, you know. And then once in a while we'd kill a goose or something and render its fat and put the goose into the fat, you know. And you would have meat to eat along with the goose fat. You could spread on whatever, potatoes or whatever vegetable that you had. So that is how we lived, we went to school and I played with the kids and I'd play with them after school and my parents talked to me and I read a lot of books and it was very disruptive, but I don't remember the bad things, I just refuse to remember the bad things. But I do that as an adult. I have a very very hard time remembering bad things.

Q: And wherever you went, it seems the people that lived in these villages were all very well ____?

A: Pretty much so, to us anyway. And ____, the mayor and his wife told my parents that they wanted to adopt me if anything bad would happen to my parents, they were going to pass me off as their child. And everyone in the village said that it was okay. They would ask me and since I spoke French, the Germans wouldn't know. And they gave me some sort of Catholic instruction so I could deal with that a little more easily. I still didn't know that I was Jewish, I just did know that I wasn't Catholic. Or a practicing Catholic. Because to me, there were only two religions. Either you were a practicing Catholic or you weren't. And you know, that was so common in Belgium and France at that time. Nobody was Protestant, nobody was Jewish, nobody was Moslem. You were Catholic and you practiced or you didn't.

Q: Did the adults, _____ at this point have much information about what was happening in Eastern Europe that you were aware of?

A: No, at that time, I didn't know. My parents told me in 1942 is when they started becoming aware of what happened. I think that was true everywhere, wasn't it? Pretty much.

Q: Through the radio or through other organizations?

A: We weren't in contact with any organization, only the free French. And they weren't really interested in anything that wasn't military.

Q: I also understand maybe that your parents had no connection with this but ____ Southern France, there were efforts to get people over to Switzerland and _____ Spain?

A: Some people did get over to Switzerland. Our neighbors, the chauffer playing neighbors, did get over to Switzerland. I believe they were and _____ concentration camps. That's what my parents had told me.

Q: Do you know why your parents decided that Spain was going ____?

- A: I have absolutely no idea. Thinking about it, I would think that my parents would have thought that that was one step closer to the United States and it might have been easier to deal with the mountains that were already half way on than to have to start from the bottom and cross over. More difficult mountains.
- Q: But your dad wasn't involved in any organization -- you know crime -- communist organizations or any political organizations?
- A: He was involved with the political resistance in a very, very small way, when we were living in _____. Somebody asked him and my mother if he could help bringing food out to the _____. And I remember that they went up most nights one of the two of them would walk. That was because they had a bicycle. And, they knew their way around. So they did do that.
- Q: Anything else that you want to tell me about France?
- A: No. Just that is a really good feeling with me -- it left a feeling of closeness and compassion. And I guess that is why when people ask me what I am, I don't tell them that I'm Belgium, I tell them I am French. Now of course, I tell them that I am American.
- Q: Were there -- in these villages that you were in under village arrest, were all the refugees Jewish?
- A: As far as I know. As far as I know. And the reason that I think so is because they all spoke a different language. They all spoke either Yiddish or German or Polish. And, I only spoke French and Russian. So I couldn't understand them at all.
- Q: And you never had to pretend that you weren't German, which was ___?
- A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.
- Q: So you were able to get into Spain?
- A: So we went on our way to Spain. I'll tell you that something that was interesting is the reason I went to Spain is because a point in time the Germans started emptying the villages of the Jews. And the first time that it happened I remember waking up in the morning and one to two families had just disappeared. And then the next night another couple families just disappeared. And then my parents said, oh time for us to disappear. So, we did at -- what my parents did is they would leave right after dark and I guess my father had already done a little bit of -- what's the word that I am looking for -- casing of the joint. And we would head out to the barn and we would hide in the barn in the hay. And in the morning we would leave, just before sunrise and go home. And we did this -- I think nine days in a row and one night for sure -- maybe two nights I remember being almost discovered because the Germans came by riffling through the straw in the barn where we were hiding. And that was the

fourth time that I was really scared. I mean that was total terror. Total, total terror. Because I knew that was instant death. And-- but they didn't find us and we headed back to our house and I guess what had happened is that they came to our house and found that we weren't there and so we were ____ to be deported the next day, and we left. And that is when we crossed the border the first time. As I said, we were found. And we were put into a -- we were put into this school yard which had barbed wire around it and as I said 14 of the 17 people were sent off to transports immediately, and we were not. And we left again, we were sent back to our house. We were kept in the school yard and I don't remember if it was overnight or one or two or three days. It served as no importance really as we were left there. And eventually we were sent back to a house and the moment that we were set free in our house we had left for the mountains again and that is when we crossed to Endora (ph) with these two men. And then we went to Spain and I told you about living in Spain. And when my parents-- when my parents got out of jail she was put into a pensoloni (ph) where she again was free to go around Barcelona but not free to leave Barcelona at all. And this pensoloni (ph) was pretty vile. You know men were making a profit as big a profit as he could now the feeding and his charges but nobody really cared. And there wasn't really anything to do, my parents played cards and learned English out of an English book. And I didn't go to school and I didn't remember what I did. I remember that I wasn't very motivated to do anything. And at a lost, lost of my time, lost of my life.

Q: How long?

A: Months, but I don't remember how many? It's just very vague and very blurry and very unpleasant and all I remember is that the men's jail, the men got fed twice a day and they got fed a sort of watery-cabbage soup and the cabbage soup smell was all over the town of Barcelona, the city of Barcelona. I loved ____, I always had. I don't even remember seeing how beautiful that city was. It was filled with beggars there's at least three families of beggars per block because of the Civil War. It was -- I remember the market. Beautiful fish and shrimp and squid and octopus. But I don't remember vegetables or meat, but I remember the fish. It was just glorious, because I hadn't seen anything like that ever. Even from the seaports just absolutely miraculous with all that fish, you know. So this is about all that I remember Spain, not a pleasant memory at all. And then I remember being -- oh shortly after -- before we got to Spain before they even tried putting us into jail, they tried to repatriate (ph) us, send us back to France. So my mother tried to get me to run away and I remember her shoving and shoving and shoving me and tell me that I had to get away and she had given me the name and the address of the joint in Barcelona and she said that I have to get there somehow you have to get there because they would take care of me. And I didn't want to leave her and I remember which is far, it was incredible but I got back on the train with them and we got sent back to France and the guards at the border refused to take us in and sent us back to Spain. They were French and the French were being very cooperative with the refugees who had gone over the side, you know. So we went back to Spain and that is when we were put back into jail.

Q: Now I remember you telling me when you were first put into jail you were ____?

A: Yes. That is because we were dealing with this family called the Hartoff (ph) and my mother wanted to send messages to my dad and so they had gotten a piece of chocolate somehow. A nice little piece of chocolate with a wrap around it maybe this big and it looked very small to me and it was small and the only thing that looked chocolate was this enormous and very tempting to me and I remember my parents would put little messages inside the wrapper and I would take the messages from one to the other back and fourth. Oh I remember how they got that piece of chocolate; my father said that he sold his wedding ring to get it.

Q: Now this is a different family than the German family?

A: No this is the family --

Q: This is the family's house that you tried to burn down?

A: Um-hum.

Q: How long did you live with them?

A: At least three months maybe more. At least until my mother got out of jail, about three months -- it was three to six months.

Q: The ___ was before this?

A: No after when my mother got out of jail and my father was sent to the _____.

Q: So what happened next, you were in this ___ for months --

A: And after that what happened is Quakers got this blah, blah, blah boat together, this convoy, they organized this convoy and the joint let my name -- made me a part of that convoy and I was shipped from Spain to Portugal to await the arrival of this boat and we were so were many other children.

Q: You went by boat?

A: No I went by --

Q: I mean ship --

A: No, okay, I was transported by train and I was sent to Portugal by train along with so many other children. And I think that we waited there until there were enough for a boat load -- about 250. Because I think altogether there were 500 of us and we went in two boats.

Q: Just back tracking here, what -- as a kid you were so close to your parents, what was your

feelings about leaving your parents to go to Portugal?

A: Close to my parents. But, I wasn't -- I hated my parents in a good healthy child-like way. I trusted them _____. I guess pretty normal feelings towards them and hated them bitterly because they put all these restrictions. I trusted them _____ because I knew that they would always take care of me. I was pretty adventurous. I think that at that time I had learned like I really liked to live on the edge. I thought that was the only way to live and I came to realize much later in my life how other people have always lives is because I learned during that time that was the only way to live. As far as I was concerned there was no other way. There was no safety in anything and so that was the norm. And so I left my parents to go to Portugal an extension of the norm. If bad things had happened to me and to rescue me in some _____ way. You know what I'm trying to say or is that too foreign?

Q: Okay. It looks like you're telling me that doing something like that seemed unusual, but you assume if anything went wrong, your parents would somehow --

A: Yeah. Nothing was unusual, I wasn't clingy at all. And they weren't with me and so I guess I grew up with a healthy disrespect for adult supervision.

Q: What did you know of Portugal?

A: No. What was there to be frightened of? What else was there left, you know. Compared to children who had seen much worst horror, there had more to be frightened of than I did. Those horrors of day to day, I never did you know. My life was totally ____ but apart from 4, 5 times of fear, there wasn't that type of fear. I mean I had a girlfriend for a while that was four years old. That her maid hit her. That her family had hit her with a book case and the Germans came in and shot her parents in front of her. And she was 16 and had snow-white hair. She had something to be frightened of. I had another girlfriend then went from Finland to Italy. She started out at 4 or 5 and she had nothing to be frightened of. It was that kind of thing, you just kept going, you know.

Q: So you went to Portugal and you went on this trip with a lot of kids?

A: Yeah. But not that many, you know.

Q: Where were they from -- how old were they?

A: They were between the ages of 6 and 15, maybe 14. They were all from France and Spain. And I believe they had originally been from those countries and more likely from Germany and Poland and the Netherlands and they had winded there way to catch us with -- were able to gather them up for the Quakers' boats of which there were two.

Q: Did you make friends?

A: Ah, did I make friends? Yeah, the way you make friends in a boarding school. You make friends with a lot of people but you didn't make close friends because there wasn't enough time. We were put in this convent where we all had one thing that we wanted to do and that was to make the nuns totally miserable for no reason but to amuse ourselves. Find toads and put them in their beds and tear up sheets and do bad things for the sake of doing bad things. Tell awful stories about those nuns, just awful stories. I don't remember any of them but I remember that was the order of the day.

Q: And you think maybe that was an expression of some control?

A: It's hard to tell at that age, you know. I mean that is what you read in all the 19th century novels of kids of that age doing probably -- but I don't think that the war was related or more experience related --but more age related. Eventually we got on a ship.

Q: Now were these European Quakers or American Quakers?

A: I didn't meet any of them.

Q: So who was in charge of you -- organizing this -- who were the people?

A: Damned if I know. You see I have no recollection of any supervisory other than the nuns. Eventually we got put on the boat and as far as I'm concerned nobody was in charge of us. All I remember is that the sailors thought that he was very amusing to have us and the sailors told me they were going to teach me proper American manners. Teach me how to say thank you to everybody and you know. So a European little girl sat down and curtsied everywhere I went. So I bowed and curtsied and then they taught me to say "fuck you" which was the first thing that I said to my aunt when I came to the United States. And I said that and I had no idea what I was saying to them. The innocence and they didn't speak English so, tell me that that boat was filled with bread baskets. But as soon as the bread was put out, it was eaten up. I remember and I don't know how this happened these two men to which we had crust were on my boat. And I remember we went by authorities and kids came up to the boat and the people came up to the boat and the people came up to the boats from little ships and climbed up the boat. And came with pineapples I never had eaten one and those two men had enough money to buy me sugarcane and pineapple which was the first time that I tasted either one of them. And I don't remember what they were doing on that boat with it. If it was in their way or if there wasn't enough room but I know that they were on that boat.

Q: Do you remember how long the trip was?

A: No, I don't. I remember that we arrived as far as I remember we arrived in Pennsylvania. So I guess it must have been -- I don't remember -- what's that city in Pennsylvania -- there is a port and I think we got to Pennsylvania and then we were put on a train and the train brought us to a school. So it must have been June. Must have been summer because school

was out and up in New York State around Mt. Pleasant, just north of New York City.

Q: In 1943?

A: June or July or August. You know it was summer time because school was out and it put us there and they set us up ____ style to play outside on the playground. I remember seeing things that I never seen before. The slides that they had in those days. Just the two bars with no nothing between the two bars, you don't remember those slides?

Q: No.

A: Yeah, just two bars and nothing in between. You know and you just went down the bars, they're fun and swing sets and things like that. My parents put down the address of there only known relative who is a cousin of my fathers who lived in Pittsburg. And sewn it in my coat pocket on my coat lining. And he was contacted and he said he would have me. But he really didn't think that he should. Anyway, should just have me come to the United States. That is exactly what happened . Andre was contacted at the same time that he was combing these lists and I just arrived and he had called my cousin -- my mother's cousin to let me know where he was. So anyway, it was arranged that I should go and live with them. And it was a good arrangement because these were people that really knew me. And he was with my dad when I was born and he known me as soon as my dad had seen me. But you know, people thought of as our very closest relatives there daughter was -- ah, I don't know eight years old, my big sister so they took me over.

Q: You don't have any more memories of what that felt like ____, what you did -- did you play or you just don't ____?

A: I'm sure they had plenty of food. I'm sure that they had more food than I ever seen since the war begun. I don't remember any of that. All I remember is, I remember my life in New York after it was all over. I made friends. I was a little girl living in an apartment house, broken down and a grocery store was put in it. My local grocery store after I lived in New York as an adult, I remember going to school in New York. I remember a lot of things.

Q: What about --

A: Before I went to live with my parents, but --

Q: When did your parents come to the United States?

A: 1944. Because in 1945 -- it might have been in 1945. The end of the war because I remember when the end of the war came and my father came to the school that day and he said we are going to have to go out and celebrate and we went out to the movies.

End of Tape #2

Conclusion of Interview