United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Fanny Aizenberg
April 21, 2011
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PREFACE

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FANNY AIZENBERG
April 21, 2011

Question: Good morning.

Answer: Good morning.

Q: This is a **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Fanny Aizenberg** on April 21st, 2011. And **Fanny**, first of all, I – like I do on every interview, I would like to thank you for giving our – your time today to speak with us. But unlike every interview that we do, where normally I ask – and I will be asking this later, I usually ask someone to start at the beginning, where were they born, what was their family like, who were their mother and father and so on. All of these things are very important. But I'd like to start ours in a little different way, because before we started the – the interview itself, we were talking about the process of it, and you were ac – you were telling me about some of the reservations that you had. So I'd like to talk about that a little bit, about what is it like to speak with someone about these experiences that we are going to be talking about today. If you could share some of those thoughts with me.

A: For me it's very difficult to talk publicly, because of many reasons. I have heard many wonderful speakers here at the museum, but all those people have been single people when the war started. I already had a child, and I already had responsibilities.

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And we – it started out scary enough, and my biggest problem also is, after so many years, I'm still living with the horrors I lived through in **Auschwitz**.

Q: So, in other words, every time you talk, there's a cost, there's a cost.

A: Absu-absolutely right. Of course it is. Even today, which is so many years later, when I'm in a car, and I pass where there's a railroad, I still break out in a sweat, which is not the polit – polite way of saying. Because we had been for so long in the cattle train and I don't think anybody has ever been able to find words what it was for three days and three nights, for 110 people, including babies, in a cattle train. The prayers, the screams, especially from babies, is just indescribable, at least I cannot find the words fer – to describe such **unhuman** things.

Q: Do you think –

A: And we didn't know what was waiting for us at that time.

Q: Were there – were there many years when you didn't speak about your life at all in – about this – these aspects of your life?

A: Well, I've only start – what is it**, Steven**, 10 years?

S: Ten years ago.

Q: **Fanny** is talking to **Steven Vitto** who is **[indecipherable]**

A: Yes, when he was always – and I was very lucky that my job was to sit with **Steven,** because of his kindness, of his generosity and caring. Don't forget, **Steven,** not because he's a young person, we are from such a different background and we

used to have conversations, like one human being should be fortunate to have with another one.

Q: Tell me of – tell me a little bit about this, this is – you started as a volunteer here at the museum, is this what you're talking about?

A: Yes.

Q: And how is it – and what was **Steve's** job? What was his way of meeting you? What was – how did your interactions start?

A: Well, it really started that I saw in "**The Jewish Week,"** which is a small magazine –

Q: Mm-hm.

A: – advertised that the Holocaust Museum needs volunteers. And one way or another, I was debating for a long, long time, and there's a lot of things which I didn't care for to come here. And I have decided I want to come and see what it is. And I am – was interview by somebody, which we connected very nicely. Her name is **Jill** and I don't -- **Coynburg**(ph) or **Cohenberg**(ph), I don't remember her name. And somehow, we had a conversation that we understand each other. She said, look **Fanny**, you could start here right now, or you could wait for about two months when we have a orientation. And I knew that if I would wait for an orientation, I would never come back.

Q: You knew yourself well then –

A: So she say you could do – yes, I could change my mind. I had many reasons for not wanting to come, like I had many reasons to do come.

Q: What were some of the reasons for not wanting to come?

A: There's a lot of things I didn't agree the way the things were working here. So I had the choice and I did not wait to be oriented. I felt I had been oriented a lot, through the time I was – the Germans occupied **Belgium** and being in **Auschwitz**, that was enough orientation. Anyway, I was very, very fortunate, I met **Steven**, and immediately we connected very nicely. At the same time, I was translating a book from **Belgium**, who just came out. This was a no – official book, how many transports they had from **[indecipherable]** how many people in each transport, how many people made into camp. What many people didn't know, that many trains had gas and people were gassed in that train before they even got to **Auschwitz**.

Q: So as you were coming to – to work at the museum as a volunteer, you were also translating this book at the same time?

A: Yes, bes –

Q: I'd like to stop – excuse me inter – for interrupting you **Fanny,** I'd like to bring **Steve** into this shot a little bit. Can we do that? Is there a way for **Steve** to stand right here?

Q2: Now, you want a two shot, I take it?

Q: This looks like – this is two people in one shot?

Q2: This is a two shot.

Q: That's a two shot –

Q2: Yeah, yeah.

Q: – yes, at this – while **Steve** is in the frame, then yes.

Q2: Keep it on the two shot?

Q: Yeah, keep it on the two shot, okay.

Q2: Okay, that sounds good. All-righty-roo.

Q: We're ready?

Q2: We're all set now, uh-huh.

Q: Okay. I'd like to introduce **Steve Vitto** to our conversation, **Fanny**, and I'd like **Steve** to explain a little bit about what his job was here, and how it is that the two of you met and interacted. So **Steve,** tell me a little bit about what you do, and how it is that your – your path with **Fanny's** crossed.

S: I work in a department that was then called the Holocaust S-Survivors Registry. We've since expanded, now we're called the Holocaust Survivors and Victims Resource Center. And my job then and my job now is to ensure that the individual experiences of Holocaust survivors are first recorded in our survivors registry and then made available to people who are asking about them. So I bridge the gap between researching archives, but always interacting with the public in s – to find

out what happened to an individual and to help ensure that an individual's experience in the Holocaust is recorded in some way.

Q: By recorded, do you mean put in a database, or do you mean that like we're doing an interview with **Fanny** right now?

S: It runs the gamut, the primary focus then was the survivors registry, which is survivors or their families providing that information to us, since most people who went through the Holocaust did not have documentation of that experience. So, to fill in that gap, we want people to come to us and provide that information that's otherwise not available, and then we put that information into a database that can then be accessed by people coming through the museum, or calling us or writing me for that information. That's one particular database and since then we also work with many other databases, including oral history collections, more online databases, digitized and also scanned image databases.

Q: So tell me about how it is that **Fanny** and you first met.

S: Well, we work in a registry, we work with su-survivor volunteers who come to us and they're very important, not only in giving us their testimony, but in helping us to arrange, put in data, to scan images and to help us in a variety of ways. And so **Fanny** came to me as a volunteer from – she had mentioned our volunteer coordinator, **Jill Weinberg**, and **Fanny** was able to do several – working with computers, she was able to pick up using our survivors registry. And we often get

requests not only for individual information, but information based on place. So for instance, all the people who were from – in **Theresienstadt** for instance, concentration camp, or from a particular town, or share a ca – particular experience, and with our database, we're able to push a few buttons and so we can get not only a list of individuals, but individuals from a particular place. And I had a particular request for people who were – somebody wanted information from those who were in **Theresienstadt**, who were registered with us. And **Fanny** was able to help me to – I could set her up and so she could look through this list and produce it so that I could filter it a little bit and provide that information to another individual. That was one database. The other infor – information – the other job she had was, since **Fanny** speaks Belgian, we have a book that's a list of the deportations that took place in **Belgium**. And this particular collection is based on date, date of convoy only. And also, it was producing. It was Belgian, so it was in Belgian**.**

Q: Excuse me. I think in **Belgium** we have French and Flemish, as – as languages, so –

S: Right.

Q: So which language was it, of those two?

S: This is in French, okay, you're right, you're right.

Q: It was in French, okay, sorry.

S: But because of **Fanny's** background in **Belgium**, I thought it would be a good fit, and this – this information was in French, and **Fanny** looked through that. And before each – it's divided by convoys, before each name list of those on the convoys is a description of that convoy, and – in French. And **Fanny** was able to translate those introductions, so that now people could not only look up the names of those who were on those transports, but they could also read, in English now, that general description of that transport.

Q: But cle – thank you**, Steve,** because I – I – I think we needed to get a sense of what was the structure of the volunteer program, but clearly something much more happened. This was the specific job, the specific task, but when you met, something much more happened between you. And **Fanny**, can you tell me what it is that you f – that you felt and that was an ongoing thing over the past several years?

A: Because mainly, little by little, I was telling **Steven** my background and my story. And he was kind, very tolerant, and listening. Also, when we got the book from **Belgium**, further descriptions, the number of trains, the number of people in the trains and how many transport, at the same time the museum got a book called **"The Hidden Heroes**." That book was written by a German reporter. She is from **Germany**. She tried to interview peop – Jewish people in **Germany** and nobody wanted to give her any information. Somehow, she was so determined, she came to **Belgium** and she got the real information, with the names of the people from the

underground. The underground, the resistance, they were also called the solidarity, and they have pictures right here from that. So that book, and the one I was translating made more sense because you could put the two and two together. And that book wasn't selling too well, and they had – she had to change the title, to "**The 20th Transport**." And what makes it so interesting, that in the book, in that what made in **Belgium** more people survive, because the underground, Jewish people, non-Jewish people, any kind of people were just one group. Where in **France** they had a separate group of French people, a separate group of Jewish people, and the same thing has happened in **Holland**. And this is why in **Belgium** only, because of such a dedication of so many unbelievable, brave, wonderful people, I can't even find the names, who organized in convents, in churches and regular people, because of their caring and their dedication, 40,000 Jewish people have survived in **Belgium**, including my own child.

Q: That's amazing.

A: So you see that combination, it was so wonderful that **Steven** was there for me to help **[indecipherable]**.

Q: So wou –

A: And many of the words from the documents from **Belgium**, I did not know because I didn't learn English of those documents. So **Steven** would – made sure I have a special dictionary, to have those **[indecipherable]** what anybody who wanted

to know. Another thing what we did is anybody passing by on the second floor, you just seen people running back and forth, specially young students. So we really – my job really was, can we help you? And we did, because once we had a French person who was sent from a newspaper in **France,** with the picture from the room where you have all the pictures there, and whoever he asked, they didn't know what he wanted. And he passed a few times, til I had enough guts and I asked if I help you? Then he said in French, nobody knows the answer. And he had a copy of the picture and the name of the newspaper he was representing. So immediately if not sooner, **Steven** was able, through the computer, to get the – all the information, which he typed for him to take. So he didn't have to go to so many places, because he was originally in the right place. So you see, you never know the contact you have with **Steven** in that particular place, because he knows the answers to everything.

Q: Well, it – to me it sounds that here when you started volunteering – I don't want to put words in your mouth, but this is the sort of thoughts that are coming into my mind, is that there were aspects of the larger story that was relevant to you because it had to do with the Belgian underground.

A: You're right.

Q: That you were finding out through this work, and that through the work and through your interaction, little bit your own story was coming up.

A: Exactly, you're right.

Q: And is – and is that what made it more comfortable for you to now speak?

A: Oh, more than just comfortable, because I had the hard time when we came to **America** and I was still young, nobody from the family wanted to hear any of our stories, because they were afraid they gonna have a headache.

Q: That must have been –

A: So this was somebody I just got to know, and I felt comfortable – there's another word which is just more than comfortable, at ease, and we could talk, which is so unbelievable, which I haven't done to such extent. Because this was always bottle up and still is, to many extent. **[indecipherable]** was very, very fortunate, and the same thing, thanks to **Steven.** He made sure that I would be speaking up. He said, if you don't do it now, when you gonna do it? And I know I'm old, so I had to do it. But it just amazing how two people from such different backgrounds, different lives, have been able to have such a wonderful relationship.

Q: **Steve?**

A: Which is gonna be for me forever, because we could talk about so many things and I'm very fortunate to have a young person who could understand our situations. So that's why I say –

Q: **Steve**, we're putting you on the spot all right.

A: No, I'm not. He knows I'm not.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: So ever – so I – if I ever get a gold star, it belongs to **Steven**.

Q: **Steve**, is there something you want to add to this, of your thoughts in the years as they've gone by, what you've learned from **Fanny** and through the relationship that developed between you about her story?

S: Oh my God. Well, the first thing I wanted to say is I br – I wanted to push **Fanny**, because we did develop this personal relationship and I'm very fortunate in my job that I'm able to interact with the survivors and their families individually, and I meet hundreds of them, thousands of them for 20 years now, but **Fanny** is os – really special. And again, one of my profe – jobs is to ensure that the stories of individuals are remembered. And so, while we had great conversations, I didn't want it to end there. I wanted to make sure that other people were able to hear her story through oral histories, read her story. I always get her – want her to write out her stories, do presentations as much as possible. And so in this way, it's sort of my job, but to make sure that her story is heard by as many people as possible. She has so many things to teach about – I guess mainly for me is overcoming. Someone who's been through so much, and by listening to her I understand as much as anybody can, what she went through. And knowing her family, the main thing is about overcoming that. You go through so many things and sometimes there's no answer to them, you just have to wait things out until they pass. And you're affected for life, but that horrible moment does pass and you have to rebuild your life afterwards. And **Fanny** was

able to do that. So I knew her story, but I also met her daughter and I got to know her granddaughter and her great-granddaughter. And so I see that for the horrible things that **Fanny** went through, four generations later, there's a beautiful 12 year old girl that's a friend of my son's actually. And I see that if it wasn't for **Fanny** just persevering and going on, that's – if it wasn't for that, this beautiful 12 year old girl would not be there, would not be friends with my sons, and would not have the freedom to go to school and enjoy life in a way that **Fanny** wasn't able to later on in her life.

Q: Thank you. Thank you very much. And we're going to continue now with let's say, the usual part of our oral history. But I thought it was very important –

A: I think so.

Q: – that we – that we would be able to –

A: Because – I'll you why I feel it's so important. It's very difficult in this time and age, with technology that's so advanced, to such extent you have little ones with the – the computers, the cell phone, just name it and it's growing bigger and bigger, that people still could have a personal relationship, and feel good about **themself**, that they have somebody else who could understand their feelings or what they're saying. Another problem I had is because of the things I went through, I always felt – and this is still with me today, because it took me 50 years to be able to talk about

it, and I still have a feeling of inferiority, that I'm not like other people, which I'm not.

Q: Because you suffered? Because you went through these things?

A: Yes.

Q: As if they're – you suffered because of something you had done, and that's – that suffering made you less of a person rather than more of a person?

A: Uh-huh. This is because what has been done to me. You see, at the museum here, I am the only person who went through medical experimentation. I'm the only volunteer survivor who was already married and had a child at the time. So I had the responsibility, which is so difficult to make other people understand. This is why when I speak to an audience here, and when you feel the reaction of the people, like you did when you heard me talk – you know somehow it's like a soothing medicine, or like somebody pats you on the shoulder and said you okay.

Q: Well, from – from what **Steve** said, not only you're okay, but you inspired others and were able to form a family that now, and that effect of – of your decisions is felt four generations later.

A: Mm-hm, he's right, absolutely. It's true.

Q: Thank you –

S: You done with me?

Q: I think we're – I think this part – this part is – is done.

S: It's all yours now.

Q: Thank you. All right, thank you very much, sorry you get **[break]** So **Fanny,** now – are we o – should I start? Okay, okay. So now I would like to go back to what we usually do in the beginning, and that is starting at the beginning.

A: Well, I'm glad you have added to, because this is why it made it important for me to come to you.

Q: Thank you.

A: To come –

Q: And it's because of **Steve,** I know, that we're speaking today, and I'm very grateful about that.

A: I'm glad you have added that, because very few people are lucky in their life to have a relationship –

Q: Yeah.

A: – as his and mine was.

Q: And is.

A: It still is, I shouldn't say was.

Q: Yeah, uh-huh.

A: As it is.

Q: **Fanny,** let's start then when you were born, where you were born, your maiden name –

A: Okay.

Q: – and then we'll go from there.

A: Very good.

Q: Okay.

A: I was born in **Lódz, Poland**. I was born December the third in 1916. We were three sisters. In the early 20's, my father, my mother and the three of us, we came to **Brussels, Belgium.**

Q: In the early 20's, so you were a child.

A: That's correct.

Q: An – and what were the names of your sisters? Were you the oldest, the youngest?

A: I was the middle one.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: My oldest sister was **Terez**(ph) **Orenbach**. I was **Fanny Orenbach**, and my youngest sister was **Rose Orenbach.**

Q: The names of your parents?

A: My father – my late father was **Benjamin.** My led – late mother was **Rivke Leah.**

Q: **Rivke Leah**.

A: Right, two names.

Q: And –

A: According to many Jewish tradition, a child born is always named after somebody in the family. This is a very old tradition, and it's interesting even today, even Jewish people who are Reform, they still give two names to a newborn child.

Q: Do you have any memories of **Lódz?**

A: Not at all.

Q: No. And what was –

A: And it's interesting because I remember going to school, and of course Polish was the language. And as soon we came to **Belgium**, we went to school, not only we were – went to school, we had a wonderful upbringing. We were very good students and we make an effort to learn English, which we learn very fast.

Q: Oh, you mean French.

A: In French, yes.

Q: In – i-in ma – fr – yeah.

A: In the higher grades, six and seven grades, you had to learn Flemish too, because anybody working fo – either for the government or any official job, you had to know Flemish and French. But we use mostly French. And we –

Q: And at home?

A: I'm sorry?

Q: I'm sorry I interrupted, but at home did you speak French with your parents?

A: Yiddish and French, because my parents were young people at that time, and they too wanted to learn. My father – we had a wonderful upbringing.

Q: What are your happiest memories from your childhood?

A: I have wonderful memories. We went to school, we were very good students. We went on outings, we belong with the Girl Scouts. And of course we had dreams and great hopes for all our lives. **Belgium** was a very welcoming country.

Q: Was it **Brussels** that you lived in?

A: We lived in **Brussels**, and **Schaerbeek**. This was like a commune, there were six communes.

Q: Tell me a little bit about your mother's personality and your father's personality.

A: My father was a very learned man. His job was being – taking care of the Jewish holidays, of the Jewish – you know, th – for the Jewish holiday it's a lot preparation to do, he was part of that. Also part of regulating the Jewish slaughter. I don't know if you're aware, but it's a different way as animals are being slaughtered according to the Jewish rituals.

Q: Is this about kosher?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay, so he would supervise how –

A: Well, he made sure the people who take care of the slaughter –

Q: Uh-huh.

A: – go through the regulation, and they were entitled to do those ta – qualified, I'm sorry. That's what I was telling you before, I still have many words in English, which I'm just trying to struggle with to find the right one.

Q: Even if you speak English fluently, anybody, we still struggle to find the right words sometimes.

A: Thank you. And also, the same organi – they had an organization, which is called **Haza**(ph) **Chalamis**(ph). That means if somebody becomes a member and pays monthly dues, once they pass away, everything is taken care. And I don't know if you know, you're aware, it's quite a preparation the way Jewish people allowed to be buried.

Q: I see. So he would be involved in those sorts of activities.

A: Yeah, that's right. And my mother was the nicest, wonderful person you could ever have met in your whole life.

Q: What – what kind of memories do you have? Did she have favorite things that she would say? Did she have –

A: Always.

Q: – hobbies, did she have –

A: And for the holidays, Friday we used – she used to bake the challah for Friday, that's another ritual. And she used to make tiny ones, just for each of the three girls. And our house was always open, and everybody always knew to come. We were the

first house that we had a record player. Can you believe that today that the record player was so important? We were the first one. So, of course all my friends were always in our house. But this was a big deal. How do you explain that when you speak to young people today, to explain them the meaning of things which today technology is so above what I have seen through the years.

Q: They – yet, it was music. It was music that you could then have at any time you wanted, through that record player, which is important –

A: And also –

Q: – to young people always.

A: – my mother was a very religious person, and we were not wealthy. In order for her to do a good deed, which was very important to Jewish people **[indecipherable]** and we didn't have money, so what she did, and this is the biggest deed you could do in your life, is helping people when they dead, to clean their body to be buried. Because, if you do something nice to somebody, or you help somebody, that person could always do something else for you. But this, nobody could pay you for, and this, of course, was not a paying job. This is what – just to do a very special deed, and she did that very often. And nobody knew about that, you know, it's not – this is what she did.

Q: So she provided an example and a model for all three girls.

A: Absolutely. Any decency we have is thanks to her.

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Q: When you moved to **Belgium**, were there any grandparents that moved with you?

A: No.

Q: It was only your mother and your father?

A: Yeah, my mother had a married brother in **Belgium.**

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And that time in **Poland** apparently, working is – was not as comfortable or not well enough and since my mother had a brother in **Brussels,** so we all came to **Brussels.**

Q: So that was your reason for coming to **Brussels**, but what was the reason for leaving **Poland**?

A: Because of the financial situation.

Q: Ah, okay.

A: And also, anti-Semitism started to grow to a big extent.

Q: In the early 20's?

A: It has always been, but apparen – which I didn't know, we didn't know. But apparently this has always been. And it seem **Poland** has always have a problem, because in 1946 – I'm just jumping from one –

Q: Okay.

A: – to the other, but you're talking about **Poland.** In 1946, many people who have survive camps, and the forest or in hiding, went back to **Poland** where they came

from to find out if there's some relatives, somebody's still alive. And at that time, in 1946, there was a pogrom and 200 people were killed, who survived and came to look after **[indecipherable]**. Just to give you an idea. And even today, **Poland** has not given any restitution. Not only not giving restitution, they don't – not even willing to give back the houses of somebody who has survived, of today it's still the same thing.

Q: So, your parents felt that you would have a better life –

A: Correct.

Q: – not there.

A: You're right.

Q: Yeah.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: What are – can you remember what are some of your earliest memories?

A: Well, th – a big memory was the record player.

Q: The record player, yeah.

A: Because we had all our friends gathering in our place, and after one record we got another one. And then I went to high school, and then I went to college.

Q: What did you –

A: When I graduated from college in art and design.

Q: Did you go to a Jewish school in **Belgium –**

A: No.

Q: – or you went to a regular public school?

A: Regular public schools, because my parents felt we should have a regular education. No matter what's going to happen, they felt – so when I graduated from college in art and design with a degree, **AP**, a few of us were taken to work for the royal house.

Q: The royal house?

A: Yes, ma'am, we work for the royal hou – and this was a great honor and a big deal.

Q: I imagine, yeah.

A: And for me, coming from an Orthodox house, it was so revealing, because there were so many departments. Everybody, like groups, we did different thing. Patterns, colors. What kind of a fair it's gonna be and how many people are gonna be involve in the fair and what kind of clothes they would have to wear. It was really very exciting for me.

Q: Well, I think it would exciting for anybody, yeah.

A: Well, because I have never lived that kind of world. Don't forget in **Belgium,** specially girls coming from religious houses, it's very difficult. And at that time women were either secretaries, seamstresses, which I was not, and that's what my parents made sure we wa – wouldn't. So, it was different.

Q: So what – your jo – what was your job in this royal house, what did you do?

A: We were part of assorting colors. Let's say 10 people would go to an affair. We were known – we were told what kind of affair is it, evening, afternoon or tea, because the royal house, those people were having different people, and different affairs.

Q: And you would design the clothes?

A: Yeah.

Q: For the royal family to wear at these events?

A: Yeah. It's wild, just what you just – to – t-today – it was very exciting.

Q: And did you – do you remember some of the clothes that you designed?

A: Well, because it was not just one design.

Q: Yeah.

A: It was at least 50 people part of the designing. And about 50 at least designing what kind of color for tea, over kind of color to receive people, other dignitaries from other countries.

Q: Oh my goodness.

A: Yeah.

Q: It was like – it was almost like th-the whole theater.

A: It was. Somebody else mentioned that, it was like a show.

Q: And did you meet the royal family?

A: No. Once the queen, when it was a special holiday.

Q: How long did you work there?

A: About three years.

Q: Was – did you have much interaction with non –

A: Other people working?

Q: Well, with other people working and was this the first time you – you really were in close contact with people who weren't Jewish? Or had you had je – non-Jewish people –

A: The – they were a few – yes, but we always lived very well with Jewish people. You see, another thing which we had in **Belgium**, at that time the **Belgium** Congo belonged to **Belgium.** The nuns and religious people went to teach religion. They built churches, schools, to **[indecipherable]** the people and teaching the people. Because of that, many people from **Africa** came to **Belgium** for their jobs, because they had a complete department, the **Belgium Congo**, that started way, way, generations before. So we have gone to school with black people, we lived in the same neighborhood with black people, and we never knew that there was a difference.

Q: So**, Belgium** was not a racist country?

A: Not at all, til we came to **America** that I have learn about racism. Don't forget, all this started when **Hitler** came to power. But before that, we went to school to

black and white and yellow, any kind of persons. And also because **Belgium** had the **Belgium Congo**.

Q: Did you, in school – if you were born in 1916, then by 1930 you were a teenager and were – and throughout the 1920's at home, were there any discussions about politics in **Europe,** in – in **Belgium**, in **Germany**, or anything like that there then?

A: No, not from – we start – that particular information we start to get in 1938, we were just married. And because from **Austria** and **Germany**, many young people escape and came to **Belgium** with an open door.

Q: I want to go back a little bit bi – th –

A: Sure.

Q: – however. **Hitler** came to power in 1933.

A: Yes.

Q: Do you remember whether or not that was discussed at home in your –

A: No, we had no problem, because in 19 – in 1938, before **Kristallnacht**, the **Belgium** people were assured that we would not be invaded. I don't know if you're familiar with the map, **Holland** and **Belgium –**

Q: Right.

A: – we have the canal. They have install like the **Maginot –**

Q: Mm-hm, line?

A: – line. This was a canal which would have, just touching it, it would be flooded and the tanks would not be able to come in.

Q: **[indecipherable]**

A: But of course this was sabotage and the German tanks were in, before even the water. And you see, when I talk about that, nobody has ever heard about it.

Q: And I lived in **The Netherlands** and I had never heard about it.

A: Well, the strange thing is, I went through the museum to speak to one of the universities. And we stayed two nights there with somebody from the museum who took me. And one lady we ca – became friendly with, that was a group of teachers who gonna teach students. So I was chosen at that particular time, to speak to the teachers who gonna teach th-the youngsters about the Holocaust. So when we went to dinner, the teacher came with us and she ask if she could take her husband. And of course, why not? There were the two of us, it was wonderful. In between our conversation, which we had a lot to talk, he apparently, he was from **Holland**. And he is young, and he had parents in **Holland** and family, where he goes to visit. That was between dinner an-and conversation, he told me even today the parents talk about the canals. And for me it was like, you know, soothing, somebody else has ever heard about that, too. He say even today they still talk that we would not be occupied, because **Holland** had a tough time too, with the Germans.

Q: So, the canals were between **The Netherlands** and **Germany**?

A: No.

Q: Or **The Netherlands** and **Belgium**?

A: Correct, but that was the border of **Germany**.

Q: That's right, that's right, that's right.

A: You know, from **Germany** –

Q: Yeah.

A: – to come in. Look, the la – **Maginot** line didn't work.

Q: So, when **Hitler** came to power in 1933 –

A: We were not affected by it.

Q: You weren't affected, but were you – did it – were – did he – was he of interest at all in y –

A: Well, not that much.

Q: Not that much.

A: Don't forget, my husband and I, we got married in '38.

Q: So I cou – want to talk about that too. I'd like to find out, after you're working for three years in the royal house, how is it that you meet your husband? How does he come into your life?

A: Well, my husband was a trained violinist. And he and many other musicians were playing in music houses, because there were silent movies, and that was a wonderful

way of making a living. Except, in ’38, the talkies came in and they all lost their jobs. So he went to school and he became a tailor.

Q: How did you meet him?

A: Through other friends, we went to a dance. In **Belgium** we went very often to dances.

Q: And was he at that time –

A: Because we were modern enough to let us go to dance.

Q: Yeah. When you met him, was he still playing as a violinist before the talkies come in, or had he already –

A: He – it just was the end of it.

Q: Uh-huh. And what impressed you about him? When you first met him, what impress –

A: Well, because number one, he played and it was very sophisticated, and I was much younger than he was. That was very appealing.

Q: How old were you, how old was he?

A: I was 21 when we got married, and he was already 32.

Q: So there was 11 years between you?

A: Right.

Q: And you got married then in 19 – how long did you see each other, how long were you together as a couple?

A: One year.

Q: One year.

A: We met in 1937.

Q: And you got married in ’38?

A: In 1938.

Q: I see.

A: And we started out like many happy couples, with many dreams and many hopes for future. And of course never knew what the future is for us.

Q: Do you remember some of those hopes and dreams?

A: I’m sorry?

Q: Do you remember some of those hopes and dreams, what you were planning to do?

A: Oh yes, oh yes.

Q: What were you – what were some of them? What **[indecipherable]**

A: Well, first of all I became pregnant and then I stopped working. Pregnant women didn’t work. And then my husband started to work, also for a different place in **Belgium.** In **Belgium** the senators or ambassadors or any people, they wear striped pants and those jackets like the music conductors.

Q: Oh yeah. These almost tuxedo type –

A: Those special –

Q: Yeah.

A: Yes. So he got the job doing that.

Q: In some ways your professional lives were very similar.

A: Completely.

Q: So you could understand one another's issues.

A: Yeah. Well, he really felt very bad that he could not continue his life with music.

Q: Yeah.

A: But that – again, it's like you have a depression here today.

Q: Yeah.

A: There was a tremendous depression, because of that's how many people were all of a sudden, you know, out of –

Q: Out of work.

A: – out of work.

Q: Did he have talent as a tailor?

A: Not as much as music, I think.

Q: So, did you have discussions about at some point having the circumstances where he'd be able to go back to music? **[indecipherable]**

A: Well, don't forget, it was also a matter of making a living.

Q: Yeah.

A: Because he was the only one making a living.

Q: So it wasn't really on the horizon –

A: Not yet.

Q: **[indecipherable]** yeah.

A: Not yet. And of course, the future has changed.

Q: What was his name?

A: **Jacques. Jacques Aizenberg.**

Q: And was he from **Belgium** as well? Was his family from –

A: No, he was from **Poland** too, and he came to **Belgium** I think in 1920, he and his brother came to **Belgium**.

Q: What part of **Poland** were they from?

A: **Radom.**

Q: **Radom**. So you had much in common when you met, both having come from **Poland**, as far as –

A: Yeah.

Q: – families.

A: But we were different.

Q: In what way?

A: In every way.

Q: Okay. So – but what was his personality like as you – and yours, and which way –

A: Well, he was much more mature than I was.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: He thought. But that was okay, it was nice and like I say, we were really having big dreams and big hopes at that particular time. That was1938, not knowing what's waiting for us. And also, in November of 1938, there was Kristallnacht, killing the Jews.

Q: In **Germany**.

A: In **Germany** and in **Austria**. Breaking windows. What they also did, and there's a book about that, the Germans were surprised that in different cities, the population would not be against arresting the Jews. What they did, and I think there's a documentary here on the fifth floor – they have treasures right here on the fifth floor for anybody –

Q: You're talking about the library at the –

A: That's correct –

Q: – the museum **[indecipherable]**

A: – yes, and they have many recordings or documentaries. And they have like a judge, or a surgeon dressed in women's clothes and parading in the streets. They had official rabbis cleaning the streets with toothbrushes. And when I spoke to that particular teacher's group, which made it easier for me to speak, they had slides of what I'm telling you now. They had slides of those people going the street, and the

Germans never thought that their neighbors would let their friends, who were in **Germany** for generations, let them do that.

Q: So that must have come as a shock when Kristallnacht happened in 1938. How did – do you remember how it is you found out about it?

A: Don't forget, we still ha – we had our radios at that time, and we knew. And also, right after Kristallnacht, 2,000 Jewish **[indecipherable]** came to **Belgium**, and they formed a Jewish organization, **J – AJB,** association of Jews in **Belgium.** And they have arranged of Jewish families to take in child. And my mother and father also had sheltered a little girl until 1940.

Q: What was her name?

A: Because the same organization picked up the children and put them in other – the reason we got – why – how come from **Germany**, we would have to take her off the train – not that we mind taking them in, because in '38 we were still innocent, because the parents would have to work in different states, so those children needed a home.

Q: So, in other words, the parents could no longer work in the same place in **Germany**, they'd have to work in different parts of **Germany**, and no one was there to take care of the children?

A: But we don't know if those parents have not been arrested.

Q: Ah.

A: We didn't know that til after.

Q: So you – your parents took in one child?

A: Yes, a girl.

Q: What was her name?

A: **Sophie**.

Q: And where – where was she from?

A: She was from **Berlin.**

Q: Did she tell you of what her experiences were?

A: She didn't want to talk about it.

Q: Was she older than you, or was she younger than you?

A: She was younger. I think they would –

Q: Oh, she was a child –

A: – yes –

Q: She was a child.

A: I think she was between 12 and 14.

Q: So she was a quiet child.

A: Right. Very hurt, not quiet. Very hurt, very hurt.

Q: So she was traumatized?

A: Yes, because she was an only child, and probably extremely spoiled.

Q: What told you that? Why did you think that?

A: Because we learned it from other families who had children who were more outspoken.

Q: Oh. So they were, you know, in other words, maybe she was totally unprepared. No one was really prepared, but – but someone who came from a privileged life would be far less able.

A: Right. And of course, many traumas happen in our lives –

Q: Yeah.

A: – affect people in different ways.

Q: Yeah.

A: Which we never know.

Q: It's true.

A: Including myself. You never know the – the reaction.

Q: So this was your first taste of what was going on in **Germany**?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you remember, were there discussions about that?

A: Then the discu – everybody was a politician. You know, coming back Friday from shul, or in the morning after shul, this is the only topic. And also, another thing what has been happening, many people from **Austria** and **Germany**, young, single men came to **Belgium** and that's how we connect and we got to know many of those people. But they didn't know, they only knew Kristallnacht. And they felt it's gonna

go away shortly, and it's not gonna continue to the way. And of course, then the Germans started to arrest the Jewish people, beating them, putting them into jails and never knowing what has happened to them. And that's what I feel, it was the end of the civilization of **Germany**. And I tell you why I say that, because in **Belgium**, if a family had a lot of money, and especially having boys, they would send them to **Germany** to study, because this was the ultimate of an education. But of course, afterwards we have learned what those educated people were able to do. And we became very friendly with those people and that's how we got involved, and we got to know those people who have joined the underground of the solidarity or the resistance, whatever you called it.

Q: So it was through the refugees coming in from **Germany** and **Austria –** I want to s – go back and then I'll talk about this a little bit. When Kristallnacht happened, you had just been married a year.

A: Yeah, mm-hm.

Q: Were you pregnant at the time?

A: Yeah.

Q: So your baby hadn't been born when all of these things started to erupt?

A: No, she was born in March '39.

Q: Did you have any thoughts when – when your daughter was born, of –

A: Any trauma?

Q: Yeah, or – or – or fear of what – what were –

A: No, because on the radios, on the ne – in the newspapers, **Belgium** is gonna be free, you don't have to worry, we gonna be free. We not going to be occupied, that's what was used. And of course then we were almost reassured, because of the **Maginot** line. And like I say, then everybody became a politician, and we believed the papers. And we did believe, because we felt reassured with friends, having the **Maginot** line, til it became, you know, a sad story, cause they went all around. Imagine such a big army, only 18 days they lasted. And **France** was occupied.

Q: What – do you remember what – where you were on September 1st, 1939? That's half a year after your daughter's born. That's –

A: A year after?

Q: No, half a year after?

A: I'm sorry?

Q: September 1st, 1939, half a year after your daughter is born, is the invasion of **Poland**.

A: Well, this is what started us really being scared.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Because, since we were told that **Belgium** and **Holland** are gonna remain free, the **Belgium** government asked people to si – young men to sign up. They didn't know for what and for where, and many, many have signed up, including my

husband. Also many people who have come from **Germany** and **Austria** have also signed up. And they, in 1940, when the Germans invaded, they all got the call where to meet, in **Dunkirk.**

Q: So your husband signed up to be part of the Belgian military forces?

A: Well, we didn't know what they're gonna do.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: Many for military – don't forget that afterwards we have learned that in **England** they had divisions of people from different countries in **Europe**. Some have mixed with the British and many have remain independent.

Q: So, in other words, when **Germany** invades **Poland**, there's a mi – mobilization effort taking place in **Belgium.**

A: Wa – we didn't know it's gonna be a mobilization.

Q: I see.

A: We only thought in case of need. Those were the words, in case of need.

Q: But signing up, what did that mean at that point? Did that mean your husband left the house?

A: No.

Q: Okay, it just meant he registered.

A: In case they would meet and we felt well, maybe, you know, to be at the borders.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And of course, none of them have ever been in the army, so we never thought that that would be the reason.

Q: Did your life change much, your own personal life, after the war started?

A: It did, because the fear grew so bad.

Q: I see.

A: Because here we were living peacefully, and really innocent, completely. Innocent is really the word you could use, because we couldn't believe anything could happen, because even when the young people who came from **Germany** and **Austria**, didn't know that Jews were killed, they only knew Kristallnacht, they only knew the damage they were doing. But they didn't know what was happening to the Jews at that particular time already.

Q: And the fear grows. When the war starts, the fear grows.

A: Tremendously.

Q: How would –

A: Because we didn't know what to expect. How do you put that in words?

Q: Yeah.

A: It's really being scared for your own shadow.

Q: Yeah. Were your sisters also married at the time?

A: My oldest sister was married and she had already two sons at that time.

Q: Her name was **Theresa**, right?

A: **Terez**(ph), mm-hm.

Q: **Terez**(ph), uh-huh

A: And my younger sister took courses in English, and they had a very special store in **Belgium** for tourists –

Q: Un-huh.

A: – where they make lace, and selling the lace. And also because she knew already English at that time, that was her main thing. So that's what she was working.

Q: Your parents – it sounds to me, and correct me if I've misunderstood this, it sounds your – like your parents were very much part of the je – Orthodox Jewish community.

A: That's correct.

Q: So that was their – their world.

A: Yeah.

Q: And –

A: And their life, with the other people.

Q: Yeah. And your father made his living through his –

A: That's correct.

Q: Okay. What were some of the discussions going on –

A: Unbelievable. Unbelievable. Everybody was guessing.

Q: They were guessing.

A: And everybody was a politician, everybody knew what's gonna happen.

Q: So everybody was sure of this and sure of that and nobody really knew.

A: You're right. Not only that, we couldn't believe in the wildest imagination that anything was happening the way it was happening.

Q: So, in other –

A: And that it could happen.

Q: So, you're f – everyone's afraid, not – the boom hasn't fallen yet, though. How did the boom fall?

A: In 1940.

Q2: Maybe we should change tape here.

Q: Okay.

Q2: Cause I'm only one minute from –

Q: Okay **[break]** Your daughter said that the – last night you were nervous about coming in today?

A: Yes.

Q: Yeah.

A: I'm always nervous before I come to talk.

Q: Yeah. And your friend who has not spoken about her story, she doesn't even talk to people about it at all?

A: No.

Q: Di – has she told you?

A: No. But we became very close friends and she – what she does, which I would like to do, is go to the writing class. That, I have a hard time.

Q: Yeah.

A: I really – I went twice to the class and I went home very unhappy. I would like to start writing. You know, just take –

Q: And what – i-if I can ask you, what was it that made you unhappy about the class, or about your experience there?

A: I'm really very shy by nature, and when there's a group of people who talk loudly, I get quieter. Here you thought I have all the qualities. I am far – I'm far from it. No, I get very agitated.

Q: I see. I – I think writing does do many good things, beca – and I think that it helps. It helps get the story down.

A: Yeah.

Q: You often find – I often find when I write, I discover what it is that I'm thinking. It's almost – in the beginning you think you know what you're going to say, but as you're writing, you discover new thoughts. And those are very important, you know, you let yourself develop –

A: I would love to do that, but I don't have much time. I'm too busy. My son-in-law makes fun of me because – and then I'm going to tell you the joke. Whenever he

calls, I'm not home. So I said once to **Freddie**, you have two choices. Would you like to have a mother-in-law who's drunk and always home? Or a mother-in-law who's never home. Didn't get an answer. No, I have to be involved.

Q: Yeah.

A: I ha – do many things, except I'm slowing down very fast because of different health problems and I'm having many. I even may need eye surgery, which scares me to death. I had two cataracts remove and now I have glaucoma on one eye, and because of the clo – glaucoma they have like a film over.

Q: Yeah.

A: In order to remove that and not to lose the eyesight, they need surgery. And I'm scared to death at my age to have eye surgery. I said, if I lose my eyesight, okay, walking, it's not a problem, I'm not walking, but this is a problem and scares me, he couldn't understand. He said, I will be **[indecipherable]** already.

Q: Yeah.

A: But I'm not.

Q: Well, it's –

A: Don't forget, I live alone. And that's not easy, but I hope to remain independent as long I can. And then say my goodbyes and go. That would be nice. That would be nice, cause I see too many people much younger than I am dying of **Alzheimer's**.

Q: Yeah.

A: Or from cancer, it's – my daughter had a fr – had somebody she took care, I think I told you.

Q: Yeah.

A: Cancer, 52. She died about a month ago. The synagogue has a sign, people to go and help, and she did.

Q: **Fanny**, let's go back –

A: Her job really was –

Q: Uh-huh.

A: – she was a social worker and she got a degree in psychology, and she was working for **Montgomery** county as a child sexually abuse.

Q: This is your daughter, right?

A: My daughter. I couldn't do it.

Q: It's heartbreaking.

A: I couldn't do the job.

Q: It's heartbreaking.

A: She did.

Q: Yeah.

A: I couldn't. And the sad thing is, we have that much of it.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: Can you imagine a woman giving birth, at the age of six, having that child to be sexually abused because she needs drugs? To me when I heard that, it was – when I think what some mothers did to have their child, it's – but –

Q: **Fanny**, I need to bring you back to 1940.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: We have to go back to when the boom fell.

A: Are we gonna talk now?

Q: Yeah, we're talking now.

A: Oh.

Q: We were rolling, we were rolling. But that's okay, that's okay.

A: I'm sorry.

Q: That's – no, no, no, it's fine, it's fine. 1940, and the war has started in **Poland** and people are frightened, and everyone's a politician finally, in **Belgium.**

A: That was before they invaded **Belgium.**

Q: And how did the – how did you experience the invasion of **Belgium**?

A: Scared. Worried. And not realizing what's really happening.

Q: Were you alone?

A: No. My husband left May the 10th. My sister-in-law, who was – my husband's brother, they both left, and my sister-in-law had a little child, she brought the crib downstairs to my apartment so we would be together. And she had a br – she wasn't

Jewish, and she became Jewish and then she didn't know what to leave – what to do with her **[indecipherable]**. Anyway, she and the baby, they left – they went to live with the brother.

Q: So this was your husband's brother's wife? Yeah. You're saying May 10th. Was that the day that **Belgium** was invended – i-invaded? May 10th. And your husb –

A: That's when the Germans marched in.

Q: And your husband left that day?

A: Mm-hm.

Q: He was mobilized, or he –

A: Well, that's where they got the signal.

Q: I see. And you were left alone then, with you – your daughter and with the other little child?

A: Well, my sister-in-law –

Q: Uh-huh.

A: – about a week later she left.

Q: I see. I see. And what was –

A: And my mother lived about – my mother and father lived about 10 minutes, but the day before the Germans invaded, the bridges were there for three days, and in three days they bombed the bridges. You know, bridges from one neighborhood to another?

Q: Right.

A: They bombed those bridges, and left. And then the Germans had a hard time coming in, but apparently they had enough forces to close those things. And that's when our pain started.

Q: What were your final conversations like with your husband before he left?

A: Very difficult. Very difficult. He didn't know what to do and he wanted to stay and I didn't think it would be right, if we – number one, we never thought of the massacre waiting for us. We never knew of deportation, we never knew of – we knew of working with the children who have been collected the same day. Not collected, they've been taken care of by the same organization who have put them there.

Q: You're talking about the German children.

A: Who came to us –

Q: Yeah, who came to you, yeah.

A: – from **Germany,** or from **Austria**. It was frightening, it was scary, it was unbelievably scary, and I don't have another word of scared.

Q: So it was ma –

A: Of such a uncertainty of what's going to be from now on. We knew we gonna have to work. That's what was told from the youngsters who came, that we're gonna have to work.

Q: But that's all you knew.

A: Yeah, but we never knew that there's gonna be a separation of people. Now, the young people who came before from **Austria** and **Germany**, they never te – told us, or they didn't know. They only knew Kristallnacht, then we run away. And already at that time, they have groups to go to other countries and organize people, just telling them. And that's how the underground has started.

Q: Yeah.

A: And those people joined with the und – and like I said before, the only thing which has saved the Jews who were saved in **Belgium** is because the resistance or underground, whatever you call it, were one group, Jews and non-Jews, where **France** didn't have that and **Holland** didn't have that. You know, at the museum here, you have the pictures.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: There's one young man who was a physician in **Belgium** and h-he was Jewish and he was one of the first organizers. Somehow he was able to get a message to **England**, and a friend of his stole a plane and bombed the Gestapo in **Belgium.**

Q: Amazing.

A: It just broke windows, but there was a way to respond to anything. And at least you felt there's somebody else who is having that fear.

Q: If your husband had realized that you really were in danger, do you think he would have left?

A: I hope not.

Q: Yeah.

A: I hope not. I never thought of it. You know, that thought never came to me, that he would leave his child.

Q: Yeah, yeah. He didn't –

A: She was just 14 months.

Q: Yeah.

A: No, I don't think so. I really don't.

Q: And when you saw him, what was the last glimpse you had of him, as he was leaving?

A: I'm sorry?

Q: What was the last glimpse you had of him as he was leaving?

A: Crying and hugging **Josiane** til the last second.

Q: So he was crying?

A: Yes.

Q: He was crying.

A: How could anybody not? Like I say, we just started.

Q: What was – what was going on with your mother and father?

A: Well, they were surprised that my husband would go, but I felt it would be wrong of me – why shouldn't he go if he could help us? We didn't know. Like I say, in the wildest dreams you couldn't imagine what was waiting for the people.

Q: When did the underground that you've spoke of, that you've mentioned, when did it really start functioning in your life? How did you get involved with it?

A: Well, we know the – we knew those people.

Q: Okay, you knew the people who were in the underground?

A: Some of them.

Q: Some of them. Your husband and yourself, or just yourself?

A: No, he too knew those people. Don't forget, we were young – we were young, and we have met those young people coming, through other young people in **Belgium** who were ready to fight. Not every young man left, because they felt we have to defend the people who are still there, which they did. And mainly the people who came from **Austria** and **Germany**, they needed a place to stay, and we have a attic. We call it the **mansard**.

Q: Mm-hm. **Marsat**(ph)?

A: **Marset**(ph).

Q: **Marseille**?

A: No, no, no, in **mansard**.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: That's a attic. But anyway –

Q: Ah, **mansard,** okay.

A: And then we made keys.

Q: So you kept some of the people in your attic?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: We didn't see them. And once my sister-in-law left, I took her apartment. She moved her things, we had the main floor, because my husband had the room where he was doing tailoring at home to make some money. And when she moved, I moved to her apartment on the third floor, and the downstairs we rented to an elderly couple who had the grocery stores, the little they could get. And so mainly they were selling flowers. But that was it. And the people stayed there til the beginning of '43, but they were not there all the time. Those two people –

Q: Talking about the underground people?

A: Yes, the two people who's there permanently had people coming with information, with pamphlets.

Q: And was your involvement that you provided this place to stay –

A: Yes.

Q: – and that's all you did, or were you involved in other ways in this –

A: That was my main involvement.

Q: Is to provide the place to stay. Did your – did your rest of your family know that you were involved in this way?

A: Not really. You don't talk about those things. And another thing, we didn't even know what they were exchanging. Like my sister and brother-in-law, they were in the ar – my married sister and her husband –

Q: Your older one.

A: Yes, they were with the underground, and they were working in a basement of a church the whole time of the war, since 1940. Food was supplied and anything. That was an exchange place for ammunition. I didn't know, and they didn't know of what I have there. And they didn't know the exchange over there. But where they were is false pay – papers and ammunition exchange. People brought and other people came to get the things.

Q: How did things change for your mother and your father?

A: They changed because my father was at the rabbi's house with 10 other people to arrange for a burial, which was in secret.

Q: And this was –

A: And one of them, they were denounced and they were arrested in August of 1942.

Q: So two years after the Germans have arrived –

A: Yes.

Q: – they were arrested.

A: Correct.

Q: Let's go back a little bit, to May 1940, when your husband leaves –

A: Yes.

Q: – and we've talked about how you got involved in resistance. When is the first time you saw a German soldier, or you came face to face with a sol –

A: I have a picture of them.

Q: You do? Oh my.

A: Yeah, because once we had the yellow star, that was in – the yellow star, we got the yellow star in 1940, and the Germans were walking freely in the cafés in **Belgium**, sure, because they felt they were the – the heroes, the victors.

Q: Did you have any experience of – of a German who would treat you differently on the street when they saw you – you wearing the yellow star?

A: No, unless they were in charge to check our papers.

Q: And did you have that happen?

A: No.

Q: Your papers weren't checked. Okay. So would it be fair to say that in the first year or two you really never had any direct contact with the occupiers?

A: Well, we were on a streetcar, and we had to run because they were on one side, then they would – came smart, and they were on both side of the tram, you know, the entrance and the exit.

Q: Right. And you weren't supposed to be on the tram?

A: Not as Jewish, they would take you. They would arrest you.

Q: So you couldn't tra –

A: Or when people were stand – in 1940, we had to buy the yellow star and we had to stay in line to get the food rations, because food was on rations. And of course you stayed in line in this small grocery store, wherever they had food, they had. And that's where they come and examine Jews. So you were lucky if you passed, and if got a half a bread or something, or certain things, and not being caught.

Q: Did you have to go to work again? Once your husband left, did you have to go to work?

A: To work? No, I didn't go. I didn't go to work any more once I became pregnant. And you know, in the middle months –

Q: How did you live?

A: I'm sorry?

Q: How did – how did you live? Once your husband left, how did you live?

A: Well, whatever food my mother has, we shared. And I was selling my husband's clothes, and that gave me food. And also, what we had in **Belgium**, young women

with their babies – we had to go to clinics where we got – where the babies were examine. You had to go every week til the baby was six months.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: In those places you have physicians or doctors, whatever you call it, with medications, care and food for the child. There was one lady by the name Madame **Louise** who was kind and generous and giving me once in awhile food for **Josiane.** But it's so unbelievable today to realize that those kind and generous people were risking their own lives, because if they would be caught, they would be shot on the spot, no question ask. They have a monument in **Brussels,** with two people who were trying to run away, and they were shot by the Germans. It's hard today to think of the courage and the bravery of so many kind people. There was no money involved, there was no glory involved. Here on the fifth floor, if you ever have a chance, see that documentary of five people. There's two priests and three women, and they were ask – because thanks to them who started to organize it, that we had 4,000 Jewish people who were saved in **Belgium.**

Q: So these were people who were part of these clinics, who would – gave food – who would check the babies every week and would give food. Now, a few questions. Did you know what happened to your husband? When he left, did you know what happened to him?

A: No. What did really happen, there were three ships. Two were put in flames and burn, and one made it to **England**. My husband happened to be on the one who came to **England**, but we didn't know about that tragedy til after the war, because the first things the Germans did is t-take away the radios. You had to bring the radios to a destination, and eve –

Q: Was that for everybody, every citizen, or just the Jews?

A: Just the Jews.

Q: I see.

A: And it was easy for them to find out who has a radio, because you had to register your radio and you paid like –

Q: Oh, I see –

A: – you – a fee, or taxes, whatever you call. And it's so hard when I speak to young people to make them understand the importance of not having a radio.

Q: You're cut off.

A: – because today you have so many gadgets of communication, so there's not the problem, and that was our biggest problem, that we were cut off completely from the rest of the world. Also, bicycles were taken away.

Q: Only from Jews again?

A: The bicycles were – but the first order of confiscation thing – and you got a number – they were so organized during it, they had the number to give you when

they took the radio away. And just to give you an idea of the importance of the radio, when we got married in 1938, part of the family got together, in order to be able to buy us a radio. My parents didn't have a radio, because it was too costly. So how you explain to young people today – I always mention that, and once when I spoke to another place, one of the teachers had slides that in German this – they did that, take away the radios. But my son-in-law **Freddie**, who is from **Austria**, he said – he lived in an apartment building, and he said he was not 10, because at 10 he left already for **England**, and he said they had a German neighbor, and he got a radio, because that's the only way you heard **Hitler's** speeches. Where in **Belgium** was just the opposite. But it's very di –

[break]

A: – fficult for young people who just, you know, have in their pocket, and technology so advance, while you and I are even talking.

Q: Well, it's very hard for a person to imagine to be completely cut off, to have no means of communication, not know what the outside world is. That's so not the current kind of experience that most modern people ex – have, you know? It's – you have to make an effort to be cut off, to go away and turn off your computer and turn off your mobile phone, but it's your choice. It's not taken from you. And in this case, your means of knowing of what was going on in the outside world was taken. So – so you didn't know if your husband survived or didn't survive?

A: No, we only learn about that tragedy after the war.

Q: So you were – and that unknowing, that adds stress too, that adds fear, too.

A: That's why I'm so surprised that my brain is – didn't take a off – tension? It – it was just like we were wired and the wires gonna just explode.

Q: Did your daughter notice this? I mean, she's a toddler, she's a baby. And daughters – children notice how parents –

A: She was the happiest child you want to know. She walked at nine months, under the table. She was singing for her food, you wouldn't believe it.

Q: So she was oblivious, thankfully oblivious.

A: Thank God.

Q: Yeah.

A: And she loved my mother. There's a picture here, I think I have it, home, her and my mother at the age of two.

Q: We can look at those –

A: There's some pictures here which are much better than those.

Q: Let me take a look at that. I –

A: When she hugs my mother on the balcony where they living. My mother used to sing with her.

Q: Yeah? She would – I see that picture. So, remind me again, right in 1940, your parent – I – I know you talked about your father being arrested in 1942, but did their lives change much in 1940?

A: Sure, they had to wear the yellow star. And –

Q: Star. Okay. Could he still earn a living through working with the community, or not?

A: Well, at that time the organizations were trying to help, because don't forget, they were still conducting funerals, and that's why they were together. You know, how you just – the more and more – this – this is in me, and I have a hard time. How did those people survive those agony, the daily agony, I think? The daily fears. And you didn't know if next minute you gonna be arrested.

Q: When did the arrests start?

A: I'm sorry?

Q: When did the arrests start?

A: Oh, the arrests start in 1940.

Q: So fast?

A: Oh yes, oh yeah, they were very well organized.

Q: And were Jews arrested en masse, or were simply certain people picked out?

A: Wherever. We were hounded like dogs. Standing in line in the grocery place, going on the tram. It was easy for them.

Interview with Fanny Aizenberg
April 21, 2011

Q: Did you get an order at one point that –

A: We all got orders to report for work, and many of my friends who were not married at the time reported for work. Not only they reported for work, they had to bring certain items to work. And don't forget that was 1940, where many people were just – who had money, bought things and to be able to sell it. I was selling all the clothes from my husband.

Q: They were brou – what – what was the purpose of these items that they had to bring to work? They had to give them up to the – to the –

A: Of course. And of course we never heard of them. None of my school friends had survived.

Q: So that means when they reported to work –

A: Yes.

Q: – it wasn't really work.

A: Of course it wasn't, but we didn't know then. The order to come to work was the order of what to bring for them to work.

Q: So they just disappeared from your life?

A: You know, this is why today, with mainly American friends, they talk about I went to school there – like I belong to an organization which is called Coming of Age, to encourage seniors to remain in their place. And they have different program, mainly lunches, shows, and just a matter of getting people together before they have

to go to assisted living or have to live with somebody else to be helped. You know, I went to school in the **Bronx,** I went to school in **New York**, and they still talk about that period, which is wonderful. But I can't describe – I don't have that. I don't have that conversation. And we were very close with our friends. I had two friends, they had money, a lot. They hired somebody to take them to **Switzerland**. And some people managed, and they arrived. But those two, with their brothers, wer – the money was taken, they never made it in **Switzerland**, and then after we learned that everything was taken, then –

Q: They were betrayed, in other words.

A: Exactly. There was a lot of betrayal, a lot. Like my father would never be discovered if somebody would not betray them.

Q: **Fanny,** describe for me the – I'm finding it hard to un – understand the overall danger. I know that it's existed and so on, but I'm trying to get a sense of, when you went out in the morning to go buy milk for **Josy**, yeah, did you fee –

A: Which wasn't often, and we didn't go in the morning. We ta – we have find out –

Q: Okay.

A: – where more guards are in that street, or in this street. Don't forget, those were neighborhoods, with neighborhood stores.

Q: Okay, so you would find out what place was guarded, and what – so does this mean that every time you stepped out of your apartment, you were in danger that you could be arrested and not come back?

A: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Q: From day one?

A: Oh yes. Which has happened. But they made it easy, because they send out working sheets, for people to report to certain places.

Q: Did you ever get such a working sheet for you?

A: No.

Q: Why do you think that didn't happen? You don't know. You may not have been on a register.

A: I was. That's the only way you – you could get your food stamps, and that's the only way that you bought your star.

Q: I see.

A: You had to have money, buy your star and get the food st – the – the coupons, in order to buy food.

Q: And in 1942, when your father was arrested, what made that particularly – beca – he was arrested simply for being Jewish in that place, you know, in the – in the – in the circle of people. Had he not gone that day to that meeting, would have he been safe for one more day? Is that –

A: Probably. I don't know, maybe.

Q: And remind me again, it was to discuss the funeral of somebody in the community, and there were a group of people who gathered together, and all of them were arrested?

A: Yeah. Including the rabbi's two granddaughters. But they were taken to **Breendonk.**

Q: Uh-huh. And what is **Breendonk**?

A: **Breendonk** was a torture camp –

Q: I see.

A: – in **Belgium**, which they took the Jewish people, they tortured them, and then they send them to **Auschwitz**, which we didn't know that name, but they were dead already, before they got to **Auschwitz**.

Q: How do you know that?

A: Because I went to **Belgium**, they had a reunion of survivors and children of survivors. Children of survivors who were already 10 - 12 and grew up in hiding. What's happening to them, their mental state, it – it just – it just unbelievable what has happened to people off the sca – and of the danger.

Q: Yeah.

A: I mean, those were people who were normal people living normal lives, either school or working or being married, or trying to get married, and all of a sudden –

and they were lucky that they wound up in hiding, but that has affected their lives. They antisocial. Many couldn't have a relationship to marry, and many have many more problems. They had a reunion quite a number of years ago in **Belgium** and I went. I don't know, did you know a **Flora Singer**?

Q: I've heard of her yes, yes.

A: She was very much involve and we – we went. And it –

Q: You went. And is that when you found out about what happened to your father?

A: No, we knew –

Q: You said that they died before **Auschwitz**.

A: Yes.

Q: How did you know about how they died?

A: We didn't.

Q: I see.

A: We only know when we came, because we cou – we had a choice to go to **Breendonk**, and today **Breendonk** is a museum where they still have the tools what they have used –

Q: In torture.

A: – to torture the Jews. Not only the tools, but there's a voice of what they were doing and what they were doing it.

Q: I see.

A: And nobody has ever come out alive from **Breendonk**, and it's still a museum today.

Q: So I want to go back to your father's fate. You heard about what happened to him through your mother, or through somebody else?

A: We only knew that they were arrested, we would – never knew of deportations. We only knew people who were – got those sheets to go to work, but we didn't know of deportations. Like I have learn about the deportations when I was working with **Steven**.

Q: I see.

A: The time and the dates and how many people on each one. And that's how I have learned, through the German young woman, the reporter, about all those things which – which has happened.

Q: Okay, I think we're gonna take a break.

A: Yep. **[break]**

Q: Okay, so **Fanny,** I wanted to ask a few questions for clarification. I wanted to get a sense of what was it like personally – as a person who is Jewish when the invasion happened. How did you go from feeling fear to actually experiencing the danger? How did things become more and more dangerous? Can you take us through some of those steps?

A: As soon each day were passing, we were more frightened, more – petrified would be better words.

Q: Okay.

A: Because we were not prepared for that, specially we have been advised that we would not be occupied, so we were still hoping that things would remain as normal, if you could use the word normal for such a situation. But it didn't happen, so – an –

Q: So – what were the f – **[technical adjustments]** Sorry **Fanny**, the – you were petrified, and wa –

A: Of the unknown.

Q: Of the unknown. Ho – what started to become known? How did things start to get to be known about what your situation was? What happened?

A: Okay, first of all it started out that the Germans in big trucks passed different neighborhoods with loudspeaker and announcing of the different rules they gonna have. And if we are not gonna obey, we gonna be punished. The first assignment was to take our radios, to bring them to a different destination. Then also the Jewish organizations has had our yellow stars, which we had to buy. We also had to collect our food stamps, and with those stamps you are allowed to buy whatever any store had available, but you had to have the food stamps in order to buy. The Germans started to – and people lined up in different little store. Don't forget there was not like a big shopping center or a big food market you go today with the list and you

buy whatever you need. You could only buy certain thing. And in **Belgium** they still had small stores, and each stores had different products to sell. So you know one day this store is gonna have certain thing, and that this day another store is gonna have the – have thing. And the Germans started to check the people in line, and you never know who was gonna be checked, and you never knew which store is gonna be checked. So you see, our fear – there must be a better word than I use, fear, because it was more than just fear. Because you were just looking in the side or on the back of – if somebody is following you. And another thing what the Germans did already in the beginning on, in **Belgium** they had street cars. There's an entrance and an exit, so what they were doing, one soldier at the exit, one at the entrance, and in between time to check people. They started to do that at the end of 1940. In the beginning people were using the streetcar and whenever you saw somebody coming up, you went down on the other side. But this way you had no chance of going there, or going there.

And after you –

Q: And if they check you and they find you, what happens?

A: Well, they haven't found me, not at that time. And many others they did. And a friend of mine who was on one of those cars, and there were a lot of people so she was standing and holding on where you stand here on a streetcar, and she got so

scared, and she wanted to jump off it and she fell off it and got killed on the spot, jumping off. Because – I don't know if you could say it's fear, was more –

Q: Terror, it sounds like.

A: – than fear.

Q: It sounds like terror.

A: Terror is the word, I couldn't find that one. We were really terrorized. And also there was a time when we had to put our radios to a certain destination.

Q: Yeah.

A: And that made it even worse, because then it cut completely off communication. And that's the only communication we had in **Belgium** from the outside world, and we didn't have the radio. And then they confiscated the bicycles.

Q: **Fanny,** as this – as th – as – **[technical interruption]** Okay. As the months went by, how did it come – occur to you, how did it come into your mind that maybe you had to give **Josy** away?

A: Oh, that was not til my father was taken away. That really made up the decision for me, if I wanted or not.

Q: I see, so –

A: Because I could never imagine if that's a possibility. Somehow I felt those people would be protected, and I didn't know. So once my father was taken away in '42, I really had absolutely no choice, but I still couldn't make up a decision.

Q: Did you talk about this with your mother?

A: No.

Q: With your sisters?

A: Not very much.

Q: So – what did your sisters do, sh – her – she had two boys, yes?

A: At that time she had already three.

Q: She had three boys.

A: Yes. And before she went to work in the basement of the church, they took the three boys away in hiding. Because the same group who put them –

Q: I see.

A: – in the particular job, they had them.

Q: I see, so – so her sons were in hiding and as far as she knew, they were safe?

A: Her boys?

Q: Yes.

A: Hopefully, yes.

Q: Okay.

A: You know, even putting a child in hiding, you still didn't know.

Q: Of course not.

A: Because we didn't know anything. And another thing, we were not allowed to know where those children would be put into hiding, because in case we would be

arrested, or stopped, we used to call it, we would be beaten and probably give out the names. And that was the reason of not knowing –

Q: So wa – yeah.

A: – where the children would be.

Q: So in some ways the – your sister had already done this, she had already given her children to the –

A: But it was differently **[indecipherable]**. Don't forget, she was with her husband through the time, so there was two people deciding, and they couldn't keep the three boys together if they wanted to go to work.

Q: I see. T – in the resistance movement.

A: In the resistant movements, and their job was in that basement, which they haven't gone out from '40 til the end of '44 when **Belgium** was liberated. They were making false papers. They were also making exchange of ammunition. People knew where to deposit whatever they had to deposit and pick up what has to be pick up. Even without names this was – that's why it was so difficult, and that's why **Belgium** was very lucky that the resistant, with Jewish people and non-Jewish people had been working together. And because of that, and the dedication of so many brave and – and kind people, so many, like I said before, 4,000 Jewish chil- children were able to be saved. Don't forget among the children saved were also children who came previously from **Belgium** and from **–**

Q: **Germany**.

A: – **Austria** and **Germany.**

Q: Yeah, yeah. So wha –

A: So for small country, the more you think about it today, and the more and more people study the history of that period of time, it's hard for them even to imagine the possibility of people, who knowing – they had big signs or posters on each corners, if we find a Jewish person, the person's gonna be shot for hiding a Jew. And they did that, killing people. Some teachers have been arrested because they were – it's – it was easier for them to hide some children. So it's really unbelievably like a miracle, you would say –

Q: Yeah.

A: – to be able to save that number of children in a very small country, because **Belgium** is about the size of **New Jersey**. Food was rationed and there was no money exchanged, and pille – people were willing to risk their lives.

Q: But still, when it comes to your own baby, I can't – I can't imagine it, being a mother myself, I can't imagine it, particularly when my child would be so young.

A: Unbelievable. I still today have the pain of her crying and leaving, can you believe that? You ca – it's – you can't say that, because we didn't know if the decision we made was right or not. We didn't know what ever gonna happen to us. We never know who's gonna take care of mine child, my precious child.

Interview with Fanny Aizenberg
April 21, 2011

Q: You describe **Josy** as a baby of being a very happy baby.

A: Very much so, because everybody just loves her.

Q: And –

A: She used to sing for her supper at the age of one.

Q: How sweet, how sweet.

A: That's why you see that picture, she and my mother.

Q: Yeah.

A: When she used to get – I used to make her clothes.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And whenever she got something new she used to come to my mother. And she didn't speak at that time, but she was just showing her, like this.

Q: Her new clothes. And was this the first time that she had ever been with a stranger, even?

A: That's correct.

Q: So she had never seen strangers before, everyone in her world, she had known?

A: Correct. Except the two ladies who came, and also friends who came til she was three. So she had seen people with me, and people with her.

Q: But the first time she's taken by somebody – so why would she cry? Why w –

A: Because, number one, she didn't want to leave me. Not only crying, screaming, she didn't want to go. And also, she was not allowed to take a toy, because we were

– you know, we were afraid in case somebody would see somebody with the child and the toy, it would become suspicious.

Q: Did you know the ladies who took her?

A: No, never met them.

Q: Okay. So they really were strangers.

A: Completely, to both of us.

Q: Do you remember what they looked like?

A: Yeah, I think I would recognize if I would see them today, because this is so **impact** in you subconscious that you see – like I'm sitting now and talking with you, I still have heart-beatings of that period, of that moment, just her leaving me and crying. They were lovely, nice ladies.

Q: Were they older, younger?

A: I think they were older than me, because don't forget, that was about – very young time for me.

Q: You were like 24 - 25, something like that, yeah.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: An they would have been maybe 30 - 40?

A: Maybe about – yes, you right.

Q: Something –

A: But you see, again, I don't look at them of any age, I look at them just as people who have tried to help, if that's the word. **[indecipherable]**

Q: Did they seem kind? When you met them, did they seem kind, or did they seem –

A: They had to be, otherwise they could never get the child, otherwise the child would cry or scream all the way, til they would be someplace. And another thing which was very difficult, because we were not allowed to know where those children would be taken, because in case we would be caught, and by beating, and of course you would tell anything, no matter what.

Q: Was it in the daytime, in – at – in the evening? What happen – was it in the morning when **Josy** was taken?

A: It was daytime, after lunch.

Q: It must have been aw –

A: I guess they were waiting, you know, for the child to be fed. You know, everything was just like when you think now, it makes so much sense of the actions or whatever they were doing, on such an important time, or unbelievable time in our lives. Or **undescribable** words, I can't find words of describing such a trauma.

Q: How do you – when did – were you alone afterwards, or did –

A: Yeah, that's why I collapsed.

Q: You collapsed after.

A: That's why I chose in the movie I was telling you –

Q: Yeah.

A: – about that schoolteacher in **Poland** who was saving children.

Q: So –

A: And they showed in that documentary, how one of the mothers, and she took away her child, how she collapsed and couldn't breathe and couldn't move for a long time. Because you – there is – for me anyway, there's no words I could describe such emotions. They're painful emotions really, unless there's another word. I really don't know.

Q: Did your mother and sisters know that this would happen?

A: No, only my mother knew.

Q: I see. And did you –

A: But sh –

Q: – did she come to you or did you – were you able to go to her soon afterwards?

A: No, I waited a few ta – a few days, because I was not able even to move. This had such a impact, which is still with me today. I still hear the cry. And I had no way of helping her. It's not when you have a child and falling and you take the child and you kiss to make good.

Q: Yeah.

A: That was not what you could do.

Q: Couldn't. You couldn't do it. When you were able at least to start functioning again, how did your life go on?

A: How you call functioning?

Q: Functioning means you got up, you had something to eat, you started to invol – you know how did your life pick up after you gave **Josy** away**?**

A: It just didn't pick up.

Q: Oh.

A: It couldn't pick up, because li – you all lives, it's not the same life you had before, because all of a sudden you just one, and you don't have a child to hug, or a child to hug you. So this is the hardest thing. You really have to try to continue breathing or continue living. Thanks.

Q: When you need another **[inaudible]** I guess what I want to ask is, what happened to you in the days and the weeks afterwards? What – how did your life continue? What were the events that took place in it?

A: It continue and started to worry us more. Don't forget, like I told you, my father was already taken away and the whole concept of life is already different thinking. What's gonna happen within a minute? We don't know, because we were like chased, like you chase a dog sometime, and we didn't know where the drop would be. We didn't. Because it just seem according to other countries, that in **Belgium** they were a little different, the Nazis, because they knew that the **Belgium** people

would help us – much help it would be available. Although in **Belgium** we had an organization, the black shirts, who were working with the Nazis and helping the Nazis deport the Jews, because many of those people who have denounced the Jews, whatever it was, in the house, in their place, it was taken by the Germans. And anybody who has denounced the Jews got part of that – whatever they were able to steal and take away.

Q: So there was an incentive? There was a –

A: Only if you were that kind of a person.

Q: – of a person.

A: But then again, how could you put the two together, when you have so many people of any background, of any religion, who were willing to risk their lives, just to sha – to save one child?

Q: It was in 1942 then, what month was it that your father was arrested?

A: In the month of August.

Q: And when – what month was it that you gave **Josy** away?

A: I think it was October.

Q: So, as 1942 go – you know, comes to an end, are you still in **Brussels?**

A: Yes.

Q: Are you still in your apartment?

A: I was still in the apartment, this was the **[indecipherable]** the decision of me going into hiding, and my mother going into hiding.

Q: How did you do that, what did you do? You stayed within your own homes?

A: Yes.

Q: And how did you get fed? Did other people go and – and bring you food?

A: No, we tried to get food.

Q: I see.

A: As much it was possible, and as much we try not to be caught. Because this is what the Nazis did, they organized. And they had a documentary about two months ago, from **France** which is called the **raffier**(ph), which really means the round-up. How they have collected and taking the Jews from **France**, which was the same order as they did it in **Belgium**.

Q: And so you were trying to avoid this **raffier**(ph) that –

A: Right.

Q: Yeah.

A: Everybody did.

Q: What happened after that, in the winter of 1943, anything?

A: Well, in 1943 I went into hiding. My mother was working in a old age home, and she was able to stay there. But being in hiding I – I was hiding in a small farm, which was run by an elderly couple. And the brother of – of **Constant**(ph) lived

with them. Very kind people. Very old, compare to me, but they were very kind. Their main purpose of keeping that little farm was just the chickens so they would have eggs. And they were exchanging some of the eggs with another farm for something else. They would –

Q: How did you get to know these people in the farm?

A: Through the underground.

Q: I see.

A: The same people who took **Josiane**, they got other people in contact, and they got other people in contact. It was just a big circle –

Q: Network, yeah.

A: Or whatever, I don't know, you prob –

Q: Network.

A: Network.

Q: Network of people.

A: Which of course we didn't know that word either. And it didn't exist, because without radios and without telephone and with any kind of communication, it just is a miracle, if that's what you want to call it. An unbelievable way of putting that in your mind, what people could do to save or to help other people, in spite of all the evil all around us. And all those people have been warned, in case they would find Jewish people. But in sp –

Q: So this wasn't – excuse me.

A: I'm sorry.

Q: Okay. This was an elderly couple?

A: Very elderly couple.

Q: And how far was their farm from your home in **Brussels?**

A: Not far, was in **Vlazenberg**(ph).

Q: Uh-huh.

A: It wasn't far. They had special buses.

Q: What do you mean by special buses?

A: I mean regular buses, but there was a larger bus and not going from one place to the other as often as regular probably, transportation. And loneliness –

Q: Did you get there by bus?

A: No, it was streetcars.

Q: I see. So you took streetcars?

A: Yes. And sometime I used to meet my mother, because loneliness, not having my mother, not having my child is like my whole soul went out of me. I don't even have the proper words to express such a despair, because we didn't know if the next day is gonna be better. Sometime people are depressed and have problem, and they know maybe next day or next week things are gonna be better, but we didn't have that to –

Q: Did you – okay. **[break]** Okay, **Fanny**, when – when you were describing that utter despair of not having your child, of being alone. Your husband is gone, your mother is in hiding, your father has been arrested. Your sister – your older sister is underground, at least in the church building, working on – in – in activities that you didn't know about at the time. You say that you come from an Orthodox family, did you feel yourself to be very religious?

A: It was very, very confusing, with many questions and no answers.

Q: Did you feel like your faith in God had been shaken?

A: Not only that, you had the feeling of such emptiness and helplessness, you could just cry to God with many questions and of course, no answers. You really start feeling, is this being punished because we Jewish? But we were good people, it's not – and it was extremely painful, because you didn't get an answer, and you just had questions. Like my father and the rabbi taken, because in the rabbi's house, he had – the son has already gone, but he had a daughter-in-law with two small children, and also taken at the same time.

Q: And how to figure all that out, why is it happening, why –

A: We don't know, we still questioning.

Q: Yeah.

A: And I think much learned people still have the same question today when it comes to religion. Everybody else has a defin – different opinion and a different

feeling about. And many rabbis today don't know the answer either and have a hard time of answering the people who have been asking the same questions.

Q: This elderly couple that you were with, were they people that you could share any of this with, or were you silent with them?

A: Completely silent because you can't convey a pain in you which you can't express, because nobody would be there. Like when a child falls and you just kiss it for better, and then it does get better, but we know that nothing is gonna get better and we didn't know how much worse it's gonna get for us. In our wildest nightmare we couldn't even imagine that there's a place like hell on earth.

Q: Well let's, unfortunately, go there. How long did you stay at this farm, this –

A: From the end of '42, til winter of '43, I went and we met, my mother and I. The attic was already empty at that particular time.

Q: Where the resistance people used to be?

A: I'm sorry?

Q: That – that – the attic where the resistance people –

A: Right.

Q: Yeah.

A: And the couple who was there permanently and originally, they were sent on an assignment and they were sent on assignments previously. But this assignment, they never came back. And then, after the war, we have learned that they have been

caught, and they were – been killed. But that we learned after the war. And our – my loneliness was to such extent that when I met my mother, we decided we gonna stay in the attic overnight. And I guess this was a bad decision, because either we were followed, or somebody told on us, because that attic has never been touched and nobody ever has been taken out. Don't forget, some of the people were there for few year – for two years at least, and it has never been discovered. Anyway, the two of us were discovered, and we were taken by a covered truck to the Germans headquarters in **Avenue Louise**.

Q: How did – can you walk me through that – those moments? You spent one night in this attic?

A: Yeah.

Q: And during that night you were discovered?

A: Correct.

Q: And was it in the middle of the night that –

A: Yes.

Q: So what happened?

A: Well –

Q: Were there police, were there soldiers, were there –

A: There were soldiers, and apparently they were making the rounds in that corner, because where we lived was not a Jewish neighborhood. They were not a Jewish

couple, but that was not like you would call a Jewish neighborhood. It was a little more out of the city of **Brussels**.

Q: So how did they know – I mean, if it was an attic –

A: They didn't know. Somebody must either follow us, or somebody has denounced us, which I think we must have been denounced.

Q: So they – they knew there was an attic door and they were able to come to the attic door and they were able to –

A: Correct.

Q: – enter? Did they need a key to get in, did they knock it down?

A: No, they just knocked and woke up the – woke up the people who lived in the floor below.

Q: I see.

A: And that's how they came and knock at our door.

Q: How many soldiers were there?

A: Well, there were two who came to the apartment, but there were other people on that truck already, which they have arrested before us.

Q: Were they uniformed?

A: Yes, they were always wearing uniform.

Q: Were they German or Belgian?

A: Germans.

Q: Germans.

A: The people who were in the black shirts in **Belgium** did more other kind of work for the Germans. But they were part of the German army in **Belgium.** They were called the black shirts. They were called the **Grell**(ph), because he was head of that department. And he fled when – after the war, and he was condemned to death, because he has denounced many non-Jewish **Belgium** people in **Belgium**. And for that was not allowed to come back to **Belgium**, he was condemned to death, and they were hoping to get him back from **Brazil,** which they have never been able to do.

Q: When they took you, do you remember what the soldiers acted like, what they –

A: Yes.

Q: – how they behaved?

A: Like worried.

Q: Were they screaming at you?

A: Yes. And we were taken to the headquarters on **Avenue Louise** in **Brussels** where the headquarters were.

Q: The Gestapo headquarters?

A: Yes, in **Avenue Louise,** that was their headquarters. And we were badly beaten up, mainly on the face and the mouth. This was their priority when they were beating on people. And we stayed overnight because we were both bleeding. Don't

forget, my mother wasn't 50, and – and the next day we were taken, also by the same covered trucks, we were taken to **Malines** which is called **Mechelen** in Flemish, and that was a place of some – where all people were gathering. And when they had a certain number, they were transporting those people, and we didn't know to where or what. And I think this is why it scared us constantly, is the fear of not knowing. Because I think we young people, if we would have even suspect what hell is, we knew it from reading, but we didn't know the real existence of hell, I think we would all killed ourself, if we would know that there's such a hell as **Auschwitz**. After three days – oh, and then we all got the number which was hanged on our neck, with the number, and on our cattle train there was –

Q: So you were put from the truck to a – to a train station?

A: No, from the truck we were taken to **Malines.** We stayed for 10 days there, and apparently they collected enough people to put on the cattle train to be transported to **Auschwitz**, which we didn't know **Auschwitz**, we never heard that name in our life.

Q: Did you know that you – did they say **Auschwitz** before they put you on the train –

A: No.

Q: – or you did – you didn't know where you were going?

A: No, we didn't even know where we going, and we didn't know the meaning of **Auschwitz**, we never heard that word. But on the cattle train, what we discovered is that they had 110 people on the cattle train and I'm sure you saw the train.

Q: Where were you? Were you in one corner, were you up above, were you down below?

A: We were about in the middle.

Q: Were you in a bunk?

A: There were no bunks on the train.

Q: There were no bunks?

A: No, you just had to stand or to lean on one another. You couldn't sit down, you couldn't lie down. And we had two buckets, one with water and one for the latrine. I can't even describe to you that voyage on the cattle train. The scream, the prayers in any language, and the cry and screaming. The worst thing was the cries of the babies. And finally we arrived in **Auschwitz**. It was pitch black. Then they have those big light – flashlight like you see sometime when they open a business, or for the movies when they showing. And from 110 people, 40 people came out alive. From the 40 people we don't know how many came to the camp. Women with children who came out alive, the soldiers greet us with barking dogs. They told to the young women to drop the child. And she says, I go where my child goes. So he shot – he shot with his own revolver the baby, and first the mother start screaming,

and he shot the mother on the way falling down to the baby. Now you could understand when I say that this is never going to go out of my soul til my dying days. The screaming of the baby before it was dead, and the mother before she died. And this was done many times.

Q: You all – when they open up the train and you let – you're let out of the train and that's your introduction to **Auschwitz**.

A: That's right. And then we had to form li – lines, one for men and one for women. And in the line where I was with the women, my mother was with me, then he separated my mother from me, and I knew being together we gonna help or being able to help one another. But while the soldier was ma – walking down, I slipped over to be with my mother. And I was hit over the head, if I tell you to stay here, then that's what you stay. And that was the last time I saw my wonderful mother alive. Then we had to form lines, and from the line I was on, we were taken to a freezing room, and we had all to, in front of soldiers with their dogs, we had to undress completely. And I tried to explain to you that we all came from decent home, and we have never undressed in front of strangers. Not only because we had to get undressed, but we were checked if we were hiding thing in our private parts. After that long wait, we were given uniforms and wooden shoes. Then we went and we had numbers tattooed on our arm, and we had our head shaved. And finally we went to the shower, with screams and crying, hold onto one another. And finally,

after the shower, we got one blanket for six people and we were put into barracks. The barracks consisted of shelves covered with straw, and one blanket for six people. Besides crying and hugging one another, and still not realizing the hell we were on, and then we fell asleep. And the net – and the next day we were called to line up, and we lined up, and our group went to work into a ammunition factory, where the air was impossible to breathe because of the chemicals. We were cleaning and the fume was bad. We worked there for 12 hours, then we marched back to our barrack where we got soup which was like water, and a slice of bread which didn't even taste like bread. And again, we were counted, and at that time, before we were allowed to go to the barracks, we learned where our loved ones went and then we saw the crematorium, and the smoke out of that.

Q: Who told you? Was it – was it other inmates who told you? Was it the camp guards who told you?

A: No, we had just above us somebody who was in charge of us to make sure we behave, and they told us. And then we saw the fumes.

Q: So these were other inmates, too?

A: Yes, sure. But they – they are the ones who were dividing the soup, and they are the ones who divided the bread we got.

Q: Was there anyone on that train that you knew besides your mother, who was in that cattle car?

A: Oh yeah, many people. And **Steven** got me a list of names of people who got to **Auschwitz**. The people who went right away to the gas chambers, their names are not on the list. Only the people who came into **Auschwitz**, their names is on the list. And of course, my mother's name is not.

Q: Were you completely then, without any acquaintances?

A: Correct.

Q: Without anybody –

A: But the six of us became like family, because we had nobody, really nobody. Nobody has anybody in **Auschwitz**. It's a word which I can describe – I can't find word. The only person who was able to describe **Auschwitz** is **Primo Levi**. I don't know if you ever read any of his books. He was an engineer from **Italy.** He was already an engineer when he was caught and deported to **Auschwitz**. He's the only person who was able to describe **Auschwitz**, really, really how it was.

Q: Do you remember the date you entered **Auschwitz**?

A: In 40 – the end of '44.

Q: That's the date you entered **Auschwitz**?

A: Correct.

Q: So you wer – managed to – you managed to not be caught for – until 1944?

A: No, not really, because every month –

Q: Uh-huh.

A: – regardless how cold it was – this is – was the – the – the biggest **[indecipherable]** of the Germans, always lining up. Because there were five women working in the ammunition factory who stood – we had little bombs with holes, and we had to clean those hole, because the next department were putting in small, small balls in the holes, so it explodes when they needed it. So they sabotaged and they stole those. And you know where they hid it? They hid it in their mouth.

Q: Oh my goodness.

A: And then one crematorium did explode. And it was only for overnight, but at least there were a few people less to be gassed at that particular time. But all those five women were caught, and they were hanged. And the whole camp had to stay for 24 hours, til those five women died hanging.

Q: And you had to stand and see this.

A: Everybody had to stand and watch those people die. It's interesting that not too long ago, on channel 26, they were showing –

Q: This is the educational channel.

A: – and one woman who has survived was telling the same thing I was telling you, what has happened to those five women. So this was recorded and people talk about it. I was sitting in front the **TV** and I couldn't believe that other people are hearing the things we went through, because don't forget, I was still very young. And in between I already had the medical experimentation. Because while we were checked

if we had lice, **Mengele** was his visit always, and he picked one or two or how many he want at each time. And one of his visits, I was picked. And I was taken, tied to a bed, things were taken from me, which I still don't know what parts were taken. Another thing, which I didn't mention before, a month after we were in **Auschwitz**, none of the women had their periods any more, because, can you imagine thousands of women being there and having their periods monthly? None of us had their periods any more. But of course, having had the medical experimentation, it was such a tremendous impact on each and every one. There's one book here on the fifth floor, which 20 women who have survived medical experimentation in **Ravensbrück** have written a book.

Q: When this was done, **Fanny**, and you were taken and you say you were tied to a bed?

A: Correct.

Q: Were you given any kind of narcotic medication?

A: You – of course not.

Q: Oh my gosh.

A: Of course not. They did that to thousands of women. And another thing I have learned, that the cher – Germans made experimentation in **Auschwitz** on babies. I didn't know that. You see, here at the museum, a little over a year ago, they had the seminar. Physicians or people who study medication from different countries in

Europe. There were 12 people, and I think they stayed here about 10 days. The interesting thing is, I couldn't understand til afterwards why I was chosen as a speaker to those people. Only because all those people have studied German medicine for the past 200 years, and what they were doing on us, they started to do that 200 years ago. Sterilization, abortion. What you call when men are being sterilized, there's a man in my –

Q: A vasectomy. A vasectomy.

A: No, there's another word. It's gonna come afterward. There's three things that the Germans did. Hundreds of years ago, if a family in **Germany** had a child and they felt that that child is not perfect, they used to have an institution where they gave their child away. When that child, or adult for that matter, died, the family just got a notice, your so and so passed away, and that was it. Nobody has ever questioned it, because everybody had to be perfect in **Germany**, and if the – they were not, they were taken to those institutions. And that's why, when they had the seminar here, they came to the museum, because of the background they have already learned, what the Germans did, hundreds – sterilization. Couldn't think of it.

Q: So, sto –

A: So this has already started 200 years ago, which they tried to do on us today.

Q: How could you stand the pain?

A: And they have books about that, and I took a book out because I wanted to show, when they had the seminar. But they were ahead of me, because they are the ones who taught me what has happened 200 years ago. So this now is just – like they have one book which is called "**The Nazi Doctors**." People want to know, why was it possible, for educated people? It's not like today a bunch of hoodlums want your money and they kill you just for the money. This was organized by excellent physicians, nurses, educated people. How could they have done the horrors they did? I tell you another thing what happened **Auschwitz** and what the Germans did. They had part of the camp where they had Gypsies collected from **Europe**. What they have decided and what they have done, there were women, were children and men. They decide that the men should lined up for the following day and that they're gonna be taken to work. Meanwhile, they have given milk to the children of the women who they took the fathers away. A few days later they took the women and the children. That was in August of 1944. And they gassed the women the following two days. In order not to fa – have a – a disturbing, they gave the babies the milk. Can you imagine how vicious that is, and being done by educated doctors who were supposed to help people?

Q: **Fanny**, how could you stand the pain?

A: You cannot.

Q: Did you pass out?

A: Of course, we all did. How could you?

Q: I can't imagine.

A: I can't even describe it, even now. My whole body is against and hurting. How do you describe things like that for people who have never seen horrors? We have never seen anybody being killed except through that period of time, and except seeing those babies being shot coming off the train. How could any normal, if there's a way of calling us normal, to live that the rest of your life? You can't. That's why we have – I have nightmares.

Q: Still?

A: Still today when a train is passing, I just broke out in a sweat, because it still beats more. That's why I say to you, and to everybody who listens, how could anybody remain sane, if that's the word I could use, after seeing such horrors?

Q: How did you?

A: We don't. We don't. We don't. And I would never recover. And another thing which I say when I talk to people, it took me 50 years to be able to just to talk, because I still feel I'm less than another person.

Q: Is that what they gave you, that feeling that you were less –

A: Absolutely, still today. I couldn't talk about I had medical experimentation, because that would make me even less than I am already. And this was the power of the Germans, besides the selections. And you – nobody ever knew who's gonna be

the next one, for any reason they have to put the person in the crematorium. There's another book here, the author of the book passed away a couple years ago. There's only two people, two young men from **Czechoslovakia** who escaped **Auschwitz**. They describe **Auschwitz**, how the selections was, and they passed – the main reason for the young men to escape and how they escape, and those were the two only ones who ever escape alive, is because they wanted to go to **Czechoslovakia**, where they come from, to go to different organizations, because **Eichmann** was getting everything from the Jewish community in **Hungary.** Trucks, tools, just name it, because he was fooling the Jewish people, telling them whatever you give us, then we would not have the discrimination or the deportation of the Jewish **[indecipherable]**. But it didn't happen so, because in spite of everything he took, it was continuing. It's – it's really an amazing book if you could sit through and just read it. You have to have a lot of strength, or whatever you have in you. Because I was asked by one of the physicians who were here at the seminar, asking me how far I was in reading the book. And I said so far I'm on the second page, and I wasn't able to turn for the third. But I have learned from them, which they have studied and they would, you know, like see how this is continuing with the German people. And I wouldn't be surprised if that's still continuing today, of the experimentation they had. They were number one a few hundred years ago, did you ever hear in history when you went to school? Okay.

Q: **Fanny,** I know it's – I know that this is probably one of the most painful sections, but I would like, if you can, to describe what you can about the room, about whether you were alone in it, whether there were other women next to you –

A: When they made the experimentation? No, there was one at the time.

Q: One person?

A: One person at the time.

Q: And were there nurses with you?

A: Yes, there were two women.

Q: So, German nurses were with you?

A: Correct.

Q: And a German doctor?

A: Correct.

Q: Was it **Mengele**, was it another doctor, or you –

A: No, **Mengele** only supplied –

Q: I see.

A: – the people. **Mengele** had s – his eyes were like evil. There's only one picture, I think the only picture they have at the museum of **Mengele**. There was no picture, he didn't want to have pictures taken.

Q: And so was it a small room?

A: Very small. I don't know if you remember, a few years ago, **Elie Wiesel** and **Oprah** went to **Auschwitz**.

Q: Yeah.

A: Did you say – see that documentary?

Q: I heard of it, yeah I heard of it, that was a –

A: Well, there's a documentary, and they show you the snow and they show the shoes.

Q: Yeah.

A: They also show – and I didn't know that til I saw that documentary, that they have made experimentation on men. And I didn't know that til I saw that documentary. It – it's – it – and also you see shelves with little jars of whatever they took from people, or whatever they put into people.

Q: Do you know how long you were in that place?

A: You don't, because you think it's gonna be the end your life. You think this is it. I thought that this is it.

Q: This is it.

A: And I understand what the other women describing in the book. Was the same. We didn't know what was done.

Q: Did you – did you have a moment that say, you pass out and then at some point you come to consciousness again?

A: You never lose consciousness, because you're too scared. You think at – that's – I thought, I don't know others, that this is gonna be my last moment and I have to hang onto it to see my last moment going out of me. You see, this is why it's so difficult for me to stand up and to speak, because everybody had different experiences. But here at the museum, of having so many survivor volunteers, I'm the only one who had the medical experimentation. And this is why maybe it took me so many years to be talking about. And like I told you, took me 50 years after I came back from **Auschwitz** from – liberated from the Russians. I was in the hospital a few times in **Belgium.** Don't forget we didn't have our period a month after we got to **Auschwitz**, and with the experimentation it took me 50 years to be able to talk about that period. But you know while they did those experimentation, it was like little by little your life gets less, and you think you there already. Then you feel another pain, and it's not there yet, you still have to go lower.

Q: So you feel you're still alive because you still can feel pain. Not that you can feel anything else, but the pain tells you –

A: Well, another thing which was difficult for me to talk about, especially here, where you have single people, who fortunately were able to start a life again and have a family. And I couldn't have children any more.

Interview with Fanny Aizenberg
April 21, 2011

Q: Did you have – after you were released, after you were again free – I'm jumping ahead, but I'll come back to the other topics, did you have any kind of medical help after the war?

A: Oh yes, I was in the hospital a few times in **Belgium**, and when we came to **America** in '49, I were twice in the hospital.

Q: And were the doctors then able to find out what had happened?

A: They only knew what was happened, and they only find out when we came to **America** in '49, why I could not conceive. So you – so you see, it – it's not like a redeeming way of life. Like people were fortunate to start the life again, married and having families. That's why I don't think it was proper for me to talk here. Cause I don't know if people could put the two and two together. You can't. I can't. So how could somebody else just make peace with oneself? You can't. You just can't.

Q: And yet, you had a child, you were reu – reu – reunited with, and you raised her and she raised a child, or more than one. And as **Steve** said, now it's down to the fourth generation, and – and despite that, despite – despite it, you were able to raise her.

A: To make a human being out of her?

Q: Yeah.

A: Definitely. You're absolutely right. You're absolutely – not only because she's a human being, but she's a wonderful human being. And another thing which has been

found out, more and more studies are being done on us, that children of survivors either went into education, or went into medicine. And I tell you why I'm mentioning that to you. I think it's very important, because now here in **America**, you hear so much violence, you hear so many young people killing one another. Either students, or just in the street the gangs. So when they arrest a young person, 14 - 15, who has been killing, the judge or whoever defends those people, feel because they didn't have a very good upbringing, that's what made them violent. What about babies born and never know the parents, like you see the program a couple weeks ago, we were still looking for the pictures of children who have never been able to connect to any family, because they were in hiding, or the parents didn't come back, or any family come back to claim them. But all those children who have been in hiding, they definitely didn't have a good upbringing. And then in spite of that they all in education, or in medicine. Like my daughter, who is in education, and my granddaughter is a medical si – psychiatrist.

Q: An amazing achievement.

A: But most children of survivors, even born after the war, went into education.

Q: **Fanny**, it's hard to ask, you know, that sort of simple question of what happened then, what happened then? I mean, you – here we are, you're in this room, you're being tortured, you're being dehumanized through this medical experimentation, and you feel like it's your last moment, but it's not.

A: I don't know.

Q: Did you – did at some point they finish and then send you back to the barracks? Did they let you heal?

A: Oh yes, and then there was another session. There never was one session.

Q: It was more than one session?

A: Yes.

Q: More than one time?

A: Yes. And the only thing they had in thy – that room is like shelves with jars of different parts, and you see that if you even watch **Oprah** and –

Q: Were those jars there when you were ha – when they were performing experiments on you too?

A: Yes, uh-huh, because there was already things from people before me.

Q: Do you have any recollection of the doctor?

A: I think if I would see him today I would recognize.

Q: Did they talk to you at all?

A: No.

Q: Did they shout at you?

A: No. They shout at us not to move.

Q: They shouted at you not to move. Were there people holding you down?

A: They didn't have to, because we were tied down. You couldn't move, even if you would – wanted to.

Q: When you went back – when – di – were you brought back to the barracks, or did you have to walk back? Could you have –

A: We had to walk back to the barracks.

Q: And did the other – other inmates in those barracks have an idea of what had been going on?

A: Some did, some did not.

Q: Do you have any idea of how long this went on?

A: I don't know, because we had no concept of time. It seems like endless, like I think I tried to explain to you, til it's going to be the end. That's why you hold onto it, because you want to see your own end.

Q: Was there a time when they eventually stopped, or was this – once you were chosen, until liberation came, you were part of this –

A: That was quite awhile.

Q: Was it the same people all the time who were doing this, or different people?

A: Well, the nurses were different, and I think the doctors were different.

Q: Was this your lowest moment?

A: I think so. I think so. One redeeming thing we did have, is in 1944, which was very bad in **Auschwitz**, more beatings for no reason. We think it was for no reason,

and we were still working in the factories and we had to lined up, which was the common thing to do. And we had **Eichmann** and **Hess** warning us that if we not making more than our quota, we gonna go to the gas chambers, which were right there. And we were already working more than any human resistance could do, because of the fume and everything. You see, our eyes have changed already because of this – the odor, and the fumes, which was really bad, because we had to wash them in some kind of a product.

Q: **Fanny**, were you given any time to recover, or after you were brought to the barracks –

A: There's not such thing as recovery.

Q: So you had to go to work after?

A: Mm-hm, like nothing has happened.

Q: God. I usually don't run out of – I don't run out of words, but I've run out of words, because it just – there are no words. There are no words.

A: I couldn't find words, and I want to say a lot more, and I don't have the words. That's why I think I told you before I started, I thought I know English, but apparently I don't. There's so many things which are just impossible to find words. There isn't any words.

Q: No.

A: There isn't any words for such a cruelty or **unhuman** cruelty. There isn't any words. That's why I didn't go into the writing class. Because there is no words.

Q: What goes –

A: And anyway, **Auschwitz** is not describable. There was one famous person that he tried to describe **Auschwitz**, and he said, there's not enough paper, and not enough ink in the world. But I don't know if I told you before, **Primo Levi** was a scientist. After the war when he was liberated, he went back to **Italy** where he was from. He got his position back, which was very high position. He got married, he had a son, and he committed suicide, because he could not accept the outside world. According to many statistic, there's about 42 people who have survived **Auschwitz** and killed themself. I mean prominent people. When I say prominent, is people who got positions back after the war. They were recognized as people and they could not accept the outside world, after having seen what has been done to people. And I don't think that any of us, if it wouldn't be for the seminar, happened here in the Holocaust museum, I did not know that the Germans did medical experimentation on babies. But they knew that.

Q: **Fanny**, did – did that thought ever cross your mind, tha –

A: Oh, many times, many times.

Q: After the war?

A: After the war. Because I could not accept cruelty for no reason to ba – to be done to another human being. Not what I have seen in my – in **Auschwitz**. Not what my eyes have seen. I'm even surprised that I'm as normal as I am today. Or just functioning to a certain extent, which is not really functioning, because the pain and agony doesn't go out, never.

Q: When you were returned to **Josy** and returned to your husband –

[break]

Q: – did you feel alone with them?

A: Yeah, because I – I – you could not have the talk, like I have with you today. And – and don't forget, this is many years ago. I could not express what I'm expressing today. That's why I said to you, took me 50 years after **Auschwitz** to be able to – and I think I'm very lucky, thanks to **Steven**, who knew, little by little – don't forget, has been nine years that we were sitting weekly together.

Q: Did you, at some point, tell **Josy**?

A: Never. Never. I really wonder today – my daughter went to the different classes in order to be able to give the guided tours. And she shows everything, of emotion. And I always wonder, does she tell anybody, this is what my mother went through? And they don't show you the experimentation, they only show you the beatings and the works, you know, done in **Auschwitz**. And I was wondering, and I never had enough guts to ask her if she tells the people, this is what my mother lived through.

Q: Do – would you feel that if she did that, she would be in some ways –

A: When she gives the talks, she doesn't want me to come.

Q: Does she tell you why?

A: She said she would be crying.

Q: When you – when you, after the war, had **Josy** back, did you feel like you were distant from her, or were you –

A: I don't think so.

Q: Okay.

A: I don't think so. I think I told you when you heard me talking, when I came back, I didn't have a place, and I stayed with my sister because she got her place back. And we had two beds to sleep, but **Josiane** very often came to the bed where I slept, and she used to tie her nightgown with mine, to make sure I wouldn't go away. Don't forget, she was only a little over five.

Q: She was a baby still, yeah. That's not really what I'm – what I'm asking about is not what – is not what she got. Because clearly, if she had not felt secure in you, she would have grown up differently.

A: Oh sure.

Q: Yeah. But I'm asking more of what did you feel? If you've gone through such experiences, and you come back and you are –

A: Well, I wanted to hold her all the time. That's all I wanted to do, just go to bed and hold her all the time, so she wouldn't go away.

Q: With a double nightgown.

A: She'd do that.

Q: Yeah. When did your life change in **Auschwitz**?

A: From the minute we got there.

Q: I meant aft – we're going through the experiments, but at some point the war does start to turn against the Germans.

A: We have not witnessed that, because we were on the dead march.

Q: Can you tell me about –

A: And the reason being called the dead march, because it was heavy snow and diseases were terrible. Hunger was unbelievable.

Q: Before we get there **Josy –** I mean, excuse me, **Fanny,** what I want to ask about is, do you remember if the work in the ammunitions factory ever became less and less, and was there a time – when did you go on the death mar – what changed within the camp that all of a sudden –

A: It didn't change, we all went out. **Auschwitz** was evacuated the 17th of January, and the 27 of January, the Russians came in. That's why they evacuated the whole camp.

Q: My a – my question is this, if you were evacuated on January 17th, was it on January 16th you were still working in the ammunitions factory –

A: Yes, oh yes.

Q: – as if it were a normal day?

A: Yes.

Q: Normal day.

A: Yeah.

Q: So you have no idea –

A: No.

Q: Okay.

A: Til we came back from our work.

Q: And then what happened?

A: And then we all had to lined up and march. We –

Q: Out of **Auschwitz**. And –

A: And we marched – well, our group, we marched from **Auschwitz** to **Ravensbrück**, and there's a friend of mine in the museum who made me a map. If I see **[indecipherable]**

Q: That's a long way.

A: Huh?

Q: That's a long way.

A: Of course it is. And you can't imagine that you were able, after **Auschwitz** to ca – I d – I don't know what was, and that's why so – that's why it's called the dead march, because either people died of disease, people couldn't walk any more, or they were shot. Because in the snow, as you were walking you saw drops of blood, people who had been shot because they couldn't – one was holding up another, til the other couldn't be held up any more, and dropped. So that's how you knew how many have died. And many have been liberated way before our group was liberated. And we were really – really found out accidentally, because this was already the last battle by the river **Elba**. And I didn't know the distance of anything, think I told you, somebody was nice enough who works at the museum, has made me a map. I want to know what happened to me through the different times. And he made me the map, the map – many people have been liberated by the British, mostly by the Americans. I had the cousin who survived, was liberated by the Americans, and died two days later, because the food she was given, she couldn't take it any more. But we were – we just gave up, the six of us. And you know when you see sometime those black bags where you put garbage in?

Q: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

A: That's how the – the six of us looked. You would never even look if somebody is dead. The reason we were discovered by the Russians –

Q: In **Ravensbrück**?

A: No, we were already by the **Elba**, which is in the other end.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: This was two months later. The reason why we were discovered, it was the last battle near the **Elba**, between the Russians and the Germans. And of course, the Russians won at that time. They were looking for Germans or Nazis who were hiding, and many did, because we have witnessed the Russians killing them. Because looking for Germans, they found us. And they took us in a makeshift hospital and they cleaned us up, because we all had the typhus.

Q: You were six women, or two – or how many were left?

A: The six of us.

Q: The same six who were in the barracks?

A: Yes. We had frozen toes, we had no fingernails, and you see our eyes, it was only a li – a white, because of the fume of the time.

Q: From the – yeah.

A: And we all had the typhus. Not clean at all, we really were in a very bad shape. And they were very kind. They gave us – first they clean us up. They give us what they had, it was only milk. And because they didn't have food, that saved our lives, because people who have survived, either with the Americans or the British, got the rich, canned food. Like I said, I had the cousin who survived and got those canned foods. And she survived with her brother, and she couldn't take the food, and she

just died. And we were lucky because that's the only thing they had, they probably s-stole some cows and that's how they have milk to help us. And we stayed there for about 10 days. The Red Cross found us. We got recommendations from the Russian doctor to tell us what we should do when we go back to make sure we go to the doctor, which we did. And on the way back from the people from the Red Cross, I went with a friend of mine from the six who didn't have anybody to go. The four others had family and friends which they went, but they didn't – although they were my age, maybe a couple years older, they didn't live long.

Q: Why not?

A: So, we don't know the reactions. And then once I came back to **Belgium**, I really had a lot of medical problems.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about what they were?

A: Well, I – don't forget, we didn't have our period the day we – toom – two months after being in **Auschwitz**, and I think with experimentation, we don't know what was put in the body, we don't know what was taken out from the body. We know blood was taken out because that was supposed to be sent to the soldiers in **Russia** who were on the front. **[technical interruption]**

Q: Okay. **[break]**

A: I'm just try – I'm still trying to save her of many of the pains I went through, that's why I don't appreciate for her being when I talk.

Q: Were we rolling? Okay. Another thing I wanted to go back to, like I had said, **Primo Levi** found his solution cause he couldn't connect to that other world.

A: Mm-hm.

Q: He committed – and –

A: He could not accept the other world.

Q: World.

A: He could not – and he wrote many books – he could not exp – tolerate with himself that somebody else is able to do an organizing **Auschwitz**. He couldn't accept that, that another human being could do that. And that's why he commit – he committed suicide.

Q: And was – and –

A: And not only because he committed suicide, but don't forget, he was one of the very few who has been accepted in society of – for what he was before. It's not like all of a sudden he was somebody else.

Q: Yeah.

A: He was accepted in society, he was accepted in his job. He got married, never been married before. Got a son. And just could not accept the rest of the world. He was on the step and he like, hanged himself. And there's 42 other people, with names and everything, they – they just could not accept the humiliation they lived through and the effect this had on their lives, and society outside. Look how many

people would not be able to sit down and have a conversation for me to tell their life. You know that.

Q: Of course, of course. It's very hard, it's very hard for anybody to talk about a time when they're humiliated, to talk about what is that humiliation, to describe it to anybody, for different reasons. To a stranger because they're a stranger. To a loved one because, as you said before, you want to protect them. To yourself. It is very hard to do that and it takes – it takes a great deal of courage.

A: I don't know, I don't know. I really don't know. And it took me a long time, as you know. And even my daughter told me yesterday, Mother, if you in such agony, why do you accept doing that? And she knows, or I hope she does, the toll it takes from me. It's not like you clean yourself, it's not, you never are clean.

Q: But you never were dirty. You never were. It was not you who was dirty. It was those who did those things.

A: But I have yet to hear anybody saying that they sorry what has happened. My son-in-law **Freddie,** spoke to a group of people here from different countries of **Europe**, who have graduated and they got like a trip from **Germany**, from **France**, those were all graduated students who got like a scholarship, and they were already in higher studies. A very small group. There was one young woman from **Germany**, the only one from **Germany**, came to **Freddie** and says, I beg you forgiveness, and crying. And I think this is what he needed to hear, because he never found his

parents again, and because he works with **Steven**, he found out how his parents were killed in **Austria**.

Q: So no one ever said to you, I'm so sorry for what you went through?

A: Not yet. Si – I'm still waiting. I don't think –

Q: How do you – how do you – how do you live a life –

A: You don't.

Q: – without being bitter?

A: It's not bitter, it's painful. It's very painful. I think – like I have been asked once for students if I hate those people. And the on – only answer I could give, because if I would be a hateful person, I would hurt myself. That's what I answer the Catholic youngsters.

Q: Yeah. Well, it is a religious answer.

A: Because if I would be a hateful person – the only person who said he would never forgive them and hates them was **Wiesenthal** when he wrote his book. He said he would never forgive them. Now, I'm not a hateful person, and like I said to the youngsters, if I would be a hateful person, I would hurt myself, because I could not live with hate.

Q: But it is pain. But you live with pain.

A: Tremendous, constantly. It's not like one minute on one person and another minute on another person, which I cannot, like, get it out of the system, you say something.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Well, this –

A: I can't, I wish I could. I wish I could, because my days wouldn't be as painful. And it's hard to convey that to another person who has not a patient of wanting to understand a survivor, because I – I don't think there's too many people who understand, really, a survivor. I remember quite a number years ago, they had five psychiatrists sitting on the stage here in the **Rubinstein** room, all psychiatrists, medical psychiatrists and of course they were talking, the majority, survivors. They knew how we feel. They knew without interviewing anybody like you and I are talking now.

Q: Yeah.

A: Tha – they never did that. So how could they know? Nobody has asked me, or somebody else just personally, how you feel about it? What makes you tick today? They have never had that ability. And I think this is a big pain we live with.

Q: That's very lonely.

A: It is. It really is.

Q: I'm so sorry.

A: Well, thanks to listening.

Q: Well –

A: **[indecipherable]** I'm glad I did it.

Q: I'm glad, too.

A: Stid is go – **Steven** is gonna be glad I did. Well, he really – really made me what I am today.

Q: I'm glad. I'm glad that you –

A: It's a wonderful relationship, it really is, because it's so unexpected and it's so wonderful that we have been able to get – cause don't forget, not because our background is different. I think I have learned to get along with many people, I hope so, because if – if I haven't learned it now, I never will. And I appreciate relationships, I appreciate people. And I think that's really what makes me tick.

Q: It sounds like it. You know, I – I'm just – I'm sad to hear that you think of yourself as less than, because of what you went through, rather than more than. Because not everybody would be able to not hate. Not everybody would be able to still feel, still –

A: You mean, have emotions?

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: I do.

Q: Yeah.

A: I really, really do. And another thing I think which is in my favor, is appreciate people and needing people.

Q: Yes. Yes, and to say it.

A: Oh yes.

Q: So many people don't say it. They don't say that they appreciate –

A: I –

Q: – even though they may feel it.

A: I definitely do.

Q: Yeah.

A: And I express it, definitely.

Q: Yeah.

A: As you know me inside out by now.

Q: Well, do you think, **Fanny**, I mean we – we – when we talk about – when we talk about your story, which is connected to, but something else beside what we've been talking about right now, are there parts that we should still cover? We've – you know, we're – you were in – you were on the death march, you're liberated, you're brought back to **Belgium**. How did you meet **Jack** again? How did – how did that happen? What happened to your younger sister? Did you –

A: My younger sister was in a convent during the war, and she wore the o – th-the habit.

Q: I see. So all three sisters survived?

A: Yes. But you know what's interesting, my older sister – I was the middle one, and my younger sister – my younger sister was at least eight years younger than I am. Six or seven at least. Both of them died of cancer. My older sister died of cancer, my young sister **Rose** died of cancer. Both of them have never been in a camp. They were sheltered. Both were in that shelter all the time. My younger sister was in that convent with that habit and it – did what all the good nuns do.

Q: **[indecipherable]**

A: I'm the only one. I look different. A different personality completely, always was. The two of them were very pretty and tall. My older sister was tall and slim and dark hair. And I must be like the misfit in the whole business. And my younger sister was nice and tall and extremely educated and extremely smart. And she died of cancer, the same cancer my older sister had.

Q: Really?

A: I'm the short one, the fat one, the ugly one –

Q: I wouldn't say those things.

A: – and I'm the only one alive.

Q: Well, first of all, I would not say those other things, but yes you are the only one alive. And how long has it been since you lost the two of them?

A: Oh, my younger sister died, I think must be about 12 years ago. Oh, at least.

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Q: Do you feel alone?

A: Very much, very much.

Q: And is that a legacy from the war, or is that from some other **[indecipherable]**

A: I don't know. I think it must be a combination. My husband is dead for 22 ow – two years. I have had many proposals, but I guess I wanted something else from companionship, and probably the other person, like me, wanted me for what I have. But it's not what I was hoping to get, and I didn't – I just wouldn't settle for second best. But you know, it all depends what you want.

Q: Yeah, it does, it does.

A: Or what you're willing to sacrifice or to offer. I was not ready to be a wife.

Q: Again.

A: Correct. I just – and the two of them were very educated, very intelligent, but it – it just was not – like I told you, I was not ready to be a wife. So now you know me from inside out.

Q: Well, I've gotten – I've had the honor to get to know a little bit about you, and I appreciate –

A: I think you know a lot, because I have never uncovered myself to the extent I did with you. And I think you have a wonderful quality of bringing that out from people.

Q: Thank you **Fanny**, thank you.

A: Because I was much more uncomfortable when I came then when I'm now, maybe because I trust you –

Q: I hope so.

A: – and that's very important.

Q: I hope so.

A: So you're doing a very special, good job.

Q: Well, thank you for that.

A: Because if people can trust you, that's the main way that you could bring out of us what you really want.

Q: Well, this is – it is – you see, the purpose is not to – the purpose is not to expose somebody in a way that is invading their privacy. The purpose is to share what was the reality, and what it does.

A: The emotions in life.

Q: What does it do to the human spirit, what does it do to the human being? And you've shared that.

A: Look what you're learning.

Q: A lot.

A: I mean it.

Q: A lot. An awful lot. And – and it's – it is – because there's such a cost, and I appreciate that you, knowing that cost, have nevertheless agreed to do this. It is a

gift you're giving and it is a gift you're giving not just to me right now in this room, but a gift you're going to be giving to all the people who will be watching this.

A: Well, especially here in the museum, I'm the only one.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: They don't have another survivor who had been married. They don't have another survivor who has a child. And I'm so proud that my daughter and son-in-law have joined it. **Steve** would tell you. And I'll tell you why, because when I started to come here and feel comfortable in our little corner – I have nothing to do with the rest of people in the museum, forgive me.

Q: It's okay.

A: I'm very close to **Michelin**(ph).

Q: I could see that.

A: She's about my daughter's age.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: But it's wonderful, our relationship. You have no idea how much I appreciate that. She could call me any time, and there's always something that we have to offer one another.

Q: That's wonderful.

A: As far as we – oh, priceless, you could say.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: Okay. And I was with **Steven**, how could we have any relationship? I had – are we still on?

Q: Yeah, we're still on. If you want to turn off, we can turn off. We're still rolling, though, we're still rolling. Because you know, when we're doing that, because some of what you say relates to what you were telling me about. And if you want it turned off we can do so, because I think we're over the most – you know, the formal part of our relationship, but we're also talking about how it comes th –

A: Life.

Q: Life. How it is that you build trust again. This is one of the things you know s – I'm happy I'm in my seat rather than in yours, because I don't know if I could answer the questions. I don't know if I could articulate. But I think that one of the challenges, if I can even start to imagine myself in having gone through what you've gone through, in this kind of betrayal of human spirits, the betrayal of human beings by other human beings, is how do you learn to trust others again?

A: That's very difficult, that's why I don't trust just everybody.

Q: Yeah.

A: In spite of me needing people, as you could tell.

Q: Yeah.

A: And wanting to be with people.

Q: Yeah, of course, of course. You know, it's not a distrustful nature, it's experience, it's what life showed you. It's what you've gone through.

A: But then again, look how many wonderful, wonderful – you know, when you just think in your mind –

Q: Yeah.

A: – complete, complete strangers have nothing to benefit by it, except risking their lives. And they were not all religious people. The majority started from churches and convents, because we needed that – I mean, they needed that outlet. But can you imagine in society today that people would want to risk their life to save somebody else's child, at such a high cost?

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: Not only for themselves, but the whole convent for that matter, which they were responsible. And there's so many horror books about young people, what they went through in hiding in convents. But then again you hear wonderful stories. But can you imagine today people taking a child and being responsible for the child, and risking their own life in order to save another human being, for no reason at all? No money, no glory. You must see that documentary they have here. It just makes you – you know, you read something of the book and then when you finish –

Q: Yeah.

A: There's a wonderful book which is called the **"Daughters of Absence."**

Q: Mm-hm.

A: Did you ever hear that book?

Q: No, I haven't.

A: It's written by **Mandy Mandel**(ph). She's a painter

Q: Mm-hm.

A: She's a daughter of survivors. Her father died and he was in a concentration camp, and he has a number. She's quite the famous painter and author. Seven women got together from different backgrounds, but all the seven have been worn – born after the war, and it's called the "**Daughters of – of Absence**."

Q: Okay.

A: And they had all those seven womens –

Q: Mm-hm.

A: – on one evening right here at the museum when they wrote the book.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And it's a book which makes you feel good because all the seven have written about their mothers, who were survivors. Their opinion of. It's called the daughters of –

Q: Absence, got it.

A: And it's written by **Mindy Mandel**(ph), and you feel so good when you finish reading that.

Q: Well –

A: How those seven women live in different countries. I happen to know two, one is my doctor's wife. Her name – I forgot her first name, **Loeffler**? I don't know if you ever heard that name. But **Mindy Mandel**(ph) has made quite a reputation for herself as a painter, as a speaker.

Q: Well, you know, here's another thought that comes to my mind as we've been speaking. I remember –

A: Does anybody have a clean handkerchief?

Q: I do.

A: Or a clean tissue? **[indecipherable]** [**break]**

Q: And so epcet – exceptional about you. And I will tell it by way of a little story. Thirty years ago I remember, I was a member of Amnesty International, okay. And Amnesty International was having campaigns against torture. And there were some people that came to their attention. And at that time there was the aftermath of the Cambodian genocide. And there was a young man they featured in one of their stories, and what he said always struck me, because he was somebody who survived the Cambodian genocide. He saw his parents murdered, he saw his – his siblings murdered, and he survived. And he said, I survived not only because I ca – I am living and breathing, I survived because I can love again, after having gone through that. And that is an achievement, because so many people couldn't, after they have

been exposed to this kind of brutality, this kind of hatred, they couldn't. And everything I hear from you about your children, about **Josy**, about your grandchildren, about the people that you ever – it has that spirit of love to it. And that's why I can't – I can't imagine that you would be anything other than more than, rather than what you said earlier about feeling inferior. If you can love again, that's a lesson for all of us, you know, because whatever challenges you go throu – and everybody has challenges, just some of us are not in those kinds of challenges.

A: Of course. The daily life you have challenges, sure.

Q: We are always challenged on do I trust again –

A: Yeah.

Q: – do I love again? Do I put myself out there again?

A: Mm-hm.

Q: Do I make myself vulnerable to other people again? And it takes extraordinary courage to do it in the face of past experiences.

A: Right.

Q: And – I mean, I don't have any other words, those are just –

A: Yeah.

Q: – what goes through my mind as we're talking. And I am glad that you're here.

A: Well, thank you.

Q: You know.

A: Thanks for having me.

Q: Yeah. You're welcome.

A: Was quite an experience.

Q: Yes, it has been.

A: Thank you.

Q: Thank you. I guess the –

A: And thank you guys.

Q: Yeah.

Q2: You're welcome. Thank you.

A: Thank you.

Q: I guess this concludes our **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with **Fanny Aizenberg** on April 21st, 2011.

Conclusion of Interview