

Do you remember your friends when you got back to Paris?

Oh, Yes.

The stroke that you had before left the left side of her face--

I didn't realize that she had had a stroke before.

And she came out of that. Then she buried two husbands. And then her granddaughter, Hala, who--

Bettyville 151, Bettyville 151.

OK.

My name is Carol Tobin. And I'm interviewing Dina Leiser in Cleveland, Ohio. Dina, why don't you start by just telling us a little bit about your life now, what's going on.

I'm employed at the Jewish Federation. I am married. I have a son, who is also married. And I am a grandmother.

How old is your son?

My son is 29.

And what does he do?

He works for one of my relatives in an auto wrecking yard.

Where do you live?

I live in University Heights on Washington Boulevard.

What kind of work do you do at the Federation?

I am a supervisor of a general office in the pool. I have about-- I'm supervising about 10 ladies.

OK. Why don't we start going into talking about before the war. Can you tell us a little bit about what your life was like before the war started?

Well, I was 12 when the war started. So I was really a child before the war, and--

Excuse me, and you were in Paris?

Yes, I was in Paris when the war-- in September 1939, when France declared war on Germany. When war was declared, that was during vacation time because we didn't start school in those days until October. So I think after war was declared, we did go back to school in October.

OK. But let's go back before the war and talk a little bit about what was your life like before the war.

Well, would you like me to talk about my parents? Or go back that far?

Yes. What was your family like? Did you have brothers and sisters?

Yes, I do. I have one brother, who's 2 and 1/2 years younger than I am. And my brother and I were born were born in

Paris. My parents were born in Poland and came to France soon after they got married. And that's where they established themselves.

What did your father do?

My father, he worked in the tailoring. And my mother also worked because they were very young and very poor. They had fled Poland to escape antisemitism. And their life was a life of struggle then.

Did you live in the city in Paris--

Yes, we lived--

--or in a suburb?

No, we lived in the city. We were born in the city, and we lived in the city in an apartment building.

What did it look like? Your neighborhood, what was it like?

Well, the first place I remember was when I was about 5 or 6, we lived in one room only, the four of us. There was no-- it was no luxury. Then after that, we moved to a larger-- it was a two-room apartment. But we never lived in larger quarters than that with no facilities at all. I mean when I say no facilities, no running water, nothing like that. My parents were poor and struggling.

How did you cook with no-- did you have a kitchen?

Yeah, we had a tiny kitchen. I mean there was one for one. It was just my mother to get into the kitchen with a little stove. And I guess we manage. I mean, we didn't know any better. So we were-- this is all we had.

Was this a Jewish neighborhood?

No, not necessarily. It was mixed. No, it was not a Jewish neighborhood. Although the first place I remember where we lived, there were a lot of Jewish people, a lot of immigrants from Poland and these countries because they tended to keep together in those days. But as I grew a little older, I remember we lived in a mixed neighborhood. As a matter of fact, we were a very low minority in that neighborhood.

What were your friends like? And what did you do with your friends?

Well, my last year-- when I was 12, I had a-- most of my friends were not necessarily Jewish because they weren't that many Jewish children in the school. And above all, I wanted to be French like everybody else. So I really wasn't seeking Jewish companionship because like I said I wanted to be French before anything else.

Did you feel that there was any antisemitism at all, at that time?

Definitely there was. Definitely there was because I remember when we lived in one of the apartments, and when we moved in there, they had a word a certain word for Jews, like they have here. I think they call them-- I don't know what they call a Jew here, which is not a very complimentary word, like kike or something. They did have such an expression. This I was called that many, many times.

What was the French word for--

[FRENCH]. It was-- and it always hurt when you heard that word. But I heard it many times. I could not say that my teachers were antisemitic. The teachers were always very nice and very-- that I never heard any antisemitic remarks from any one of the teachers. But from some children I did.

Did your parents tell you how to handle these remarks?

No, my parents were so involved in their work, in their life, which was a struggle continuously, they really didn't counsel us that much. We pretty much grew up on our own, my brother and I.

Would tell your brother about these experiences? Or did he have similar things happen?

No, I don't think my brother, being a little younger than, I always protected him. And I don't think he was exposed as much as I was to those things.

Was your family religious?

Not at all. My mother and father both came from very religious homes. But it seems that they went the opposite way when they came to France. They didn't follow any religious rules. I mean we never kept a kosher home. We didn't even observe the Jewish holidays in France. I used to go to school on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. I knew these were Jewish holidays, but they were not observed by us.

What sorts of things did you do in your free time? Did you go to the movies?

We went a lot to the movies. We used to go to school from Monday through Saturday, except Thursday, which was our day off in those days in public schools. It's been changed since. Now, it's Saturday off. But in those days we used to get Thursday off.

And since my mother was going to work, we were always by ourselves. So we used to go to the movies, get in the movies at 1 o'clock and stay there until 6:00. So I was an avid movie goer, especially of American movies. And I could name you all the American stars.

Did your family go on vacations?

No. My parents did not go on vacation. But they used to send us away on vacation because there was a program sponsored by the public schools. And when I was about five, when I went to a nursery school, the directress of this school was from a small town in western France, not far from the Atlantic coast, about 50 kilometers from the Atlantic coast, right south of Brittany. So she was from there.

And she used to place children, poor children, with farmers for the summer, for two months. So she sent us away with a group of children. My brother and I were sent away to this place. And we were placed with farmers. And we would stay there for two months.

This was the best time of our life. We always ate to our content. And we had a good time. And we used to go back year after year.

Did you ever have any antisemitic experiences on your vacations?

Never. Never.

But you felt somehow that you were different from the other children?

Absolutely. Yes. First of all, because my parents could not speak as well as the other children's parents. My parents had a very strong accent, and especially my mother, who always spoke in Yiddish. As a matter of fact, my first language was Yiddish because when my parents came to France they naturally couldn't speak any French. So when I was born, I spoke Yiddish until I went to school.

Then when I went to school, I learned French. I did not forget my Yiddish. But I spoke French. And my brother, who only spoke French, couldn't understand my mother when she was talking to him because she would speak in Yiddish. So

I would do the translating for them.

Did your parents have books in the house?

No.

OK, let's talk a little bit about you personally. How do you remember yourself in those days? What did you look like? For example, were you healthy?

I was-- no, I was very, very skinny because apparently I was undernourished. So was my brother. And I--

But not because there wasn't enough food, you just didn't have--

There was not enough food. That was also was one of the reasons, the proper food. We used to get a meal in school. The school provided the children with a free meal, which was a complete meal from soup to dessert. So I guess that was the best meal of our day.

Did you have special interests or hobbies?

Reading. I used to read a lot. This is how I-- I learned to write and read at a very young age, by the time I was 6. And I used to do all the correspondence from my parents because they couldn't write. I think I was-- like I said, when I was six years old, I could write and read fluently.

What did you think about yourself in those days? Were you shy?

I was very shy. And I had a complex on account of my-- I think it's terrible to say, I was not exactly ashamed, but I resented that my parents could not speak French without an accent, that they couldn't be as fluent as the other children's parents. And I guess this was very-- impressed me a lot. And this is probably why I excelled in French at school. I was always above everybody else in the French language. And this is probably why I read a lot.

Do you remember what you wanted to do when you grew up at that time? What were your plans for the future as a little girl growing up in France?

I really didn't have-- I don't think I had any then because our life was such a struggle, a continuous struggle. Even though I was young, I had problems already. And I just couldn't think that far ahead. And then by the time I was 12, there was another problem presented itself. So there was really never any plans for a future.

OK. What do you remember about the beginning of the war?

Well, I remember-- first of all, I remember 1938 when they already were talking about war. We were on the brink of war in 1938. And I think this was when Chamberlain went to Munich and appeased everybody, came back to England. And we lived for another year. And then finally, Germany attacked Poland, and France declared war on Germany.

And it was in September when a lot of people were still away on vacation. So Paris was very calm at that time. But there was a feeling of-- it was-- there was some kind of a fear in the air. And people were starting to-- we were making preparations for the war.

When we went back to school, we were issued gas masks that we had to carry with us at school. I remember the firemen came to the school and taught us how to use the gas mask. It was in a long-- in a gray metal box. And like I said, we had to carry it to school.

And then a few months after, we were awakened during the night because there were alerts, the Germans would-- planes would come nearby. So we had to take shelter in the subway. Used to run to the subway. That happened a few times.

How would this happen?

The sirens would go off.

In the middle of the night?

And they were so loud that you were awakened. So you had to grab your gas mask and whatever clothes you had under your hand and run to the shelter.

What did your parents think about these changes? Did they ever talk about them?

Oh, yes, they talked about it. Because by that time, being Jews, we already knew what was happening in Germany because a lot of German Jews had escaped Germany and come and seek shelter in France. So we were exposed a little bit to that already. And we knew that if the Germans ever came to France that thing would not be good for us.

My father was not in France at that time. He had gone to Belgium. He had a job there. But he enlisted in the French army. France did not take foreigners in the army unless they enlisted. Even though you were residents of France, you were not drafted in the army even though there was a war. But my father enlisted. And he was sent in for training in Southern France. But, as you know, by 1940, I mean, the French army was defeated.

Did you experience more antisemitism at this time when the war started?

Yes, we did because all of the children's fathers were in the army. And my father was not in the army at the beginning. And he enlisted a few months later. And I felt some kind of a pressure, like they were looking at me. My father is in the army. He's fighting for France. What's your father doing?

So when my father enlisted, I was relieved. Even though I knew that he was risking his life, I was relieved because I said, well, now my father is like your father. My father is also fighting for France.

What are some examples of these incidents where you experienced antisemitism?

Well, they were not blatant then because the war was on everybody's mind, not so much antisemitism because the Germans were our common enemy. So it was more important to fight off the Germans than antisemitism.

When did your life start to change?

Well, it started to change right then. I remember then in 1940-- I think it was May 1940, when the Germans were approaching Paris. A lot of people fled Paris. I mean they took everything they could on their back, and they just went.

And we were living in a six-story high building. And we were the only people, the only family left in the building. Everybody had gone. Paris was deserted.

But where could we run? Where could my mother with two young children run? So we stayed home.

Then I remember one day, it was in June 1940, when the Germans came into Paris. I was walking. And all of a sudden, I heard the roar of motorcycles and big trucks. And the Germans were coming in.

How old were you?

I was 12. No, 13. 13. All the stores were closed. It was a beautiful summer day. And all these motorcycles and trucks were going by. We knew that a new life was going to begin for us, not better.

So what happened after that?

Well, that was June 1940. Then there were-- all the schools were closed then. The summer was pretty quiet. Then we went back to school in October, in October 1940.

In the first year-- oh, and we started to have restrictions. Food started to be restricted. We were issued coupons. But the Germans did not start with the Jews at a rate of way. That came little by little. I think--

Food were restricted for everybody or just the Jews?

You mean for rations?

Yes.

No, that was everybody. We were not singled out for that. It was everybody. I mean little by little, you could see the Germans all over. And they were going to the store, buying the best things. And food was getting scarce in the stores.

Like I say, we went back to school. And that first winter was a very rough winter because food was hard to get. And it was so happen it was a very cold winter. Everything was bleak.

What were some of the other restrictions that started to come about?

Against the Jews?

Yes.

Well, the first one that I remember I think it was in 1941 when the Germans started to round up men only. They sent them notices to come to the police. And they came to the police. And some of them didn't because they knew what was waiting for them. But most of them did because they were afraid if they didn't go, there would be reprisals against their families.

So they went. And they were sent to camps in France. One of which was Pithiviers, Beaune-la-Rolande. And they were there. And their families used to go and see them on weekends and bring them packages. I mean, these were the first steps against Jews.

Then little by little after that, we had to give up our radios. All the Jews had to bring their radios to the police.

Their wages?

Pardon me?

Wages did you say?

No, radios.

Radios.

Yeah.

I see.

The radios. And we were given a little receipt, which was absolutely useless, because they just didn't want us to have radios. That's the first thing we had to give up.

Then we weren't allowed to go to-- then we had to wear the stars. That was in-- that was in 1942 I think.

What did the stars look like?

It was yellow with a black print saying Juif on it, J-U-I-F. It means Jew. It was a six-pointed star. And I think they were issuing three stars per person. And we had to sew them on our clothes on our left, on the left side.

How did you feel about having to wear it?

I had to-- and I was still going to school. And the first day I had to put on my yellow star and I went to school, I took the subway to go to school. And I got off the subway. And one kid called me a dirty Jew. So I naturally, how do you feel? Do you think I went to school that day? I was very distraught.

And I-- this was in May, I think, of 1942, then when we were wearing the stars. And that went on. And then one day in June of '42, I came out from school. And this German soldier comes up to me and says, where are your papers? I said, I don't have any papers. He says, well, if you don't have any papers-- he was talking a broken French-- you come with me.

So I started to cry because I knew by then that this was nothing pleasant was going to happen. So one of my teacher came up to the German. And meanwhile, I had all-- people were around me and arguing with the German soldier. And she talked him out of it. And she talked him out-- leave me-- leave her alone, and he did.

Well, when I got back home, I said to my mother, I am not wearing that star anymore. I'm not going to school. I don't want to go out in the street.

Did you stay home?

So meanwhile, my brother had been sent back to this place in the country where we used to go on vacation because he was sick. And he had spent the whole year there. And this was almost vacation time. Although school wasn't over until about July 15, my mother decided to send me away there.

So I took off my star. And I went with the children of these farmers who lived in Paris who were going on vacation. So she sent me with them. And I left.

But before that, I feel that I left something out. When my father enlisted in the army, he came back from-- the French army was defeated in 1940, in the summer of 1940. My father came back from the army and left for Belgium again. And we never knew whether he had arrived there or not because there were no way of communication. So all this time went on without having any news from him.

When you came back from the camp, what was Paris like?

When I came back from where?

When you came back from this camp, where the farmer's children lived.

Oh, that wasn't a camp. It was a farm.

A farm rather. What happened after that?

You mean after the liberation?

No. You stayed in this farm for a while?

No, well, when I left to join my brother, we stayed on that farm because we used to call the farmers grand-pere and grand-mere because we used to go to them on vacation every year. And we had become very attached to them. And we were like their own grandchildren.

So this farmer's son worked for the French police in Paris. And July 16, 1942, this was the day where the Germans rounded up all the women and children, Jewish women and children, they could find in Paris. He came to warn my mother at her apartment that this evening the Germans were going to round up all the Jews. And he told her, don't stay home tonight.

So my mother went into hiding to some friend's house. And in fact, the Germans did come looking for us. They were looking for my mother and me. And naturally, they couldn't find us. So they sealed the door of to our apartment so we couldn't get into the apartment anymore. And that night, that July 16, 1942, thousands of Jews were arrested in Paris and sent to one of the detention camps near Paris, Drancy. And from there, they were sent to different camps in Germany.

So what happened in your life next?

Well, my mother eventually got false papers. And she came to join us there on the farm. And we lived on the farm there until 1944, until the liberation. In that little village, everybody knew us. It was a farming village.

And the people, like I said, knew us since we were little kids. And I've never heard a word of antisemitism in that village. And all the children our age grew up with us. And they knew us well. And they all protected us.

So the police, who was a few miles away, they knew we were Jewish. They were aware that if they the Germans would find out, it would mean trouble for everybody. But everybody was mostly very protective of us.

What did this place look like?

It was an old farm with four cows and chickens, rabbits, an old French farm.

So you really escaped a lot of the terrible things that were going on.

Yes, we did. We did. We used to listen to the BBC every night. We used to listen to Free France. By that time, the goal was in England. And they had raised an army, the Free French. And they were broadcasting every night. So we used to listen to the BBC to know the progress of war.

Things were very bad at first. But as it progressed, the war turned. The tide turned. And we knew it was a matter of time before we would be liberated.

But before that, before that, life in Paris I feel I missed a lot. It was very hard. Since being a Jew, we weren't allowed to ride in the subway. In any train that we went we were restricted to the last train in the subway.

We could not go shopping after-- during certain time, our shopping hours were in the evening where there was nothing left in the stores anymore. These were some of the restrictions against Jews.

And how did you find out about these restrictions?

They were on-- they were on the papers. They were on the walls, on the walls that we weren't allowed. And I guess they knew we were Jews. They must have sent us notices we couldn't do those things. We couldn't go to the market during the day. By the time we get to the stores, there was nothing left. Everything was gone.

Did your Gentile friends associate with you during this time?

Some of them did. I remember particularly I had a Gentile girlfriend. And I had a Jewish girlfriend. And the two of us were wearing our star. And one Sunday, we decided to go for a stroll. And the two of us were wearing our star. And she didn't have-- she was a Gentile. So she got in between the two of us. And arm in arm, the three of us walked in the street. So she was very proud that she was-- she considered us as friends.

Naturally, a lot of French people were antisemitic. But for most of them, I would say they were protective. Most of them



were.

Did you have a hard time understanding why these changes were happening?

I-- it's funny of thinking about after all these years. I don't know why we accepted all that. We didn't even question-- well, I did question why us Jews? But this is how far my thinking went.

Because we were so busy trying to survive, to find ways of surviving, that we really didn't try to analyze the thing completely, until much later, until we realized what happened when-- I know that some of my classmates never came back, were taken to concentration camps. I remember particularly one of my classmate who didn't come back. So until then, we were too busy fighting to stay alive.

How did your parents react to all these changes?

Well, as I say, my father-- I had no-- we had lost contact with him completely. We didn't know what happened. We didn't find out until 1944. And my mother was too busy-- we were all too busy hiding and trying to be-- trying to live from day to day.

What was the name of the place where you stayed, this farm?

It was called Souil, S-O-U-I-L. It was about 50 kilometers from La Rochelle, La Rochelle, which is a port that was bombed many times by the Germans because there was a submarine base there. So we used to hear the bombing.

Were there other Jewish people at Souil?

No, in this particular village, we were the only ones. But I know there were-- in the vicinity there were some other peoples because we did hear that some of them were caught by the Germans. And on more than one occasion, we were warned by friends there, be careful, the Germans are out. They're looking for Jews. And they would tell us, be careful.

So then the people in this community protected you.

Absolutely, 100%. 100%.

There were occasions where they could have given somebody notice that you were there.

Of course, they could.

Instead, they chose not to.

But I don't think it ever entered their mind. They were good people, just good people.

What were they like and--

They were hard-working people, Catholic. It's a very Catholic country in this part of France. But they had no hint of antisemitism at all. They were-- they loved us like one of theirs.

Do you remember any incidents where possibly you were in danger and somebody protected you?

Just that one incident I had when I came out of school in Paris. And, no, I remember Germans going through the village there. But what they were mostly looking at that time it was for food, eggs, butter, and things like that. I don't think they were too concerned with Jews then. They wanted to have food.

What was your life like there? Day to day, what did you do?

We went to the field. I helped my friends, my girlfriends whose parents had farms. I went with them to the field. They took the cows to the fields. So we spent the days there taking care of the cows, seeing that they don't run away. And we helped out on the farm.

And there was nothing to do. There was nothing we could do because we had to hide. So we had to make ourselves as unobstructive as possible.

And how did you do this? How did you stay unnoticed?

Well, since everybody knew us in the village, I mean we didn't go out much of the village, although people around the village knew us too. But the Germans were not in that village. They didn't live in that village. There were Germans in about 10 kilometers away. There was a large concentration of Germans. But I guess we were just lucky. We were just lucky.

Did you feel safe there?

I felt quite safe. Although when we saw Germans coming out, and even we knew they were looking for food, we kind of we disappeared. We just didn't stay there. And there were times at night when we would hear footsteps, we turn off the light and didn't make any noise.

Did you think about going back to Paris?

No, we knew it was out of the question because we couldn't go back to our apartment. There was no way we could get into the apartment.

Had you heard anything about your father at this time?

No. I had no idea what happened to my father until after the liberation. So then when June 6, 1944, came, we knew that-- when the Americans landed in Normandy, well, we knew that pretty soon our turn would come. And from then on, everything looked so much brighter in our lives, although the Germans did remain there in that little village a while longer.

But little by little, they disappeared. And by October 1944, we were able to go back home. But when we got back home to our apartment, our apartment was empty. There was nothing. Some of the neighbors I guess helped themselves for whatever we had there. So there was nothing in our apartment.

Do you remember the day you found out that you could go home?

Yes. Well, we waited until October 1944, although Paris was liberated in August of 1944. But there were no trains. And most of the bridges had been bombed. And so we really couldn't leave sooner. Even though when we left in October, it took us about three days to get back to Paris, although the distance is not that far.

And then we had to cross the bridge-- a bridge on the Loire River on foot because the bridges had been blown up. So it was a long trip for about 350 miles, 400 miles at the most. It took us about three days to get back.

What were your feelings at that time?

Well, I was elated. I mean it was great. I was going to go back home. I was going to go back to school. I was going to see my friends again. I was going to know what happened to my father. Maybe I know where he was.

But life was still very difficult because a lot of my friends were gone. And war was still going on. The war wasn't over yet.

We were still restricted. We didn't have any lights until late at night. Food was still rationed. And shoes were rationed.

Everything was still rationed.

And then the Germans started to push the Americans back. And Christmas 1944 was a very scary one because we were afraid the Germans would get back to Paris. The war wasn't going so well. But the Americans pushed them back.

And it was just a matter of time when little by little we saw the deported ones, the ones who had been deported, coming back. Meanwhile, I knew someone who was from Belgium, went to Belgium. And I asked him to look up my father to see what he could find out about my father. Then when he came back, he told me that my father had been deported.

Did you know where?

No, they didn't know where. And I just found out last year. I found out where my father was deported.

Just last year?

Last year I went back-- I went to Belgium, and I found out where he was deported after all these years. But I knew that he was deported. But I didn't know when.

But I did find out the date. It was October 1942. I had the convoy number, the train number. And I kept writing to Belgium asking them if they had heard. But even after I came to the States, he never came back.

How did Paris start to change when you came back?

Well, it changes in the sense that instead of the German uniforms, we had American uniforms in Paris, a lot of American soldiers. I went back to school.

Did you notice a difference between the Germans and the Americans?

Well, I have to say the Americans were more rowdy than the Germans, although I liked that rowdiness. But they were more effervescent, more jovial, friendly. And like I said, they were very loud. But I loved it.

Did you speak to any of them?

No, because in school I had only had one year of English, although many times I was approached by German-- excuse me, American soldiers because I was 17 then. There were a lot of young American soldiers. I did talk to some of them, but very briefly because my English was very poor. And most of them did not speak French.

Did you feel that life was normal then?

No, it was not normal. It was not normal because nothing was normal. I mean people-- there were still a lot of tragedy in a lot of people's lives. A lot of people were still missing. A lot of prisoners of war were still in camps. People had been deported to concentration camps. So life was not normal. No, it wasn't.

So you went back to school. What about your mother and brother?

My brother also went back to school. My mother went to work. And we resumed life as normally as we could.

I went back to school to learn a trade. I took up shorthand and typing. And in a few months later, I was able to secure a job.

Did you see any of your old schoolmates?

Yes, I did. My best friend came back. She was also in hiding with her parents. She was lucky to come back.

Some of my relatives were missing, were sent to concentration camps. Some of them came back. Some never did. And--

Did they tell you about what happened in the camps?

Well, at first, they didn't. You didn't have the heart to ask them because they came back, they were so thin, so pathetic looking. How could you ask them?

Had you heard about what was happening?

Oh, yes, we knew what was happening. We knew what was happening. This is why I'm surprised when Americans said they didn't know what was happening. To me, it seems unbelievable that in America they didn't know what was happening.

Did you ever fear that you might be put in a camp?

Oh, yes, many times. That's why I consider very lucky. That's why I feel my story is-- my story cannot compare to these people's stories.

It's a very interesting story. Different.

Yes. All of that, I even now I feel that it was-- I was cheated of many years of my life because what's that-- when the war started, I was 12. When it ended, I was 18. That's six important years in your life, which were not normally-- normal years for me.

What happened when the war ended in Paris?

Well, little by little, businesses started to open up. School started again. And little by little as the camps were being liberated, we saw people coming back. Every day, family used to go to-- there was a special place where they used to bring back the people from the camps. And the families would go there and wait for them.

Was this a medical facility?

No, it was a hotel, I think. And the trucks would-- truckloads would come back with these people from the camps. And I'll never forget when one of my cousins came to our house looking for his brother. He came back from a camp.

He was so thin. And his wife and two children died in the camp. He's the only one who escaped. And he came looking for his brother, a cousin of ours, who was living not far from us. And this was my first exposure to someone who just came out of the camp. I'll never forget the sight.

Then like I said, we saw truckloads of a camp survivors coming back. And then the prisoners of war started coming back too. And strangely enough, the prisoners of war, the Jews, the French Jews were not treated any differently than any other prisoner of war in Germany, even though they were Jews. They were treated as prisoners of war, not as Jews.

Do you remember D-Day in France?

Oh, I remember very clearly D-Day. I remember--

Where were you?

I was in that little village. I was particularly thought of D-Day this year since it was the 40th anniversary. I remember that day very clearly. If it's not my most happy day of my life, it certainly is the most memorable day of my life.

I remember hearing the BBC saying that the Americans had debarked on the Normandy shores. And it was such a beautiful June day, June 6, 1944, beautiful day. And I felt so light, so different. I knew that at that point we didn't have

to live with fear anymore.

How did the people around you react?

Oh, everybody was happy. Everybody was happy because everybody there was anti-German. There was-- no one was for the Germans.

What about when the war ended? World War II, do you remember that day?

Oh, yes, it was 1945, I think. May of 1945, I think it was May 9, 1945. Well, to us when liberation came, it was like-- to us it was the end of the war. This is what really mattered to us, to be liberated. We knew that the rest was just a matter of time. So to us D-Day was much more important than the end of the war.

But do you remember what that was like in France?

At the end of the war?

Yes.

Oh, Yes, I remember. It was-- of course, it was that day that everybody who lived in those days will remember. But like I say, I think the liberation, the day they were liberated was the most important day in their lives. The day Paris was liberated, the day the Americans came on the shores of Normandy, these were the most memorable days.

So at this time you said, Dina, that you were a secretary.

Yes.

Working. And where were you working?

My first job was with a place where they were manufacturing typewriter ribbons and carbon paper. That was my first job. And I left because I felt there was antisemitism in that place. So after working there one year, I left that place.

And then what happened?

Then I went to work for another firm. They were brokers, grain brokers. That was a Jewish firm. I felt after that I didn't want to go and work for another Gentile company.

What made you feel that there was antisemitism in the first job?

I heard some of the remarks being made on the jobs. And I was the only Jew there. And I felt very uncomfortable. Although when I left, I gave my notice, they assured me there was no antisemitism there. But I know it was there.

How did you happen to come to the United States? How did that come about?

My grandfather lived in the United States. My grandfather had come from Poland. That was my father's father. He came to the United States in 1913. My father was then a little boy. My father was left in Poland. And--

Why didn't he come too with your father?

That's another story. I don't know if you want to hear it.

Is it short?

It's involved.

Briefly, why--

My father was left in Poland. My grandfather came here because my father's mother had died. And my grandfather remarried. And he came here with his second wife. No, his second wife came after. My father has a brother who came after the war here. And my father was left with his sister in Poland.

And this is why we came-- after the war, things were so bleak, we didn't know what to do. And I knew that I had an uncle and a grandfather in the United States. So we wrote to them.

At that time, my uncle was in the army. He was in the Pacific. But when we heard that we were alive, he started to correspond with us. And we decided to come here.

OK. I'm curious about why you decided to come here. You mentioned things were bleak. And I think that we'll get more into that on the next tape.

Yes, things were bleak. And I add since we had no family in France, I mean no close family, and I had never met my grandfather and my uncle, I was anxious to get to know my family better. And since I knew that my father was no longer here, this was his family. And I wanted to know them. So this is why we decided to come here.

We'll conclude the tape here. And next tape we'll start talking about Dina's returned-- or I shouldn't say returned. Dina moving to the United States.