United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Barbara Goldberg
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PREFACE

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BARBARA GOLDBERG
August 22, 2012

Gail Schwartz: This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Volunteer collection interview with Barbara Goldberg conducted by Gail Schwartz on August 22nd 2012 in Chevy Chase, Maryland. This is track number one. What is your full name?

Barbara Goldberg: My full name is Barbara June Goldberg and Heymann was my maiden name.

Q: Since you're going to be telling the story of your parents' journey, let's talk about your parents. Their names?

A: Erich Bailey (distorted) Hayman, H-E-Y-M-A-N-N and my mother Emma, which changed to Emily when she got here.

Q: Where were they born and when were they born?

A: My mother was born in **Olomouc** in Czech, what was then Czechoslovakia in 1912 or 13. And my father was born in the early 1900s in Thorn, T-H-O-R-N .That was the part that kept going back and forth between Poland and Germany, the corridor up there. But he lived in Berlin and my mother in right, Prague. **Teplice**, a kind of suburb of Prague.

Q: Did they come, let's take it one at a time. Did your father come from a religious background?

A: He was totally secular. He was German. However, his mother was quite religious and his father, I remember him saying or at least my grandmother who lived with us that he studied Torah in the back room and I guess they had some kind of store And my mother's family was also secular. That was the Sudetenland where she grew up and her father was as she said a **notar**, which was notary which is very unusual for a Jewish man. And they were secular too.

Q: What kind of education did they have? Your parents?

A: Well gymnasium for my mother. I'm not quite sure if there was something after. She probably went to some school in Switzerland and after. And my father probably went, I'm saying probably, university in London because he was in London for some time. I think he wanted to be a lawyer, but that all changed when his father died of the swine flu. I think it was 1918 Is that right, yeah? So.

Q: That was the flu epidemic.

A: He had to come back to Berlin and you know support his mother and himself.

Q: How did your parents meet?

A: I think they met at **Karly Vary**, Karlsbad in German and it was a place where people went to summer and as a matter of fact I found the actual ballroom where they met and first danced with each other and as my mother said. I mean he was quite short and quite fat but my mother said he could dance a mean tango. So and he was very kind of Prussian. He was not known for his charm, although he could be very funny. And my mother was very beautiful and very charming and after they met they were both invited to a dinner party where the subject of Hitler came up. And the Czechs in the Sudetenland were saying oh it's nothing. Don't worry and my father who got, he had a big, bad temper. He got outraged and he called them all chicken headed. And but no one believed him and so he stormed out. But the next day he was at my mother's apartment at that time. She was probably working in some kind of dress shop boutique in Prague, with a dozen long stemmed roses. And I think you know she later said that why she married him. She had many suitors was because she felt like he was rock solid. That she could rely on him and indeed his paranoia saved her and her own parents wouldn't leave. Her father said since he didn't speak English, what would I do, sell sausages in a foreign land.
So his, and her brother, my uncle Paul Brennan, is the story stayed behind to take care of them. And that's how they met.

Q: When did they get married? Do you know what year?

A: No, I don't because I know that I, when was Kristallnacht?

Q: November.

A: Of what year?

Q: November 38.

A: I know that they -- he was in Czechoslovakia in the first place because he had developed a reputation for taking failing companies and making them profitable.

Q: This is your father?

A: My father. And pretty soon after they met, I think he took my mother and his mother to Paris to live. And they made their getaway the minute the Germans crossed over into France, maybe a little before that.

Q: But they were married by then?

A: They were married by then, yeah sure. They were married in Czechoslovakia and then pretty soon after went to Paris.

Q: Ok so now they're in Paris.

A: Now they're in Paris and my father, when he got paid, had asked to be paid in Swiss francs. He didn't want Czech money or German money. So he had resources and when they came to Paris, well I'm sure he didn't work or maybe, I don't know if he worked or not. But anyway they lived there a couple of years and my sister was born I think in 1940 or 41 in **Neuilly le Bain** [ph]

which was kind of a resort town. And then they came back to Paris and then when they left Paris, along with all the others, my -- you had to wait in line for a visa and everything like that. And so that took a while, even to get out of Paris. But then I think I wrote you that – so I think is that they followed a lot of people who were there who were driving south and trying to get to Spain and then Portugal. And in, I believe, it was Bordeaux there was **Aristide de Sousa Mendes** who arranged for them I think along with something like 30 or 33,000 other people to get –

Q: Possibly 10,000.

A: Oh really cause I heard from them and that's what they said. So they got an exit visa from him.

Q: Did they meet him directly?

A: Well I don't know but the manifest exists that you know their names exist on a, on a I don't know cause I never heard his name til very recently.

Q: I just didn't know whether they had direct contact with him.

A: I don't know but you know the people who he gave visas to, they were like on the first three lines of god knows how many pages was my grandmother, **Gusha Agusta** and Erich and Emma and then my sister, Monique Marguerite was her name before it was changed to –

Q: How old was she at that point?

A: I think this was 40, 41 so she was, I remember that she was very young. I mean a baby.

Q: She was an infant.

A: She was an infant and my grandmother in the back seat of the car was feeding and feeding her to keep her quiet.

Q: So they get the papers from Aristide de Sousa Mendes.

A: Yes, and I remember them saying that it was this long, long ride over the Pyrenees or something to get to Spain. I don't know how long they spent in Spain. Eventually they got to Portugal and then where was their visa from because –

Q: Did they talk about any of the other people who were doing the same thing and tell you about that. The other refugees who were leaving with them.

A: I'm not really sure. I have this one photograph which seems to me so strange which was on this obviously cross Atlantic trip and they were partying. I mean they were dressed up in party clothes.

Q: OK so they get to Portugal you said.

A: They get to Portugal. They had a three day visa for the States. When they get to the States, Ellis Island, the customs person looks at my mother.

Q: They went directly to the United States.

A: From Portugal?

Q: From Portugal. Do you know what boat they were on?

A: My son, my younger son has a suitcase which has Rio de Janeiro on it and I'll tell you how that happened. So they had a three day visa and the customs person -- this is how the story went. Looked at my mother and the baby and the older grandmother and all that and he extended it to

three months. And in that time they got a visa to Brazil. They had been considering Argentina but my, his mother had high blood pressure and I think Brazil was better for that. They spent a year in Brazil. My sister was in a crib and my mother said the cockroaches were like nothing you can imagine. And then I think, I don't know whether they came in on a Brazilian visa or whether that visa finally, I'm very –

Q: Where did they stay in the United States for that month?

A: I think they were in Delaware, Wilmington.

Q: Because.

A: Because the next job for my father was going to be in a brewery to make it profitable and so the first year of my life, I was born in 43, was spent in Wilmington. I was born there.

Q: I'm a little, let's clarify this. They came to the United States. They stayed for how long.

A: Three months.

Q: Three months and then went to Brazil.

A: Went to Brazil for about a year.

Q: What did they say about their life in Brazil besides the cockroaches?

A: Not much. I don't think they were alone there. There were many –

Q: Many other refugees.

A: Yes, but I don't know much about that at all. And maybe the party dresses could have been on the boat from Rio to you know to the States. That I don't know either.

Q: So then after Brazil they came back to the United States.

A: And when to Wilmington for about a year, a year or two.

Q: But my question was when they were first in the United States.

A: I'm not really sure. I assumed it was –

Q: Where were they staying the first trip?

A: I don't know.

Q: You don't. Ok so now they're back again.

A: They're in Wilmington. He's making this brewery if only I could remember the name of the beer, because Pabst of course is -- I'll remember the name of the beer. But long story short, he somehow became a financial advisor to people. And one of them was Lehman, L-E-H, you know of the famous Lehman and that went broke. But anyway so he was doing quite well and then they moved to Forest Hills, New York, where there were many, many, many refugees. And I believe they may even have known a number of them beforehand.

Q: In Europe.

A: In Europe, yeah.

Q: How was their English? Did they know English before they came?

A: My father spoke English well with a trace of a British accent. And my mother I'm not sure how well she spoke it, but all her, I mean she spoke it fluently but all her life she still said Velcome with a V. But they kind of, by the time that they had lived in America for a while

spoke this I guess it's called Spanglish, if it's Spanish and English. They kept throwing in English words and stuff. But I do remember -- and I spoke German with my grandmother. And when I was in high school and I had taken a practice boards, they said that I should study English vocabulary because it wasn't as good as it should have been all that. So.

Q: Let's go back. You were born in 43.

A: 43 in Wilmington.

Q: In Wilmington. And then you moved to New York.

A: Right.

Q: And stayed in –

A: In Forest Hills.

Q: In Forest Hills.

A: Right.

Q: And while you were growing up did your parents tell you or talk about their previous experience?

A: I knew very little. I, the only thing I got about the camps is when I was eavesdropping. And you know the people they had over in their social circle, for bridge or canasta or whatever. I wrote an article about this once. I don't know how I knew but I knew pretty much everything. They never talked about it.

Q: Directly to you.

A: Never. And you know I knew that Mr. Nash had lost his wife and children in camp and he came here and he was starting over again, had married someone else. And I know this person had relatives that I somehow knew their stories. And I don't know how it, how I knew it. And the only thing I really knew about them. I knew her parents had died. I don't know when I knew that exactly but I know when I was born, they named me Barbara. So I said how come you named me Barbara and by that time my sister's name had changed to Monica. And my mother said well you know Santa Barbara, Santa Monica. And it really wasn't until I was 20 that I knew her mother's first name which was Blanca so they didn't talk about it.
And I also found out that there was a letter written to my father's uncle in Australia that I saw a copy of years later through my Australian cousins. And it went -- sorry to hear of Max's death. Agusta who was, they were brother and sister, is grieving. I thought I didn't know she was grieving about. So it turns out there were seven brothers and sisters on my, of my grandmother. And there was a short period of time where you could buy people out of Germany. And so he and a cousin in London you know raised some money and got a lot of them out. So I know, to South Africa and Israel, Palestine then. And Australia. But I didn't know about that until so much later.
And I remember the text of the letter because it said Monica is so smart et cetera, et cetera. There was hardly a word about me. I remember you know feeling well why not. Of course I was younger.

Q: So your folks did not talk as you said about their experience or about Aristide de Sousa Mendes.

A: Not at all.

Q: So you know, so what you know about him is what you read later.

A: Is what I heard within the last couple of months. We were contacted. Nothing from what they said.

Q: Who contacted you?

A: There was a woman who I guess is with the Foundation or beginning the foundation. It's very bizarre.

Q: What foundation?

A: The Sousa Mendes foundation. There, they want to start a museum.

Q: Where?

A: I'm not sure whether it would be –

Q: Portugal.

A: Or Brazil. I don't know.

Q: He was a Portuguese diplomat.

A: It was, so where did Brazil come in?

Q: Well it was Portuguese, Brazil was Portuguese.

A: Oh so it was, ok so maybe he came from Brazil or whatever. But anyway, actually got in touch with her through my sister's daughter whose name is nothing related to our names at all but who is an extremely active presence on the web and has her own company. Contacted her. She referred it to my sister, who really hasn't followed the history of my family you know the way I have. There's always one. There's always one, thank god. And so she forwarded it to me and so that's how I found it. It's startling to see. This is all recent. So I forwarded it to my kids and, and my younger one Jesse, who's the historian in the family sent along images of this

suitcase to the foundation. He still has it. He said when my mother died, he saw this suitcase. So I must have said something to him. And he took it.
And or no one else was interested and it was an old bunged up suitcase. But interestingly enough she kept it. Yeah. Now my uncle who was a survivor came to this country, America, when I was four.

Q: It was 1947.

A: Right. And he was very handsome. My father had sent him and a cousin, Gary Lee Fleishman to a sanatorium in Switzerland for a year. To recover because you know he was severely underweight. And apparently now again I don't know how I knew this, but he sat my mother down, probably my father too. And said I'm going to tell you the story once. I'm going to tell you what happened once and then I never want to speak of it again. So my parents weren't exactly communicative, but I think I knew this story before he actually did start talking about it which was when he was older and my younger son was getting bar mitzvahed so he was starting to talk and he, I remember my uncle as being a great ping pong player. And young and kind of dashing and very funny. He told jokes all the time.

Q: His name again is.

A: Well his real name was Pavel Briess, B-R-I-E-S-S. And when he came to this country the customs person said well you can't go with Pavel Briess. No one will know what to do with that name. So I now call you Paul Brennan, the Irishman from Prague. And many years later I got contacted by someone who by chance, had been searching for my uncle for many years. Unfortunately he had just died and he was in the bunk bed above him at this camp. I want to call it **Friedenwald**. I don't know what it would be in another language. I don't think it was in Germany, but it's where they made rocket parts. But he was in Auschwitz and the whole –

Q: That was his story. I was going to ask you what his story was.

A: Well his story is that he was in **Theresienstadt** and then when he was sent to Auschwitz,

along with his mother. His father had already died in the boxcar. From Prague to Theresienstadt. And I think he saw his mother die but long story short, he was greeted at the train by Mengele in his white uniform. Just the way they say. This is what he told me. And he was going to the right, to the left, to the right, to the left. And the man ahead of him said you know I'm a good worker. My back hurts me a little bit but I can certainly hurt to the left or however it was to the left. And my uncle got off and he said I'm young, I'm strong and I know how to weld. To the right. How he learned how to weld is another story. But another cousin of ours, also a survivor who recently died was a violinist and his father, I don't know, had taught them both to weld. So anyway, he survived and then was sent to I don't know if he was sent to another camp like Dachau, before Friedlander. I mean my cousin, other one was in every camp you can imagine. So.

Q: So then he, that's the story he told your parents when he came.

A: Yeah he told it and then I remember after the war, he had saved someone's life in the camps by getting him extra food or doing what I don't know or by getting him a pair of shoes and then after the war they were kind of marching out. Or getting out. And this same man said look what these shoes have done to my feet. You like them so much, you wear them. And he took them off and he threw them at my uncle. Because I guess the shoes didn't exactly fit. So I remember that story. And it must have been horrible for him to know about his mother. So I don't know how they actually, my uncle got in touch with, or my father actually got in touch with him. I remember in my early days there were all these phone calls, all these phone calls going on all the time, trying to locate people. And then there was always **Vita Gutmacher** [ph], so there was a lawyer, accountant or whatever in Forest Hills, **Hans Lexa** and I think he dealt with all the people who were putting in claims. And you know legal claims. And I don't think my parents or my grandmother ever got any, Vita Gutmacher. But from what I understand its property, not people. You know if you lost a paint factory.

Q: So you don't' think they got any –

A: I don't think so. I'm not even sure the reparation, yeah.

Q: And so then your parents stayed in New York.

A: In Forest Hills, yes.

Q: The rest of their lives?

A: Yes.

Q: And your father worked?

A: He became a stock broker. And I remember he was one of the first hundred or whatever to be admitted into the New York Stock Exchange. It's got to be back in the 50s. And he did very well. I mean he researched companies and invested for himself and for other people. And he invested in this little company that had something to do with technology and computers which was IBM. So IBM as a matter of fact traveled through my father, through my mother and came to me. They weren't all that much by the time they came to me. But so he, he did quite well. And I also remember we had a little candy store at the corner. Walking there every night to get the evening paper so he could see. Eventually we had a ticker tape in our basement. Yeah.

Q: Any other stories about them or your –

A: I know my mother took sleeping pills. She couldn't sleep. She was having trouble sleeping and because for many years when I was first born, she didn't know whether her own parents were alive or dead. And you know she had her own fears which I think were exaggerated because of the situation. And my father's paranoia was certainly exaggerate – well maybe not. Maybe he would have been like that anyway. So he said you know I've written a lot about this. I've written a lot of this material in two books of poetry that talk about this exactly how he kept saying, never invest in real estate. It's not liquid. And the one illegal thing he did was keeping a bar of gold under his pillow. It's not allowed, at least at that time. To keep gold because you couldn't, it wasn't liquid. You couldn't make a getaway. And that mentality of making a getaway

is something that I grew up with. Also these are just little things that are sort of interesting. He never believed in showing exactly what you have. So our house in Forest Hills. It was outside the gardens, which were the Forest Hills garden which were segregated. No Jews, no blacks, no anything. You know it looked like a decent house but you would never know what it looked like inside. And there was this snobbery but I imagine that preexisted the war. With the Eastern European Jews. And it would – the two communities Forest Hills and Kew Gardens were in their own way segregated. With the, as I said the Hungarians and the Czechs and the Germans and the Austrians and all that in Forest Hills. And the Poles and the Russians and the, you know the rest over there in Kew Gardens.

So there was only German spoken in my house. I don't think we had an American. I mean I don't know if it was on purpose but they didn't have any, they had American acquaintances but they never came to the house or I don't know if they went there or not. So it was a fairly closed society which they called **De Ganse Circus** [ph], which is the whole circus because it was so, the morality and the ethics and all that were so different from 1950s American Ozzie and Harriet. I mean there were love affairs and divorces and you know and parties and lots of a big social life, even during the week, as I call it a school night. But that was the life there. I know that my father loaned money to a lot of people. And helped a lot of people out which you would think would not quite be like his character but he did. And he always said this country's been very good to us. You have to pay all your taxes and you have to this, you know. He was very black and white. So.

Q: How do you think their experience affected the way they raised you and your sister?

A: Hey listen. I was raised in 19th century Vienna. I mean the discipline was such. Children are to be seen when they're clean et cetera. And my father was well let's just call him Prussian military although he never was in the military. Very, very strict. At least my father was. And my mother was less so. But –

Q: Do you think I was also asking in the sense that they had to escape, to leave, did that affect how they raised you or do you think that influenced --?

A: You mean were they overly cautious for us and protective?

Q: Yeah or did they encourage you to be independent?

A: Well the assumption at that time was you're a Heymann girl. You're supposed to behave a certain way and you have to have the best education and you have to go to the best colleges, et cetera et cetera. And you're going to marry someone who's rich who will take care of you for the – you will be the perfect wife. We were two girls so that was how we were raised.

Q: But you don't think that was influenced by the fact they had to escape?

A: It's hard to say isn't it. I don't know. There were little things like in terms of movies, my mother didn't want to see sad movies. She always said life is sad enough. Of course I love sad movies. I had to grow up opposite. My father died when I was 14 and he left an extremely complicated will. I mean you had to admire the way he was thinking it through. Like ok, at 21 and we were 14. Up until the age of 21 you know whatever my mother you know but when we were 21 we came into money. Then when we were 28. So 21 we might be married. 28 we might be divorced. And 35 we might be buying a house with a second husband. I don't know. I'm sure this was the way he was thinking. So very -- you know that we would be taken care of. And in terms of being taken care of, that was how he showed his love. I don't remember one hug. And my sister, I think he felt closer to her for many reasons. I'm not saying I don't know if he hugged her either. But she was more apparently or supposedly, more mathematically minded and her personality was totally different. I was a lot, I mean I just was like mercury. I was all over the place. And I kind of always had the feeling he could deal with her easier, and I was like my mother, more exaggerated. But he did hit us, me in particular because I was fresh. The reason I was fresh is cause I was proud and I didn't even know I was fresh when I was being fresh. So but again it's hard to say whether that would have been the case anyhow.

Q: Did you tell your friends about your parents' history when you were young?

A: I don't think so. But I know that a lot of immigrant families, the children are kind of ashamed of them or ashamed of their parents or ashamed of the house. I never felt that. I always kind of thought it made me you know exotic. But, no. Not, no I don't think I talked about it with them.

Q: When did your mother pass away?

A: Quite recently. February 2011. I was just so glad, not 2011, 2001. So I was glad that she didn't live for that. That would have -- the thing about my mother is that as she said she was a worrier, but she never worried about the big important stuff. She worried about the little stuff that didn't really make a difference. And I think that was intensified like there was just a reluctance. I can't blame her really, to go in certain directions in conversation or even thought because I think it was just too vivid for her.

Q: You're relating this to her experiences in Europe to escape.

A: Yes and because of her parents and her family and the whole thing. That it just really intensified what may have been a quality anyway, which was a kind of anxiety but it became quite pronounced.

Q: When the Eichmann trial took place, did your mother say anything?

A: No.

Q: Did you feel any connection when the Eichmann –

A: What year was that.

Q: 60s, 70s.

A: No, but I tell you what I did cause I think I was older. Who is that guy who came to the States. His name was Dem something or other.

Q: **Demjonjuk.**

A: Yes and how he had kind of passed. I did kind of follow that. Also my step father who was also a member of the De Ganse Circus. His brother went to South America and Argentina. And I know there was a big community of Jews there and I had a cousin who they made their lives in Mexico. So we met them maybe once or twice. I just remember I was the one person who I knew growing up who had hardly any family. I had a grandmother and I had an uncle. And somehow distant were Ilsa and Hans Voss, she had been experimented on. They never had children. They met in the camps. Really very nice people and they I think my father helped them out a lot. And he helped my uncle out when he came to this country. But Ilsa and Hans were about, that was about it and my uncle. And my grandmother. And she lived with us til I was about 11 and then at that time what they had were people who took in older boarders so she lived a bus ride away with this, these people who took in other older people.

Q: You mentioned stepfather. So your mother remarried.

A: My mother remarried.

Q: When was that?

A: Let's see 59 I graduated. Like 58, 57, 58. No, that's not right. I remember she married before the year was out, big scandal. So my father I think died in 53, yes. And in August and they wanted to make a trip back to Czechoslovakia as a matter of fact. And she said she wasn't going to travel with him unless they were married and so they got married in May or June to make the trip. I went with them to – I went to Europe.

Q: So you were ten years old?

A: That sounds or 11, no. I had to be older. Maybe my father died in, at age 53 in 1957 sounds more like it cause I was 14. Yeah, sorry. So in 1957 and in 1958 they got married. And in terms

of their lives, they went to Europe every year. Switzerland, et cetera. And stayed about six weeks, a month, six weeks. And then at 11 was my sister. I was 11 our first trip to Europe. They put us in a Swiss boarding school for a month and then to learn French supposedly. And then we met up with them. I can't believe they sent us alone by train from Switzerland to Austria, but we did. And I think they always no matter you know they always felt Europe was their home, even though he was extremely patriotic.

Q: Your step father's name?

A: No, this was my father.

Q: Oh your father?

A: Yeah, my step father's name was Richard **Glauber**. And he had two daughters with his first wife. And he had tried to, he had made an expedition to Palestine. He was a pediatrician to see if he could live there and he just found the language so impossibly hard that when he came back he came to the States. He, I remember him saying that he was in a rented apartment, but I don't know what. It was a sweltering hot summer. He was in his undershirt, his underwear listening to tv all day, trying to learn English.

Q: How do you think your parents' experience affected you? Or would you be a different person today --

A: Absolutely. There's no question about it. No, no, no there's no question about it. Because there were a couple of little things like I couldn't stand Hansel and Gretel because of the oven. And, and because I was so curious. I was really curious to know all the unspoken stuff. And you know I say there's always one in one family. I really felt like in a way I was holding the history because no one else was. Certainly had to do with the subject matter of my poetry which is very much affected by that.
And also because it's astonishing to me. I mean I think I could be funny too. But how in a way obsessed I am with a, with terrible things happening. Like I never imagine things are going to

turn out for the better. Of course my father said always imagine the worst. That way you won't be disappointed. I think that was a huge mistake cause it made me always imagine the worst. And you know like right now. Ok so I worked my whole life and for the last ten years before I retired, I was a speech writer at AARP, many issues. So after I retired I thought ok, I don't want to teach. I've taught enough. I've taught all the way through when I was working. And I've written and this and that so I became and am to this day which has only been two years like obsessed with Iraq and Pakistan and the terrorists and I go to everything having to do with that subject. I mean there are many, stuff downtown, think tanks that are talking about it. I'm there. So I mean it's, I don't know if it's linked or not.
But for some reason going there and finding out these horrible things makes me -- it objectifies it in such a way that I can kind of live with it sort of.

Q: And you think this is a result of your family history?

A: I do. I mean I think I may also have been anxious or whatever, but I don't think I'd be thinking about these things. I do.

Q: Do you discuss it with your sister?

A: My sister has a kind of amnesia about our childhood. So I say do you remember when. I don't remember that. I said you know I used to think that such and such about uncle Paul. She says what are you talking about. So it's like but she became interested for five minutes when this, when the foundation people were contacting her but it does -- and she doesn't live it. I think it's always there for me. At some level.

Q: So she doesn't talk about the fact that you –

A: No and she knows so little. Although you know I might be surprised. We're going to spend a week together shortly and I might be surprised by the things she does remember which have nothing to do with what I remember so we'll see.

Q: She was older.

A: She was older.

Q: She was closer to the European experience than you were. Obviously she was born there.

A: Yeah but she was like a year, an infant. And the other thing is through my life I've always lived in two worlds. It's like never putting all your eggs in one basket. Like I had and it was really like a kind of split life. Even when I was working I had my poetry life, my poetry career when I was having my poetry career and I was teaching and so it was always like I wanted always to have an escape hatch so that if something went wrong here I could move there. And the other thing is that whatever sustenance or support or -- I didn't get it at home. I just and I got it from school, through education or whatever and so it made me very – Also you can't tell here but I think I survived my family cause I was very funny. And whenever I felt fires starting as it were. You know I would just start being very funny.

Q: To protect yourself?

A: To protect them too, yeah.

Q: Tell me about your education.

A: Well I went to PS 101 and after high, I went to Forest Hills High. Home of Simon and Garfunkel. They graduated a couple years ahead of me and some other famous people. And from there I went to Mount Holyoke. It was a given that I would go to a girls' school because and my father was dead then. But it was the Ivy, it was the Ivy League. Majored in philosophy, minored in art history and was writing all along but didn't claim it. I knew I wanted to be a writer but I never, it sounded too kind of arrogant so even in my college, my high school year book, I said journalist. I didn't want to be a journalist. So after Mount Holyoke. Let's see where do I start.

I went to my first graduate school which was Yeshiva University in New York cause I wanted – they had a special program for teaching people who wanted to teach in disadvantaged schools, education for the disadvantaged. So I taught in Spanish Harlem. And then after that I got another degree to become, in psychology of school learning. That was to be a reading specialist because people were tracked, kids were tracked according to reading and there were smart kids who couldn't read so I did that. And then I got my MFA here. And I say you know I have recidivism. Always keep going back there. But I wrote a –

Q: Here being where?

A: School, learn.

Q: Where did you get your MFA?

A: My MFA was Myra, American University. And so currently I'm a visiting writer at American University and I taught there for a while, just as an adjunct. But the DC, JCC in Rockville. JCC I taught and also I did some private work, when my kids were young as a reading specialist. And –

Q: Do you tell people about your -- when you're teaching in a professional situation do you ever talk about your parents' background or do you bring it in?

A: Sometimes I do, depending on the books we're reading. You know Tova Penny. Well she's fascinating. That's all she reads. I mean she reads everything there is to read about it and I'm not like that. I'm sort of like that but in that sense I'm my mother. I haven't read all the literature and it's like I'm there. I remember when I wanted to change jobs and I interviewed at the Holocaust Museum. And I thought I just don't think I could come here every day. I couldn't. And so it's like I'm very aware of it. I'm very aware that I'm Jewish. But I've never been observant. So and I'm very -- I'm trying to think of the books I've chosen. Well when I was in the Rockville JCC I may have chosen some books that were supposed to be by women authors where this was the subject. And of course I see the films.

Q: When your parents were still alive and came to this country, did they have any kind of religious observance or –

A: No my father only said if you want to not go to school for Yom Kippur you better go to temple. You can't stay home just to stay home.

Q: No holidays observed in –

A: Oh yeah we did Passover. And my grandmother as I say she was kosher although we didn't keep kosher except for bacon. She loved bacon. But no.

Q: What are your feelings about Israel?

A: Oh I have very powerful feelings about Israel. Very complicated feelings about Israel but I'm not sure I would have those feelings were I not, did I not get involved with an Israeli poet and you know get involved in the translation and I go there. At this point I go there a lot. I'm trying desperately to learn Hebrew. I have very complicated feelings about Israel. Like I think the basic question is does it have a right to exist. And once you say yes and that comes along with so many other issues, I'm very bothered by people who have very strong opinions about it without having seen it or been there or seen how small it is and how close everything is and to know what they live with every day.
So and I'm very sorry for the generation that's aging that knew about the ideals that Israel had and are now very materialistic and Americanized in the hatred. Because like when the -- **Moshe Dor** who I –

Q: He's the poet that you translate?

A: Yes, I mean he learned Arabic in high school or to a certain extent. So it was a whole different world and it's sad to see it go and it's sad to see it, the people of his generation are very –

Q: Again do you feel that your connection to Israel is –

A: Is stronger.

Q: No, is influenced by your parents' history?

A: I know my father bought bonds and all that stuff. And supported Israel but I don't know. We never went with them. We always went to Europe. But I think you know -- what's the word, philosophically speaking he was certainly in favor. But you know both my sister and I married, our first marriage was to non-Jews and the rabbi, we did belong to a reform. You know when I went to Sunday school so I know my Bible stories which is more than I can say for most of the people today. And I knew that – he said he wouldn't marry my sister cause her husband to be was not Jewish. And for me the more important thing was that he not be American. So my first marriage was to someone Dutch who came to this country when he was 11 and he had blond hair and blue eyes and my mother thought, first thought was he's a Nazi.

Q: Why was it important that he not be an American?

A: I didn't think anyone American could understand my terrain. I often said that an American poet asked me well I mean is your poetry you know American? Is it Jewish? And I said no, I don't think I hide that I'm Jewish. You'll be able to know but it's not American. She says what, you don't feel connected to Walt Whitman and Emily. I said not at all. My landscape is the brothers Grimm, those woods. That's my inner landscape. And I don't think that or under certain circumstance. I mean Moshe is a foreigner so it just feels like it's a bigger world. I feel I need to live in a bigger world. Not that people who don't, aren't American live in a bigger world but just something that's broader. Or international.

Q: Did you raise your children as Jews or not?

A: Well now my older son is observant and he married someone Jewish and she was bat mitzvahed when she was in her 20s. So you've got that story. And my, the husband who's the father of, is the father of my kids, that's number two, a psychiatrist but we're divorced.

Q: Was he Jewish?

A: Yes, but ok now I'll do the right thing. But that didn't work out either for 18 years. But anyway. Jewish doctor. But he was observant and he would go to **Kol Nidre** et cetera and I guess I'd have to come along. And I just did it but it didn't really mean anything to me. But it did seem to mean something to my older son. My younger son married someone non-Jewish. But they're everything. If you ask him do you believe in God, he'll say now I'm going to start saying this cause I like it so much. Yes, but my god is the god of infinite complexity. That sounds good. I like that a lot. So I can acknowledge that god.

Q: How do you feel about the Holocaust Museum being in Washington, DC?

A: I like it. We knew, what was his last name.

Q: Weinberg

A: Weinberg. Yeah we used to go out to -- Moshe knew him from Israel. I think it's fantastic.

Q: Even though the war took place in Europe?

A: Well you know –

Q: You I think it's appropriate that it be here in Washington, a museum –

A: Was it the first because I know they have one all over the world. They have holocaust museums.

Q: They do.

A: Yeah, no I have no, the more the better, especially now with the people dying off. The one thing that made me feel uncomfortable is, and that's only as I've gotten older is there are so many holocausts. You know so many other slaughters. I don't know if they've ever been six million. I don't know how many Armenians died or Rwandans or any of the others. So the word holocaust to have it, it's like appropriated for the genocide. So but as I recall there are parts of the museum which I don't know, which do it.

Q: The unconscious that deals with it.

A: Right. I was in Paris not so long ago and I was wandering around and before I knew it I was – I didn't plan on it. I was in front of the holocaust museum that's in Paris. Never knew there was one and I thought look I have a day or two in Paris. Do I want to do this? And then I said God put me here. The god infinite, you know he had me standing here. I think I have to go. So I spent the day in the museum.

Q: What was your reaction?

A: Very interesting. You know the French, they were not so great. They had concentration camps of their own and very anti-Semitic. And all of that. The, it seems to me that the holocaust museum there concentrated on the French people who saved peoples' lives. There was a map but the general impression, the most space were these very moving videos. And by the way that to me is the most moving part of the Holocaust Museum. Like I went through that museum and didn't cry but when I came to those –

Q: Testimony.

A: Testimonies. I mean I found them so unbelievably moving and so they had some people who went back to the French farmers or whoever who saved them. And the building itself was very impressive. They were taking school kids around.

Q: Do your grandchildren -- well how old are they?

A: Five and two and two and a half so no but my, they go to synagogue already. They belong to a congregation. My older the first born -- and to me the most important holiday is Passover. I really I don't go to services although I used to like to hear the shofar.
I'm trying to think of the principle, the principle. I remember when I was going to, when I was younger I did go to services because I stayed home from school. I was Jewish. I think it was the Abraham Isaac story that turned me off. I still don't know how to cope with that. And I was about, I'd say I was about 11 or 12 when I thought no. I mean and even a metaphor I don't quite understand obviously. But the principle behind atonement for sins. I remember thinking well I haven't sinned. I haven't sinned, what have I done? But then that one line for being stiff necked. I thought ok, maybe I've been stiff necked so but I think the principle of it is very important.

Q: I think you answered the question I was going to ask which is has the world learned any lessons from the Holocaust which you obviously answered in the negative to that. There still is so much genocide.

A: Still. It's just, it's I think as you get older and you see right, wrong, gray, white, black, white. Everything is so complicated, becomes so complicated that it almost becomes impossible to make a moral judgment because everyone has something. I do think, I do think that Israel still, despite everything stands on more of a morally high ground than the Palestinians. I do. Even though by no means are they perfect. They have terrible PR. And people are so uninformed but you know the recent incident of beating up Arab youth, it's hard to say.

Q: Are you, if you meet someone who's a child of a refugee, do you feel any connection to that person?

A: Absolutely. As a matter of fact one of the causes that I used to give to and not just Jewish, it was Refugees International because I see those people leaving their countries with what. So I do feel that they have experiences that are quite unique.

Q: And you yourself personally feel a connection?

A: I feel like as I said I have one foot in this country and one foot over there. I really would doubt that my sister feels that way. She's in California. They have no history. I'm exaggerating. But yeah. Now I think that my parents adjusted with minimum discomfort compared to many other stories. But my mother always said any time she did see someone selling sausages in New York City she would think of her father. So you know they say remember, remember, remember. I mean even that doesn't prevent, sad to say.

Q: Do you have any future messages for your grandchildren. They are young now but they may listen to this in years ahead. Is there any message you'd like to leave them?

A: Well I will say one thing when I was growing up and I felt this burden. I felt a terrific burden even though I always felt really strongly that I didn't want to burden my children. And so I talked very little about it myself, about the Holocaust and all the experiences. I think when they got older I started to a little more because I feel probably how my parents felt, very protection. I mean how do you grow up with this? I don't know what young children do with this kind of information. I mean they should know about it, but when. That's you know one of my main concerns. So in terms of my grandchildren. In terms of my grandchildren. I want them to know that it happened and there's a written record of it happening. And I just can't expect them to feel as connected to it as I do but on the other hand if they're connected to me they will be connected to it.
So it's a big world out there. I think that you know they should know what they want to know about it and kind of stretch a little. I mean my oldest granddaughter is starting kindergarten in a few days. Do I want her to know that there are people out there who do these kind of things? I remember in terms of when I found out about my cousin who had these medical experiments. I didn't want to, I mean I guess I didn't want to picture it all but somehow so that a lot of my – like my mother maybe has just been pushing the imagery away. Cause the imagery is so disturbing.

Q: Is there anything you'd like to add that we haven't covered, anything else you wanted to talk about?

A: Well interestingly enough I am not, I haven't gone back and traced my roots or done genealogies. I know that when I was in Israel I was very upset there was no trace. And of course you have to fill out all the papers and do all that. And same here, same in the Holocaust Museum here. So while I do want it, I somehow am not doing the work for it. I was going to say something. Now there was a relative in my family who did do all of that and that was the husband of this Gertie Fleishman who was a survivor. She survived with my uncle. And her brother became one of the Czech pilots. Remember. The beginning of the war there was a Czech air force. They were very good. Anyway they somehow made it out to England and became part of the London -- but they didn't let him fly. So then he went to Israel and started up the Maccabee, the athletic games.

Q: Maccabee games.

A: Yeah Maccabee games and he did do some kind of family tree on my mother's side so I have that somewhere. And then as I said, this man who contacted me some years ago who was the bunkmate of my uncle. He must be dead by now. I sent all the stuff to my uncle's kids, to my sister because this had to do with my uncle and no one followed up on it. So we were in correspondence a while and he sent me tons of papers on the laws in Germany and how they like when they first began. Like a veterinarian couldn't treat a Jewish dog. What they saved, it's all with that, the record keeping stuff. So there are some people who make it their lives and I guess I haven't but it's definitely there.

Q: Do you have any desire to find out any more about Aristide de Sousa Mendes?.

A: Yes, I'm curious about him because he really he got punished after the war.

Q: Yes he did.

A: I don't remember in what ways.

Q: His government, yeah he was in poverty when he died. He lost his job for doing that cause he issued all these visas.

A: Against the orders. Ok so this was Portugal but there was someone else from Portugal in another part of -- in another country who did the same thing.

Q: Have you been to Portugal?

A: Just once.

Q: At that time you didn't know –

A: No, I didn't know this but –

Q: Do you have any desire to go to Portugal and –

A: And to find all this. Not really. Listen it was hard enough to get me to Theresienstadt. I was in Prague. Limited period of time and I kept saying should I go, should I not go, should I go, should I not go. And I mean really it was fighting an enormous thing to go. I felt I should have gone to Teplice and seen the streets where my mother grew up and all of that, although I'm sure it's changed, but still I didn't go to Teplice. It's ten minutes from Prague. So I did go there. I have no desire to see Auschwitz or any of the sites and make the pilgrimage. Why? Why?

Q: Is this something you live with every day?

A: Yes.

Q: In what way or ways?

A: I mean it's hard for me to live in the moment which is I know the best way to live and the feeling of menace even when there isn't any, in my general surroundings. I feel safe. But I it just,

I don't know if this is the holocaust. Maybe I'd be there anyway but I really feel this earth has come it's very close to the end of its life span. It's not funny and you know I worry for my grandkids in that way because human nature is human nature. I remember once I was being interviewed and my interviewer who was black said do you feel like the Jews were specially singled out or whatever. And I said look it's an accident of fate. It could have been anything. It's an accident of fate that I'm born Jewish. It's an accident of fate that Hitler went after the Jews. It could have been this, it could have been that, there's no limits in terms of what could have happened and what did or didn't happen. I don't know if I put quite like that.

I don't feel specially what's the word, righteous for my people having gone through this and survived. I mean look I don't feel that way, but I just I just feel that life is – you're vulnerable and the best thing to do sometimes is to deny although I would have been scandalized by my saying that in my flagrant youth. But yeah cause otherwise how could you live? But I try. And to be remotely cheerful and good natured which was my livelihood when I was younger. I mean that's how I made it through all this.

I do remember when I went to my stepfather who was a doctor. I was around 18 or 19. I said I'm very depressed. And he went -- you, depressed? And he laughed and I mean I think a lot of people would say that. You, depressed? So.

Q: So your poetry is your way of expressing?

A: The depression. Oh there's so much work about it. Even in disguise there's a lot of work but I write about it in terms of my, it's always in terms of my mother's experience. You know I have a lot in there, now that I think of it. You'd know more if you read just five poems about how the war affected my father and how he, well I don't want to paraphrase the poem but about how he always heard boots coming. And my mother and how that affected how they parented me. It's in the poetry and how I understood it and how I had to come to terms with it.

Gail Schwartz: This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Barbara Goldberg. This is track number two and we were talking about your poetry and would it be possible for you to read some of your poems.

Barbara Goldberg: Yes, I'd like to because it says in such a more profound way what I've been saying. It seems to not have the kind of life that a poem has.
Carvel. In the summer when the days were light longer, we piled in the car and drive down Metropolitan Avenue for soft ice cream at Carvel's. Those nights we could have been a regular American family out for spin whose father maybe tossed a ball with his kids. Or tousled their hair or let himself be tickled, but we knew his moods would return when we'd tip toe around the house, lay low. This was the 50s. There was Korea but it was far away and it wasn't our war. And they weren't murdering our people. Later I've learned but only much later after he was long gone, that he gave our blue Persian carpet to Franz Smetana who was broke and could sell it for cash. He also gave money to his mother's seven brothers and sisters. And some got out in time, dispersing to Israel, Australia, South Africa. Or the year he paid the bills for the Swiss sanitarium my uncle stayed at after the war to put on fat. These kindnesses, these things my father did without thinking twice, what to say about them, about him except that how a man treats his own children is only one part of his story and there are others.

Q: That is from your book?

A: That's from my book the Royal Baker's Daughter. And the whole first section of that book is kind of about growing up in a house where atrocity is always the undertone.
The next poem I'll read is from Cautionary Tales and this poem is about my mother and just imagine that the I in this poem is my mother speaking.
Survivor. And the child by the way is me. They say I should feed you, child with a gift of tongues. But darting through woods of dark pine, hounds chase the scent of sandals. Days spent under cover in a field of eiderdown. My fingers searched for traces of my own lost mother. At night when the bulb shines through the parchment and I scrub my body down with soap, I think of her parting lace curtains, looking for father to round the corner. A small patch of pine presses against the north side of this house. Here, by Union Turnpike, a car is parked in the driveway.

We'd all fit in, all if we had to make a quick journey. I keep a bar of gold under my pillow. They bring you to me, my locket clasped in your fist. I want to feed you. It's those spiked needles that scrape against the glass, those shadows that won't sleep behind the drapes. It's that woodsman walking through this forest swinging his ax.

I said just a little while ago where the undertone, where the undertone is everything and this poem is called Uninvited Guests and it's also from Cautionary Tales and it has an epigraph, three can keep a secret if two are corpses. And that's a Yiddish folk saying. Even the dead can't keep a secret. They barge in, sit at your table, demanding to be served. They bang their spoons like children, crying feed me, feed me. And you have never prepared enough. Once you would have welcomed the dead, begged mother to set out extra plates, but now they consume what was promised to the living. They climb into the marriage bed with their own unearthly linen, whispering old secrets you wish they would keep to themselves.

Q: Do you think that you will be continuing to write poetry with this underlying, these underlying themes? You still feel the need to write?

A: No I don't actually because Royal Baker's Daughter is my fourth book of poetry and the Royal Baker's Daughter is like to me, that's the close of the chapter, because it's – it's only been you know been out for the last couple of years. And it's really reflects a life time of not just observing but trying to understand what their lives, how their lives and their histories were taken in by me. And it's possible I might write fiction about it but as far as the poems, I just, I don't think I will. Maybe I'm wrong. I mean for a whole year I was writing mother poems saying please spare me, not another mother poem, but you don't have any control over what you'll be writing about.

Q: What is the significance of the royal baker's daughter phrase?

A: Well she's obviously the poor stepchild. She's getting the leftovers from the royal house, from the royal king and queen. Her father is the royal baker. He just makes the stuff. She's getting the crumbs. That's putting it quite overtly, but actually it refers, it's a line from a poem that's in the book that's not really about my parents at all. But I think it does reflect that fact that

even though I wasn't starving that I might have felt that I was starving. So that's what the title means to me.

Cautionary Tales well I don't know if you've heard of what's his name. Those books that were read to me when I was a child. Oh my god, how could do that **strugel pather** and these, these terrible tales of what happens to bad children. Like I used to suck my thumb and there's a story in there about how a tailor comes at night and cuts off the thumb. So –

Q: These are German folk tales?

A: Yes, by a German pediatrician of all people.

Q: It would be read to you in German?

A: No. I don't think so. The **Strugel Pather** it had to, in English it's shock headed Peter. But –

Q: Speaking about the German language, what are your thoughts about Germany and the Germans?

A: Funny you should say that because I've never been to Germany because my mother always used to say she could never go back to that country and she said Austria was just as bad, if not worse in terms of the anti-Semitism. And that if she were in Germany she'd never know who did what. And I guess I absorbed those feelings too. I remember her being quite upset with my sister when she bought a Mercedes. How could she do that? But this trip I'm taking with my sister, it's a pleasure trip. It's not a history trip. But we're taking a river cruise up the Rhine. So it will be my first time in Germany which I always kind of said was unconscionably beautiful from what I could see. But again those woods and so I guess I will see. And I know that I have some time after the trip. And I feel a compulsion to go to – compulsion because we end up in Amsterdam. But I want to go to Berlin because I understand that it's a very interesting city and it is a city where my father lived for some time. So I'll be doing that too. And I do speak a kind of child's German. So I won't feel – I'm not comfortable going to a country where I don't speak the language, but I will understand most of it.

Q: So when you hear German being spoken, do you have any visceral reaction?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: In what way?

A: Well I'm very curious where people come from and I always ask. I'll always say well what's your country of origin or whatever. And when I hear German it's like it's not my mother tongue cause my mother tongue I guess is English. But in a way it is, because it's what I heard before I could speak. So I feel you know I don't feel oh my god a Nazi when I went for therapy or whatever, I went with an analyst who was Austrian German, cause the accent just made me feel at home. And that she would understand. There are words that exist in German that I don't even know what they are in English. **Forvufa** [ph], my mother always used to say **Mach me kind of forvufa** [ph]. I don't know, don't make any accusations. I don't know. Don't, don't give me a hard time. I just don't even know how to do it and I'm sure there are things in English that are untranslatable too. But if I knew that you know if I threw in a German word cause the English didn't occur to me, it would be understood.

Q: Did the therapy help you?

A: I thought about that a lot. I think I have to have been the longest this is analysis we're talking about. It was many years ago. It was ten years. And at the time I was just very committed to it and took it seriously and I said I don't want a band aid, I want surgery. But you know you don't have another way of comparing. I mean I think a lot of the things might have come to me anyway, just by getting older and more experienced. Having made my own mistakes. But I think I really started writing poetry seriously during it so yes, for that I'm grateful.
I mean before that I was writing short stories and stuff like that.

Q: About your parents or about –

A: Some of it. Some of it.

Q: In a prose fashion.

A: I don't know. I'd say 50, 50. As I said, it's hard to walk the line of not wanting to make it your life but yet recognizing that it's a big part of your life.

Q: Why did you want to be interviewed today?

A: Frankly I wanted to be interviewed so the stories about my uncle could be preserved and you know about Gertie and these people who and my cousin Tommy who I loved. He's the only person in my family who I thought was related to me. Because he was so forthright and my family was so subtle. You know you always had to kind of guess. And I mean his stories were amazing. And he had no ambivalence about talking about them, but I mean the story of how it was in terms. I mean I just can maybe it's cause I can picture Mengele so clearly doing that. And so the image of it is so permanent within me. So I didn't know it was going to be so much about me. it's more about my parents and those who really – but I mean I really do think it's important to know the residual, the residual flavor that lingers and goes in generations to come. And for all I know are embedded in some way in my children in ways that are not so obvious.

Q: Are there any other stories that you wanted to tell of relatives or –

A: Hans and Ilsa. And then there's, in terms of the events, salons or whatever you want to call it that happened at my house. There was one, I can't imagine this happening in my neighborhood. There was like a cabaret singer who would sit on the piano with black and kind of sing these old cabaret songs.

Q: This is in your house?

A: In my house and I knew she was a survivor and Lilly Robinson with the beauty mark here who had a, shouldn't say her name. What's it called. A threesome going. Everyone was very

happy. And it's hard to put, it's just so odd to think that these were all people who had suffered trauma, even if they themselves hadn't been in the camp. In terms of being torn up from their lives. And they were – it was like the Israelis in a way. They were partying with a vengeance because Israel's like that a lot. I mean everything is so intense and you feel you have to live to you know make up for everything that's come before. And you may not see another day. And I guess it's affected my politics too. I mean I'm, I guess I'm more or less hawkish internationally while very liberal domestically. My son by the way is in the State Department. He loved languages although his language is Japanese. I remember Moshe saying Japanese. Why couldn't it have been Hebrew. And my other son is a scientist, neuroscientist. So they're just my pride and joy along with my grandkids.

Q: Well if there's nothing else you wanted to add, that's a lovely –

A: I'm going to call at five in the morning. No, with something else.

Q: That's a lovely note to end on your pride and joy. That's a lovely note to end on.

A: Well they're my joy. I'd rather have it be that cause I don't know what effect, direct effect I have on their formation.

Q: Well thank you very much for doing the interview. This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial museum interview with Barbara Goldberg.

(end interview)