

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Flora Singer
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PREFACE

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FLORA SINGER

December 12, 1995

Answer: My name is Flora Singer, my maiden name is Mendelowitz(ph), and in the United States, Mendelowitz(ph). I was born in Berchem(ph), which is a suburb of Antwerp, Belgium. On August 16, 1930.

Question: Tell me a little bit about your family life before the war.

A: Okay. My dad had a furniture workshop and mom was a housekeeper, house, homemaker. We were three small children. And we lived in what was known as a Jewish neighborhood, which encompassed sort of six, seven streets in Antwerp. We went to school, Friday night we had a Sabbath dinner, Saturday we went to synagogue, but Saturday afternoon sometimes we snuck off to the movies. And life was pleasant, you know, with three sisters, sometimes we played together, other times we fought, we did homework, there was a beautiful clock at the end of our street, and after school we'd go and play there, we'd ride our bikes, we'd play ball on the wall next to our apartment house and life kind of was pleasant. It was pleasant. On the week-end, on Sundays, neighbors, friends, everybody'd get on their bikes, we'd go the park, have a picnic. And the park was a beautiful park, it was called the Lanekevitzstrak(ph) Park and had a beautiful pond with swans and we enjoyed it. I re-visited it recently and, seems smaller than it did when I was small. And, everything seemed alright for awhile and what I didn't realize, however, was that the, there was a depression. And that my dad was having financial problems. He eventually lost his business which was, he had a furniture workshop. He made custom furniture. He lost it. And then went off to the coal mines to get work. People tried to get work just about wherever they could. And, he even worked for the Fourth Company for a short while. And then eventually got a position with a steamship company and started sailing the seven seas. And this was about early '36, '37. And at

that time we had gone back, we had gone, I wouldn't say back exactly, my mom did go back, but we went with my mom to Romania because my family originated from there, and that was the last time I saw my grandfather, my grandmother and many of my aunts and uncles. Most of them did perish in Auschwitz. By 1937, we rarely saw my father. We always saw him like every three months, every four months, when he'd come home for about two or three days and then would take off again. At about the same time, he made the acquaintance of an officer on his steamship, on the steamship he worked on, the man was a German and a Christian. And I'm mentioning that because he'll be coming into our lives later on again. Otherwise, I wouldn't have identified him like that. Carl would not always be able to go back to Germany when the ship docked in Antwerp to see his family because time was short, so he would stay with us and we became very fond of him. In 1938, there was an influx of refugees in Antwerp. They came from Austria, from Germany and the whole Jewish community opened up their homes for them. We, ourselves, in our small apartment, had four people staying with us. I think it was four, I'm not sure if it was three or four, but from what I remember, there were two couples. And around the dinner table a lot of talk was going on about what went on in Germany, about what I know now to be Chrystalnacht(ph), and I remember becoming fearful, I remember going to bed and thinking about it and I say, well, maybe we're going to have to run away. And I would ask my mother about it, and she said, don't worry, old people tell stories, they're exaggerating. She says, nothing's happening, Austria, Germany, they're civilized countries. The people there are like here, she says, maybe some things are happening, after all, you know, I always tell you that there are people who are antisemitic, and who don't like Jews, but nothing like what they're telling you. So, time went on.

Q: Let me just, before you go further, just ask, you said that you lived in a Jewish community. Did you have contact with Christian people?

A: Oh, sure. Of course. I went to public school. I went to public school and then after school the boys went to what they called Hebrew school and the little girls went to what they called Yiddish school. We learned how to read and write in Yiddish. Of course we had contact because in public school it was mixed. I didn't go to a secular, I mean I went to a secular school, I didn't go to a religious school. So, yes, we did have contact, but the reason I mentioned the Jewish neighborhood, is, there were Jewish people living all over Antwerp, but the neighborhood that I'm speaking of was, I would almost say 90% Jewish. There were Christians living there also, but it was the neighborhood where you had all the kosher butchers, you had synagogues almost on every second street, and kosher restaurants, and if you really walk those streets you really didn't think there was another world. As a matter of fact, until I went to kindergarten, I spoke just Yiddish. I didn't know there were other languages, except the Hungarian and Rumanian that I heard my parents speak, which I never learned. So, for me, until I went into regular public school, I thought that the only people who existed were Jewish people. But then, of course, I came in contact with everyone. And speaking of school, in Belgium, in many of the European countries, school isn't five days a week like here in the United States. You go to school on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, full days. Thursday is a half day and then a half day on Saturday. So, we were not excused from that, although many times, we were absent on Saturdays. However, when we did go to school, our teacher would excuse us from reading, I mean from writing on the board or writing in our notebooks and then I had one teacher who sat us in the back of the room so she would remember who not to call on to write. And that wasn't overly comfortable, but it was something that we adjusted to. And, okay, going back to '38, '39, there was, I remember hearing talk about Poland being invaded and I heard talk about Belgium being neutral, but it was very vague at that particular time. It wasn't until later that I learned the full history of that. In 1940, the spring of 1940, I was at a summer camp. In

Belgium, you had socialized medicine, you also had a system whereby poor children were offered what they called Fresh Air Camp experience. And you would be able to go away for about two weeks to a Fresh Air Camp to kind of be physically rehabilitated, get good food, get fresh air so that we'd stay healthy. So, I was sent to one camp for two weeks and one of my sisters was sent to another camp. And I remember the morning, this is very clear in my mind, the morning of May 10, 1940. We were sitting and, to the best of my recollection, having breakfast in the dining room, and the radio was playing some music, the music was stopped and an announcement was made that the German armies are walking into Belgium. Which shocked the counselors, everyone, they practically jumped out of their seats. And rushed us to finish our breakfast. Took us back to the dorms, we had to pack our little bags, they got us onto buses and took us back to Antwerp. I got there, I remember getting to Antwerp and I remember the streets being full of people, rushing back and forth and talking. It was very chaotic. Very chaotic. Almost, you know looking back on it now, is I can understand it, what happened is everybody was caught by surprise. Nobody expected it. And people were packing up wagons, and this holds true for both the Christian and the Jewish population. Everyone was running. Because from what I learned later on, is the Belgians were as afraid of the Germans as anybody else would be, at the time. Because during World War II, there was a lot of resistance in Belgium and...World War I, I'm sorry, I apologize. World War I. There was a lot of resistance in Belgium against the Germans. And, from what I heard at the time, was that the, a lot of torturing took place. So Belgians were tortured and they were frightened. I don't have, myself, any specific cases that I could document, but it's sort of one of these known facts within the country. So, everybody was running. Now, we had a slight problem. My mother and the two of us. By then, of course, remember I said my father was on a ship. Meanwhile, unbeknownst to us, my father's ship in '38, had docked in Canada and he had a sister who lived in

New York, who had been sent there after World War I because her father had been killed on the front and there was an aunt in New York who was willing to take in the little girl and raise her. So, my father called her from Canada and she says, have you heard? This was after November of 1938, have you heard what happened in Germany? And my father says, no, what are you talking about? She says, don't go back. He says, what do you mean, don't go back? I've got my wife, I've got the two children, I've got to go back. And she urged him to stay and she sent someone for him and they illegally brought him into the United States. I shouldn't even say this, but he became legalized. He eventually entered the American Army, served honorably and was honorably discharged. As soon as he got to New York and settled down, they started making arrangements to bring us to the United States. That, they encountered great difficulty. First of all, my father wasn't here legally, as yet. Secondly, we, even if my uncle and aunt made the arrangements to bring us, we fell under the Rumanian quota. The Rumanian quota, as for most Eastern European Jews, was very long. It could sometimes take up to 10 years, waiting to come. And I came across something that was very interesting here in the United States, in the immigration department of the years '37 through '40, immigrants were listed by countries, except for one group. One group was listed as Hebrews. I'll show it to you later. But, anyway, getting back to 1940. I had been sent to the summer camp as did, my second sister was sent. So, two of us had been away. I was back now, the little one, the youngest was back. The middle one wasn't back yet. Now, mother tried desperately to reach the camp. We didn't have a phone in our home. She had to go to a shop to get, actually, most of the phones were at the post office, to try to call. Somehow, she couldn't get through. And had absolutely no knowledge where my middle sister was. Someone with a car and a trundle seat in the back, getting ready to escape to France, because that's where everybody was heading, everybody was heading towards Northern France, offered us a seat if we would just go right away. And my

mother had a terrible dilemma. Does she take two of us and go, does she wait for the third one and get stuck and lose all the children, as well? And I learned later, of course, at that time I didn't know, although she talked about it, I had a vague recollection of what she was telling me. Because I remember her saying, Florika(ph), that's a diminutive in Belgium for Flora, we have to try to find Charlotte so we can leave. But, I remember her also saying, if I can't find her, maybe we should go anyway and see if we can find her later on. And, while she was pondering this question, which I now as a mother and a grandmother, I realize it's one of the most difficult ones you ever have to do, and I hope that no mother ever has to ponder this kind of dilemma. She kept talking, but at the same time she started packing some little bags. My youngest sister at the time had the measles and she had a high fever, which was another problem. The people who had the car kept saying, we're leaving, we're not waiting any more. And she kept begging them, wait a little while longer, maybe they'll bring my Charlotte. Finally, they said, no, we're going. And she made a decision. She told one of the neighbors who had decided not to go, to wait out the war or whatever was coming, she says, if my Charlotte comes, please keep her for us. And we got into the car, into the trundle seat in the back, it was an open seat, and we, we went. So, it was the two of us and my mom. And her idea was that if we can get to France, maybe to Calais(ph), and maybe get a ship to Britain, Great Britain, maybe from there, and she was, pure fantasy. We had no Visas, nothing. But, somehow, this is the plan that she had made. From Britain to get to the United States. So, we went.

Q: Was this kind of exciting for you? Or scary?

A: I remember, what I remember is not understanding why we're not waiting for Charlotte. That I remember. And, it was, I don't know, I can't explain it, it was frightening, I don't remember being excited. I don't remember being excited. It was a lot of chaos, and it was, it was strange. But, I can't say excited in the sense of feeling like I'm living a drama or anything like that. No, I don't

recall anything like that. I just remember it being very chaotic, very strange, and I remember having to, to just sit in the car and clutching my doll, I had a fairly new doll that I had gotten just before I had gone away to the camp. And I remember clutching my doll and holding on to her, to the doll. My mother placed the little one on my lap, and I remember her being very hot. So, there were very, there were many physical things going on, so mentally, I don't remember too many sensations. I remember being uncomfortable, I remember trying to hold my doll, I remember my sister who was very hot, being placed on my lap, and not understanding why Charlotte wasn't coming with us. That was the middle sister that we couldn't find.

Q: What else did you take with you?

A: We had two suitcases. They were large in my eyes, but I learned later on that they weren't quite that big. They also started feeling very heavy later on. Anyway, the car went, you couldn't go, you could walk faster than you could ride because, as I said, everybody was running. And, what I didn't learn until later on, is that we were part of the refugees that blocked the roads which prevented the Allies, the Allies were the French and some of the British, from pulling back, or trying to get through on the roads. We, because I remember, this was after the war, I remember reading and learning about the roads being blocked by refugees, and I learned then that we were part of that group of refugees. The car ran out of gas, there wasn't any to be gotten, so they just, the people left the car, so we left the car and then we were on our own. We slept in the fields, wherever you could just find a spot. With our suitcases. Or a barn somewhere, if a farmer allowed you to stay in there. And we did, we did make it to Calais(ph).

Q: _____?

A: Well, we did get a train for a short while, the train stopped in the middle of the road, people had to get off the trains. It took several days. Neither myself or my mom remembered precisely how

many days, but it was several days. I remember being, we were in a railroad station, and this was in Calais(ph), but not near the port. And we were, our plan was at that point, mom decided, well, maybe we shouldn't just go to the port to try to get to Great Britain, maybe we should just try to get to Paris, maybe that would be safer. So, we were in the railroad station, and I remember being very tired and we had slept on our suitcases in the station and then we decided to just abandon one suitcase because mom had to carry my little sister who was four, and who, not quite, this was in May and she wasn't four until the following, the next month, June. What's happening to my English? It's funny, when I get emotional, I lose my ability to speak. We left one suitcase in the railroad station. I remember we hid it behind a corner because we were afraid someone would see us and run after us and tell us we left a suitcase. We thought that was illegal. We then went to the port and we, I sat on a suitcase, the one suitcase that we had left, with my little sister and my mother saw a big ship and they were loading soldiers on the ship. And she went over there and she spoke to someone. I didn't know who she spoke to, but she spoke to someone and when she came back she said, we're going to wait here, maybe they'll take us, they're going to go to England. It was a Red Cross ship. So, we sat. And we sat through the night and they kept loading wounded soldiers. By dawn, the man mom had spoken to walked over to us and he said, sorry, there's no room, it's full. And he couldn't take us. So, we tried to find a place to stay. As we were walking away, we saw people screaming, anybody want to go to England, there's a ship here, you can come, every, people just loaded onto a ship. I learned later that this was a ship that was abandoned and someone who knew how to steer just took the, just went in took the ship and invited people to come onto it. Because, I mean, it's incredible and it's difficult to describe, what things looked like. It was just, people were running and coming and going and nothing was the way nor...quote, normal. And we decided, great, we're going to go onto the ship. So, we came and we went on. Now, there were, it

wasn't a very large ship, but it was still good size. And there were cabins, and we sat against a wall on the deck, on the floor, against a cabin, but facing the dock. Other people sat on the other side facing the water. And, I'm saying this for a reason, what happened, once the ship was full, suddenly the tide went down as it typically does towards evening, and the ship tilted. The people on the other side started sliding down because the ship kept tilting. We ended up sitting on the cabin wall. But, we were safe. And, of course, they did manage to save most of the people. They threw them ladders and we were all pulled up. From there we found a church, we gave up on going to England. We found a church and the Red Cross was giving out milk for children and things like that, so we got a little milk and then we went out to try to find a place to stay. As we were walking the street, the sirens came on and we ended up in a shelter, a bomb shelter. We stayed there for awhile, when the clear siren rang, mom said, you know what, you stay here with Betty, I'll go find us a place to stay. So, she left me in the shelter and I sat there by myself with my little sister. And I sat and I waited and I waited and I waited. And then after awhile I panicked. And I went out of the shelter with my little sister, meanwhile she kept crying, she was thirsty, and I had nothing to give her. So, the streets were deserted and they were fairly dark, and I walked screaming, mamma, mamma, mamma, all of a sudden I hear someone calling, Flora, Flora, Flora. Mom had forgotten where she had left us, because we didn't know Calais(ph). So, she was walking the streets hoping that I would have left the shelter maybe, and she kept calling and hoping that I would hear and I was calling, so we did find each other. At that point, we went, found another church, well, to make a long story short, because this was lengthy, we ended up in Bulangsumere(ph). In Bulangsumere(ph) we stayed put. By then the German Army had walked into Northern France, and we got stuck in Bulangsumere(ph), so we stayed there, we found a place to stay with a woman who had a bar and mom helped her so that we could eat. And we were there for, I would say, about five or six weeks.

By then an order came out that anyone who was not a legal resident of France must return to their countries of origin. So, we decided to return to Belgium. We started walking back, transportation was a mess, you couldn't even get on trains, rails were bombed and everything. And we hitchhiked. As a matter of fact, with German soldiers, we did hitchhike. Anyway, we made it back to Antwerp. Got to Antwerp...

Q: With German soldiers?

A: Yeah, right, we hitchhiked, the German Army. Well, the Germans, we're in Northern France. And we needed to get back to Belgium, so...

Q: And they gave you a ride?

A: They gave us a ride. Of course, they didn't know who we were, what we were, you know, but they didn't give us a ride all the way, just, you know, piecemeal.

Q: One question. I think I recall in an earlier interview you did, you talked about seeing a lot of looting and...

A: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Okay, here's what happened. While mom was helping the woman working in the bar and everything else, my little sister and I, we wandered the streets. And every time you had sirens and you had the bombing, stores were bombed, stores were broken, and people, people broke windows. And we passed, it was a shoe store that we had, we kept pass, it was more than a shoe store, because they also had clothing. And there was a pair of white boots in the window [laughter], it was kind of a silly thing in the middle of a war, but anyway, it was a pair of white boots that I kept looking at. I just, oh, would I love to have those white boots! Anyway, this particular day, my sister and I were walking and we see a lot of people in front of this store. And we get there and we see people walking out with packages, the window was broken, it was an absolute mess. And I saw, so I went over, and I somehow, we made our way into the store and I see the white boots. And I

grabbed the white boots and there was two rain coats, another kind of a coat, and I grabbed that and a pair of boots for my sister, and we ran out. I didn't even try them on. I just thought, approximately, I just grabbed them. Anyway, they did fit. And I loved them. And she loved hers. And we, and the rain coat. And we come back, I come to the bar, and the first thing my mother says is, what in the world is that? So, I told her, I says, everybody was taking, you know, the store was open, everybody was taking. So, she was, I learned later, at the time she just said, you're not supposed to take things you don't pay for them. But, she did not take them away from us. We kept them. Anyway, one day [laughter] I was, you know, in the middle of chaos, in the middle of such dramatic times, there were these moments that there is some humor to it in a way, but I didn't laugh at the time. One day, I'm walking on the street, and all of a sudden I feel somebody grabbing me by the back. It was the owner of the store. And he made me take off the boots and the rain coat, which I wore sunshine or rain or whatever, so that was the end of that. Is that what you were referring to? Well, I didn't steal for a long time, I was told later on that this was stealing. So my mother was in a dilemma at that time, too. You know? It wasn't a time where you taught children honesty or not, you know? You survived. Anyhow, we came back to Belgium eventually. There were a few incidents, like I would brag, you know, really, you want to get food, you know, if you were little, even adults would push you aside, okay, get away, get away. And they were stronger, so they would push you out of line, because they wanted the bread. But, anyway, we made it, we got back to Antwerp and one of the neighbors did have Charlotte. Charlotte, I don't know whether she ever speaks about it, as a matter of fact, she was just interviewed by the Spielberg(ph) project and I don't know if she ever, can you edit this out?

Q: We're not going to edit.

A: Oh, you're not going to edit. Well then, well anyway, I don't know if she ever forgave mom. I don't know if she's mentioned it even, but I must ask her, but I don't know if she ever forgave mom. I don't think she ever understood why mamma took off without her. And she asked a few times, and mom could not explain it. She kept saying, I thought I could save two children instead of losing three. That was her answer. And there were difficult decisions to be made. I felt sorry for mom, because that's, I know this was something that was always on her mind, it was always there. Anyway, we settled back in Antwerp, and, except for bombs, planes that we heard, seeing German soldiers in the streets, life took up a normal routine again. September, we went back to school. By October, however, Jews were supposed to register. Registering was that you had to go to the municipal building, _____, administration and register. Now, the question comes up sometimes, well, what if you didn't register? You were known because in Europe, people carry identity cards. After the war when I turned 15, I received an identity card. As a matter of fact, I carry one, I still have it, it says, stranger. Born in Antwerp, Belgium, nationality, Rumanian. The Rumanians never recognized me as a Rumanian national, and the Belgians didn't recognize me as a Belgian national. It's something I always resented. And, so whether you wanted to or not, you were registered, but you had to officially register. So, mom registered, everybody did. The attitude was that, if you obey the law, you'll be fine. And, a little later on, men were called up for forced labor. My mother's youngest sister also lived in Antwerp. And she had a little boy who was born early in 1940, and her husband had escaped from Poland. He came from Poland around, oh somewhere around '38, just about that time when they got married. And my uncle was called up. He went. And he came back three months later. Many of the men went and they came back three months later. And, see? If we obey, if we do what we're supposed to do, it's no problem. Then, my uncle was called up again. My mother had almost like a sixth sense about things. She lived a lot by

intuition, but it served her well. She said at one point, she said, Alex, I don't know. I don't think you should go. And he did listen, and he took his wife and child and they escaped to Brussels. In Brussels it was easier to get lost. It had a small, in Sashiel(ph), one of the suburbs, it had a Jewish community, but it wasn't quite as big or as defined as the one in Antwerp. Antwerp was almost, a good part of it was what you call almost like a Jewish town. So, in Brussels you could get lost a little bit more. Then, you know, as time went on, we wore the star, it wasn't any fun to go to school with the star, but we didn't have to worry about it too long because we were told you couldn't go to, in Antwerp, you couldn't go to school anymore. In Brussels, the Jewish children were still going to school.

Q: What, what were you doing for money? For food, or...

A: Mom worked. Mom worked. She did some dressmaking and we each had a job. I did handwork, I hemmed. Because lace was hard to obtain, so you made little scallops on the bottom of slips, on top, we made women's slips, so I was in charge of the scallops. One of my sisters was in charge of turning, we made, mom made, of straps. You see, things are different today. To make straps, you made kind of a little tube and then you turned it inside out with a safety pin, and then you attached it to the slip, and one of my sisters was in charge of turning the straps inside out. And then one of us would deliver it, because they were piecemeal, they were made for someone and then we would deliver it, and, she also worked in a restaurant, because by her working in a restaurant we were able to go have dinner there, so it helped with the food. She was always a very hard worker, even when she came to the United States. She's a Rock of Gibraltar, four eleven but an incredible little lady. As a matter of fact, she was one of six sisters and the only one who lived after the war. The difference between her and her sisters, let me just make a comment. I was at a conference about two weeks ago where Lyle(ph) Hilberg(ph) and Yahuda(ph) Ballo(ph) were debating whether

survival depended on pure luck or whether it was the personality of individuals that helped them to survive. And when I went home, I, that whole night I thought about that, and, of course, I related it to our own personal lives, and I realized that short of physically being taken and killed, a lot of it had to do with personality. Knowing when to take advantage of an opportunity and acting upon it without too much debate, without too much reflection. To move, to constantly move. Mom was like that, but she had been a rebel way back. She came from a very religious orthodox family in Romania. She was born in Sighet(ph) which is Transylvania and lived in Romania. And she was the only one of six sisters who decided to leave and go to Belgium. So there was part of a rebel, not someone who is going to just sit still and let life lead her. She eventually brought her younger sister to Belgium. And the same thing happened during the war. I know you want me to talk chronologically, but let me jump ahead a little bit. At one point when we were going into hiding, the problem you ran into with that was that the people who would hide you, particularly there was an official, not an official, an organized network in Belgium that hid children, but they couldn't tell you where they would take the children to. Because if you were caught, what you didn't know you couldn't tell, should you be tortured. So, they didn't tell. My aunt wouldn't let her child go, she could not bring herself to let him go. My mom took the risk, we're alive, my little cousin is not. When my aunt and uncle were already in our clandestine apartment, which they never left in more than eight months, and my mother begged them to accompany her to another hiding place, my aunt's attitude was, there's no place to run, they'll find us, where are we gonna run? My aunt is not alive, she died at Auschwitz, and mom lived. Because mom, that does not mean that mom could not have gotten caught, but she still, she kept acting, she kept moving and trying. Anyway, going back...

Q: I wanted you to talk to me a little bit more about the various restrictions placed upon Jews in Antwerp and how you felt about that, how it impacted you, your school, your play, everything.

A: Okay. We couldn't go to school. At one point we couldn't go to school. Actually, yeah, we were supposed to go to a, Jewish schools were still operating a little bit, but technically, we couldn't go. Then Jews had to give up their radios. Jews had to give up their bicycles. And there was this constant attitude, well, if we do what we're told to do, a bicycle is very important in Belgium. I mean, people practically lived on their bicycles. But that, okay, so you give up the bicycles, so you give up this. Then, but there was, you became upset, you became angry because you couldn't have your bicycles any more, because you couldn't have radios any more. Also, once we started wearing the star, we didn't risk as much going out of the neighborhood. We didn't live in an official ghetto, as they did in Warsaw and Łódź and places like that, in Poland, but for all practical purposes, once we wore the star we might as well have lived in a ghetto. Because, you didn't dare venture out too far from home. You didn't feel comfortable. If you, for example, when I was, just before I was told we couldn't go to school anymore, I would wear the star and I would go to school and I'd hold a book up sort of covering my star. And youngsters would walk over and pull away the book and say, don't you know it's a crime to cover up your star? Which was true. It was a crime, you weren't supposed to cover it up. But, even children were drawn into that situation, and children can be cruel. So, it did create a lot of discomfort. You couldn't go to the park anymore, it was forbidden to go there. You couldn't go to the movies, Jews weren't allowed in the movies. You couldn't go to an ice cream parlor or restaurants, there were signs, signs went up different places. So, you found yourself sort of retreating. The only saving grace, so to speak, that there was, was that you weren't alone. Other kids were in the same boat. Your neighbors were in the same situation. So, that kind, and you did, it was, the feelings were very strange. It was, you found yourself being very, at that

point, I remember becoming very unhappy. And, not understanding why. I knew what was going on, but what I couldn't understand is the why. What did we do? Why us? I remembered before the war, we were happy, we went, we came, and then all of a sudden, everything changed, and that is where I had great difficulty, with that why. Then there was another element for us, personally, at that point, mom got upset with dad. He's in America, he's, why did he leave us, you know, somehow thinking that if he had been there, he would have been okay. We would have all been okay, which we wouldn't have been. It would have probably even been worse. For the simple reason, being alone, she made all the decisions, she didn't have to consult and there didn't have to be a discussion as to should we, shouldn't we. She decided, and we did. But, it was difficult. My little sisters had even greater difficulty with it. And I found myself constantly saying, don't worry, it'll be okay. It'll be okay. Because there was crying, why can't we go here, why can't we go there, and why can't we do this. And then food started being a problem because Jews, the rationing stamps were stopped for Jews. We couldn't have rationing stamps. Now, if you didn't have rationing stamps, you couldn't buy food. We still had a small advantage. Mom worked in the restaurant as a cook. So, we were able to go and have a meal there, but even that slowed down because the restaurants had to start using ration stamps, so then we couldn't have, and then mom lost her job.

Q: Were you ever turned away from anything? You said that all of a sudden you couldn't do this, you couldn't do that...

A: Oh, yeah. I went with my sisters, after we couldn't go to school anymore, I remember I went, remember I mentioned the park we always went to? It was at the end of our street, it's called the Lanekevitzstrak(ph) Park, at the end of our street. I remember going with my sisters to the park, and there was a sign, no Jews allowed, and, but there was no gate. And we walked, I said come on, we walked in and all of a sudden a guard walked out of nowhere and he looked at us and he goes,

like that. And I remember going... And I didn't say anything, I just remember going like this, so we had to turn around and go. And my little sisters were devastated, because we went there every day, it was like natural, it was our, quote, our park. You know, that's where we had picnics on the weekends with the friends and neighbors, that's where we went after school, our park, and we couldn't go there. We used to go to the movies, and we couldn't go to the movies. We used to go get ice cream, and we couldn't get ice cream. So, there were a lot of things, and we started finding our way of life sort of narrowing. A friend of mine wrote her biography, autobiography, and she called the book, the Shrinking Circle. But that's exactly what it was, sort of your world started shrinking and getting smaller and smaller. So, we found ourselves ending up just never really going far from the building we lived in and just playing there. But, again, there were other kids in the same boat. So, we ended up playing together and, you know, children have a way, though, of surviving. So, while this was all going on, as I said, my uncle and aunt had already left and they started coming and arresting people. Not many, one, two, and then later on they came with a van that was about the size of, you know, the small vans that we have? It would come around, it would stop, a siren would get off, four or five Gestapo men would just jump out, go into a building, pull out a couple of people, take off with them.

Q: What people?

A: Well, we assumed that it was people who had broken some kind of law, who hadn't obeyed a law, who must have done something, this was an assumption at first, must have done something wrong. But, it increased and increased. And then we realized that they started arresting people, also rumors started reaching us. You know, it was very interesting, they did things in such a way that, if somehow you had contact, managed to contact someone from another city and you would tell them, they would say, what are you talking about? Nothing was done in a manner simultaneously in

different cities or across an entire country. When they were arresting people in Brussels, they were still not arresting in, I mean, in Antwerp they were still not arresting in Brussels. Or in another part of the country. It was, they were, they were incredible psychologists. They were, the same way with my uncle I said going off for forced labor. You do what you're told to do, we won't touch your wife and child. And at first, that's exactly what they did. And then people started, like I said, being arrested and not coming back. By then, just about that time, all of a sudden, one day, Carl shows up, my father's friend. The Christian officer of the ship that he had been on. We had not heard from him from the time that dad had jumped ship. It seemed that he had been attached to the Commandant Tour in Antwerp, and, you know, I've been wracking my brain trying to remember his last name, and I can't. I had, just before my mom died in '92, I kept, the last few years, it didn't occur to me, I always thought of Carl, I never thought of his last name, and it wasn't until here, in the last few years just before mom died, that it all of a sudden occurred to me that I didn't know Carl's last name. And I asked her and she says, Oh, my God, I've forgotten. She could not recall his last name. So, this is something that escapes me to this day, is his last name. But anyway, he showed up one day, and mom, of course, is worried, she saw a uniform. Because by then we started getting very nervous if anybody in uniform came to visit. And he says, just relax, he says, how are you, how is David? Have you heard from him? So, she had to tell him that we hadn't. How are the children? He came around a few times and brought us food, but then some of neighbors are saying, what are you doing with this German? What are you doing with this Deutsche(ph)? So, she begged him, she says, don't come. She says, I'll manage. And he didn't. One day he did show up. Didn't stay, just came, very quickly, brusquely said, Fanny, take the kids, if you can get out of town, go. And she says, why? He says, just do what I tell you to do. Turns around and takes off. Didn't even wait to, I can't, looking at it now, thinking back, I think he, himself, probably was afraid, because he

was Army. Although, mom seemed to remember and, see I remember him being Army, mom seemed to remember that he had a black uniform. Now, if indeed the uniform was black, then he was attached to the Gestapo. So there, I have a little, there's a little cloud there. I'm not 100% sure whether he was or was not attached to the Gestapo.

Q: Did he suggest where you should go?

A: No. Nothing, he didn't even stay. And I remember that, I was there. He just didn't even stay. Just took off. Mom didn't hesitate, she immediately, she took off my star, she took off her star and she put a double layer of clothing on each of us, and we took off. We went to the train and we took a train, where are we going to go? We're going to go to Brussels. To, because somehow, through people, my aunt had let us know where she was. So we knew where to find her. And by then, people still weren't really going underground. The only ones at that point, that were really going underground, were people who were, like my uncle, who refused to go again for forced labor, who didn't show up, people like that. And, of course, unfortunately, those who disappeared or those who might have been _____. We had a problem, mother's card by then, when we registered and we got the stars and everything, they stamped everyone's identity card in two languages. _____ in French and Yode(ph) in English. So, mom's card was stamped. And you could be stopped at any point, anytime, you could be stopped on the street, there were always checkpoints, no matter where you went, so we, basically, had to pray. We get a ticket, 40 minutes later you can get off in Brussels, it's very simple, very easy. However, trains can be stopped at any time, so if they stopped the train and they came in and they would ask for documents, we would be caught. By then there was already a lot of suspicion that people were being deported. There were rumors and, but people didn't know exactly, but you knew you were in danger.

Q: Approximately when...

A: This was, you're going into spring, like winter, late winter, spring of '42. About this time. Well, by the previous December, December of '41, that's already school and everything was closed, we weren't allowed to go to school and that's when they already took people, but nothing massive yet. But that was getting into the spring, summer of '42. We were lucky. We did make it to Brussels, they didn't stop the train, and we get to Brussels. And we're ready to leave the station and there's a mob of people. We couldn't get, there's a staircase that you have to go down before you can exit. And there was a mob of people, there was a checkpoint at the bottom of the staircase. And, mom panicked. So, she looks at us and says, pick a fight. It's amazing, you know, we were young, but, there was this instant matter of being able to obey orders. You sensed, as young as you were, you may not have known the details, but you sensed that you were in danger. So, we picked a fight. And we started kicking and screaming, people started making way for us and we ended up down the stairs and one of the people at the checkpoint, I remember, said, in German, you know, get out of here with these brats, technically, and mom pretended she didn't understand him, although she did very well because Yiddish and German, the same language, they teach it here by the way, at our local universities through the German department. Not the Oriental department, the German department. So, he then said in broken French, _____, so we did, we left. And, amazingly enough, we made it out of the station. And we caught our breath about a block or two. We didn't, it was amazing, we didn't talk. We just walked, without rushing too quickly, although that's what we wanted to do. And we did make it out and we made it to my aunt's, and we couldn't stay really where she stayed because it was a really tiny little place. And we found a place to stay and we took a neighbor into our confidence. At that point, we changed our name. So, we settled in and mom managed to get some work, which is, basically, most work at that point was done on the black market, so to speak. It wasn't legal work. Also, sewing she did. And...

Q: Q: What did you change your name to?

A: Fiers, F-I-E-R-S. And, we didn't change our first names because they were Belgian enough and secular enough, so people who were named Sarah or Abraham, you know, they changed their names totally.

Q: Did you get any kind of identification with these new names?

A: No. Not at that point, not at that point. At that point, mom just enrolled us in school and I still can't understand, they took us in and I know you need birth certificates and things to enroll kids in school. Somehow, I have a feeling, I've thought about this recently, I have a feeling that the principal, when mom enrolled us, was already suspecting that we were Jewish kids. She never asked us for documents, mom just enrolled us. And, we didn't stay too long. We only stayed a few weeks. Uh, my middle sister ended up having an argument with another child and the, that particular child's brother, who was an adult, was part of the Blackshirts, Belgian Blackshirts, which was Belgian Nazis. We, as I said, we went for a few weeks and I remember just before we stopped going to the school, a man came into the class that I was in, handed out slips of paper to the kids wearing Jewish stars, kids were in that school with Jewish stars, the one condition that we had when mom enrolled us in the school, she enrolled us under that false name, Fiers, we couldn't tell anybody we were Jewish, even the Jewish kids. And that was hard. That was hard. Because you kind of wanted to tell them, I'm like you, you know? But you couldn't, we couldn't, and we didn't. We didn't.

Q: _____?

End of tape one.

Tape two

Q: I want to just go back to Antwerp a minute and see if there's anything else you can remember about what life was like before you went to Brussels. You talked about the Germans coming and ____ taking people away, did you see any act of violence against the Jewish people?

A: I, let me give you a few incidences. For example, one day we were in the apartment, my two sisters and I, mom was at work. And I remember we were standing near the window, looking out, and we saw a group of Blackshirts, who were Belgian Nazis, coming into the street. Across the street from us there was a small book store, actually the store had Jewish books, _____, which were the prayer shawls, and all kinds of Judaica. They broke the window, they stormed into that shop and I remember them pulling out the old man who ran it. He had a long beard, they literally, they pulled at the beard and they pulled his side locks to the side and all that. And then they threw him down in the middle of the street and I remember they kicked him, they literally kicked him with their boots, and I remember we stood near the window holding each other and shaking, the three of us, we were just devastated. And we were frozen, but yet, we stood at the window, looking. It was one of the more difficult moments. The other time, I remember we had gone for a walk, because we still walked out and, you know, we didn't stay confined yet at that point, and I remember seeing a fire wagons at the big synagogue, and there was a crowd of people around it. And I looked and the synagogue was burning and the, they put the fire, they waited, they weren't putting the fire out and that's what I remember was bothering me. I didn't see the firemen, I remember seeing the firemen standing and not doing anything. And only after a while, I saw them go in and putting out the fire. I didn't learn until after the war that they had strict orders not to put the fire out until the fire threatened the adjoining buildings. But, at that time, I didn't know that. I just saw _____. But, before the synagogue was burning, I was there just, I remember. I remember seeing, while the

synagogue was burning, I remember also seeing a pile of books and Torah Scrolls laying messed up in front of the synagogue and I was told after, I also learned afterward, that they had been pulled out first and dumped in the street. So, but basically, what I saw was the crowd of people, the firemen doing nothing and the synagogue burning. And it wasn't until afterwards that I learned how the whole thing had proceeded. And I remember being scared. I remember being quite scared.

Q: Now, you, it sounds like you and your sisters were on your own a bit, did your mother...

A: We were on our own a lot.

Q: ...leave instruction with you? Did she, did she kind of tell you what was going on and how to act differently?

A: Uh...

Q: You were in charge of both of your sisters?

A: No, yeah. Okay. Me, she told. She also let us know, all three of us, that if we didn't behave a certain way, that we could get hurt. Basically, that we could get hurt. Later on, we learned from my mother that if we didn't behave or act in a certain way, if we didn't remember our false name and things like that, that we could be taken away and killed. She didn't say by whom or how, but that, basically, was it. Me, she told me more, and she says that all the things that I had heard before the war were true. That was the first time I was, you know, by '41 or so, that I started learning that the things that she had said before the war that the people were exaggerating, that, of course, they weren't really exaggerating, you know?

Q: When you say behave in a certain way, what does that mean?

A: Okay. A, to be very, very good. To never draw attention to ourselves by anything that we did. And the biggest thing, once we ended up in Brussels, was to never forget our false name and to never forget that we were, quote, not Jewish. That we were Christians. And, as for me, if someone

asked, I was supposed to say that I had already had my first communion. I didn't even know what it was, but, those are basically, you know, some of the orders.

Q: Were there things you had to learn at this point about being Christian?

A: Not yet. Not yet. Not in Brussels. That was only if we were approached. But no one approached us. As long as we remembered our false name, at this point we were okay, because we were still living in a very secular world. But, we weren't really out, once we got to Brussels, except for the few weeks that we went to school and back to the apartment, and just going back, we didn't really move around too much. The only other place that we went was to a house that was across the street from the school where mom had gotten a job working as a housekeeper. Because by now things are getting very difficult. There was no place to really work any more. Don't forget, this wasn't Antwerp where she was sewing and working at the restaurant. Once we got to Brussels, she couldn't really work legally anymore. So, she cleaned the house for these people. And, but that, you know, things didn't last, it wasn't that, it only lasted a few weeks and then what happened is, after my, Charlotte, it was the middle one, it was always Charlotte for some reason. Charlotte had a fight with this child in school, we learned that, later on, that even the instructors at the school were worried about this child. Because when this child said some, I'll get my brother on you, there was good reason. Her brother was a Belgian Nazi. Everyone in school was afraid of her. The principal, one day, said to me, Flora, ask your mother to come to school. And by then I said the other kids had already had gotten these slips of papers and I later learned what it said. For example, they got them on a Friday and they were, the paper basically said, told the parents or whoever were the guardians, that on the Monday following this Friday, I have no date to give you here, you know, all I remember is it was a Friday, they were to report to another school. To the best of my knowledge, those children reported, but never came home. I have no documentation of that. That's word of mouth.

That is what I learned. And when mom came to school, her first reaction was, and my reaction when the principal told me this, well, we didn't do anything, we were good, because they never called parents to school. See, there was no thing about parent-teachers association, you didn't have that over there. When a parent was called to school, it was because a child did not behave. So, my reaction was, well, we're good, my sisters are good, we didn't do anything. And she says, no, I know you didn't do anything, I want to talk to mom. So, when, meanwhile, just prior to that, also, all that was happening within those same weeks, she realized that we didn't have really warm winter coats. So, she had made arrangements for us to receive a winter coat and also receive a glass of milk every day. That was like for poor children, but what we didn't know is that those winter coats and the milk came from an industrialist, Msr. Rausank(ph). He was the patron, we didn't have, as I said, parent-teacher associations, but what you had is patrons of the school. And which a rich industrialist or another wealthy individual would take a school under their patronage and give poor children clothing, vitamins, all kinds of things. So Msr. Rausank(ph) happened to be the patron of the school, _____, where we were going to. And when mom came to school, of course, her first reaction, too, when I told her the principal wanted to see her was, what did you do? I said, mamma, we didn't do anything. And I answered for my two little children because they didn't do anything. So, she did go to school and the principal said, Madame _____, she called her, said Mrs. Fiers, I know you're Jewish and I'd like to help you. And mom denied up and down. And she says, look, let's not waste time arguing, I will put you in contact with Msr. Rausank(ph), and he, I think it's time for the children to be hidden.

Q: Now, before we go into that chapter, I just have a couple additional questions. When, after moving to Brussels, did you ever have occasion to go back to Antwerp, what was that...

A: Okay. I should have mentioned that earlier. Once we got to Brussels, at first, when Carl told us to leave, mom reacted, like I said, put a double layer of clothing on us, we took off, we ended up, and we made it safely to Brussels. Once we were settled in Brussels, it was, I don't even know, I think it was no more than about 48 hours later, or something like that. It was within a day or so. If even the same night, I don't remember the exact time period, at this point. I'm getting old and my memory is starting to go. That's why I'm glad we're doing this, in a way. She said, Florika(ph), you're going back to Antwerp, you're going to warn everybody. You're going to tell them that something's going to happen. And, I didn't want to go. She says, my attitude was, why don't you go? She says, you're a child, you can go. You don't have an identity card. You see, children didn't walk around with identity cards unless they were Jewish and wore the star. She says, you'll go, you'll tell everybody that's something's going to happen and then you'll come back. So, the one thing, we always obeyed. My mother, we did not disobey my mother, ever. Of course, if we could help it, but, we did obey. And I went. I went. I took the train, I went back to Antwerp, and I was looking for someone to tell them. The streets in the neighborhood were extremely quiet. I didn't see anybody in the streets, the shops were quiet. I walked around, I saw nobody. And I started feeling very frightened. I wanted to leave and go back to Brussels. However, how could I go back to Brussels without telling somebody? I had to obey and fulfill what mom had told me to do. As I was walking on the street, there was one street that was called the, I believe it was the Laminerestratt(ph), I was walking, it was starting to get towards evening, and I was always very afraid of the dark. I still am. And I saw it getting between day and night and I said, I really want to go back, but I didn't do what I was supposed to do. And while I was walking and debating what to do, I hear a knock near the bottom of my feet. And I look down and I see a hand saying...it was someone who was related to us, like a distant cousins and relatives who were in, down near that, it

was like a cellar window, like one of those little cellar windows. I knew how to get into that building. I went down two houses and went in and I made my way down to that cellar. There were several people holed up there. And they said, what are you doing here? I thought you left. And I said, well, mamma sent me back to tell everybody to leave. That something's going to happen. She says, you're a little bit late. What had happened is, just shortly after we left, _____ came in with trucks and they emptied several of the streets. That, there were people, there were still Jews in Antwerp, but that quarter, except for people that they missed, like those people that they missed. So, I said to them, well, you better come with me. And they said, no, we have food for several weeks. And there's no place to go. We'll just stay put. See, there was that, you know, you had sort of a mixed bag, you know, people say, why did Jews go like sheep to the slaughter? They didn't go like sheep to the slaughter. But there were people who did become paralyzed, that's the only way I can describe it. If they became paralyzed like, we can't, where are we going to go? There was, there was a panic that set in, that kind of paralyzed them. There was like a disbelief also. Because here you, don't forget, Belgium was a very free country. You were able to walk on the street and say, I'm a Jew. I mean, very tolerant, the Belgian government paid for parochial schools be they Jewish, be they Christian, Catholic, Protestant, whatever. See, but in that country, even though you did have the fascists, you did have those components, but on the whole, the country was a comfortable place for people of any religion to live in. So, a lot of people did become sort of, like I said, paralyzed.

Q: And that was your sense at the time?

A: That was my sense at the time, right. I was frustrated, I remember being frustrated. Okay? I remember I said, no, mamma said you've got to come. You have to come. So, and I, like I felt like I couldn't leave, they were like, they were upsetting me, I was actually getting upset because I was

supposed to tell them that they have to leave. And, they didn't, I left myself. Took the train, went back to Brussels.

Q: Did you have any sense at the time, either in Antwerp or Brussels, what the Christian response to all of this was?

A: Not yet. Not yet. No, no. That part was, don't forget, out of my realm. And there was, you know, there was not that kind of a contact. No. We lived in a narrow mentally, for us the world became very narrow. You know. If mom had a sense of what the Christian world's reaction was, except for the immediate people that you dealt with, I don't know if she even knew yet at that time.

Q: You know, just for clarity, I wanted to date this time period. This was late spring of '42?

A: This was like very late spring, like toward the end of the school year.

Q: Of 1942?

A: '42, correct.

Q: Okay. So, why don't you continue.

A: Okay. By August of that year, we, Msr. Rausonk(ph) had come, actually in June yet, Msr. Rausonk(ph) had come into the picture and he immediately made arrangements. A, he gave mom a job in the factory. He made false documents for mom. He took me into this home, my sister, one of them went to his brother's home, the third one went to his secretary, and he started making arrangements to hide us in a convent of the Franciscan nuns in Doel, D-O-E-L. The Flemish part of the country. He had a cousin who also this past spring received posthumously, the medal and the title, Just of the Nations from _____ in Israel. So, he made arrangements with her to hide us. Doel was a very small town. It was, it's a one street town, in fact, I've gone back there and I've only afterwards, realized how small it really was. One single street and one cross street, that was about it. It was a convent of Franciscans, nuns, it had been a boarding school. But, there were

no children now because of the war. And since it was right near the sea, sort of in the line of battle, there were no kids. There was also one outpost, one German outpost, one church. Msr. Rausonk(ph) took us there personally. Well, first, as I said, I stayed in his home and...

Q: Okay. I want you to tell me about the trip there. Like, how much did you and your sisters know at this point about where you were going and what, you know, what was happening and...

A: You know, it was almost like a fog. We knew we had to be hidden. We knew that somebody could take us away and kill us, although the word kill us was very vague. We knew that if we made the slightest mistake, if we disobeyed, if we made noise when we were supposed to be quiet, if we cried, we would not be taken care of. And then all these bad things can happen to us. And the words even bad things, was pretty, it was vague. Because, you know, when you're a child, even the work kill or taken away and bad things can, it's something that frightens you, but you don't have that clear concept. I had it and I didn't have it. I knew I had to protect my sisters from all these bad things. I had to make sure that they didn't betray themselves, that they didn't accidentally say their real name. Or say that they weren't Christian. But, it wasn't that, okay, the Gestapo will take me, they will take me to the camp, they will gas me, they will, you know, I didn't know, we just knew this global concept, we'll be taken away, we'll be killed, bad things will happen to us. But, nobody really knew yet. Yet.

Q: Did you put up a fight at all about leaving your mother, or...

A: No, it was, you know, this is something we talk about, my sisters and I, to this day. The way, you know, because I look at my grandchildren, and my own children when they were raised, I mean, just to make, to get them to even eat or do homework sometimes, you know, is a little battle, when they want to watch TV and all. And, I look at them, and I say, I have a grandson who, one is married, one's this 13, he will celebrate his Bar Mitzvah January 1, and I look at them, and I say, I

can't believe how young they are in comparison to how old we were at that time, without knowing precisely. No, we did not, even the little one, even the little one, was so well behaved. Although, I did have to pinch her a lot. To get her to behave. She had a habit of biting and I had to constantly tell her, don't bite someone because they're going to send us away. Don't scream, they're going to send us away. Don't cry, they're going to send us away. Don't ask for more food, they'll send us away. And we knew that we couldn't afford to be sent away. That was very important.

Q: You had a lot of responsibility for an 11 year old.

A: Yes, it's amazing I'm halfway normal. Sometimes I think about it and I say to myself, you know, I miss, the one thing that I do miss is having had some frivolous light years. I am younger today than I was then. Because when I came to the United States at 16, I was old. And I look at 16 year olds and I say, they're such babies. They're such babies. And I remembered I was handed a piece of paper to sign to vote for two people, which one do I like best? Frank Sinatra, Perry Como. I didn't even know who they were. And when I learned what it was the kids wanted me to sign, I said, what kind of stupidity, don't they know any better? They were babies, I was isolated. I was a very lonely teenager.

Q: I want to get to that later, but I just, it must have been hard having responsibility for your sisters.

A: It was! But, I didn't think about it. I just knew this is what mom had told me to do. And I have to do it. And it was something that I had, was doing already, from the time that I was like seven and a half, eight. Because from my earliest recollections, what I heard constantly was, don't be such a child. Go take care of the children. Don't be such a child. Or don't be a child. So, I, I was not a child. It was my mom and me and the kids. And that's the way it went. And even as adults, it was mom and me and the kids.

Q: Any thoughts about your father at this point? Or he was really in the background?

A: By now, we weren't really thinking about him. I mean, at first there was, and there was anger. We didn't, there was really no reason to be angry, but, you see, we didn't know that he was going to jump ship. The aunt here had talked him into doing this. He had no intention of not coming back. As it turned out, there was, for him it was the best thing, but he had no intention. But he was talked into it and the attitude was, well, you come and we'll immediately take Fanny and the kids. But, of course, by the time he realized that he couldn't get Fanny and the kids here, the war started and the rest is history. But, there was anger because I think we all have to lash out at somebody. So, whenever we did go, before we even went into hiding, when we were still together, I remember mamma getting upset many times. And, where she'd lash out, sure, he's safe, but you know, and, you know, we had, especially when she had some real difficult times, so, you know, yeah, there was anger. My anger lasted even after the war when I came to the United States.

Q: We'll get to that...so, I think you were beginning to tell me how you got to Doel?

A: Doel, right. We stayed no more than about two, two and a half months.

Q: How was the trip getting there, was that easy?

A: Okay, the trip getting there. Msr. Rausonk(ph) got a little flatbed truck and, it's amazing because later on we went to hiding places and we went openly by train, but I guess he must have been really frightened at this point, it was probably his first experience even doing this, although he was with the Resistance, so I'm sure he was involved in many other actions. He got a little flatbed truck, took some vegetable crates with, those wooden crates, fairly large, and put each of us under a crate. He then surrounded them and topped them with crates that were filled with vegetables and fruits. And when he was stopped at a checkpoint, well, because we had strict orders, not a sound, unless he stops the truck to let us go in the field, take care of our physical needs or to give us some food and a drink. At a checkpoint, he said especially when the truck stops, not a sound. And, I remember at

one of the checkpoints, we had stopped and I heard him ask for documents which was standard procedure. No matter where you went, at any corner, any spot, you can be asked for documents. So, that was nothing unusual. He was asked for his documents and I know they were in order, and I remember hearing, what have you got there on the truck. He said, well, you can see, I've got vegetables, and I remember hearing like knocking on the crates, but we didn't make a sound. I always tell kids when I talk to them, the one thing I remember, and it's amazing the way you retain something. I had a tickle in my throat. And, I remember thinking that if I don't cough and clear my throat, that I was going to choke to death. But I also knew that if I cleared my throat and I made the slightest sound, Msr. Rausonk(ph) would be caught, then we would be caught. So I held out. I survived, apparently. I used to, when I taught, I used to make the kids do that in class. And I'd say, you know, see if you can hold out a minute. It's good exercise. But, anyway, that's how he drove us to Doel. And that's how he took us back to Brussels two and a half months later when the Mother Superior was afraid to keep us.

Q: So, describe your arrival at this convent, if you would.

A: Okay. We got there, we were let into a parlor and we were left in the parlor with the nun and Msr. Rausonk(ph) took leave of us and he left. I had a feeling that he might have stayed to say goodbye to his cousin or something, but I don't know. But, he took leave of us and he left. And we're sitting in this parlor with the nun and all of a sudden Betty, the youngest, looks up at the wall and she sees a cross. And, which we had seen on churches, but we had strict orders we were never to walk into a church or anything. So, I knew really very little about Christianity. I knew there was a cross and that there someone by the name of Jesus Christ on the cross. Why, what, when, I knew absolutely nothing about. And, I knew that Christian children went to church on Sundays and Jewish children went to synagogue on the Sabbath. But, I don't remember even thinking about the

why's too much at that time because I associated mostly with the Jewish children, even though I knew some of the children in school, Christian children. So, she looks up and she says, what's that? And the nun looks kind of strangely at her and she says, of course, I'm Flemish, you know, why, that's our Lord on the cross, my little one. Sure you know, and do you have that at home? And she looks, and meanwhile, I started kicking, luckily there was a tablecloth, I started kicking her under the table. And she didn't make a move to listen to me. So then I pinched her and she says, stop hurting me! And, I'm like, dying. And I says, okay, we're lost. I didn't say it, I thought it. And Charlotte was just sitting quietly. Charlotte was very, very quiet. But, Betty was a rebel. That was the youngest. And, the nun says, well, I'm sure you have that at home. And she says, no, we don't. She says, well, what do you have? She says, I don't know what you call it, if you give me a pencil and paper, I'll show you. And she made the most beautiful Jewish star. Well, I thought, that's it, you know. The nun jumps out of her seat, runs out of the parlor, and, I mean, leaves the door wide open, two minutes later we see two nuns coming, I found out later one was Sister Adonia(ph), the other one was the Mother Superior, arguing loudly, chaos broke out. And, I learned later, of course, in retrospect, I learned later from Sister Adonia(ph), I didn't learn this until after the war, from Sister Adonia(ph), that she was the only one that knew we were Jewish children. She knew, but she told the Superior and Msr. Rausonk(ph) had, of course, I guess, instructed her to say something, that we were children of a prisoner of war whose mother had gotten ill, and who just needed a place to stay until our mother got well. But they were not told. She lied, actually, to her own Mother Superior. Which, you know, for a nun, so, I was, until 1993, I was under the impression that the reason we were sent away was because Betty betrayed us. In 1993, I found out differently. This little nun here told me. She, in 1993, I visited with her, I said to her, I said, Sister Roberta, I said, it's a shame we couldn't stay with you. If only Betty hadn't betrayed us. She said, Betty had nothing to do with it, it

was you. I said, me? What did I do? She says, it was you. I said, so tell me. So, she told me. It seemed that, see, there was no chaplain, usually convents have a chaplain. There was no chaplain because of the war. The nuns went to the local church and the priest, on Sunday when he was preaching, said something to the effect of, it's a shame what's happening to the Jews, but, after all, they're paying for the sins of their father, and so forth, and so forth. And I would come back to the convent in a rage, and just go on and on, why does he keep saying that? We didn't do anything. My mother didn't do anything. We didn't kill anybody. We didn't hurt anybody. And the Mother Superior was afraid that someday, in my anger, I would say this to the wrong person and, so, we were returned to Brussels.

Q: How long were you there?

A: About two and a half months or so. Between two and a half months and three months. Even Sister Adonia(ph), after the war, wasn't sure if it was two and a half or three months.

Q: During this two and a half months, or three months...

A: It was great. They were so good to us. Sister Roberta and Sister Adonia(ph) took care of us. They crocheted little slippers for us because we wore the wooden clogs, and what you would usually do is, you would walk into them with the little, like a little slipper and then when you get to the front door, you just walk out into the house. You didn't walk in with the shoes. They, I remember her braiding my hair, I mean, they were just, really treated us wonderfully. There we were with all these nuns and, it was just nice.

Q: Did they teach you any rudimentary Catholicism to just get you by?

A: Not much, well, we did learn who Jesus Christ was, and we learned what Mass was, and I also learned that I should have been, have had my communion and be able to go to communion, and I couldn't go because I wasn't baptized. So, I was told that if someone asked me, to say that my

baptismal papers hadn't arrived, so they didn't feel they could let me go to communion. You know?

So, but not really much there, not much.

Q: Learned a few prayers...?

A: Yeah, right. You know, just learned from the nuns, you know, Our Lord's Prayer, you know, but nothing really much at that point in time. By the end of the war, though, I knew catechism better than I knew Judaism, so.

Q: Were you, were there certain rules you had to adhere to in there?

A: Not in that particular convent as much. You know, we had to obey, we had to really be good, but we were just basically the three of us with all those nuns, so, it, that place was kind of nice. Of course, we couldn't go where we wanted to go. You know, we couldn't just walk out and go walking and things like that, or talk to any of the villagers.

Q: How did you spend your days?

A: I did some crocheting, some knitting, we talked to the nuns. It's vague, it's pretty vague.

Q: Do you remember ever having some sort of a contingency plan or a special hiding place if there was visitors?

A: Not in that particular convent. Later on, yes, but not there.

Q: You never kept a diary during any of this?

A: What I did do, is I had written a few poems and a few things, some got lost, some had, I can't, there's one poem that I wrote in French and then I kind of polished it up, I don't have it with me. About, because what happened is, later on Charlotte was very, became enamored of catholicism and was talking in terms of she wanted to be baptized also, and I wrote this thing about my name being Jewish, and, one day I'll show you a copy. I should have maybe brought it, I didn't think about it. It's somewhere is one of my drawers.

Q: You don't remember it?

A: Not, well, basically, the sequence was that, you know, we were being pursued and why, and because my name is Jew, it's synonymous, I am you and you are me, and see, there was a girl in one of the later convents, course this was later on, one who did become baptized, and became Jewish again. That's a story in itself, and I said, you know, when they betrayed you, I didn't do, Charlotte almost did, I didn't do, you remained me and I remained you. My name is Jew. So, I still have it. I, actually, I submitted it in a French class when I went back to college, and it got an A, but that's not the issue.

Q: Did you have any contact with your mother during this two month period?

A: Not, no, not during that time at all. The next time that we saw mother is when Msr. Rausonk(ph) took us back the same way that we came. And, so we did spend some time with mom again. And it was then that, apparently, Father Bruno came into the picture. Although, then I still did not know that he was in the picture. We were hidden after that, we were hidden in a, an orphanage in Etherbig(ph). Etherbig(ph) is a suburb of Brussels. A borough of Brussels. And, it was with the Sisters of St. Joseph. What I didn't know until after I was there for awhile is that some of the nuns were not really nuns, they were young Jewish women dressed as nuns. Who were also being hidden there. We were there for, I'm not sure if it was seven or eight months. There was a leak, how the leak took place or what, I don't know. All I know is that we, we did leave very suddenly.

Q: Can you describe your arrival at the orphanage? What your impressions were...

A: Okay. The orphanage, there we were very unhappy. It was, things were very strict. The food was not enough and it was awful. There mom was able to come once in awhile. And she'd bring me some bread. The bread during the war was not really good, it was like, thick, heavy bread and the first day it almost tasted like clay. Cause I don't know, as the war progressed, they used all kinds

of things to make bread go further. The second day it got a little chewier, the third day it started having mold on it, but we ate it anyway. And, we also, our bread there was also rationed in the, when I say rationed, we got a certain portion a day. And what I would do is, I would hold the bread for my sisters and myself to make sure that, because the little ones would eat up their bread right away and then they would cry they were hungry. And I wouldn't have anything to give them, so I held the bread and I gave them bits of it at a time. And there was a lot of stealing amongst the kids from each other of the bread and, I remember, like, at night, I would have the bread under my pillow but I couldn't sleep because somebody would always come and try to steal your bread from under your pillow. And I remember we also had terrible, we were packed with lice. And Betty, the youngest, had these big sores on her head because the lice got under her skin and caused infections. And, what I also had to do is, I was, I took the lice, as much as I could, and the little, they were like, I don't know if you call them nits or whatever, the little eggs that, they get stuck on, they get like stuck on the hair, and you have to actually, you can't just take them off, they, it's almost like they're cemented on, you have to literally hold the hair and pull them off. And then we'd crack them. And I took them out of my sister's head, but I couldn't really take my own out. So, I would pay a bite of bread, I would measure it, my thumb, from here to here, one piece of bread, for every ten lice they took out of my hair. But, they had to show them to me. Or ten, as I called them then, nits. Like little eggs. So, this is, there I worked, I had to help with peeling potatoes, I would steal some potato skins, you know, and I didn't know they had become a delicacy someplace, it was just, you know, sneak some away to eat, and I had to help with the younger kids. We bathed like in a tub they would fill with water. But like, we would stand in line and we'd each go in and wash and then step out and the next kid got into that same water. And I had a problem, Charlotte was always very fussy, that's the middle one. And I remember she didn't want to go in, and she got punished, so I

forced her to go in because I didn't want her to get punished. And then, there were rats there. So, this was a very, it wasn't a great place. I did go back because there was one nun, an older nun, who was trying to be as good to us as she could. But, see, they had problems, too. They couldn't get enough food. I mean, war brings all kinds of problems, you know?

Q: What about the other kids, I mean, did you make friends?

A: Okay, well, in that, see, there were mixed groups there. There were Christians and Jewish kids. And it was an orphanage, but it was also an orphanage for difficult children. So, there was a lot of punishing. I remember a lot of punishing, a lot of kids who didn't behave, it wasn't a very, toilets were being, overflowing all the time, you had all that, you know, smelly water and, I remember there was a courtyard in the center of it and when I went back to see if my memory, I, everything I remembered, I went back to confirm that my memory served me well, and it did serve me better than I even had ever dreamed it would. Not that I want to remember all of it. There was a courtyard, there was an apple tree in that courtyard. And I remember seeing the apples and I used to die for one. So, we tried once in awhile to sneak in, but we had to climb a pretty big fence and it had these pointed posts, it was like a regular metal fence. And we couldn't really, comfortably get over it. One kid once got over and stole an apple and threw it over to us, but she couldn't get back over, so she was caught and we got punished. It was difficult, but we were safe, that was the important thing.

Q: Now, were you distinguished as Jews? Did anyone know you were Jewish?

A: No, no. We were not distinguished. We were just all the kids. Nobody said, you're Jewish, you're this. No. We were there, period. I mean, whatever went on, went on for all the kids. Not just for Jewish kids. Jewish or Christian. I mean, we all, you know, suffered the same lot, so to speak.

Q: But, the other kids didn't necessarily know you were Jewish?

A: No. No. We had our false name, we were always, nobody told anybody. As I said, I didn't even know that some nuns weren't really, weren't nuns, you know, until afterwards.

Q: Did you have any fun there?

A: No. No. The only thing is, Msr. Rausonk(ph) came to see us once, and Father Bruno came. That was the first time I had met Father Bruno. But, I didn't know he was Father Bruno then. He wanted to know if we were being taken care of, are we being taken care of, are we okay, and I remember saying, yes, yes. He said do you have enough to eat? I said, yes. I said yes to everything.

Q: Anything else about this place? Did you...

A: There was a raid once, there were, I remember coming, it was shortly after that that we left, because I think there was a relationship between the, between that day and, there was something else, for the life of me, I can't recall it right now. I just can't recall.

Q: So, you really didn't, you didn't establish friendships, you took care of your sisters...

A: Period. Right. As I say, we were with everybody, yet we were isolated. If that makes any sense. We didn't share. You didn't confide. You constantly were aware that you couldn't talk or tell anybody. That was basically it. You can't tell anybody who you are. And make sure that your sisters never tell. And that was another thing that kept me awake, is because I was always worried that maybe in their dream, if they woke up, they would accidentally give us away. Well, with Betty I ran into some, I don't remember the exact time, but, I remember one time she said, I don't want to use this pretend name anymore. Because we told her we were going to have a pretend name. I don't want to use it, I want my name. I said, well, you got your name, you got Betty. No, I want my whole name. And she says, I don't want to pretend anymore, I don't want to play pretend any more.

I says, well, if you don't play pretend, the boogie man's going to come and scratch your eyes out and tear your hair out and he's going to really hurt you, so you better keep playing pretend. That was the only time that I recall that I ever had reprimand her for that. The other things I ran into is mostly because she would get into trouble with adults. Because if, she had a habit that if you got angry with her, remember I said she bit, she would bite, I guess it was her only defense, and she would always get punished. So, I tried to prevent her from biting, so I sort of kept constantly watching her to make sure she behaved.

Q: To your knowledge, were there any other Jewish children there with you?

A: Yeah. I learned later on that there were several. But, I don't know who they are.

Q: Do you remember what you were...

A: Unless I look at Father Bruno's list. You know, there were some names there, but...

Q: _____?

A: Yeah, right.

Q: Do you remember what you were thinking about or dreaming about at the time?

A: No, I just kept worrying about my sisters. That was it. You see, you got to realize, I had a mandate. Okay? When I left, when we left to go into hiding, here was the mandate. My mother said, make sure the kids don't betray themselves. She never said, make sure you don't betray yourself. Make sure the kids, which, of course, was inclusive, make sure the kids don't betray themselves. Make sure they don't give themselves away. Two, make sure they remember they're Jewish. Three, if the Gestapo gets me and I don't come back after the war, find your father in America and take the children to him. That was my mandate. So, this is what I lived with. In fact, I asked mom after the war, I said, you know, mamma, how could you put such a load on me? I said, you know what it was like? She says, Flora, did I have a choice? She had no choice.

Q: Did you worry about your mother, or miss her when you were away?

A: Yes. Very much. I was very attached to her. As a matter of fact, it was not until she died that I realized how much our psyche's were intertwined. Because we lived through so much, in a way, together, even though we were separated at times. That it was, let me put it this way, if that makes any sense, I felt responsible for my mother's happiness. My mother ended up being the only survivor of her entire generation. Of the, I'm talking family. She, it was very difficult for her. She had a, an _____, which nobody else knew except me. What she went through. And, to her, to the day she died, I felt a tremendous responsibility of making her happy. And in those days, making her happy, was to be good, to do what she asked, to make sure the children were okay.

Q: So, when it was time to leave the orphanage, _____.

A: I came back to the secret apartment that we had and, by then, my uncle and my aunt were in the apartment.

Q: Actually, I just want to try to get a sense of the day...

A: Okay, by the time we left there, was, it was either late July or early August, '43, by then. Okay? We went back to the apartment. And, as I said, by then my mother's younger sister, her husband and the little one were already staying in our clandestine apartment. By then, my mother had started sleeping in the factory. Msr. Raouk's(ph) factory. Actually, he was with the Resistance, also. During the day they had to work for the Germans. They make like little micro parts for, I don't know if it was for arms or what, but there was something that they produced, some kind of industrial object that the Germans needed. But, at night, in the cellar, they worked for the Resistance. They made, you know, secret arms and all kinds of things. He was, besides hiding us, he had a couple of families that were hidden in attics of buildings that he owned. One of the families was hidden upstairs in the building that housed, it was like across the street from the

factory, that housed a cafeteria where his workers had their lunch. And the people, during the day, could not make a sound because the workers downstairs, you know, came and ate at different hours and there were snacks during their breaks or whatever. But then at night, once the factory was closed, they had the run of the house, the whole building. So, he had a few families that he hid besides us. Which is something I didn't know until after the war. So, we stayed with my uncle there in the apartment and then, Father Bruno made the arrangements for us to be hidden in Werselater(ph). Werselater(ph) was near Tielt(ph), which was not far from Bruesch(ph), which was like on the other side of the country. Totally opposite side of where we had been til now. Because Etebekke(ph) was right outside, was really part of Brussels, Etebekke(ph), Doel was north, but it was near the sea, this was closer going towards Holland, the Netherlands, whatever.

Q: Now, did you meet Father Bruno at this point?

A: At that point, no. At that point, the only time I had seen him was at _____, of course, I didn't know that it was Father Bruno until later on. I really became close to Father Bruno after the liberation. That's when I really felt a relationship with Father Bruno. So, we were supposed to, the way we went to the last hiding place, and that was also, and my mother, again, begged my aunt to let the little one go, and she just couldn't bring herself to do it and by this time, the little one was already two years old. So, go ahead.

Q: I'm sorry to interrupt you.

A: No, that's okay.

Q: At this point, did you know much about what was going on with the war and the camps?

A: At this point I knew, because at this point already, people jumped trains and people who escaped, somehow managed to come back and tell and, it was like, there was like, an unofficial, there was a grapevine. There was a grapevine. People picked up and, the Resistance was a big conduit of that

information, too. Because there were Jews involved, too. There were a lot of Jews who were with the Resistance in Belgium. There was, in fact, there was a group called the Commite(ph) Defance(ph) De(ph) Schwif(ph), the Committee for the Defense of the Jews, which was a Jewish group. As a matter of fact, I met one, the head of that group, Mrs. Strassberg(ph), just this spring in Brussels. And they worked with the Resistance and with the group with Father Bruno and an attorney Vandenberg(ph). As a matter of fact, Vandenberg(ph) was a Christian who died in a concentration camp. He was arrested, not for hiding Jews, but for hiding people who hid because they didn't want to go for forced labor, because, you know, Christians also were taken for forced labor. It wasn't just Jews. So, he did die in a concentration camp. You know, there were like a lot of, as I said, I just translated a book, I'm just about putting the polishing touches on it, on this network and these people who were helped. It was an incredible operation. So, but at that time, I wasn't aware of who was totally involved, except that the name, Father Bruno came up. And not only that, until 1993, I didn't even know the name of the person who took us to the last hiding place. Because here's what happened. We were supposed to go to the railroad station and meet a woman dressed in a certain manner, no name given, nothing. We were just supposed to kind of make eye contact with the woman and so, actually, mom did and her. Although, and we had to stand apart from, our mom stood in one spot, we stood in another spot, the woman stood in another spot. Although, we saw each other, and our instructions were that, when the train pulled in and this particular woman went into the train, that we were to follow her, sit down where she sat down, but not to address her. But, you know, when I think about it, as I'm saying, it's amazing that we were able to carry all this out. And we did. We did. We did exactly as we were told. At that time, and when I think back, one of the hardest things that I personally ever did, and I talked to my sisters, and for them, too, was not to say goodbye to my mother. Not to hug her. You know, you go off on a

train, still, we were still kids, by then, when we left the apartment it was early September, '43, by then, I was 13, Charlotte was 10 and Betty was seven. So, we, and also, I said, rumors had started coming back because one of the people that had jumped a train, as a matter of fact, was a friend of mom's, who was one of the refugees in 1938 who had stayed in our apartment. Because there was a Mr. and Mrs. Gross(ph) who had stayed with us. And Mr. Gross(ph) had jumped a train. And found mom, because he knew her, because, you know, through the grapevine, you kind of let each other know where you are. And, he had given information. Then, there was another person who had jumped a train and had come, that we knew. And, there was no, not only was there no room, space, but also being the Gestapo was, I guess, must have been searching for him, mom hid him. See, she had these false papers, so she was able to move around. She hid him in a bombed out building. Gave him blankets, whatever we had and everything. And she took food to him. And then one day, he wasn't there. Because he, he was pretty badly wounded, he could barely, he had great difficulty walking at that point, because from the jumping, that, I don't know what happened to him to this day.

Q: We're almost out of tape, so...

A: ...just sum up?

Q: Well, no, I think, let's stop the tape so you can start on a new tape.

End of tape two.

Tape three

A: No matter what the circumstances are, there's a natural way of parting from a parent. You give them a hug, you kiss them, you say goodbye, you look back at them. We weren't allowed to do any of those things. We just literally had to ignore her and pretend that she was a stranger. And I remember it being very, very difficult. It went totally against my being because we were a touching family. We always hugged, we touched and here we couldn't even, not only not touch her, we couldn't even look at her and say goodbye. Or even from the train, wave goodbye. Or anything. And we didn't. We didn't. We went into the train, we followed the lady who, as I said, in 1993 I learned her name, it was Mrs. Vandervagen(ph). And she was a Christian woman, poor woman, who did this. And the only thing she asked for in return was reimbursement for a little lunch that she bought. Unfortunately, I didn't find her alive, so I could thank her personally. She, when the train stopped, which I know now to be Werselater(ph), we followed her out of the train and, not until we were quite a bit of a distance from the train station, did she stop, turn around, sort of spread her arms out around us, say, I'm taking you to a safe place. And she took us to the convent of Werselater(ph). Werselater(ph) was a boarding school, it also had an orchard, it had a farm. During the war, however, in addition to the regular boarding school, they added one of the wings of the, they took one of the wings of the convent rather, and turned it into a Fresh Air camp for poor children, children whose fathers were prisoners of war, or whatever. And every three months a new group of children came. They left, they never came back. They had no visitors during the three months that they were there. In the boarding school, the children had visitors every weekend. They went home for holidays, they came back. Even the physical facilities were very different. In the boarding school, the children's dormitory was divided up into little cubbyholes, each child had sort of an alcove, a bed, a nightstand, small closet for their clothing, and a curtain so they could have a

little privacy. Their dining room had small tables, tablecloth, flowers, and it was a beautiful room with large windows and everything else. Being the other set-up was a temporary set-up, the dormitory was a large room and metal beds, one next to the other. Just divided by a little nightstand. And in the dining room were long tables, set up where children sat one next to the other. There was, to me, that was a very important distinction. In addition to that, in the colony, as it was called, there was one teacher for all the grades, and she did, basically what she did was babysit and not really teach much. She disciplined. She was not a nun, she was a secular teacher who had been brought in. And the older children helped with darning socks. I learned how to do beautiful darning work. I can still darn nicely to this day. And, we helped kind of watch the little ones and all that and being I was one of the older ones, by then I was in charge, in addition to being in charge. I wanted to go to school. I wanted to go to the boarding school and I remember asking the Mother Superior, why can't I go to the boarding school? And she said, for security reasons. She said, here there are no visitors, no one is asking questions as to why I don't go to communion. The children leave, they never come back. In the boarding school she felt that, at some point, somebody would ask questions. So, she says, unless, if you had been baptized, she says, I could let you go to the boarding school. That was the only, if you could call it mention, of my, perhaps, becoming baptized. Otherwise, outside of that, never was there any pressure or anything. The other girl that was there, there were two girls, actually, we were five, to the best of my knowledge. One of them did not stay too long. She did an awful lot of crying. She, one day, just vanished. And my assumption was, that, because she couldn't control her emotions, they couldn't afford to keep her. Because the one thing, and not only from my own experiences, but from speaking to other children who have been hidden, you had to be, quote, a good child. And when I say good, as I said, you had to be able to obey, you had to be able to be quiet when you were told to be quiet. You had to not

cry. In other words, you had to almost be invisible. To be kept. So, and the other girl that was there, eventually, was baptized and went to, the one was sent away, the other one was baptized and went to the boarding school. As a matter of fact, I did meet her again here in the United States. She's Jewish today. She felt that there was pressure put on her to be baptized. My experience, having been in the same place, was that there was no pressure put on us. Never did anyone, any of the nuns, say to me, you have to be baptized, I heard them say, or you'll go to hell, or whatever. Never. We did learn catechism, we had to everything the other children did, short of going to communion. We went to church, prayed and studied catechism. That, she did teach us, that teacher.

Q: Did the other children know you were...

A: No. Nobody knew we were Jewish. The, as a matter of fact, when, at the end, they were packing to go home, they said, so I guess, we're all going home today. I said, yes, we're all going home today. Except, that they went home and we stayed. Eventually, we were there for 13 months. When Belgium was liberated, we stayed awhile, back, later. In April of 1944, my, one day, mom, I'm going to go back to Brussels on this. But, of course, this I don't know from personal experience. I only know this through mom. Mom, as I said, was sleeping the _____ factory, and taking food to my aunt and uncle that he had brought into the factory. She came one evening with the food and there was a Gestapo seal on the door. Now, what is a Gestapo seal? Whenever the Gestapo would empty a residence of the inhabitants and take them away to concentration camps, they would seal the door with a seal, a Gestapo seal, which was easily removable, we're not talking about anything that, it was a sort of a cardboard, paper kind of thing. Like a sticker. Which meant no trespassing. A few days later they would come back with a truck and empty the contents of the residence. From us, they didn't get that much. Because, don't forget, this was already late, you know, when we ran and everything, so, basically, the few things that we assembled weren't of any

great value. But in many residences, they did get great value. They'd come back and they'd empty the place. And it was called mublakseum(ph). And what they did is they took the possessions back to Germany or whatever, you know. And, as I said, I know people are still claiming artwork that they took. She came, there was a Gestapo seal, she knew immediately what had happened. But, she was, she had enough sof wau(ph), as they say, I don't know, how do you say, I mean, she was cool enough, calm enough, because she was, she had an incredible strength. Opened the seal, went into the apartment, took the albums out, she had this obsession, the albums. And it was after that that the albums went to a Christian family. And she took a cover for herself, so she could be a little warmer. And that's it. And took off. I mean, if they had caught her, I don't even think they would have taken her to a concentration camp, they would have probably killed her immediately. I get a letter, now here's the thing, when we were hidden, and this held true for other children, also. We were receiving mail. Not by official post, but by couriers. And I would, I got mail, it wasn't a weekly thing or anything like that. But, I did get mail from mom and I was able to respond. Mother Superior calls me into her office, I didn't know that my aunt and uncle were taken, and the baby, of course. Mother Superior calls me into her office one day, and says to me, Flora, read this letter from mamma. And I read the letter and she says, what's your mother saying? I said, I think my mother is saying that my aunt and uncle and Nunu(ph), we used to call my cousin that, were taken by the Gestapo. She says, exactly what I think. Cause see, my aunt, my mother wrote in code. She said, dearest Flora, your aunt and uncle and your little cousin went away on vacation to visit the rest of the family. I don't know when they'll be back and I don't, something to the effect, I don't know what to do in the meantime. So, she, the Mother Superior picked up on that and I immediately knew what it meant, because nobody went on vacation, you know, if you were Jewish. You know, but then, see, by that point in the war, I already knew, there were enough rumors coming back, that

we kind of knew what was happening. We didn't know about gas chambers, we just knew people were being deported and somewhere they were being killed, they vanished, that's what we knew. She told me to send my mom a letter. Dear mamma, why don't you come visit us while Aunt Leah(ph) and Uncle Alex(ph) are on vacation? And my mother came. She, by then, even with false papers, it was getting dangerous. So, what she did is, she walked the railroad track at night, slept under bushes during the day, and when she ran out of food that she had, she took from the fields. It's a very fertile country, there are always things growing. And, she came, by this, by that time already, of course, it was May of '44. And she stayed in the convent. We couldn't, Mother Superior gave her a room, a small room, under the staircase, I'll never forget it. She helped out in the orchard, by her own free will because she didn't want to eat for nothing. And, once a week, we were allowed to see her. Outside of that once a week when the Mother Superior would come and take us for a half hour visit, we were not allowed to see her. If we did see her somewhere in the courtyard or in one of the hallways, we had to pretend we didn't know her. It was not that easy, the other girl knew it was my mother, but, the day of her birthday, her birthday was, this was at the end of June, her birthday was in June, June 29th to be precise. We were allowed to see her on her birthday. And the Mother Superior, the first cherries had just been coming out, they were very early, but these were very early cherries, unless she got them somewhere else that I don't know about. There was a box of cherries, a metal box of cherries that she gave mom for her birthday. And then there was an envelope with some money. And I remember mom protesting about the money. And she said, this might have been past her birthday, this was on one of the visits to her room, with the Mother Superior. It could have even been later, because I distinctly remember it being cherries. Because mom loved cherries. And she, mom said, you're hiding me, you're hiding my children, you're feeding me, why are you giving me money? She says, hopefully, the war will

be over soon, you'll need it. And she insisted. I think it was something like two hundred fifty or three hundred franks in there, which wasn't much, but, it was just, even symbolically, it was just a beautiful gesture. And, mom had to endure quite a bit. There were a couple of people, adults, who were also residing in the convent. And there was one couple who was living there, an elderly couple, and, this woman, the woman kept saying to mom, gee, it's so good, it's great to get rid of all these Jews, and mom had to endure this. And couldn't say anything. And one of the first, and all kinds of remarks and everything, and one of the first things my mom did after the liberation, was go over to her, she says, what do you think of me? She says, oh, but, you're such a wonderful lady, Mrs. Fiers, I always enjoyed talking to you and everything, you know, you're great. Mom says, you know something? I'm a Jew. Well, the woman's face dropped, needless to say, because all these things that she said about the Jews and how wonderful it is to finally get rid of them, blah, blah, blah, blah. Anyway, after liberation, the Mother Superior suggested that the two little ones stay in the convent and that just mom and I went back, go back to Brussels to see what we can do to get settled again. So, she and I went back. It was, you know, even that time was chaotic because we were liberated. And, I'll never forget the day of liberation. And the first tank rolled past, and everybody ran out of the cellars and everything, they were standing and they were waving and all that. I remember soldiers sitting on the tank. By the way, we were liberated, interestingly enough, by a Polish unit. And everybody said, no, there were no Polish units in Belgium. I was there this past spring, for the umpteenth time, I wanted to verify that, and I asked. I said, everybody says that we couldn't have been liberated by a Polish unit, yet I remember that. The nun said, yes, you are right. We were liberated by Polish units. These were Poles in exile who were supposed to go into Holland, but there was a problem for some reason, that they, and this was disputes between the liberating forces that, instead of going into Holland, there was a change made and they came into

Belgium to liberate. See, politics play, always play into it. So, it was a Polish unit. Anyway, the tank goes by, we're waving to the soldier, when he gets up to the church, which was at the end of the street, which had a white flag hanging out, from the tower, because some Germans were holding up in there. Something got thrown out of the tower, there was an explosion, the tank swiveled around, the other tank slowed down, came back, the same soldier that we were just waving to, was laying on the tank, all bloody. I'll never, never forget that sight. It would put such a damper, people say, oh, liberation, it was great, you know. It was, and, and then fighting still broke out, even when we got back to Brussels. That when first, the V2's started coming. They were the unmanned rockets that Germany was sending out. That was when the Battle of the Bulge was started taking place. I mean, it just as everybody thought things, this is it, finished. It wasn't. So, the little ones were in the convent and mom...

Q: This was in September, October?

A: This was beginning October. Middle October. And I went back, we found a place to live and I went back to get the little ones. And...

Q: Any, I'm just wondering, is there anything else you can tell me about this last convent? You were there for quite awhile. In terms of your daily life or the way you had to live or the way you had to kind of adjust yourself?

A: Okay. Alright, well, discipline was strict. That time was starting to be lengthy. There started to be this feeling, when will this be over? It was starting to be lengthy. But, it was, almost had adjusted to this way of life. I had a small personal problem, because the other girl who was baptized, was transferred to the boarding school. And, I'll never forget, I met her once in the garden. So, of course, we didn't really interact that much any more, I met her once in the garden. And she kneeled down and crossed herself in front of a statue. I said, Renee(ph), you don't have to

do that now, there's nobody here to see you. You know, we had never said, I'm Jewish, you're Jewish. We just knew. It was amazing. Not with everybody, we just knew. And she says, she threatened she was going to tell the Mother Superior. But the Mother Superior knew that I had, that I could not accept, I did ask questions. And I was tempted. There was something very beautiful about the church, the chapel, the mass. And, I started feeling very secure. So, there was a temptation of becoming Christian, but it was, but there was always my mother's words behind me, you know, don't forget, make sure the children remain Jewish. Don't forget. So, that held true for me, too. But, we did have one problem. I mean, it wasn't one problem, there were several. Once in awhile, there were checks. The door would ring, men in uniform, they came looking. They came looking for political dissidents, they came looking for German soldiers who had gone AWOL, which, at that point of the war, there was a lot of it. A lot of German soldiers were leaving their units. And, they were also looking for Jews. And, I remember one specific incident, it was several times where we sort of had to run and hide. But, one specific one I remember, because I remember being very, very frightened. The doorbell rang, there were sort of, there was a sort of plan, that was set into motion immediately, as soon as someone in uniform would come to the front door. There was a chain of command, so speak. Anyway, we knew exactly where to go, a nun came with us. And we ran into, remember I told you it was a farm, and they had potatoes. Of course, they had to share it with the Germans. They were raised, you know, quotas that they had to take. We ran down to the cellar and the nun and the three of us ran behind a big pile of potatoes. I mean, I talk, you know, a big pile. So, we ran behind it, we sat down and we stayed put, quietly. All of a sudden, the door to the cellar, I didn't see it, I heard it, open up, I hear footsteps coming down, several people, and I remember hearing in German, _____? Rouse(ph)! Rouse(ph)! _____? Rouse(ph)! And we're sitting there, I remember shaking, I remember

getting so cold. And I held my little, the little one, and the nun kind of had her arm around Charlotte. And, we were sitting there, not moving. And then we, every once in awhile the command would, we knew they were there because we hadn't heard the door close. And it would be quiet for a minute, and then, we heard potatoes rolling. So, I felt like, somebody was disturbing the potato pile behind which we were sitting. We heard potatoes rolling and I hear someone say, _____, or something to that effect. And then they left. And we just stayed put for awhile yet. We didn't dare come out. And then, after a certain amount of time, we finally did come out. We were safe.

Q: Did you have any contact with the local population in that area?

A: There was, not exactly contact. My sister, Charlotte, somehow befriended one of the kids that was coming to the convent, there was also, see the convent, it was a large convent. Like a hundred and twenty nuns or something at the time. Now, they've, they've dwindled down to a very few. There were, the nuns also ran the public school. And, I say the public school, I mean the village school. So, you had the children that came for the three months, you had the boarding school, which were like the wealthy kids, and then you had the regular school. The kids that came every day and then went home every night. Charlotte, somehow, had met one of the little girls and became friendly with one of them. And I remember being very nervous about that. And once or twice, she would go to that child's house. And when the nuns learned about it, they stopped it. It was the custer(ph), the custer is, you know, like the man that takes care of the church, not, who kind of keeps it clean and orderly and all that, I don't know the word in English. But, outside of that, we didn't really have any contact with the outside. I did, occasionally, sneak out of the building. And, I snuck out because I just needed, even though there was a courtyard, and I was able to get fresh air within, once in awhile, I just felt like I needed to get out. And, I remember, I snuck out, and I'd go

into the fields. And the wheat was growing high, and I would just go in and kind of sit down by myself and just, just sit. Literally, just sit and look up at the sky for little periods of time, and then sneak back into the convent. And it was forbidden, I wasn't allowed, for obvious reasons. The other thing I did one day, they had a little room in the courtyard, where every, where a nun died, or someone, she would be laid out in that little, like a little, tiny thing, two by four, or whatever. They, until burial time. And, I remember, being very curious as to what happened to her in that little room, and I one day I snuck in there and I kind of felt her toes, and she didn't move [laughter]. I mean, little things like that, you know. And, that's where, also, I, well, never mind, this isn't important. _____.

Q: So, you and your mother returned to Brussels...

A: Right.

Q: You came back to retrieve your sisters. What was, and this is October, '44, right?

A: '44, late October, '44.

Q: What was going on in Brussels? What was it like?

A: Okay. Things were still chaotic in Brussels, at that time. You had British troops, you had American troops. People, at that point, there were no refugees coming back, yet, but you still had to keep running down into shelters because, as I said, the V2's were flying over. See, the war didn't end til '45. So, there was a lot of, there was bombings, there was shootings, there were all kinds of things still happening. Food was hard to come by, but the Jewish organization was already setting into place, and was the joint, as you say, Jewish immigrant, Hebrew immigrant society. And they started to help Jews who were returning either from hiding places and then later on, of course, those who were coming back from the camps. And, we also, one day mom was on a trolley car and a British soldier walked over to her, I guess there must have been something about her, and he said to

her, Yiddish? And she says, yeah. And, so he was like so excited that he saw a live Jew. Came and brought her some food and all. Eventually, and then, of course, Father Bruno, mom, now, I don't know how Father Bruno knew where we were living. I think, probably, through the Mother Superior, somehow the contact was made, mamma, Father Bruno came to the house. You know, there are questions that, even though mom and I talked a lot, there are some questions that somehow never came up. Because I, myself, didn't talk about this until about 1980. I did go back to visit and everything, but I didn't talk. I did not consider myself a survivor. Because I had not been in a camp. So, I deferred to, to me, survivors were those who survived the camps. And, not until 1980, when in, it was either '80 or '81, I was teaching at Einstein High School in Kensington, and a Social Studies teacher and I were in the office, and he pulled out a pamphlet, something from his mailbox, and, as we were walking down the hallway, my eye fell on that pamphlet, and I say, let me take a look at that. It was one of the first pamphlets that I had seen by, we call them the _____, revisionists, Alfred Butz(ph), out of Northwestern, when he had written a book, the hundred and twenty questions about the Holocaust that have never been answered, the Hoax of the Twentieth Century. Well, there was this anger that came up. And, I say, sure, it never happened. So, where is everybody? And that same day, I put a note in every teacher's mailbox in my school, identifying myself as a survivor for the first time. And saying I'd be glad to come talk to their students. And then later on, one of the teachers to whose class I had spoken to, and who had done, then, a little unit on the Holocaust, had a swastika painted on her door. So, she and I and a Social Studies teacher from Richard Montgomery, got together and decided, because they were both Social Studies. I taught foreign language, I taught French and some German at the time. So, their frustration was that, at that time, there was nothing on the Holocaust that you could use to teach in the textbooks. There were maybe two lines. So, they were frustrated and I was. So, the three of us got together

and we created a course. We've been teaching for 11 years, the teachers. We do teacher training. So, that came out of this anger. So, that's when, for the first time, I identified myself as a survivor.

Q: Let's just go back to right after the war in Belgium.

A: Okay. Father Bruno came to visit. I had to go to work. Mom and me had to try to find some work. I had to go to work, I found some work, we again did some sewing in the house, with mamma. Also, I found a job filling boxes with soap powder. And, being the youngest, had to scrub the stairs in the building, and I worked, I came home. Then mom felt that, if I could work with my hands, I could earn my bread anywheres in the world. So, she, there was a dressmaker in the building we lived in. So, she asked her to take me on as an apprentice. She did. And then I went and took some evening courses, learning how to make patterns, clothing patterns. To design them, cut and all that. _____, waste paper to make them this big, you can't do anything with them. But, anyway, it was around that time that Father Bruno came to visit. And he was also honored, I went to a Hannuka(ph) party where he was honored. Just before he left, because he eventually went to Rome and to Paris. He worked in Paris in the red light district, with prostitutes, to bring them back to the faith. But, anyway, he came to visit, he brought food. I went back to the convent several times. The Mother Superior gave me food to take back to Brussels for us. Because, remember I told you, they were a farm. And Father Bruno, at that time, when he visited, said to me, so, what are you doing, Little Flora? And I told him that I'm working, learning with the dressmaker and all. He said, wouldn't you rather go to school?

I said, yeah, but I have to help mamma feed the kids. So, he said, I'll talk to mamma. So, I hear them arguing in the other room, the apartment was so tiny, you couldn't help hearing one another. And, I hear mamma saying, look, Father Bruno, you've saved their lives, that's enough, I'm taking over now. I'll handle it. We'll be fine. But, he did convince her, and he enrolled me in a catholic

school on the _____, in Brussels. I went back there this spring, as a matter of fact. But, I didn't know at the time, but I just learned now, is that his sister, the school belongs to the same order where his sister is a nun. And she's still alive. I saw her this spring. I visited her. I visited Father Bruno's brother, he has two siblings that are still alive. And, he sent me to school. I learned how to type. Then I finally took, after I finished the pattern course, I went at night and learned how to do bookkeeping. I was always trying to juggle and learn and things like that. But, anyway, not only did I learn how to type, that was extracurricular, he had one of the nuns give me piano lessons. I didn't have a piano, because he knew I loved music, but I didn't have a piano, so the convent, the school was on one side of the street, it's still there, but it's a different, they do something different, it's not exactly the same type of school. Then, it was a regular, you know, you know, school. The convent on one side, school on the other side. And, in the morning before classes, they would leave the convent door open and the parlor door open, and I would go in and practice on their piano. Then I would go across the street and go to classes. And then, of course, after school, immediately after school, there was typing and drawing lessons, which were extracurricular. And I loved it, just absolutely loved it. There was a slight problem, though. Because, you see, we came from the Flemish part of the country, I had been at Etervig(ph), but I didn't exactly learn how to read and write in French. I learned how to speak French. And I didn't speak French until, learn French until we came, after we were in Brussels. So, that was another thing we dealt with. Then we went back, Werselater(ph) was in the Flemish part of the country. So, then, by the time I came back to Brussels, most of the French was gone again, except for speaking a little bit. So, I really had to learn how to read and write French. So, at first, I just sat in class and then, slowly, anyway, to make a long story short, he did visit a couple of times. And then, of course, he left. And then I didn't see him again. But I corresponded with him. And, I did visit him

a few times before he left Belgium. I visited him a few times where he lived. He was sort of like a surrogate father. There was something, how can I explain, very, very special about the man. He had these twinkling eyes and, you know something, everybody who knew or met Father Bruno, people who had been hidden by him and everything, tell me, when I say he had these twinkly eyes, they say, that was exactly it, that was Father Bruno. I mean, it just, there was something about his face. It was like goodness itself. And I always asked him, you know, Father Bruno, you took such, you see, Father Bruno was betrayed. Father Bruno had to get out of his habit and wear civilian clothes. And yet, he continued doing what he was doing. He his over 300 children. And, he and Father Andre(ph), another priest, they stole virgin identity cards, and they stole municipal stamps and filled them in with the children's false names. And then he had to go and get ration stamps with that. And he had a collaborator there. I mean, it was amazing the things he did. So, I went to school there and, eventually, I dropped out of the school because mamma felt that the schooling wouldn't really do much for me. That I really needed to learn a trade. So, I became, I really learned how to be a dressmaker. And, then through a soldier, we, who helped us, he, a British soldier, he helped find my father. And one day, it was Christmas morning, I didn't know it at the time, of course, you know? The doorbell rang and I, mamma said, run open the door, and I went to open the door, and there was an American soldier at the door. And he said, Mendelowitz(ph)? I say, yes, oui. And he says, Merry Christmas! I didn't know what that meant. I knew Noel at that point. So, and he hands me a box. And he leaves. There was a letter taped to the top. And, I'm standing there and all of a sudden I'm starting to yell out, mamma, mamma! There was soldier here and he gave me a box. And I run up with the box, because we lived on the second floor, and, nobody even looked at the letter, we opened the box. A box. It was filled with food. Spam and everything else. At that point, we ate everything. Today I don't eat pork, but then, as long as we had food, who

cared what we ate? And, then when we were full, we ended up being sick for several days, we overate. But that was another story. And, we read the letter and it was a letter from the American Headquarters in Brussels asking mom to come by on a certain day, that day. Her husband was an American veteran and, eventually, the Army brought us to the States. In 1946.

Q: When you were living in Brussels, after the war, were there other Jewish people who had come back?

A: Yeah. Okay. People were coming back, started coming back from the camps after '45. And, I cannot describe to you, what some of them looked like. It, most of them didn't, couldn't talk about, you know, you'd ask, say, well, what happened? They couldn't even tell you. And, you waited, mamma waited for my aunt to come back. And my uncle, and the baby and other members of the family. And, they never came back. And there were many who waited and they didn't come back. Basically, it became a waiting game. So, you know, simultaneously, while all this was going on that I was telling you about, at that same time what you did is, you waited. And if some people came, came and they needed a place to stay, you had, at one point, we had several people, again, living with us. We had several young girls who had managed to come back. And, in fact, a couple of them did tell mamma some things. And I asked mamma, because I'd overheard a work here and there, but not everything. She'd say, not for you, Sweetheart, you're too young. You're too young. And, it was hard. And many, there was one person I'm still looking for. He was a little boy who we're indirectly related to through marriage, who was born in '39. And, after liberation his family, his parents, his 17 year old brother, all of them were taken and they didn't come back. And, the convent that he was in, because mom knew where he was, allowed us to take him home, like for the weekend. So, I would bring him home, I remember him being full of sores and mamma got nauseous when she had to take care of him, so she made me take care of the sores. I took care of his

sores. Then when we were trying to leave for the United States, we were trying to take him with us because his family, there was nobody. But, the convent wouldn't release him to us because we weren't his, mamma wasn't his parent. So, mamma got in touch with the Jewish community and then left him in their hands. What happened was, in 1980, '83, there was a gathering in Washington and I met a woman and I told her the story. So, she says, you know, there was a group of young children that were given to an orphanage, the Jewish orphanage, after liberation, and then, Pittsburgh, a whole group of kids were adopted sight unseen. Maybe he was amongst them. Sends me a photograph, I'll recognize him on the photograph. I haven't found him yet. See, I don't think he remembers his name or who he really was.

Q: How long after you were liberated, did you, did it take you to observe the Jewish religion again? Was there any ambivalence about that?

A: Okay. Mom, as soon as, picked right up again, tried to find candles, and we lit them, anything that she could find. There was a piece of metal, so it shouldn't burn. But, at the same time, simultaneously, declared there is no God. And God does not exist, because if he had existed, he wouldn't do what he did. Because she was also trying to find out about the rest of the family and all then. Of course, nobody came back. She died a religious woman. Her faith came back to her, later, much later. But, she always immediately started observing the rituals and always did. So, she lived a very Jewish life while claiming and asking, where is God? So, I think there was that ambivalence within her. But, as I said, towards later years, her belief in God returned.

Q: Anything else you can tell me about Father Bruno or how, or your sense of how much of an organization there was?

A: Okay. I did not even know how much of an organization there was until 1991. Of the extent. I didn't know until 1991 that there was anyone in the United States, outside of my two sisters, myself

and these two people of which the one girl was in the convent, were saved by Father Bruno. It was in 1991, after a gathering of hidden children in New York, that I learned of others in the United States who were saved by Father Bruno and I learned that there was a book out that was assembled on Father Bruno and that Father Bruno's nephew, Michelle(ph) Rainers(ph), who helped him through the war, lived in Denver, Colorado. So, through all this I was in the dark, but I wrote to Father Bruno. In 1948 I received my last New Year's card from Father Bruno. As a matter of fact, it's in the book that I received it. I just translated anonymously because they couldn't make out who had written this letter to Father Bruno and I'm reading it, when I started translating, but I said, My God, that's my letter! And after that, I lost track of him. In 1966, I went back to Belgium and I searched for Father Bruno. I had forgotten the address in Brussels that his family lived at, but I have been there since. But, I remembered the apartment that he had taken, where I had visited him, and he wasn't there, nobody knew about him. I knew his Abbey was in Leufair(ph). I went to Leufair(ph) and I was told they didn't know where he was. But that part, of course, now I know where he was, they didn't tell me where. And I was sort of lost. And, how, you can't, you can only, my time was limited in Europe, I had to come back and go back to my job, and I never found him again, to my, so, I was not able to see him again. And especially in his later years, I would have loved to have been able to go see him because he died, unfortunately, a very sad death, he had Parkinson's.

Q: At the time, you didn't have a sense that there were, that there was a network of people trying to hide children?

A: No. I did not know that at all.

Q: Now, this Msr. Rausonk(ph)...

A: Now, Msr. Rausonk(ph) I remained very close contact with. We saw him when I went back to Brussels.

Q: What, what motivated him? How did...

A: Msr. Rausonk(ph), let me tell you something, I asked the same question of every person who was responsible in our rescue, and of anyone, I, who did any rescue work, even when at the premier of Shindler's List, I had the opportunity to speak to Mrs. Shindler because what happened is, I was sitting with her and talking and a lady walked over and said, will you still talk to me after the film? And, I, Mrs. Shindler looked, I said, she didn't understand a word she was saying. So, I said to her, if you tell me, I said to Mrs. Shindler, sprekensie(ph) kine(ph) English? She said, neutsche(ph), spreke noi(ph) Deutsche and Spanish. So, I don't really, I mean, I can survive in Spanish, but I don't really speak it, but in German I can manage. So, I said to the lady, I said, who, if you'll tell me who you are, I'll be glad to interpret for you. So, she says, I'm the actress who's playing Mrs. Shindler in the film. That was before, there was a reception before the film. And, so I interpreted and then I turned to Mrs. Shindler after she had left, I said, you know, Frau Shindler, tell me, if you, because, you know, they minimize her role, and it was much larger than the people know. If you had to do today, if you were young today, and you had to do what you did, could you, would you, do it again? She, I remember, she went like this, what else is there to do? If one person can't help another, what's life all about? Just like that, very simple. I wanted to see what someone else said, because the answers I got were also simple. Sister Adonia(ph), I remember, I asked her, and she said, Flora, what do you mean, why I did it? For the love of God, they're innocent children. Period. No great heroism there, right? Mother Superior, what else was one supposed to do? Father Bruno, he said, Flora, why do you keep asking that question? I only did what I should do. Msr. Rausonk(ph), you read the card. He thanked me. Instead of we thanked him, he couldn't understand why we're

thanking him. We thanked him, and when, he wrote me this card in 1967, after we had given him a gift of a watch from all three of us. And, I receive a card from him saying, I'm overwhelmed with all this gratefulness you're showing me. It is for me to thank you. And he goes on and on and on. And then I called him from the United States and I said, Msr. Rausonk(ph), what kind of nonsense are you writing me in your card? What is this business of you should thank us, you saved our lives. He says, but you don't understand, Flora, you gave me a chance to find out what I was made of. That's how simple it was. For them. It wasn't simple, but these are people who couldn't see another direction. There was no hesitation, this is what was, there was a need, they did.

Q: Yeah, I mean, he, on one hand you have people who were very pious, here you have this rich industrialist who actually shepherded you to your hiding places. He could have paid people to do it.

A: No, he did it himself.

Q: He took the risks himself.

A: And yet, from a Catholic point of view, he wasn't the most moral of people. He had a mistress. In fact, after the war, he was, he and his wife are both devout Catholics, and, you don't have to tape this.

Q: The tape is rolling and I don't want to...

A: Anyway, they were devout Catholics and so they never got divorced. But, when he was older and ill, he went home and his wife cared for him until he died. That had nothing to do, you know, with...

Q: In all these experiences, did you ever have a sense that people were either frightened to or resistant to helping you?

A: In my personal experience, okay? With the exception of Msr. Rausonk(ph)'s wife, and now, who feared for herself and her children, there was an incident. I don't know if I mentioned it already on

the tape or not, whereby I was in Msr. Rausonk(ph)'s home, and I was put to bed, and I heard Msr. Rausonk(ph) and Madame Rausonk(ph) arguing in the next room. And I heard her saying, _____, you want to risk your life? You can do whatever you want, but you don't have the right to risk my life and my children's lives for a couple of Jews. And I remember jumping out of bed and running into the other room and saying, Msr. Rausonk(ph), please I don't want you and Mrs. Rausonk(ph), and I was sobbing, to fight over me, please take me back to my mother, please take me back to my mother, I don't want you to fight with Mrs. Rausonk(ph) for me. And he pointed his finger at me, and went, you, get back to bed! This is none of your business! The voice was so powerful, so authoritarian, I mean, I just ran, jumped back into bed, put the covers over me and just laid there shaking. And never said another word. But, that was the only time that I actually heard in words, someone say, and, you know, I'm a mother and I'm a grandmother, and I pray, and I always said to myself, God forbid, if there were ever a need, if someone knocked on my door and said, I'm being pursued, help me, that I would have the courage. I would like to believe that I would have the courage to help, but I don't know. Until that moment of truth, so to speak, I don't think any of us really know. But, had there been more of that, you would have had more people living. Because, also, when people protested as a mass, the Nazi's backed off. They were only able to carry through, I firmly believe what they did, is because people did not protest enough.

Q: Let's just, for a few minutes, finish this circle. Your father sent for you, or the American Army...

A: The Army brought us to the United States. Yes.

Q: And in 1946?

A: 1946. May 29th, we docked in New York, I'll never forget it.

Q: Okay. I want you to tell me a little bit about your impressions upon arrival, who was there to meet you? Also, it must have been fairly powerful, or maybe even strange, to see your father again.

A: It was. We hadn't seen him for eight and a half years.

Q: So, why don't you tell me about your trip to the United States, your arrival here?

A: Okay, when we arrived, we were met by two men. At the Port of New York. One was very tall, and one was, looked extremely small to me, much smaller than I had vaguely remembered, from what I had remembered, the little one was my father. And I kept looking at him and saying, that's my father, that's my father, but I didn't feel that that was my father. There wasn't any elation, I remember. We were all so, don't forget, we were all so very tired from the journey. And we, there wasn't a lull where there was sort of a period of time where we relaxed, were happy, all that. Because there was a struggle and all that because we also had to go from Brussels all the way to Ovr(ph), and things weren't that comfortable either. We got stuck in Paris, and there was a problem with me, I couldn't go onto my mother's passport. And the Army was also, there was a question as to where could I be brought as a dependant, because I was past 14, somehow, at that time, for some reason, 14 was the cut-off date. So, it was always, well, we'll let her go this far, and if they'll let her, pass her, fine, and it was all the way into New York, that it was, okay, she can go on the ship, I don't know if they'll let her off the ship. Okay? But, anyway, I looked at him and it was very strange. We then came out in New York, New York was very dirty at that time, around the port was a lot of garbage and everything, I remember, we didn't think we liked it. He hugged each one of us, but I don't remember feeling the sense of family. And then, I remember being angry. I was angry. Because I felt that, well, I had sort of absorbed my mother's anger, I think, you know. Then we came, we were a large, see, dad had nothing when we got here. Because he was so sure that his wife and children were killed. That he didn't really prepare. I guess he had formed sort of, I guess you can call that a depression or something, but, like, well, who should I really work for, kind of thing, you know. So, we moved into a fourth floor apartment, no elevator, one toilet on the

whole way for four apartments. And, we had hot water, but our bathtub was our kitchen counter with a cover. Take the cover off. But, anyway, we settled in and, the children, the two children took to my dad pretty quickly. Because they were still young and they were sent to school. And I went to work. I went to work in a sweatshop. They called it a sweatshop, it was actually, you know, they make the blazers. And at night, I went to a school called the Eron(ph) School. For business. I think it still exists, on 14th Street in New York. And, I took English stenography. I didn't really know English, but I took English stenography. Because I figured, I knew by then French stenography, because that's another thing I had studied, I knew how to type. I knew some bookkeeping. So I took English stenography. And I tried to kind of adjust into life. Mom went to work. She went and presented herself as a furrier, they fired her two days later, she was no furrier. Because she heard you could earn good money. She learned something, she then got a job somewhere else. She got fired a week later, she learned something. Within six months, mom was a furrier. She then learned she can join the union, and you can earn more money that way, so she went, they said, yes, but you gotta picket a certain amount of time. Guess who got elected to picket? Me. I picketed. She joined the union. She started earning good money. And, we children were very unhappy living where we were living. Even with the war and everything else, there was just, also, we had to learn English. It was, they were difficult times. And, she says, kids, don't worry. Because I wanted to go back to Belgium. I wanted, at that point, I wanted to go back. And, she says, don't worry, I'll have you out of here. You'll be out of here within two years. Within two years, mom had learned enough English to learn that, and dad, of course, they both worked and they were trying to save a little. And learned that if you're a veteran, you can buy a home without a down payment, within two years we were established in a townhouse in Queens, New York. That was mamma. Of course, with papa's help, but she was really the big push.

Q: _____.

A: Okay. This is the four of us, my mom and the three of us in 1939, going from left to right, my facing left to right, this is Charlotte, Betty, mom and I'm on the extreme right.

Q: _____.

A: My father, David Mendelowitz(ph) in the U.S. Army. I believe it was the years '42 to '44, I'm not 100% sure as to what year.

Q: Did he go back to Europe?

A: No, they didn't send him. It just so happens...

A: Okay, myself on the left. The center, George(ph) Rausonk(ph), and to the right, his cousin, a Franciscan nun, Sister Adonia(ph). Who sheltered us, from the first convent, the one in Doel. Father Bruno _____, who hid over 300 children, including my two sisters and myself. To the left, Sister Roberta, a Franciscan nun, who sheltered us and helped care for us together with Sister Adonia(ph) in the Franciscan convent at Doel, and myself, on a visit. Reverend Mother Mary Chisistal(ph), a nun of the Order of Our Lady of Seven Sorrows in _____, Belgium. To the left, back row, my mom, to the right, her youngest sister, one of, they were two sisters out of six. To the left, first row, myself, I'm five years old, and my middle sister, who was then two years old.

Q: And this is the aunt who was living in Belgium?

A: Who was living in Belgium, who my mother had brought out from Romania, but who, unfortunately, perished at Auschwitz with her child and her husband. Sister _____, of the Order of the Sisters of St. Joseph, who sheltered us and cared for us at an orphanage in Ethervig(ph), outside of Brussels, Belgium, during World War II.

End of tape three.

Tape four

Q: So, you were in New York, you moved to Queens...

A: We moved to Queens...

Q: I guess my question here is, even though you are now free, you're in the United States, you're, you've been able to, I guess, re-establish yourself, I'm sure there were a lot of adjustments you all had to go through?

A: Well, there were, there's no question. We came, we didn't really know the language. I had the privilege of having had five English lessons before we left. Because we needed one person who could ask a few questions. So, we, I had five English lessons, so I was elected to ask the questions, where is this and where is that. So, that was the extent of my knowledge of English. When we, we settled in in New York, as I said, within a week, mom was out looking for work. And, so was I. We both got jobs. Mom and I then talked and she says, you know what, it would be a good idea if you could learn again, maybe finish up learning how to make patterns and things like that. So, I found out, with my five words of English, that there is a school called the High School for Fashion Industries, or something to that effect. I believe around 23rd Street in New York. I make my way there and I enroll myself in this high school. And, as far, when it came to the dressmaking and those parts, I knew everything. However, in the other classes, it was another story. I didn't know the language, and I remember sitting in a class, and one day I was asked a question, and I couldn't, I tried to answer it and, of course, I had this deep accent, and my English, of course, was very poor, and I remember everybody laughing and I got very upset that one day. And I just bust out crying and ran out. The teacher came after me and, you know, brought me back into class. And then, time went on, I did very, I got several high school credits from the things that I did know. And then the principal called me in to her office and she said that I could get a scholarship to the Fashion Institute

of New York. I didn't know what a scholarship was. I thought it had something to do with being a scholar, but I didn't feel like a scholar. But, I didn't know what a scholar, I didn't know that a scholarship was, as I said in French, _____, which was money to attend a school. And, I went home and I told my mother and father that the principal said I could get a scholarship. My father knew what a scholarship was. But, he says, I'm a girl and a girl doesn't need that much education. Then they discussed it, of course, with uncle and the uncle who sent his two daughters to college, didn't think that I needed it. And, I was then pulled out of school and I went to work. Period. But I went back to the Eron(ph) School and took some more bookkeeping. That I could do at night. Then, I decided once I knew stenography, I would get a job and I applied for a job with an attorney. Because I then learned that in the United States, it isn't very elegant to work in a shop, that you have to work in an office, to be, quote, something. So, I applied to this attorney, I know stenography in French, I know stenography in English and I know how to type and I know bookkeeping. And he dictates his first letter and I type up the letter, I was there for three days by then, and I wrote the word subpoena, S-A-B-E-N-A. That's the only subpoena I knew. Whatever, that's the end of that job. I then got another job. And another job. After awhile, my English improved because what happened is, I, as I said, I found teenagers very frivolous here. So, I wasn't comfortable with them. Adults really didn't want any part of me. I wasn't considered an adult. So, I isolated myself. I worked and then in my free time, I went to the library and with a dictionary and books that I had asked the librarian to tell me what I should read, I taught myself English. I didn't know a verb from and adjective for, or a topic sentence or anything like that, but I taught myself how to read English. And I literally photographed linguistic structure. Not realizing that it would come in handy later on. And, eventually, I presented myself to M. Lowenstein(ph) & Sons. I believe the company still exists. As a bilingual secretary. And, when I was asked if I had a high

school diploma, I said, of course. And, I got the job, and I realized that I really didn't know a lot, so what I did is, nobody else in my office knew French, so I told my boss, I need a dictionary. He brought me a dictionary and I took the work home. I pretended to do it in the office, I took the work home, I worked at night, brought the work back, and learned. I ended up staying there until after I was married and I didn't leave until I was expecting my son. I became a good bilingual secretary. Of course, I felt bad I had lied by then, you know, but you had, the thing is, I did my work, I worked very hard. Then after that, I just kept, basically, I worked. I mean, literally, that was my life. My home, my family and work. Then for awhile there, my second child, my husband was promoted and I could be a homemaker for awhile, so I was a homemaker, but I wanted certain things, like music lessons with the best of teachers and everything that was good for my children, so I started using my dressmaking skills because I didn't want to leave the children because I didn't have parents at home and I felt that my children should have a mother at home. But I wanted money. So, I became a dressmaker again at home. And when the children were in school, I worked as a dressmaker. Meanwhile, I became active in the community. We lived outside of Philadelphia and there was no library in my children's elementary school, so I volunteered to set one up. I set up a library. My husband had a decent job, but, I wanted more. And I told him to leave his job and go and try out for another one. And his father said, no, you have a job, you stay put, you don't go chasing after birds in the sky. And I said there's only one way, I said, we're young, we can do it, well anyway, time went on and we made it. And then, but meanwhile, I never had a high school diploma. When my son was, there were two incidents that drove me to improve myself in other areas. One of them was, I still had a fairly deep accent and I didn't realize to what degree because my husband never said anything. Once in awhile people would kind of make fun, but by that time, it didn't bother me that much. One day my little one came home from first grade crying. And I

thought somebody had beaten him up, and he said, please, mommy, when you come to school, don't talk. Everybody says you talk funny. So, my child wasn't going to be an outsider, so I started working with my husband and improving my accent, that's why I have a New York accent. And fighting my accent, that was one thing. Then one day, I realized that someday the children are going to ask me if I have, if mamma has a high school diploma. And I didn't want to have to lie to my children. So, I went to see my, but, you know, there was one element in all this, is that I, basically, I was very much of a loner. I did things. Like, I, as I said, I became part of the community, I worked at the school as a volunteer at the library, I, at the synagogue I volunteered, I became a den mother and all that, but, yet, I was a loner. I had no time for friendships. But, I think it wasn't so much that I had no time, I think I had become so comfortable going my own way, going all the way back when the children laughed at me after school and I isolated myself. I worked and started teaching myself English. That it became a pattern. In fact, I'm still accused of being a workaholic. I'm supposed to be retired, but I work all the time. And I think you develop a pattern. But, anyway, I went to see my little girl's kindergarten teacher and I said, look, this is between us, I want to tell you something, maybe you can help me. See, because I had talked to my husband, my husband kept saying, Flora, you're a smart girl, you don't have to prove anything to anybody, you don't need it. But, I wanted it. So, she says, you can get a high school diploma two ways. She says, I know they are giving some exams at Temple University to veterans. You can get what they call a General Education Diploma. Or, she says, you can take classes. She says, but, you know what, why don't you take the test, if you fail it, you'll take classes. So, I went and I took the exam and, it was, after that, it was a series of exams. And I took them and then I was supposed to come back to find out the results and, I get a diploma. And I'll never forget, the man who handed it to me says, well, Mrs. Singer, what are you going to do with this? What am I going to do with this? Who's

going to be my equal? I've got a high school diploma! You know? So, by then my husband was more successful, we were able to live in our own home already, you know, things like that. So, that, that's it. We went out to dinner, he was so proud of me and all that. Anyway, time goes by.

Q: You have how many children?

A: I have two children and four grandchildren. Time went by. We, eventually, my husband went into his own business and when my son was in his first year of college, it was either the last year of high school or the first year of college. One day we were talking about courses and credits and things like that and he says, you know, mom, he says, how come you never went back to school? He says, you're always pushing education. How come you never went back to school? I said, me, at my age? I'm old. I was only 39. I don't even know if I was quite 39 at that point, but I felt old. I said, I'm old, I said. Sure, he says, schooling, everybody's gotta go to school, you gotta, learning never stops except for you, right? Well, I didn't sleep all night, the next day I presented myself at American U, because by then we lived here. And, I said I need to speak to someone who could advise me on college. And I kind of give a little background and the counselor says, well, I'll tell you what, I'll give you a stack of books. Take them home, read them, come back, we'll discuss them and I'll tell you if you're college material. I did. Came back. Meanwhile, I had built, helped my husband build a business, we had a bagel bakery and all that, you know? And, I read the books. I had read every one of them. Those were the books I had read during my hours in the library. But I re-read them to make sure that I knew what I was talking about. I came back, we talked, no question, you can make it. I said, well, how would I go about it. She says, well, you can come in as a special student, if you do C or better, you can matriculate. So, I went home and I told my husband, I want to go to college. And he says, Flora, why are you always trying to prove things? And I said, no, I just, I want to do this, I said, I want to give an example to the children. So, but

financially, it was more convenient for me to go to Montgomery College. So, I enrolled in Montgomery College and I finished up there and then there was a scholarship for women. It was right after that that Horizons for Women came out, remember? Started going back to school. But, I had started it just a little before. To make a long story short, they had a scholarship to Maryland that was offered to women. And I was one of the candidates. But, then it was based on need and, fortunately, by then, I didn't have a need. So, another woman got it. A minority woman. So, I went to Maryland anyway. And I finished up my degree, finished Magna Cum Laude, believe it, I still can't believe it. And, now, again, I get a surprise party. My professors are invited and all that. And at that point, I added my maiden name again as a middle name, because I felt that my father would have wanted that. Because there's no one else to carry his name. But, that was the end of it, you know? Again...

Q: So, do you think your husband was right, that you had this compelling need to prove yourself?

A: I don't know. It's a good question. Because what happened, what's interesting, my husband is the one who changed, not me. What happened was, after the surprise party, I didn't know, but he had gotten some tickets to take me on a vacation. And, being I had been so busy between helping him and going to school and studying, and all, and taking care of the children still, even though they were adolescents now, he kept complaining. See, the thing is, he kept complaining throughout the years that I was going to college, we couldn't go out because I had to study for tests or write a paper or whatever. But, anyway, this was it. I'm in the house, I had gone out shopping to get a few clothes for my vacation. And I get a phone call and it was Jack, and he says, my husband, he says, Flora, are you standing or sitting down? I says, why, who died, who got hurt? Anyone got hurt? Anyone sick? He says, why does it always have to be bad news? He says, no, sit down if you're standing. And, so I sat down, he says, how would you like to go to graduate school and teach at the

University of Maryland? I said, what? He says, yes, they waived the GRE's and you can go to graduate school, not only aren't you going to have to pay, they're going to pay you, and you'll teach. I said, well, I can't do that to you, I said, you know, it's not fair. He says, how can you refuse it? Meanwhile, that same week what had happened is, a friend of mine had bought out a, actually, no, she hadn't bought it out yet, she had gotten a job as a guide, a tour guide. And they offered me a job also, because of my linguistic skills. And I had accepted it, but I hadn't gone down yet to get fingerprinted for the license and all that, and I said, and not only that, I said, I already promised to take this job. He says, Flora, how can you compare the two? How can you, you can't turn it down. I says, but, Jack, do you know what that means? That means again, homework, and papers and all that, I says, I won't be able to go out. He said, so what? So, anyway, I went back to graduate school, I taught at Maryland three years. And then they offered me a job in Baltimore. And, I took it and then my husband talked me out of it because he felt it was just such a big trip to go to Baltimore all the time. And, I sent a vitae to the local colleges, but then, a friend of my husband who works in the county, they needed a French teacher at Einstein High School, called, said they had an opening, would I take it? I said, me teach high school? My husband says, look I know you, come September you're going to be unhappy if you don't do anything, he says. So, I took the job and a few days after I had, after I had signed the contract, I got an offer, there was a position at Georgetown, part-time. But, of course, I had signed the contract. And I loved working with the high school kids. It was like, literally, a fish going into water. I just loved working with the kids, and I stayed. Stayed with Britannia and ended up retiring from Walt Whitman High School. And some nice things happened to me, too. I ended up going back to Maryland as what they call a master learner, there was a special program. And I just went to a wedding of one of my former students. From Maryland. I ended up going to Japan on their program that I was selected for on a

grant because of something I had written, comparative study of Shakespeare and French literature. So, some real nice things happened. Did they just happen? Did I need to prove? I don't know if I needed to prove myself. I don't remember thinking, ever, that I needed to prove myself. There isn't, I don't remember there being an ego. There is ego now, because I say, yeah, I really did all these things. But, I don't remember thinking about needing to prove. It was always for the children, you know?

Q: Maybe tried to make up for the fact that your education was interrupted in Europe?

A: Perhaps. It was basically, the feeling of, I've got to give an example, how can I let my children, in other words, mamma had to be an example for the children. And it started with mamma not having her high school diploma.

Q: Let me ask you a couple of other questions. If you don't mind.

A: Do you guys have bedrooms here to sleep in? Because I'm afraid at the rate she's going...[laughter].

Q: You expressed that you had to really grow up very, very quickly. That when you were age 11, you were, I think you said, that you felt older then than you do now.

A: Yes.

Q: Were you ever resentful of that, or...

A: Well, there are moments where I would, I miss being light hearted. I have never really even today, I've never been able to be totally light hearted. Because even today, I feel I've got to justify my life. Being alive, let's put it this way, and I do a lot of work relating to Holocaust work, you know. I, as I said, I teach the course. I do a lot of public speaking. I'm on the, I speak, a member of the Speaker's Bureau at the museum. I sit as president, co-president now, because we're getting older so we decided, we recycle each other because we're not that many, of the survivor's group, and

these are responsibilities. I feel, I don't really stop and really think about it, but I think I must feel a sense of meriting, earning my life, the fact that I'm alive. And I think sometimes of, I'll give you a parallel of someone most kids are familiar with. Kids read Anne Frank. Now, Anne Frank would have been a year older than I am today, had she lived. Anne Frank was hidden. Not even three hours from where I was hidden. And yet, I was given the chance to have this beautiful productive life. I have children that I'm proud of. I have grandchildren that I adore and find a lot of joy in. I have a wonderful man that I'm married to. So, I do have a feeling that I do have to earn that, perhaps, yeah. That, if I'm alive, I can't waste that life, if that makes any sense.

Q: What, are there other long term effects that you can cite in terms of how these early experiences impacted on your later life?

A: Okay. Let me give you, let me tell you, yeah, I know exactly. I don't know if that's what you're looking for, but let me tell you, where I do have it. I, on my passport, is always renewed at least a year before it expires. I will not risk getting stuck. And I have a little cash, enough to buy a train ticket somewhere. I have urged my children to do that. I've urged my husband to do that. My husband's, I renew for him. But, which is stupid, because he's an American you know, and I'm an American today, too. My citizenship is my most precious possession. Because, you know, I don't agree with everything the government says, but I bless this land every time I come home from somewhere else. That is an obsession and I have not been able to convince my children because they feel so comfortable and so free, that they can't, as I say, they think I'm still obsessed. Maybe it is a foolish obsession, I don't know.

Q: So, you still don't feel entirely safe?

A: No, I never feel entirely safe. I don't. I really don't. In fact, my neighbors tell me that I have the most locked up fortress, why I'm always locking. I didn't many, many years ago. I do. There's one

thing that never has gone away. If I am stopped by a policeman, even though I know, I've worked with policeman community relations, the department, you know, come to my classes, and I've dealt with them and they're wonderful people. But, there is still, in an official capacity, if I am stopped by a policeman, my whole insides shake. Literally, shake. There's just something, I got stopped, I didn't get a ticket, but I got stopped by a policeman once, and his voice was a little louder than it should have been. And I could not come up with a voiced answer. I finally did, but I was shaking. So, there are these things, alright? If I see a pair of boots, I still get affected. We had an incident. This goes back at least, oh, God, at least maybe 18 years ago. So, I don't know exactly. My husband and I had a free day and we had gone into, it was one of these perfect days. We had gone into the city, we visited a couple of the museums, we ate at the National Art Gallery, the little cafe they have there. And it was one of these perfect days, but whenever I had a perfect day like that, it frightens me, you know? Kind of, nothing can be that perfect. But anyway, we're driving back on 16th Street, and all of a sudden, my body started to shake. My husband must have noticed it, he was driving, pulls the car over, he said, what's the matter? I could not talk. I was literally, my teeth were chattering. And I couldn't even tell him what's wrong. Finally, I calmed down, there were several men on K and 16th Street, with a swastika on their arm handing out leaflets. Now, I know I'm safe, I'm in the United States, there's something that that triggered in me. Or sometimes, I'll forget myself and I'll listen to a lecture. I'm fine as long as I'm on guard and I know exactly what's happening, but I can't be caught by surprise. And, as a matter of fact, I was at the museum, and I do very well, you know, I'm strong and I, I was at the museum at a lecture, and a friend, one of my neighbors introduced one of the speakers and he happened to be a, he's a psychiatrist, he came up and I was shaking. And I said, you know, Richard, I don't understand this. My mind is calm, I know where I am, I know exactly what I'm dealing with, I said, why is my body reacting? He says, because the

mind may not forget, but the mind can repress, but the body remembers. He says, there is physical remembrance, which I was not aware of. Not being a psychiatrist, you know.

Q: I'm sure there must be, I mean, in light of what you're talking about, there must be certain sounds, certain smells, certain sights that trigger...

A: It does. Well, I do fear whenever you have, like when Farakan(ph) spoke _____ . I knew I was safe and all that, but such fear that someone who could mobilize people can take another people, perhaps, and mobilize this mass against others. And that's a fear that's never gone away. Because even with Hitler, there are many things, even I sometimes tend to want to say, yeah, I'd like a little more order. I'd like less violence. Let's, you know, _____ , and then I say, no, we can't, you know. Because there's always seemingly something good in an authoritarian kind of a setting. But...

Q: One other question, there's only a couple of minutes left on this tape. We can always put in another one, but, I'm sure _____. Just sort of your thoughts on the Catholic religion. I mean, here you, basically learned it, it harbored you, and yet you are an observant Jew today.

A: But, I respect those who believe in Catholicism or any other religion. And, as I say to youngsters, when I speak to them, I say, had I been born a Catholic, I would've been proud to be a Catholic. Had I been born a Hindu, I would have been proud to be a Hindu. Because each religion does teach some good things. It's the way we twist those things. And...

Q: But you must have some feeling about Catholicism.

A: Yeah. Let me, I used to question, there are some things I can't accept because I have been so strongly Jewish before I ever went into the convents. So, even though there was this attraction, the Mother Superior has said I have promised to come back and become a nun, and I'm still sometimes

accused of, for a nice Jewish girl, being a, I could easily be a nun. Not, why I don't know, that's another, you know, thing. But, I did question the Mother Superior a lot and one day, I'll never forget this, she said to me, she says, Flora, faith is beyond us. It's above our heads, let's just pray to God to be able to believe, she says, but don't worry about it, she says, there's one God in Heaven and different ladders to reach him. And each religion is one of those ladders. Now, this coming from a nun. Father Bruno, when he gave a child into hiding, said, this child is not to be converted. That doesn't mean that some overzealous people didn't try, but he said, this child is not to be converted. Our job is to save their lives, we don't, you know, their soul doesn't belong to us. A true Christian, to me, is the one who practices religion, who does what you're supposed to do, but...

Q: When you were in the convent, did you say Jewish prayers to yourself?

A: I did try to think if the _____ quietly. But I didn't dare tell the little kids, my sisters, to do it, because I was afraid they would do it loudly. But, after awhile I really didn't, but once in awhile I would sort of think the _____ in my heart, you know? Just remind myself.

Q: We have, I think, probably less than one minute on this tape. Is there anything else you want to quickly say?

A: If my tape will, this story will help people to reduce prejudice and if we could just learn to respect one another, in spite of all of our difference, I'll feel like I've accomplished something.

Q: Thank you.

A: You're welcome.

Conclusion of interview.