

Hello. I'm Judie Wayman. Today we are interviewing Olga Lebovitz, a Holocaust survivor. The project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland Section.

Olga, I'd like to thank you very much for participating with us in this interview today. And to start off, could you please tell us a little bit about yourself. First of all, tell me your name.

My name is exactly what you said, Olga Lebovitz, and was born Berkowitz. My maiden name is Berkowitz. What would you like to know?

How old are you?

[LAUGHS] 66.

OK. Don't look 66. Where do you live?

I live in Beachwood, Ohio now.

Do you work?

No. Well, on freelance, I'm working a little bit. Yes. I have a couple of clients for whom I am doing the financial-- their financial things, who are not able anymore to do it themselves. And that's what I am doing now.

Like a bookkeeper or an accountant?

Yes. Yes. Something like a bookkeeper.

Did you work before, have any other kind of jobs?

Well, yes. At home I was working in law offices for eight years, since 1936, until Hitler came, until we went to the ghetto. I was working in two law offices. In one I was working until-- they were Jewish, and their license was taken away. So I just emphasize that I was never fired in my life from a job.

And then I worked for a converted Jew, who was allowed to practice. And for him I was working from 1939 until 1944, who later also was taken into the ghetto very close to me. So he didn't escape it either.

That's what I did. I was always interested in law.

Have you had any other jobs in the United States?

In the United States, I became a bookkeeper. Yes. That's what I did. Here in Cleveland, I was working for a CPA, Mr. David Schwartz. And then in New York, again I was working in a radio and television representative office for three years and then at a book publishing, until I moved, until 1970, when I moved to Cleveland, back to Cleveland.

What does your husband do?

My husband is now retired.

And what kind of work had he done?

He was a businessman.

What kind of business?

Well, at home he was in a hardware-- managed hardware stores. And here he worked for 10 years for a cutlery wholesale store, for the beer steins. And then he opened his own store, a couple of stores, discount stores. It was very-- a novelty in 1959.

And then in New York, he was working until 1970 for his cousin. He was a manager. And then he retired.

How many children do you have?

I have one, one child, a son. His name is George.

How old is he, and what does he do?

He's 38 years old, and he's an engineer.

Where does he live now?

He lives on Merritt Island, and he works at Cape Kennedy, with the Cape Kennedy, with the space program.

What does he do with them?

He's a system analyst, whatever the job is. I'm not familiar that one.

Talks to computers.

Yes. Well, I think that he's doing more than the computers anyway. Probably he sets it up and others work on it or with it.

OK. And grandchildren?

Yes. I have three granddaughters, my son's children. Rebecca is five years old, and Katie is three. And the little one, Jennifer, is one year old.

How nice.

Beautiful children.

Can you tell us a little bit now about what was life-- life was like before the war?

For us?

Yes. When you were in Europe, where were you living then?

I lived in a town named Beregszasz.

How would you spell that?

B-E-R-E-G-S-Z-A-S-Z. That's the Hungarian name of the town. Well, it is a very strange place because I never moved, yet the country changed. The city changed, was overtaken. Before 1918, it was Hungary. And when I was born, it became Czechoslovakia. So I always considered myself a Czechoslovakian.

First of all, it was a democratic country, and I just loved it. I was very good in the Czech language, which Beregszasz, in my hometown, most people didn't learn the Czech language because they considered themselves Hungarian-- Hungarians. And so I went to school there.

And then the Czechoslovakian name became Berehovo-- B-ER-E-H-O-V-O, Berehovo. So in 1938, in November, Hitler gave it again to the Nazi, Hungarian. Hungary became very Nazi, very anti-Jewish. And Hitler presented them with this lower part of Czechoslovakia, while he took the Sudetenland, the upper part.

So at that particular point then it was under Hitler then. What city was it close to?

Well, it was pretty close-- everything was close, the whole country.

Was any big city near it?

Kosice was very, called Kassa.

What did your town look like?

Well, the population was only 20,000. We had the second biggest wine, wine fields-- not fields really, but--

Vineyards?

Vineyards. Mountains. It was a very cultured town. I really hardly know anyone who was not educated to a certain point or who was-- we had-- as I told you, I was working in the law office, so we had not only the lower courts but the higher. And from other cities, from the whole county they came. When something was tried in our city, they had to come to our court from neighboring cities.

It was the center of the-- county seat or something?

That was the center, yes. I think because it was so cultured and it was-- we had a beautiful courthouse, a very, very impressive building. And it was always busy.

What kind of work did the people do? What industries did they have besides the vineyards?

I think everything, just about everything. If you are interested in the Jewish population, then the bigger percentage was educated. They were lawyers, doctors, like, almost-- engineers-- the city engineer was my second employer's father, Mehes. And only one city engineer was, and he was the head engineer.

And my brother, my oldest brother, was a lawyer also, who was working in a law office. And then he moved in 1939. He escaped to Israel, where he opened his own.

And then my father was a contractor. He made custom-made windows and doors on houses because everything was built and custom made beautiful. I think that he had a touch of engineering talent, which probably my son inherited from him. So they were in all kinds of-- and also merchants. The majority, about 80% of the stores, as I look back, were in Jewish hands.

About how many Jews were there in the town?

6,000.

That's almost about a third of the--

A third of the population was Jewish. Right.

How many brothers and sisters did you have?

I had five brothers and one sister.

Where did you fit into the family? Which number? Were you one of the oldest, the youngest, or--

Where did I fit in? The middle one. I was the middle child. I had two brothers, and my sister was older. And then after me came a twin brothers and the youngest one.

Did you live with your parents in 19-- let's take 1939 as a key year. Did you live with your parents then?

Always. At home it wasn't stylish to move away from home until you got married. And I would never even think of it.

Did your mother also work outside the home?

Never. No.

How would you--

She raised seven children. And she was really the manager of the household, and a very good one.

A domestic engineer. [LAUGHS] Would you describe your family as well-to-do, comfortable, or poor?

No. We weren't very wealthy, but we were very middle class. We owned our own home. We built it in, I think, in 1924. My mother inherited some money from her parents, and we bought a lot. And we built a very nice home for ourselves, with the shop in the back, with a carpenter shop for my father.

When you worked--

And we were very comfortable. Yes.

I'm sorry. Go on.

Pardon.

You can go on. I'm sorry.

So you ask that where we belonged. But I think that, if my parents had only two or three children, they would be very well off. But to raise seven children, and schooling and everything at home was so expensive, the food, so this way we were very middle class.

You worked in an office. Did you work to help support the family? No, I wanted a career. Very few girls wanted a career really. When I went to high school, to gymnasium, very few girls attended. Mostly it was a boy's job. A girl had to learn how to cook, and it was still a little bit old fashioned.

And don't forget, this was-- we are talking about from the late 1910s until the '40s, which wasn't-- the only entertainment was radio and movies. We didn't have television then. So the girls went-- either they learned how to sew. But a very few of us, we weren't more than a dozen of girls who worked in offices.

And I always had the desire to study and really wanted to become a lawyer, like my oldest brother. I think I liked it. And I was always very aware of that many people don't have their rights. And I thought I'm going to be a criminal lawyer and fight for people rights. And my father really thought that I am queer.

How did the other people react to that?

Well--

Not only to that, but the fact that you wanted the education, you wanted to work. How did other people react to your

liberation, shall we say?

Which people? My first employers were very, very strict to me. When I first went to their office in 1936, they were extremely strict. I learned shorthand after I got the job. I told them, yes, in six weeks I will take shorthand like anybody else. And I was writing in the air, in my sleep, always. And I really became a very good office worker.

So once when I made a spelling mistake on a typing, one of my employers crossed the whole page. I said, that's not fair. When Rose does a mistake, she erases it, and that's it. And he said, OK, but you are not Rose. You have to be very perfect because you have a talent, and you better work on it.

So in my jobs, I was always very secure. And I knew that that's what I wanted to do. So I wasn't alone. As I said, we were about a dozen girls, who worked in law offices, mostly in law offices. I don't know if any other place.

And the rest of the girls, they learned how-- almost everybody, how to sew, how to cook, how to bake. I wasn't interested in it. But I always knew how to sew on a button, and I still-- you can learn anything if you want to. And I fix my own things if it is torn. But I was very, very happy in working where I did work, so that my office, after a half a year, never had a young lawyer.

Like, other officers had young lawyers employed. I was the little lawyer, nicknamed the little lawyer because, well, I don't want to sound bragging, but that was the truth, that when I had an idea, I went up. It wasn't scary to walk at home. And nobody scared. Sometimes I went 10:00, 11 o'clock, went back to the office, opened that, and looked at the law book.

I remembered that precedent, or I got the idea. And in the morning, when my employer came in, there it was on his desk, ready, the problem. And I was very much at home at the courthouse. And all the judges, I knew the prosecutors, I knew everyone. I felt very, very good.

How much schooling, formal schooling did you actually have?

Public school? 12 years.

And what-- was it a regular public school you went to, or did you go to religious school?

Pardon.

Did you also go to religious school?

Yes. We had Sunday school. Right. Yes.

How religious was your family?

My father was Orthodox very Orthodox, very Orthodox. I think my mother would be a Conservative now in this. But she tried to adjust herself to my father's orthodoxy. But deep in her heart, she really wasn't because none of her sisters were religious.

And I think for the-- well, that's another story. I don't think that I want to go into it because I think that my mother wasn't very satisfied, wasn't very happy because a couple of times she had to cut her hair for the sake of my father, just shorten it. But I went with her in 1939 to Budapest. And I pretended not to notice that she traveled with me on Saturday. And on Friday night we came home, where we stayed in, and she saw the Shabbat candle. And she said, oh, I forgot that it was Shabbat.

And I think if she was really very religious, she would never forget that it is Shabbat.

Were your parents involved in the Jewish community there?

Yes. They belonged to the-- there was one temple, and yes.

How did-- you said your mother took care of the household and all. Who made the major decisions in your family?

Mm. My mother. My mother because she had a business sense. And she was an extremely intelligent woman. I think that she was born at least 50 years ahead of her time. She would fit in very beautifully into this era because she talked about things which nobody would know. We all asked her about geography with our homework, all of us.

My oldest brother, we were not good really. I was very, very poor in geography, very, and I still am. I know only-- now I know the Red Sea because I was there now in Israel. Just came home two weeks ago.

But I just asked where is Israel. I never knew in which continent. Now I know it is in Asia. But my mother, just liked that. We didn't have a map, and she knew everything. She was a very, very intelligent woman.

Where did she get her knowledge?

Well, she had middle school, which was very rare. I think she was alone, who finished middle school, girls' school, at 14. And I found her many, many, many times, 5, 6 o'clock in the morning sitting outside on the corridor on a little chair and reading and studying. She was hungry for it.

And she had things, ideas, that nobody understood it. For example, they built a new hospital in our town. We had those little, like, little sheds before. And they built the most modern hospital during the Czechoslovakian era. I think in '33 or '34. And my mother had an idea that, from out of town, people, when they come to visit their sick relatives, they have nowhere to stay and nowhere to eat. And she had an idea, how interesting it would be. And she wanted really to do it.

She wanted a sponsor, and she would tell what to do with that, to build a building with a few rooms to stay. She meant, really, a motel with a restaurant. And she would have a cook there. And on their-- I don't know-- sanitary-- to-- anybody to look it over on there, the city sanitary system, to have a kitchen that they would have somewhere to eat, these out of town customers. And when she proposed that to people who were involved, they said, ach, this town doesn't need it really. We don't even know what you are talking about.

And when I came to America, that's where I saw that this is what my mother meant. And we have it.

How did you get along within your family, with your brothers and sisters and your parents?

Well, as you can imagine from my memory of my mother, I was very attached to her. And my brother screamed that I was her favorite child. And I think it is true. I was very close to her. I was with her on Saturday afternoons, when my father went up to the shul and the boys went their own ways. And my sister was older, only less than three years, but somehow she was always a big girl.

Your brothers didn't go to the shul with your father? ?

Until they were forced to when they were very young. Not later, no. My older brother, oldest brother, I think, is the most religious-- not now in Israel anymore. But I remember when he went to high school, to gymnasium. He still put on the tefillin and running to school. But he still did that. The rest of them didn't. No. No. And none of them are religious.

They are good Jews, but now I am the rebbetzin. They call me that I am the rebbetzin because I light the Shabbos candles. I wouldn't miss it, miss the time. I wouldn't want to be late. And I think-- we belong to a Conservative temple. And I have always worked on Saturdays, as soon as I started to work in the law office.

Of course, my father was against it. But he already learned from my oldest brother that he worked on Saturdays because the businessmen, they were closed on Saturdays. The businesses were closed. And that was the only time when they could come to take care of their-- if they sued someone or to go to a law office. So we had to be open on Saturdays.

The only thing, that he didn't let us touch the wine, claiming that we are not Orthodox because we are-- but I was already the second person who wasn't Shomer Shabbos. So he, reluctantly, but got used to it.

What do you remember about the holidays?

These-- they were very, very festive. With five sons and-- so we were nine people, but we never sat nine at the table. We always had-- we were the big city. We lived in the big city. So the relatives from other cities, everybody vacationed in our house, everybody. Since I remember, three, four years old, I had to share the bed with a guest.

Do you remember how many rooms there were in your house?

Pardon?

How many rooms were there in your house?

Two bedrooms and one day room we called it and the kitchen and the long hallway and a [NON-ENGLISH]. What is that? A cold room, where we had-- kept the food. Of course, there wasn't refrigeration.

You just said everyone would come.

We had a summer-- my mother called it a summer kitchen. In the summer, we had a little-- really, just a little built place on the court. We had a very long court. And we had a little-- OK, she decorated that, and that was the summer kitchen.

So then the holidays, everyone came to your house.

The holidays were the most festive. It had to be with six men. And they all loved it. Everybody loved the holidays. First of all, the kitchen smelled beautiful from the cooking and baking. And my sister helped for my mother before she got married. And it was very festive-- singing, oh, the beautiful, the-- Passover was the most festive.

And then we built for--

Sukkos?

--Sukkos, yes, a little sukkot. We had the two walls already against the shop wall. And it was very, very festive. The neighbors came to see it. And the neighbors came to raise that whatever on sukkot. You know, the-- I can't remember, the--

The lulav and etrog?

Right. Because we had that. My father was a religious man, and they respect that. So it draw the neighbor. And we had the first radio in 1929, so they came to listen to it. And it was a very, very busy house, a very healthy, I think. We had seven healthy children, which my mother kept on saying, that I have seven healthy children.

A doctor never saw our house from the inside, you know. So--

Were most of your neighbors Jewish?

It was mixed.

How did you get along with the non-Jewish neighbors?

Not very well, I think. Everybody kept for themselves. With the Jewish neighbors, it was an antisemite atmosphere. Always it was an antisemite atmosphere.

What sort of things would happen?

Pardon?

What sort of things would happen?

Well, I had girlfriends and the neighbors, Gentile girlfriends. We weren't aware of it then. But we noticed that before Pesach, the girls didn't come in. Just through the gate or through the fence we talked. We were fenced around, and everybody else was. And I didn't understand it, why.

And they loved the matzos because there you couldn't buy it in the stores. They baked it before the holiday. And we always took to our Gentile friends a present, matzos, with an orange on top of it or whatever. But it didn't come.

Until later, I realized that they were taught not to come because there was that fear, which you probably know, that the Jews need Gentile virgin children's blood into it. So these girls were young. When I was about 13, 14, 15, that's when I noticed that the children are not coming into our house a month probably before the holidays because that's when they started to bake the matzos.

And later, we came to understand that. And well, they showed a good faith because they did benefit from our being friends. If we had a goose, and the schechter cut it and it wasn't kosher-- it had a nail or something in it, it wasn't kosher anymore. So for a very bargain price, they bought it from us. Or everything was so, so valuable.

An egg had a blood spot in it, we weren't allowed us, you know. They claimed that we needed blood, yet we are washing the meat, and everything has to be so very bloodless. And when the egg had a blood spot, so my mother sent it over to this neighbor to that neighbor. And they liked it.

[INAUDIBLE]

And the children, really, we mixed. But once I became a teenager, I really preferred Jewish friends. I went to school with them, and I was-- I had more Jewish friends than than Gentile.

Do you remember anything about Christmas or Easter?

Of course. Yes.

What was it like then?

Yes. Christmas was very, very festive. And occasionally they invited me. I had a friend named Kovac. Olga was her name also. And that's when they-- we got a little goose for the holidays, and they got a big pig. They raised that, they fatten that, and they cut the pig for Christmas.

So she occasionally asked me over, to come over to see how they bake it on the outside, you know, and the ears. And I don't remember what part was so delicious for them to bake it-- and to see the Christmas tree. But as time went on and all my town, especially, which was so very Hungarian-- 90-- the Czechoslovakians just came in from Czechoslovakia in 1918. And rather than the-- my town was, as I said, more than 90% who was very Hungarian. And the non-Jews were all very devoted Hungarians.

And some never even pledged to be Czechs in position. Rather, they gave up their position than to pledge for the Czechoslovakians. And they lost their jobs. I knew a not-*Ā*TM, who was a very good position. But he ceased to be a not-*Ā*TM because he doesn't want to be a Czechoslovakian servant. And so that's where we differed.

The Jews were very devoted Czechoslovakians because they were very democratic. And they had to learn Hungarian. The Czechs had to learn Hungarian to be able to deal with the population. Then the population wasn't ready to learn

Czechoslovakian.

Was your family, political at all?

Pardon?

Was your family at all political, either Zionism, to Zionism or any other political organization?

Well, we all, all of the children, all of us were Zionists. I was a scout, a Girl Scout. Of course, we were separate. The Jewish scouts and the Gentile scouts were separate. And I was a Girl Scout since I was six years old. My sister was already.

I was Hashomer Kadima member. And all my brothers were always Zionists. Yes. I think my father probably would have, but he didn't agree with his being an Orthodox. He didn't agree with Zionism. But my mother sympathized with Zionism always. And all seven of us belonged to Zionist organizations. My sister and I were Hashomer Kadima.

Did your family belong to any other community organizations, either you or your family?

No. There wasn't-- the city wasn't organized really. And you asked if Sunday school. The temples, no temples had Sunday schools, especially not for girls. The school requested the Sunday school, a couple of hours on Sunday.

It was in the school system that Jewish girls went there and non-Jews. The Sunday school was important. It was a subject.

But separate in the public schools?

Pardon?

In the public schools.

In the public school.

Who taught it?

It was on our record, report card, religion. We were-- it was a subject. If you failed from religion, you failed the class.

Who were the teachers?

The religion teachers were-- first, there was a Mr. Frenkel. They were teachers, religion teachers, official.

Sponsored also by the Jewish community?

No. I don't know. I don't think it was. It sponsored by the school system. They were really part of-- they were teachers.

Did the Jewish community have any input as to who the teachers were?

No.

Did they support-- did they support it at least-- not necessarily financially, but did they go along with the system? Did they think that was good that the children were learning about religion in the school?

It was a must. It was a requested. That if the Jewish community sponsored, there wasn't-- I don't remember there was such a thing as a special Jewish community, like we have, like this Pioneer Women or what you are working for.

Oh, yes. We had the WIZO-- Womens--

The Zionist organization.

The Zionist organization, that's what we had. And I don't even know if I belonged there because by the time I could have belonged to it, already it changed. Czechoslovakia ceased to be in 1938. So the-- it wasn't very wise, or dissolved the WIZO. I don't know. But we weren't so steady already. The Jewish community wasn't so steady, so sure. We were really troubled.

How many languages were spoken in your home?

Hungarian-- my mother spoke very nice German. But we spoke mostly Hungarian.

Any Yiddish?

No.

What kind of books did you have in the home? You said you-- a lot of times you'd see your mother reading magazines and all.

My father had, on the bookshelves, he had two shelves with his Jewish or Hebrew and bibles and beautiful-- he ordered a 24-book, black, I remember of these big books, a whole things. And he read them in the evening.

And he was a storyteller, a big storyteller. We all remember him that, starting from November until March, when we were mostly closed in, that there was ever an evening when he didn't tell us stories. And he started-- I don't know if I told you this story. And from the first word, we knew, of course, that we heard that many times. But we kicked each other under the table. And we said we have never heard this one.

And he was a storyteller. And from his Jewish books, he told us stories, very interesting-- the Bible, the story from Moses. And we listened because we were occupied with things. In the evening, we-- seven children, you can imagine, and always two or three guests. And my friends loved to come to our house.

So the boys played domino in the meantime or cards. Or we called that [NON-ENGLISH] which is mill. It was a game, and mill was its name. Two people played that. So it was very-- we had a very, very warm home.

And you just asked what language we spoke, mostly Hungarian. Yes.

Did you ever go on vacations?

Yes, we did.

Where would you go to?

To relatives, to other cities to relatives, when we were young. Mostly my sister and I, every summer we went because all year long the relatives came to us. So my mother sent us to-- I had a grandmother in a nearby city, Cop, where my father was from. It was the railroad station's main--

Depot?

Depot, Yes. Cop. And that's where my grandmother lived and a few uncles. So for the summer, about four or five weeks we spent there. And I loved it. And my sister-- the boys, I am not sure if they visited so much. But, yes, we went on vacations.

Going to zero in now a little bit on you personally in these days just before the war. What did you look like then?

What I looked like then?

About 1939.

What I looked like then? Well, we don't know ourselves, really, what we look like. But I was told all my life that I had beautiful black eyes. They were big. All my brothers and sister had black eyes. My mother had gorgeous eyes.

And I was very tiny. I think I never weighed more than 98 pounds, very slender. And most of the times, even while I was working in the offices, at summer time I always remember myself wearing a little cotton dress and a pair of sandals. That was my-- everyday, a little, little cotton dress or a blouse and a skirt and barefoot sandals.

And I felt so secure in it. I never wore makeup, and I still don't. Probably I could use it now. But besides lipstick-- and I think that I was more than 20 years old when I started to wear bras because I thought I have a nice figure without it. So that's how I looked like.

I think I was friendly, sometimes sad. Until '39, during the Czechos-- a little bit sad. I think I wanted very much my father's love, which I was the only one who didn't get it because he was against my thoughts of studying, of being different. And he referred to me as-- to my mother-- as your daughter. I was always your daughter.

So that was the only sadness in my life. I saw that my mother suffers for it. And I did because I went out of my way. I was always a good girl just because I wanted to get his love.

So I think when boys or even the judges or my employer says, why are you so sad about, sometimes probably I forgot that something bothered me, which happened before I left the office, that your daughter wants to be the mayor of town. Tell her that the town already has a mayor.

I never aspired to be a mayor. I just wanted-- I knew that I will be good in a law office. That's all I wanted to do. And I was very good in it. So I didn't know why I wasn't loved until much, much later. So that's how I looked until 1938.

I was the most secure before in school, among friends. I knew that they liked me regardless. And I was trying not to make a big, big dust at home.

I did-- I washed the dishes, the morning dishes. I cleaned. I kept-- I was very immaculate. I always kept my things so-so, so that I would always clean.

I was a little bit different. It could be. But at home I really wasn't very loud. The boys were five-- five boys. They always were louder than I was. And that's how it was until '38.

You seem to imply that you were very much like your mother.

Very much like my mother

Why did your parents marry each other?

Why they married each other?

If that your father did not seem to like the way you were, but you were so much like the woman he married.

Well, that was a different reason for it. He made a big mistake, I think, with me. But I know from my mother, we were very good friends. And in 1939, as I told you, when we became Hungarians, we went up to Budapest together. It was a World's Fair there.

And that's when usually mothers didn't talk like girlfriends with their daughters. But I knew that she always wanted to

tell me something. So I know from her part of it and this is the way I saw it. She was a very pretty girl. She always had beautiful, big, shiny eyes and long eyelashes. She must have been gorgeous. And we still think that she really was beautiful.

She was so young. She was 54 years old when she was killed. So she was beautiful, gorgeous body, little feet, little gorgeous hand, long fingers. So she went to dance school. That was the social way of meeting boys there. And my father was from another, from Cop. And he was working as a carpenter in a carpenter shop.

He got a job in our town. And he went to this dancing school also. And he was a handsome man. My father was a very handsome man. And he fell in love with my mother, followed her. And he didn't let her go.

And I am like my mother. And I married almost like my mother did, very interestingly. So he never, never let my mother go.

And she said no, no, no. I am not getting married. I'm only 19 and this. But he danced nice. And that's-- and there were five girls, five sisters. I think my mother was the second oldest or the oldest. And I think that there was just, you know, where there are five girls and no dowry, so she married my father. And he really loved her a lot in his own way.

But I don't think that my mother was in love. And in those times, I-- but my mother was so advanced, so very cultured, so very intelligent, but couldn't afford probably to marry for love. If she could afford that, she would fall in love with a very intelligent man, which were very scarce at that time.

And a studied man or professional people, they wanted-- there wasn't such a thing that a professional man married a poor girl. Or at least they weren't poor, they were middle class but without a dowry because they either wanted to set up an office or buy a house. So my mother didn't have a dowry.

As I said, she just inherited a third of the house in about 1923 or '24. And that's when she bought this lot, where we built our house.

Getting back to you again now, you seem to be very content with what you were doing, with your jobs and everything.

Very content. I was very good in that. And I think I deserved a nickname, which everybody called me, a little lawyer. Yes.

What plans did do you have for the future?

Well, I definitely wanted to become a lawyer. I was always in the law books. When I had that chance or after hours, I stayed. I attacked, in the office, the-- which was closed. We closed it against-- to keep it safe. The law books, they were very expensive.

And almost every-- with every case, the more complicated it was, I tried to find the answer. I hoped to become-- to continue and get into college and become a lawyer.

There was a possibility for you then?

No. No, it wasn't. Not for me it wasn't.

Had it not been for Hitler, would that have been a possibility? If life had been normal, you could have actually done that?

With more years, because I was working only three years, from '36 to '39, when my first employers, who taught me so much. Really, they shaped me almost. They said, no. That's why I crossed the page for you because you weren't a typist. And I really spent very little time in the office.

I was always in my briefcase, always running to offices, taking care, doing a lawyer's job. So they shaped me. They were very, very strict.

Everybody knew them in the whole county. They were the Enger brothers. They were the sons of a shoemaker, who had, I think, seven sons and two daughters. A very strict, very rude man he was, the father.

And all the boys, when one became a professional man, sent the next one to college, and the next one. And they all became lawyers and doctors. And that's what they wanted me to do, to be good, to be the best, and no nonsense.

So had I stayed with them-- their practice was taken away from them. They had to quit. I think it was taken away very, very fast. The Hungarians came in on November '38. By March it was-- they had to liquidate. They gave them a half a year. And I stayed with them till the last minute.

Had I stayed with them a few more years, I am sure that I would be the next they-- that they would have sent me to college to become a lawyer.

Then in '39, that all got dashed.

All dashed.

OK. What-- was that your first awareness of any of the Nazis taking over and of the antisemitism that was coming?

No. No. The first was the day when they marched in, when the Hungarian marched into our hometown. I was still a shomer. I was still a scout. And we, the scouts, also wanted to greet the Hungarians. We were Hungarians basically because that was our mother language. It was Hungary before.

That I personally never desired to be a Hungarian because I knew that in Hungary there is Nazism, which wasn't-- which was-- and our country was democrat. I was hoping that we will ever stay democrat Czechs. But when the Hungarians came in, we said, OK, we will organize, and we will meet them, greet them, or march.

It was a big march on the main street to greet the Hungarians. So we were practicing. And when our leader announced that we will march also, they said, oh, no. The Jews are not. We shouldn't.

And next day, the Hungarians came in. We were all very disappointed. So that was the first time we were said that we are different. The day before they came in, we were told that we are not marching with the rest of the scouts, with the non-Jews and Jewish scouts.

Did other people-- did you find your friends and other people treating you differently after that?

Of course. At the first day already, when they came in, they were marching, shouting. They became such big shots. So they felt that for 20 years they were the second-hand citizens, which is not true. They had the same privileges. But now they are back again Hungarians.

My friends' parents were deep inside always Hungarians, hated the Czechs. And now they said, you see? Now we are the big shots. They were-- right away they changed.

First of all, because they started to beat Jews. The very first day as they marched in, already they grabbed beards because it wasn't fashionable to wear beards. Only the Jewish men wore beards. And we were led to know the first day that we are different.

My heart ached, started to ache then. And it lasted forever.

Were there any plans to fight the antisemitism?

Fight antisemitism? We always fought the antisemitism, but with what against the law, when it be it became official? It was-- we were a free prey right away. We knew that it is going on in Hungary and in Germany and in Austria. And now this leprosy came to our country.

OK. We'll continue at this point when we come back for the second tape, the second hour.

All right.

Need time to have a little break.

All right.