

Dina, we ended the first tape with your saying that conditions in France were very dreary and that you and your family thought about leaving at that time to the United States. Could you say a little bit more about what France was like, what the city of Paris was like that caused you to want to leave?

Well, first of all, one of the reasons I wanted to leave is, like I said, my father's family was in the United States. That was my father's father and his brother. And I didn't know them.

And the close relatives we had in France were just cousins. And I didn't have an uncle. I never knew an uncle or an aunt or a grandfather. And since I knew that my father had disappeared and probably would never come back, I wanted to meet his family.

But you didn't feel that France was where you grew up and you had some friends there?

Yes, I did. But I felt no future for us then. Because we didn't in which direction to go. And I thought maybe there would be a better chance for us in the United States.

Although I did feel very strongly about France, especially Paris, where I was born and grew up. But we were so young. And there was nothing. There was no opportunity then.

So how did you leave?

We started to write to my uncle. Well, my uncle was in the service then. He was in the Pacific.

Then when he came out from the service in 1945, we told him of our idea. And he agreed. And by that time they had to have papers made, affidavits that we wouldn't become a charge of the United States. And by the time all the papers were done, it was the end of 1947. So that's when my brother and I left, in November of 1947.

And my mother remained in Paris because she could not come with us. My mother was born in Poland. And although she was stateless, she was still considered as not a Polish citizen, but she was on the Polish quota. And that quota was closed at that time. The United States did not admit any Polish citizens.

But there was no quota for the French citizens. So my brother and I decided to leave at that time.

Did you hope that she might be able to come later?

Oh, of course that was with the understanding that my mother would join us as soon as it would be possible.

Was she possibly waiting for you for word of your father?

Well, I don't think that by 1947, there was much hope. Because everybody had come home. Everybody who was going to come home had come home by that time.

I kept on writing to this office in Belgium, in Brussels. They had set up a special office for Jewish affairs. And periodically I would write to them and ask them did you hear anything, do you know what happened.

And I would get the same answer all the time. I even wrote after I came to the United States. I think I wrote until 1949. But by that time, they told me there's all reason to believe that your father died.

Was your mother working at this time?

My mother was working, yes. So my brother and I came. As a matter of fact, we came on the Queen Mary. The Queen Mary, which is at Long Beach, California now. And my grandfather and my uncle came to pick us up in New York.

What was it like on the Queen Mary? Were there other people like you moving to the United States?

Yes. We traveled with some French people and a young woman who was going to Atlanta, who had met an American soldier in Paris. And she was going back to the States to get married with him. Another one was going to another city also. She had met a young American soldier. And they were war brides, actually, who were going to join their husbands or get married.

Were you looking forward to coming to the United States? What were your thoughts about it?

Oh, yes. I was looking forward going. Because first of all, the United States, everybody talked about the United States. And the American soldiers were there, were in Paris, I mean. And that was an enticement.

And also, my family was here. My closest family was here in the United States in Cleveland. So yes, I was looking forward to coming to the United States. But I did leave Paris with a lot of regrets and tears.

What was the Queen Mary trip like? What did it look like on the boat?

It was a luxury boat.

[LAUGHS]

It was a holiday. It was beautiful. A lot of food--

How long did it last?

We went over to Southampton. And from Southampton to New York, it took five days.

So then you arrived in New York. Did you come immediately to Cleveland?

No, we stayed in New York about five days. My uncle and my grandfather wanted to show us New York. And we had some cousins in New York. So everybody was anxious to show us New York.

Particularly I remember a young cousin, she was 14 at the time. And she would show us the skyscrapers. And each time she pointed to a building, she would say this is the biggest in the world. This is the tallest in the world. And I thought, my God, there's nothing but everything is bigger and taller in the United States.

[LAUGHS]

Did you think about staying in New York?

Not really, I was anxious to get established, to start doing something, to get on with my life. So we really didn't think of staying in New York because we came primarily to be with our family. So we really wanted to be with the family who lived in Cleveland.

You were how old at this time?

I was 20.

20. So what was it like first coming to Cleveland?

Well, I found Cleveland very-- it was November '47. We had our first Thanksgiving dinner in New York City at some cousins'. And I was appalled when they put corn on the table because I thought corn is only for animals.

I mean, people don't eat corn. Because in France, corn was fed to the animals only. But they do eat corn now. But in

those days, they didn't.

And I was amazed at the amount of food. Because in France, the food wasn't as plentiful in 1947. It still wasn't. And when we got into Cleveland, well, I found Cleveland very, very dreary, not very pretty.

How did you start to get settled and think about what you might do now?

Since I spoke very little English, I only had one year of English at school, my aunt and uncle suggested I go take night courses. I went to John Hay. They had a special course for newcomers. Because in those days, a lot of people came over from Europe.

So I joined one of the classes. But I was very disappointed. Because all the people there, most of them spoke Yiddish. So my Yiddish improved a lot, but my English wasn't getting anywhere.

So I said this is not for me. Then they would teach us words like table, very elementary English, which I felt that I was above that at that time.

So after a few months, I gave up those courses. And I took up reading a lot and listening to the radio. And then six months later, I started to work. So this is really the way I learned English.

And where did you work?

In those days, there was a company named Cashmere Corporation of America. They used to make cashmere sweaters. It was Hadley. And I worked there for three years. And that's really where I got my experience in English and American life. And from then on, I went to work for an office-- you know, did some office work.

Did you have any agencies try to help you get settled in Cleveland?

No.

It was mainly your relatives helped you with this?

No. The only thing is we had-- I think it was through the JCC. I don't remember which organization helped us.

They contacted a young Jewish couple who received us, my brother and me, in their home once a week. And they would converse with us in English. So that helped us tremendously.

So we would go and visit them once a week. And we would have a couple of hours of just conversation. Although we lived with my aunt and uncle, and my aunt and uncle had two children, a cousin who is about four years younger than I am. So we did have a lot of conversation going in English all the time. But like I said, this is how I learned English.

Was there a difference between your expectations about the United States and what you found here when you finally did get settled?

Oh, yes, yes, there was. First of all, I didn't find Cleveland that exciting, for one thing.

After Paris, what would be?

I did long for Paris. I mean, I did miss Paris a lot. And I did miss my friends. Because although I joined a group, the Jewish newcomers, there were a lot of young people who had just come over from Europe and we all were together, but they were mostly from Eastern Europe. And they tended to be in one group.

And I was a little bit like the outsider. And so I found it very hard to make friends. And I did miss my friends from France. I guess the friends that you make as a child and friends that you have, that you grow up, these friendships you

don't make later on in life.

What about your brother? What did he start to do?

Well, my brother went to work in the factory. I think it was a suitcase factory. Then he was drafted in the army in the Korean War.

[LAUGHS]

Just like that, it was 1949, '50 he was drafted. There was the Korean War. And they sent him away to Korea. I mean, you coming out from one fire and you're being sent to another.

Boy.

Meanwhile, my mother came over from France. We were able to bring her to Canada in 1949, where she remained for five years before she was able to come to the United States.

Did she have friends in Canada?

We knew some people there. My uncle and grandfather knew some people in Toronto. So they consented to have my mother live in their house. And so she came there. And this way we were able to go see my mother. Every two or three months we would go and visit her.

So from the time you were 12 to about 22, your life was very unsettled.

Yes, it was. It was not a normal life.

Did you begin to think, finally, that your life was going to start to settle down when you came to Cleveland? Or did it still take you a while?

My life really didn't settle until I got married. Because I was living with my aunt and uncle who were very nice, but it still was not my home. I was not with my mother or my brother.

Then my brother was gone into the army. And I felt-- I was very sad and very concerned about him. And you know, life still wasn't a happy life.

Where did your aunt and uncle live?

They lived in University Heights.

And your uncle, what did he do?

He owns that auto wrecking yard where my son is working at now.

Well, how did you meet your husband?

Well, my brother was sent for military training in Fort Sam Houston, Texas. And my husband was there, too, at the same time. That's how they met.

And my brother showed him a picture of his sister. And he started to write to me. And that's how we got together and got married.

And he was from Cleveland?

No, my husband was from Detroit. He was born in New Jersey, but grew up in Detroit.

How did the meeting happen?

Well, my husband had the furlough. And instead of going home to Detroit, he came to Cleveland to visit me. And he proposed almost immediately. And when he came out of the service, we got married, in 1952.

So you were in Cleveland how long before you finally settled down?

Five years.

Five years?

Mhm. Almost five years, by that time, I had become a citizen, an American citizen.

Your husband's family is from here?

Yes. Well, my husband was born in the United States. Yes.

Did you join a synagogue when you first came?

No, I did not. Because like I told you before, my parents were not religious. But my grandfather here was very, very religious. I did not join a synagogue. No, I did not, until just the last few years.

How did you feel about seeing your grandfather?

I was very elated. I was thrilled to meet my grandfather. And I think he was, too. He was, too. He was very protective of us while he was-- he died in 1956. So I got him got to know him for about nine years almost, nine years.

How did you happen to settle in Cleveland and not Detroit, where your husband is from?

Well, my family was here. And my husband really didn't have anything. His mother, his parents had moved to California by then. So in Detroit, he only had cousins.

And since I had my family here in Cleveland, my brother and everybody, I didn't want to move away from my family again. So my husband was agreeable and said, OK, well, I'll stay in Cleveland.

Mhm. And what was your family life like as far as when did you have your children and what types of jobs did you have, where did you live?

When we first got married, we lived in a very small place. My son was born in 1955. And by then, my mother had come to the United States. And she was living with us.

Then two years later, I had a daughter. But she died 10, 12 years ago. She was handicapped all her life.

Mhm.

And I went back to work when I was able to.

At the Federation?

I've been working at the Federation. I went to work to the Federation a couple of months after my daughter died in 1972.

I'm going to ask you a few questions about your feelings about the Holocaust and the war years. Do you think that these

experiences that you've been talking about affect you now?

Oh, definitely.

In what way?

Because each time I go back to France, this is all we talk about with my friends that I have in Paris, particularly my girlfriend. And I have another friend, a childhood friend, he was born in Germany and came to France in 19-- just before the war. He had fled Berlin.

And all we seem to talk about is the war, the Holocaust, all the time. I don't know why, all the time.

So this happens more with your friends in Europe?

Oh, yes, naturally, naturally. Because people here don't like to talk about that. I know my husband doesn't want to hear about those things. When there's a program on television about the Holocaust, a movie or something, I want to watch it. I read all the books I can find about the Holocaust. My husband doesn't want to know about those things.

I've noticed that some people really don't want to know.

No, they don't want to know.

And some survivors don't want to talk about it.

Well, I guess maybe if I had gone through their experience, maybe I would feel this way. I don't know. But I want to know.

One of the reasons I want to know is because I want to know how my father lived and died in camp.

Oh, yes. Now you mentioned that you found out recently what happened to him.

Yes. Last year, my friend and I, when I go back to Paris I stay with my childhood friend. And her brother lives in Brussels. So one weekend when I was there last July, she says let's go to Brussels.

I said, fine. I've been wanting to go for a long time. Because I want to see if I can find out something about my father. So I said this is the perfect opportunity.

So we took the train from Paris to Brussels. It's about a three-hour ride from Paris to Brussels. Her brother came to pick us up at the train station. And he showed us the sights of Brussels.

And then we went over to a camp that was set up outside of Brussels where my father was deported from that camp to Germany. It's called Mechelen. It's between Brussels and Antwerp.

So we went there. And it's an old army camp. And there's a plaque on the wall showing that from this site, 20,000 Jews were deported to camps in Germany. And I knew that my father had been deported from that particular place.

So to me, it meant a lot being there and seeing that place. And from there, he took us to Brussels to a park, like. And there's a monument.

It's a big wall with names, thousands of names all over the world in alphabetical order. So I proceeded to look for my father's name. And sure enough, I found my father's name inscribed on that wall.

What was your maiden name?

Rothstein, which I didn't know that it existed. So like I said, I took a picture of it, naturally. Then my friend's brother gave me a book about the Jews who were deported from Brussels from Mechelen.

And it showed that they were all sent to Auschwitz. So this is where my father died, in Auschwitz. See, he had very little chance of survival. Because the ones who were deported at the beginning, like in 1942, very few of them came back. And my father was only 37 at that time, a young man.

Did you feel a sense of relief having finally found out?

Yes, because somehow I had the feeling that maybe one day--

[CRYING]

That you might find?

He might show up.

Yeah.

You talk a lot about your experiences with your friends in Paris.

Yes, we do.

Do you think that they're ever envious that you came here?

No.

And escaped?

That we came to the United States and they stayed here? Absolutely not, because their lifestyle has changed and improved, that their lifestyle is comparable to our lifestyle here now. And their standard of living is at the same level as the standard of living in the United States. As a matter of fact, my friend's standard of living is even higher than mine, I could say. She's got a cleaning woman every day. I don't.

[LAUGHS]

But the fact that you broke away from your past completely by coming to this country.

I did not break away from my past completely by coming to this country. Because I went to another life. But I did not break away from my past. Because my past is always with me.

And since I go back there every two or three years, I go back to my past and I want to hold on to my past. And I don't want to forget my past.

Has anyone ever visited you here from France?

Yes. I had a cousin. As a matter of fact, she was here just three years ago. This cousin was in a camp. She came back from the camps.

She was here for a month. And my best friend, that one I stayed with, she came here about eight years ago.

Do you feel that the Holocaust affected your present physical health? Of course, it affected other peoples' very seriously, but what about yours?

No, not mine. I don't feel so. Because my health was not the best before the Holocaust. So I don't feel that the Holocaust, because I was lucky enough to live in a place where there was fresh air and food, so no, it did not. Really, it didn't.

It affected me in the sense that the Holocaust is a part of me. It's always with me. It always will be with me. But it may affect me mentally sometimes. I think about it often.

How does it affect you mentally? Do you mean, maybe, do you dream about it?

Yes, I dream about it a lot. I often dream, I picture how my father lived and died. I tried to put myself in his place.

I often wonder how did it happen to him? How did he die? How long did he suffer?

[CRYING]

Yeah, I could imagine that.

I think about that very, very often.

Do you ever feel angry or bitter now, or perhaps in your past, did you when you were younger and these things just happened to you about the Germans?

Yes, I do feel cheated. I do feel that I was cheated of many years of my life, that my father was cheated out of many years of his life. Yes, I feel anger. But I can't say that I ever-- I don't like the Germans and I don't ever want to go to Germany. But I don't think I hate them. I just don't want to be associated with them. But I wouldn't say that I hate them.

Do you think your brother feels the same way you do?

My brother is more passive on all these issues. He very seldom talks about those things. And I don't know if it's because he's is two years younger than I am and he wasn't as involved as I was.

So I was very close to my father. Where my brother was not as close to my father. So I really don't know. My brother very seldom talks about those things.

To what extent do you think the Holocaust affected your outlook on life, if at all?

Well, the only thing I can think of, it's my feelings toward Germany itself, the country itself. Excuse me.

There's a Kleenex there, too.

Although I love to travel, I don't want to go to Germany. I never want to go to Germany.

I don't blame you.

We were ready to go to France last year. And it was a chartered flight. And we were supposed to, I don't know how, the agent booked us for a flight to Paris through Munich.

But when I heard of it, I said, I don't want to go to Munich. But she says you don't get out of the plane. I said I don't care. I don't even want to go over Munich. I just don't want to go there.

Do you think that survivors are different from other Jews?

Oh, definitely. They are different than other Jews. You mean, the American Jews? Because you calling survivors the ones who survived the European war years, the occupations? They are definitely different.



How would you say they're different?

Because they lived with the Holocaust. They're so involved. Most American do not want to hear about it.

It's only in recent years that the Holocaust has become such a subject. Is it because we're getting older and in another generation, most of us won't be here anymore to talk about it? But if all American Jews behaved like my husband, they don't want to hear about it.

So we are different. Because we've got something to tell. They don't have that to tell.

Did you feel many times that you wanted to talk, but people just didn't want to?

They're not interested. People in general are not interested. My generation, my son is interested because I've told him about all that since he was a little boy. I told him about my father.

So my son is very well aware of the Holocaust. But I imagine all the children of Holocaust survivors are interested. But that's all.

What do you think are the reasons for your survival?

The reasons is, like I said before, it's we were lucky that we were going on vacation to that village. This village was our salvation. And the French people there were our salvation. And I'll never be able to thank him enough.

Do you think that there's ways that you contributed to your own survival?

No, I don't think so. I don't think so. Well, just by being where I was. I guess I was at the right place at the right time. I could have been at the wrong place at the wrong time.

What made you decide to share your experiences with us?

I guess what was most in my mind is I said I wanted to thank the French people who saved us. I wanted them to be publicly acknowledged, that not all French people were collaborators and that French people are not what many, many say they are. I just wanted to say thank you to them.

Do you think that survivors like yourself have a message that others need to understand?

The only message I have is I feel that these experiences should be made public. And that it should become a part of-- it will become a part of history. And it should be a subject taught in all the schools, just like American history or any other subject, especially when you hear that people are denying that it ever happened.

Yeah, that's unbelievable.

Yes, it is absolutely unbelievable.

In your opinion, what would be an appropriate way for those who did not go through the Holocaust to relate to survivors?

They should-- well, I don't know if the people who don't know much about the Holocaust, I don't know whether they're afraid to ask questions. Are they afraid that the Holocaust survivors don't want to talk about it? Or they don't want to know what happened? Or I don't know what the reason is.

But I feel that if you have not been exposed to it, you should go and ask questions. Because that's the only way you're going to learn about it. And I feel after all these years that I do feel that the Holocaust survivors want to talk about it. I

really do.

I think that some people are afraid that they don't. And don't want to offend them. And I think that's why they keep quiet. But I think, like you said, it seems that there's a trend now to be open, more open about these things.

I think it's because everybody feels that time is running out. And everybody is trying to grab whatever they can. Because like I say, in another generation, who's going to talk about it?

Dina, are there any other things that you would like to talk about as far as your whole experience with this, any details that we may have forgotten, any interesting stories? It doesn't have to be in order. We've covered a lot of ground. But I just wondered if there was anything in particular that maybe you would like to mention.

Well, some incidents maybe that happened during the occupation while I was going to school and when Petain was the head of the government. And we were told-- I think it was Petain's birthday. And we were told would children write a letter to Petain. And if you want to ask him something, ask him that letter.

And since the Jews were being sent to camps at that time and we knew about it, so I wrote a letter to Petain. And I said, why are you doing that to the Jews? And I did get an answer. But it was the same mimeographed answer then any child got into in the school system. That's one of the things.

So you weren't satisfied. And you still didn't find out why they were doing that--

No.

--to the Jews.

No.

Do you ever think about that now, or come up with any answers?

Why they did it to the Jews? Why was there an anti-Semitism for so many years? In Poland, my parents had to leave Poland because of anti-Semitism. Why did it-- why? It's always been like that through history.

So Hitler did it on a much bigger scale. But I think it's history repeating itself. I hope it never will happen again. But who knows?

Have you had any experiences in this country, anti-Semitic experiences.

No, I did not. I did not, I guess, because I always lived in a Jewish neighborhood. And I worked for the Jewish Federation. So really I was not exposed to any anti-Semitism in the United States.

And I think that the Americans are more aware of Jews because the United States is a melting pot. The world is in the United States. You've got people from all over. So I feel this you celebrate your holidays here, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. On the television, they wish you a happy New Year.

Well, those are things that were never done in France. Even to this day in France, they still hide their Jewishness, most of the Jews. You just don't go around and saying well, I'm a Jew, like you say it here. So to some extent the freedom that you experience in the United States, you don't experience anywhere else in the world, the freedom of being a Jew, the freedom of expressing yourself is unique in this country.

Is there anything else that you would like to talk about or any other feelings that you might want--

Many times I feel like I would like to live in France again. Yet when I think back of what happened, because I do miss Paris, but I love the Americans so much that I said, well, if I could combine France and America both in one place, that

would be the ideal place for me. But unfortunately, I can't have both.

Do you ever find that might be true in Canada, Montreal?

No, because I feel that in Canada and Montreal, there's a lot of anti-Semitism. I feel it more up there than here.

Oh, that's interesting.

Yes, because I've been a couple of times to Montreal. And speaking French the way I do, I felt it there a lot more than I felt it here.

Well, I don't have any questions. Is there anything else that you would like to bring up?

I can't think of anything else, of course, to say.

There's a lot more to tell. But I don't know. I don't think you want all these details. The most important--

I do if there's more to say.

I can't-- other things that I remember during the war on the subway, all the big-- on the walls, they had big posters on the walls depicting anti-Semitism. They always had Jews, big, big hooked nose. And they would say this is our enemy.

I can't imagine what that would be like, being a Jewish person to see that.

And then walk past by, it was, like, billboards in the subway stations. The anti-Semitism, it was advertised all over.

Did you feel like hiding when you would see that? I imagine that.

Sure I felt like hiding. But how could I hide? I was wearing my star. Unless I stayed home and didn't go to school or didn't do anything, that was the only way to hide. But this is one thing I'll always remember, the way that they were depicting the Jews, ugliest people on Earth, and despicable. That's how we were pictured.

That's incredible.

Yes.

What about on the radio?

On the radio, It's very-- well, of course, when we were in Paris, we didn't have a radio. Because we had to give up our radio. So we just couldn't listen to news.

We weren't allowed to go to the movies, either. That was off limit to the Jews. So there was nothing, really, that much we could do besides walking.

And then after a certain time in the evening, we weren't even allowed in the streets, either. I think it was after 11 o'clock we weren't allowed in the streets. It's hard to imagine that we lived through a time like that.

Maybe because you were young it was a little easier for you.

Probably. I am sure it was. Although I was at an impressionable age. Because between the age of 12 and 18, I mean, it's really your growing up years. This is when you really become aware of everything around you.

So this is probably why I feel different. And this is always on my mind. Because those pictures always keep coming back. And I do think about it quite often.

Do you ever feel that you could see a movie, such as Sophie's Choice? Did you happen to see that?

Yes, I saw it. Yes, I see the movies. Of course, it makes me cry. But I do see them.

It makes me cry and I am drawn to see them. Because like I said, I want to see how my father died. I just want to imagine what his life was like during the time he was there.

That's interesting. I guess some people would feel like you. And other people would feel the opposite.

That they don't want to know about it.

They just don't want to know.

Yes, I know.

And I guess personally, I think it's good. I think I would want to know also.

Yes, I want to know. This is why I was-- maybe I shouldn't use the word "elated." But I was elated in relief when I found my father's name inscribed on that stone.

Because in one way I want my father to have a monument, his own. So although he shared that monument with thousands, still his name is there.

Do you think that there should be a way to commemorate the memory of the people that lost their lives?

Absolutely. I am very happy that they decided to have a museum in Washington, DC. And I think that there should be a day, at least one day a year, where all these Jews should be remembered. Although I'm sure that most of us remember them all the time.

Excuse me.

Do you ever envy the life that your son had, growing up in one place?

No, I didn't envy him. I was very happy that my son never had to live the way I did. And my son feels very bad that I had to go through all these experiences. He's very attentive and very, very concerned. And he always, always tells me, oh, Mom, I feel so bad that you had to go through all that. I'm happy that he had a good life.

Anything else?

I can't think of anything else.

OK. Well, Dina, I want to thank you so much for agreeing to do this. And your story and thoughts have been real interesting.

Thank you. I hope it helps and people will learn from it.

I hope so, too.

We're going to conclude the second tape here.