

--not duck any questions. But for the most part, we didn't talk too much about this. My stepmother was very protective. And she would not want us to talk about it.

Was she Jewish?

Yes. I also felt that she must have felt that she was really excluded. That wasn't really part of her life. And she was really possessive of me. And even talking about my mother I think would have been difficult for her.

Did you have a good relationship with your-- or what kind of relationship--

Yeah.

--did you have with your stepmother?

Good. Good, but she's sort of very rigid and set and, as I said, protective. For instance, if there was anything on television that pertained to the Holocaust, she wouldn't want my father to watch it. And she wouldn't want us to talk about things.

And I'm not really sure whether that was because she was protective, or perhaps it was difficult for her because, I think, on some level, my father's life was still over there. And so was mine. I mean, he was cut off from some of his friends that had settled in the States, but he really did not reconnect with them. And I think that she had something to do with that.

But he and I didn't-- I mean, this is just in retrospect now. I think at the time it wasn't something I was conscious that we were-- that I was aware of and didn't really think that much about what was happening, not until maybe five, seven years ago that I began to really think about it and want to retrace some of the things that had happened to me.

Do you remember what your impressions were of the United States?

Mm.

Do you have any sense of whether it was safe to be Jewish in the United States? Or were you concerned also about--

No, I had absolutely no concern. I don't think that I had the kind of fear, even during the war, of being-- I think my terror was more in terms of being left and not being with my family rather than for my life. I don't think I was--

Of being discovered.

Yeah, of being discovered. I didn't have to live with that. It wasn't part of my everyday life, so it wasn't something that I really thought about when I came here, that I'm safe at last. It never really occurred to me.

You had to learn to speak English, obviously.

Mm-hmm. Well, before we came to the States, we lived in Paris for three months. I was studying English then. Then when I came, I don't think it took me very long because we came in March, end of March. And by September, I was in seventh grade.

I started in fifth grade for a month. And then I did well in no time. I did well. I learned English. I was in the right grade for my age.

Did you make friends?

Yeah, I made friends. Looking back, I think one of my strengths is that I'm able to adapt. I think that's something that I

had to learn, I did learn. And whatever the situation, I'm able to adjust and adapt quickly. And so--

Sort of fit in right away?

Right away, yeah. And I had no problem in high school. And I had friends. And I had boyfriends.

Did your father-- do you recall if anyone ever asked you questions about the war, whether it was your parents friends or your friends? Or did anyone know?

After the war?

No, when you were in the United States. Excuse me. Did anyone ever question you about your experiences?

Yes, the family did.

The family-- you mean your--

My father's brother, his wife, his wife's family.

So your father's brother came to the United States too?

Yes, his story is a little different. He was a Japanese prisoner of war. That's how that family ended up here.

That's interesting. I've never even heard of a situation like that. Was he--

He was tortured.

Was he a Polish soldier?

I don't know.

Oh, wait. Oh, I'm sorry. He was American. You're talking about your father's--

At the time, he was an American. He came to America before we did.

I see. And he was the one that you came to see when you came to the States?

Yes, right. But the people who actually sponsored us to come were my father's cousins, who had always been here [INAUDIBLE].

Did your friends ever ask you about your experiences in the war?

Yes, and I remember it was sort of telling them by rote. It was really no affect of what I was talking about.

How did they respond?

Very warmly and a good response.

Did your father join any survivor organizations?

No.

He didn't? Did he apply for reparations after the war?

Yes, he did. And he received and I received some. And he was receiving-- until his death, he was receiving a monthly check.

When did he die?

'78, I think.

Is it around that time, since '78-- you said that your sort of exploring the past has been a more recent thing for you?

Probably before his death, but not in the same depth as now.

How old was when he died?

73. He had an open heart-- he died after an open heart surgery.

And he kept memoirs?

Well, my son is a writer. And he encouraged him to do that. And so he was in the process of working on this stuff and reworking it and adding on to it. And next thing he was going to do was record Jewish songs and stories and things like that.

What did he do here in the States?

Well, when he first came, he was working in a bakery. And he was working in Macy's sports department, different things. And then he and my mother bought a business, hardware store. And that's what he did.

That's interesting.

That's the only thing he knew how to do.

And was he successful at it?

Very successful, yes. I mean, awful, hard work [INAUDIBLE] 12 hour-a-day work, both of them. They started with nothing. I mean, he came with nothing and built a business that was-- supported them well and sent me to college. But it was hard work.

What languages did you speak at home?

English only, because we wanted to learn or perfect our English, so we only spoke English.

When you were growing up, what language did you speak in--

Poland?

Yeah.

Only Polish.

Did you ever speak--

I never learned Yiddish, no.

You didn't?

No, the family did not really speak that much Yiddish. When my father came to this country, he was totally irreligious. He just totally lost any faith he had before, did not go to Temple. Although all the holidays, we acknowledged all the holidays, and he presided at everything because he--

Sort of traditional then?

Yeah, but as far as the religious part, he totally lost any faith he had. My grandfather, though, the one that was in Siberia, he was very religious-- Orthodox religious. And after his daughter died, he lived in a old age home in the Bronx. When he died, he was 99, just a few years ago.

Wow, 99.

Yeah.

Marvelous.

He was wonderful.

This was your grandfather?

Yeah, my mother's father. He had survived in Russia.

And where did he spend [INAUDIBLE]?

In a Jewish home, old age home in the Bronx.

So you had some members of your family survive, extended family members?

My father and my grandfather and my aunt. That's it.

And your uncle, who was--

Yeah, and another uncle in Israel.

Right.

Right. Three survived, and three did not. Three brothers survived, three didn't.

That's actually a pretty high percentage, given--

Well, one wasn't even in Poland when the war started.

That's right. He had gotten out.

Yeah.

Right. What do you recall when you were growing up in the United States? Do you have any sense of how your earlier experiences affected your-- how they affected you in terms of your approach to life, your trust of other people, your feelings?

Well, I think that I had a very stable, loving, nurturing early years because I don't think it affected me. I adjusted well. I had friends.

The only thing that-- I was kind of numb. And I didn't feel for a long, long time. And I'm still getting in touch with all

that. But that's slowly coming back. But in terms of being trusting and caring for other people and doing my stuff, I don't think-- I was very fortunate because it did not-- I don't think it really affected my life.

How old were you when you married?

I was 19. Yeah.

And how long have you been living in Massachusetts?

Six years.

So up until that time, were you living in Egypt?

With the exception of five years when we lived in Toronto.

And how many children do you have?

Three.

What are their names and ages?

David is 26. And Debbie is 22. And John is almost 16.

Have they ever asked you questions about your experiences?

Oh, yes, they know. Before we all went to Poland, David made the trip himself. So he did a lot of preliminary. It was very helpful to have had him there before because he knew where we were going and you know. So it was the second trip for him. So the kids really know everything that I know.

How do you feel about your Jewishness today?

I feel very Jewish, but I'm not a religious Jew. And I think that was really confirmed for me when I went to Israel. I didn't expect to react the way I did. I really felt Jewish after I went to Israel. And I think my kids--

Why did you say you didn't expect to react?

I didn't expect to feel so warmly and so intensely. And I was very surprised to have such an emotional feeling for Israel, and for Judaism, for that matter. I think that it all started to come together when I began to get in touch with some of those feelings.

What kinds of values do you think you have tried to teach your children, I guess, in terms of-- I mean, given what happened to you, I'm trying to even conceptualize. To me, this was a period in life which just really spoke to the sort of worst in humanity, bringing out the absolute-- and given that, how do you think that's-- particularly now, maybe that you're trying to get a better sense of your feelings and--

Well, I think that I learned from my father. I think that's something that he gave to me that I'm hoping to give to my children. And that is that he was never bitter. He was never hateful. He had people, non-Jews, who were helpful and good to him. And he was never embittered. And that really impressed me.

Initially, before we went to Poland, I had very strong anti-German feelings, to the point where I had a difficult time of even going into Germany. But I did anyway. And I think that was good for me.

My father never felt it was general-- he never felt general responsibility. He didn't condemn all Germans. And I try not to. Sometimes I'm not that successful. When I come across a German person, something happens. But for the most part,

I hope that I teach my children to accept people for whatever they are and not prejudice.

What are your feelings about Poles?

I feel the same way. The trip to Poland was very revealing to me. Of course it was superficial and short and all that, but the experiences we had with Poles were very, very nice. People were very nice, very friendly. I don't know. I mean, I personally did not suffer prejudice and discrimination, so I am not hateful.

What kinds of feelings do you have about the United States?

Oh, it's my home, very warm, especially since I've traveled all over many, many countries. And I feel very proud and pleased to be an American.

What were your reasons for deciding to go to Poland?

I had to sort of validate my being, my existing, and all the stories that I have told and I've heard. I just needed to confirm these things for myself and to just actually be in the places that I had thought about or talked about. And that's what the trip did for me.

It did?

Yeah. But I sort of felt like I needed to go and sort of get it over with and be done with. But it's not finished for me. I feel like I probably will need to return.

And sort of like stripping away layers, I need to go back. Maybe it's searching for my mother. Maybe it's knowing where she died or what happened there. I don't know.

Is your step-mother still alive?

Yes, she is. When we went to Auschwitz and visited that one display where they have all the suitcases, right on the top of that heap of suitcases there was one with the name Singer. Of course, it's not an uncommon name. But I would have liked to have done some research, whether it could have been her. We were there for nine days, but I guess it wasn't really enough time to do everything.

How did your children react to what they saw?

Oh, well, they were terribly upset.

Was this the first time you had seen camps?

Mm-hmm. Yeah. Yeah, the youngest one, John, he was very upset. He couldn't sleep that night. And they were very--

Did your husband go with you?

Yes. They were very tender toward me. They were just-- they just didn't know how to be with me, whether they should leave me alone or be with-- they were just trying so hard to be there for me in any way I needed them.

That's hard.

Yeah.

I guess that brought out a lot of feeling in you that time, at this point?

Yeah.

[AUDIO OUT]

--this respect in my life. So I didn't know-- I was still kind of numbed. I don't know.

[AUDIO OUT]

Do you think another Holocaust is possible?

No, I don't think so.

Did you hear about the incident in Needham recently?

No.

OK.

What was it?

Well, this is--

[AUDIO OUT]

I was going to say something.

You don't think it could happen again?

Could happen again? No. No.

Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you feel like you'd like to add?

I don't know.

It sounds like you're at a point in your life right now where you're trying to sort of get a sense of the feeling that you weren't really dealing with at the time that you were experiencing what you were experiencing?

Mm-hmm.

Why did you want to be interviewed? Why did you express an interest in being interviewed?

Well, I think that it's important to keep records. It's important to keep other people informed. This is so very much part of my life, even now more so than even 20 years ago. But I want this to be heard.

There is a place to record it. And I felt that it's important to do that-- for myself, I think. I guess it probably was my need to-- somehow I wanted to talk about it.

Well, I'm glad that you did. And I want to thank you.

Thank you.

[AUDIO OUT]