

Good evening. My name is Toby Ticktin Back, and I'm the director of the Holocaust Resource Center in Buffalo. We are at Channel 4. It is December 12, 1989. And our guests this evening are mother and daughter. We have Sofie Tihel and Elza Friedman. And both of them are from Iasi, Romania.

We'll start with you, Elza. Do you want to tell us about your childhood in Romania, please?

Yes. I remember the very first years of my childhood were happy one. And I was with my family together, and I was able to get a nice education. And I enjoyed going on nice trips, and resort areas. And my father was very good, a good provider for us.

What did your father do, Elza?

My father had his own business, like a small manufacture. And he liked very much music, and he wanted me to play the piano, so he bought me a piano. And I was five years old. And I had to study. And I was able to take a lesson-- French lesson and then Hebrew lessons.

And we were quite happy till '39. In 1939, 1941, the antisemitic [INAUDIBLE] came in, and the Germans. And they start talking about the war. So the war really started in Romania in 1941, in June 22, 1941.

Sounds like you remember that date. Did something specific happen?

Oh, I remember a week after the-- June 22, it was the terrible Sunday. It was June 29, when Iasi had a pogrom, and where almost 50% of the Jewish population was killed.

50% of--

Jewish population.

--of the 40,000 who were--

I--

10,000 were killed.

I don't know if there were 40,000 or less, but I would say it was-- the proportion was almost 50%.

Did you lose members of your family in the pogrom?

I lost a lot of members of my family, close, and close-- my uncle, and cousins, and aunts, and a lot of person.

Who actually were behind the pogrom? Who were the fighters? Were they Germans or were they Romanians?

The Romanian were allied to Germans. So it was a combination. It was the Romanian, mainly. They were the ones who started. But sure enough, with the help of the Germans.

And they broke into your homes?

They did break in our homes. They took us to the city hall, where they told us a trick that they want to verify our paper and see if we are in order or not. But this was only a way of getting us out and bringing us there.

And then, by a miracle, we escaped, because at one point they tried to give us passes. And then they stopped giving those passes, and whoever was left there, they were taking those-- this train. And for seven days they were kept. And they were animal wagons where they were kept, without air, without food, without anything. So most of the people, they

died on the train.

And after seven days of being on the train, they were brought in a camp. The camp was real. There were two camps. And they were quite close to Iasi. But that's the way they wanted to kill them, just by keeping them in the--

Keeping in the trains.

Yes.

Sofie, did you lose any members of the family on those trains?

Oh, yes. As I told you, my uncle, who was an old man-- I don't know how old he was, but he was looking like a saint, like a rabbi. Very religious. And his wife and his two sons were in the trains. But I know the sons, where they were killed in one on the camps there.

I mean, they arrived there, or exactly I don't know. They were found. But my mother, all the elderly people, we don't know where they are-- where they are.

But you, and your husband, and your two daughters--

My husband--

--were saved.

--we didn't get in in the courtyard of the city hall because it was so full. They said, children and woman, go back. But we weren't sure if we go back if we won't be killed on the streets, which the most of the people who left already the city hall going back home were killed on the streets by the hooligans.

So you were-- by the hooligans.

Yeah, but when we came home, the house was broken in. And whatever it was good, they took out from the-- you don't remember that? And they hung on the hangers. They hang their clothes that was remaining. Those lower-class people, they put all their dirty clothes, and with lice, and with that, and they put them on the hangers.

And they took your good clothes.

And they took our good clothes. But it didn't count-- anything didn't count anymore. At that time, when I was out in this convoy, and in front of me was my mother-in-law, who was old that time already. And my two children with me. My husband was taken in already.

And my mother-in-law was pushed with a bayonet, with a-- one of the soldiers. And I was looking. They're going to kill her. And I was there, and I couldn't help it. And we had to go with our hands up, like--

Prisoners.

Yeah.

Did your mother survive?

She survived, yeah.

It must have been such a shock.

She survived. That time she didn't know that she lost her son, because--

Oh, that was your young--

Yeah. Yeah. Younger son, yeah.

And I know-- I remember an episode during those few days, which I think it's quite sad, but it's interesting. We were together in the same house with my uncle, and his wife, and their little girl, who was less than one year--

Painful.

Excuse me. She was less than one years old. She was nine months or so. So they had a older woman, a Romanian woman, who used to take care of-- help them in the house, and take care of her. And when we were taken out to go to--

To the city hall.

--to the city hall, my uncle and aunt decided that they won't take the baby. And they just gave the baby to this older woman.

Do whatever you want to do with her.

Excuse me.

And so when we got back home, and we were all of us home, we realized that we don't know where the baby was, because she was afraid to stay. But she was, in a way, an honest and dedicated was. And she was close to my aunt and uncle. So she decided to take the baby and to go to her own house and stay there.

So for days we didn't know where is the baby, if she's alive or not.

What a trauma.

And after a week or so she brought back the baby.

Oh, that's quite an episode.

Yes. And now, talking to you, I just--

You just remembered that.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Because sometimes you don't think about--

You don't remember, and you blocked quite a bit of this out.

And then another thing I remember-- this is what I remember-- it was the second day. You know, it started two days before the Sunday. The Sunday was like the peak of the whole thing. And then they start-- in a way it calmed down, but it took a few days till really it was, again, so-called a normal life.

And after this terrible Sunday, there were still people killed, and beaten, and so forth, and so on. So we were in a terrible shock, locked in in the house.

And suddenly, we heard terrible knocks at the door. We had like up and down. And we looked through the window, and we saw two Germans officer, or soldiers, with two Romanian soldier knocking at our door. So we didn't know what to do, and we couldn't help without opening.

So we opened the door. And I remember the Germans were drunk. And they came in. And they told us that they have information that we have arms, and that we tried to shoot through the window-- my parents, and my father, and my uncle wanted to kill the German officers. So they said--

And he was so drunk. And he didn't-- one point he didn't make sense. But he was talking and talking how is he going to kill all the Jews. And he said that Hitler ordered them to bring all the Jews head, and to bring him. And this was his purpose of-- or his challenge, to kill Jewish. And so he wanted really to kill us all.

And my uncle and my father--

They spoke--

--start crying.

They spoke German.

Yeah, my uncle knew a little bit Germany. And they start begging him, and my mother, crying, and my aunt and everybody, please don't kill us.

I remember they opened the dressers, whatever, and they started giving them whatever we had in the house. Please take this. Take this. Just don't take our lives.

So I don't know why. They gave them drinks, and food, and clothes, and whatever. They took whatever they wanted. And they left.

And they went next door, and they killed the whole family. It was a mother, and a father, and three daughters or so, and nobody was left alive.

So it was a miracle that you--

It was a miracle, and something--

It was a miracle who escaped.

It's something--

So things were miraculous, the people escaping the city hall.

Right.

And this was this terrible week. And this is what left really marks in my childhood.

Now you mentioned, after this period of time, the public school that you attended closed. And tell us about your schooling, and your housing, what happened.

Yeah, well, the school we did learn, and we got quite a nice education. But the conditions were terrible because I was in an elementary school, and we didn't have any buildings prepared for us. So we went to those small synagogues where we used to--

To pray.

--to pray. And this is where we learned. And our teachers came. And we didn't have any kind of accommodation of having a school there. We used to stay on the benches, and without a [CROSS TALK].

It was all primitive.

Very primitive. But we went through, and we studied.

Did you have books?

Yes.

Yes.

Yes, we had books. We did have books. I don't know how they provided us, but mainly the big support was done by the Jewish Federation.

Your community--

Yes, I would say Jewish Federation which is equivalent to here. And it was a tremendous help.

You mean, the rich helped the poor.

The poor in the school. And they kept an eye on everything.

The rich people realized that with money, you can't buy, really, everything, because if, like here, god forbid, who would give all his money for the poor people? At that time, you realized that the money didn't have any value. You couldn't buy your freedom with the money, your life from those robbers, from those stealing tyrants. You couldn't buy.

They had people who were on those trains. There were a lot of rich people. And they didn't know--

It didn't make any difference.

And they didn't know where they are going. And being on those train, and that atmosphere, some of their were-- of them were crazy. They went out of their minds.

And they had money, and they tore the money. They tore the money-- lots of money.

It didn't make any difference.

Yes.

What happened-- talking about money. Your husband had a factory. What happened to the factory under the Germans and the Romanians.

At that time, we left Iasi after the rebellion.

'44. no. We left in '44.

Yeah.

Three years after [CROSS TALK].

We left, and we went to Bucharest, because the Russian, the front--

In '44.

In '44.

Sure.

When the Russian-- the front was already by the Russian occupied.

No, no, no.

No, no, no.

Between '41 and '44 we stayed there. In '44, when the front approach, they start--

When the front was getting closer.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

They broke. Yes.

--were winning.

Yes. And there were horror stories about the Russians when they--

Wait, before we get-- so let me ask your mother. What did you do for finances from '41 to '44? How did your husband manage with the factory? Did the Germans and Romanians permit him to continue working?

No. I told you, under a gentile--

Partnership?

--management-- I mean, partner. So he was the one who used to go and take the audience. And because our factory, that time you had the right to militarize the factory. That means they had to use your factory for military purposes.

Right. Yes.

So our factory was among those militarized--

What did you make in your factory?

We used to make bottles, metal--

Accessories.

--accessories. We had buttons, like metal buttons, which are good for uniforms for soldiers too. But we had a lot of small accessories.

So that's how you maintained your factory and your livelihood.

And the last time, we moved it from there, and we moved it in a city where we took some of the machines, and we moved it in another city, which was in Transylvania. But we couldn't do a move. Only the gentile man, our partner, he was the one who was the owner at that time. But he used to come when-- he used to share the profit with us.

Was he somebody who was known to you?

I don't know how they met this man.

But he gave you money so that you could continue living, buying food and clothing.

But I think he was a clerk at-- a city clerk. And he was very poorly paid. And he was happy to have such opportunity to make a--

To be a partner.

Yeah. And he made a good life.

[CROSS TALK] partner.

He made a good life without any investment.

Absolutely.

Yeah.

Sofie, would you tell the story that you told me before about how Elza, coming home from school, was attacked by a German soldier.

Yes, she came with some friends, coming home from the Talmud Torah there. And it was in a area where only Jewish people used to live there. And she came home. And she was, like, not her. She was so sick. And she says, Mom, look what happened. And she was very scared.

And she says, what happened? And some other girl and so on, says, a soldier, a German soldier, sprayed something on her. So I don't know if she got sick from scared, scaring, or she got sick, something poisoned her. The fact that she was sick two months. She couldn't go to school.

And the doctor couldn't diagnose it?

It was something neurological about this.

So maybe it was a poison gas.

It was a poison gas, yeah. It was a poison gas.

Do you remember that?

I remember being sick. I don't remember really what happened.

How it started.

Yes. Yeah.

So actually, your years from '41 to '44 are difficult years, but you're living in your house.

Yes, we did live in our house.

And part of your family has already been killed.

Yes.

But it was all the time mourning, and crying, and very sad, sad--

Very difficult life.

--and heavy. And we had a lot of close family missing. So we did have to help a lot of people. We used to help each other a lot. This is what I remember.

We used to go out on the street and say, this one is-- is didn't come home, and this one didn't come home. And this-- people you know for years, and suddenly you saw only in black. You saw all the women dressed in mourning, in black, woman and young girls, and crying on the street. It was such a sadness. Such a sadness.

And mostly a community of women and children, and the men were gone.

Mostly men.

It was very difficult.

Which I want to tell you, when she start telling you that they used to take hostages every month, my husband was like black-- not black.

Blackmailed? Blackmailed, yeah. Because even if it wasn't his turn, those--

Officers.

--officers, they used to come, and if you give me that amount of money or whatever, because it's your turn now. And they used to take hostages and put them in a synagogue. And it says, for each German soldier who was going to be killed, which Jewish men were going to kill a Jew-- a German soldier. We used to go with our heads down. That's the way you used to walk. I never had my head up. Then Jews will be killed for one soldier.

And that's what they did? And they took 10 Jews for each day, or each week?

But imagine the fear. Imagine the-- which kind of life you lived. You didn't know.

They took only men away?

Only men, yeah.

They kept them hostages. And every Sunday, it was the-- you never knew whose--

Whose turn is it.

Did they kill them?

No, they kept them because it never-- it happened that none of German officer would be killed by a Jew. But this was a way to keep the terror going.

Terrorize.

They terrorized.

And on the other hand, they had a good way of blackmailing. Because like my mother said, they used to come and tell you, your name's on the list. You are going to be the next hostage. So if you give me this amount of money I'll make arrangements, and I will take you off the list. So this was a very good way of blackmailing and taking money from people.

So they kept the people for a week until they got the next turn.

Yeah, this is what I remember from my childhood, this terrible Sunday. Every Sunday we didn't know what is going to happen, if my father is going to stay home or not.

Each month--

[CROSS TALK]

Each month we used to work. We had to give clothing, clothing, and sheets, and pillowcases, a certain amount each family. People who didn't have for themselves what to wear, they had-- they used to go and buy and bake, because they had to go and give for the soldiers, for the German soldiers.

Now during this time, you had a-- you had radios, or were they confiscated?

They took it out.

So did you know how the war was going? Did you know that the Germans were losing? Did you have any kind of--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

--communication.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

At the very beginning we didn't know.

No, I meant around '44.

We used to have newspapers, and we used to read them between the lines.

Oh, it was-- we used to have friends who used to have radios, or neighbors. And it was also like here, the Voice of America, like now in Eastern Europe. We used to live with, during the communists, with the Voice of America for Europe. This was the-- for our soul, the food of our soul. And this is the way we found out. It always, it's a way to find out what was going on in the world.

Well, also you had a non-Jewish partner who I guess could bring you information.

Everybody knows. We knew very well what was going on. We knew better maybe than knew here.

He used to go. This man used to go on the road for business. And when he used to come home, we were all ears and eyes, and the mouth open, to hear what he's going to-- what news he has for us.

So one day he came. He says, you know, I believe that you Jews didn't do anything. But they said that you did it, that you started. That was our partner who had--

Who was supposed to be taking care.

They said that you started. Yeah.

So in 1944, you decided to move to Bucharest?

Yes, yes.

Why was that--

We moved to Bucharest. And we didn't have any-- a good friend of ours took us in, and we slept on the floor.

Why did you decide to go?

Why did you move to Bucharest?

We moved because we thought that-- we heard that the Russian were as good as the Germans, what they did there in Russia. we had some friends, a Russian who left Russia. And when the war-- before the war broke out, they said, if you hear that the Russian are coming closer, run as far as you can.

Away from the Russians.

Away from the Russian. So--

They did a lot of--

But the front was--

--damage when they came, because they were wild, and they used to rape a lot, woman, and to steal, and to kill. They were wild. They were absolutely--

So you realized that you should move away from the Russians.

We thought that it's going to stop, the war, and it's going to be the border in Iasi and Bucharest won't be touched. But they came all the way. So that's why we left everything. Everything. And whoever--

You left your house. You left--

We left the house.

I remember, we were sitting and eating dinner at that time. And we couldn't leave. No Jew was allowed to move from one city to another. But also, through this man, through the--

Through the partner?

Yeah. They made arrangements. And we left in a small compartment. We were 10 people. In order to lift my foot, I asked the other people, please, move your foot and I can put my foot down. We were like sardines in a small compartment in train.

Oh, in train. On the train.

Yeah, in a train. And that's the way we left.

Do you remember that?

Yes.

We left with nothing.

I do. Yeah, I remember [CROSS TALK].

Were you scared, you was a little girl?

I was scared because my parents left. And I was taken by my uncle and aunt. I don't know how was the arrangement. We didn't have room to go, all of us. So suddenly I saw myself and my sister without my parents. And they took us. They were supposed to meet my parents. I felt like I'm lost.

And I remember very well--

Do you remember that feeling?

--the train stations, and the Germans walking their boots around the train.

And you were-- you're still wearing stars on the train. So you could have been picked up by the--

Yeah, but we were hidden. Unofficially, we were there.

But we were protected, because everything was bought with money. We paid a lot of money to get into this train. No Jewish person supposed to travel there. But we were protected. But put like animal--

Who protected you?

The police. We bribed the police.

You bribed the police, the Romanian police.

Yeah, yeah. They were very easy to be bribed.

So you got-- you came to Bucharest. And you lived with friends. And how long did you live with them?

Oh, we lived a year then. A year, I think, we lived.

And it was the-- in August the--

It was possible to find a--

Excuse me. August the 23, 1945. And this was when Romania started a ceasefire. Romania gave up.

In 1944.

Yes, 19--

1944.

Yes, 1944. So this was the-- officially a liberation by the communists.

And life was difficult.

And Romania switched from having Nazi friends to communists. They became very, very communist overnight.

So how did that affect your everyday life, being under a communist regime?

As bad as--

It was as bad as the--

Yes, yes, yes. But you didn't have to wear stars.

No, no, no, no.

And you could go to public schools, I presume?

Yeah, well, at the very beginning, we saw that they are going to save our life. I mean, in a way they did.

They did.

In a way they did, because they didn't kill us, or we were not exposed to go in a concentration camp, or pogroms or so. But little by little, it wasn't really easy. I mean--

Was your economic life easier? More food, more--

| was a period between '44 and '48 which was like a relaxation type of years. It was called in the economical history "nap." I don't know if you--

A nap? Is it nap time?

Yeah, it was like-- we were waiting for American to come. We didn't know. It was this was the time when we didn't know exactly what--

Sort of an interim period.

Right. So it was really a nice period. We could see American movies they brought in. And we found our books and magazines.

And you were a teenager. So you were having a better life than before.

Yes, yes, yes, yes.

And were you going to a public school in Bucharest at that point?

Yes. No. No. When I started the school, I went to a Jewish private school.

In Bucharest.

Yes. And I still went there till-- almost when I finished, when they came with a law. They didn't allow public schools anymore.

Oh, everybody went to a private school?

Yes, the communists didn't let to-- the public school was like a public-- like a private property, like a private. So they didn't have-- you are not allowed to have anything private, including schools.

So schools were public then.

Public.

Yeah, we went-- yes, we went from public.

You went from private to public.

From private to public. The public was before too, but because in '44 we started going to a Jewish school, I went till the law came, and they closed them.

Now with the Russians coming in, how did that affect your religious observance?

Well--

Did they permit you to go to synagogue?

No.

No, no synagogue?

Well, they did the synagogues. Yeah, they did permit. But it wasn't officially. In a way, you were not well seen by them if you would practice religion. You did it under--

You did it quietly.

Quietly. Quietly. The only time when we really-- when we really went to the temple for synagogue was for Yom Kippur.

And they permitted you to do that? They gave us a few hours' time off, and this was it. Yes.

So your life had this nap. You had this interim period. And then what happened after '48? Life was more difficult for you?

Well, because the economy, like you know very well now, it became very bad. And everything was related to the bad-- to the shortage in food, shortage in clothes, shortage in everything. So it was a struggle to survive, to-- whatever we earned, we were hardly able to provide food.

But it wasn't only Jews. It was everybody--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

No, no. No. Everybody. Yes, yes, yes. We're talking about the-- yes, yes.

Did you experience antisemitism at this time?

Yes, I did. Yes. In a way, the way they put it, they said that we brought in the communists, the Jewish people. We brought in the communists.

Oh, so you were the guilty ones.

We were the guilty one. And then, when the Jewish people start leaving, they said, you brought them in, and now you are leaving. And so they were very much against us leaving, because-- and this was a way of reviving the antisemitism even more.

Now you, Elza, as a young girl, you graduated from high school. What did you do after that?

I went at university. I studied chemistry.

And did you have any problem getting into university because you were Jewish?

Not because I was Jewish, but because they--

Now [CROSS TALK]. Excuse me. Now is, under communism, they considered me a bourgeois, because my father owned whatever.

Property.

Property, factory. So I was on the blacklist.

And usually the majority of students, they had free education, with the exception of people like me. And we had to pay an enormous amount of money to be able to get our education.

So how did you manage it?

I was already married. And it was really very, very hard. I got married when I was in first year in school.

So how did you manage to pay the tuition?

Well, with sacrifices, and with whatever was--

That was the first year. And then--

We sold-- from our goods, from our house, whatever we had, like jewelry we sold, and whatever we had. Goods. We sold a lot of our own--

Own personal.

Personal.

Little by little, everyone became a pauper. Little by little. You get down, down, down. Because the income was very little. My husband couldn't get a job because of his background. He was a bourgeois. He was a exploiter.

So what did he do to make a living for you and your family? What kind of work did he do?

He did work lately. He did work in a cooperative. Yeah.

So at this time, are you already beginning to think of leaving?

Yes.

In the '50s?

We applied.

They-- when-- what year--

When did you?

I got married on January 1, 1950. And I think we applied after, a few years after. And we came out in 1970.

So it took you almost 20 years.

Yes.

[CROSS TALK]

Officially-- not officially. It was a time till '58 when a lot of young people, my generation, they ran away through the border, unofficially. They were a lot of--

Clandestine.

--our friends, they just passed the border.

Did you ever-- did you and your husband think--

No, we didn't attempt to do it. But in '58, we were married, they came out with an official invitation. Whoever wants can apply to leave the country. So it was like a line. We stayed in a day and a night to get-- to be able to get the papers to apply.

And right away afterwards, everybody-- professional people like us, and a lot of people-- we were put on the blacklist, and they announced our--

Management.

--management where we used to work that we are traitors, and we want to leave the country. So they took us from our positions.

So you all lost your jobs.

We lost our jobs, yes. And this was from '58. And then it took us many, many years. And little by little, we start, in a way, recovering. But we had a good position in management, but we were not paid for our work.

So that's what you did. You took an inferior job--

Yes, yes.

--just to be able to get a salary.

Yes. And from '58 till '70 we really suffered to struggle terrible.

And you, Sofie, how did you manage during that time?

In that time-- when did Daddy passed away? In what year? In 1950?

Yeah.

Yeah?

Right. In '52.

'52?

Two years after I got married.

Yeah.

So you were a young widow. How did you manage?

Yes, my father was 49 when he passed away.

I was 42.

She sold her--

I sold whatever I had in the house. I sold. And then, I don't know. I tried to do a little business, to take from a friend who had a store, to take some scarves and go door to door, and sell, and things like that.

So you struggled. You always struggled.

I struggled terribly. And they had small salaries. They lived with me. I lived with them. And I had Miriam, who was a young girl. She was in high school.

Yeah, we lived together.

So it was hard. You all struggled.

It was a very hard--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

It was terrible. Terrible. It's no words to--

But it was a little bit better than during the war. You struggle, but you weren't--

Afraid of--

--really afraid, were you?

--to be killed or--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Because it used to disappear, people, during the night, under the Russians. You woke up in the morning, and you didn't know if, during the night, they don't take you out. The Russian, they were suspicious. They were suspicious. They used to go in the houses, and take out the young men, and put them, the dark glasses. And they didn't know--

Did these people ever come back?

Yes, some did and some didn't. And they used-- at that time they builded a canal where the Danube and the Black Sea is. And they took the people to work there.

Like in gulag.

And lots of people-- yeah. A large amount of people died there. Yeah, it was--

Did you have any happy times, aside from naches from children and grandchildren, could you go on a picnic? Could you go on a vacation?

No vacation.

Oh, yeah, used to go on vacation.

We used to go, because I remarried, being three years by myself after my husband passed away. And I married this man,

the pharmacist. And being employed where he was-- he was in a pharmaceutical chemistry lab. He used to work, because he was a pharmacist, and he sold the pharmacy, but they took it away from him, because everything the Russian nationalized. You couldn't have any property in any industry. Nothing.

So he worked for the government.

So he worked for the government. But they gave you, like, two weeks or three weeks off, but in terrible conditions. But they had special resorts where they used to send the people, like eating in a canteen, in a commune, and sleeping in terrible conditions. But this was the only way to go--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

--for fresh air with the children.

So you took whatever was given to you. That wasn't very good.

Yeah. You know, we-- I don't know the human being is the easiest creature in the world to be accommodated.

No, I don't think it's a generalization. I think it's you.

It's me.

I think that you accommodated. You wanted to make it work.

No, but I think the conditions are making you, under the conditions--

To know how to--

You have to cope, whatever it's--

[INAUDIBLE]

Yeah.

So you didn't leave--

But the real happy life is when I arrived here. Of course, in the beginning, I--

Now you arrived before Elza and her husband?

Five years.

What year did you arrive?

I arrived in '66, 1966. We left in '65.

And you came with your daughter--

With Miriam and my stepson. Yeah.

And you didn't know anybody in Buffalo?

No. Just vaguely a friend, a friend of theirs.

And so knew him [INAUDIBLE].

Also he was a year before us here.

No, but nobody--

But--

--American.

But we didn't know. But we were happy that-- and we had a roof over our head.

And you had privacy, and your life was easier.

And privacy, yeah.

Where did you first start? When you first came here, where did you live?

I lived in Norwood. And--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

--they give you a--

The Jewish--

The Jewish family service?

--provided for us. I will, all my life, I will appreciate what they did for us. They were very nice.

They helped you out until your husband could get jobs?

So much. So much. They did a lot for us when we were here and didn't have anybody to turn to. So they were very good to us.

And you went to school then?

No.

So where did you learn English?

I picked it up. By walking, by television.

Channel 4.

After 10 months being here, Miriam, met Max Lenard.

Oh, just after a short while?

After then-- yeah. And they got married right away.

So that was nice, because you had a normal family.

And so we start having a normal family, yeah. In that time, Phil Leonard took me in, and gave me instructions, and he

gave me a job there, and a little bit with Yiddish. I don't know how I did it, but I did it.

So your life certainly improved.

Yeah.

And what happened to you, Elza? Why didn't you come at the same time?

They didn't let her.

She can tell you.

[LAUGHTER]

Yeah, because they considered young people with profession, they didn't let them go out. So they wanted us only to-- they wanted to find out who wants to go. And then we suffered, because we--

Oh, then you were put on the blacklist.

We were on the blacklist, yes. And my husband is a textile engineer, and I am a chemist. So they took us from our positions, and they put us to hard work, like he was, like, mechanical, to wash pieces of equipment, and me--

Like a technician.

Oh, less. Much less. The lower working type of person would do. And really they wanted to--

To punish?

Humiliate. Humiliate.

To punish. Yeah, to humiliate and to punish us. And I, as a matter of fact, I got sick. I had a hypertension. I got it when I was 28.

From all the stress.

I suffered terrible. And then I have my daughter. And I tried to-- I quit my job because I couldn't take it. And then I--

What did you do? You said you were a--

A chemist.

No, but when you were forced to leave your job as a chemist? I used to make boxes for--

Oh, assembly line-- assembly line work.

Assembly line. And they used to give you a special amount. I mean, they used to give you a certain amount--

Allotment.

An allotment. And if you don't have training, or you are not used to do, I never could do it. So my salary was nothing. Almost nothing.

And you got very nervous from that.

Yeah, the whole atmosphere. People who I used to manage. And they wanted to help me, and they felt very sorry for me. But the conditions were very hard. So I give--

Oh, you mean it was in the same factory. Yes, yes, yes.

But then you stayed home.

And then I decided to stay home, but not to stay. I tried to work something else. And together with my husband, we put together a way of weaving, to make scarves by--

Oh, weaving.

Weaving. Excuse me. Weaving, yes. And I did this type of work home working nights and day, and nights and day. And I--

And did it take? Did people buy it?

Piece by piece. Paid by piece?

But it wasn't done in private by me. Everything was owned by the state. So it was a special place where they used to give work for woman who were not capable of working in a plant, work home. And I was able to take this work home. But it was underpaid. Very tough work--

And long hours.

And long hour-- well, you don't have enough hours. I used to work at night, day and night, and take care of my baby.

And then, after a while, I was able to get a job in my profession, but very low paid. And I stayed there till I left.

And then, when we left, we were here the rich people with nothing, but we used to make such economy. And every month we used to send her parcels, and she used to sell things from America.

And I used to leave out of those things to buy food out of--

And to help her--

You were just managing [CROSS TALK].

Yes, yes, we used, Miriam and myself, we used to send them parcels.

So when did they-- they permitted that to go through, that it wasn't stolen.

They did, yeah.

So you came here in '66. And when did you come here?

I got here in '71.

'71. So how did you manage to get here? You said they didn't want young people to leave.

Well, it was a kind of a story with this too. It was a--

We warned them.

--an English businessman who used to make business with the Romanian government. And Jewish people, they found their way through. And he used to put in his contract of business with the government a certain amount of people to go out.

He was Jewish, this Englishman?

Yes, yes. He was very well known in Europe. And he was paid by people who were able to have the money here or in Western Europe. And this was the way. And most of the--

And he paid the government to get you out? Is that--

Well, he, I think he made money out of this too. But the government had all kind of maybe business from him, or all kind of advantages. It was just a business. We were bought.

And who supplied the money, the Englishman or your--

No, my family.

Your family did.

My family. But most of the professional people-- doctors, engineers. And that's the way they came out from Romania during 70s.

And how much did it cost per person to--

For the couple it was \$5,000.

And how did you manage to save \$5,000.

That is the question. We borrowed. We borrowed.

And then we paid back.

We saved. And when they came, they paid back their share. No question about it.

So we came here with a minus.

But the family, Max's family, Max, whatever he had. I mean--

Everybody put in--

We put-- yeah, they pitched in, and they bought us out.

We paid back.

And the government must have gotten most of that \$5,000.

Yes, yes, yes.

For sure.

This old man was-- the Englishman was saving the life of a lot, a lot of--

Do you know his name?

He died.

He's dead. I think his son is alive.

But he was-- he was--

Jakober.

His name was Jakober.

Jakober.

Wait, that's his first name or his last name?

Jacobi, Jakober, Jacobi. His last name, I think.

Jakober was his last name.

So what were your impressions when you came to America? Your mother, and stepfather, and sister were old-timers already.

Right.

What did you-- what did you think?

Well, first of all, I wanted to reunite with them. This was the most important thing. My first impression was I saw-- the first thing, I saw Buffalo. And my image of United States was so different than Buffalo. I used to know from pictures and movies. I knew New York, the skyscrapers and the big buildings. And here I was in this-- they used to live on-- off [PLACE NAME] and Commonwealth. And I was really impressed that the first thing, the ceilings were so low, and the rooms so low, that I said it's United States.

But it wasn't-- I had quite a--

A good impression?

It was hard for me to adjust for a couple of months. Even I was waiting so much for this moment to come. But when the moment came, I had to, because I had to readjust for a new life, it wasn't easy at the very beginning. I was very fortunate to get a job four weeks after I came. And my husband--

In your field as a chemist?

Yes, I work at the university. Also, through a Romanian girl who is married to a professor of biochemistry at UB. And he hired me. And I worked there.

Who was that?

Ettinger.

Ettinger.

Now we are friends with them till now.

And then I worked there--

It was easier for her than for us. She came to us.

And she already had somebody--

And embraced by us--

--family.

--and tried to make it easier for her.

Yes, it was hard. It was really very hard for you.

Yes.

And I mean, I wasn't that young either at that time. I was 56. And started from scratch. And my husband was over 60 already.

And you had already suffered so many things in Romania [CROSS TALK].

Yeah, while I was suffering so much, and all those-- and I lost my husband after 23 years of marriage. He was 49. I was left with the-- she was married. She married when she finished high school.

So it was a very, very hard life.

I've had a terrible life.

So you appreciate freedom.

If I would have a little talent to write what I got through, I would have thousands of pages to write.

You should. Or tell it-- put it on tape.

Yeah. I should. I said I should for my grandchildren, for my great-grandchildren. They should know what--

Yes, you certainly should.

But, yeah. Yes.

Are there any more stories you want to tell before we wrap this up, because it will be time soon.

Yes.

Or any messages, anything that you want to say in conclusion?

Yeah. In conclusion, I want to say that people should appreciate freedom.

That's a big, strong message.

Yes, yes, yes.

You've certainly--

And I would say no matter how hard I struggled, it was worth it to do it.

And we--

And I'm happy.

--we appreciate the fact that you're here safely. Yeah, I appreciate very much. And thank god I'm with my children together.

Thank you very much.

Thank you.

Thank you for having us.

Thank you.