

Hello. I'm Judie Wayman, doing an interview for the Holocaust Project for Council of Jewish Women in Cleveland, Ohio. Our guest today is Sylvia Lavon. Hello, Sylvia, and thank you so much for being with us today. Could you tell us a little bit about yourself, please?

Well, I come from Romania. This is Bukovina part of Romania. Today it is Russia. And I grew up there part of my youth. I was born in '33. And I lived there till 1940.

My parents had small stores. My mother was a millinery. And my father made uniform and police caps.

And in 1939, the war broke out. And the Germans came in to-- the Russians, rather, came into our town and of course took everybody's things away. If they were just working, it was OK. If they had a factory, it was nationalized and so forth.

After that point, they were there for about one year. I was six. I could not go to school because they were not equipped for six-year-olds for school yet. So I had to go to kindergarten one more year.

In 1940, the offenses started where the Germans started to push the Russians backwards. At that point, we were told to get into a ghetto. Most of our family from the city of Czernowitz, Romania, were told that the street where I was living it will be a ghetto. Therefore, everybody came with their belongings, whatever they could take out of their home where they lived all their life, and they brought it to us. Then they told us--

Why would they have brought it to your family?

They should take it along, their main belongings, whatever they could carry they took along.

But you said they brought it to you.

They brought it to us because we were in the ghetto. Our house belonged to the ghetto. So whatever they could take-- and we were told that we were going to be chased out at one time and point. Where to? I don't remember if we were told. But we knew that we were going to be transported somewhere. So every family took whatever they could.

We stayed in our place for a number of weeks maybe, or days. And we were told to make a pack, a back pack, for 15 kilo. That's all we were allowed to take from whatever we had.

How big was your family at that point?

I was the only daughter living. My mother comes from 11 children in another part of Romania. But when she married my father, we lived in this city, in Czernowitz.

Just the three of you living at your home?

Yes. So my father's cousins, they all came to live-- to stay by us. Every corner was another family trying to make do.

About how many people was that altogether at this point?

They all had one daughter for some reason. And they must have been maybe about 20 some people. But when you have one big room and a smaller one and one kitchen, it seems very crowded. We couldn't even get to our closets to take out clothes that we wanted to take because they were sitting right around the room.

Everybody was-- they were trying to sew backpacks. And each time they put something in and try it on the backpack would we carry it, everybody was pulling stuff out and throwing it away. I can't carry that, and I can't carry that.

I remember there was one man that was sent by the Russians to Siberia while they were in our city because he had a

chocolate factory. And there was no chocolate to be found so he bought it privately. Well, somebody snitched on him and said he bought it on the black market. So they deported him to Siberia for a year.

Exactly when we were about to leave, he came back, just in time to pick up his family and put all the clothes together. And each time, we would throw something out, he would say, don't throw it out. You'll have to live from that. That's all you will be able to have. Don't throw it out. And whatever we threw out, he took. Well, at one point, the soldiers came and--

Why did he tell you not to throw it out?

Because we would have to take these clothes and exchange them for food, which was the truth. There was no monetary exchange there. It was war. There was nowhere you worked.

About how much did these backpacks carry then when you actually left?

As much as you could carry. And people took more than they could carry. So they just dropped it. My father took his violin along, which was his most precious possession. He just put it down in a corner.

The children too also--

I don't remember carrying anything. Probably my parents only. And at one evening, we were told everybody to get out of the house. And we were just standing on the street. Nobody knew where. And hello to this and hello to that and hello to this one.

And finally, we were chased down to the railroad station. At that point, my mother's brother said, please, let us have Sylvia with us with our child. And my mother looked and she said, no, I really don't think so.

That was at a point where we were already in the train. And the two trains came together for a stop. And by the window they asked that I should come with them. And my mother said, no, I'd rather have her here.

And you were in different trains?

Yes. Luckily, they went to a different place and didn't come back. Just one little girl came back, my cousin.

And we proceeded. We came to a border the border of Ukraine. And there-- that was Ataki. There, we were stripped of everything gold. You had to return-- you had to give everything that you had in gold. It was taken away from you. And if somebody had a mark from a ring and they didn't get the ring from them, they were beaten because they knew there must have been some ring. And where was it?

Then we were left there overnight. In the room, in the morning, there was written on the bottom in blood, please, say a prayer after the dead because a lot of people died here, perished.

From that point on, we were chased by foot. I don't know where, somebody rented a buggy and a horse, which gave up on the way there. And we put our belongings on it. And children and older people, if they could, they switched them a little bit, to sit a little bit, to walk. And we walked I think for a week till we got to this village.

How many were in the group at this point?

I couldn't tell you. I couldn't tell you. I was 7.

And we were chased with soldiers. I mean if a parent was old and couldn't walk anymore, they were just left there. There was nothing one can do. You weren't allowed to pick them up or comfort them or anything.

When we got there, we were just left on our own. Nothing, we were just left to fend there. We found one house, which

to me, that time, seemed huge. It was winter almost. And we were somehow renting this house, all these families, and my father's side of the family, the cousins that came with us.

There were three rooms in the kitchen. There was no bathroom facilities. There was bucket that everybody had to go on. And everybody took turns going down to the river to empty it every morning. And you know, the fights about that. Who was going to empty that one?

And there was no shame. Right away everybody lost all their shame because there was that hallway, an open staircase going upstairs. Because we rented this house, the owner lived downstairs with the horses, with the buggy. And we lived upstairs.

Now, as I said, these three rooms, every corner had one family. We lived with my father's two brothers and their family. Now, your belongings were-- we improvised a piece of rope over the corner, straw on the floor when you found it. And you hung a blanket or clothes or whatever you had left, and you got undressed behind the blanket to shield you for privacy from the rest of the people. And that's how we lived there.

Whatever you had brought-- if it was a man's suit, you were lucky to exchange it for some wood, which was wet. By the time you got the fire going, you forgot what you need it for.

What were some of the things that your family, your parents had brought at this point that they were able to take with them or thought of taking with them for the future?

Just some clothing. My mother had found in one of her purses a pattern from a pair of slippers. And she was a millinery, high fashion millinery. So she started to make-- people were left without shoes. So she started to take hats.

Somebody had a hat or a piece of stronger material, she would make shoes out of that by hand. She would sit day and night. And the soles, she made out of rope. So my father would help her cut the size of the person's foot, a cardboard. And she would stitch the rope around it to make a sole because there was no leather, there was nothing else.

She found in the village a carpenter that made for her wedge wood to make the heel. She would cover it, stitch it around it, and make a sandal out of that. And that's what my mother sold to the farmers or whoever needed some shoes.

And with a few pennies we would buy some flour. And there was one lady that she had a bakery, so she would bake-- the unit of measure was like 16 pounds. So you bought 8 pounds of flour. My mother would make little breads. They were that tiny. She would cut it in four quarters. And being that everybody was hungry all the time, this was like for a whole week, the food. One quarter of bread and a piece of garlic, and that was the food, just one quarter for a person. And we would get up like at 5:00 in the morning just anticipating to eat.

And otherwise whatever you would exchange from your clothing, there was no soap. A piece of soap was weighed in gold maybe. No matches. A cousin of my father's improvised. He found a sheet of metal, a sheet of aluminum something like.

He cut it in pieces. He was a tinner. He cut it in pieces. He made nails out of a strip. And he put together a little stove.

And everybody took turns cooking on it. My mother had brought one tin-- I mean we didn't have refrigerators before the war. It was ice box. So we knew that butter if you cook it over it will last longer. It had a horrible taste, but for some reason cookies and this we brought along.

This tin box that was the top, fitted the bottom, everybody took turns using it for cooking. I mean we didn't have utensils. And that's how we survived.

Were there any personal things you were able to bring with you?

No.

You had mentioned something before when we were talking earlier that your mother had taken.

Well, that was the only thing. She had found this pattern. So it helped her make a little bit money to be able to eat, buy some potatoes. And you didn't peel the potatoes because whatever you peeled-- there was somebody who used to live on the peeling of a potato. You just didn't peel a potato.

Anything you found, it was very tough at the end already. All we could buy was flour from peas. That gave everybody diarrhea and whatnot. My mother got typhoid at one point from malnutrition. And she went into a hospital. Luckily, she came back.

And everybody got typhoid. I didn't get it. My father didn't get it. So we were able to take care of them.

What did your father do during this time?

Well, he worked a little bit at the streets, I think.

What had he done in Romania?

In Romania, he made fur collars, trimmings, and caps, jockey caps, uniform caps, like policemen's caps. And by us, the high school would wear uniform caps, like the police had, with their gold emblem and numbers. Like every child used to have a number. In other words, you had to behave because otherwise somebody will walk down and see your number and report you to the school. Discipline was very high, yes.

So every school had their own colors, high schools. So that's what he was making. Or jockey hats, things like that. So there, there was no need for that. He was sewing by somebody for something. I don't remember what he was doing, repair or something like that for a little while.

And at one point, they always came to take the husbands, the fathers, away for work. At one point, they came and they took all the men together. And the way the men were, that's how they took him away, to send him to work.

My father had gone out without socks. And it was cold. And they were all in one big backyard, in a school yard. And he said to the policeman, please, let me go. I live right here. I just want to grab a pair of socks.

And he came back. And he was always a very straight, honorable person. And he said to my mother, he came, fast, fast, to take some socks. And she said, well, are you going back? He said, yes, I said, I'm coming right back. She says you are not going back. He was petrified. She says, you are not going back. They will have to come and get you.

And from the window one of the rooms had a little roof. And we used to put the pillows there to air. She stuck him there for days. We took food to him after sundown. And we hid him there between the pillows. And she wouldn't let him go back. And that's how he-- that's how he stayed not to go there. He might not have come back.

My uncle went. And, of course, my father could never forgive himself. But--

Did they come looking for him?

He came back very broken up, very sick. He's a very sick man today. He has emphysema. And he cannot walk. And he's younger than my father with five years.

Did they come looking for your father?

No. No. They didn't know. If he didn't go back, that was his luck. So that's how he survived.

You were about nine years old at this time then?

Yeah, about nine.

What were your days like?

Mainly in the house. I don't remember going out much. There was one little girl that I brought a little rubber kitten. That was my only toy. And she improvised some little rags to make clothes. That's what we entertained ourselves.

Whenever we used to fight, I remember she used to grab her cat clothes back and throw me the cat back. That was the only entertainment. There was another little girl, the youngest one.

But the main thing everybody was sitting and waiting. What's new? What did you hear? Where are the Russians? Are they coming this way? Are the Germans coming that way?

There was no radio, no newspaper. We were just left in this village. Luckily, they didn't know what to do with us at this point.

When I came back from the war, and when I was here, I only found out that the rest of the people were taken after we had come back. They were taken to the gas chambers from Czechoslovakia and Hungary and those places after we were back in '44.

You knew nothing about any of this at that time?

Didn't know nothing. Didn't know nothing. We were just saying, where is the rest of the world? Where is the rest of the world? They didn't know nothing.

What kind of role-- were you being educated at this time?

None whatsoever. I had a cousin that drew the map of Romania and showed me the triangle where the Carpathian Mountains were. I couldn't perceive what a mountain is. I haven't seen a mountain. I was 5, 6, very sheltered.

And when the Russians came in, as I said, there was no kindergarten. There was no school. I started to speak Russian because I am very-- I perceive languages easier.

And all they let me do was take piano lessons. So that's what happened. I took piano lessons from 6 to 7. Then when they left, we were chased out.

I had no schooling till the age of 11 when I came back. I didn't know what a mountain was. A pencil was the height of my life, a pencil and an eraser. Oh, I mean till today, a pencil, you can't throw it away.

And then finally when we were-- I can't say liberated. The Russians were chasing back this way. So when the Russians came going towards back home, at that point, we just hopped on the trains with the ammunition, with anything. The bombs were still flying at that point because it was exactly where the Germans and the Russians came together fighting. On the streets, we saw fighting. When we saw that already, we knew that it's getting better. We just hopped on the trains, and that's how we came home with ammunition, with everything.

You went back to Romania?

Back to Romania.

So you were in this town the entire time?

All this time, yes. Whoever passed away passed away. At the end, we had no socks to wear. We had nothing to change. Nothing to put on.

How did the people get along with each other?

Fighting. Nobody would give anybody-- like animals everybody became. There was one of my father's cousins that was a barber. So he would go out and make money. Or people wouldn't give him money. There wasn't-- they would give-- the butcher would give him a piece of meat. And this one would give him a little bit of this or that. They had food for their three people. Nobody would share anything. Very, very tough people became.

What about the people who lived in the town before you got there?

Very mean. They didn't have anything to share with. They wouldn't. Very cold.

Were they--

Very cold.

Were they Jewish or Gentile?

The Jewish people also were very hard people, very tough. The Russian people are very hard people. Very heartless. Don't forget they're brought up-- they're brought up without their parents. I mean the kids are in a nursery without a mother and father. The mother and father works.

When they come home, even today, they have to go first to the store to buy me there. And they have to buy bread there. By the time they come home and have to make food, they don't even have one room to themselves. They share till today facilities. And one spies on the other one. There is no warmth in there.

And the Ukrainian people are very hard-- farming people. And they had just for themselves. And we intruded on them as they were. We didn't take anything away from them. But they wouldn't share.

Was the carpenter you mentioned, was he part of your group or is he part of the people who was already there?

I can't remember. I can't remember where she had gotten those wedge pieces that go, make a wedge in a shoe.

Were there any overt acts of antisemitism?

Well, they would constantly take us to work, not the women, but the men. I was mostly indoors. Nobody let me go out. If I went out a little bit, the summers are short. There was nowhere to go.

Father would go out. My mother would go out to buy something. And that was it. We were mainly indoors in this upstairs house, the only house with an upstairs. In the winter time, being the staircase was outside, like a freestanding one, the ice would be that high on it. You couldn't walk down. I mean you took actually your life in your hands when you had to go out to bring something in.

And constantly, the main excitement was were talking of what was and how would it be if we would have bread enough to eat and a piece left over. It was just unbelievable. But mainly, they forgot us there and that was our luck.

And coming home, that was another ordeal. When we came home, on the train there were-- we hopped on a train. And they said, well, don't go this way because the Russians are taking the men to work. Go that way.

Well, we went that way. They caught my father and took him to work, took him to the army. My father never was in the army. And here, they took him away. So we had to come back home without him.

We hopped on the train and came back to Czernowitz at one point. And we found on the train white blocks, which we thought was soap. We were so happy we found a piece of soap.

We brought it home, sitting on all that, all the while open trains. And we arrived home, found our whole houses in disarray, of course. There was no furniture. I was told my piano went first. Somebody took it. Feathers, that's all there was. Scattered feathers and some pictures, that's all that we found in the rooms.

And we came home without my father. This piece of soap turned out to be dynamite by the way. And we were told to bury it fast because if somebody will see it, they'll send us to Siberia at this point thinking who knows what we want to do with it. We thought it was soap. So we buried that somewhere.

My father was caught, put into the army. And we were home. The Russians were there at this point. And they would not give you a permit to stay there if you didn't have work. They wouldn't give you work if you didn't have a permit to stay. And we were born there. So that was the other hassle.

So a friend of my mother's that didn't go to concentration camp, she stayed there. I remember she invited us for dinner. Not having a table and utensils for four years, she served us some food. And my mother waited for her to walk out of the room, grabbed the plate and set it down on her lap. She couldn't eat by a table. We didn't have a table for four years. Grabbed the plate on her lap and gobble it up.

Well, we went into the city to look for work. And mind you, she was a fashion person all the time dressed with gloves. Without gloves, you didn't go out. Without a hat, you didn't go out, crossing the city.

She saw a woman with a hat. And she looked after her and horror, held her mouth because she burst out laughing. It was such a funny thing to her to see a woman dressed.

So we didn't have a choice. My mother couldn't get work. So we found the attic. Now the attics there are not like addicts in the United States-- hot, unbearable. And we stayed in that attic. And she got some material and started to make some caps. And I would take them to a store that would take them in concession for us. So whenever they would sell a cap, we would have a little bit money.

And my father kept on going in Ukraine from one commission to another one. They should let him home because he is weak. He cannot go to war. So they told him if he will come to another commission, they will send them straight to the front lines because he's not going home.

He had no choice. He shaved his hair. And he figured maybe he'll go again. Well, the third time going to the commission, they let him home.

And coming home, they wouldn't let him into Czernowitz, to our city, because he didn't have papers that he belonged there. So there was some Russian soldiers playing the violin. So he said, can I have the violin for a little bit?

He took the violin. And he played a Russian song for them. And they said, what are you doing here? He said, well, that's my city, and your soldiers wouldn't let me home. Go home.

And in the meantime, we've got what-- my mother was at such a desperate point, she said we have nothing to do, we'll just go and jump in the lake. We just have no choice out, nowhere to live. Dad isn't here. She just couldn't cope anymore.

And then we got word that he's down. We should send him some papers. So before we could send somebody with his birth certificate, which as I told you, my mother was very ingenious, and she took the documents that she thought were very important, rolled them up in a little bit of cotton, and threw them in the pillow case. And that pillow case was absolutely necessary. And that's how we got some of our documents that we have till today.

What are some of the other ones she took?

Birth certificates and my father's-- that he finished high school, and my mother that she was a licensed millinery. You

had to have this. In other words, you went through schooling. You just didn't open a store without that. So all these papers she had.

Before the war, back in the early '30s, mid '30s, what do you remember about vacations, holidays, things like that, or just general family life?

My father and mother worked. But when we had a holiday, we would go back to a small town where my mother lived. She comes from a family of 11 children.

OK, where was that?

That was Campulung, also Bukovina. We would go back to the grandparents. And they had a farm. And that's where we would spend our summers. We weren't well-to-do by no means. But we just made a nice living before the war, very respectable town and very cultured.

As a matter of fact, when the Russians came in-- or was it the Germans at that point? I don't remember. They took all the elite, meaning the doctors and the rabbis and professors, and they killed 2,000 people in one night, first, because those were the leaders. And if people didn't have leaders, then they are just in disarray. So they could do with us anything they wanted.

So those went first. They took them up on a hill. And they just shot them. That's what I was told because I was just-- I was born in '33. So '35, I was two years, three years.

You said your father played the violin.

Yeah.

Was he in an orchestra?

No. No. Just like people learn here hobby. Everybody had some hobby. And he learned. He was taught to play the violin. That was his recreation.

Would you--

He'd have another couple of friends come over. And they would just have a jam session on Sunday or what.

You had said that-- you mentioned the town had a lot of culture.

Yeah.

Things going-- did you ever go to plays and things like that?

My parents went. My parents went. Not me. I was small. I stayed home with a maid. We always had a maid because my mother worked and my father.

And the people in the city knew that we were going to be chased out because at the end when my mother would go to the market and buy something and she would pick one thing and put it back, oh, this chicken is not fat enough or so, they would say, you're going to look for this chicken yet. You know.

Did they treat your family fairly well though?

When?

Before--

Before the war?

Mhm.

Yes.

When they made the comments you mentioned about the chicken--

Well, that was--

They were giving inklings--

They heard already that they are going to chase the Jews out.

Did they treat the Jewish people differently though because of it?

Yes.

How so?

Yes. Well, all kinds of things. We weren't allowed to have any maids when the Russians were in. I mean you weren't allowed to have a maid. So my mother had to do her own cleaning and everything. She wasn't used to it, but of course she did, and things like that.

And my father worked that time in a cooperative. They nationalized all these little stores. You see, somebody was making caps, you weren't allowed to be your own boss. So they made one cooperative, one big factory. And all the people went to work there. I mean the ones who made caps went there. The tailors probably went to another cooperative factory to make clothing.

You couldn't have a small store anymore. They just closed it up. It was Bourgeois. You weren't allowed to. So that was at that point. So if it weren't for the Germans, we would have still been there and still had our whatever.

Do the Jewish religion play an important part in your family's life when you were little?

Well, it was very traditional, Orthodox. My father-- our city was very modern, no beards, clean shaven, but very Orthodox, not to the point where it's very, very painful to be Jewish. But kosher, the house was kosher.

My father had to sometimes go into the store when the season was at the peak to work on Saturday. He did. The store had to be open. Sunday even he had to go in to work when it was. But it was a kosher house. All the holidays were very, very strictly observed until we left. Synagogue, holidays, everything.

When you were in the Ukraine, what was the name of the town there again?

Murafa.

Murafa. When you were there, what happened with the religion and the Jewish holidays?

There was no calendar. I can't remember what was done for holidays. I don't remember any observance of holidays.

No Seders or anything?

No. No. I don't even remember any mention that today is this or today is that, none whatsoever.

What about when you came back again now?

When we came back, it was very hard to get utensils to keep two kinds of foods. We came back to Romania in our town. And we stayed there for one year, till '45.

At one point, I came back, and I went to register for school by myself because my parents were working already. And I remember registering a second grade. What do I know? They asked me how old I am. They put me in second grade. I hadn't gone to school at all.

So a little girl was crossing the hall. And she said, did you just register? I said, yes. I remember her saying, what grade did you register? I said in second. She says, well, I registered in third. Come back, she says, and you go with me to third grade. I went back and registered in third.

I came into class-- if you can imagine somebody who has been locked up in a room without the perception of-- what shall I tell you? Tell them a village, they don't know what a village is. There was nothing, nobody tutored me, except my cousin showed me once that map of where mountains. I mean you look at the flat piece of paper, how can you imagine what it was?

I went into third grade, Russian language. At home, we spoke German before the war. Then I learned Russian when the Russians were. Then concentration camp, we spoke German again. When I came back, it was again Russian.

Then, we were lucky to get permission to leave Czernowitz, to go to Transylvania, which was Romania, which is Romania till today, under the Russian government, of course, Communist government. So we were lucky to leave to Romania.

And in Romania, I went to Romanian school now. And the Jewish community there tutored us so we could pass junior high school in one year, get a little knowledge of history, a little knowledge of geography, language, which in Romanian, that's my only language I'm fluent in writing and reading. German I just refused to speak. I can, but I refuse to speak.

Did your family speak Yiddish at all?

With my grandmother-- with my grandmother. Yes, I'm fluent in Hebrew. I speak Hebrew because we lived in Israel.

But you didn't speak Hebrew before the war?

No. No.

You mentioned concentration camp. What camp were you at?

In Murafa.

Oh, that was a camp.

That was it. We were just concentrated in that one place. And that was it. If there was a doctor to treat someone, fine. If there wasn't, that was it.

A lot of people died. I can't-- I don't know the percentage that came back, or that came back with both parents like me. I think this is very unusual. I'm very lucky. And then in Romania, as I said, I went to Romanian school until we emigrated to Israel.

And what year was that?

We emigrated to Israel in '50, in 1950. So from '55, '56, I went to school till 19-- no '45 till '50, from '45, '46 till 1950.

And 1950, we emigrated to Israel, which was right after the war of independence.

When you came home originally to Romania, you said your house was torn apart and all, then your mother found work, how did the neighbors react to your coming back?

They just told us what happened to our belongings, that they came in and they just moved all the furniture out, the piano first. Of course, whatever jewelry we had it in the wooden locker in the backyard between the roof and the wall. That was taken apart. So we didn't have anything left.

But coldly, they were poor. They didn't have nothing, not much to eat. It was war.

There were two old maids, teachers, professors. So they gave us one room, which had a separate entrance. So that was the room that we had, one single room after the war. And that's where we stayed. And my father went again to work for hats, a cooperative of hats that was making. And my mother to the same place.

What was your name at that time?

Stanislavchik, that was my maiden name. We changed it when we came here.

What happened to the rest of your family, your grandparents and your cousins and uncles and aunts?

They died. My mother's-- about six sisters and brothers perished in concentration camp there. Only the wives came back with one daughter or whatever they had. Some didn't have children. Some weren't married. The only family she had was one brother that came back with her. And the family that was here in the United States, two sisters and two brothers she had here.

How about your father's family?

My father had one brother died, and one brother came back. And he lives in Chicago.

How were you--

And he's sick.

How were you able to find each other after the war?

Well, this one brother, we heard of him that he was in another part of Romania. That's how we made contact with them. He was taken away to work, very far in Ukraine.

And my mother's brother, very sick man, how he came back, we don't know. Miracles. He came back and he lived till a few years ago, about four years ago. He was here in Cleveland too.

The sisters from here brought us out. So that's how we came here to Cleveland. My mother's sister is still alive. She's 91, the oldest. She's coming visiting this week from Los Angeles.

She's coming visiting you?

She's in LA.

What made your family decide to leave Romania in 1950?

Well, we all wanted to emigrate to Israel.

Why?

Well, that was-- we felt after so much suffering that was the only place for us to have finally some peace and our own land. There was a lot of pride. We were in Romania when we heard the voting in the UN. There was great rejoicing. And that was our only thought, of coming to Israel.

I would never leave it. But my mother's family here said, you've got to come. You've got to come. So I said, well, my mother wants to see her sister and the family that bad. I'll come and visit. And then I'll come back.

So then my kids were born. And you don't think of going. You just think of diapers and of paying the bills and of becoming a productive citizen and taking care of yourself and family. So that was it. We didn't go back to Israel visiting until 18 years after, 17 years after.

When you were back in Romania, were there anyone there helping you get resettled in the community?

No.

You just kind of went back and whatever it was--

Yeah, the few friends that were there took my parents in to work. That was it.

The Joint Distribution Committee or--

Yes, yes, there was. But we didn't need it, only as far as being registered to see who can go when, how-- they allowed that many people only to emigrate. So you had to register there. There was a Joint, I remember there was a Joint, yes.

As a matter of fact, I was adopted by a family from Australia. They kept on sending me letters. And then we lost touch. And when we came to Israel, it was still tough. We lived in tents. But we were happy to be there.

Where about in Israel did you live?

In Netanya. And we didn't expect anybody giving us anything. Whatever we got was OK at that point because we came with nothing. And we were very lucky, very lucky to come back with my parents.

What do you think--

They're still alive and live with me.

What was it like in Israel with the survivors and the natives, sabras and--

Very high spirits. Very high spirits. Nothing was too tough at that point. After we survived, whatever, everything was OK. The heat was OK. Everything was OK as long as you were together with your family.

My father worked on paving streets. He didn't have the strength to do that. But that's what he did for some time. Anything that was work. The country was new. I met my husband there. He fought in the war of independence.

He's a native Israeli?

No. He's from Bucharest, from Romania. He lost his parents. He came back with a little brother. He had to take care of him.

And he also-- for some reason, they ran over the border to Hungary, his family. And they were there. Then they took the father to work and never came back. The mother went to look for him, and she never came back.

And he was left with an old grandmother and two cousins in diapers and his brother. And he was at that time maybe 14,

15. He had to take care of them. He used to go into the village and steal some cabbage or whatever to live, to feed them. And he doesn't know where his parents disappeared till today.

So he came back to Bucharest after the war. And he had an uncle there. And he taught him to be a plumber. And then he emigrated to Israel with the youth group through HIAS and those things, ORT. And when he came to Israel he was 17. And all his friends were 18.

So he said he wants to go into the army. So he had to lie that he was 18. So they took him. And then we met just after I came to Israel. We got married in '52.

How did the two of you meet?

Just through friends, outside walking, a bunch of friends.

Did the Romanian community sort of stick together or keep in contact?

Well, the kids-- at that time, I was not yet 16. We went out to the movie. And we met with another friend of ours. And then he lived in another part of the city. And he came up to town. And we were introduced. We hit it off. And then we were going for a couple of years, and we got married from 1950-- in the '50--

In 1950? Or--

In '52, we got married. End of '50 we met, right after I came to Israel. And then we came here to the United States.

You had said your name was changed when you came to this country. What was your name, your husband's name?

My husband's name was Leibovich. So it was a little bit too long to pronounce, too many spelling-- too many letters to spell. So we decided to change it.

Then you came to the United States to visit, you said. In what year was that?

Well, we came on permanent residency.

Oh.

I just thought we'll go back because I was very attached to the country. But being the only daughter and never away from my mother, and she wanted to come here, we came. But, of course, once you come here, you start work. And you have to buy this. And you have to buy a car. And you have to pay for it and all these insurances. And you have to be independent. And it's a wonderful country, needless to say.

I get nightmares if I think sometimes of moving anywhere. I wake up in a sweat. So it would be a nightmare if I would have to leave it. I've never lived anywhere for 15 years in one place until I came here. So 15 years in one house was the longest I've ever lived somewhere, which is here.

In what year was it that you came to the United States?

In '56.

How did you get involved in things when you came to the Cleveland area? What did you get involved in?

The newcomers sort of flock together. And we decided that we have to get together and do something for the 6 million that perished. And the only thing that we decided to do was put up a monument for them.

As a matter of fact, Dorothy Fuldheim had us on the show, our representative, when we broke the news that we were

going to work very hard to put up a monument. Because the remains were scattered all over, nobody knew where their parents are. So that's the least that the rest of us felt we could do as survivors.

When was this?

That was I think-- we came in '56. It must have been '59.

And the monument--

1960-- yeah, the monument is still is here.

Where is it?

Mount Olive Cemetery.

What is it like?

It's a black piece of granite, very stark, not very impressive. We were given space donated from the cemetery where to put it. And it is a very holy thing to most of the survivors that came back without parents. And we take care of it. And we go there often.

When you came here, did you feel more part of the Romanian-- was the Romanian, you identity there, your identity as a survivor, your identity as an Israeli, your identity as a Jew, your identity as-- which groups did you-- which groups did you feel closer with, more comfortable with?

The identity as an Israeli now gave us a strength in the spine to stand up straight. And slowly, slowly, the whole community gave us the encouragement and the respect that you are a human being. And that means a lot.

Were your friends primarily Israelis, Romanians, Holocaust survivors?

Holocaust survivors mainly. Mainly. And my family very supportive. Very big family here. And they all helped us along. They brought and they came. Anything, anything they could, they just couldn't come empty handed, if it was food, if it was furniture, all the furniture that they had left from when the kids were growing up.

We still use some of it. It's just cherished by us. It must be-- I don't know how many-- 80 years old or 50 years old at least. Very supportive and very encouraging. And, of course, the whole community that came here, very hard working. We all gave work to many more people of the States.

Very enterprising. Nobody got into trouble. Everybody takes care of themselves and their families. And I think this is a very commendable thing.

OK, we're about out of the first hour. And the second hour, we'll get into some of this, more current things.

Thank you.